

**Artículo / Article**

## ***Parental Leave in Spain: Use, Motivations and Implications* / Los permisos para el cuidado de niños en España: uso motivaciones e implicaciones**

**\*Gerardo Meil**

Departamento de Sociología. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. España/Spain  
gerardo.meil@uam.es

**Pedro Romero-Balsas**

Departamento de Sociología. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. España/Spain  
pedro.romero@uam.es

**Jesús Rogero-García**

Departamento de Sociología. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. España/Spain  
Jesus.rogero@uam.es

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In Spain as in other countries, advances in childcare leave policy have aimed to encourage leave-taking by both parents. Based on the survey *Social use of parental leave 2012*, this study explores the characteristics of and underlying motivations for leave-taking, as well as the implications for careers, focusing in particular on gender differences. While the analysis reveals only moderate gender-based differences where paid leave was concerned, unpaid leave was taken primarily by women or by the parent with the most favourable working conditions. The reasons for using unpaid leaves revolved essentially around a desire to spend more time with or breast-feed the baby beyond the termination of paid leave, although contributing to the partner's job security also entered into the equation. The study showed that in addition to economic costs, taking unpaid parental leave entails a setback in a significant percentage of men and women's careers.*

**Keywords:** *leave policy, work-life balance, childcare, parenthood, Spain.*

### **RESUMEN**

Como en otros países, en España se ha promocionado el uso de permisos para el cuidado de niños y niñas por ambos padres. A partir de la encuesta *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*, este trabajo analiza las características del uso, las motivaciones y las consecuencias para la carrera profesional, prestando especial atención a las diferencias de género. El análisis evidencia que, mientras la utilización de los permisos remunerados no presenta diferencias de género muy marcadas, los no remunerados son utilizados principalmente por mujeres y por quienes tienen mejores condiciones laborales. Las motivaciones para utilizar los permisos no remunerados están relacionadas con la crianza (pasar más tiempo con el bebé, prolongar la lactancia, etc.), pero también para preservar el empleo de la pareja. El uso de estos permisos no sólo tiene costes económicos, también supone perjuicios para la carrera profesional de una parte significativa de quienes los han utilizado.

**Palabras clave:** Permisos parentales, conciliación de vida laboral y familiar, cuidado de niños, parentalidad, España

**\*Autor para correspondencia / Corresponding author:** Gerardo Meil. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Departamento de Sociología, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, c. Francisco Tomás y Valiente, 5, 28049 Madrid

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## INTRODUCTION

With women's rising participation on the labour market and the concomitant growth in the proportion of dual-earner families, the harmonisation of work and family life has acquired increasing social significance in developed countries. Demands for public authorities to implement policies that would further such harmonisation have therefore intensified. One of the responses has been to broaden the scope of traditional maternity leaves with policies that would enable fathers to take time off work to care for their children and favour their return to work upon termination of their leave (Kamerman & Moss, 2009). National governments have reacted in very different ways to such demands, although a common trend may be identified in the initiatives appearing in the European Union over the last 25 years. One such common trend, for instance, entails extending the length of leaves (although this parameter is very variable), raising the percentage of the salary paid during leaves and enhancing the flexibility of their use (OECD, 2011; Moss and Deven, 2015). Moreover, fathers' use of such leaves has been fostered, mainstreaming parental leave policies in overall gender equality policy (Haas and Hwang, 2008; O'Brien & Wall, 2017).

Although somewhat later than in other developed countries, the proportion of mothers in Spain engaging in paid work has risen steadily, intensifying the life-work balance problem (Moreno Minguez, 2010). Further to Eurostat data, the percentage of Spanish women aged 25 to 54 with paid employment rose from 38,8 % in 1992 to 65,6 & in 2016. Although the transition from the single- to the dual-earner family has been possible thanks primarily to inter-generational support (Tobío, 2012), alternative or supplementary resources have also been forthcoming. Policies favouring parental leave have been implemented and related measures reinforced, with the reduction of the age of first enrolment in school and the furtherance of change in business culture and labour relations in this regard (Meil et al., 2008, García Sainz, Luque and Ayuso, 2008; Escobedo et al., 2012, Flaquer and Navarro, 2012; Lapuerta et al., 2011, Baizán and González, 2011). Spanish parental leave policy has generally followed in the footsteps

of developments in other European Union countries. EU legislation has been transposed and partially improved and provision made for fathers' leaves, as discussed in the following section.

Studies on leave to care for children in Spain have engaged primarily in comparative analyses of its evolution with respect to other European countries (Iglesias de Ussel and Meil, 2001; Escobedo and Wall, 2015) and in inquiries into the scope of the various types of leaves and their conditioning factors. Particular research has addressed paternity leave (Romero-Balsas, 2012; Flaquer and Escobedo, 2014; Escot et al., 2014, Fernández-Cornejo and Poza, 2014; Meil, 2017), unpaid full-time parental leave (Lapuerta, Baizán and González, 2011; Romero-Balsas et al., 2013, Muntanyola-Saura and Rogero-García, 2013), part-time parental leave (Lapuerta et al., 2011) and men's use of maternal leave (Escot et al., 2012, Fernández-Cornejo, Lafuente and Poza, 2012; Meil et al., 2017b, Romero-Balsas and Rogero-García, 2017b). In this article, in keeping with the international literature on the subject, leave of absence (*excedencia por cuidado de hijos*) and part-time parental leave or reduced hours (*reducción de jornada por cuidado de hijos*) are referred to as parental leave.

