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## PREPRINT

### *Policemen on Leave Alone in Spain. A Rift in Hegemonic Masculinity?*<sup>1</sup>

Pedro Romero-Balsas\*, Gerardo Meil\* and Jesús Rogero-García\*

\*Dpto. de Sociología, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Type Egalitarian and pioneering fathering in very traditional and masculinised environments has been under-researched. This study analysed the experience of Spanish policemen who cared for their babies alone to ascertain whether it favoured the construction of caring masculinity. The qualitative methodology deployed consisted in semi-structured interviews conducted in 2014 with a sample of 15 policemen who took parental leave alone for at least 4 weeks while their partners returned to paid work. More specifically, the analysis addressed the respondents' discourse on the justification of their decision to engage singly in childcare; the workplace reaction to the decision; and their experience as solo carers. The findings suggest that such innovative practices tend to narrow the divide between traditional hegemonic and caring masculinity. The conclusion drawn is that caring for babies singly is a powerful tool for change to more egalitarian masculinity in highly masculinised environments.

Keywords: Masculinities; fathering; childcare; gender; parental leave; army

## Introduction

Family and work conciliation policies are increasingly geared to furthering fathers' use of parental leave as a way of reducing gender inequality in both realms. The measures adopted to reach that aim vary from country to country, as does the success rate (Blum, Koslowski and Moss 2017). The institution of paternity leave and the extension to

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fathers of the right to other childcare leaves is an approach widely implemented across European Union countries, Spain among them (Moss, Duvander and Koslowski forthcoming). Whereas paternity leave use, which is of short duration and taken immediately after childbirth, has been fairly successful, other leaves involving caring for babies singly when their mothers return to work have been much less so (O'Brien and Wall 2017).

In Spain, although 75 % of eligible fathers take paternity leave (Escot, Fernández Cornejo and Poza 2014), only 0.5 % use parental leave full time and 1.8 % part time, while around 1.5 % take part of the mother's maternity leave when she consents to the transfer (Meil, Romero-Balsas and Rogero-García 2018). Although a minority option, fathers' use of leaves to care singly for babies when mothers return to work is significant, for it constitutes a deviation from the type of paternity associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1993).

Research on parental leave has shown that solo fathering is a very minority experience in nearly all countries, primarily because it has not been an explicit aim of leave policy (O'Brien and Wall 2017). Nonetheless, since the latter years of the last century, northern European countries have encouraged fathers to share parental leave with mothers for significant periods of time as a way of narrowing the gender divide in working and family life. The outcome of that policy is that the vast majority of fathers view such decisions as obvious (Almqvist, Sandberg and Dahlgren 2011; Duvander, Haas and Thalberg 2017; Gislason 2017). Single-handed fathering tends to induce change in families' gender relationships (Brandth and Kvande 2003; Fernández Cornejo et al. 2016). More specifically, the use of longer leaves has been observed to lengthen

the time devoted to childcare after fathers return to work (Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Meil 2013; Fernández-Cornejo et al. 2016).

Whilst the use of parental leave is being increasingly studied in both Spain and other countries, fathers' experience in singly caring for children has been less fully researched (O'Brien and Wall 2017), particularly in male-dominated professions such as the armed forces and law enforcement agencies. Analysis of professions where female presence is only token in practice and confined to specific niches in the organisation (Atherton 2009) may afford helpful insight into the effects of such new practices, not only on the masculinity exhibited by the fathers involved, but also on the type that prevails at the workplace.

The majority presence of men in law enforcement agencies is international (Natarajan 2016) and the Spanish police force is no exception. In the *Guardia Civil*, the agency studied here, 93.5 % of the employees are male and women hold just 2.7 % of the positions of power and responsibility (Official State Journal 2014). A civilian force, the *Guardia Civil*<sup>2</sup> is nonetheless organised along military lines and performs certain military tasks (Ministerio del Interior 2018). Its mission includes protecting persons and their goods from harm, controlling firearms and explosives, persecuting tax evasion and fraud, ensuring interurban traffic safety, guaranteeing security in communication channels, ports and airports and protecting the natural environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Spain has two national police corps, the *Cuerpo Nacional de Policía*, with competence in provincial capitals and other cities designated by the Government, and the *Guardia Civil*, which polices the rest of the country and its territorial waters. Hereafter, the term 'policeman' refers to the members of the latter corps.

