

FATHERS ON LEAVE AND GENDER EQUALITY: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Fathers on leave alone in Japan How were they able to become pioneers?

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Basics and Recent Changes in Statutory Parental Leave Scheme in Japan

Statutory Leave Scheme introduced in
1992

- Either father or mother
- Until 1st birthday of the baby
- No leave benefit

- Conditions (collective agreement)

The mothers need to be working and not on leave for fathers to take leave except 8 weeks after birth (maternity leave period).

- Only for a continuous period.

Changes

2001 Benefit payment: 40% of monthly payment before leave

2005

Conditional extension until child is 18 months
e.g. admission to a childcare centre has been requested but denied for the time being.

2007 Benefit: 50%

Changes

2010.4

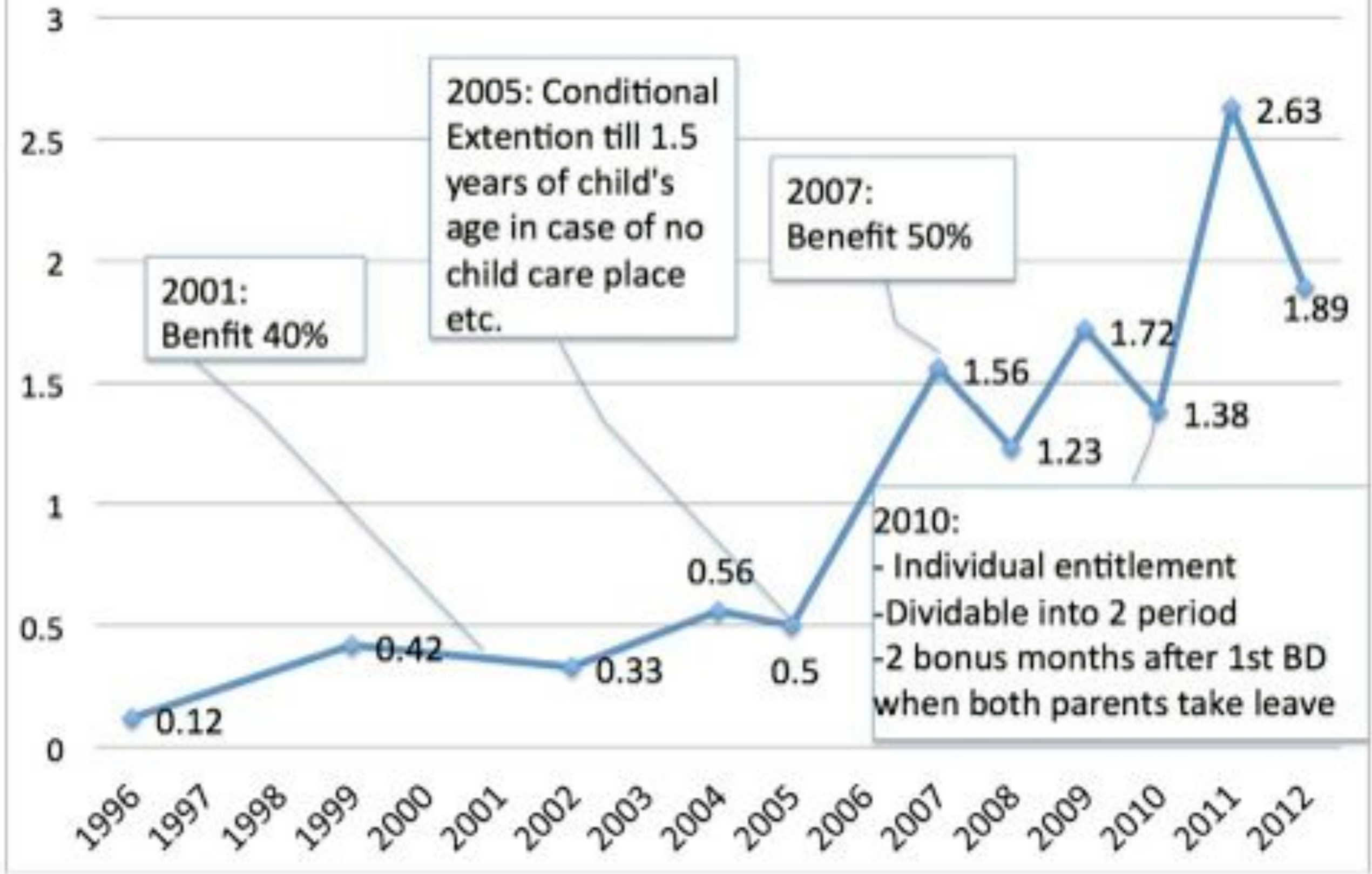
- Individual Entitlement (no conditions about his partners situation)
- Fathers can take parental leave in the first 8 weeks and later again.
- Bonus 2 months (extension until 14 months) if both parents take leave (max 1 year/parent)

