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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Introduction

Up to the present day, public gender equality policies have aimed to improve women's situation by giving them rights equal to those of men or supporting positive discrimination. But this has not been sufficient to ensure effective equality between men and women. Indeed, Esping-Anderson (2009) does not hesitate to qualify the movement that began in the twentieth century as an 'incomplete revolution'. Women are still earning less than men per hour for full-time jobs and they often perform several 'jobs': career woman, domestic worker and carer. This creates tensions that weigh on the shoulders of these 'superwomen', trying to combine their careers with family life and household chores (Conway, 2003). An enduring unequal division of housework not only makes work-life integration extremely difficult, but may even have a negative impact on the birth rate (Holloway, 2010, p.178).

Should future public policies designed to achieve genuine gender equality be aimed not at women, but at men? In an arena such as work-family balance, it may well be a

prerequisite for gender equality. According to the OECD, the involvement of fathers is not only essential to the welfare of the family, but it has an impact on the perception of workplaces regarding female employees and wage inequality:

As long as mothers rather than fathers reduce labour force participation in the presence of children, and make use of parental leave provisions, [there] are of course employers who perceive women as less committed to their career than men, and are therefore less likely to invest in female career opportunities. (OECD, 2007, p.59)

Yet, it is not always easy for fathers to take leave from work for family reasons, since this responsibility traditionally belongs to the mother and firms are not always open to fathers' desires to be more active in sharing family responsibilities. Thus, public policies play a very important role in bringing about change: Paternity Leave and fatheronly Parental Leave become ways to bypass 'mother gatekeeping' based on the traditional parental roles (Tremblay and Lazzari Dodeler, 2015).

By encouraging fathers to take a break from work, because if they do not take their leave entitlement they will lose it, the state sends a clear message about the importance of the father's role in the family. This chapter examines the opportunities that Paternity and Parental Leaves create for fathers, based on the findings of two qualitative studies of leave-taking fathers in Québec. It reveals some difficulties encountered in the workplace by fathers who do take leave, such as being asked to take a shorter leave, to postpone the taking of leave, or to compromise part of their leave by working from home (telework). We also investigate the problems that arise when fathers, upon their return to work, try to reconcile new family responsibilities with their previous routine working schedule.

We consider the literature before presenting our findings from extensive interviews with fathers. To support our conclusions, we use extracts from these interviews relating to discussions which the fathers had with their employers. Altogether, just over 60 interviews were conducted: around 30 interviews with fathers who took Paternity Leave and, in some cases, Parental Leave, being at home alone with their child, and drawn from a variety of sectors and occupations (Tremblay and Lazzari Dodeler, 2015); and a similar number with fathers in the IT multimedia sector, many of whom encountered challenges in the use of the Parental Leave, in particular with regard to timing and length.

Family public policies: a brief history and ideal type classifications

As the fertility rate has declined in many industrialised countries, the introduction of Parental Leave is part of the broader set of family policies that have been developed to help parents reconcile work and family. The labour market has also undergone profound changes during the twentieth century. Atypical work, self-employment, competition for

quality jobs and pressure for greater job performance have all steadily increased (Tremblay, 2012). Because it is difficult to manage the combination of demanding work and time required by the family, parents in the twenty-first century often experience a lot of tension: 'Parents who are in the workplace and who have young children are twice as stressed as the population on average' (Pronovost, 2015, p.47).

In order to counteract the decline in birth rates and promote work–life balance (among other rationales as discussed elsewhere in this volume), many governments have therefore put in place a series of family policies. According to Esping-Andersen's typology (1990), the Nordic countries belong to the group of social democratic welfare states, in which the state is heavily involved in redistribution among citizens and provides innovative family support (Haavind and Magnusson, 2005). There are two other categories: the conservative states that allow the intervention of the government, but in a less direct way, such as France and Germany, for example. Finally, unlike the social democratic regimes, the liberal states minimise government interventions in favour of market intervention (Tremblay, 2017). The Anglophone countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada (except for Québec province), largely constitute this liberal group.

When discussing Parental Leave, the institutional models described by Hantrais and Letablier (1996) arguably offer more helpful explanations and categorisations for understanding the types of relations between family and work in different countries than are to be found in Esping-Anderson's work. The ideal types of Esping-Anderson and of Hantrais and Letablier cover different categories and as such are difficult to combine analytically. It could be said that Esping-Anderson's liberal ideal type, placing a greater emphasis on individual freedom, overlaps to a certain extent with Hantrais and Letablier's non-interventionist model; the ideal type country in this case largely delegates responsibility to employers to negotiate agreements with their employees about leave when there is a birth (Tremblay, 2012).