No study has yet been published on the type of paternity practised by members of the armed forces (army, *Policía Nacional* and *Guardia Civil*). This article analyses the discourse around paternity and masculinity expressed by male policemen who cared for their babies singly. The aim is to determine whether that experience furthers caring masculinity or is interpreted as a practical, temporary arrangement with scarcely any effect on traditional masculinity associated with paid work, as suggested by earlier studies (Doucet 2004). More specifically, the analysis addresses respondents' justification of the decision to undertake solo childcare; their descriptions of the workplace reaction to their decision; and their experience as solo carers. This study contributes to filling the gap in the literature on alternative paternities in highly masculinised working environments.

### **Masculinised working contexts and new paternities**

Linked to the practices, relationships and interpretations with which men define their position in the gender order (Connell 2002), masculinity builds on the historic and cultural context. As it may be understood and practised in different ways in any given culture, its analysis entails the study of all the realms where it is expressed: labour market, family and State (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Multiple masculinities can therefore be defined, with different degrees of presence and power. Masculine identities flow, i.e., change and adapt with the roles played in different domains, embodying what Atherton (2009) dubbed the fluidity of masculinities.

The most prominent type of masculinity, associated with authority and cultural leadership, has been labelled 'hegemonic masculinity'. That does not mean that no other

types exist or even that the hegemonic variety prevails in all environments, but only that it is the most visible and taken as the social reference (Connell 1993). Such hegemony refers not only to other masculinities, but to the gender order in the broadest sense. It covers practices, expectations and identities that allow men's dominance over women to continue (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), legitimising the former's non-participation in unpaid childcare and domestic work. As hegemonic masculinity tends to be more firmly and uniformly entrenched in workplaces with a minority of women, the experience of men who display non-hegemonic behaviour in those contexts is particularly significant.

Other authors have studied views on masculinity in the security forces, where hegemonic masculinity is deeply rooted (Connell 1993). In such professions the hegemonic masculinity cult is maintained through the observance of masculinised rules, values and lifestyles, as Dunivin (1994) showed in a study of the U.S. army. The archetypical soldier is male, even though formally women may also play that role (Woodward and Jenkins 2011). The warrior is perceived to embody such traditionally masculine attributes such as discipline, strength, exercise of legitimate violence, rationality and courage (Atherton 2009; Hutchings 2008).

Whilst the advent of paternity for Spanish policemen may be experienced as a reassertion of masculine identity (Brandth 2012), it constitutes a crucial biographical event that triggers practice that may potentially clash with the values associated with workplace masculinity. In the security forces, the demand for full availability for work (Fusulier, Sanchez and Ballatore 2013), coupled with women's recent enlistment in these organisations and their scant presence in management positions, generates an

environment in which women and men find it difficult to conciliate work and family obligations (Tremblay, Genin and di Loreto 2011). Earlier studies show that work-family life conflicts may lower policemen's job satisfaction, jeopardise their professional performance and pose family problems, all to the detriment of their satisfaction with life in general (Howard, Donofrio and Boles 2004). Workplace demands can be harmonised more readily with parental obligations where collective bargaining agreements contain provisions on family and life conciliation, such as in Canada (Tremblay, Genin and di Loreto 2011). As a militarised organisation, Spain's *Guardia Civil* recognises no trade union representation or collective bargaining, although its members are eligible for the parental leaves established for all workers by law.

One issue to be addressed, then, is the extent to which policemen who care singly for their babies develop pattern-breaking fatherhood and identify with so-called caring masculinities (Elliott 2015). Studies in countries such as Canada show that the younger generation of policemen devote more time to family activities than baby boomers (Labrèche & Lavoie 2004 in Tremblay, Genin and di Loreto 2011) and are more open to an equitable division of domestic tasks. In qualitative studies on male use of parental leaves in Spain, however, leave-taking is justified more on the grounds of its being 'a right' than on the furtherance of a balanced distribution of childcare responsibilities (Romero-Balsas, Muntanyola-Saura and Rogero-García 2013). Policemen's justification of their decision to others and in particular to superiors and co-workers, their interpretation of workplace reactions and their experience with childcare may reveal the extent to which caring singly for a baby drives a rift in their perception

of masculinity. Analysis of such discourse may also afford insight into where resistance to change primarily lies.

### **Data and analysis strategy**

The qualitative analytical strategy adopted for this study consisted in semi-structured interviews. The choice of that strategy was informed, firstly, by the paucity of statistical data on men's use of parental leaves alone, not only in highly masculinised professions, but among the population at large. Secondly, analysis of discourse is the most suitable approach to capture the complexity of these fathers' experience with solo childcare and their ideas about paternity and masculinity.