The present study aims to contribute to an understanding of the use of such leaves, focusing not only on the social and professional factors conditioning their use but also on the motivation underlying leave-taking and the implications of doing so for one's career, areas that have been largely ignored to date. The authors drew for this purpose from a survey specifically designed to analyse leaves taken to care for children and dependent adults: their use, the reasons for using full or part-time parental leave and the implications of use for the user's career. Three objectives were posed: 1) to ascertain the use rates and characteristics of use of the various types of childcare leaves, and more specifically paternity, maternity, nursing and parental leaves in Spain; 2) to identify the main reasons for using parental leave (which is non-paid); and 3) to determine the implications of using parental leave for job quality and content and the user's career. One over-arching issue to which particular attention was paid was the gender perspective, in light of its significance in the distribution of childcare tasks.

## CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CHILDCARE LEAVES IN SPAIN

The earliest childcare leaves in Spain date back to the early twentieth century, with the institution in 1929 of 12 weeks of paid maternity leave and one day of paid leave for fathers for the birth of a child (Wall and Escobedo, 2009). Childcare leave legislation developed very slowly, with significant progress recorded only after 1980 (Iglesias and Meil, 2001). In the years following, maternity leave coverage and remuneration were expanded and new paid leaves for specific risks

(during pregnancy, during nursing and to care for seriously ill minors) were introduced, along with unpaid parental leave usable after paid maternity leave either under full- or part-time arrangements or a combination of the two. While initially envisaged for women only, the right to parental leave was subsequently extended to men, in 1980 as a family right and in 1999 as an individual right, i.e., as the father's personal right, independent of the mother's. The mother's right to assign part of her maternity leave to the father was acknowledged in 1989, and paid and non-transferable paternity leave was instituted in 2007.

**Table 1.** Characteristic features of childcare leaves in Spain

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### Maternity leave

Sixteen weeks of fully paid (subject to a ceiling) leave for biological maternity, adoption or fostering, providing the mother is affiliated or similar and has been contributing for the specified minimum time. When contributory requisites are not met, the mother is entitled to 6 weeks of leave paid at a flat rate. A 6 week leave after childbirth is mandatory, whilst the remainder may be transferred to the father or converted to reduced hours.

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### Nursing leave

After maternity leave, either parent may opt for the nursing leave (although it may be taken by only one of them), consisting in two half-hour breaks or a one half-hour shorter working day till the ninth month after birth. If stipulated in collective bargaining agreements or covenanted with the employer, this leave can be used to extend maternity leave by 2 weeks (4 weeks for public officials).

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### Paternity leave

Two days for the birth of the child and 13 consecutive days (4 weeks as of 2017) of fully paid leave (subject to a ceiling) for birth, adoption or fostering, providing the father is affiliated or similar and has contributed for the specified minimum time.

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### Full-time parental leave to care for children

Right of any worker to suspend their employment contract without pay until the child reaches the age of 3; the right to return to the same position is guaranteed for the first year and to a similar position through the third year. The leave may be taken intermittently.

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### Part-time parental leave to care for children

Right of any worker to reduce their hours by a minimum of 1/8 and a maximum of 1/2, with a proportional decrease in salary, until the child is 12 years old. The leave may be taken intermittently.

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### Other childcare leaves

Fully paid (subject to a ceiling) full-time leave for risk during pregnancy or nursing. Right to reduced hours to care for children with cancer or any other severe illness, with compensation for the concomitant reduction in salary.

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*Source:* compiled by the authors from information in Meil, G., Lapuerta, I. and Escobedo, A. (2017).

The leaves presently available (see Table 1) can be classified under two main headings. Fully paid leaves include maternity, paternity and nursing leaves as well as special circumstances (risk during pregnancy or breast-feeding and severely ill child). Whilst fully paid leaves envisage a replacement salary but are of limited duration, unpaid leaves can be taken for very long periods of time (3 years in the event of leave of absence and up to 12 years for part-time leaves) but lack any financial consideration (except in a few regions) (Meil et al., 2017, Lapuerta and Escobedo 2017). More than in other countries, leaves in Spain are characterised by this distinct duality in terms of remuneration and duration. From the gender equality perspective, the legislation has tended to individualise leaves, in keeping with a pattern found in most OECD countries, although few explicit incentives are in place for parents to make use of such benefits. Nonetheless, the extension in 2017 of fully paid paternity leave from 2 to 4 weeks forms part of a trend to lengthen the duration of leaves available to fathers. Further to the typology developed by Wall and Escobedo (2013), which also takes the characteristics of childcare and the mother's employment into consideration, Spain has evolved in recent years from the 'short leave modified breadwinner model' to an 'extensive early return to work model' (Escobedo and Wall, 2015).

## METHODOLOGY AND DATABASE

The analysis was based on the survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012* (Social use of parental leave 2012) designed under a broader eponymous project<sup>1</sup>. Those data were supplemented with secondary information published by the National Social Security Institute for 2013 and earlier. The survey, which was cross-sectional and retrospective, was conducted between January and March 2012 and covered all of Spain except the cities of Ceuta and Melilla. A total of 4000 respondents between the ages of 25 and 60 were surveyed. Random sampling with minimum sex and age quotas was used and weighting was based on those two variables.