Countries typically classified as 'liberal', which have introduced Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave, and several 'conservative' countries, which have also done so, would arguably fit better in Hantrais and Letablier's ideal type model based on alternation between work and family, however. This model allows parents (mostly mothers) to leave the labour market or reduce their hours to care for children (Netherlands for example, see Tremblay, 2012). They will then be supported by public policies before returning to work, often part-time, when children enter school.

Iceland also stands out because even if classified as 'liberal', it should clearly be included, like the 'social democratic' countries, in the work–family balance ideal type proposed by Hantrais and Letablier that has put in place measures to allow work to be pursued while also allowing for family life. This latter set of countries gives priority to equal treatment between men, women and children (Tremblay, 2012, p.263) and they develop family policies that are consistent with these values. Faced with these hybrid

states, the classification developed by Esping-Andersen is then less useful than that of Hantrais and Letablier from the point of view understanding the dynamics of family policies, even if both typologies may be considered complementary to some extent.

A feature of those countries in the work–family balance idea type has been the treatment of fathers in leave policies, in particular the provision of a ‘father’s quota’ of non-transferable and well-paid leave. Norway (1993), Sweden (1995) and Denmark (1997) were the first countries to introduce such a quota, followed by Iceland (2003). The Canadian province of Québec followed in 2006 with its own nontransferable Paternity Leave of three to five weeks, of which more in the next section.

The consequences of these non-transferable Paternity and Parental Leaves have been positive for the division of tasks at home. Icelandic parents in 2003 reported a better sharing than parents in 1997 and fathers’ participation in tasks increased from 30 per cent in 2005 to 40.4 per cent in 2010 (Gíslason, 2011). Over the years, Parental Leave ‘increases the likelihood of fathers being involved in childcare’ (Ásdís et al, 2013, p.335) and fathers continue to be present even after the end of the leave period. A study conducted in 1997, 2003 and 2009 with fathers in Iceland showed that care is more equally divided if the father uses at least three months (Ásdís et al, 2013, p.340), a conclusion which is consistent with research in Québec that concludes that Paternity Leave allows men to develop more confidence in their abilities to take care of a newborn (Tremblay and Lazzari Dodeler, 2015). With this new-found confidence, the longer the time a father spends on leave, the greater his subsequent involvement is likely to be at home. Also, as mothers have done for a long time, according to a Swedish study, these fathers tend to decrease their working hours thereafter, taking more days off work for children’s illness. They also make more use of the various working time arrangements intended to support careers (Haas and Hwang, 2008). Thus, generous family policies specifically aimed at fathers could help gradually reduce the inequalities between men and women at home as well as in the labour market.

The case of Québec

In Canada, the province of Québec has sufficiently different family policies to be considered distinct from the rest of Canada. Many consider it closer to the ‘social democratic’ welfare states, with its family policy clearly closer to the ‘work–family balance’ model of the Nordic states than to the ‘liberal’ model of the US and the rest of Canada (Tremblay, 2012). Around 2000, both the Canadian federal and Québec provincial governments aimed at improving leave policies. If the federal Maternity Leave did not change, remaining at 15 weeks, Parental Leave was extended from 10 to 35 weeks (with an income replacement of 55 per cent); and as of 1 December 2017, an option of 61 weeks ‘extended Parental Leave’ at 33 per cent of earnings is available (for a fuller discussion of leave policy in Canada, see Chapter Nineteen).

In Québec, in 2006, the provincial government introduced the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP), which replaced the federal programme in the province. The QPIP is more generous than provision in the rest of Canada, not only for the mother but also for the father: it allows him to take three or five weeks Paternity Leave, with income replacement of either 75 per cent for three weeks leave or 55 per cent for five weeks (details of all leave policies in Québec are given in Table 13.1, showing how options that trade off duration against payment level are also available for Maternity and Parental Leaves). As a result, Québec is the only province in Canada to provide fathers with a non-transferable paid leave, and it leads to impressive statistics: while fewer than 20 per cent of Québec fathers used (federal) Parental Leave between 2001 and 2014, today 80 per cent take the QPIP, for an average length of seven weeks, which combines the full length of the Paternity Leave (five weeks) plus an average of two weeks of Parental Leave (Tremblay, 2017); fathers who take both Paternity and Parental Leave average 13 weeks. The Québec provincial government has also created an affordable childcare programme, which has provided further support for employed parents.