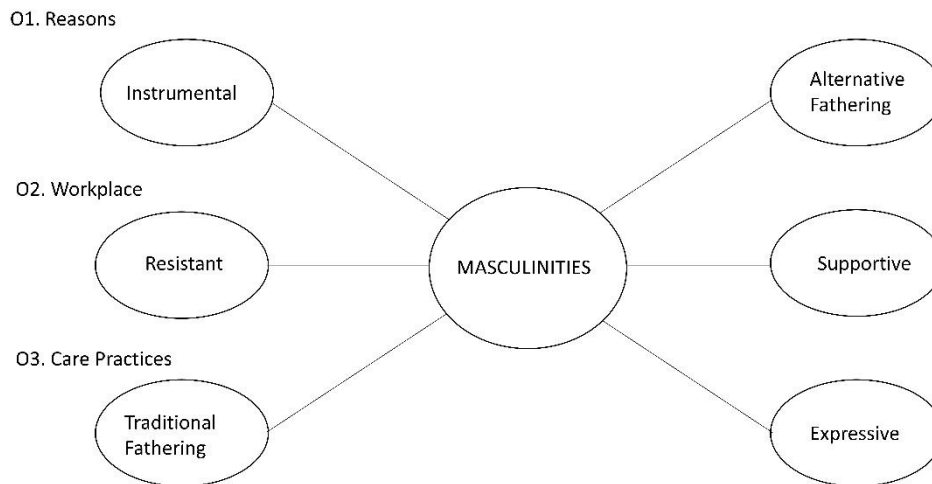
Snowball sampling, deployed here, is the most appropriate technique for identifying hard-to-reach minority populations (Whyte 1985) such as policemen using leaves to care singly for their babies. The research team gained access to the sample by applying to the *Guardia Civil's* Equality Department. Their application requested the collaboration of policemen who in the last 4 years had cared for one or more of their children under parental leave for at least 1 month after their partners returned to work. The types of parental leave available to fathers acting singly are listed in the Annex, Table 1.

The 15 policemen meeting the above requirements who ultimately comprised the sample were interviewed by telephone in 2014. That medium, the advantages of which for qualitative methodologies are open to question (Sweet 2002; Novik 2008), generates trust through non-verbal communicative components (Muntanyola-Saura, Romero-Balsas 2014) and provides for readier location of and contact with the



respondents (Schwarz 2007). The mean duration of the interviews was 1 hour and 16 minutes, with the longest lasting 2 hours and 11 minutes and the shortest 47 minutes. The sample included policemen from seven of Spain's 17 autonomous regions: Asturias, Balearic Isles, Castile-Leon, Castile-la Mancha, Catalonia, Galicia and Madrid. Respondents' characteristics are given in the Annex, Table 2.

The script for the interviews was designed in keeping with the research objectives. Discourse analysis, the methodological approach adopted (Gee 2004), sheds light on respondents' social representations against the backdrop of the socio-historic conditions that inform such discourse (Alonso and Callejo 1999). The negotiation of their personal identity reflected social mores and legitimations (Martín Criado 2014). A semi-structured interview script was used to ensure an acceptable level of confidence when comparing codes. Atlas.ti, the qualitative software chosen for analysis, generates theory through systematic hierarchisation of categories based on codes, super-codes, families and networks (Hwang, 2008). The procedure used to analyse the discourse on the reasons for taking leave (O1), workplace reactions (O2) and the experience as sole carer (O3) is diagrammed in Figure 1. Discourse is distributed on three axes ranging from the archetypical to its opposite that cut across the notion of masculinity, which varies with the way in which such discourse is expressed.



## Results

### *Reasons for solo care*

Unlike paternity leave, leave alone is not routinely taken by Spanish men. Those opting to do so consequently explain their decision in fairly elaborate terms. That contrasts with the pattern observed in northern European countries, where the practice is viewed as an obvious choice requiring very little further explanation (Duvander, Haas, Thalberg 2017; Gislason 2017). The reasons given by the policemen interviewed varied with their personal situations and the type of leave used. Their arguments were based on the parents' job status, the family life conciliation options available to each member of the couple and their social representations on how babies should be cared for.

In all the cases analysed the explanation revolved around direct parental care for the new born and the obstacles to the mother's use of leave to provide it, as illustrated in the following extract.

