

In Sweden, men can have it all ^[1]

Author: Benhold, Katrin

Source: The New York Times

Format: Article

Publication Date: 9 Jun 2010

AVAILABILITY

See text below

The Female Factor- Series ^[2]

EXCERPTS

...

From trendy central Stockholm to this village in the rugged forest south of the Arctic Circle, 85 percent of Swedish fathers take parental leave. Those who don't face questions from family, friends and colleagues. As other countries still tinker with maternity leave and women's rights, Sweden may be a glimpse of the future.

In this land of Viking lore, men are at the heart of the gender-equality debate. The ponytailed center-right finance minister calls himself a feminist, ads for cleaning products rarely feature women as homemakers, and preschools vet books for gender stereotypes in animal characters. For nearly four decades, governments of all political hues have legislated to give women equal rights at work - and men equal rights at home.

Swedish mothers still take more time off with children - almost four times as much. And some who thought they wanted their men to help raise baby now find themselves coveting more time at home.

But laws reserving at least two months of the generously paid, 13-month parental leave exclusively for fathers - a quota that could well double after the September election - have set off profound social change.

Companies have come to expect employees to take leave irrespective of gender, and not to penalize fathers at promotion time. Womens' paychecks are benefiting and the shift in fathers' roles is perceived as playing a part in lower divorce rates and increasing joint custody of children.

In perhaps the most striking example of social engineering, a new definition of masculinity is emerging.

"Many men no longer want to be identified just by their jobs," said Bengt Westerberg, who long opposed quotas but as deputy prime minister phased in a first month of paternity leave in 1995. "Many women now expect their husbands to take at least some time off with the children."

...

"Now men can have it all - a successful career and being a responsible daddy," she added. "It's a new kind of manly. It's more wholesome."

...

In 1974, when Sweden became the first country to replace maternity leave with parental leave, the few men who took it were nicknamed "velvet dads."

Despite government campaigns - one featuring a champion weightlifter with a baby perched on his bare biceps - the share of fathers on leave was stalled at 6 percent when Mr. Westerberg entered government in 1991.

Sweden had already gone further than many countries have now in relieving working mothers: Children had access to highly subsidized preschools from 12 months and grandparents were offered state-sponsored elderly care. The parent on leave got almost a full salary for a year before returning to a guaranteed job, and both could work six-hour days until children entered school. Female employment rates and birth rates had surged to be among the highest in the developed world.

- reprinted from the New York Times

Region: Europe ^[3]

United States ^[4]

Tags: maternity and parental leave ^[5]

work/life balance ^[6]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/06/sweden-men-can-have-it-all> [2] <https://www.nytimes.com/search?query=The%20Female%20Factor> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/maternity-and-parental-leave> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/5668>