

Parental leave in Quebec: Beyond success, a few challenges appear^[1]

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Excerpts

Conclusion

With its Paternity Leave, Québec stands out from the rest of North America. But despite this innovative measure, we can see that there are still challenges for fathers. As our research shows, Paternity and Parental Leave are not straightforwardly happy events for fathers, not breaks from the office that will make it possible for them to return relaxed to a conducive office routine. Many fathers in our research had difficulty in negotiating the length and the timing of leave-taking. So, even if mothers still take most of the Parental Leave weeks, it is not always easy for fathers to apply or take leave, especially if they wish to exceed the standard now established in Québec for the first five weeks of Paternity Leave, and go on to take some weeks of Parental Leave as well.

Employers accept the weeks of Paternity Leave as something which is not really negotiable, even if they sometimes try to change the timing planned by fathers; but it is more difficult for some fathers to take weeks of Parental Leave, especially in sectors with strong work intensity such as IT. Furthermore, firms often ask fathers to do some work during the five weeks of Paternity Leave. Because of this, not only are fathers in these intensive sectors somewhat apprehensive at asking for leave and having to negotiate their departure, but they cannot always detach themselves completely from their work, using technologies to stay in touch (email, telework) and undertake part timework, which adds to stress (see also Chapter Twelve on possible impacts of flexible leave in Norway).

Becoming a father is a big change in life, especially when it is the first child. Yet the term 'leave' leads some employers to consider that, once this temporary absence from work is completed, the arrival of the child has been taken care of by the workplace, that the situation is resolved as soon as the father goes back to work, and that he no longer requires more time at home (Brinton and Mun, 2016). It is then up to the employee to manage the new reality of his personal life by trying to minimise as much as possible the impacts of these changes on his professional life. One solution is to change job, to a position more compatible with parenting; in a recent poll of 1000 fathers, 54 per cent stated that they will certainly or probably consider a job change in order to obtain a better reconciliation between work and family (Regroupement pour la valorisation de la paternité, 2017, p.10). Our results are in tune with other research on employees' and employers' opinions: the former say that their priorities are the family and the couple, while the latter seem to think that existing measures are sufficient and nothing more needs to be done (Mercure, 2008, p.170).

The childcare network developed since 2000 and the Québec Parental Insurance Plan undoubtedly make things somewhat easier for employed parents in Québec than in other Canadian provinces. Fathers in Québec seem to be very attached to the Paternity Leave offered by the QPIP. They use it, and some even go beyond the number of weeks reserved for fathers and not transferable to the mother. Québec is thus moving closer to what is offered in the Nordic countries, namely the work-family balance model of Hantrais and Letablier (1996). But this may not be enough. In a context where the Québec population is ageing and some sectors of the economy already have job shortages, losing workers because of insufficient work-family balance can be a real issue. Childcare and leave entitlements offered by the state are very important, but workplaces also need to be supportive of parents, not only accommodating both mothers and fathers taking Parental Leave but also offering working time flexibility and telework in order to facilitate the longer-term integration of work and family.

Region: Quebec^[4]

Tags: parental leave^[5]

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