‘The idea was to keep the baby out of a nursery for as long as possible, for her mother or me to care for her as long as we could’ (E17, 43, secondary school diploma, two children, 14 weeks on leave alone).

The interpretation of ‘as long as possible’ varied from one respondent to another and depended on the type of leave. Men taking paid (maternity and nursing) leave defined it as the time allowed by such leaves (around 5 months). Where leave of absence and part-time (unpaid) leave was used, ‘as long as possible’ was defined in keeping with the conciliation resources available and the family’s care models. In some cases it was only until the child qualified for pre-school, and in others for a longer period.

Very few respondents explicitly linked that desire to the idea of caring paternity (Elliott 2015), even though in the social discourse prevailing in Spain fathers’ active engagement in childcare is highly valued. Only a small number of fathers explained that one of the reasons for using the leave alone was to become more involved in caring for their children. That differs from the explanations given by Scandinavian fathers who, when asked why taking leave alone was an obvious choice, replied that they wanted to experience paternity singly (Almqvist, Sandberg and Dahlgren 2011; Gislason 2017). With one exception, no reference was made to gender equality as a reason for using the leave, a pattern observed in other studies on caring fathers in Spain (González and Jurado 2015). Involved fatherhood need not necessarily be associated with the desire to further gender equality (O’Brien and Wall 2017) or a very elaborate discourse on how paternity should be practised. Spanish leave policy does not encourage men to take leave alone and their ability to do so depends on the transfer of part of the mother’s

maternity or nursing leave or on using unpaid leave. As a result, the reasons for using such leave had predominantly to do with job status and economics.

‘We always thought that children should be raised by the two of us, not “your mother or your father”, no, it should always be both, for better or for worse, the two together, I mean, we share everything practically equally, and that means housework, everything... we do everything 50-50. ... So in addition to me providing care, it’s also a way to lighten his mother’s load, because he needs someone around the clock’ (E4, 35, secondary school diploma, two children, 14 weeks on leave alone).

One of the job-related reasons that induced fathers to use the available leave was their own job security. As civil servants, no matter how innovative their behaviour or whether or not their attitude was shared by superiors and co-workers, these fathers were not at risk of dismissal for taking time off. In addition to such job security, they alluded to the greater flexibility that characterises State employment, i.e., the greater ease in exercising the right to conciliate work and family life in the public than in the private sector.

‘because I work for the State and, look man, there it’s more flexible than in private companies [where] they always make it more difficult and they’re less given to this sort of leaves, especially with the economy the way it is today, of course’ (E5, 35, university degree, two children, 14 weeks on leave alone).

The assurance that they would not be dismissed was a major consideration when making the decision and choosing the type of leave, corroborating the results of quantitative studies on the use of leaves in Spain (Lapuerta, Baizán and González 2011;

Meil, Rogero-García, Romero-Balsas 2018). These policemen attached greater importance to their partner's job circumstances, however, when explaining their decision. That is not exclusive to their profession, but observed in others (Meil, Romero-Balsas and Rogero-García 2017) both in countries where only a minority of fathers take parental leave alone (Wall and Leitaó 2017) and among fathers who take leaves for more than the standard time in countries where their use is routine, such as Finland (Lammi-Taskula 2017) or Sweden (Duvander, Haas, Thalberg 2017). The mother's job circumstances cited by respondents as a reason for assuming childcare singly included responsibility for a business that could not be left unattended; temporary employment contracts; employment in a company where they were asked to return to work in advance; or part-time employment.

'my wife manages a restaurant and if she were to take the whole maternity and nursing leave she would have to hire someone to replace her, which would mean losing a lot of money and we're fortunate enough for me to be able to take it, so that's what we did' (E9, 42, secondary school diploma, two children, 14 weeks on leave alone).

Overall, the respondents alluded, more than to caring fatherhood, to instrumental or pragmatic reasons associated primarily with the two partners' working conditions. That differed widely from Scandinavian fathers, who referred mostly to expressive reasons (having the experience) with no explicit mention of gender equality, which was taken for granted (Duvander, Haas, Thalberg 2017; Gislason 2017). The discourse analysed here revealed that these fathers saw no incompatibility between solo childcare, their notion of masculinity and loyalty to police service.

