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Article

What Helps and What Hinders? Exploring the Role of Workplace Characteristics for Parental Leave Use and Its Career Consequences

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Abstract: The division of parental leave among couples today is still unequal—even in countries with progressive leave schemes. Given the gendered nature of the workplace, we examine how organizational characteristics relate to fathers' uptake and length of parental leave as well as to the perceived career consequences of leave uptake among those fathers who took leave. In our mixed methods study, we draw on unique quantitative and qualitative data on different-sex couples with young children in Germany (2015). We find that the fear of professional repercussions and the lack of a replacement at work inhibit fathers both from taking leave in general and, for those who take leave, from taking it for more than two months. Interestingly, however, the majority of fathers who took leave did not think that their leave negatively affected their professional advancement. This positive evaluation was independent of the length of leave. We compared fathers' perceived leave consequences to those of mothers, who tended to have a more negative view of the impact of taking leave on their careers. Both fathers and mothers were more likely to report negative career consequences if they worked in organizations that promoted a strong ideal worker norm, that is, where employees thought that they were expected to prioritize paid work over their private life.

Keywords: parental leave; employment; workplace culture; ideal worker norm; gender equality; mixed methods

1. Introduction

Work–family policies, particularly those that seek to foster women's labor market involvement and men's involvement in family life, play an important role in improving gender equality (Misra et al. 2011; Hegewisch and Gornick 2011; Hook 2006; Budig et al. 2016; Jaumotte 2004). One policy that is particularly interesting in this regard is parental leave. Depending on the design, it can either further or hinder gender equality (Morgan and Zippel 2003; Gangl and Ziefle 2015). Well-paid leaves of short or medium length that also incentivize fathers to take leave can enhance gender equality, both by strengthening mothers' labor force attachment and by encouraging greater involvement of fathers in childcare and housework (Rossin 2011; Tanaka 2005; Ruhm 2000; Nandi et al. 2016; Lamb 2004; Huerta et al. 2013; Berger et al. 2005; Fegert et al. 2011).

Yet, even in the countries with the most egalitarian parental leave schemes, uptake of parental leave remains highly gendered. In Sweden, fathers of children born in 2008 only took one quarter of all available leave days (Duvander and Haas 2018). In Iceland, fathers took one third of all available leave days in 2015 (Eydal and Gíslason 2018). In Germany, only around one third of the fathers of newborn

children take parental leave. This means that around two thirds of fathers forfeit even the two months of comparatively well-paid leave that are exclusively reserved for them (BMFSFJ 2018b).

These low take-up rates are surprising given that mothers' labor force participation is rising and an increasing number of fathers want to be involved in child rearing (e.g., Bernhardt et al. 2016 for Germany). Whether men can realize this wish seems to be contingent on the workplace context. Pedulla and Thébaud (2015), for example, showed for the United States that the vast majority of young men and women would opt for an egalitarian division of labor if public policies and workplace norms supported work–family reconciliation.

The focus of this study is therefore on the role of workplace characteristics for the use of parental leave and its perceived consequences. In particular, why do many fathers opt not to take (longer) parental leave? What role does the workplace context play for the duration of leave taken by both fathers and mothers? How does it relate to the question of whether fathers and mothers who take parental leave experience negative consequences for professional advancement?

To answer these questions, we apply a mixed methods approach to two unique data sources from Germany. In our quantitative analyses, we draw on survey data from a probability sample of different-sex couples with young children (N = 878), which were collected as an add-on to the AID:A II panel ("Aufwachsen in Deutschland: Alltagswelten"/"Growing up in Germany: Every-Day Worlds"). In this survey, respondents were asked detailed questions about workplace characteristics, such as their workplace culture or the availability and the use of work–family policies in their organizations. The qualitative data stem from 44 in-depth interviews with parents from the same target population, which include further descriptions of parents' workplace contexts and their division of paid parental leave for their youngest child.

2. Background

2.1. Parental Leave and Gender Inequality

Policy makers have increasingly modified parental leave schemes as a means of promoting gender equality (e.g., Erler 2011; Gornick and Meyers 2003). Following the Swedish example, several European countries, including Germany (Karu 2012; Karu and Kasearu 2011; Erler 2011), have shortened the duration of paid parental leave to reduce mothers' time spent outside the labor market after childbirth and to incentivize fathers to also take leave.

Long leaves solely taken by mothers have detrimental effects on their labor force attachment and earnings and tend to entrench mothers in the caregiving role (Morgan and Zippel 2003; Gangl and Ziefle 2015). Evertsson and Duvander (2011) have shown for Sweden that long leaves were associated with a lower likelihood of promotions, and Aisenbrey et al. (2009) found that longer leaves were associated with downward occupational mobility for women in Germany, the United States, and in Sweden. Well-paid leaves of short or medium duration, by contrast, incentivize mothers to quickly return to the labor market after childbirth and, hence, reduce the career penalties associated with parenthood (Boeckmann et al. 2015; Misra et al. 2011; Jaumotte 2004).

"Use or lose" components in parental leave regulations, meanwhile, tend to get fathers more frequently involved in these schemes (Leira 2011; O'Brien 2009). Fathers who take parental leave are, in turn, more likely to work shorter hours (Bünning 2015) and spend more time with their children than fathers who do not take leave (Evertsson et al. 2018; Hook 2006; Bünning 2015; Schober and Zoch 2019; Almqvist and Duvander 2014).

2.2. Fathers' Use of Parental Leave

However, even in those countries that have implemented well-paid parental leave schemes of short or medium durations with "use-or-lose" components, the distribution of parental leave among parents continues to be very unequal (e.g., Karu and Tremblay 2018; Duvander and Haas 2018). Several studies indicate that fathers opt not to take (longer) parental leave because they worry that this would

have negative repercussions for their careers and that their supervisors and colleagues would react in a negative way (Vogt and Pull 2010; BMFSFJ 2007, 2018b; Bloksgaard 2015).

The question of whether such fears are justified has not yet been conclusively answered in the existing literature. A series of experimental studies from the United States showed that men who made their care obligations visible at work experienced discrimination and were regarded as "unmanly" (Rudman and Mescher 2013; Vandello et al. 2013; Vinkenburg et al. 2012). Likewise, observational studies from Sweden, Norway, Belgium, and the United States indicated that fathers suffer wage penalties when taking parental leave (Evertsson 2016; Rege and Solli 2013; Theunissen et al. 2009; Coltrane et al. 2013). An online survey from Germany based on a convenience sample also indicated that some leave-taking fathers were penalized for deciding to use these schemes (Pfahl and Reuyß 2009). Of the fathers who had taken parental leave, 16% reported having fewer promotion opportunities and 10% reported a negative development in their income situation. In the very same study, however, fathers who took longer leaves reported an "improved reputation at the workplace" (Pfahl and Reuyß 2009). This surprising finding that taking leave is not necessarily detrimental to fathers is also backed up by two additional studies from Germany. In her longitudinal study, Bünning (2016) found no evidence that fathers who took parental leave were penalized in terms of wages. Likewise, in an experimental study, Hipp (2018) showed that fathers who took longer leaves were not any less likely to be invited to a job interview than fathers who only took short leaves or did not mention any leave in their application materials.

2.3. Organizations and Gender Inequality in Parental Leave Use

The question that hence arises is whether and, if so, to what extent workplace characteristics contribute to fathers' reluctance to take leave and how they affect the careers of those fathers who took leave. Sociologists have repeatedly shown that organizational structures shape gender inequalities in the workplace (Acker 1990; Anderson and Tomaskovic-Devey 1995; Baron and Bielby 1980; Bielby and Baron 1986; Ferguson 1984; Kalev 2009; Kanter 1977; Kmec 2005; Reskin and McBrier 2000). Both formal and informal organizational structures and practices may hence also contribute to the gendered uptake of parental leave policies.

Organizational characteristics, such as firm size or economic sector, may affect both fathers' decision to take leave and the consequences that the use of parental leave entails. In many countries, including Germany, employment in the public sector as well as employment in large organizations go hand in hand with increased levels of actual and perceived job security (Hipp 2016). This is because large organizations tend to have lower turnover rates due to their internal labor markets and their higher incidence of training (e.g., Wotschack 2017; Pfeffer and Cohen 1984). Moreover, they are more likely to have formalized HR policies implemented (Reskin and McBrier 2000; Kotey and Slade 2005) and to provide a replacement in case someone goes on leave. In the German case, larger organizations are also more likely to have a works council, that is, a shop-floor organization that represents workers and seeks to ensure employee rights. Works councils, hence, contribute to the fairness of employment practices and employees' actual and perceived job security (Grund and Schmitt 2011; Holst and Schupp 2003).

When fathers do not fear losing their jobs as a consequence of taking leave because they feel well-protected and secure, they may also be more likely to take leave. This suspicion has been backed up by findings from studies in several countries, which showed that fathers' uptake of parental leave was related to a more secure position at work, as indicated, for example, by a permanent contract and employment in the public sector; being self-employed, by contrast, made men less likely to take parental leave (Escot et al. 2012; Lappegård 2008, 2012; Geisler and Kreyenfeld 2018; Reich 2010; Naz 2010). However, no consistent relationship between fathers' uptake of parental leave and firm size has been found in studies conducted in Sweden and Norway (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Lappegård 2012). The availability of family-friendly workplace policies, which should also be more likely to exist

in larger firms, by contrast, was found to be positively associated with fathers' leave take-up (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Escot et al. 2012).

Less salient, but equally important for fathers' leave uptake, may be informal organizational characteristics, such as the workplace culture and supervisor support as has been shown in the UK (Moran and Koslowski 2019). Based on Acker (1990) theory of gendered organizations, the prevailing expectation that men ought to be breadwinners and women homemakers is not only engraved in the formal structure of work, prevailing organizational practices, and policies, but also in the informal practices, expectations, and norms (Acker 1990, 1992; Britton 2003; Gorman and Mosseri 2019 for a recent overview). These gendered assumptions about work and family have recently also been incorporated in research on the "ideal worker norm" (Williams 2000). The "ideal worker" is fully devoted to his—or potentially her—job, prioritizes paid employment over private life, works full time and regularly works overtime (Blair-Loy 2003). This concept of the ideal worker is hence inherently gendered and contributes to fathers' reluctance to take parental leave (Haas and Hwang 2019). Mothers, who today still assume a large bulk of childcare duties and domestic chores, can rarely conform to the ideal worker norm (Brumley 2014; Davies and Frink 2014; Williams 2000).

