

Nordic Family Policy and Continued Fertility

Ann-Zofie Duvander, *Stockholm University*; Trude Lappegard, *Statistics Norway*; Synøve N. Andersen, *Statistics Norway*; Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, *University of Iceland*; Gerda Neyer, *Stockholm University*; Ida Viklund, *Stockholm University*

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Introduction

The notion that generous family policy results in relatively high fertility is found both by research noting the association, and by political concern (Olah and Bernhardt 2008; Ferrarini and Duvander 2010). There has been a special focus on family policy aiming at a gender equal division of both childcare and labor market work, often termed earner-carer-model. The Nordic countries are given as the prime examples, both because their policy generosity and their focus on fathers' participation in childcare. Most notably, father's quotas in the parental leave use are aimed at encouraging fathers' early involvement, with great success (Duvander and Johansson 2012; Duvander and Lammi-Taskula 2011). The Nordic countries have had 20 years of experience with the fathers' quota and the fathers' share of leave use is constantly increasing. The aim of this study is to examine the association between parents' use of parental leave and especially fathers' use of the fathers' quota and continued childbearing in three Nordic countries, namely Iceland, Sweden and Norway. As we have data on parents' use of parental leave for almost two decades (since 2001 in Iceland) we are especially interested in whether the pattern have changed over time.

The major argument for why a more gender equal parental leave use would increase fertility is that a more equal division in the household would ease women's work burden at home and thus enhance the degree of compatibility between childrearing and female employment, thereby making it easier to realize childbearing plans (Duvander and Andersson 2006). Parental leave taken by the father can, for example, facilitate a faster return to work for the mother. Shared parental leave indicates a shared responsibility for childcare during the child's first year(s) and signals the father's commitment to share the care of children also later in the child's life (Duvander and Andersson 2006).

Focusing on three Nordic countries we will consider whether there are cross-national variations in the relation of parental leave use and continued fertility. The Nordic countries are similar in many regards ranging from labour market, women's role in society (including labour market participation), culture, history and primarily family policy arrangements (Eydal and Gislason 2011). The similar family policies in Iceland, Norway and Sweden make a comparative analysis highly relevant. The parental leave systems are broadly based on the same principles, but there are some differences in the organisation of the programmes. Furthermore, the father's quota was introduced and expanded at different times and with different lengths or proportions of the total leave. The meaning and consequences of the mothers' and fathers' use of parental leave may thus vary. Even though policies have a clear gender-equal motivation in all three countries national differences make it reasonable to

expect differences in the magnitude of the effects between the countries. For instance, Sweden is the prime example of a dual-earner model where gender-equal parenthood has guided the family policy development since the 1970s (Ferrarini and Duvander 2010). Norway offers more general family support in a dualistic policy sometimes called “gender-equality light” (Rønsen and Skrede 2006). Iceland is particularly interesting in a Nordic comparative context as they lagged behind in family policy generosity until the turn of the century and has thereafter had the most radical transition towards a gender-equal family policy. Iceland has the longest leave reserved for fathers and the shortest leave possible to take for mothers. In addition, as fathers’ leave use has increased dramatically over time, it will be of major interest to investigate whether the impact on continued childbearing has changed over time and whether thresholds of leave use can be found in different countries.

Background

Our point of departure is two profound societal changes sweeping across western countries and pioneered by the Nordic countries: new gender practices and shifts in family dynamics. Gender practices in work and unpaid work have changed over the past few decades, and in most western countries there has been a move from a traditionally strict male-breadwinner model towards various degrees of dual-earner models where both men and women participate in the labour market. However, changes in employment have been more profound than changes in domestic responsibilities. This uneven development has been labelled the “stalled revolution”, i.e. women increasingly share the market work with their husbands, but men have not necessarily increased their share of domestic work accordingly (Hochschild 1989). This situation is also still found in the Nordic countries, even if men share more of the domestic responsibilities than in most other countries (Hook 2006). In the demographic literature, the substantial changes in family dynamics and fertility behaviour in the western countries are known as the “Second Demographic Transition” (van de Kaa 2001) stressing the importance of ideational changes in bringing about certain demographic behaviours. Gender equality has been singled out as a key element in fertility change (e.g. Chesnais 1996; McDonald 2000). According to this perspective, low fertility in certain countries today can be explained by the incoherence between the relatively high level of gender equality in individually oriented institutions (i.e. educational system and labour market) and the low level of gender equality in the family and family-oriented institutions (McDonald 2000). The combination of relatively high fertility and employment of mothers in the Nordic countries has been interpreted as an indication of the impact of social policies facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life (e.g. Daly 2000; Esping-Andersen 2002; Stier et al. 2001).