1 For which funding was provided by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (CSO2009-11328).

The sub-sample for this study consisted of 2 775 parents between the ages of 25 and 60 who had paid employment when their children were born. A total of 411 had taken at least one unpaid full- or part-time parental leave. The specific analysis of leave use was run on the 359 parents with children under the age of 13 at the time of the interview. The reason for this selection was to avoid long-term memory bias and to take the break-off point as the entry into effect of Act 39/1999 of 5 November on harmonisation of family and work life.

The survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012* proved to be an innovative and useful source of information, for it shed light on the effect of leaves on the population eligible to apply for them. Other sources with detailed data on leaves, such as the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, showed how many people took full-time parental (and other) leaves yearly and the terms of their employment contracts, but not the number or characteristics of potential applicants. Moreover, the *Encuesta sobre el uso de los permisos parentales 2012* furnished information on the employment status of respondents and their partners when applying for the leave (or otherwise), the reasons for the application, the couple's decision-making process and the participation of other members of the social network in childcare.

A descriptive analysis was conducted with contingency tables whose significance is measured with Pearson's chi-square statistic. Logistic regression models were also developed to analyse the factors conditioning leave use. Analyses were run using SPSS 21 software.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Leave use and characteristics

Even though maternity leave is firmly rooted in Spanish labour legislation as a women's right of which the population at large is fully aware, not all working mothers benefit from it. Further to the survey *El uso de los permisos parentales 2012*, 81 % of women between the ages of 25 and 60 who were working when their children were born claimed to

have taken maternity leave, whilst 19 % reported that they had not. Younger mothers took maternity leave at significantly higher rates than their elders: 90 % of working mothers under the age of 35 and 85 % of those between 35 and 44 reported benefiting from maternity leave, compared to 71 % of mothers between 45 and 54 and 61 % of those between 55 and 60 (Meil and Romero-Balsas, 2016). Those results are consistent with the findings reported for other studies. According to data published by Mari-Klose et al. (2010), 91 % of eligible mothers with children under the age of 4 took maternity leave. The rise over time in maternity leave coverage may be attributed essentially to improvements in leave conditions for beneficiaries introduced by successive legislative reforms.

Working conditions were observed to be a determinant for extent of use. Self-employed women, women working in the private sector and especially women with temporary employment contracts or no contract at all were the ones most frequently unable to take maternity leave, and also the ones with the lowest incomes. That finding is illustrated by

the logistic regression in Table 2, which analyses the odds ratio of using versus not using the leave conditioned to working conditions, level of schooling (as a proxy for income level) and age. The odds ratio for using maternity leave dropped to half for women working in the private (OR=0,52) versus the public sector and even more steeply for self-employed women (OR=0,40) as opposed to salaried workers. It was 9,2 times higher for women with permanent than for those with temporary employment contracts. Higher levels of schooling also raised the likelihood of leave-taking. Women with unstable employment were, then, the ones unable to exercise their right to maternity leave laid down in the legislation. When the women themselves were asked why they had not taken maternity leave, all their reasons shared a leitmotif: self-employment at the time (31 %), no employment contract or working as a contractor (16 %), temporary employment contract (13 %), loss of job (13 %) or others (29 %). According to the Mari-Klose et al. (2010) study, this leave was taken least frequently by women with low salaries, less schooling and an older age.

**Table 2.** Logistic regression for factors conditioning the likelihood of using maternity and paternity leave or otherwise (odds ratio)

	Maternity leave taken by mothers	Maternity leave taken by fathers	Paternity leave
Private sector employment (ref. public sector)	0,52*	0,81	0,36**
Self-employed (ref. employed)	0,40**	0,42+	0,38**
Permanent employment (ref. temporary employment)	9,17***	-	4,22***
Age 18-34 (reference)			
Age 35-44	0,59+	0,82	1,05
Age 45-60	0,47*	0,50*	0,85
Primary education (reference)			
Secondary education	1,94*	1,22	1,57
Tertiary education	3,67***	1,13	1,66+
Partner not employed (ref. employed)	0,72	-	0,55**
Constant	5,16*	0,12***	3,40**

Source: Survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*. Notes: +  $p < 0,10$ , \*  $p < 0,05$ , \*\*  $p < 0,01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0,001$ . Nagelkerke R square 0,33, 0,03 and 0,29 respectively.

The option most often adopted was to use maternity leave full time for the maximum entitlement specified in the legislation. Nonetheless, it was used part-time (for only part of the working day) by 13 %, with no significant differences between self-employed and salaried women. Around 4 % of the salaried mothers who took the leave took less than the 16 weeks to which they were entitled, while among self-employed women the percentage ranged from 25 to 30 %, depending on the child's birth order. In 2016, the mean duration of the leave among women contributing to social security was 113 days (16 weeks), compared to the 42,5 days (6 weeks) taken by non-contributors (unemployed women seeking employment and receiving unemployment benefits) (Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social, 2017). Employees, then, tended to use the legal maximum entitlement: 16 weeks for individual births and 18 for multiple births for contributors and 6 and 8 weeks, respectively, for non-contributors.

