



Universidad Autónoma  
de Madrid

**Biblos-e Archivo**  
Repositorio Institucional UAM

**Repositorio Institucional de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid**

<https://repositorio.uam.es>

Esta es la **versión de autor** del artículo publicado en:

This is an **author produced version** of a paper published in:

Journal of Family Issues 44.3 (2023): 633–653

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X211054469>

**Copyright:** © The Author(s) 2021

El acceso a la versión del editor puede requerir la suscripción del recurso

Access to the published version may require subscription

# The impact of paternity leave compared to unemployment on childcare and housework distribution in Spain

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

\* Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

\*\*Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

## Abstract

There is growing evidence that paternity leave has a socializing effect on childcare. However, it has not been identified yet its impact in forthcoming stages and neither if other situations, such as unemployment, have a similar influence in paternal involvement in childcare. Hence, this paper aims to (1) analyze the relationship between the duration of paternity leave and father's involvement in care and domestic activities in the short, medium and long term; and (2) examine the association between unemployment and paternal involvement in these activities. The results show that prolonged leaves are related to a greater dedication of time to care activities and housework, although only in the former the effect is maintained in the long term. Regarding unemployed fathers, these individuals show more involvement in childcare during the first year, but the effect disappears later and there is no significant relationship with housework. In this sense, time availability motivated by unemployment does not seem to transform gender roles in the same way as it is produced by the use of paternity leave.

**Keywords:** parental leave, childcare, housework, parenthood, masculinities.

In Spain, as in the other developed countries, public discourse on the subject of fatherhood has changed significantly. Traditional gender-based task distribution, in which fathers were exempt from becoming involved in caregiving, has given way to a relative redefinition of responsibilities. Nevertheless, traditional attitudes toward fatherhood coexist with recent interpretations about paternity. Time use surveys have repeatedly proved that women's entry in the job market has not created a similar level of father's involvement in the private sphere (Domínguez-Folgueras et al., 2018; Álvarez & Miles, 2003). Accordingly, public policies aiming to increase fathers' involvement in caring for their children in the early stages of life have not been implemented satisfactorily, as has happened in other countries with active gender equality policies (Moss, Duvander & Koslowski, 2019). Central within such policies are moves to encourage men to take advantage of work-life balance measures and the recognition and extension of the right to parental leave for fathers (Meil, Romero-Balsas & Rogero-García, 2019).

The academic literature highlights the particular influence of the arrival of a couple's first child on the internal distribution of work (Domínguez-Folgueras et al., 2018), as in many cases, if home and caring responsibilities are unevenly distributed between the man and the woman at this point, it never returns to a balanced footing. That is why some of the measures recently implemented aim at not only facilitating reconciliation between

childcare and work, but also promoting a balanced distribution of caregiving activities between men and women from the beginning. In this sense, various researchers have shown that, as occurs in other countries, men's use of leave is related with a higher degree of involvement in childcare, which depends of the length of the paternal leave (Romero-Balsas, 2015; Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016; Meil, 2017). But fathers on paternity leave are not the only ones with the time to care for their new-born children; fathers who are unemployed when their children are born have the time, too. The question arises, then, of whether the socializing effect of paternity leave in childcare can also be found in the opportunities provided by unemployment or, on the contrary, unemployed fathers are more deeply involved only until they return to work, due to the lack of the institutional dimension that is inherent to the leave. Some qualitative research has addressed unemployed fathers' involvement in childcare (Boyer, Dermott & James, 2016; Castrillo et al., 2020), but no study has compared the effects of leave versus unemployment in the short term and in the longer term, either qualitatively or quantitatively.

In Spain the gradual lengthening of paternity leave since 2007, the sustained high rate of unemployment and the publication of the 2018 Fertility Survey (which collected information on leave use and employment status at childbirth) facilitates a rigorous comparison of the effects of these circumstances on both childcare and housework performance. Thus, this paper pursues the objectives of (1) analysing the relationship between paternity leave length and the father's post-leave involvement in childcare and housework and (2) analyse if father's unemployment at the time of childbirth influences his involvement in childcare and housework.

### **Changes in fathers' involvement from a structural perspective**

For an understanding of how paternal involvement in childcare has changed over the last few decades, three elements need to be examined: the expectations society and culture place on fatherhood, social and family policies and fathers' behaviour or responses (Miller, 2010), or, as Wall and Arnold (2007) put it, the articulation of agency, structure and the reigning ideology. These elements wield a decisive influence on individuals' decisions and actions, because individuals ultimately align their own preferences with the expectations and possibilities offered by their contexts (Doughney & Leahy, 2006). One of these constraints is family policies, which form a structure capable of modifying social expectations and individual behaviour (Coltrane, 2000).

So, in accordance with the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens (1995), the way fatherhood is understood and practiced can be modified if the social structures that constrain and enable individuals' actions are altered. Similarly, Barbara Risman (2004, 2017) establishes that social structures generates certain gender roles and behaviours that are (re)created and reproduced dynamically with cultural expectations, the influence of the labour market and public policies. Family policies in general and parental leave in particular therefore have the ability to influence fathers' involvement in the care of their children, women's participation in the labour market and social expectations about the distribution of work in the home.