Moreover, the prevalence of the ideal worker norm may also contribute to fathers' reluctance to take leave (von Alemann et al. 2017). In this vein, Kaufman (2018) found that a low uptake of parental leave was associated with fathers' perception of an unsupportive workplace and hence backed up the finding by Thompson et al. (2005) that fathers in Britain who had very supportive bosses took longer leave on average than those whose bosses were not at all supportive. Lammi-Taskula (2007) explained the unequal division of paid leave in Finland as being related to the "difficulties for the father to take long leave from work." This resonates with a finding from a qualitative study from Germany (Neumann and Meuser 2017) that HR managers perceived the two months of leave taken by fathers to be an extended vacation and therefore compatible with organizational interests; longer leaves, by contrast, were "problematic for both men and women," as they did not fit into the operational process (Aunkofer et al. 2018, p. 73).

Taken together, the growing body of literature on fathers' use of parental leave has shown that the workplace context matters for fathers' uptake and length of family leave; at the same time, less is known about whether, and in what way, the workplace context relates to potential negative career consequences for fathers who took parental leave. Most of the existing studies on the relationship between workplace characteristics and fathers' parental leave have been conducted in Nordic countries. Empirical work on the relationship between workplace characteristics and fathers' uptake and length of leave in Germany is still relatively scarce and has, thus far, predominantly been qualitative (von Alemann et al. 2017; Aunkofer et al. 2018; Neumann and Meuser 2017). Hence, while we know that the workplace matters, we do not know which workplace characteristics contribute to the persistent gender gap in the uptake of parental leave. Therefore, with our study, we seek to close this gap by asking the following questions: Which workplace characteristics inhibit fathers from taking (longer) leave? How important is the availability of family-friendly workplace policies in comparison to workplace culture and work organization when seeking to encourage fathers to take (longer) leaves? Do the same workplace factors that matter for fathers' take-up also matter for whether they experience career penalties, and do they also matter for mothers? What are the professional consequences of taking leave for fathers? Are fathers' fears of negative career consequences justified?

2.4. Germany as a Research Setting

Germany is a particularly interesting country for examining the relationship between workplace characteristics, as well as both the use of parental leave and the consequences of taking leave. The German government reformed its parental leave system in 2007, taking the Swedish system as a model and including all the "success" factors that have been found to be related to higher gender equality (OECD 2017). Paid leave in Germany is relatively short by European standards (maximum of 14 months, yet with the possibility of taking additional unpaid leave), is well-paid (65% of previous

income), and contains a "use-or-lose" component of two months that incentivizes fathers to also take leave (BMFSFJ 2018a). Together with the expansion of publicly funded childcare, the introduction of the new leave system has contributed to Germany's shift from a conservative, "familialist", to a "sustainable" welfare state model (Esping-Andersen 1998, 2009; Lewis 2010; Ostner 2010; Ray et al. 2010; Saraceno and Keck 2011; Collins 2019). Yet, even though the division of parental leave has been more gender-equal after the reform than before, pronounced gender differences have persisted: Among parents of children born in 2015, only 36% of fathers took parental leave, and out of these, more than 80% only took the two months that otherwise would have been forfeited. At the same time, the average duration of paid leave among mothers was 11.6 months (Statistisches Bundesamt 2019).

3. Data and Methods

In our analyses, we draw on qualitative and quantitative couple-level data from Germany that were collected in 2014 and 2015. Both samples were drawn from the national probability sample AID:A II[1]. Our quantitative sample contains data from a national probability survey of different-sex couples with young children (N = 878 couples). At least one of the parents had to be employed at the time of the interview to be included in the sample; moreover, unusual employment constellations (e.g., couples in which both partners worked part-time) were oversampled (see Bernhardt et al. 2016 for more information about the sample). We adjust for this oversampling (and the fact that our multivariable analyses also contain characteristics of the respondent's partner) by including couple-level weights.[2] The qualitative data stem from 44 in-depth couple interviews with dual-earner couples with young children.

In our mixed methods approach, we combine descriptive and (multinomial) logistic regression analyses with qualitative content analysis to identify the reasons for differences in leave take-up and leave durations among fathers and mothers as well as the perceived consequences of taking leave. Logistic regressions are used to model the probability of the occurrence of perceived negative career consequences. Multinomial logistic regressions are used to predict the probability of more than two possible outcomes, in our case different lengths of leave.

The purpose of our mixed methods approach is to complement findings from our quantitative analysis with findings from our semi-structured interviews, which not only elaborate on and illustrate our conclusions but also clarify them (Greene 2007). Illustrating quantitative findings with the help of qualitative findings in a mixed methods approach is often characterized as putting "meat on the bones of dry quantitative results" (Bryman 2006, p. 106). Yet, describing our intention as solely illustrative would be insufficient. Beyond this, we want to detect in an exploratory manner any plausible explanations for variations in the uptake of leave and the self-perceived consequences of taking leave that were not captured by our quantitative categories. The qualitative material hence provides insights that go beyond the categorical outcomes of our quantitative material. Our research approach can best be described as a concurrent triangulation design (Creswell et al. 2007, p. 229). Using Morse (1991) notation system, the composition of our design can be described as QUAN$\overset{+}{\rightarrow}$qual.[3] The findings from the quantitative analysis partly informed our qualitative analysis, while the qualitative material revealed additional findings that were not captured in the survey data. The "joint display" (Schoonenboom

[1] AID:A II stands for "Aufwachsen in Deutschland: Alltagswelten" (Growing up in Germany: Every-Day Worlds); more information on the study can be found at www.dji.de/aida.

[2] It needs to be noted here that highly-educated couples were more likely to participate in the survey and that the weights used in our analyses may not fully account for this potential bias.

[3] Although not typical for Morse (1991) notation system of mixed methods designs, we linked the core and supplement with a plus sign and an arrow. Since the data collection occurred in a more or less sequential but independent manner, the plus sign signifies the concurrent collection period of the two data sources. Unlike most mixed methods designs which have a corresponding level of dependency in the data collection and analysis phase, resulting in a "sequential" design as in Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017), we analyzed the two data sources dependently, even though the collection occurred more or less concurrently, thus the additional arrow in the notation.

and Johnson 2017) of the quantitative and qualitative results serves as the point of integration of both components at the level of data interpretation.

3.1. Quantitative Data and Analyses

In our quantitative analyses, we drew on the sample of parents whose youngest child was born after the 2007 parental leave reform and who were eligible to take parental leave (as indicated by being employed before their youngest child was born and/or actual parental leave use).[4] Our entire analytic sample therefore consisted of 1286 observations (660 fathers and 626 mothers). However, the number of observations in the different analyses varied, because, for instance, we could only ask fathers who did not take any leave about the reasons for not taking leave.

In the first step, we explored fathers' reasons for not taking leave (N = 367) and for not taking leave for more than two months (N = 172). In the second step, we linked both fathers' and mothers' self-reported working conditions to the length of parental leave they took for their youngest child. The comparison between fathers and mothers allowed us to identify the potential gender differences in what is perceived to be a family-friendly working environment. One limitation of the data is that we only had information on workplace conditions at the time of the interview but did not know whether parents encountered similar workplace conditions at the time their child was born. To account for this as much as possible, we excluded those individuals who had changed employers since the birth of their youngest child (and those for whom information on the relevant covariates was missing by listwise deletion). The multinomial logistic regression analyses we used to explore the relationship between workplace conditions and length were based on the responses of 369 fathers and 291 mothers.[5] In the last step, we examined the relationship between workplace conditions and self-reported negative career consequences of taking leave among those who had taken leave, using logistic regression analyses and applying the same sample restrictions as above (N = 162 for fathers and N = 257 for mothers).[6] For an intuitive interpretation of our findings, we graphically present predicted margins for both types of analyses and display a table containing average marginal effects in the Appendix A.

3.2. Qualitative Data and Analyses

After taking a random sample of N = 131 couples from the AID:A survey, the interviewees were further selected via theoretical sampling according to their occupational arrangements in order to cover a wide range of household constellations and occupational arrangements, including less common ones; this resulted in the aforementioned N = 44 interviews. In eight couples, the father worked part time and the mother full time; 13 couples had a male-dominated additional earner model (father worked full time, mother part time), in 11 couples both partners worked full time, and in 12 couples both partners worked part time. Moreover, the interviewed couples exhibited a wide range of parental-leave distributions. A considerable number (12) chose a distribution of parental leave in which the father took no leave whereas the mother took 12 or more months of leave. A total of 16 couples opted for the "new leave norm," that is, the mother took 12 months of leave and the father took two months. In two couples, the mother was still the main user of the parental leave, but the father took more than the two partner months, that is, he took between three and six months and she took between eight and 11 months. An egalitarian distribution—where both partners took at least six months—was chosen by

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[4] Parents who had not taken any leave but were planning to take leave in the future were excluded from the analysis as it is not clear whether they realized their plans.

[5] It should be noted here that the fathers who had remained with the same employer since the birth of their youngest child were more likely to take exactly one or two months of leave than the fathers who had changed employers since the birth of their youngest child and the fathers who were self-employed or not employed at the time of interview. Those mothers who remained with the same employer were less likely to take more than twelve months of leave than the mothers who had changed employers or were self-employed or not employed.

[6] The mothers who had only taken the eight-week mandatory maternity leave were defined as not having taken parental leave in this questionnaire and were therefore not asked this question.

three couples. Seven couples did not make use of the entire possible leave, that is, the father took less than three months of leave and the mother took less than ten months. Four couples chose the father to be the main leave taker, with the father taking between eight and 12 and the mother between zero and four months, excluding the compulsory maternity leave of eight weeks (more information on the sample characteristics is provided in the Appendix A in Table A4).

All couples were interviewed together by trained interviewers between December 2014 and January 2015. The interviewers followed an interview protocol that contained questions and stimuli on working conditions, work–family reconciliation, parental leave use, and the distributions of paid and unpaid work among couples. The interviews lasted an average of 1.5 h and were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in German; codes and citations were subsequently translated by the authors. Interviewing couples allowed us to observe intra-couple dynamics when parents talked about their chosen parental leave arrangements. In these types of interviews, agreement and disagreement in the narratives provide additional evidence on whether the claims the individuals make are accurate or not. Through the interaction between the interviewees, topics might come up that would not have been revealed in individual interviews (Bjørnholt and Farstad 2014). In this vein, couple interviews have been shown to add richness and details to the narrative (Wimbauer and Motakef 2017). Moreover, the interviewees were addressed individually on some topics, which provided us with their individual experiences with taking leave and their own perceived career consequences.