Some fathers took part of their partner's maternity leave where it was granted to them by the mother under the terms provided by law. The percentage of maternity leaves taken by fathers has remained flat at around 2 % in the last 10 years. The mean duration of men's maternity leave in 2016 was 71,2 days (10,2 weeks), the maximum allowed (Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social, 2017). Further to the survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*, 7 % of fathers entitled to maternity leave used it. Use was more intense among younger salaried workers, while no differences were observed by level of schooling or sector (private or public) (see Table 2). Based on the survey *Encuesta de la calidad de vida en el trabajo*, however, Escot et al. (2012) observed a higher rate of leave-taking among males who worked in public health or public education. Similarly, men working in companies where conciliation policies were encouraged were more inclined to use maternity leave (Escot et al., 2012).

Nursing or breast-feeding leave, in turn, which is often taken as an extension to maternity leave, was used much less frequently than the latter (by 40 % of women drawing salaries when their children were born). Such a low use rate may denote scant awareness of the existence of this leave or

that many women may confound with maternity leave, for the two are generally applied for successively.

Furthermore, despite its recent enactment (in 2007), 2 week paternity leave was taken by 75 % of fathers who were working when their children were born, 97 % of whom used their full entitlement. The couple's employment status and their working conditions were determining factors in leave-taking, which was more common when both parents than when only the father worked (the odds ratio declined to half in the latter case, as shown in Table 2). As in the case of maternity leave and as reported by earlier studies (Romero-Balsas, 2012; Escot et al., 2012; Lapuerta et al., 2011, González and Baizán, 2011), greater job stability furthered use: the odds ratio was 4,2-fold higher for men with permanent as opposed to temporary employment contracts and two-thirds lower for self-employed men or those working in the private sector.

On the whole, paid leave was extensively used for the full entitlement established by law, the main constraint being job instability, with the added risk, in the case of self-employed workers, of losing market share.

Full- and part-time parental leaves were used much more sparingly, essentially because in most cases such leaves are unpaid (Lapuerta et al., 2011, Baizán and González, 2011) and only salaried workers are eligible. A mere 9,7 % of parents working when their children were born used part-time parental leave (Table 4). Full-time parental leaves were even less common, with a usage rate of 4,8 %. Women were much more prone to use full- and part-time parental leaves: 26 % compared to 2 % in men. Only 0,5 % of men used full-time parental leave, compared to 10,4 % of women, with a similar divide for part-time parental leave: 1,8 % of men and 19,9 % of women (Table 4). As in paid leave, working conditions were a determinant, as were child-care models, as discussed in an earlier paper (Meil et al., 2017b, Romero-Balsas and Rogero-García, 2017b). As Table 3 shows, the odds ratio for using one of these unpaid leaves was 4,37 times greater among women and 2,93 times greater among men with permanent jobs than among those with temporary employment. For women, having a partner with

a stable job was also relevant (OR=1,46), whereas for the few men who used this leave it was not. For them, the determinant was working in the public sector (OR=3,94), which may be interpreted to mean that the risk of adverse discrimination for using such leaves was lower there than in the private sector. Women with higher incomes (as measured by the proxy variable schooling) were observed to be more readily able to temporarily forgo their full salary, whereas among men that variable was not particularly relevant. Women with more demanding jobs (work weeks of over 40 hours) tended to use these leaves less frequently, however. In addition to a couple's working and financial status, childcare models

were observed to be significant, for the odds ratio for using parental leaves was significantly higher (OR=1,69) when mothers deemed they should cut back on their working hours while their children were very young. Men who felt that such leaves are primarily intended for women, in turn, were much less prone to use them (OR=0,22). Significantly, the presence of grandparents in the vicinity able to care for the children had no impact on the use of such leaves. In other words, unpaid leave did not appear to be a substitute for grandparents but rather the result of a desire to spend more time with one's children, as discussed in the following section.

**Table 3.** Logistic regression for factors conditioning the likelihood of using parental leave (full or part-time) or otherwise

	Women	Men
Permanent employment (ref. temporary employment)	4,38***	2,93**
Public sector employment (ref. private sector)	0,84	3,94**
Partner with permanent employment (ref. temporary or no employment)	1,46*	0,99
Primary education (reference)		
Secondary education	1,71+	6,47+
Tertiary education	1,88*	5,39
Work week > 40 hours (ref. work 40 or less hours)	0,57**	0,69
Traditional attitude towards parental leave		0,22*
Attitude towards childcare prioritising childcare over paid work	1,68**	
Partner used a parental leave (ref. not used parental leave)	1,72	2,53*
Grandparents less than 30 min. away (ref. no grandparents or live further)	1,23	0,82
Age 18-34 (reference)		
Age 35-44	1,06	0,94
Age 45-60	0,74	0,82
Constant	0,06***	0,002***

Source: Survey El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012. Notes: + p<0,10, \* p<0,05, \*\* p<0,01, \*\*\* p<0,001. Nagelkerke R square 0,19 and 0,16 respectively.

Gender differences were observed not only in percentage of use, but also in the leave characteristics with career implications (Lapuerta, 2013). Men tended to take shorter leaves than women, particularly where part-time unpaid leave was concerned: 24,5 months compared to 36,3 months for women (Table 4). Women also tended to reduce their working hours more than men (2,6 compared to 2,2 hours/day).