In accordance with the idea of structure as posited by Erving Goffman (2006) in the theory of dramaturgy, the concept of fatherhood is represented as the naturalization of the repetition of fathers' actions and the way in which these actions are defined by

institutions. How fatherhood is performed is influenced by social expectations and negotiations among the different agents involved. This idea of naturalization is also present in the concept of *habitus* established by Pierre Bourdieu (1997). From Bourdieu's perspective fatherhood, like other kinds of social behaviour, is internalized and reproduced as if it were second nature, and therefore it resists sudden changes. It is through the socializing process during infancy when future fathers internalize new values and generate different kinds of awareness, producing generational modifications of the way fathers perceive and perform childcare activities. In this sense, the alteration of the father's traditional role in the early stages of a child's life can modify not only fathers' involvement in childcare, but also the socializing experience of new generations. The father's role can be altered in this way through public policies, such as parental leave policy, or through other supervening circumstances, such as unemployment.

### **The evolution of leave policy in Spain and its impact on the distribution of family responsibilities**

Significant changes have taken place in the design of paternity leave in Spain in recent years. With the approval of Constitutional Act 3/2007 for the effective equality of men and women, 13 days of non-transferrable (but not mandatory) paternity leave was established for the father or the parent not claiming maternity leave; this time was added to the two days established in the 1980 Workers' Statute. The new leave included the right to receive a benefit amounting to 100% of the regulatory base of the wages the parent forfeits while on leave. On 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2017, paternity leave was lengthened from two to four weeks, and on 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2018 it was extended to five weeks (Spanish Act 6/2018). Less than a year later, on 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2019, Royal Decree-Law 6/2019 on urgent measures to guarantee equal treatment and equal opportunities for women and men in employment and occupation was passed. With the entry in force of this reform, both parents (biological, adopting or foster) gained the right to 16 weeks' leave. So, paternity leave has been gradually lengthened from five to 16 weeks. Furthermore, paternity leave is now defined as an individual, non-transferrable right, thus eliminating the possibility (created in 1989) of the mothers' transferring part of her time to the other parent. The requirement of six uninterrupted weeks of full-time leave is set for both parents. The royal decree includes a timetable for gradual application until full equality of leave for both parents is reached, which is scheduled for 2021 (Table 1).

**Table 1. Evolution of the length of leave for fathers in Spain**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Length</b>
1980	2 days
2007	15 days
2017	4 weeks
2018	5 weeks
2019	8 weeks
2020	12 weeks
2021	16 weeks

Because the measure was instituted only recently, no estimates have yet been made of the proportion of fathers taking paternity leave for eight weeks or more. Earlier evidence

nevertheless shows that the rates of use of the 15-day leave (2007-2017) were high: at least 75% of eligible fathers took leave (Romero-Balsas, 2012; Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016). The fathers who did not take leave were fundamentally self-employed, under no contract or under a temporary contract (Romero-Balsas, 2012). Evidence has been found both nationally and internationally to show that a high leave-taking percentage is linked to a high level of wage replacement (Castro García & Pazos Morán, 2016; Fuwa & Cohen, 2007) and non-transferability to the mother (Reich et al., 2012; Castro García & Pazos Morán, 2012). How the lengthening of paternity leave will affect Spanish fathers' involvement therefore has yet to be seen.

Studies in other countries have observed that parental leave has a positive impact on fathers' involvement in childcare, an activity that is shared more fairly than housework (Thomas & Hildingsson, 2009). Meil (2013) analyses data from different European countries and finds that taking leave, regardless of length, is related with a higher frequency of childcare but not greater involvement in housework, and that leave length is related with increased care time. Research done in North America also shows a positive relationship between leave length and men's involvement in care (Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Knoester et al., 2019; Patnaik, 2019). In some research conducted in Scandinavian countries (Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011; Rege & Solly, 2010; Haas & Hwang, 2008), parental leave use is related not only with greater time spent on childcare, but with greater equality in some housework as well. The same effect has been recorded in Germany (Tamm, 2019; Reimer & Pfau-Effinger, 2020).

In the case of Spain, the research findings in this area also suggest that paternity leave (two-week leave) has a positive effect on the amount of time fathers spend on caregiving (Romero-Balsas, 2015), an effect that is not observed in other housework. The length of the leave may be a decisive factor in fathers' greater involvement in housework, because, as observed in Sweden, the use of longer paternity leaves (over 100 days long) increased father's involvement in domestic tasks (Almqvist & Duvander, 2015). Furthermore, in Germany, Bünning (2015) shows that, while using paternity leave results in greater involvement in childcare regardless of leave length, greater involvement in housework is registered only when the father takes more than two months' leave or when he uses his leave to enable the mother to go back to paid work.

Two weeks' paternity leave thus seems to have positive effects on fathers' involvement in childcare, but the evidence of a similar effect on other non-paid responsibilities is shakier. There are as yet no studies analysing the effect of paternity leave length on the equal distribution of childcare and housework in the case of Spain. It is therefore necessary to look into the questions of whether expanding paternity leave to five weeks in Spain intensifies the effects on childcare and whether it facilitates greater balance in the distribution of housework.

### **Unemployment and fathers' involvement in child care and housework**

Supervening situations forcing the father to act as his children's main caregiver can create a period in which emotional ties and caregiving commitments increase, modifying partners' negotiations and distribution of responsibilities. As Henwood and Coltart (2012) show, unemployed fathers have the potential to transform hegemonic masculinity. Along these lines, Lane (2009) asserts that, in contexts where the job situation becomes unstable,

temporary and precarious, the masculine ideal becomes dissociated from its job component and seeks out new signifiers that do not necessarily have to do with paid work.