Latest change

2014.4

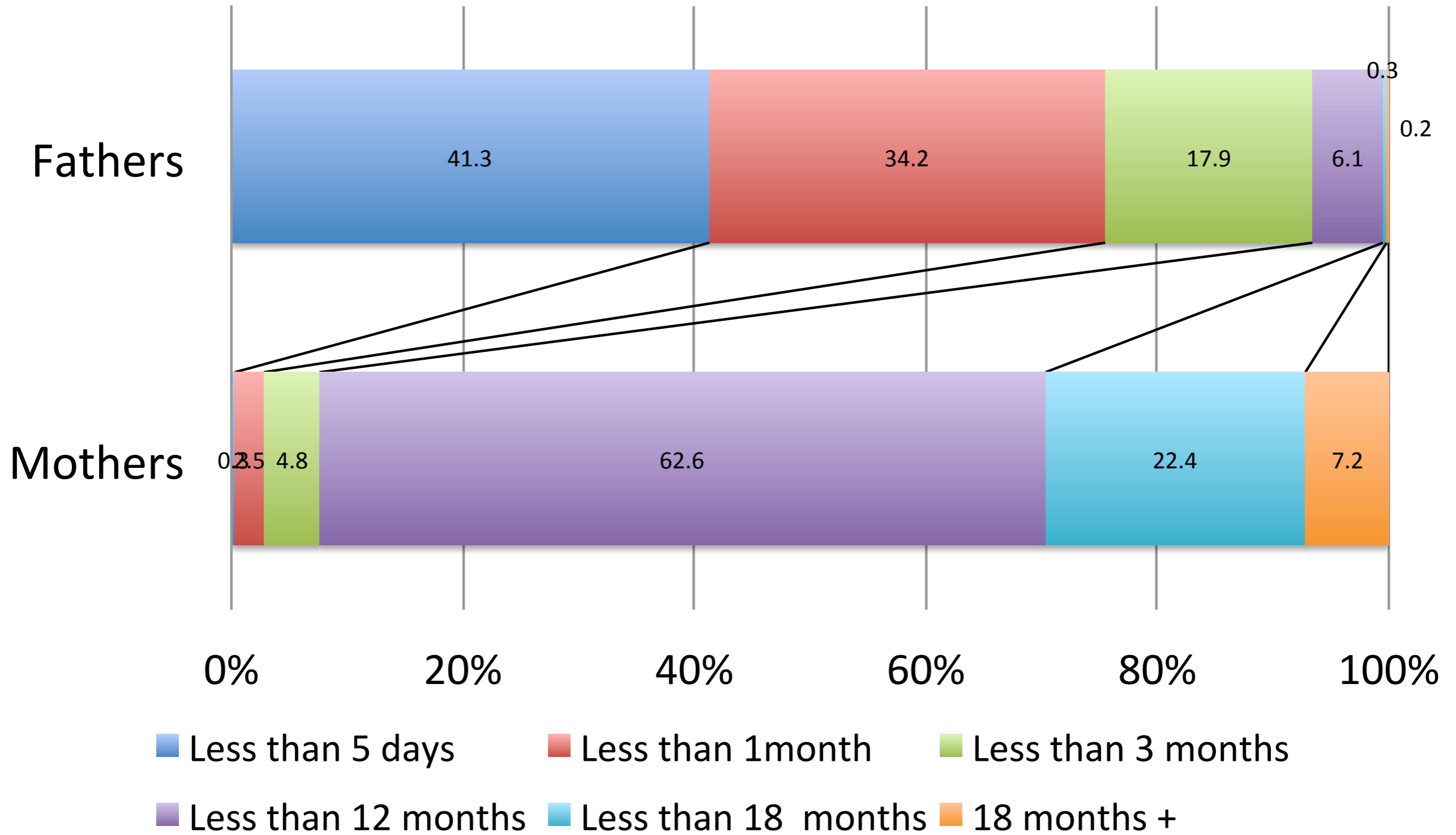
Benefit: 67% first 6 months and 50%
later

Trends in leave take-up rate of fathers



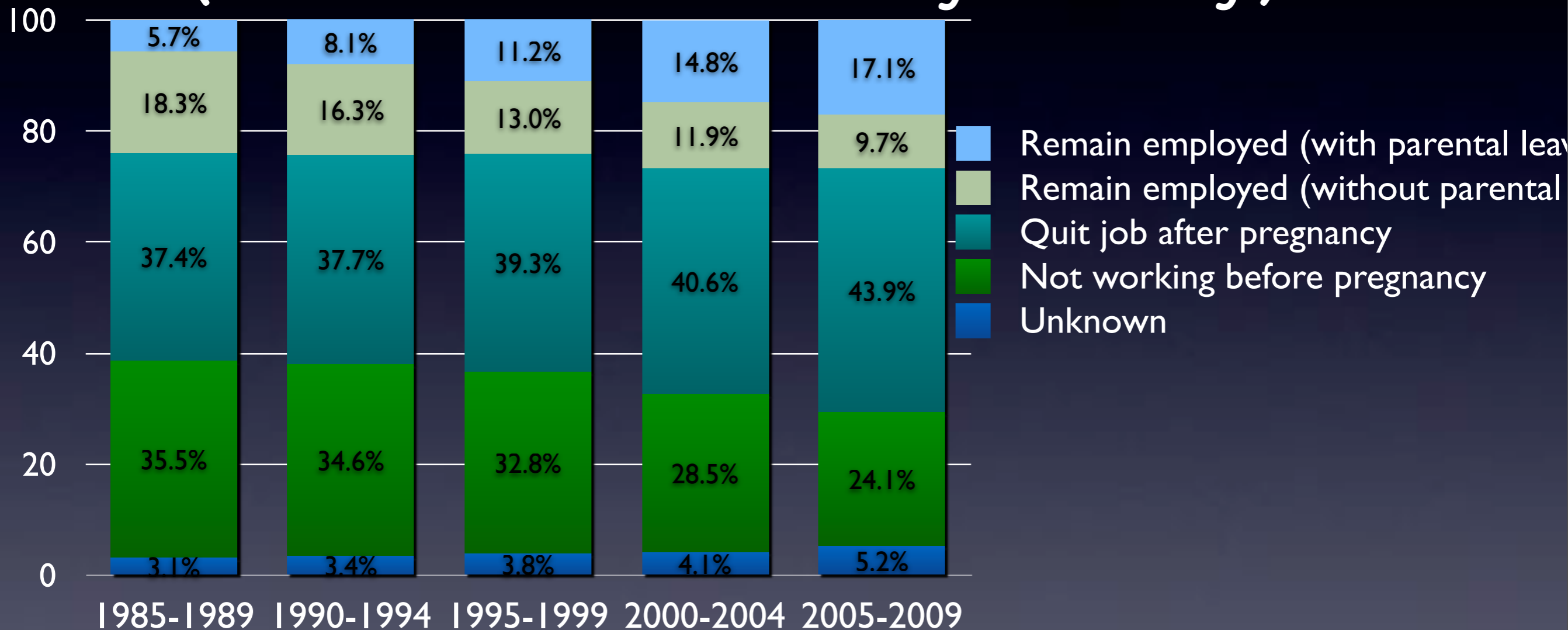
Increase with fluctuations, but still very low.