Full-time parental leave, in turn, lasted for 9,8 months among women and 8 months among men. Earlier studies such as the one authored by Lapuerta et al. (2011), Baizán and González (2011) revealed

a high return to work rate after a 12 month parental leave, given that the right to return to the job held when the leave was taken is guaranteed for 1 year. According to the data gathered for this study, 86 % of full-time parental leave were shorter than 1 year. Mothers tended to take this leave when their children were younger and fathers when they were somewhat older (6,1 months on average for women compared to 12,5 months for men); 64 % of the women who took such leaves did so immediately after maternity leave (Meil and Romero-Balsas, 2016). The timing was more variable in part-time unpaid leaves, which parents tended to take after the child was 1 year old.

**Table 4.** Use and characteristics of full- and part-time parental leaves by sex

	Part-time parental leave			Full-time parental leave		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Use (%)	9,7 %*	1,8 %	19,9 %	4,8 %*	0,5 %	10,4 %
Duration in months	33,6*	24,5	36,3	9,5	8,0	9,8
Child's age (1)	12,5	14,0	12,0	7,4*	12,5	6,1
Number of hours (2)	2,5*	2,2	2,6			

Source: Survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*. **Note:** All means calculated from at least 27 cases (1) Child's age in months at outset (2) Hourly reduction per day. \*  $p < 0,05$

**Table 5.** Employment status by sex after termination of full- or part-time parental leave

	Post-full-time leave status			Post-part-time leave status		
	Total*	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Full-time work	62	87	55	73	76	72
Part-time work	30	13	35	7	8	7
Temporarily / permanently out of work	8	0	10	20	16	22
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of cases	115	23	92	131	25	106

Source: Survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*. \*  $p < 0,05$



After their part- or full-time parental leave terminated, most people returned to full-time work. Nonetheless, according to the survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*, substantial percentages, 38 % full-time and 27 % part-time leave-takers transitioned into other situations, with significant differences by gender and sector. Only 55 % of the women but 87 % of the men taking full-time parental leave returned to full-time work (Table 5) and while one in ten women did not return to work at all, not a single case of stay-at-home dads was recorded.

As corroborated in the literature (OECD, 2011; Hegewisch and Gornik, 2011; Gornik, 2015), leave duration conditioned women's return to full-time work, although not linearly. After part-time leaves of over 2 years, 62 % of women returned to full-time employment compared to 76 % for shorter durations. The gap was even wider for full-time parental leave, for only 9 % of women who used such leaves for over one year returned to full-time work, compared to 62 % whose leave lasted for 12 months or less. Employment in the public or private sector was the variable with the greatest effect on the return to full-time work. After full-time parental leave, half of private sector employees (both sexes) failed to return to full-time work and 14 % failed to return at all. All public sector employees returned to work, 77 % full time. The data also showed that private sector employees were much less likely than public sector workers to return to full-time work after a part-time parental leave. These data revealed the impact of full- or part-time parental leave-taking on parents' and especially on mothers' careers.

### Reasons for taking parental leave

A key question in the sociological analysis of leaves is to ascertain mothers' and fathers' motivations for using them. This is the only way to determine whether a public policy is meeting its objectives effectively: in this case, to enable fathers to devote more time to childcare while eluding possible adverse effects on their careers, such as resignation or forfeiture of job-associated rights.

Different approaches may be adopted to explain the relevance of the motivations and practices involved in gender model change. One of the most prominent is the 'doing gender' theory (West and Zimmerman, 1987) that carries gender role theories one step further, contending that gender is not a series of features *pertaining* to individuals, but a staging of interactions built on everyday social practice. The theory assumes that people are aware that their acts are assessed in terms of gender expectations and behave accordingly (West and Zimmerman, 1987). From that perspective, the reasons given by mothers and fathers to justify their use of leaves denote either the reinforcement of traditional gender roles or progress toward more egalitarian childcare models.

The reasons for taking unpaid full- or part-time parental leave are analysed here because as they generally have a longer duration, they carry a high opportunity cost and have more profound effects on the social construction of gender roles. Given the limited use of full-time leave, the number of cases was insufficient to break the analysis down by sex and type of leave both. The discussion consequently distinguishes by sex only, pooling the information on full and part-time leaves.

The reason most frequently given for applying for such leaves was the desire to spend more time with the baby (Table 6). That is closely related to the reluctance to surrender childcare to others: to avoid either overburdening grandparents (48 %) or placing the baby in a nursery or hiring a "nanny" (50 %). The underlying assumption in this group of responses was that parents, more than any other agent, are primarily responsible for childcare. The fact that women subscribed to such responses more frequently than men is consistent with their stated desire to take leaves to have sufficient time to assume a lead role in raising their children. Another significant reason given by women was, as in other countries (McKay & Doucet, 2010), to breast-feed their children beyond the termination of paid leave (46 %). On the whole, then, child-raising was a concern that prevailed among women and men both. The decision appeared to be unrelated to the availability or otherwise of grandparents able to provide childcare, for no statistically significant

differences in leave-taking were observed between families living at shorter or longer distances from maternal or paternal grandparents.

A minority of respondents listed other reasons for taking leaves. Five per cent did so to engage in other professional activities, 3 % to participate in training courses and 4 % to lower their likelihood of being laid off. These reasons were given more frequently by men than by women.

Men who used a parental leave tended to prioritise their family over their career, for 75 % claimed to be more devoted to their family than their job, compared to 40 % among men not taking such leaves (25 % and 46 %, respectively, said they were equally devoted to both). No statistically significant differences were observed among women in this respect. These findings were consistent with earlier qualitative studies according to which the discourse characteristic of men using parental leave was more family- and childcare- than career-oriented (Romeo-Balsas et al., 2013, Muntanyola-Saura, Rogero-García, 2013; Brandth and Kvande, 2002).