Unemployment levels in Spain are very high compared to the average of other European countries. However, despite the possible implications that joblessness may have for parental caregiving, there are hardly any studies on the subject. One notable exception is the study by Flaquer et al. (2019), who used data from two phases of the Survey on Time Use to show that, with other significant factors controlled, unemployed fathers spend more time caring for their children than do employed fathers, and that this effect is greater in a context of economic crisis and high unemployment. Also, the qualitative study by Castrillo et al. (2020) on paternal care, finds that one of the differences between caregiving by lone fathers on leave and fathers caring for their children while unemployed is how the time of care is constricted by the father's need to hunt for a job. In their discourse these unemployed fathers reconstruct a gender identity in which they include caregiving but nonetheless maintain some traditional elements. Castrillo et al. (2020) observe that it is the long-term unemployed who feel most uncomfortable in the role of main caregiver.

Studies of unemployment and paternal involvement in other countries mainly address changes in gender identities with a qualitative methodological approach. This researches observes that, in the same line as Spain, while a father remains unemployed, a situation occurs in which his role is redefined to include housework. In particular, Brannen and Nilsen (2006) state that intergenerational cultural changes are happening in the United Kingdom, defined by structural situations (one of which is male unemployment) that are forcing fatherhood/fathering into renegotiation. In their research into stay-at-home (largely unemployed) fathers, Boyer, Dermott and James (2016) state that structural changes, like the fallout from economic recessions, including high unemployment and increasingly precarious conditions, are key to the future of new family dynamics and particularly the inclusion of the man in caregiving.

Research concludes, then, that staying at home gives fathers a significant opportunity to redefine gender relations more fairly (Medved, 2016), although the binary significance of work and caregiving, the reduction of caregiving to an individual choice, the paucity of public policies for reconciliation in many contexts (Doucet, 2016) and the persistent social expectations and stigmas concerning the man's position in caregiving and in the labour market (Kramer & Kramer, 2016) limit its transformative capacity.

## **Research hypotheses**

Based on the bibliographical review, the first hypothesis is that fathers who take paternity leave are more involved in childcare than those who do not and that this involvement grows stronger the longer the father's leave lasts (H1). The foundations of this hypothesis rest, primarily, on the prescriptive nature of paternity leave as regulated by law, in the sense that fathers who take leave are expected to involve themselves in caregiving, so the fathers who take leave internalize this rule. The hypothesis is also based on what we might call "doing fatherhood"; that is, fathers learn about caregiving by practicing, and in the process they also gradually discover that caregiving involves not only work and responsibility, but also satisfaction. Parental leave is thus identified as a structural element

that can generate behaviour and attitudes in fathers. This process becomes more intense the more available time the father has to develop and consolidate his response. It is thus to be expected that, under the logic of the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1997) or what we have termed the “principle of precedent”, whatever fathers become used to do when on leave they will continue to do once they go back to work, on a scale adjusted to their available time and the changing needs associated with the child’s development (Meil, Romero-Balsas & Rogero-García, 2017). In other terms, parental leave is a caregiving resource that facilitates fathers’ incorporation and involvement in caring for their children, creating a *habitus* that naturalizes caregiving. Diverse studies in different countries confirm this finding (Huerta et al., 2014; Tamm, 2018; Knoester et al., 2019). Our second hypothesis (H2) is therefore that the greater involvement caused by taking leave will last over time.

Unemployment does not have the institutional dimension leave has, but unemployed fathers might be expected, as long as they are at home, to cooperate in caring for the new baby and eventually to learn to handle the various tasks to be done just as fathers on paternity leave do. What sets unemployed fathers apart is that they do not perceive time spent caring for their children as a break in their work routine, but as a generally imposed, open-ended time during which they have to change their routines. Another difference is that unemployed fathers often must spend time searching for work, which may make it difficult for them to spend as much time caring for their children as fathers on parental leave do. Nevertheless, as interaction with the baby progresses, unemployed fathers may be expected to develop an emotional bond with the child just as strong as the bond fathers on leave develop, and that is anticipated to keep them involved in caregiving as the children grow. Our third hypothesis (H3), then, is that unemployed fathers who are not entitled to paternity leave are also more involved in caring for their children and that this greater involvement is not just short term or medium term but will last over time, controlling for the effects of other significant variables. Following the same line of reasoning, our fourth hypothesis is that after several years fathers who were unemployed when their children were born will be more involved than fathers who were employed and did not take paternity leave (H4).

The same hypotheses can be posed in connection with the distribution of housework. The fifth hypothesis, then, is that the greater the numbers of weeks of leave taken, the greater the father’s involvement in housework, and that this effect will last over time (H5). Furthermore, the same effect might be expected in cases of unemployment, both in the months following the birth of children and later (H6).

## **Data and methodology**

The source of information used in this research is the *2018 Fertility Survey* conducted by Spain’s National Statistics Institute. This survey is designed to ascertain the factors determining fertility, but the questionnaire also includes questions about the use of parental leave by both parents and about the distribution of housework and childcare between partners. The survey was administered in the spring of 2018 to a representative sample of 14,556 women and 2,619 men aged 18 to 55 residing in Spain. Due to the limited size of the sample of men and bearing in mind that paternity leave was introduced in July 2007, it was decided to analyse the sample of women only; they are used as informants about their heterosexual partners. Considering only those women who bore children after 2007 and live with a partner, the sample contains 3,388 cases.

