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Fathers trying to take leave in 21st century Britain

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Overview of leave in UK: minimal father-care provision



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1976 Statutory **maternity leave**

1999 **Parental leave (13 weeks, individual entitlement, unpaid)**
EU

2003 **Paternity leave (2 weeks)** Flat-rate payment of €160 a week and the right to request flexible working, extended **maternity leave** to 52 weeks (paid 90% first 6 weeks, + a flat-rate payment of €160 for 33 weeks; remaining 13 weeks are unpaid)

2011 **Additional Paternity Leave** (from 20 weeks) transfer of maternity leave if mother returns to work payment for Maternity leave, i.e. between 20 and 39 weeks after the child is born. If he takes APL after the 39 week period, it will be unpaid

Overview of leave in UK: minimal father-care provision



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2013 Parental leave (18 weeks, individual entitlement, unpaid) EU

2014 Shared Parental leave 30 June 2014 “If mothers choose to bring their leave and pay or allowance to “an early end”, parents can share the balance of the remaining leave and pay as shared parental leave and pay up to a total of 50 weeks of leave and 37 paid.”

A post-election radical proposal



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Modern Workplaces: flexible parental leave, flexible working, annual leave and equal pay (2011)

1. Proposal to reconfigure UK's leave system:

- reduce the length of Maternity leave to 18 from 52 wks
- retain Paternity leave 2 wks
- reclassify the remainder of existing Maternity Leave as Parental Leave (to include mummy & daddy months)

2. Payment (no new money)

- currently ML paid for 39 wks - of which 6 weeks 90% income replacement & 33 wks at flat rate
- PL paid flat rate 2 wks

A retreat: Children and Families Act 2014



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- Retention of Maternity leave duration to 52 weeks and Paternity leave duration to two weeks.
- After the first 2 weeks of Maternity leave, the mother can **transfer** Maternity leave to her partner- termed **Shared Parental Leave** (replacing a similarly designed instrument, called Additional Paternity Leave (APL), under which mothers could only transfer leave to partners after 20 weeks).
- Unlike APL, there will be no requirement for a woman to return to employment before the father can begin taking SPL.

A retreat: Children and Families Act 2014



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- No provision to introduce an individual non-transferable paid entitlement to fathers (e.g. 'daddy month')
- Instead a proposal to extend paternity leave & pay through secondary legislation at a later date.
- No mention of parallel EU legislation on Parental Leave increase from 13 weeks to 18 weeks legally enacted (silently) in the UK during the parliamentary discussions on 8th March 2013.

Utilization of paternity leave by UK fathers



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- **91 %** of fathers take time off around the time of their baby's birth. Of those taking time off, 49% use statutory Paternity leave only, 25 % statutory leave plus other paid leave, 18 % other paid leave only and 5% unpaid leave.
- Most take the statutory **two weeks** -50%, 34 % took less & 16% more.
- Higher take-up levels in the **public sector** and where there were **family friendly arrangements** available in the workplace
- **Large private and public sector** organisations most likely to give full payment for longer periods of paternity leave- and take up higher.

Chanfreau, J., Gowland, S., Lancaster, Z., Poole, E., Tipping, S. and Toomse, M. (2011) *Maternity and Paternity Rights and Women Returners Survey 2009/2010* (Department of Work and Pensions Research Report No 777).



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Emerging findings from research with couples taking APL

Who are the couples?



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- Small pilot study in preparation for larger mixed methods longitudinal study
- Six heterosexual couples recruited, all biological parents of the baby. Data collection completed with three, on-going with the other three
- Recruited through: Mumsnet; a local fathers' group and the National Childbirth Trust (NCT)
- 3 couples are from England, 1 from France, 1 from Sweden-Poland and 1 from Australia
- All university educated, all living in or around London, all both working FT pre-baby (more demographic information to come)

Methods



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- Couple interview and individual interview with each parent
- Observations of fathers on leave (and potentially mothers on leave)
- Reflexive diary
- Constructivist Grounded Theory approach to analysis (Charmaz 2006)