It is up to the couple to decide which of the two partners is to take the leave. Hence the interest in asking those who took a parental leave why their partner did not (Table 7). The question is important for it is an indication of how leave-takers build their maternity and paternity ideal. The reasons given by women for their husbands' not taking the leave were primarily financial, although as they stemmed from the division of work along sex lines and men's and women's traditional roles in childcare, in 'doing gender' theory they would be seen as contributing to the reproduction of such attitudes. The reasons most frequently cited by mothers had to do with the effects on household income (53 %). The decline in family earnings tends to be greater when leaves are taken by the father, for men's salaries tend to be higher. A fair percentage (50 %) of the women claimed that it was unimaginable for their partner to take a leave to care for the children, reinforcing the idea that men's employment is less dispensable than women's.

**Table 6.** Reasons why respondents took full- or part-time parental leaves, by sex

	Men	Women	Total
To spend more time with child(ren)	89 %	96 %	94 %*
To avoid placing the child in a nursery or with a domestic worker	40 %	53 %	50 %*
To avoid overburdening grandparents	43 %	50 %	48 %
To continue breast-feeding	-	46 %	-
To avoid the high cost of childcare	19 %	38 %	34 %*
To reduce work-induced stress or fatigue	26 %	28 %	28 %
To engage in other professional activities	10 %	3 %	5 %*
To reduce the likelihood of being laid off	6 %	3 %	4 %
To engage in training	6 %	3 %	3 %
<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>279</i>	<i>359</i>

Source: Survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*. \*  $p < 0,05$

**Table 7.** Reasons for leave-taking by respondents instead of their partners, by sex

	Men	Women	Total
Because of the adverse effect of the contrary on (their partner's) earnings	40 %	53 %	52 %*
Because the characteristics of their partner's job made such leaves unthinkable	42 %	51 %	50 %*
Because the respondent wanted to take a full- or part-time leave	33 %	51 %	49 %*
Because the contrary would have endangered (their partner's) job	26 %	35 %	34 %*
Because of the adverse impact of the contrary on (their partner's) career	21 %	28 %	27 %
Because their partner had better working hours	40 %	16 %	19 %*
Because their partner preferred to devote more time to work	9 %	9 %	9 %
Because their partner thinks these are women's leaves	-	6 %	-
Because the respondent thinks these are women's leaves	-	14 %	-
<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>264</i>	<i>307</i>

Source: Survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*. \*  $p < 0,05$

Three of every four women (77 %) who took a leave contended that they did so because their working conditions were less favourable than their husbands', attesting to the gender inequality on the labour market (García Sainz et al., 2014, Santos Pérez and Valencia Olivero, 2014). One in four (22 %) wielded ideological reasons around gender role models, either because their spouses associated parental leaves with women or because they prioritised work over childcare. Half of all women (51 % compared to 33 % of men) reported that they took the leave because they "wanted to", i.e., because they were more inclined to do so than their husbands. The reasons given by most women about why they instead of their husbands used leaves were related to a desire to exercise a right to which they are entitled by law, and to the traditional definition of gender roles still in place in Spanish society.

Men also wielded financial-occupational reasons to explain why they took leaves instead of their

partners. The two reasons most often put forward were that the characteristics of their wives' jobs made the contrary unthinkable (42 %) and that the reverse would have had an adverse impact on household earnings (40 %). Overall, two of every three men (63 %) took the leave to protect their wives' jobs. Men, then, took leave primarily to support their partners' employability and career and, to a lesser extent, to raise their children outside the traditional model.

## WORK-RELATED IMPLICATIONS OF TAKING PARENTAL LEAVE

### Workplace implications

Full- and part-time parental leaves, which have long been in place, may have direct or indirect costs for users' employers and workmates. More specifically,

they may lower production levels due to the high replacement costs (not only substitutes' pay, but also their lower productivity) and entail a heavier workload for workmates (Bygren and Duvander, 2006). In light of such consequences, leave-taking might understandably be discouraged by superiors and, where they entail a redistribution of work, criticised by workmates. That notwithstanding, 95 % of the people taking full-time and 94 % taking part-time leaves, and 94 % of the men and 92 % of the women taking parental leave deemed that their absence had no adverse consequences for their employer (Table 8). The respondents reported that employers' strategies to adapt to their leave varied and depended, among others, on the type of leave.

As noted before, workplace characteristics affected the use (or otherwise) of parental leave. Scant information is available on the impact of leave-taking at the workplace, however. Qualitative studies have shown, in the case of men taking parental leave, that workmates' most frequent reaction is indifference, although occasionally attendant upon surprise and joking about the idea (Meil et al., 2017a, Romero-Balsas, Rogero-García, 2017a; Wall, 2014). Further to the survey results analysed, only 5 % of those using a leave reported any objection or attempted discouragement by their workmates. Such indifference may be related to how work is distributed during the leave. According to 71 % of the respondents (with no differences between the sexes), taking a part-time

leave usually did not lead to any substantial decline in their own workload, but rather to a rise in their productivity: i.e., they did more work in less time. This perception was more common where the reduction in working hours was smaller (88 % for one hour less) and was more widespread in the private (75 %) than in the public (62 %) sector. One-third of the people who reduced their working hours mentioned, however, that another employee had been hired. That percentage rose with the number of hours cut back (41 % for two or more hours compared to 18 % for one hour) and was higher in the public (54 %) than in the private (30 %) sector. A constant 15 %, irrespective of the hourly cut-back, said that work had been redistributed among workmates, which was more common in the public (26 %) than in the private (14 %) sector. Where part-time leaves were concerned, then, leave-takers' productivity rose, particularly where the cut-back was small. In other cases, either more people were hired or the work was redistributed among the remaining employees.