### *Dependent variables*

The first variable examined is a compound index of fatherly involvement in childcare, constructed on the basis of the average of responses about who performs ten caregiving tasks. The tasks are dressing children, bathing children, putting children to bed, deciding what children eat, staying with children when they are sick, playing, helping children with homework, taking children to school, buying children's clothes and deciding on after-school activities. The index therefore includes instrumental and playful tasks indicating assumption of caregiving responsibility. The response options available are: the task is performed by the woman interviewee (value=1), the man (value=3), both equally (value=2) and other options (grandparents, domestic staff, the children themselves, etc.), which are recoded as 0. The index, constructed as the average of the responses to these 10 caregiving dimensions, runs the range from 1 to 3 points, and Cronbach's alpha for response consistency is 0.75.

The father's participation in housework is measured using the question about what percentage of housework is done by the woman interviewee, her partner and other people. The response is a continuous variable that contains the percentage the man does as reported by the woman interviewee.

### *Independent variables*

The first variable whose effect is analysed is the father's use of paternity leave and, in the case where the mother transfers part of her leave to him, his use of maternity leave. Because leave is granted for each child, the maximum length of weeks used with all children has been calculated instead of the average number of weeks, to prevent the reduction in the number of weeks when the children in question were born before paternity leave was lengthened. The fathers who used more than five weeks (the legal maximum at the time of the survey) were few, so it was decided to lump them together into a single category. This variable therefore ranges from 0 (no leave taken at any time) to five weeks (five or more weeks' leave taken on average).

The second variable is employment status when the man becomes a father. In this case unemployed fathers have a period of availability, similar to paternity leave, in which they can accompany the mother and care for the baby. The limitation on the survey is that it does not record how long unemployed fathers spend without a job, so this factor is treated as a dummy variable (1= not eligible for paternity leave at childbirth). This variable records only fathers ineligible for unemployment benefits, because eligible fathers can take paternity leave. The ineligible fathers are men whose career before the baby's birth was unstable, with long periods of unemployment and/or work without a contract or with very short contracts, disqualifying the father for payed leave. Cases of fathers who are not eligible for paternity leave for one or more children but are eligible for another child or children do not belong to this category, because these fathers have taken paternity leave at some point.

### *Control variables*

Men's involvement in childcare and housework depends on many factors (see Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010, and Aassve, Fuochi & Mencarini, 2014, for a summary). We introduced the *employment status of both parents* as control variables for the time



availability hypothesis. We distinguished between the cases where both parents are employed (which we used as our reference), where the father is employed and the mother is not, where the mother is employed and the father is not and where both are unemployed. To measure the housework burden, we introduced these control variables: the *number of children* (grouping families with three or more children into a single category), the *existence of paid domestic help* and the *age of the youngest child*. To control for the influence of role ideology, we included *both parents' level of schooling* as proxy variables. According to Inglehart (1997), education is the social driver behind the appearance and growing visibility of more-humanistic post-materialistic values, which translate into, among other things, more-liberal attitudes toward gender roles and a heightened appreciation of gender equality ideals across society. *Level of schooling* is measured on a nine-point scale ranging from no education (0) to the most advanced level of tertiary education (9). To measure the relative power of each of the spouses in negotiating the distribution of housework, we calculated the *income difference between partners*, with these categories: the man earns more than his partner (reference), both partners earn the same (1) and the woman earns more than her partner (2). Mean values and standard deviations of the variables included in the analytical model are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Mean values and standard deviations of the variables included in the analytical model

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Father's involvement in childcare index	1.624	.333
Percentage of father's participation in household work	30.13	17.06
Use of paternity leave among eligible fathers	.675	.468
Duration of paternity leave	3.03	2.79
Father ineligible for paternity leave for any of his children	.083	.277
Both parents work	0.65	.477
Both parents do not work	.047	.213
Mother works, father does not	.051	.221
Father works, mother does not	.25	.434
Age of the youngest child	4.42	2.973
Number of children	1.80	.679
Paid household help	.11	.314
Mother's education level	5.58	2.063
Father's education level	4.99	2.114
Mother earns less than father	.567	.496
Mother earns as much as father	.259	.438
Mother earns more than father	.171	.377

We used OLS regression models as our analysis strategy. To test the hypothesis that involvement in caregiving at birth lasts over time, we ran four separate regressions. The first regression included families with children aged 10 or younger (the maximum age of

children born after paternity leave was introduced), while the other three addressed different phases of the family cycle in terms of the age of the youngest child: when the youngest child is 0 to 1 year old, 2 to 5 years old and 6 to 10 years old.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The father's involvement in childcare**

Firstly, we will describe the patterns of paternity leave use and the distribution of family responsibilities in the young generation of parents who have been able to benefit from this measure. As stated before, since paternity leave is a Social Security benefit, only fathers who met contribution requirements were eligible to take paternity leave. According to the women interviewees, 15.6% of the fathers who had children after 2007 were not eligible at the birth of at least one of their children because they did not meet the requirements, although the percentage of fathers who never took leave is 8.4%. Among the eligible, 67.5% took paternity leave for at least one of their children. These percentages are lower than those men report in the same survey, as 76% of the eligible fathers asserted that they took leave, a figure similar to that found in other studies (Romero-Balsas, 2012; Escot, Fernández-Cornejo & Poza, 2014). An average of three weeks' leave is taken, although there are major differences depending on the child's year of birth, due to the increase from two to four weeks' leave in 2017. If the first child was born before 2017, the average is 1.6 weeks, while if the first child was born later it is 3.3 weeks.