The leaves described in Table 13.1 can be taken so that both parents are at home at the same time. QPIP data indicate that mothers are on leave at the same time as fathers in 89 per cent of cases when fathers only take Paternity Leave, but in only 51 per cent of cases when fathers use both Paternity and Parental Leave, as mothers are more likely to have resumed employment when fathers take Parental Leave.

Table 13.1: Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) - Summary Table

Type of leave	Basic Plan		Special Plan		Benefit Payment	
	Number of weeks	Income replacement	Number of weeks	Income replacement	Begins no earlier than:	Ends no later than:
Maternity (exclusively for the woman who gave birth)	18	70 %	15	75 %	the 16th week before the expected week of delivery.	18 weeks after the birth week.
					*the week the pregnancy was interrupted (after the 19th week of pregnancy)	*18 weeks after the pregnancy is interrupted.
Paternity (exclusively for the father)	5	70 %	3	75 %	the week the child is born.	52 weeks after the birth week.
Parental (may be shared by the parents)	7	70 %	25	75 %	the week the child is born.	52 weeks after the birth week.
	25	55 %				

Source: Régime québécois d'assurance-parentale, 2017

In Québec, fathers who have used Paternity Leave are afterwards 'more likely to be absent [from the workplace] for family reasons, which in turn would contribute to changing attitudes in workplaces that were once very resistant to men's absenteeism for family reasons' (Baillargeon, 2013, pp.232–233). In terms of gender equality, a study that focused specifically on the effects of the QPIP shows that while the new regime has not succeeded in eliminating the large gap between the number of weeks of leave taken by mothers (46 weeks on average) and fathers (nearly seven weeks now), QPIP contributed to reducing this gap, as fathers' participation jumped from two to five weeks almost immediately after the plan was introduced (Patnaik, 2016).

The same study also looked at the labour market and the division of labour within couples between two censuses, just before QPIP (2005) and after (2010). In 2010, on average mothers were more active in the labour market, working more hours per week and more often in full-time work. Since the introduction of the new public childcare and leave policies at the start of the twenty-first century, Québec has moved from being one of the Canadian provinces with the lowest employment rates among women with young children (under six years old) to being one of the highest – 70.3 per cent in 2014 compared with 65.1 per cent for the rest of Canada (Demers, 2015). Moreover, between 2005 and 2010, fathers' average working hours had declined. There is therefore a more equal distribution of working time between parents than previously.

Judged by family policies, fathers' leave-taking, the number of childcare centres and the labour market participation of women, Québec now compares with Iceland and other Nordic countries, and sits beside them, using Hantrais and Letablier's typology, as a model of work–family balance.

Difficulties experienced by Québec fathers in the workplace

While it is clear that the QPIP is well appreciated by parents, including fathers, the perception of leave has not changed in all sectors and occupations, especially when it comes to fathers wanting to take Paternity and Parental Leaves. One problem seems to be that fathers on Paternity Leave (unlike mothers on Maternity Leave) are not often replaced, even if they go on to take more than five weeks by using some Parental Leave, as they usually do not take so many continuous weeks; where fathers take both kinds of leave, they mostly take Paternity Leave earlier on and Parental Leave later, after the mother has gone back to work. This means that their work is split between the remaining employees or that projects are postponed. This poses particular challenges in industries where there is no slack and where employees are already on a tight schedule with a high-level of work intensity.

To explore such workplace issues further, two studies were conducted in 2013 and 2014 by the authors of this chapter, with fathers who were using Paternity and Parental Leaves. The first was conducted with some 30 fathers who had taken at least four weeks of Paternity Leave, spending time alone with their child. Many took much longer, up to a few months, including some Parental Leave, but they usually had to take Paternity Leave and Parental Leave separately. Fathers in the study were from various sectors and occupational categories (employees, professionals, blue collar workers). They were contacted by phone from a list provided by the agency responsible for administering the QPIP of fathers who had taken leave.

The second study included 31 fathers working in IT multimedia in urban areas; an invitation to participate was sent by participating companies and the fathers answered directly to the researcher to set a date for meeting. Fathers had taken leave for 49 children (some participants had more than one child), and in two-thirds of cases (32

children) this had involved non-consecutive weeks, meaning that fathers had returned to work after a few weeks at home, and then taken some weeks of leave later. Only 17 cases were consecutive and these fathers (13) mostly took less than seven weeks. For the analysis presented in this chapter, the data from both studies have been integrated.