### ***Reactions at the workplace***

Respondents' discourse showed that caring for children singly challenges the hegemonic view of masculinity (Connell 1993) in place in the *Guardia Civil*. The decision elicited a broad spectrum of reactions in co-workers and superiors which tended to entail some manner of social response, ranging from explicit criticism to open support. Co-workers often couched their opinions about the decision in humorous terms. Such jokes subtly reproached the decision to use the leave, undervalued caring (less than 'real (=paid) work', associated with 'doing nothing' or 'being on holiday') or attributed the task to women, thereby relegating female responsibilities to a subordinate position in the gender order (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The respondents took this jesting as friendly teasing rather than as criticism, an indication that they were fully aware of the ideological context contrary to divergence from the hegemonic masculinity ideal.

'Well they said kiddingly, "oh so you're going to take three months off to do nothing, holidays", that sort of thing (laughing), that's pretty funny' (E5, 35 university degree, two children, 14 weeks on leave alone).

'With the older daughter there was more of that... Look, here he comes and there he goes. Childcare is women's work' (E11, 36, secondary school diploma, two children, 12 weeks on leave alone).

Some respondents reported that their superiors and co-workers were surprised and put up some resistance. Where explicit social disapproval was initially present, its intensity tended to gradually recede. The significant generation gap in the perception of

these new behaviours identified here was also observed in earlier studies (Labrèche and Lavoie 2004 in Tremblay, Genin and di Loreto 2011).

‘Look, I know my boss didn’t like the idea [...] because he has an employee who’s going to be gone; it’s very important for the worker, but the boss couldn’t care less about you’ (E10 33, secondary school diploma, two children, 14 weeks on leave alone).

[Do you remember any adverse reactions?'] ‘Some old schools who’re retired I think couldn’t believe it and when they saw that I got it they were pretty much gobsmacked’ (E9, 42, secondary school diploma, two children, 14 weeks on leave alone).

At the same time, being a policeman made taking long-term leave easier in some ways. Several respondents noted that, as the decision was based on an individual worker’s right, it was not questioned by their superiors. The corps’ highly bureaucratic military hierarchy facilitated negotiations. In some cases respondents claimed not to know their bosses’ opinion, for the administrative proceedings could be handled without negotiating the leave with them directly. Such unawareness on the part of superiors, which would be odd in other types of work, is less so in this highly bureaucratic and hierarchical scenario. Given that policemen are in charge of enforcing the law, rules and regulations lend powerful legitimacy to decisions involving the exercise of lawful rights. The bureaucratic rationality assumed by army employees (Hutchings 2008) consequently serves to endorse this new practice as natural. Even so, some bosses questioned the legitimacy of such a provision for men. In those cases, workplace-specific rules based on hegemonic masculinity clashed with a new right associated with alternative masculinity.

‘No, I don’t know [what his superiors thought] because they don’t express personal opinions; I think it’s too serious and sensitive a question for any boss with a little knowledge and understanding to criticise or express an opinion about it. [...] Well, we have a military hierarchy, so everything goes through some regulatory channel until it reaches your most immediate superior; everything goes through the works: your immediate boss refers it to another boss and that other boss takes it to the big boss who approves it and then you apply. Although it’s a (quote unquote) right that they have to grant you; no unit is going to deny a voluntary leave of absence to care for a child because it’s a right you have by law’ (E3, 38, secondary school diploma, two children, 25 weeks on leave alone).

Some respondents expressed a certain solitude in making a minority, frequently pioneering decision in a female-light environment, for women co-workers were conceived as the ideal source of support. One respondent mentioned that having a female civilian human resources manager made the decision easier to implement. That observation suggests that a better balance in staff sex composition might induce more routine use of leaves, particularly in the case of heavily masculinised workplaces.

‘Remarks, a certain isolation, like saying “what are you thinking?”. Not the commander, a co-worker or two’ (E15, 48, secondary school diploma, two children, 6 years of leave alone).

‘Then we talked to the unit head about it, a civilian who has nothing to do with Guardia Civil staff, and all she said was that there would be no problem, that it couldn’t be denied because the law was on my side and also that she found it inspiring that a man would make that sort of decision. It was a great feeling, at no time did I feel pressured into changing my mind, nothing like that’ (E1, 38, university degree, one child, 18 weeks on leave alone).



Even though in general respondents mentioned some disapproval, a few were enthusiastic because they encountered positive attitudes among co-workers and bosses. Some received explicit support from their superiors and others were praised by their co-workers for challenging traditional childcare patterns. Their discourse included terms like ‘courage’, a typically masculine value in the army (Hutchings 2008) to legitimise leave. These fathers proudly claimed to have served as an example, an indication of the depth of the rift their behaviour made in the hegemonic masculinity prevailing in the *Guardia Civil*. The inference is that novel regulations and behaviours induce fluidity (Atherton 2009) toward more egalitarian, caring masculinities (Elliott 2015), even in predominantly male professions.