Conceptual Framework



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1. Gender as relational (Connell 2002; Walby 1997)
2. Couple intimacy as a mediating factor in gender relations and roles (Twamley 2012; Jamieson 2011; Schober 2013)
3. Parents' relationship with one another shapes parenting behaviour (Cowan and Cowan)
4. Gendered constructions of parenthood shape parents' behaviour but can be both done and undone (West and Zimmerman 1987; Deustch 2007)

Findings: Negotiations around APL



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1. APL constructed as women's leave to give

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"I wanted to give my husband a chance to experience how it is to stay at home with a little baby." **Anka [APL6-12mo]**

"I was really happy that she wanted to [share her leave]." **Arthur [8-12mo]**

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*And because I'm from Sweden, it's felt very natural for me because in Sweden we've had this paternity leave or the shared parental leave for so long that it's kind of in my culture already to think about such things. I have many friends who have taken it as well, shared their time together. So it's [unclear 00:05:18] obvious for me in that sense. **Peter [APL6-12mo]***

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But I actually felt quite proud [unclear 00:11:55] when we decided. I remember sometimes my friends [...] on Facebook, for example. I saw one photo that “Oh like men think that maternity leave is [a holiday]...” [...] and there were lots of comments like “yeah, men don’t know when they come home and they expect everything to be ready, clean and baby’s fed and sleep. It’s not so easy.” I could then write like “Yeah my husband actually knows something about that.” [...] And there was like a discussion that every man should try it and see so they then understand that it’s not as easy as they think. It’s not a holiday. Anka [APL6-12mo]

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Evie: I think it's up to John to decide whether he would want to do that or not. I am happy that he gave it a go this time, but it's not necessarily his battle, so... I think he found it harder than he expected. But if he felt that it was impacting on his career or something then, yeah. ... But then, another part of me thinks 'well, it impacts on women's careers', doesn't it? So... Hmm. I am not sure. It depends on his reasons.

KT: What reason would be okay?

Evie: I don't know. ... I can't actually think of any reason. No, I don't think I would be happy if he said no. It would be worse had he just never tried it, but even now he has, yeah. Sorry! No, I can't really think of any reason. It's hard, isn't it?

Evie [APL9-12mo]

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2. APL portrayed as natural or obvious choice in context of the relationship

"I just thought we'd do everything together." **Peter [APL6-12mo]**

3. Financial situation 'allows' APL

Findings: Fathers' experiences of APL



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1. Tiring and hard work

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1. Tiring and hard work

“Jason says his daily dilemma is whether he should let [son] sleep or wake him for an activity: He knows [son] will enjoy the activity, but then he needs his sleep too and maybe he will be unhappy if woken up. (This conversation went on for several minutes.)” **Jason [APL6-12mo]**

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2. Enjoyable but lonely

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1. Tiring and hard work

“Jason says his daily dilemma is whether he should let [son] sleep or wake him for an activity: He knows [son] will enjoy the activity, but then he needs his sleep too and maybe he will be unhappy if woken up. (This conversation went on for several minutes.)” **Jason [APL6-12mo, +3mo]**

2. Enjoyable but lonely

“P chats while the tv is on. Says he feels lonely sometimes as there are no other men. He’s approached men at rhyme time, none were on APL. Also tried to form Dads’ group with other men from work, none of whom took APL. Says he was first in his company.” **Peter [APL6-12mo]**

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3. Mixed reactions of others

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3. Mixed reactions of others

*I even lost one of my friends during my time on APL. He thought I was leeching on benefits. I told him I'm just taking the remainders of my wife's Maternity Pay. But he's very conventional and thinks a woman should take care of the kids rather than men. I told him I think he's a traditionalist, he got offended and didn't want to be my friend anymore. I don't know. Feels silly that someone cannot be friends with you because you want to spend time with your son. Diary extract from **Peter [APL6-12mo]***

Whether positive or negative, reactions have a tendency to 'other' the couple

(Emerging) concluding thoughts



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The structure of APL impacts on, or perhaps solidifies, gendered ideas of parenting which the couples find difficult to escape from. The proposed shared leave unlikely to change this?

The decision to take leave is embedded in the intimate relations between the couple (leave as gift; taken up by couples who already hold egalitarian values which are intrinsic to their ideals of intimacy).

Men's experiences of leave are shaped by the unusualness of men taking APL – feelings of both pride and isolation