According to the responses from the interviewed mothers, many young fathers are heavily involved in the routine tasks of caring for their children. The overall index of childcare distribution is an average of 1.6, where 2 means all tasks are shared equally by the parents. The tasks that are most often shared fairly or mainly done by the father are playing (81.3%), helping with homework (56.8%), taking the children to school (52.7%) and putting the children to bed (52.2%). A large share of fathers is also fairly involved in caring for children at home when they are sick (41.6%). The cases where grandparents are called on to do this (5.1%) are very infrequent. The tasks in which fathers are least present are: deciding what the children should eat (34.8%), choosing the children's clothes (37.4%) and dressing the children (36.4%), but in this latter case it is because many children dress themselves (21%).

The influence of paternity leave use on involvement is shown in Table 3. As can be observed in the first model, the coefficient for this variable is statistically significant and positive, such that, the longer the leave, the greater the father's involvement index, controlling for the effects of other important variables. These results confirm our first hypothesis and are consistent with the findings of other studies performed in Spain (Romero-Balsas, 2015; Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016; Meil, 2017) and in other countries (Haas & Hwang, 2008; Hosking et al., 2010; Meil, 2013; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Knoester et al., 2019; Patnaik, 2019). Disaggregation of the analysis by age (models 2 to 4) shows that these effects not only occur when the children are very young, but also become part of these fathers' conception of their parental role and last over time as the children grow up, although some of the tasks are eventually performed by the children themselves as they grow (bathing, going to bed and dressing). The changes effected through concrete policies are thus seen to have an impact on agents' behaviour,

causing structural transformations that can modify social inertias and expectations. These results are consistent with the studies that have examined this issue in other countries (Huerta et al., 2014; Tamm, 2019; Knoester et al., 2019; Reimer & Pfau-Effinger, 2020), and they confirm our second hypothesis.

The fathers who were not eligible for paternity leave at the birth of a child (generally fathers unemployed at the time) are not more involved in childcare than other fathers, because, while the coefficient is positive, it is not statistically significant. Disaggregation by ages shows that impact differs according to the age of the youngest child: while ineligible fathers are more involved in the first two years of life, shouldering all the typical tasks of childcare, as evinced in the study by Castrillo et al. (2020), it is not the same at more-advanced phases of the family cycle. This difference may be due to the fathers' having found jobs at more-advanced phases of the cycle and spending less time caregiving. Therefore, although unemployment does enable fathers to become socialized in caring for their children, unemployment does not result in a more-involved long-term fatherhood, unlike paternity leave. It is the lack of the institutional dimension that appears to limit the experience's long-term transformative capacity (Doucet, 2016). Consequently, our third hypothesis is only partly true, in that unemployment does make it easier for fathers to learn to care for their children and become actively involved in childcare while they are unemployed, as indicated by a large number of the qualitative studies on the subject (Lane, 2009; Demantas & Myer, 2015; Henwood & Coltart, 2012; Strier, 2014).

The fact that the time made available by unemployment does not result in the naturalization of childcare or the internalization of a *habitus* of involved fatherhood can also be examined considering the spouse's employment status. As can be observed in Table 2, unemployed fathers are more involved than the fathers employed at the time of the survey. This result is consistent with the data found by Flaquer et al. (2019). Consideration of both parents' employment status, however, reveals that this is only so if the woman is employed, but not when both parents are unemployed. This is so regardless of the phase of the cycle the family is in, and it does not imply that gender roles are reversed, i.e., that the unemployed father assumes all caregiving activities, but that tasks are shared equally, as made evident also in the study by Castrillo et al. (2020). In this sense, the fourth hypothesis is only partly true.

In addition to paternity leave and the couple's employment status, other variables also appear as significant in this analysis. The father's involvement declines with the age and number of children and when the couple have paid help to care for their children. This suggests that fathers' involvement tends to be more intense when the children are very young and there are only one or two children. Furthermore, the fathers' schooling level is also revealed as a significant factor in the expected sense: regardless of the child's age, the higher the father's level of education, the greater his involvement. As other research (Jurado-Guerrero & Muñoz-Comet, 2020) shows, the father's level of education has a positive relationship with paternal involvement and with the importance fathers place on the activities they do with their children at an early age. In the case of the woman's schooling level there is an inverse relationship, controlling for the effects of other variables, although its weight is light and it is found mainly when the baby is very young. Lastly, an income difference also proves to be significant in the distribution of caregiving work, because the father's involvement is greater when the two parents earn the same or the woman earns more than he does.

Table 3. Factors conditioning the father's participation in caring for his children

Age of the youngest child	0-10 years	0-1 years	2-5 years	6-10 years
Constant	1.62***	1.59***	1.59***	1.95***
Duration of paternity leave	0.02**	0.02*	0.02*	0.02*
Father ineligible for paternity leave for any of the children (unemployed)	0.03	0.10*	0.01	0.00
Both partners are unemployed (ref.: both are employed)	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.08
Mother is employed, father is not	0.12***	0.14*	0.09*	0.16**
Father is employed, mother is not	-0.05***	-0.08*	-0.04	-0.05
Age of the youngest child	-0.04*	-0.05*	-0.02*	-0.07***
Number of children	-0.05*	-0.01	-0.03*	-0.09***
Paid household help (reference: yes)	-0.06**	-0.12**	-0.05	-0.03
Mother's education level	-0.01**	-0.02*	-0.01	-0.01*
Father's education level	0.02**	0.02**	0.02**	0.03***
Mother earns as much as father (reference: mother earns less)	0.07***	0.09**	0.06**	0.06*
Mother earns more than father	0.09***	0.10**	0.11***	0.05
R2	0.135	0.081	0.050	0.120
N	3.369	721	1.352	1.294

Notes: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: Author, based on microdata from the 2018 Fecundity Survey for women.