In our data analysis, we followed the qualitative content analysis procedures suggested by Mayring (2015). Following his classification of the objectives of qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014), we pursue two objectives; these are summarizing and structuring the content. To this end, we constructed a hierarchical category system of main categories and subcategories using the software MAXQDA with memos and explicit coding rules (Kuckartz et al. 2008). We generated the categories both deductively and inductively. We started our analyses with a set of main categories deducted from our quantitative research interests, which were in turn derived from theory and previous research. This initial category system consisted of codes of reasons for the chosen parental leave arrangements, such as occupational or financial considerations, or the partner's wish to take 12 months of leave. We further included main categories regarding the consequences of parental leave for the career; these included "no consequences," "positive consequences," and "negative consequences". This deductive category assignment helped us to extract typical lines of arguments and structures from the interview material. Through inductive category assignment, we added subcategories to specify the general main categories. For example, we added eight subcategories, specifying clusters of different occupational reasons mentioned when explaining the parental leave arrangement. Throughout the category-generation and coding process, we paid particular attention to inter-coder reliability. Disagreements on the category system were discussed thoroughly and taken into consideration in the subsequent coding procedure.

4. Results

In the following section, we first present our findings on fathers' reasons for not taking parental leave. Then, we examine the factors influencing the duration of parental leave use by fathers and mothers. In the third section, we describe the results on the question of perceived career consequences of parental leave. In each of these sections, we first present the findings from our quantitative analyses and then supplement these with the findings from our qualitative analyses.

4.1. Fathers' Reasons for Not Taking (Longer) Parental Leave

Why do fathers either opt not to take parental leave or opt not to take leave for longer than the two months that would otherwise be lost? Figure 1 shows that around 50% of the fathers who had a child born after the parental leave reform of 2007, but did not take any leave, said that financial reasons held them back from taking leave. The second most important reason was that they lacked a replacement at work. About 40% said they did not take parental leave because they anticipated negative career

consequences or because taking leave among fathers was uncommon at their workplace. Only one in six fathers said that they did not take parental leave because their supervisor was against it or because they did not consider leave to be fulfilling. When all work-related reasons are taken together, these seem to be the most important factors for why fathers had not taken parental leave. About two thirds of fathers stated that at least one work-related reason (fully) applied to their decision not to take parental leave. This indicates that the work environment seems to play a major role in the decision whether to take leave or not.

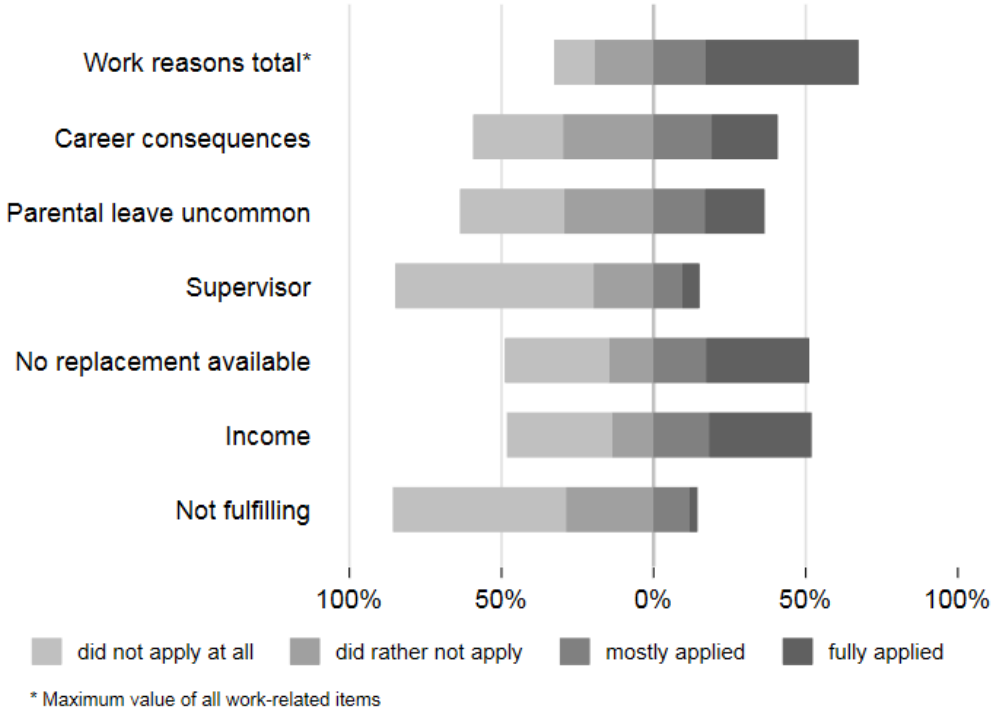

Figure 1. The fathers' reasons for not taking parental leave. $N = 367$, weighted results.

Figure 2 shows the reasons why fathers who did take leave opted not to take leave for more than two months. The most important reason for not taking longer leave was that the mother wanted to take at least twelve months of leave (80%). This indicates that mothers (among whom the vast majority still takes at least twelve months of leave) might play a considerable role as gatekeepers (see also Bloksgaard 2015). Again, financial reasons were prominent. Three quarters of fathers said that financial reasons prohibited them from taking longer leave. Overall, around 80% of fathers named at least one work-related reason that held them back from taking longer leave. About half said they did not have a replacement and almost as many said that their colleagues would have been overburdened, a similar proportion indicated that they anticipated negative career consequences, and also around half reported that longer leave was uncommon at their workplace. Again, only one in six fathers said that they had decided against longer leave because their supervisor opposed it or because they regarded it as unfulfilling.

In the qualitative interviews, couples also stressed the importance of work-related reasons when they were asked about how they decided on who took leave and for how long. Several parents invoked an unsuitable job situation to justify their non-use of parental leave, often without giving concrete or comprehensible reasons "*F: From the operations standpoint, this is not so easy to implement, because I partly work in shifts*" (02_PTFT, 12 + 0 PL).[7] This non-specific, problematic-context narrative on one

[7] We use M/F in front of a quote to indicate whether a statement was made by a mother or father interviewee. The abbreviation PT stands for part-time employed, FT for full-time employed. The contract type of the male partner comes first, the female

partner's side (mostly the father's) was often supplemented by a low-threshold-situation narrative on the other partner's side (the mother's) as the following quotation illustrates: "*M: Well it was simply easier for me to take the full year because my job is safer*" (29_FTFT, 12 + 0 PL). This line of argument was particularly prominent among public sector employees. These general descriptions of mothers' and fathers' workplace situations complemented each other in couples' descriptions of how they decided to split up parental leave.

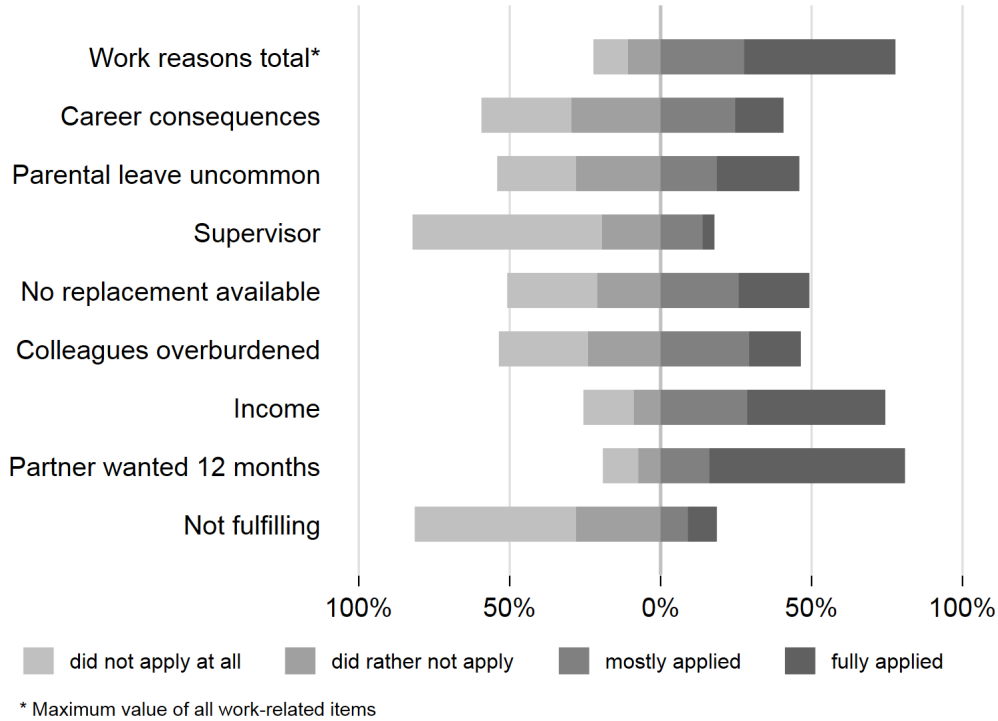

Figure 2. The fathers' reasons for not taking leave for longer than one or two months. $N = 172$, weighted results.

When describing their decision-making process, parents also talked about how work interruptions due to their parental leave fitted their general career. Surprisingly, these claims were made by both men and women. For example, one father explained "*F: My contract ended with the end of parental leave and after 13 years I moved on to another company, consensually. [. . .] That was a wonderful opportunity to take a 12 months break and evaluate the labor market and find something new*" (01_PTFT, 2 + 12 PL). Women used the "career-fit" narrative to explain unusually short leaves; more specifically, they referred to the timing dimension in their career course: "*M: Twelve months before the birth, I climbed the career ladder and had a new job that carried a great deal of responsibility and it was clear that a long career break would not be possible*" (01_PTFT, 2 + 12 PL). Both men and women, but predominantly men, stated that having started a new job or being at the beginning of a new work cycle was the main reason for not taking (longer) parental leave (35_PTPT, 2 + 2 PL; 34_PTPT, 12 + 0 PL).