‘My co-workers: the women delighted with the decision and the men a little like the boss, surprised, courage for doing it, but wholehearted support from them all’ (E12, 37, university degree, two children, 4 weeks on leave alone).

[How did your co-workers react when you told them?] They took note to do the same when they had kids and I mean that literally because that was the most common reaction; the others, good’ (E14, 43, secondary school diploma, two children, 14 weeks on leave alone).

### ***The solo carer experience***

The main adversity mentioned in respondents’ discourse on the childcare experience was the fear of having to undertake it alone. They recalled feeling fatigued and overwhelmed, relieved when the mother came home from work, when they could rest. Some explained that stress and fear were more intense at first and then waned. Those

who used leave alone after sharing time off with their partners deemed the earlier period to be a training grounds that made things easier when they were left on their own:

‘When I took the leave of absence we’d already been doing it for 5 months and I was a little more practised’ (E12, 37, university degree, two children, 4 weeks on leave alone).

More or less implicit in these fathers’ discourse was the idea that mothers did a better job of caring and therefore ranked higher as carers. Unaided time management was recurrently perceived as an enormous responsibility.

‘In those first 2 weeks of paternity leave, with your partner there you have support for everything; little by little you discover things and you’re backed, you have the peace of mind of knowing that, well if something happens there’s someone there to help. And when you’re alone he’s all yours, you’re responsible: he eats if you feed him and he’s clean if you change him, if he’s tired you put him to sleep’ (E1, 38, university degree, one child, 18 weeks on leave alone).

Fathers expressed insecurity in the absence of the mother’s supervision. They missed their partners to coordinate activities, delegating in her the responsibility for organising care for the baby and for the home. When caring singly they felt the weight of responsibility and experienced doubts about how well they were performing the task.

(about solo caring) ‘Well pretty scared, because I didn’t really know how to calm him down, because his mother did that better. Always a little afraid, but on the second day we were alone, I handled him perfectly well’ (E6, 32, secondary school diploma, one child, 10 weeks on leave alone).

Many respondents took these difficulties as a challenge that was symbolically rewarded with 'feeling capable', which lifted their self-confidence and made them 'proud to say that I did it alone'. Problem solving was the area where some elements of hegemonic masculinity crept into caring. Traits such as ability and self-improvement characteristic of the hegemonic masculinity prevalent in the police force were cited (Dunivin 1994). In such cases the values and models of a masculinised environment were used to justify the performance of female tasks, including childcare in reformulated hegemonic masculinity. Archetypical military jargon (Woodward and Jenkins 2011) was likewise observed in the expressions used by some respondents, such as front line, duty or obligation.

'It's satisfying to face a challenge and get to know from the front line what it means to bring up two kids at once, or in this case I can say to care for just one, I mean to get hands-on knowledge of the everyday, the difficulty, be able to talk to any mother about everyday caring and at the same time the satisfaction that they're your kids and it's you who's with them...' (E3, 38, secondary school diploma, two children, 25 weeks on leave alone).

The trade-off for these problems was always the bond generated with the baby. Fathers realised that their relationship with their children was strengthened because they had cared for them singly. Another advantage mentioned was not having to resort to nurseries or other external care.

'Very positive (the experience), to be at home and able to take care of my daughter, I didn't have to leave her with anyone' (E10, 33, secondary school diploma, two children, 14 weeks on leave alone).

Respondents' discourse applied professional values such as justice, objective discipline and responsibility to masculine caring and child rearing. Those values were set against ideal motherhood in which love and affection prevailed. Although these attitudes are typical of the male breadwinner model, other notions related to the profession were also highlighted. Like the notions of capability and challenge analysed above, they constituted a logical continuum between the military profession and child-rearing, as observed by Atherton (2009). The notions favouring fluidity between hegemonic masculinity and childcare included objectivity, responsibility, justice and discipline. Respondents adapted traditionally masculine rules, values and lifestyles (Dunivin 1994) to more egalitarian caring behaviours.

‘(A good father) provides all his children need, is responsible and able to raise them in keeping with what one thinks their way of life or values should be. (And a good mother) [...] gives her children affection and a good upbringing also’ (E11, 35, secondary school diploma, two children, 12 weeks on leave alone).