Leave period taken by Fathers and Mothers (2012)



Fewer fathers took parental leave for 1 month or more (1/4 of 1.89 %)

Mothers' work status by year of the birth of the first child (The National Fertility Survey)



Still many women quit job when pregnant or after the birth of a child,
but steady increase of leave mother remain employed with parental leave.

Existing studies on why fathers don't take parental leave in Japan

- There is no provision of parental leave, or fathers do not know.
- Atmosphere at workplace that discourages fathers from taking leave

- Fathers are afraid of putting more workload to their colleagues
- Fathers are afraid of negative impact on their own career
- Impact on household income (large gender pay gap and insufficient leave benefit)

Existing studies on fathers who took parental leave

(1) Factors enabling and encouraging a father to take parental leave

- Less economic damage because his wife is working, in most cases, full-time.
- Intension to support his wife's return to work
- Efforts at the workplace:
 - providing a replacement
 - telecommuting option.

(1) Factors enabling and encouraging a father to take parental leave (cont)

- Information on job and family has been shared at the workplace
- Encouraging attitude of his manager.
- His attitude and his partner's toward sharing housework and child care because of dual-earning.

(2) Effects of leave taking on fathers

- Positive view on their experience during the leave
- Change in the view on work and life
- Recognising the hardship of working mothers

(2) Effects of leave taking on fathers (cont)

- Develop connection with society outside the workplace
- Developing effective work style within a limited time.

Importance of this study

- Most studies based on case studies with small number of participants. → Additional case studies are necessary.
- Many studies mainly focus on organizational domain, not much on family domain.
- Leave scheme is continuously changing

Data collection and methods

Sampling Criteria

Fathers who took parental leave alone for more than 1 months with children under 3 years old.

Sampling methods

- Personal connection
- Snowball sampling
- Purposive

Interview details

Selected participants: 4 fathers

Interview methods: Semi-structured

Interview length: 2-3 hours (taking note and recorded)

Place: researcher's office (single-occupied room)

At least 2, hopefully 4-6 interviews to be added, especially employees at domestic firms and small ones.

Research Questions

(1) What characterizes fathers taking parental leave in the country where it is very rare?

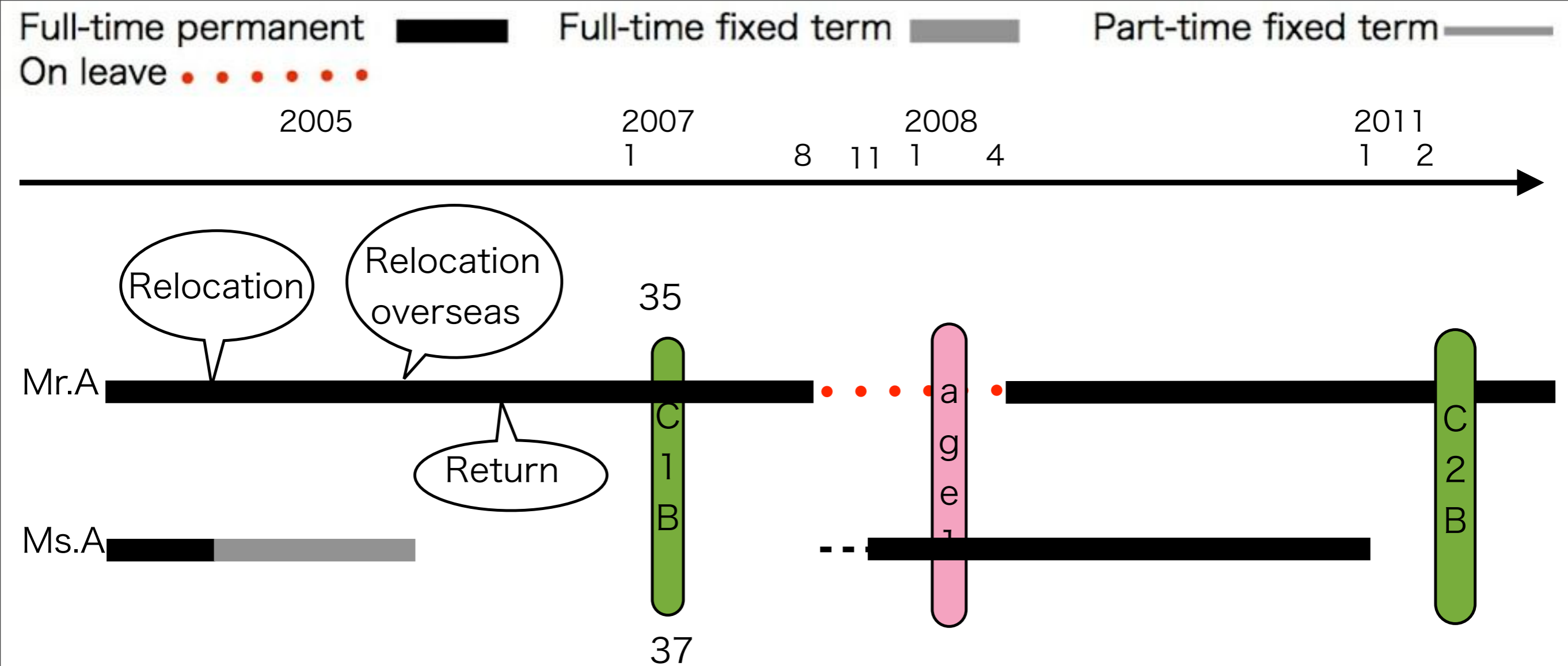
How these fathers were able to:

- deal with income reduction?
- escape from perception that child care (or at least parental leave) is for mothers?
- escape from the fear of negative impact on his workplaces?
- escape from the fear of negative reaction from his workplaces?

Research Questions

(2) Does father's leave take-up promote equal career opportunity between couples?

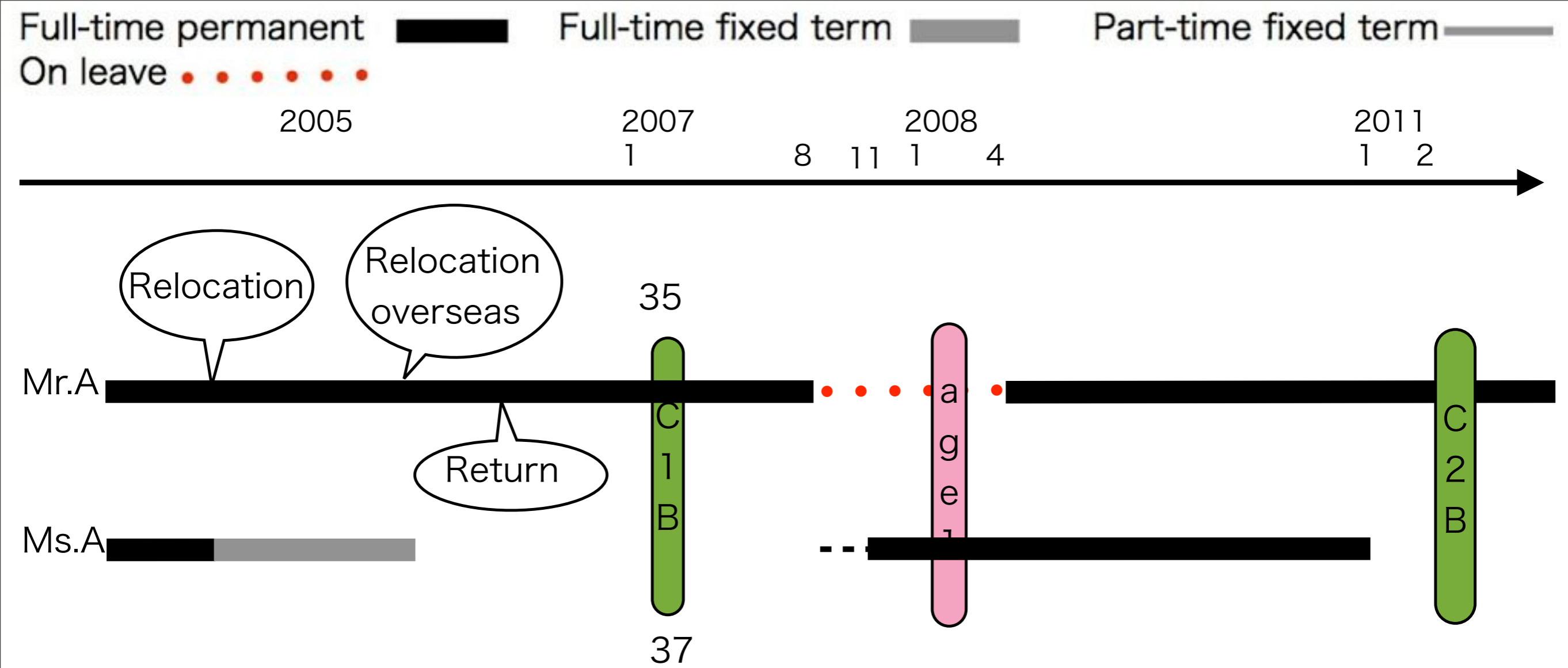