Confirming the results from the survey data, the interviews also revealed that anticipating negative career consequences was a major reason for fathers either to not take leave or to opt for a traditional distribution of leave among mothers and fathers. "*F: If you then make use of your allowance, come hell or high water, of course you have the possibility to do it in the end, but that you face disadvantages, that's just the risk*" (02_PTFT, 12 + 0 PL). Women also worried about and expected to face penalties for taking longer

partner's second. 12 + 0 PL indicates the division of paid parental leave. The female partner's length of leave comes first, the male partner's second. Mothers who took only the eight weeks of mandatory maternity leave were coded as having taken leave for two months.

parental leave. However, in contrast to men, their descriptions mostly focused on how they tried to minimize these penalties rather than avoiding them entirely. This is illustrated by the following quotation by a female metro driver, who would have lost her driving license for safety reasons after a long leave period: "*M: So eight weeks after giving birth I drove the train for four hours and then every three months again during the parental leave, just not to lose my drivers' license [. . .] and well he had to follow my route those days with the baby because I was still breastfeeding*" (25_FTFT, 12 + 0 PL).

Moreover, and again in accordance with the results of the quantitative analysis, many parents did not think that their boss inhibited them from taking (longer) leave. The qualitative material instead showed that supervisors played an encouraging role when it came to taking leave. Fathers, in particular, emphasized this positive role of supervisors "*F: I announced my wish to take leave and talked to my boss about whether this was fine with him and he said 'No problem, definitely, do this!'*" (28_FTFT, 12 + 2 PL).

4.2. Workplace Characteristics and Fathers' and Mothers' Leave Durations

How are workplace conditions related to the duration of parental leave taken by fathers and mothers who have a stable employer? Given that work-related factors seem to be decisive barriers to taking (extended) parental leave, we will explore which aspects of the workplace context are related to the actual length of leave taken and whether these factors (in addition to the length of leave) are also linked to negative career consequences. In these next two steps of analyses, we will compare the fathers' experiences to those of mothers. Mothers take much longer leaves on average than fathers. Yet, so far, we know little about whether mothers' decisions regarding parental leave length and perceived consequences of parental leave are related to the same or different workplace factors than those affecting fathers.

Figures 3 and 4 present the predicted margins of the likelihood of taking different lengths of parental leave (regression table with the full set of covariates is available in Table A5 in Appendix A). For mothers and fathers, we divided the length of leave taken into three categories, which reflect the gendered patterns of parental leave use. For fathers, the three categories were "no parental leave", "one or two months of leave", and "longer leave." For mothers, the three categories were "less than twelve months of leave," "exactly twelve months of leave," and "more than twelve months of leave." In both cases, the middle category, which reflects the "12 + 2 norm", was chosen as the reference category. In these multivariate analyses, and in subsequent ones, we included the following predictors (see Table A1 in the Appendix A for an overview): whether parents worked in the public or private sector, whether respondents had a replacement or not in case of absence (referring to general absence and not absence due to parental leave)[8], and whether the organization had a works council[9] (all dummy variables). To assess different aspects of organizational culture, we included the respondents' perceptions of the prevalence of an ideal worker norm at their workplace, the prevalence of traditional gender norms, supervisor support, and the existence of family-friendly workplace regulations.[10] As controls, we included respondents' age, number of children, and year of birth of the youngest child, along with information on whether respondents lived in eastern or western Germany, whether they were married, had tertiary education, had a partner with tertiary education, worked on

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8 The exact question wording was: "Turning to your colleagues: If you are absent or have to leave early, do you have colleagues who cover for you or does your work remain undone?"

9 In an alternative specification (Table A5 in the Appendix A), we included firm size instead of presence of a works council and workplace policies. As formal policies and works councils are concentrated in large firms, we could not include these variables in the same model as firm size.

10 The perception of an ideal worker norm was operationalized by a scale consisting of the average of four items adapted from Booth and Matthews (2012). For workplace gender norms, we developed a scale consisting of the average of three items based on Gärtner (2012). Supervisor support was measured by creating an average of four items following various studies (Hammer et al. 2009; Harrington et al. 2011; Pfahl et al. 2014). Regarding family-friendly workplace regulation, we generated a scale based on the company case studies by Botsch et al. (2007) consisting of the average of five items. We assessed the level of agreement with each item on a ten-point scale (0 = do not agree at all, 10 = agree completely). Details on our operationalization of the workplace characteristics can be found in the Appendix A in Table A1.

a fixed-term contract, and whether they worked in a professional position (Class 1 and 2 according to the European Socio-Economic Classification) (all dummy variables, see Tables A2 and A3 in the Appendix A).

As shown in Figure 3, in line with the explanations given by the fathers who opted not to take (longer) leave, fathers were more likely to take longer leave (three or more months) if they had a replacement. While fathers who had a replacement had a predicted probability of 23% to take more than two months of leave, fathers who did not have a replacement had a predicted probability of 7% of taking an extended leave. To our surprise, none of the other workplace conditions exhibited a statistically significant relationship with fathers' leave uptake.

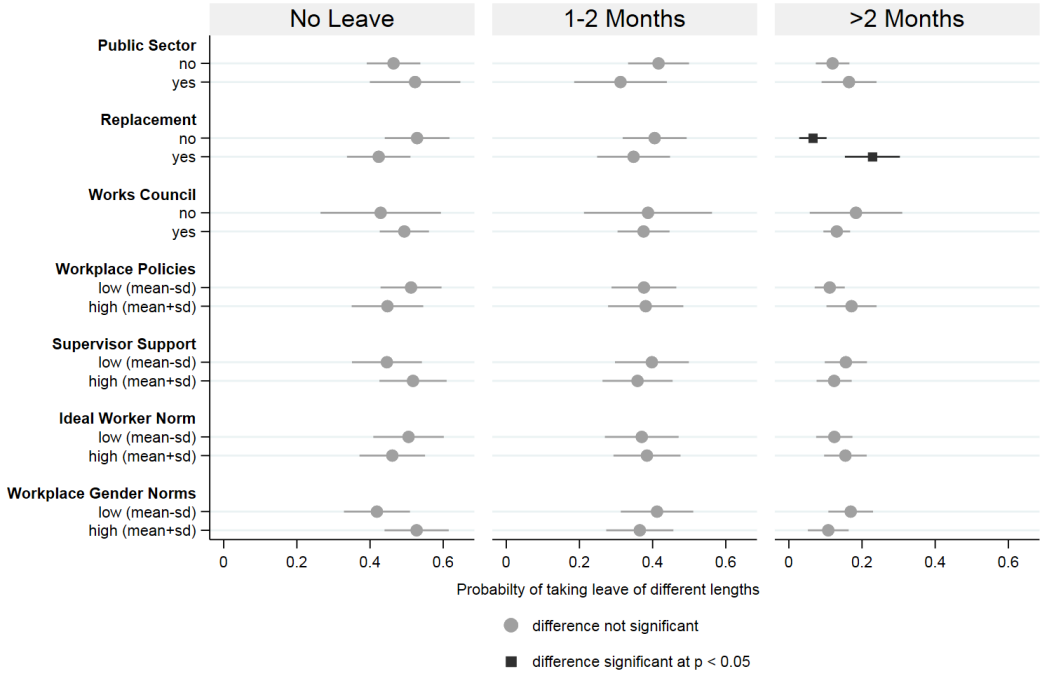

Figure 3. Predicted margins of the fathers' likelihood of taking different lengths of leave with 95% confidence intervals. Note: $N = 369$. The results are based on models that are adjusted for the following covariates: age, marital status, tertiary education, partner's tertiary education, number of children, birth year of the youngest child (as a proxy for time since the introduction of reform), region, professional position, fixed-term contract; full results available in Table A5 in the Appendix A.

Figure 4 shows a couple of statistically significant relationships between mothers' length of parental leave and their workplace conditions. As is the case for fathers, replacement regulations were also relevant for mothers. The mothers who had a replacement had a 12% likelihood of taking less than twelve months of leave and a 48% likelihood taking more than twelve months. By contrast, the mothers who did not have a replacement had a 32% likelihood of taking less than twelve months of leave and only a 28% likelihood of taking more than twelve months. Again, no statistically significant relationship was found between both the availability of workplace policies and the existence of a works council and mothers' length of leave.[11] The mothers who perceived their organization as traditional with regard to gender norms were less likely to take short leaves than the mothers who perceived their workplace to be more gender egalitarian. Extended leaves of more than twelve months were also less common in the public sector, possibly because more family-friendly working conditions facilitated an earlier return to work. An account given by a mother working in the city administration supported

[11] Regarding firm size, an alternative specification shown in Table A5 in the Appendix A reveals that the mothers in small firms (less than 20 employees) are more likely to take short leaves than the mothers in medium-sized firms (20–250 employees).

this presumption: she stated that she was easily able to return to work part time and hire an additional person to cover the other 50% when she realized she needed help (17_FTPT, 7 + 0 PL).

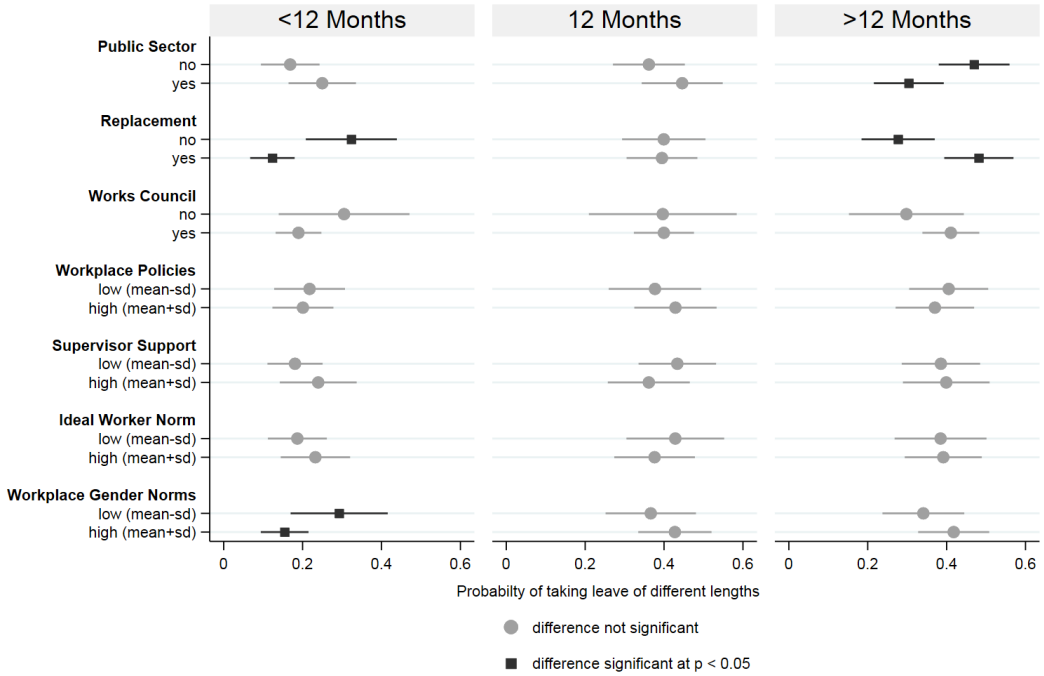

Figure 4. Predicted margins of the mothers' likelihood of taking different lengths of leave with 95% confidence intervals. Note: $N = 291$. The results are based on models that are adjusted for the following covariates: age, marital status, tertiary education, partner's tertiary education, number of children, birth year of the youngest child (as a proxy for time since the introduction of reform), region, professional position, fixed-term contract; full results available in Table A5 in the Appendix A.