‘Kids need to be told things the way they are, they need discipline and I think that’s being a good father, instil in children self-discipline, self-organisation. [...] their mother often has to be the good cop, she’s more a mother and that’s why they’re different and I think that should stay that way’ (E12, 37, university degree, two children, 4 weeks on leave alone).

As the analysis shows, respondents applied some professional values typical of the police force to childcare. The profession formed part of their identity at all times, whether on or off duty. As revealed by research conducted by Tremblay, Genin and di Loreto (2011) and Fusulier, Sanchez and Ballatore (2013), the 24 hour component of

police service may be an obstacle to engagement in fatherhood. That idea was expressed by E3 (38, secondary school diploma, two children, 25 weeks on leave alone).

‘Well I personally can’t, outside of my job as a military public official and policeman, I can’t perform tasks other than those of a policeman, I’m a policeman 24 hours a day and, with a few exceptions and concessions, I can’t do anything else’.

The idea of the importance of self care was present in these policemen’s discourse. In contrast to other studies (Atherton 2009), however, it was not associated with the military domain, but with having lived alone and a certain degree of socialisation in their parents’ families.

‘No, because before living with my partner I lived alone for a long time, so I was pretty used to domestic tasks and everyday planning’ (E1, 38, university degree, one child, 8 weeks on leave alone).

Although these masculine values closely related to strict discipline and hierarchy were prevalent in respondents’ discourse, the emotional components of fatherhood were also present. Nonetheless, although affection and emotional intelligence were expressed as ideals by some fathers, as a rule they were interpreted as characteristics more typical of mothers.

‘Well, I don’t know, spend more time with them and take care of them, love them more, be with them, not leave them alone so much. (And a good mother) I think she does a better job of mothering, she’s more affectionate, she’s with them more when they’re ill, me too but less. The mother gets more involved, because of maternity or whatever, but it’s different; I don’t see myself in that role’ (E8, 41, secondary school diploma, two children, 25 weeks on leave alone).

## **Conclusions**

This study aimed to explore the extent to which the decision to take parental leave to engage in childcare singly challenges the hegemonic masculinity prevalent in policemen's highly masculinised, military environment. The analysis revealed how solo childcare is interpreted from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity, helping fill the gap in the literature on alternative fathering models in working environments characterised by firmly entrenched hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Three dimensions were defined in the analysis of respondents' discourse to meet the research objective pursued: the reasons for using leave to care for children alone; workplace reactions; and the solo carer experience. Initially, the reasons wielded for single-handed care were essentially instrumental. Although exhibiting pioneering behaviour in terms of gender equality, these policemen expressed no desire to diverge from hegemonic masculinity, nor was their decision explicitly related to action intended to foster intra-partner equality. They did nonetheless mention, implicitly or explicitly, that parental childcare is preferable to alternative arrangements.

Their discourse around workplace reactions was ambivalent. Some respondents recounted co-workers' more or less subtle objection to a decision that deviated from the norm. The inference to be drawn from such reactions is that fathers caring singly for their children challenge the hegemonic masculinity prevailing in that work environment. Those taking the leave justified it on the grounds of bureaucratic rationality, legitimising the decision from the standpoint of compliance with the rules and the exercise of a lawful right. Importantly, some respondents found explicit support from

their co-workers and proudly claimed to have served as an example, perhaps driving a rift in the predominance of a type of masculinity that denies men carer status.

In their narratives around single-handed care, respondents invoked hegemonic masculine values to interpret and imbue their egalitarian behaviours with meaning, as well as to justify their engagement in care: rising to a challenge, discipline, a sense of objectivity and justice and responsibility. Other features typical of traditional masculinity, such as associating mothers with affection, subjectivity and unconditional dedication, were also observed in their discourse.

This study is subject to a limitation that merits comment. The empirical material used is apt for analysing how respondents balance their masculine identity with engagement in pioneering, egalitarian childcare. It does not capture the change in that identity before and after the solo carer experience, however, for interviews were conducted a posteriori. Contrasting the discourse of men in highly masculinised professions before and after caring singly for their children would further the understanding of change in masculine identities.