### Involvement in housework

Housework is distributed much more unevenly than childcare, as has also been shown in other studies (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Aassve, Fuochi & Mencarini, 2014). According to the women interviewees with children 10 years old or younger, their husband does an average of 30% of the housework. The percentage is somewhat higher for husbands who have taken five or more weeks' paternity leave (33%) than for husbands who have not (29%). Almost one out of four couples distributes the work evenly (23%).

The positive impact of paternity leave use on task distribution is less evident in housework than in childcare. Without considering the phase of the family cycle, the longer the paternity leave, the greater the father's involvement in housework, but even so disaggregation by the youngest child's age shows that this relationship is not statistically significant in all the stages. Moreover, in the first years of life, when family work piles up, there appears to be no statistically significant difference in involvement between fathers who take leave and fathers who do not, although such a difference does appear at

older ages. This ambiguity in the results reflects the disparate findings reported in the comparative literature cited above.

Fathers who were unemployed when their child was born do not become more involved in housework, either in the first two years of life after birth nor in the longer run, considering the responses given by the interviewed mothers. This result contrasts with the observations of in-depth interviews with fathers who were unemployed when their partners returned to work after maternity leave (Castrillo et al., 2020). Again, analysis of the results shows how normative structures and social expectations generated by specific family policies enable the naturalization of certain kinds of behaviour that might otherwise never happen.

The results in Table 4 show that, regardless of the children's age, the man becomes more involved in housework only in the case where the mother works while the father is jobless, and in such cases the proportion of instances where it is the father who mainly performs the activities or these are shared, fairly rises. If both parents are unemployed, the fathers do not do more housework than employed fathers. The experience of joblessness therefore cannot be deduced to result in a lasting naturalization of housework by the father, producing lower gender inequality in the family.

The rest of the variables that influence the father's involvement in housework are similar to those that influence caregiving, except for the mother's schooling level and the number of children, whose differences are not statistically significant. The variable that has the strongest influence is whether the family has external paid help for these tasks, which substantially reduces the father's involvement regardless, in any phase of the family cycle.

Table 4  
Determinants of the father's participation in housework

<b>Age of the youngest child</b>	<b>0-10 years</b>	<b>0-1 years</b>	<b>2-5 years</b>	<b>6-10 years</b>
Constant	28.83***	28.83***	30.43***	28.13***
Duration of paternity leave	0.51*	0.23	0.76*	0.52
Father ineligible for paternity leave for any of the children (unemployed)	1.82	2.95	0.74	2.44
Both partners are unemployed (ref.: both are employed)	-2.06	-1.59	-2.50	-2.08
Woman is employed, partner is not	5.50***	4.02	6.13**	5.78**
Partner is employed, woman is not	-7.53***	-9.09***	-6.71***	-7.52***
Age of the youngest child	-0.18	0.53	-0.49	-0.25
Number of children	-0.64	0.23	-1.03	-0.80
Paid household help (reference: yes)	-12.02***	-13.74***	-10.48***	-12.65***
Mother's education level	0.25	0.04	0.20	0.39
Father's education level	0.54**	0.41	0.39	0.76**
Mother earns as much as father (reference: mother earns less)	2.41***	0.45	3.47**	2.35

Mother earns more than father	3.24***	3.69*	3.51*	2.61
R2	0.106	0.141	0.102	0.102
N	3.369	721	1.352	1.294

Notes: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: Author, based on microdata from the 2018 Fecundity Survey for women.

## CONCLUSIONS

Paternity leave has been introduced in many countries as a way of promoting gender equality. This has happened in Spain as well, where paternity leave was introduced in 2007. The length of leave has been increased several times since. According to the analysed data, between 62 and 75% of eligible fathers have taken paternity leave, while the rest have not, although they have the right to do so. Since paternity leave is a benefit managed by the Social Security system, applicants must meet eligibility requirements, which means approximately 16% of fathers do not qualify for paternity leave. These are primarily long-term unemployed fathers or fathers who work in the informal economy. The objective of this work was to analyse the impact of paternity leave length on the reduction of gender inequalities in the family space and to do so through comparison with fathers ineligible for paternity leave.

Our initial hypothesis was that, the longer the father spends on paternity leave, the greater is his involvement in childcare and housework. The outcome of our analysis confirm this hypothesis for childcare and reinforce the results of other studies (Huerta et al., 2014; Tamm, 2018; Knoester et al., 2019). The effect appears to remain steady not only when the children are very young, but also as they grow. The reason for this positive effect rests in the fact that paternity leave transforms the internal constrictions imposed by the traditional distribution of work learned during primary socialization and by external constraints caused by the labour market and other social agents, facilitating time and enabling the father to involve himself in caring for his children.

Thus, during this crucial period in the family's biography, the father learns to provide care if this is the first experience as a father, or he is compelled to become more deeply involved in child care if he already has children. In this sense, on the basis of the "principle of precedent", whatever he used to do while on leave he will continue doing when he goes back to work, adapting the activities to the time available. In addition, in a different dimension, the father is assigned the social role of caregiver, generating non-traditional social expectations. Moreover, this greater involvement has socializing effects on the children that will facilitate the transformation of intergenerational social behaviour.

It is also observed, although at a lesser intensity, that the longer the leave, the greater the father's involvement in housework, but this positive effect on the reduction of gender inequalities is small and seems to peter out in the long term. Altogether, these results justify the policy of lengthening paternity leave, a policy Spain has followed as it has gradually extended paternity leave until making it equal in length to maternity leave in 2019.