Furthermore, our data show how the 12 + 2 norm in the division of parental leave became institutionalized over time: Fathers became more likely to take one or two months of leave and less likely to take no leave as more time passed after the parental leave reform. Meanwhile, mothers became more likely to take exactly twelve months of leave rather than longer leave (Table A5 in the Appendix A).

Taken together, the quantitative analyses suggest that, for both men and women, the availability of a replacement arrangement is central for the length of leave parents take. Other workplace characteristics, by contrast, appear to play a minor role—at least among those parents who had not changed their employer since the birth of their last child (74% of the fathers and 57% of the mothers in our sample).

As the quantitative data only allowed us to make claims regarding the effect of a replacement being available or not, and because having a replacement only seemed to be of importance for men when they wanted to take longer leave, we use the qualitative interview material to take an in-depth look at replacement situations. In accordance with the quantitative analyses, the replacement situation was not of great importance for fathers when they took up to two months of leave. Yet, when fathers were taking leave exceeding the duration of two months or thinking about it, the replacement situation mattered more. Several fathers said that taking more than two months of leave "*F: would have been bad*" (39_PTPT, 8 + 2 PL), referring to the reorganization of tasks at their workplace. In particular, those fathers who "only" took two months of leave showed a lot of understanding for the company's interests and included the employer's interests in their reasoning for not having taken longer leaves: "*F: I work in a small company, well and if someone is missing—I am team manager—that's definitely more problematic to work out. But it worked out after all, we could cover for each other, that was okay then. But longer would have been a problem.*" (31_FTFT, 12 + 2 PL). Retrospectively, however, even in those cases in which

fathers took two months of leave, the fathers viewed the replacement situation as problematic and causing an increased workload after returning to the workplace: "*F: It was only that I expected them to redistribute my tasks during my absence, but that didn't happen. So the workload stayed the same, I simply wasn't there for a time*" (38_PTPT, 11 + 2 PL).

In the male interviewees' narratives, parental leave was characterized as a "*F: prolonged vacation*" (15_FTPT, 12 + 2 PL) and was considered to be a favor on the part of the employer rather than a legal entitlement. As is the case with vacations, leaves of up to two months were considered to be unproblematic when they were well-planned and compatible with the employer's needs: "*F: I asked them when it made sense, when it would be okay, so that they had a replacement available [. . .] and also with the months, I handled this flexibly, I took the leave when it was not high season*" (13_FTPT, 12 + 2 PL). It is particularly noteworthy that the replacement in this particular case was not an additional hire but a colleague who covered the absent father's day-to-day work.

Understanding the employer's needs, particularly the difficulty of organizing a leave-related replacement, was also prevalent among the fathers who wanted to take more than two months of leave but encountered barriers when seeking to do so: "*F: My bosses already stated that, that it would be difficult for them. They tried to find someone for a year but that was not possible [. . .] and that's why we had to have another talk and tried to find a way that I would not stay away for so long*" (08_PTFT, 4 + 3 PL). One father stated "*F: Well he [the boss] was lucky that a colleague's son could enter the company at that time and replace me . . .* " To accommodate his company's needs, however, he reluctantly agreed to work once a week during his two-year parental leave in order "*to take some work off of him [the boss]*" (05_PTFT, 14 + 24 PL). In many cases, fathers named the tight job market situation and their specialization as the main obstacles to taking their preferred length of leave: "*F: Well I work in a highly specialized field and you cannot simply replace an employee there*" (02_PTFT, 12 + 0 PL). Hence, these male employees seemed to accept and even reproduce the company's implicit mode of operation. It is, therefore, not surprising that, in our material, very few fathers considered the employer responsible for enabling them to take leave (42_PTPT, 12 + 2 PL). The fathers who took leave against the explicit will of the company faced disapproval: "*F: They reacted with a lot of groaning because it meant more work for the others [. . .] so in fact my work stayed still for two months, no replacement was sought and I had a big pile of work and never managed to catch up after the leave*" (20_FTPT, 12 + 2 PL). They even faced public mocking and humiliation: "*F: They made jokes like 'look who is the mother now,' the usual, right?*" (20_FTPT, 12 + 2 PL).

We found the interplay of replacement provision and leave uptake among mothers to be very different from the experiences described by fathers. The mothers' use of parental leave—even for 12 months or longer—seemed to be taken for granted in their companies, which meant that mothers described their leave agreement to be unproblematic, particularly when the leave was organized in advance together with the leave-taking employee (36_PTPT, 12 + 0 PL). Pregnancy was described as a form of dropping out that was easy to integrate into the company's workflow: "*M: We had some time before I left, so my employer took care of finding a replacement in time so that I could even train her*" (17_FTPT, 7 + 0 PL). In contrast to fathers, for mothers, finding a replacement, even in specialized management positions, was not described as an insurmountable obstacle (05_PTFT, 14 + 24 PL). It was instead characterized as a "*technical question*" (07_PTFT, 4 + 10 PL; 33_PTPT, 36 + 36 PL). Even in small organizations and teams, mothers described the reactions to their leave uptake as understanding and positive, and both the employer and the employee worked together to find pragmatic solutions (11_FTPT, 12 + 0 PL). In general, it was clear that finding a replacement for twelve months or more was less of a problem than for shorter periods of time, which might be the reason why mothers described the replacement situation as less problematic than the fathers.

The generally positive reactions most mothers in our interviews described should, however, not conceal the fact that replacement arrangements did not always work out very well and that mothers also encountered negative reactions from their colleagues and supervisors when announcing their leave: "*M: I got a quick recap about what had happened in the last months and that was about it.*" And, speaking of the work that had come up while she was gone, the respondent noted "*well that had been*

taken care of by whoever was available (laughs)" (10_FTPT, 7 + 0 PL). Although mothers also reported that their colleagues feared being overloaded with work during their absence, they did not—in contrast to our male interviewees—refrain from taking the leave they had intended to take (06_PTFT, 12 + 0 PL). Resisting external pressures and following through with their original decision was a narrative that could be found among some mothers, in contrast to fathers, who gave in more often to their employers' directions: "*M: From my boss the question came very, very insistently whether I could come back earlier or come back later, so that either no replacement would be necessary or it would be reasonable to hire someone, which was very difficult for twelve months for my position. I didn't give in to this request, I said that it's my decision and I want to handle it this way and she has to see how she manages and she did manage*" (41_PTPT, 12 + 2 PL).

Taken together, the analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data indicate the relevance of replacement arrangements for parents' length of leave. While fathers tended to justify short leaves by invoking the lack of a replacement at their workplace, mothers mostly described professional replacement as being unproblematic and as not hindering them from taking longer leaves.

4.3. Consequences of Parental Leave for Fathers' and Mothers' Professional Careers

Last but not least, we were interested in the professional consequences of parental leave for fathers and mothers. How is leave uptake related to fathers' and mothers' assessments of their professional advancement? What workplace characteristics are associated with a negative evaluation of leave uptake among fathers and mothers? In the weighted full sample, 93% of the fathers reported that they did not perceive any career consequences as a result of taking parental leave, while 6% perceived negative consequences and 2% positive consequences. In the restricted sample of the fathers who had not changed their employer since the birth of their child, the proportions were the same. Hence, even though many men feared negative career consequences, such consequences were uncommon among those fathers who took leave. This discrepancy might partly be explained by self-selection. Fathers who feared career consequences might have decided against taking parental leave, whereas most fathers who actually took parental leave may have correctly anticipated that they would not encounter negative consequences.

As almost all mothers in Germany take leave beyond the mandatory eight weeks, the sample of mothers in the analyses is less selective, which may explain why mothers are more likely to report negative consequences. In the weighted full sample, only 72% of mothers perceived no consequences, whereas 23% reported negative consequences, and 5% experienced positive consequences. Mothers who had remained with the same employer since the birth of their youngest child were somewhat more likely to report no consequences (77%) and less likely to report negative consequences (18%) than mothers who changed employers, who were self-employed, or who were not employed at the time of interview. Mothers were hence far more likely to perceive negative career consequences for taking parental leave than fathers, although they experienced fewer employer obstacles when asking for leave.

To assess whether the perception of negative professional consequences was related to workplace factors and to the length of leave taken, we now turn to the multivariate results in Figure 5. Interestingly, the last two rows show that the length of leave taken was unrelated to the likelihood of perceiving negative career consequences for both fathers and mothers. This observation also holds for the full sample, i.e., also for those parents who had changed employers since the birth of their youngest child, who were self-employed, or who were not employed at the time of the interview. While these findings may be surprising, the results for fathers are actually in line with other findings from Germany based on longitudinal analyses (Bünning 2016) and experimental work (Hipp 2018).

Regarding workplace characteristics, the employment sector mattered for fathers. The predicted probability that fathers perceived negative career consequences due to taking parental leave was 7% in the private sector but only 2% in the public sector. Even though the availability of a replacement was related to the length of leave that fathers took, it was unrelated to experiencing negative career consequences due to taking parental leave. Moreover, neither the availability of workplace policies

nor the existence of a works council were related to the likelihood of experiencing negative career consequences.[12] Regarding workplace culture, the fathers who reported a strong prevalence of the ideal worker norm at their workplace (that is, whose assessment was one standard deviation above the mean) had a 12% likelihood of reporting negative career consequences, whereas the predicted probability that fathers who perceived a weak ideal worker norm at their workplace (minus one standard deviation from the mean) reported negative consequences was close to 0%.