This research nonetheless contributes significantly to the understanding of the construction of masculinity in contexts where hegemonic masculinity is deeply rooted. Single-handed care by men is a powerful tool for change to more egalitarian parenthood (Brandth and Kvande 2003; Fernández Cornejo et al. 2016; O'Brien and Wall 2017). The present findings show that this change also takes place in highly masculinised environments, where innovative caring generates discourse that narrows the divide between traditional hegemonic and caring masculinity. The fluidity of masculinities

(Atherton 2009) exhibited in these fathers' discourse chips away at the hegemonic masculinity traditionally present in law enforcement environments and suggests that change to other types of paternities is possible. Public policies geared to encouraging men's engagement in solo childcare may be particularly effective in such environments by contributing to normalise fatherhood patterns associated with such engagement while driving a rift in hegemonic masculinity.

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## **Annex**

Table 1. Childcare leaves which can be taken by fathers in Spain. *Source*: compiled by the authors from information in anonymised (2017).

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### **Maternity leave**

Sixteen weeks of fully paid (subject to a ceiling) leave for biological maternity, adoption or fostering, providing the mother is affiliated or similar to the Social Security System and has been contributing for the specified minimum time. A 6 week leave after childbirth is mandatory, whilst the remainder may be transferred to the father provided he has been

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paying social security fees for a specific minimum time. In case of adoption or fostering, both parents can divide the whole period at their convenience

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### **Nursing leave**

After maternity leave, either parent may opt for the nursing leave (although it may be taken by only one of them), consisting in two half-hour breaks or a one half-hour shorter working day till the ninth month after birth. If stipulated in collective bargaining agreements or covenanted with the employer, this leave can be used to extend maternity leave by 2 weeks (4 weeks for public officials).

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### **Paternity leave**

Thirteen consecutive days (4 weeks as of 2017) of fully paid leave (subject to a ceiling) for birth, adoption or fostering, providing the father is affiliated or similar and has contributed for the specified minimum time. In the private sector, this leave can be taken just after birth or just after maternity leave.

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### **Full-time parental leave to care for children**

Right of any worker to suspend their employment contract without pay until the child reaches the age of 3; the right to return to the same position is guaranteed for the first year and to a similar position through the third year. The leave may be taken intermittently.

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### **Part-time parental leave to care for children**

Right of any worker to reduce their hours by a minimum of 1/8 and a maximum of 1/2, with a proportional decrease in salary, until the child is 12 years old. The leave may be taken intermittently.

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Table 2. Respondents' characteristics. Source: formulated by the authors (P) paid leave; (U) unpaid leave; \*Only one of the partners is the parent

Code name	Age	Schooling	Partner's schooling	Number of children	Children's ages	Total time alone (weeks)	Leave time (weeks)	Total time with partner (weeks)
E1	37	Secondary	University	(1) 1 boy	15 months	18 (4P+14U)	2 (P)	16 (P)
E2	38	Secondary	University	(1) 1 girl	6 years	14 (P)	2 (P)	6 (P)
E3	38	Secondary	University	(2) 2 boys	3.5 years (twins)	25 (U)	-	24 (P)
E4	35	Secondary	University	(2) 1 boy and 1 girl	6 and 3 years	14 (P)	2 (P)	6 (P)
E5	35	University	Primary	(2) 1 boy and 1 girl	5 and 2 years	14 (P)	2 (P)	6 (P)
E6	32	Secondary	Secondary	(1) 1 boy	3.5 years	10 (P)	2 (P)	6 (P)
E7	35	Secondary	Primary	(1) 1 boy	1 year	4 (P)	2 (P)	16 (P)
E8	41	Secondary	University	(2) 1 boy and 1 girl	2 years and 1 month	25 (U)	0 (sick leave)	16 (P)
E9	42	Secondary	Secondary	(2) 1 girl and 1 youth	2 and 16* years	14 (P)	2 (P)	6 (P)
E10	33	Secondary	Secondary	(2) 2 girls	6 and 3 years	14 (P)	2 (P)	6 (P)



E11	36	Secondary	University	(2) 2 girls	5 and 2 years	12 (P)	2 (P)	10 (P)
E12	37	University	University	(2) 1 boy and 1 girl	7 and 3 years	4 (U)	2 (P)	16 (P)
E13	49	Secondary	Secondary	(2) 1 boy and 1 youth	3 and 21* years	10 (P)	2 (P)	6 (P)
E14	43	Secondary	University	(2) 2 girls	4 years and 1 year	14 (P)	2 (P)	6 (P)
E15	48	Secondary	Secondary	(2) 1 boy and 1 girl	12 and 7 years	6 years (U)	-	16 (P)