Substitutes were hired to replace 67 % of full-time leave-takers, a practice that was more frequent when the leave was longer (56 % for under and 71 % for over 6 months) and in the public (76 %) than in the private (61 %) sector. Redistribution of work among other employees, while not the most frequent solution, was not unusual (23 %), with higher percentages for shorter leaves (30 % for under and 18 % for over 6 months).

**Table 8.** Effects of the use of parental leaves on the workplace, by type of leave

	Full-time leave	Part-time leave	Total
The leave had an adverse effect on the workplace	5 %	6 %	6 %
The workload was the same after the hourly cut-back	-	71 %	71 %
A substitute was hired during the leave	70 %	37 %	44 %***
The leave increased other employees' workload	21 %	17 %	18 %
<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>269</i>	<i>343</i>

Source: Survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*. \*\*\* p<0,001

In light of the foregoing, when employees applied for full- or part-time parental leaves their superiors did not usually object, but rather approved the request without posing reservations (72 %). According to 14 % of men and 18 % of women, when they applied for the leave, their superiors tried to discourage them or opposed their request. Such obstacles were found most frequently by women applying for full-time leaves (22 % compared to 7 % in men) and in general, regardless of sex, when the leave was expected to have adverse consequences for the employer (40 % compared to 16 %).

### Implications for careers

Studies conducted primarily in Scandinavian countries have shown that the use of leaves can impact careers. Research on the effect of the use of leaves on future earnings, one of the factors explored most thoroughly, showed a decline in earnings after the return to work (Görlich and De Grip, 2009; Nielsen, 2009; Johansson, 2010; Hegewisch and Gornik, 2011). That the effect proved to be more accentuated with longer leaves of absence (OECD, 2011) was attributed to a loss of 'human capital' during the long leaves available in Nordic countries (Johansson, 2010) and the absence of ongoing training during the leave (Luotonen,

2012). Income loss may have been the result not only of professional de-qualification, but also of a reduction in the number of hours worked by both male and female Swedes after their leaves. That decline was observed to steepen with increases in the length of the leave (Duvander and Jans, 2009). Johansson (2010) in fact found that Swedish men took a heavier income loss than Swedish women.

In the survey analysed respondents were not asked about the impact of leaves on their salaries, although they were asked about other areas of job performance not yet broached in the literature. Some type of adverse consequence for their work or career was reported by 35 % of workers, with no significant differences by sex or by type of leave (full- or part-time). The types of discrimination most frequently mentioned included retarded career promotion (26 %) and lower quality of job content, i.e., lesser responsibility or competence (16 %), less demanding tasks (11 %) or the boss's loss of confidence (15 %) (Table 9). Although the use of parental leave is legally protected against dismissal, 5 % of women (but none of the men) claimed to have lost their job as a result of having taken such a leave. Other adverse consequences of using leaves included exclusion from ongoing training (11 %) and the forced acceptance of a lower category job (3 %). Frequently (20 %), leave-takers were affected by one or two of the aforementioned adverse consequences, although 15 % reported three or more, with no significant differences by sex.

**Table 9.** Consequences of using full- or part-time parental leave on careers

	Men	Women
Dismissed	0	5 %
Career stalled	23 %	27 %
Job category lowered	-	4 %
Loss of superior's confidence	14 %	15 %
Exclusion from ongoing education courses	-	12 %
Job responsibility or competence lowered	18 %	16 %
Lower level tasks assigned	11 %	10 %
One or more consequences reported	35 %	35 %
<i>Number of cases</i>	79	274

Source: Survey *El uso social de los permisos parentales 2012*.

While higher in the private sector (41 %), the likelihood of encountering one of these types of discrimination was also present in the public sector (23 %). Discrimination for using parental leave was also more frequent when the immediate superior opposed the leave or attempted to discourage its use (63 % versus 30 %) and when the leave had adverse effects for the employer (55 % versus 34 %). Leave duration was not clearly related to the number of adverse consequences. Only where parental leave were taken full-time for over 1 year did a clearly higher proportion of women report having experienced at least one such adverse consequence (61 % compared to 29 % for shorter leaves). That finding is consistent with the effects on future income observed in the papers referred to above.

Therefore, in addition to the direct costs as a result of the forfeiture of all or part of the user's salary and the absence of compensatory benefits, using full- or part-time parental leave also entailed indirect costs in terms of career promotion, power or quality of job content. This risk of discrimination was similar for women and men.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In recent decades Spain has implemented a parental leave policy that has afforded parents greater freedom in connection with their children's upbringing. Gaps can still be found in the understanding of the use and effects of such leaves, however. This article aimed to illustrate the state-of-play of the various childcare leaves in Spain, introducing new information in three areas: their use, the motivations behind their use and the career implications involved.