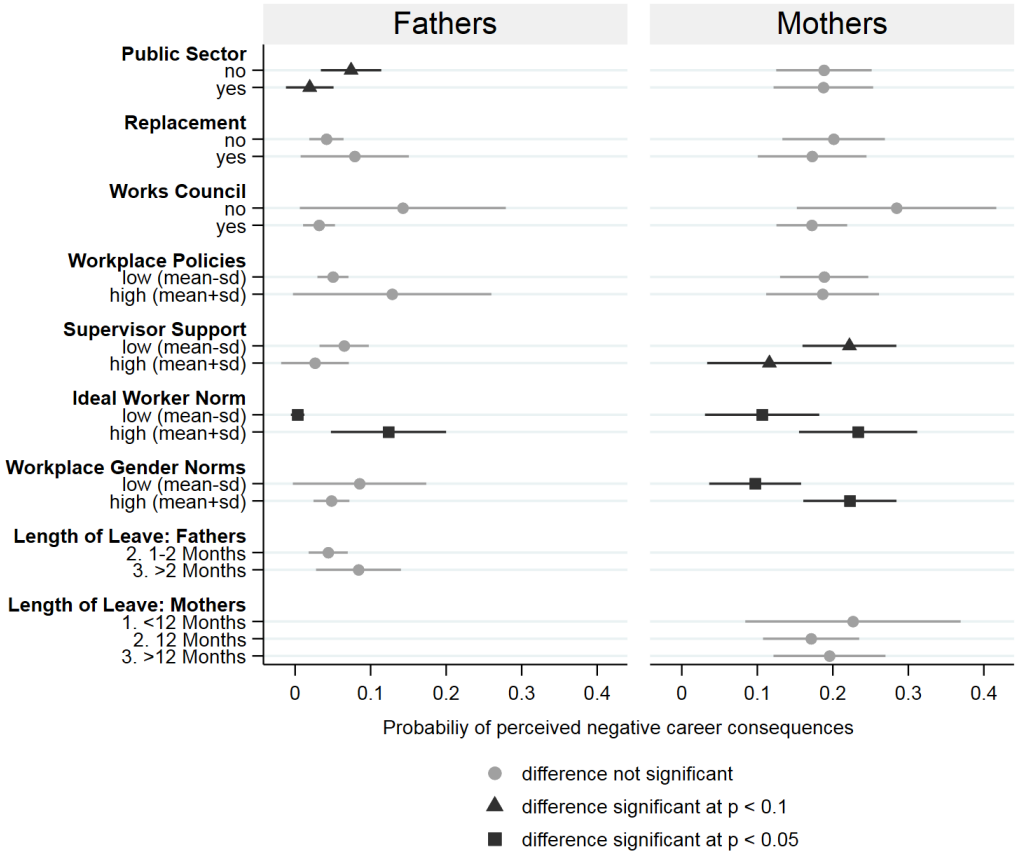

Figure 5. Predicted margins of parents' likelihood of perceiving negative career consequences. Note: $N = 162$ (fathers) and $N = 257$ (mothers); Parents answered the following question: "What consequences did taking parental leave have for your career?" Parents could choose between positive, negative, and no career consequences. Given that very few parents reported positive career consequences, we combined no consequences and positive consequences into one category. The results are based on models that are adjusted for the following covariates: age, marital status, tertiary education, partner's tertiary education, number of children, birth year of the youngest child (as a proxy for time since the introduction of reform), region, professional position, fixed-term contract; full results available in Table A6 in the Appendix A.

A strong ideal worker norm also increased the likelihood that mothers would experience negative career consequences. It is important to note here that fathers in organizations with strong ideal worker norms were only slightly more likely to report negative career consequences than mothers in organizations with weak ideal worker norms.[13] Mothers who had more supportive supervisors were less likely to report negative career consequences than mothers with less supportive supervisors (12%

[12] The same applies to firm size; see Table A6 in the Appendix A.

[13] Also note that the relationship between the prevalence of an ideal worker norm and the mothers' likelihood to experience negative career consequences was not statistically significant in the alternative specification of the model that includes firm size instead of works council and workplace policies (Table A6 in the Appendix A).

compared to 22%). Additionally, if mothers worked in an organization with more traditional gender norms, they were not only discouraged from taking short leaves, but were also more likely to perceive negative career consequences (22% compared to 10%). The other factors that were associated with the length of leave mothers took (sector of employment and replacement) were unrelated to whether they experienced negative career consequences.

The qualitative interviews paint a more nuanced picture of the type of the professional consequences of taking leave and further illustrate how workplace characteristics affect whether parents think that their parental leave had negative effects. In line with the quantitative findings, several fathers experienced no consequences and some even experienced positive consequences, for example when the length of parental leave they took was very common in the organization or when they managed to stay in touch with their employer during their leave. Yet, in contrast, the interviews also revealed a wide range of negative professional consequences, especially for mothers: these employees were assigned less interesting tasks, had their projects cancelled, did not receive scheduled salary increases, missed promotions, or encountered stigmatizing comments from colleagues and employers. Several mothers described being "*cut off*" from the communication processes in their workplaces when returning to their jobs after the end of their leaves: "*M: Yeah, that was a bit difficult, I didn't know where I would be working after my leave, because I said that I would like to change to another department, but I didn't know where that would be. I kind of felt cut off from the information*" (43_PTPT, 7 + 7 PL). Even during a relatively short absence of half a year, communicative barriers arose. Due to this insufficient communication and the disinterest of their employer, mothers were reassigned to departments or positions that did not fit their qualifications, in one case without the person's agreement (21_FTPT, 24 + 2 PL). Others were cut out in the course of restructuring: "*M: They decided to close the research department and it was understandable but it was very obvious that they primarily asked those women on parental leave to leave. And well since I was not in the company at that time it was way more difficult to find a solution, maybe to transfer to another department. It was so demoralizing to not have any points of reference inside the company anymore*" (31_FTFT, 12 + 2 PL).

While the quantitative analyses point out the relevance of the ideal worker norm in the workplace, the qualitative interviews illustrate how leave uptake was actually penalized in organizations in which strong ideal worker norms prevailed. One father, for example, said that his boss depicted the leave he took as a "*favor*", and not the legal right it actually was, and that the organization "*suffered*" during the three months of parental leave. In fact, his employer used the leave as an argument to refuse a standard salary increase (08_PTFT, 4 + 3 PL). Even a father who only took two months of leave reported that he had not obtained his salary increase since he was not present on the key date. This shows that, irrespective of the duration of leave, if an employee is not present at relevant moments, he/she can be refused promotions/pay raises (03_PTFT, 6 + 6 PL). An illustration of another form of non-compliance with the ideal worker norm resulting in negative professional consequences was given by a mother, who reported that a person she had trained and who was in a lower position than she had been in before her leave had been promoted to be her superior in her absence (26_FTFT, 7 + 0 PL). Here, only the employees who put paid work above their private life and, hence, adhered to the ideal worker norm got promoted. The interviews, moreover, also revealed how returning to work part time after family leave complicated things further (Williams et al. 2013) and that supervisors tended to prefer full-time employees (12_FTPT, 12 + 0 PL). One mother recalled that her supervisor had assumed she would catch up with the skills and qualifications the other employees had obtained during the 12 months of her absence but failed to provide the training and a proper introduction to the new software. In consequence, the woman found herself with an overly low workload and less interesting tasks. Furthermore, her return to work part time—which violated the ideal worker norm (Lott and Klenner 2018)—rendered her return to work even more difficult (09_FTPT, 12 + 2 PL). Another illustration of the power of the ideal worker norm is provided by one (career-oriented) mother who arranged with her boss to take "shorter" leave of four months and received explicitly positive feedback for this choice (07_PTFT, 4 + 10 PL).

Our qualitative data also provides indications as to why mothers encountered negative consequences more often than fathers. The interviews suggest that mothers' stronger negative career consequences resulted from a combination of gender stereotypes held by employers and colleagues and the duration of parental leave. They revealed that there is a substantial difference between what is considered to be an appropriate and normal length of leave for men and women. Short leaves for fathers were presented as normal in our interviews. Short leaves were not only perceived as very common but were also described as almost exclusively having no consequences for employees and employers (in contrast to the common long leaves for mothers). Interestingly, several fathers did not perceive consequences like work left undone, leading to overtime as negative consequences but framed them as "normal" consequences that one has to deal with as an employee (03_PTFT, 6 + 6 PL; 14_FTPT, 12 + 2 PL; 38_PTPT, 11 + 2 PL). However, while the two months of leave that were generally perceived to be "ok" for men and "only" entailed the "normal" negative professional consequences (if any) (08_PTFT, 4 + 3 PL), the appropriate and normalized duration of twelve months of leave for women was repeatedly penalized by employers. In general, parents made reference to gendered stigmatizations by employers and colleagues in their accounts. For the most part, while some mothers reported being perceived as uncaring mothers if they took leaves that were "too short" or were characterized as unreliable employees because of childcare duties after taking parental leave, some fathers were presented as flagships for active fatherhood when taking "longer" leave. This unequal evaluation standard is illustrated by the example of a couple who consciously decided to split their paid leave equally into six months each. While both partners worked in management positions in big companies and had a "seamless" transition returning to work, they recounted very different reactions from their colleagues: "*F: For me, no problems at all, I'd say positive reactions even, I was in a company's brochure as 'role model', that one can live family differently. [...] M: For me the reactions were mixed, also a lot of negative comments like 'a mother should be with her child . . . one doesn't do that . . . what does a father do home alone with such a small child' [. . .] I had to explain myself a lot*" (03_PTFT, 6 + 6 PL). For another mother, who also worked in a management position in a big organization, her boss's gendered and devaluing perception had very concrete impacts: While her boss was generally happy that she returned to full-time work in her management position comparably soon after the child's birth, she was given less interesting tasks and less responsibility because he assumed that she would be absent a lot if her child was sick (07_PTFT, 4 + 10 PL). Furthermore, previously planned projects and tasks were cancelled based on the argument that "*it doesn't fit anymore, it doesn't make sense*" (07_PTFT, 4 + 10 PL), making her feel that "*M: I was somehow punished [for the pregnancy]*" (07_PTFT, 4 + 10 PL). She continuously proved herself to be the ideal worker insofar as she was working as effectively as before the pregnancy. Interestingly, after having her second child, for which she took even shorter amount of parental leave, she reported a positive experience. She was asked to be part of a mentoring program for career development during her pregnancy.