Leave take-up patterns and profiles



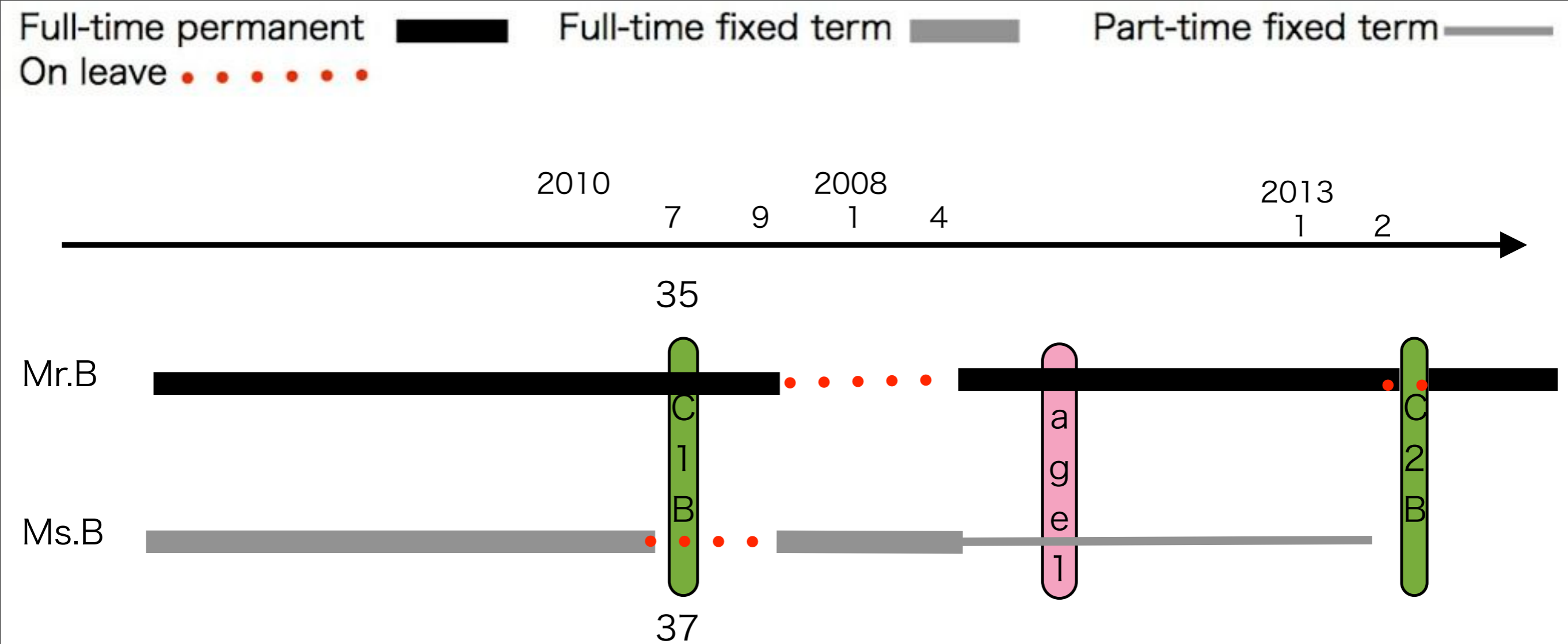
Job at the first child's birth: Full-time permanent, a large foreign multinational firm

Benefit payment: 50%

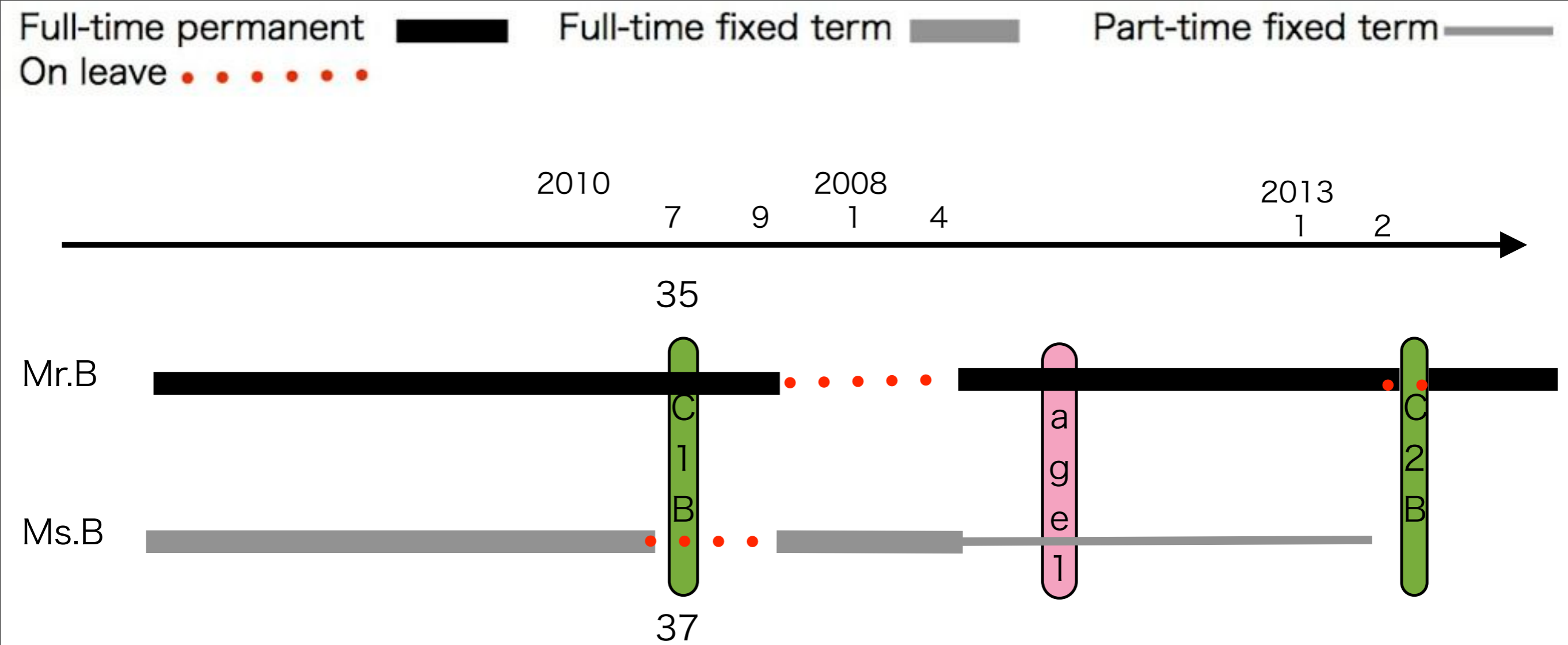
Decision and negotiation: He offered. It sounded interesting as no other male colleagues haven't taken parental leave.