Our research also makes it evident that the socializing effect of caregiving while on paternity leave is not comparable to the effect of caregiving among fathers who were unemployed at their children's birth and therefore ineligible for paternity leave. Although

unemployed fathers become more involved in caring for new-borns while jobless, things change at more advanced stages of the family cycle if the fathers find a job. Free time due to unemployment thus does not make for the same deep, structural transformation of family gender roles as free time while on paternity leave. The potential for transforming gender relations therefore seems to be linked to the institutional dimension of paternity leave and the change of social expectations that paternity leave entails, i.e., the attached social significance that defines time on paternity leave as caregiving time. That is probably due to the fact that the social meaning of unemployment is that of a time that really ought be used hunting for a job and/or gaining occupational skills instead of being a stay-at-home father. Consequently, the introduction and lengthening of paternity leave are plainly an effective mechanism for promoting fairer gender relations not only in the short term, but in the long term as well.

This analysis labours under several limitations. One of the most serious is the lack of sufficient information on the number, time of onset and duration of the fathers' jobless experiences, so their medium- and long-term impact cannot be analysed with precision. Furthermore, as shown in various qualitative studies (O'Brien & Wall, 2017; Romero-Balsas, Meil & Rogero-García, 2019), caregiving's socializing capability depends strongly on whether a father uses his paternity leave to care for his children alone at home when the mother goes back to work or he uses paternity leave to care for his children while the mother is at home, too. Future research into the efficacy of leave policy should collect information on these points and analyse their impact. Furthermore, the index used to measure the father's involvement does not provide sufficient gradations to indicate precisely how the parents distribute the different dimensions of caregiving or the time spent on them. Moreover, the analysis does not disaggregate caregiving tasks by type to reach an overall view of the task-by-task impact. Another of the limitations stems from the lack of longitudinal or panel data to ascertain the effects of unemployment on fathers' involvement after they return to paid work. Future studies can report on the questions left unanswered here.

## References

- Aassve, A.; Fuochi, G.; Mencarini, L. (2014). Desperate housework: Relative resources, time availability, economic dependency, and gender ideology across Europe. *Journal of Family Issues* 35(8): 1000–1022.
- Almqvist, A. L., & Duvander, A. Z. (2014). Changes in gender equality? Swedish fathers' parental leave, division of childcare and housework<sup>1</sup>. *Journal of family studies*, 20(1), 19-27.
- Alberdi, I., & Escario, P. (2007). *Los hombres jóvenes y la paternidad*. Bilbao: Fundación BBVA.
- Álvarez, B. & Miles, D. (2003): "Gender effect on housework allocation: Evidence from Spanish two-earner couples, *Journal of Population Economics*, 16, 227–242.
- Bailey, J. (2015). Understanding contemporary fatherhood: Masculine care and the patriarchal deficit. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 4, 3-17.
- Bourdieu, P. (1997). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Barcelona, Spain: Anagrama.
- Boyer, K., Dermott, E., James, A., & MacLeavy, J. (2017). Regendering care in the aftermath of recession?. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 7(1), 56-73.



- Brannen, J., & Nilsen, A. (2006). From fatherhood to fathering: Transmission and change among British fathers in four-generation families. *Sociology*, 40(2), 335-352.
- Bünning, M. (2015). What happens after the ‘daddy months’? Fathers’ involvement in paid work, childcare, and housework after taking parental leave in Germany. *European Sociological Review*, 31(6), 738-748.
- Castrillo, C., Rogero-García, J., Romero-Balsas, P. & Meil, G. (2020) Becoming primary caregivers? Unemployed fathers caring alone in Spain. *Families, Relationships and Societies*
- Castro García, C. & Pazos Morán, M. (2012). Permisos por nacimiento e igualdad de género: ¿Cómo diseñar los permisos de maternidad, paternidad y parentales? *Papeles de trabajo del Instituto de Estudios Fiscales. Serie economía*, (9):7-25.
- Castro-García, C., & Pazos-Moran, M. (2016). Parental leave policy and gender equality in Europe. *Feminist Economics*, 22(3):51-73.
- Coltrane, S. (2000). Research on household labor: Modeling and measuring the social embeddedness of routine family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62,1208-1333.
- Demantas, I., & Myers, K. (2015). “Step up and be a man in a different manner”: unemployed men reframing masculinity. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 56(4), 640-664.
- Domínguez-Folgueras, M., Jurado-Guerrero, T., & Botía-Morillas, C. (2018). Against the odds? Keeping a nontraditional division of domestic work after first parenthood in Spain. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39(7), 1855-1879.
- Doucet, A. (2016). Is the stay-at-home dad (SAHD) a feminist concept? A genealogical, relational, and feminist critique. *Sex Roles*, 75(1-2), 4-14.
- Doughney, J. and Leahy, M. (2006). “Women, Work and Preference Formation: A Critique of Catherine Hakim’s Preference Theory”. *Journal of Business Systems, Governance and Ethics*, 1 (1): 37-48.
- Escot, L., Fernández-Cornejo, J. A. y Poza, C. (2014). Fathers’ use of childbirth leave in Spain. The effects of the 13-day paternity leave. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 33(3), 419-453.
- Fernández-Cornejo, J. A., Escot, L., Del-Pozo, E., & Castellanos-Serrano, C. (2016). Do fathers who took childbirth leave become more involved in their children’s care? *The case of Spain. Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 47(2), 169-191.
- Flaquer, L., & Escobedo, A. (2014). Licencias parentales y política social de la paternidad en España. *Cuadernos de relaciones laborales*, 32(1), 69-99.
- Flaquer, L., Navarro-Varas, L., Antón-Alonso, F., Ruiz-Forès, N., & Cónsola, A. (2019). La implicación paterna en el cuidado de los hijos en España antes y durante la recesión económica. *Revista Española de Sociología*, 28(2).
- Giddens, A. (1995). La constitución de la sociedad: bases para la teoría de la Estructuración [The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration]. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Amorrortu.
- Goffman, E. (2006). Frame analysis: Los marcos de la experiencia [Frame analysis: The frames of experience]. Madrid, Spain: CIS.