The findings show that in Spain as in other countries the rate of leave-taking depends largely on whether or not absence from the workplace is paid. Most people who were working when their children were born took paid leave. From that perspective, the introduction of non-transferable paternity leave, with the same degree of protection as maternity leave, may be deemed successful, for most fathers used it to the full entitlement. Some studies suggest that such success may be due not only to full salary

benefits, but also to the fairly short leave duration (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Romero-Balsas et al., 2013, Montañola-Saura and Rogero-García, 2015). Be that as it may, such a high rate of use stands as proof that progress can be made in involving men in childcare via longer paternity leaves, longer even than the 4 weeks legislated in Spain in 2017. Future research on the use of this leave should analyse the extent to which that longer duration may have affected use, the type of possible constraints on the exercise of the right and any career implications.

Despite the progress made, the use of paternity and maternity leaves is very uneven, depending on each individual's work situation: the percentage of use is significantly lower among self-employed workers and those with unstable employment. Future research should explore how difficulties in accessing leaves weigh on workers' fertility and identify effective measures to guarantee the right to care for vulnerable segments of the population. The implementation of mechanisms favouring more flexible arrangements, such as the possibility of transferring part of the maternity leave to the father or using a leave part-time, may constitute a valuable resource for parents whose working conditions are an obstacle to 'standard' leave-taking. The easing or elimination of requirements restricting access to leaves by non-contributors to the system might be instrumental to raising their use among workers with unstable jobs.

This paper introduces a new estimate of the duration of men's and women's full- and part-time parental leaves. Whilst the maximum duration allowed in such leaves is generous, the fact that they are unpaid has led to very uneven use, depending on sex and working conditions. On the one hand, only a tiny minority of men use them and then for shorter times than women. Where part-time leave (the option of choice for both sexes) is taken, men shorten their working hours less than women. The establishment of such leaves as an individual right has served to facilitate work-family conciliation for only a minority of men, while not significantly furthering their use. In-depth reform of the entire leave and childcare system would be required to ensure more egalitarian use from the standpoints of gender and working conditions.

Another novel element in this study is the analysis of the motivations behind parents' decision to take full- or part-time parental leave. The present findings show that the reasons are associated more with care for the baby than financial or work-related considerations (such as capitalising on the time to train or engage in other professional activities), although the latter are present in a minority of cases, among men in particular. The persons taking such leaves appear to deem that parents should assume childcare rather than delegating that task to third parties, even when grandparents or other resources are locally available. In women, the desire to extend breast-feeding beyond the end of maternity leave also plays a significant role. Consequently, parental leave does not appear to be taken to compensate for the absence of other conciliation resources, but rather out of adherence to a model of parenthood that entails personally devoting more time to children. That is especially true for women, whose motivations are more frequently linked to the division of productive and reproductive work along sex lines. As the present quantitative approach lacks the depth that might be afforded by a qualitative analysis based on interviews or focus groups, future studies should explore the subject from that perspective in greater depth.

The present findings show that parental leave, be it in the form of full- or part-time leave, has more than the direct costs measured in terms of salary and social protection. Although earlier studies have addressed some of the effects of leaves on careers (Hegewisch and Gornik, 2011; OECD, 2011), this article analyses aspects yet unstudied, such as the loss of responsibility prior to leave-taking, the loss of trust on the part of superiors or the perception of career stalling. One of every three respondents, with no sex-based differences, report indirect costs in terms of promotions, responsibility or quality of job content. Moreover, a significant proportion of people, particularly women, fail to return to work at the end of the leave, either voluntarily or involuntarily. In short, the findings of this study show that at present regulation is insufficient to prevent post-leave workplace discrimination.

Pursuant to earlier research, the longer the duration of the leave the higher are the career costs (OECD, 2011). Nonetheless, studies covering a wider

window and addressing the question of whether the penalisation is higher in certain occupations should be undertaken. That would call for longitudinal surveys able to detect the relationship between adverse effects and leave duration and the sector or industry involved. Measures adopted that have proven to effectively protect leave-takers' rights in other countries should also be identified and their likelihood of success in Spain determined.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

**Gerardo Meil** is professor in Sociology at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain). Master Degree in Economics and in Political Science, and Doctorate in Sociology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in 1987. President of the European Society on Family Relations and member of several scientific societies. His research and publications focus on Family Sociology, Gender Violence, Mobility and Social Policy. For a full vita see his web-page at <http://www.uam.es/gerardo.meil>

**Pedro Romero-Balsas** is Lecturer at the Department of Sociology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. He holds a PhD in Sociology (with distinction) from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2014. He has a bachelor in Sociology (Universidad de Alicante, 2008). He has a master's degree in Social Anthropology (Universidad de Murcia, 2010) and a Master's Diploma in Multivariate Statistical Techniques (UNED, 2009). He has been visiting researcher fellow at Thomas Coram Research Unit (University College London), at the Federal Institute for Population Research (Germany) and at the Department of Sociology and Political Science at the NTNU (Norway). His research areas are Sociology of Families, Parental Leave, Fatherhood, Parenthood, Multicultural Families, Job Mobility and Public Policies.

**Jesús Rogero-García** is lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain). He received his PhD in Sociology from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. His research

interests include inequalities in education, childcare and adult care. His last works have focused on different dimensions of leave policies and on some aspects of educational inequalities in Spain.