Several fathers across both studies mentioned the difficulty of taking more than five weeks off as they were not replaced during their leave; while in order to avoid being overloaded on their return, fathers often did not completely cut off from work. Technology allowed them to be connected at all times to continue with tasks already in progress, and several fathers even checked their professional emails every day. Consulting emails or responding to calls from colleagues, if necessary, seems to be the norm in the IT multimedia sector in particular, and this can have an impact on family life even before the baby comes along, as the quote below illustrates¹:

Yes, we kept in touch...Even for my first, when we were in the hospital for the birth, I got a call, in front of the doctor! When my girlfriend told me she was pregnant with the second, I had a call that night and I made a mistake, I made a mistake of 30,000 dollars! But we corrected it, we corrected it! But I was so nervous that I made a mistake and I was too fast. (Ryu, two children, ten and 11 weeks off for Parental/Paternity Leave)

Moreover, births do not always take place at a favourable moment for the company, which may force a father to compromise on the dates for taking his leave. A position of responsibility can also prevent a father from using all the weeks to which he is entitled, also setting a negative example for other fathers. Occupying a leadership position in the firm may mean refusing to be absent, even for the birth of a child, or making greater compromises so as not to disturb the workflow in the company.

I wanted to take five weeks, as the plan allows. But I was at that point in a crunch, so I could not. I was in a leadership position. I had the pressure on my own, I did not feel it from the boss, but I certainly anticipated it. So I took three weeks and took two weeks around Christmas break. I had to adapt the leave a little, considering the situation at work, it was not easy. Now I can say that after three weeks, my spouse would have liked to have me stay at home because at the third week, it was still a little difficult at home. (Prolog, one child, five weeks leave)

I said: 'Can I take three-four weeks?' And they said, 'It would be best not to do that.' No pressure, you can take them anyway, there are people who do it... But no, I did not take them. (Luigi, two children, five weeks for the last child)

¹ All quotations from fathers have been translated from French.

While some have encountered difficulties in simply asking for and using the weeks of Paternity Leave, those who wanted to use a few weeks of Parental Leave in addition to Paternity Leave were faced with more stress when they put forward this request.

To announce that I was going to take a leave, I found it really hard. Because I was the first, nobody had ever done that. I was willing not to take it! If it was a problem for them...I did not want that, but I was trying to be flexible, to take less than six months. I said: 'I understand that, we can manage...' You see, this kind of thing, I really left all the doors open. That's what I found most difficult about my job. (Pascal, one child, 22 weeks leave)

There's a stress...You're really scared, because all your career you've been working in the same place for ten years. Every week, you're there 40 hours a week, that's what gives you cash to live, that's what pays your house, that's what makes your children live, you do not want your children to miss anything...But in the company, about the leave, I never had to blame anyone. No pressure, nothing. No encouragement, no discouragement. You have the leave, you are not encouraged to take the weeks, but nobody will say anything. (Marcus, two children, 24 and 28 weeks)

The feeling of being a troublemaker, of betraying or threatening the stability of the company, of perceived resistance from senior colleagues possibly leads many fathers to take a shorter period of leave than they would ideally want. This can also explain why fathers can go beyond merely an email and telephone presence, usually without remuneration, agreeing to continue working part-time even while taking leave, in which case remuneration is common; Paternity and Parental leave regulations permit receiving up to 25 per cent of gross weekly earnings. Such arrangements can make the management of their personal schedules very complex.

I had asked for a full-time leave, because I thought I needed it, I was tired. At work, I was a little tired, there were things that did not suit my taste and it would have done me good, but it was a little more difficult to negotiate. Finally, they preferred that I do some telework. I could take care of my daughter the way I wanted, but they trusted me that my work would go forward anyway. I found it very difficult. Super difficult. (Vincent, three children, 24 weeks each)

When fathers returned to work, some had seen promotions escape them because of having taken leave, whether it was clearly mentioned to them or just implicit.