Wife's reaction: No surprise. No reaction. She likes books on feminism or gender studies.
 Manager's reaction: No surprise, Supportive

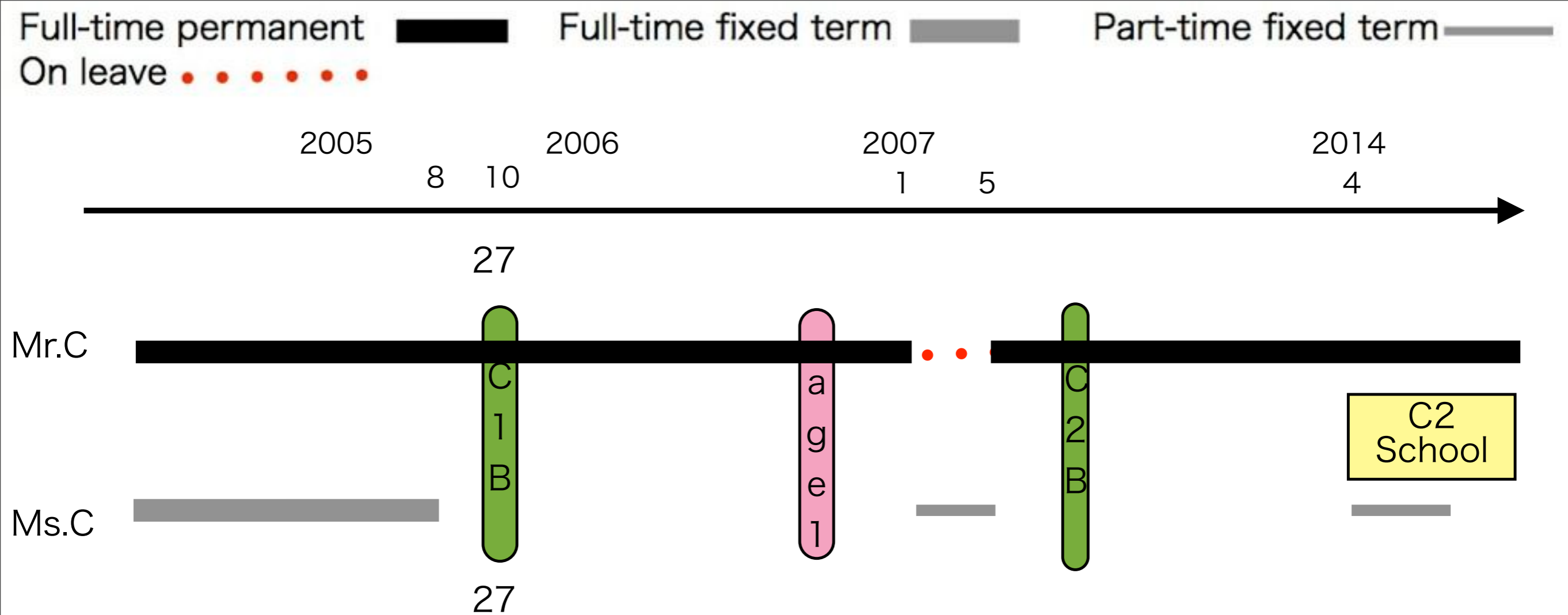


Job at the first child's birth: Full-time permanent administrative staff at a university
 Benefit payment: 80% (50% by employer + 30% Employment insurance)
 Decision and negotiation: His wife has no right to parental leave (only maternity leave). He started research.