In a sharp contrast, a father who took seven months of paid leave and was generally comparable to the mother in the aforementioned example received a lot of understanding and goodwill from his boss. While on parental leave, he applied for and managed to get a higher position. His boss even waited four months until he had ended his parental leave for him to start in the new job (43_PTPT, 7 + 7). Interestingly, these gendered stigmatizations were mainly reported from employees in management positions, but it is unlikely that these mechanisms are exclusive to the management level or even to white-collar jobs in general.

In sum, the analyses of both the quantitative and the qualitative data indicated that fathers, who typically take short leaves, only rarely experience negative career consequences, whereas mothers, who typically take twelve months of leave, do so more frequently. Even though the quantitative analyses showed that the length of leave taken was unrelated to the likelihood of negative consequences within the groups of mothers and fathers, the qualitative material indicated that the length of leave taken, in combination with gender stereotypes, is part of the reason why fathers experience less disadvantages than mothers. Moreover, both fathers and mothers were particularly likely to experience

negative professional consequences of taking leave, e.g., foregone pay rises or being assigned to less interesting tasks, if they worked in organizations that adhered to the ideal worker norm.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, we assessed the role of workplace characteristics for fathers' and mothers' parental leave use and the perceived consequences of taking leave for their career advancement. To promote gender equality in paid and unpaid work, several European countries have implemented parental leave schemes that include "use-or-lose" components to incentivize a more egalitarian division of paid leave among parents. Yet, despite notable increases in the fathers' uptake of leave in these countries, the division of leave nevertheless remains highly gender-asymmetrical (O'Brien 2009; Blum et al. 2018). Germany, for example, introduced a "use-or-lose" component in its parental scheme back in 2007. The fathers in Germany have responded to the policy change by taking leaves in increasing proportions, but they rarely take leaves that exceed the time that otherwise would be lost, and the majority of fathers do not take leave. This suggests that factors beyond the policy design need to be considered in order to understand parents' decisions of how to share parental leave.

In this paper, we therefore examined how the workplace, which is a highly "gendered organization" (Acker 1990), shapes fathers' and mothers' decisions on how to divide parental leave. Moreover, we also investigated how workplace characteristics relate to fathers' (and mothers') perceived career consequences of leave use, since several studies show that fathers do not take (longer) leave out of fear of negative career repercussions (Vogt and Pull 2010; BMFSFJ 2007; Bloksgaard 2015). However, given the lack of good information on workplace characteristics in the available data sources, these studies could not fully identify which workplace characteristics inhibit (or promote) taking leave among fathers and how workplace characteristics are related to the (perceived) career consequences of taking leave.

Drawing on original quantitative and qualitative data, which provided detailed information on parents' workplace characteristics in Germany, we were able to narrow this important gap in the literature. Our quantitative and qualitative findings showed that fathers indeed invoked work-related reasons when explaining why they did not take (longer) parental leave, but also that most workplace characteristics were actually unrelated to fathers' use of leave. In particular, our quantitative analyses showed that supervisor support, the presence of traditional gender norms at the workplace, and family-friendly workplace policies were not related to the fathers' leave uptake (in contrast to what previous studies have found for other countries (e.g., Thompson et al. 2005; Escot et al. 2012; Haas et al. 2002)). However, our analyses showed that the replacement situation mattered a great deal. Both fathers and mothers took longer leave if they had a substitute. This finding supplements research on fathers' working hours and work–family conflict (Bernhardt and Bünning 2019; van Daalen et al. 2006). The qualitative results further supplement it by suggesting that employers typically do not bother finding a replacement for men if fathers take two months of leave (Aunkofer et al. 2018). Male employees' decisions on whether they take any parental leave (or even a longer leave) are in turn contingent on the employer's ability and willingness to find a replacement. Hence, we highlight that general human resource practices such as staffing strategies may be more decisive for the parents' uptake of parental leave than the availability of explicit family-friendly workplace policies.

For mothers, we also found a relationship between the replacement situation at work and the length of leave they took. The mothers who had a replacement took longer leave on average. Yet, as our qualitative findings show, the situation is completely different for mothers than for fathers. As mothers reported, taking leave for twelve months or more is seen as relatively normal and unproblematic within the organization, as is hiring or finding a replacement (Aunkofer et al. 2018). A few individuals reported complicated or problematic replacement situations. Interestingly, in our qualitative material, mothers, unlike fathers, did not react to a problematic replacement situation by taking shorter leave, which diverges from our quantitative findings.

Our research shows that one main hindrance for the fathers who wish to take parental leave is the fear of negative career consequences. In reality, we found that few fathers that ultimately take leave actually experience negative consequences for their careers, which supports findings from previous longitudinal and experimental studies in Germany (Bünning 2016; Hipp 2018). Furthermore, we found that men experienced negative consequences of leave less often than women, which reinforces Acker (1990) claim on the workplaces' ability to produce and reinforce gender-specific social inequalities. One might think that these different experiences are attributable to the differences in the length of leave between mothers and fathers. Although we cannot directly test this explanation (as most mothers in our sample took longer leaves whereas the fathers with longer leaves are a highly selective sample), we do not think that the fact that the mothers' leaves were longer is the only explanation for their more negative experiences. For one, the length of leave was unrelated to experiencing negative career consequences among both men and women. In addition, interviewees in the qualitative interviews talked about the gendered expectations employers had with regard to parenthood. Implicitly or explicitly, some employers assumed women would prioritize work less and would be less flexible when becoming mothers, while they did not anticipate any changes in the fathers' work commitment. We therefore assume that the length of leave cannot be the main factor explaining the differences in effects between men and women.

Overall, we found that the workplace characteristics that were related to the parents' perceived career consequences of taking leave differed from those that were related to the length of leave they took. The only exception to this pertained to the traditional gender norms for mothers: In the presence of traditional gender norms at work, mothers were unlikely to take short leaves and tended to experience negative career consequences for taking leave. In line with previous work on this topic, this finding suggests that mothers are more likely to suffer as a result of prevailing gender stereotypes than fathers. On the one hand, mothers are perceived to be less competent and less committed than nonmothers or men in general. On the other hand, they are normatively expected to stay at home when having young children. This double bind may be particularly prevalent in organizations in which traditional gender norms prevail (Benard and Correll 2010).

For both men and women, taking leave was associated with a higher probability of experiencing negative career consequences if they worked in an environment with a strong ideal worker norm. Our qualitative interviews illustrated that the fathers who did not comply with the ideal worker norm—e.g., because they were absent at a specific date—or mothers who returned to work part time encountered negative career consequences. This is in line with previous research which shows that requesting parental leave triggers career penalties because employees violate the ideal worker norm. Yet, we also highlight that not all companies adhere to the ideal worker norm to the same extent and that employees in companies with a weak ideal worker norm have a low likelihood of experiencing negative career consequences for taking leave (see also Lott and Klenner 2018).

Future research should compare the importance of workplace characteristics to other factors that affect parents' leave-taking behaviors as well as the consequences of taking leave on individual career advancements, such as personal or family characteristics. Future studies, moreover, should also re-examine whether our findings also apply to parents with unstable employment trajectories, ideally using longitudinal data. Longitudinal data could further help researchers to assess the extent to which the lack of fathers' negative career experiences when taking leave is due to self-selection. Last but not least, information on workplace characteristics at the moment when parents actually decided on the division of leave would yield even more precise estimates for the role of workplace characteristics than those based on our retrospective data, as, in some cases, there was up to seven years in between the birth of the child and the interview.

In conclusion, although the findings of our study are only based on cross-sectional data and a sample that includes coupled parents of young children with stable employment, our study nonetheless offers some suggestions on how to reduce workplace barriers to promote a more equal division of parental leave. Clear staffing schedules and a reliable replacement situation have been

shown to be important aspects of the workplace culture when seeking to make parental leave more accessible for fathers. Furthermore, fundamentally reformulating the existing ideal worker norm, both in the public debate and at the workplace, constitutes an important step in the pursuit of greater gender equality in parental leave uptake.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Overview of the variables used in the quantitative analyses.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES
Reasons for not taking parental leave
Why didn't you take parental leave? Please tell me which of the following statements "fully applied"/"mostly applied"/"did rather not apply"/"did not apply at all" ... I chose not to take leave because of financial reasons. ... The leave would have harmed my career. ... Only taking care of the child would not have been fulfilling for me. ... My supervisor was against it. ... In my company it was uncommon for men to take parental leave. ... There was no replacement available for my tasks.
Reasons for not taking longer leave
Why didn't you take longer parental leave? Please tell me which of the following statements "fully applied"/"mostly applied"/"did rather not apply"/"did not apply at all" ... I chose not to take longer leave because of financial reasons. ... A longer leave would have harmed my career. ... Only taking care of the child would not have been fulfilling for me. ... My supervisor was against it. ... In my company it was uncommon for men to more than two months of leave. ... My partner wanted to take at least 12 months of leave. ... There was no replacement available for my tasks. ... A longer leave would have overburdened my colleagues.
Duration of leave taken
How many months of parental leave did you take for your youngest child? (0–36 months) Categorical variables Men: 0 month; 1–2 months; >2 months Women: <12 months; 12 months; >12 months
Negative Career Consequences (Dummy)
What consequences did your parental leave have on your career? Did the leave ... ... help the career ... harm the career ... or did it have no impact at all 0 = help the career or no impact at all; 1 = harm the career