Previous studies from Sweden and Norway during the first period with the fathers’ quota show that features encouraging an active participation from the father in child care may stimulate fertility, as women are more likely to have another child if the father took parental leave with the first child (Olah 2003; Duvander and Andersson 2006; Duvander et al. 2010; Lappegård 2010). Neither of these studies is able to disentangle selection from causality effects. That is, men who take parental leave, and especially those who take extensive leaves, are likely to do so because they are more child-oriented than other fathers and it is thereby also conceivable that such fathers are more interested in having more children. Similarly, women who only take short parental leave may be the most work oriented and may see one child as sufficient. In this study we use the same approach to the association between use of parental leave and fertility. However, comparing countries with fairly similar policies, and economic, social and cultural conditions, we are better able to distinguish the impact of family

policy on demographic behavior from other factors. We expect for example that the more radical shift in policy in Iceland will lead to a radical change compared to the gradual interventions in Norway and Sweden. We also expect that the more ambivalent Norwegian setting will show more difference between fathers using the leave and fathers not using the leave, when comparing to the more clearcut aim for gender equality in Sweden. As we have data for almost two decades we will also be able to investigate changes over time and whether changes take different paths in the different countries.

A Nordic comparative perspective on the issue of the association between the parental leave use and fertility is of high relevance. If we find similar patterns in all countries, it will give more strength in the results. If we find differences in results we will be able to conclude on policy differences on a detailed level. By isolating policies in an institutional context that is generally similar we can better uncover the importance of *variations* in policy between the countries. Findings from such comparative studies supply sound evidence for policymakers and will improve the knowledge base for population-related policy formulation (e.g. Neyer and Andersson 2008).

Data and method

We use data from the national population registers covering the whole population. Each person is identified by a unique identification numbers. This allows us to link data from different administrative registers and we will construct datasets that contain childbearing histories and longitudinal information on income and education. The data cover an almost twenty year period 1993 to 2011. Father's quota was first introduced in Norway 1993, in Sweden 1995 and in Iceland 2001. When the reform was implemented it was 4 weeks in Norway and Sweden. In both countries there has been additional reforms increasing the father's quota to the total of 10 weeks in Sweden and 14 weeks in Norway. In Iceland it has been 12 weeks from the reform was implemented. Today Icelandic fathers use 32 percent of the leave, Norwegian 15 percent and the Swedish fathers 24 percent. As leave is of different lengths the percentages imply various lengths.

We will measure parental leave use in various ways, including father's share of all leave used, time period benefits are used by mother and father as well as benefits during leave. There are a number of changes in regulations, for example in benefit level and expansion of leave period that we will consider.

In order to examine the association between parents' use of parental leave and continued childbearing we make use of data on parents' exposure times of 'risks' splitting up and their childbirth for the different groups of parents. Thus we are making use of an event history analysis of continued childbearing in which we estimate the impact of different use of parental leave and father's use of the fathers' quota on the propensity of having a second or a third child. We follow parents that had their first or second common child and we censor if parents split up. The estimated risks reflect both the timing and the quantum of the event we study. The hazard rate is estimated from the birth of the previous child. The technique is a standard tool in analyses of time-dependent data like ours. We estimate models for first-child

and second-child parents separately. We control for several relevant background variables such as age of the parents, age of the youngest child, unions status, education and income.

Innovation

The proposed analysis is innovative in several ways. Our study will provide new insight about how a policy with an explicit aim of changing the gender roles in the family are interrelated with continued childbearing covering a period of almost 20 years. The key question is whether and how more equal gender roles in families influence fertility. In this study we are not able to distinguish between causality and selection, but we will gain insights by comparing three countries and follow the development of the association for a long and eventful time period. Using administrative register data including information of the whole population allows us to perform more detailed analysis, distinguishing into sub-groups of parents.

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