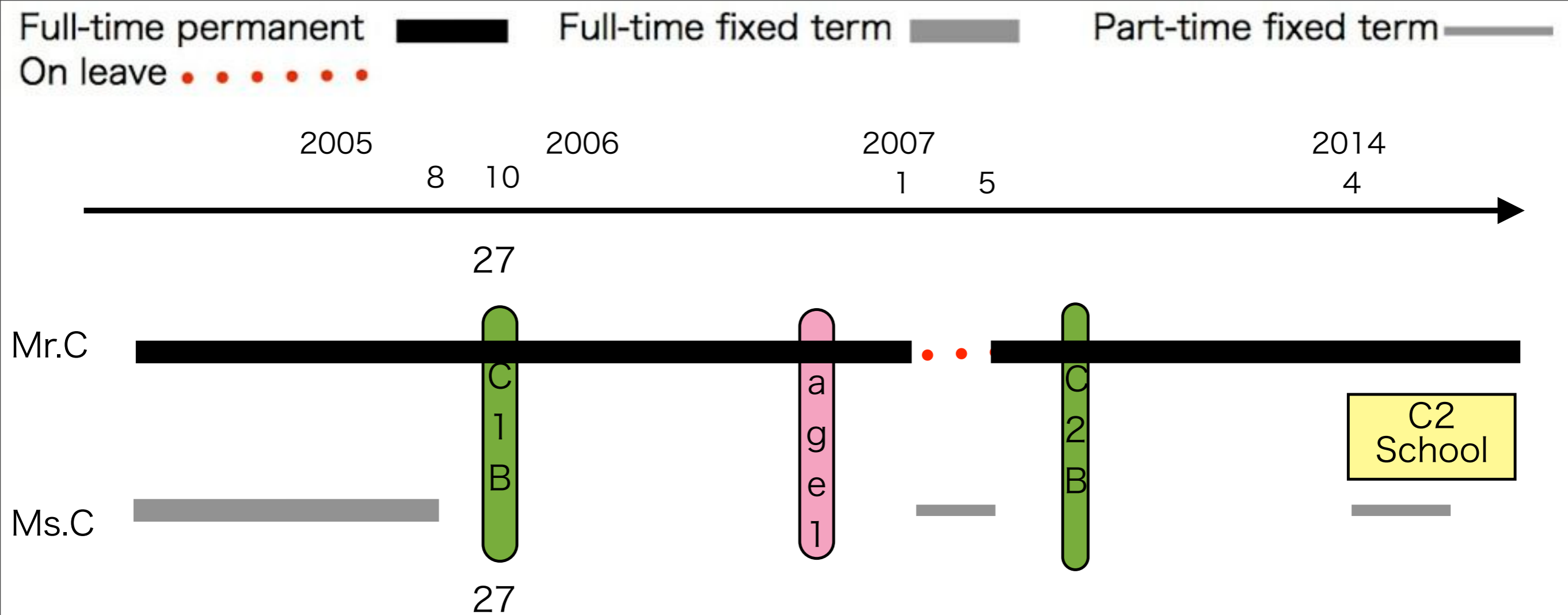


Wife's reaction: No worries. Had been sharing house work. Liked cooking.

Manager's reaction: No surprise, Supportive

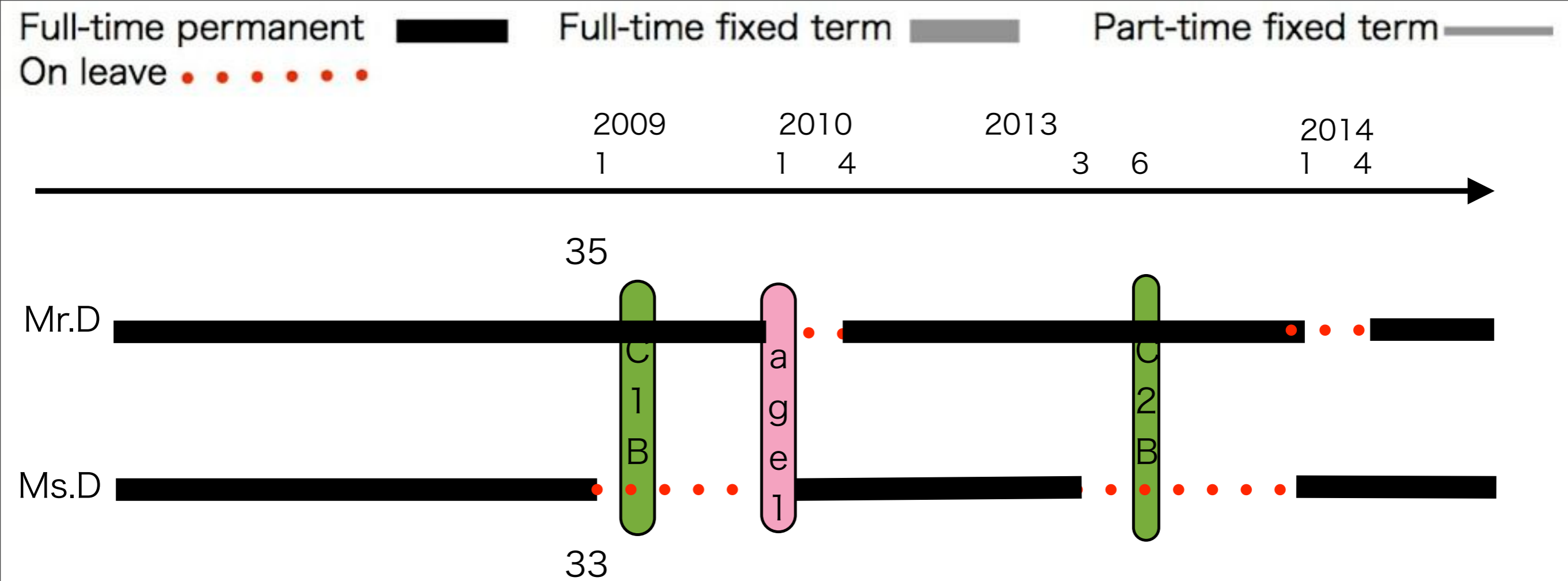


Job at the first child's birth: Full-time permanent local government employee
 Benefit payment: 0%
 Decision and negotiation: He offered taking leave and ask his wife to find a job because he knew fathers can and thought "why other fathers wouldn't take"