- Hosking, A., Whitehouse, G., & Baxter, J. (2010). Duration of leave and resident fathers' involvement in infant care in Australia. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(5), 1301-1316.
- Huerta, M. D. C., Adema, W., Baxter, J., Han, W. J., Lausten, M., Lee, R., & Waldfogel, J. (2014). *Fathers' leave, fathers' involvement and child development: Are they related? Evidence from four OECD countries* (No. 140). OECD Publishing.
- Jurado-Guerrero, T., & Muñoz-Comet, J. (2020). Design Matters Most: Changing Social Gaps in the Use of Fathers' Leave in Spain. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 1-27.
- Knoester, C., Petts, R. J., & Pragg, B. (2019). Paternity Leave-Taking and Father Involvement among Socioeconomically Disadvantaged US Fathers. *Sex Roles*, 1-15.
- Kramer, K. Z., & Kramer, A. (2016). At-home father families in the United States: Gender ideology, human capital, and unemployment. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78(5), 1315-1331.
- Lachance-Grzela, M.; Bouchard, G. (2010) Why Do Women Do the Lion's Share of Housework? A Decade of Research, *Sex Roles* (2010) 63:767–780.
- Lapuerta, Irene; Baizán, Pau & González, M. José (2011). «Individual and Institutional Constraints: An Analysis of Parental Leave Use and Duration in Spain». *Population Research and Policy Review*, 30: 185-210.
- Lupton, D., & Barclay, L. (1997). *Constructing fatherhood: Discourses and experiences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Meil, G. (2013) European Men's Use of Parental Leave and Their Involvement in Child Care and Housework. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*. XLIV (5):557-560.
- Meil, G. (2017). Permisos parentales para hombres y corresponsabilidad en el cuidado de niños. *Revista del Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social*, (131), 15-34.
- Meil, Gerardo, Romero-Balsas, Pedro y Rogero-García, Jesús (2017), "Fathers on Leave Alone in Spain: 'Hey, I Want to Be Able to Do It Like That, Too'" in M. O'Brien, K. Wall (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality. Fathers on Leave Alone*, Springer, Life Course Research and Social Policies 6, pp. 107-124
- Meil, G., Romero-Balsas, P., & Rogero-García, J. (2019). Spain: leave policy in times of economic crisis. En Moss, P., Duvander, A. Z. and Koslowski, A. (Eds.) *Parental Leave and Beyond: Recent International Developments, Current Issues and Future Directions* (21-38). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Medved, C. E. (2016). Stay-at-home fathering as a feminist opportunity: Perpetuating, resisting, and transforming gender relations of caring and earning. *Journal of Family Communication*, 16(1), 16-31.
- Miller, T. (2010). *Making sense of fatherhood: Gender, caring and work*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Nepomnyaschy, L., & Waldfogel, J. (2007). Paternity leave and fathers' involvement with their young children: Evidence from the American Ecls-B. *Community, Work and Family*, 10(4), 427-453.

- O'Brien, M. (2009). Fathers, Parental Leave Policies and Infant Quality of Life: International Perspectives and Policy Impact. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 624, Núm. 1, 190-213.
- Patnaik, A. (2019). Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers' quotas. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 37(4), 1009-1059.
- Reich, N.; Boll, C.; Leppin, J.S. (2012) Fathers' Childcare and Parental Leave Policies: Evidence from Western European Countries and Canada. *HWWI Research Paper*, 115.
- Risman, B. J. (2004). Gender as a social structure: Theory wrestling with activism. *Gender & Society*, 18, 429-450.
- Risman, B. J. (2017). 2016 Southern Sociological Society presidential address: Are millennials cracking the gender structure? *Social Currents*, 4, 208-227.
- Romero-Balsas, P. (2012), "Fathers Taking Paternity Leave in Spain: Which Characteristics Foster and Which Hamper the Use Of Paternity Leave?", *Sociologia e Politiche Sociali*, 15: 105-130.
- Romero-Balsas, P. (2015). Consequences Paternity Leave on Allocation of Childcare and Domestic Tasks. *Reis: Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 149: 87–109.
- Romero-Balsas, P., Meil, G., & Rogero-García, J. (2019). Policemen on Leave Alone in Spain. A Rift in Hegemonic Masculinity?. *Men and Masculinities*, 1097184X19878221.
- Strier, R. (2014). Unemployment and fatherhood: Gender, culture and national context. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 21(5), 395-410.
- Tamm, M. (2018), "Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation", *Labour Economics*, 59, 184-197.
- Thomas, J. E., & Hildingsson, I. (2009). Who's bathing the baby? The division of domestic labour in Sweden. *Journal of Family Studies*, 15(2), 139-152.
- Wall, G., & Arnold, S. (2007). How involved is involved fathering? *Gender & Society*, 21, 508-527