

Germany measures benefits of parental leave for fathers ^[1]

Fathers who took parental leave spend an hour and a half more with their children every day during the first few years of their life compared to fathers who work continuously.

Author: Erbersdobler, Julian

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EXCERPTS

MUNICH – German economist Marcus Tamm has looked into the effects of parental leave. His findings: Fathers who take a break after their children's birth spend more time with them after going back to work.

Is the role of fathers who go on parental leave changing? Do you spend more time with the child in the years that follow? Or are two months too short to change that? Tamm has looked into these questions in a recent study by the RWI Leibniz Institute for Economic Research in Essen. The results surprised the economist by the degree of difference.

According to his study, fathers who went on parental leave spend about one and a half hours more with their children every day during the first six years of the child's life than fathers who don't take the break. The change is also noticeable in the household: fathers who took parental leave and parental allowance did an hour more housework every day.

"We were able to work out the effect and results of the parental allowance," says Tamm, who has been doing research on the topic for more than 10 years. The parental allowance introduced in Germany in 2007 encourages fathers to take parental leave. The longest option, of more than 14 months only exists if both partners take parental leave. A single parent can receive full parental benefit for a maximum of 12 months. Although a different distribution is possible, in practice this often results in women taking twelve months and fathers two months. The two months on average taken by fathers often are then also used to take the whole family on a long vacation.

The positive effects apply even if the father only takes a short leave.

The positive effects that Tamm has noticed apply even if the father only takes parental leave for a short time. In his study, he compares the behavior of men who became fathers both before and after the parental allowance was introduced in 2007.

The evaluation is based on data from the socio-economic panel. This data is collected annually from some 11,000 households and a total of more than 30,000 people in Germany. The parental leave study used data from the years 2000 to 2015. Nowadays, about one in three fathers in Germany chooses to exercise his right to parental leave. When it was first introduced in 2007, it was only three percent.

Above all, Tamm has been surprised by one aspect: "I did not expect parental leave to have such an impact on the second, third or fourth year of the child." In Scandinavia, paternal leave was introduced earlier than in Germany. Researchers there came to different results, according to Tamm: Some studies could have found a behavioral change of the fathers, others not.

But even with the German study, there are questions that remain unanswered, because of lack of effective measurements. "We can not say anything about the quality of the time spent, so we do not know if the father plays with the child or just takes care of it."

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