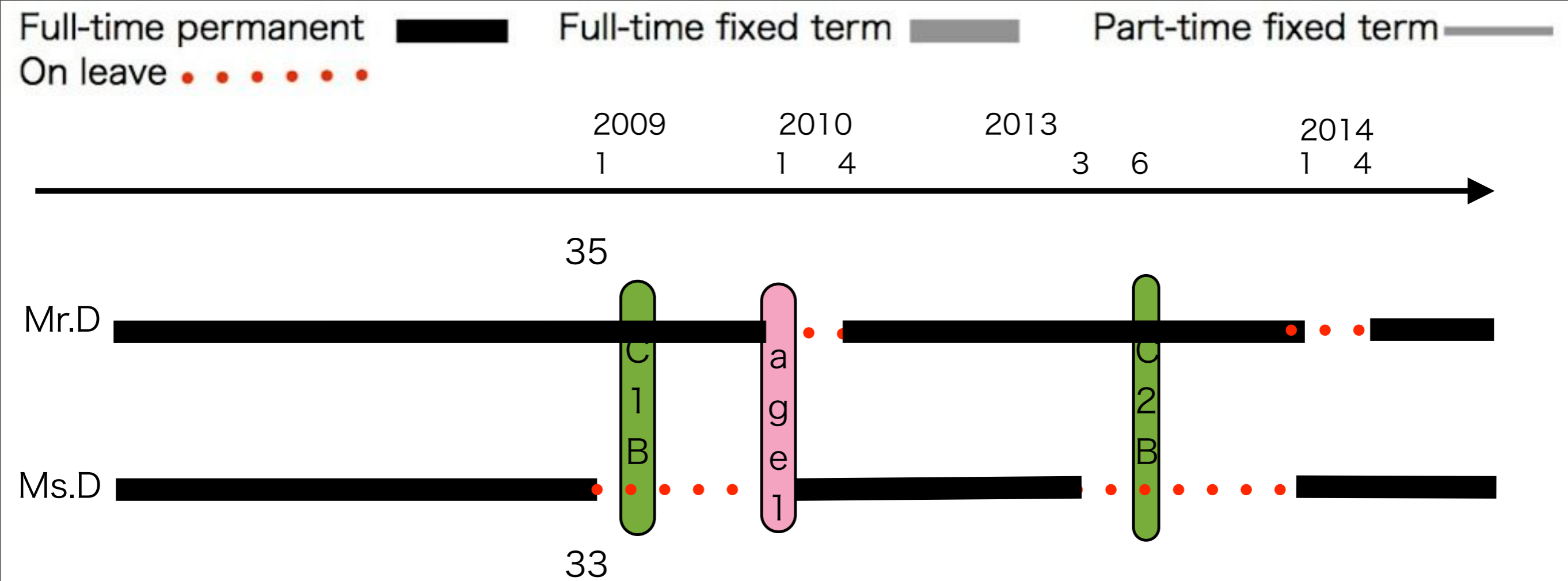


Wife's reaction: Surprised, but welcoming. No worries as Mr.C had been doing housework regularly.

Manager's reaction: No negative reaction. "He has been always encouraging about new challenges."



Job at the first child's birth: Full-time permanent engineer at a large foreign multinational firm
 Benefit payment: 50% same for 2 children
 Decision and negotiation: His wife wanted to return to work after 1 year of leave, but couldn't find childcare place for another 3 months. Similar for 2nd child.



Wife's reaction: No worries. No detailed explanation before leave.

Manager's reaction: At a loss what to do. No idea about father taking parental leave and asked for time to consider. A month later he understood and supported.

What did we find from
the 4 interviews?

How were fathers able to deal with income reduction?

- Long career with enough income and saving. (3 cases)
- Calculated the necessary saving and saved beforehand (Mr.C)
- Mother's salary does not necessarily equal father's.

How were fathers able to escape from perception that child care (or at least parental leave) is for mothers?

- All four had been doing housework regularly.
- Wives wouldn't stick to her territory at home.

How were fathers able to escape from the fear of negative impact on his workplaces?

- Supportive managers but no replacement in most cases.
- Relatively short period helped.
- Not necessarily successful.

How were fathers able to escape from the fear of negative reaction from his workplaces?

- Supportive managers (Mr.A, Mr.B, Mr.C)
- Strategic preparation before asking manager for leave opportunity (All)

Does father's leave take-up promote equal career opportunity between couples?

- Leave take-up by fathers is not necessarily linked to a continuous career of mothers.
- In three cases (mothers in a fixed term contract) fathers didn't take leave for the second child.
- In the case where the mother is working in a permanent position, father's leave take-up helped her career.

Does father's leave take-up promote equal career opportunity between couples?

However, all fathers:

Increased commitment on child rearing

Changed the way he works



Mothers will have more options when considering new career.

Implication for comparison

With the lack of close role models, strong will/preference/needs or a favorable work environment is necessary for fathers to take parental leave for 1 month or more alone.