During my leave, I received the results of an exam I had done at the beginning of the year. While I was away, there were promotions in the firm and I was not called. My employer did not consider my resumé, he did not

ask me for it. As I was not there, I went unnoticed in the process. (Mario, one child, five weeks leave)

Before I had children, I was a representative of my company in an organisation with international travel and all that. And since then, this has been taken away from me and they have given it to someone else who is not very interested in doing it. It may just be a coincidence, I don't know, I'll never know, but it is weird. (Vincent, three children, 24 weeks each)

At the annual evaluation, having a baby has held me back. I was criticised for not necessarily being up-to-date about the products on the market and all that. (Java, two children, six and five weeks)

The most difficult aspect of working life to manage after leave for many fathers seemed to be overtime, especially in jobs with specific delivery dates and where it was common to work overtime to get projects completed. When they become fathers, employees are faced with the impossibility of being as available at the workplace as they used to be. Yet because the new parent does not have the benefit of special treatment, he is reintegrated at the same level as other workers, with the same expectations.

Since the birth, I have accumulated 190 overtime hours in two years. (Dante, one child, six weeks)

This takes us onto a new issue, that of fathers' continued commitment to involved parenting following leave-taking. Many can no longer work as much as before, which becomes a source of daily friction; peak moments of high intensity at work raise the problem of work-life balance and the stress it causes.

It was not something new, in the sense that I had lived that before. I've already had the impression that I've been rushing for two or three months. But I found it even more difficult to face this now that I had other responsibilities at home. My boss did not expect us to take a day off, he expected us to work more. (Abel, two children, 37 and 38 weeks)

Before, I worked up to 50 hours a week and it was not a big deal! Then, when you do things like that, you get noticed... While now, it is 4 o'clock, I have no choice but to stop working and get the child from daycare. With one of my bosses, it causes friction. He absolutely wants me to do overtime, overtime, and overtime: 'I cannot stay, I have to go get the child at the daycare.' He said: 'Yeah, but we all make sacrifices here!' Yes, but the little one, she cannot come back alone from the daycare. I gotta go, I just have no choice! (Faris, two children, nine weeks each)

Some fathers find other ways to continue working overtime as before, by teleworking, for example, when the company is open to this possibility.

The employer is very, very, very nice, I have an online access key that allows me to work from home. So when my daughters sleep, I go back to work. I prefer to arrive early in the morning and leave early at night, and I have to work again after the girls are sleeping, if possible. (Mac, two children, four weeks each)

I was always doing at least five more hours per week. I have a laptop, I can do telework. So I arrive home, I take care of the children, I make supper, then I...Bathing, sleeping, then at 8 o'clock, I open the laptop and I go on until about 11 pm. (Link, two children, six weeks each)

The issue of availability to work overtime in the evening or at weekends generates workplace tension, and it also causes a lot of stress and guilt for fathers. Their refusal to participate and be present as much as others, to be less present than before and not to be there outside standard office hours, is not always easy for them to manage (as has long been an issue for mothers).

I have conditioned myself to say that it is totally acceptable that I do my 40 hours. I consider myself a productive person when I am at work. But it is certain that sometimes we make small scenarios in our head: sometimes we say that the world will say that I am a 'coward', that I work less or whatever, that I left the job for others to do. (Rockman, two children, six and five weeks)

Some fathers cannot find a solution and end up leaving their jobs. They clearly refer to work-family conflict as the main reason for moving to a new job with more conducive working conditions. This is often also explained by other frustrations, amplified by conflicts and tensions that have grown since the arrival of a child.

I finally left my job to go to the public sector. I found that it did not make sense for my child: I left at 7:00 am, I arrived home at 7:00, or 7:15 pm and my child is sleeping, I did not see him! He spends more time at the daycare than at home...Where I am now, overtime is extremely rare. So it was a matter of work-life balance, that was really my reason for leaving. (Joel, three children, ten, eight and eight weeks)

I was tired of always having to struggle when it was time to leave work, feeling guilty because I was leaving and there were people who stayed. I did not quite agree with this way of operating. Because even if I knew that sometimes we had rushes, I found the rushes that we had lasted relatively long. (Abel, two children, 37 and 38 weeks)

Our interviews confirm that if Québec fathers are very positive about leave-taking and wish their employer to be supportive, this is not always the case. In sectors where work is very intense, such as IT multimedia in particular, some fathers have had their employer ask them to change the timing of leave and to take only the Paternity Leave part (of three to five weeks) and not share the later Parental Leave with the mother. This has led to some tensions and to some fathers leaving their job for another where there is more flexibility.

Conclusions

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 parttime work, 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.

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