Table A1. *Cont.*

DEPENDENT VARIABLES	
MAIN INDEPENDENT VARIABLES - WORKPLACE CHARACTERISTICS	
Public Sector (Dummy)	
Replacement (Dummy)	
When you have to leave work early or when you are absent, do your colleagues cover for you or does your work remain undone? 0 = work remains undone; 1 = colleagues cover for me	
Firm Size 0 =<20 employees; 1 = 20 to 249 employees; 2 = 250+ employees	
Works Council (Dummy)	
Degree of family-friendly workplace regulation (Cronbach's alpha = 0.84) *Based on five items rated from 0 = do not agree at all to 10 = agree completely*	Botsch et al. (2007)
Balancing family and work is a private matter. (inverted) The management is committed to the needs of employees and their families. There are official policies on balancing family and work. Policies, for instance, on working from home or flexible working hours, apply to all employees. Employees are informed about family-friendly policies.	
Support from supervisor (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81) *Based on four items rated from 0 = do not agree at all to 10 = agree completely*	Hammer et al. (2009); Harrington et al. (2011); Pfahl et al. (2014)
My supervisor respects my private life. My supervisor has a lot of understanding for my family situation. My supervisor assists me in advancing my career. My supervisor demonstrates how a person can jointly be successful on and off the job.	
Gender Roles at the Workplace (Cronbach's alpha = 0.65) *Based on three items rated from 0 = do not agree at all to 10 = agree completely*	Gärtner (2012)
In my company the common opinion is that women are supposed to back their partners up at home. In my company, child care is regarded as a women's task. In my company the common opinion is that fathers should take parental leave after the birth of their child, too. (inverted)	
Ideal Worker Norm (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78) *Based on four items rated from 0 = do not agree at all to 10 = agree completely*	Booth and Matthews (2012)
Employees who are highly committed to their personal lives cannot be highly committed to their work. It is assumed that the most productive employees are those who put their work before their family life. The way to advance is to keep non-work matters out of the workplace. Attending to personal needs, such as taking time off for sick children is frowned upon.	
CONTROLS	
Age, marital status, tertiary education, partner's tertiary education, number of children, birth year youngest child (as a proxy for time since the introduction of reform), region, professional position, fixed-term contract	

Table A2. Summary statistics for men (full sample), men with a stable employer, men who took parental leave, and men who reported negative consequences. Men who were unemployed or not employed at the time of the interview were excluded.

	Full Sample	Stable Employer	Parental Leave Users	Reported Negative Consequences
Age	42.66	42.63	41.67	39.47
Married	0.86	0.85	0.86	1.00
Tertiary education	0.54	0.55	0.56	0.74
Partner tertiary education	0.47	0.47	0.62	0.96
Number of Children	1.87	1.93	1.75	2.15
Age youngest child	4.23	3.95	3.00	2.04
Region: West	0.83	0.85	0.80	0.91
Professional position	0.68	0.70	0.76	0.80
Temporary contract	0.08	0.04	0.05	0.00
Observations	586	453	206	18

All values were weighted. Age, number of children and age of the youngest child are reported as sample means; all other values are proportions.

Table A3. Summary statistics for women (full sample), women with a stable employer, women who took parental leave, and women who reported negative consequences. Women who were unemployed or not employed at the time of the interview were excluded.

	Full Sample	Stable Employer	Parental Leave Users	Reported Negative Consequences
Age	40.15	40.51	40.42	41.50
Married	0.81	0.82	0.82	0.63
Tertiary education	0.50	0.51	0.52	0.46
Partner tertiary education	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.40
Number of Children	1.63	1.62	1.62	1.51
Age youngest child	4.79	4.54	4.48	4.24
Region: West	0.77	0.80	0.79	0.83
Professional position	0.66	0.69	0.68	0.49
Temporary contract	0.09	0.06	0.06	0.02
Observations	484	333	305	52

All values were weighted. Age, number of children and age of the youngest child are reported as sample means; all other values are proportions.

Table A4. Characteristics of the sample of semi-structured interviews.

Interview Characteristics		
Number of Interviews	N = 44	
Field period	December 2014–January 2015	
Interview Duration	Ø 1.5 h	
Sociodemographic Interviewee and Organizational Characteristics		
Number of Children	Ø 1.84 children (national average 1.5 children) *	
Seniority	Ø 10.6 years (range 0.25 (min)–29 (max))	
Public Sector	*Abs.*	*Proportion (%)*
Yes	58 (Individuals)	66%
No	30	34%
Works Council		
Yes	65 (Individuals)	74%
No	23	26%
Occupational Arrangements		

Table A4. *Cont.*

PTFT (Father Part-Time/Mother Full-Time)	8 (Couples)	18%
FTPT (Father Full-Time/Mother Part-Time)	13	30%
FTFT (Father Full-Time/Mother Full-Time)	11	25%
PTPT (Father Part-Time/Mother Part-Time)	12	27%
Parental Leave Distribution		
'Solo Parental Leave: Mother'	12 (Couples)	27%
'New Leave Norm 12 + 2'	16	36%
'Main Leave Taker: Mother'	2	5%
'Egalitarian'	3	7%
'Employment-Oriented'	7	16%
'Main Leave Taker: Father'	4	9%
Education		
Tertiary Education	50 (Individuals)	57%
Up to Secondary Education	38	43%
Marital Status		
Married	36 (Couples)	82%
Cohabitating	8	18%
Region		
West	34 (Couples)	77%
East	10	23%

Notes: Explanation of parental leave types: Solo Parental Leave: Mother—Mother took 12 months or more, father took no leave; New Leave Norm—Mother took 12 months, father 2 months; Main Leave Taker: Mother—Mother took between 8–11 months, father took 3–6 months; Egalitarian—Both partners took at least 6 months; Employment-Oriented—Mother took less than 10 months, father less than 3 months; Main Leave Taker: Father—Mother took between 0–4 months, father took 8–12 months. * (Statistisches Bundesamt 2018).

Table A5. Full model length of parental leave: multinomial logistic regressions, average marginal effects.

	No Leave	Fathers 1–2 Months	>2 Months	No Leave	Fathers 1–2 Months	>2 Months	<12 Months	Mothers 12 Months	>12 Months	<12 Months	Mothers 12 Months	>12 Months
		M1			M2			M3			M4	
Age	−0.01	0.01 *	−0.01 (*)	−0.01	0.01 *	−0.01 (*)	−0.01	−0.00	0.01	−0.01	−0.00	0.01
Married	−0.02	0.02	0.00	−0.00	−0.01	0.01	0.06	−0.10	0.04	0.07	−0.10	0.04
Tertiary education	0.10	0.02	−0.13 **	0.10	0.01	−0.11 *	0.01	0.12	−0.13	0.01	0.12	−0.13
Partner tertiary education	−0.27 ***	0.12 (*)	0.15 ***	−0.26 ***	0.13 (*)	0.14 **	0.02	−0.14 (*)	0.12	0.00	−0.13 (*)	0.13 (*)
Number of children	0.14 ***	−0.13 **	−0.02	0.14 ***	−0.13 **	−0.02	0.00	−0.07	0.07	0.01	−0.08	0.07
Birth year youngest child	−0.07 ***	0.06 ***	0.00	−0.07 ***	0.07 ***	0.00	−0.02	0.05 **	−0.04 *	−0.02	0.05 **	−0.03 *
West Germany	0.15 (*)	−0.13	−0.03	0.13 (*)	−0.11	−0.03	0.08	−0.13	0.06	0.08	−0.12	0.04
Professional position	−0.09	−0.07	0.16 ***	−0.11	−0.04	0.15 ***	0.04	−0.10	0.06	0.04	−0.10	0.07
Fixed−term	0.05	−0.23 (*)	0.18 (*)	0.08	−0.22	0.14	0.13	−0.43 ***	0.30 *	0.13	−0.43 ***	0.30 (*)
Public sector	0.06	−0.09	0.03	0.06	−0.10	0.05	0.07	0.07	−0.14 *	0.08	0.08	−0.17 *
Replacement	−0.10	−0.06	0.16 ***	−0.10	−0.06	0.16 ***	−0.20 **	−0.01	0.20 **	−0.20 **	−0.00	0.20 **
Firm size < 20	0.05	0.07	−0.12 *				0.17*	−0.12	−0.05			
Firm size 250+	−0.06	0.15 *	−0.09 *				0.06	−0.05	−0.00			
Works council				0.06	−0.01	−0.05				−0.12	0.00	0.11
Workplace policies				−0.01	0.00	0.01				−0.00	0.01	−0.01
Supervisor support	0.02	−0.01	−0.00	0.02	−0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.00
Workplace gender norms	0.02	−0.01	−0.02	0.03	−0.01	−0.01	−0.03 (*)	0.01	0.02	−0.03 *	0.01	0.02
Ideal worker norm	−0.00	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.00
N	369	369	369	369	369	369	291	291	291	291	291	291
pseudo R^2		0.26			0.25			0.18			0.18	

(*) $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. All values are weighted. M1/M3 estimated with company size, M2/M4 estimated without company size but with workplace policies and the existence of a works council.

Table A6. Full model perceived career consequences of parental leave: logistic regressions, average marginal effects.

	Fathers		Mothers	
	M1	**M2**	**M3**	**M4**
Age	−0.00	−0.00	0.00	0.00
Married	0.05 ***	0.05 ***	−0.16 *	−0.14 (*)
Tertiary education	0.07 (*)	0.06	0.06	0.08
Partner tertiary education	0.07 *	0.06*	−0.03	−0.06
Number of children	0.02	0.01	−0.01	−0.02
Birth year youngest child	−0.01	−0.00	0.00	0.01
West Germany	0.05 (*)	0.04 *	−0.05	−0.02
Professional position	−0.00	0.02	−0.18 *	−0.20 **
Fixed-term	0.00	0.00	−0.17 ***	−0.18 ***
Public sector	−0.09 ***	−0.05 (*)	−0.04	−0.00
Replacement	0.01	0.04	−0.01	−0.03
Firm size < 20	−0.04		−0.02	
Firm size 250+	−0.03		0.10 (*)	
Works council		−0.11		−0.11
Workplace policies		0.01		−0.00
Supervisor support	−0.01	−0.01	−0.03 (*)	−0.02 (*)
Workplace gender norms	−0.01	−0.01	0.03 *	0.03 **
Ideal worker norm	0.03 *	0.03 **	0.02	0.02 *
>2 months leave	0.04	0.04		
<12 months leave			0.04	0.06
>12 months leave			−0.00	0.02
N	162	162	257	257
pseudo R^2	0.46	0.51	0.38	0.38

(*) $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. All values are weighted. Standard errors in brackets. M1/M3 estimated with company size, M2/M4 estimated without company size but with workplace policies and the existence of a works council.

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