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## **Fathers on parental leave: What happened since the recent reforms in German family policy?**

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In 2007, a reform of the parental leave act was introduced in Germany. Among other goals, the reform aimed at encouraging men to share in child care more intensively than in the past. Politically this goal was pursued by following Sweden's model and reserving two out of 14 months of relatively generously paid leave for fathers. Official statistics show that within four years, fathers' take-up rate increased greatly from around three percent to almost 20 percent. Additionally, it can be shown that the great majority of fathers do not take more time off than the two 'daddy months'. However, much less is known about the characteristics of couples within which fathers take parental leave.

Therefore, this paper aims at answering two questions: What are the main determinants of men's parental leave decisions? What are the driving forces of men's decisions to take more time off than the 'daddy quota'? The two competing ideas behind both questions are value change versus economic constraints. Do these men belong to the group of 'new fathers' that could not live up to their preferences under the previous regulation with low levels of means-tested remuneration? Or are economic considerations in relation to the women's economic capacities the main factor for men's decisions regarding whether and how long to take parental leave?

The questions are pursued by following a two-step research design. First, representative survey data for recent parents are used ('Junge Familien 2008', collected by the RWI Essen) to analyze men's take-up of parental leave. The major finding is that economic factors have more explanatory power than value-related aspects. So are fathers more likely to take leave if they were not employed prior to child birth or if the female partner had higher earnings, a result in line with previous research regarding the impact of women's earnings (Lappegard 2008; Naz 2010; Reich 2011). In a second step, attention is called to the economic determinants for the duration of fathers' leave. To do so, register data are used for all births between 2007 and 2009 where parental leave was requested (provided by regional authorities) in two select Northern federal states of Germany. It can be shown that employment status of the couple as well as women's and men's relative earnings have a slightly different impact on the duration of fathers' leave in both of the German states. This differential effect can be

related to structural opportunities (e.g., unemployment) and in part to varying traditions of mothers' employment at the regional level. Overall, fathers are most likely to take parental leave and to use it extensively if they have relatively poor economic resources.

References:

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