EQUAL RIGHTS TO EARN AND CARE

-PARENTAL LEAVE IN ICELAND

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Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands
2008

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Policies promoting care from both parents - the case of Iceland

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Comprehensive childcare policies are one of the main characteristics of the Scandinavian or Nordic welfare model (e.g. Bradshaw and Hatland, 2006; Crompton and Lyonette, 2006; Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006a; Kangas and Rostgaard, 2007). The goal of the Nordic welfare systems has been to promote the dual-earner/dual-carer family, where both parents participate in work and care of their children (Leira, 2006). Policies on care and gender equality are regarded as the key explanatory factors for the high labour market participation of women in general and mothers in particular in the Nordic countries. Yet, at the same time, the policies have not ensured the participation of fathers in the care of their young children nor has women's position in the labour market become equal to that of men. Although all the Nordic countries have developed extensive childcare policies their approaches to enable both parents to earn and care differ (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006b; Eydal, 2005; Finch, 2006). The term childcare policies applies to support provided to parents caring for young children, regardless of whether the support refers to paid parental leave or cash grants for care or services (Rostgaard and Fridberg, 1998).

As pointed out in chapter one in this volume, Iceland provided less support to families than the other Nordic countries during the post-war period, but during the past two decades public support for the care for young children has been increased. Day-care services have been expanded and the law on parental leave from 2000, already discussed in length in Chapter 1, enhanced the rights of parents to paid parental leave. The stated aim of the 2000 legislation was twofold: to ensure that children enjoy the care of both parents and to enable both women and men to coordinate family life and work outside the home (Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave no. 95/2000). In other words, the policy defines it as the

state's role to actively encourage fathers to participate in the care of their young children by earmarking part of the parental leave for fathers. The statistics shows that take-up rates of fathers are high and that in most cases they are taking three months paid parental leave. The aim of this chapter is to examine the influences of these changes. Are parents dividing the work outside the home and the care of their young children more equally after the law came into force, thus reaching the twofold goal of the law on paid parental leave from 2000? How do parents of children under three years old organize the care of their children? What care options are there after the parental leave ends? Are other care policies supporting the aim of the law on paid parental leave?[1]

The first section of the chapter discusses the development of Icelandic childcare policies, in order to gain a holistic picture of the care support offered to Icelandic parents. In order to put the Icelandic policies in context the main characteristics of the care policies are compared to the other Nordic countries. The next section of the chapter explores the care pattern of children born in 1997, before the law on parental leave came into force, and compares it to that of children born after the law came into full force, in 2003. The comparison is based on two surveys conducted in order to estimate the effects of the laws from 2000 on both work outside the home and care. Finally, the conclusions and recent trends in Icelandic childcare policies, such as home care allowances on local level, will be discussed.

Icelandic childcare policies

As discussed in length in Chapter 1 Iceland was the last Nordic country to develop a universal scheme of paid parental leave. Such a scheme wasn't enacted until 1980; giving parents entitlements to 3 months paid parental leave. It gave the mother the opportunity to transfer her entitlements to the father 30 days after parturition (Eydal, 2005). In 1987, this leave was extended to 6 months. In 2000, Iceland, hitherto a laggard in comparison to the other Nordic countries, enacted the radical piece of law; i.e. the Act on

[1] The data for the policy analysis and the data from the two surveys was collected within the research project *Combining Work and Care: Childcare and Labour Market Participation of Parents of Children under 3* funded by the Iceland Research Found (*Rannís* – The Icelandic Centre for Research), the Icelandic Equality Fund and the University of Iceland Research Fund and the Assistantship Fund.

Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave (no. 95/2000), which ensured both parents the same individual entitlements to paid maternity and paternity leave.[2]

Day-care

During the 1960s and the 1979s, day-care became an important issue of the social discourse within Nordic countries. The main reasons were labour shortages and an increased emphasis on women's right to waged employment on par with men (Sipila, 1997). However it was also discussed how to ensure childrens best interest, and whether it was better for young children to be cared for at home or in day-care institutions. While this issue has been debated (e.g. Brannen and Moss, 1991) the policies developed in the Nordic countries emphasized that children should be *entitled* to public day-care in order to *ensure their best interest* (Rauhala, Andersson, Eydal, Ketola and Warming, 1997). Thus, the services were developed with both pedagogical aspects and the needs of the labour market in mind. Leira (1987) points out that the arguments for developing day-care services can be categorized along two points: (1) that it was necessary in order to support the family in ensuring the best interest of the child, and (2) that it is necessary in order to ensure that mothers have (equal) opportunities to participate in the labour market as well as in social reproduction. Regarding the latter argument the causal relationship between day-care and mothers employment has been debated but, "on the whole the literature supports the theoretically driven prediction that more attractive childcare options increases maternal employment" (Gornick, Meyer and Ross, 1997, p. 48).

All the Nordic countries developed comprehensive legislation on day-care in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1973 the Act on the Creation and Administration of Day-care Institutes (no. 29/1973) came into effect in Iceland. It states, "The aim of day-care institutes is to give the children access to the guidance of pedagogy professionals and provide an environment that cultivates their personal and social development". The fact that day-care was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education indicates that day-care was seen as an educational issue, rather than a social or labour market issue. The characteristics of the services developed was in line with the day-care in the other Nordic countries: The municipalities were responsible for developing the services, it was subsidized, based on universal

[2] Please see chapter one for detailed account of the content of the law.

rights, and public regulations were developed concerning the administration (Broddadóttir, Eydal, Hrafnsdóttir and Sigurðardóttir, 1997; Sipila, 1997). However, Iceland differed from Denmark, Finland and Sweden in regards to the volumes of the services. Indeed in the early 1980s Iceland had much in common with Norway as following table shows.

Table 1. Children age 0-2 years and 3-6 years enrolled in day-care institutions and family day-care in the Nordic countries in 1984 shown as a percentage of all children in the age groups

	0-2 years		3-6 years		
	Day-care	Family care	Day-care Full-time	Day-care Part-time	Family care
Denmark	18	23	43	8	7
Finland	7	12	17	10	4
Iceland	5	14	9	34	12
Norway	6	1	16	25	1
Sweden	17	13	33	21	19

Figures from Hanssen and Elvehøj, 1997, 181 - 183

Thus, Iceland and Norway differed from the other three Nordic countries, providing relatively low volume of day-care for children under the age of two and mainly part-time care for children aged three to six.

This development of the day-care services is actually in line with the development of the entitlements of parents to paid parental leave. In Iceland the care of young children seems to have been defined as private matter and public care support for parents of young children developed at slower rate in the 1970s and 1980s than was the case in the other Nordic countries (Eydal, 2005). Despite less public support the Icelandic mothers were as active in the labour market as their counterparts in the other Nordic countries and the fertility rate was higher in Iceland than in any other Nordic country (see Chapter 2). Thus, there was a gap between the working hours of mothers and care services. Research from 1980s shows that the Icelandic parents used various solutions in order to bridge the gap between the relatively short paid parental leave and public day-care such as irregular working hours, private solutions, most often help from grandparents but also other relatives, friends and neighbours and in some cases even redefinition of children's need for

care, including children being cared for by older children (Júlíusdóttir, 1993; 1995; Kristjánsson, 1989; Köhler, 1990).

A new day-care act was passed in 1991 by a coalition government of the Independence Party and the Social Democratic Party (Pre Schools (Nursery Schools) Act no. 48/1991 and no. 78/1994). The Act emphasized the educational and pedagogical aspects of institutional day-care. In previous laws two concepts had been used for part time and full time institutions but according to the Act all day-care institutions would be called pre-schools (the precise translation would be playschools, *Icl. leikskóli*). A new curriculum was also established in which children's play was defined as an educational tool. Family day-care was regulated by the Act on Social Service from 1992 and under the administration of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

In the Pre School Act the municipalities were considered to be responsible for the volume and the organization of day-care and the Act states; "The local authorities shall supervise the building and running of pre schools and bear the expenses involved, each in its own local government area. They shall be obliged to take the initiative in ensuring places for children in good pre schools" (Act no. 78/1994). Hence due to the responsibility of the local authorities the political debate on need for increase in day-care volume has mainly taken place at the local level.

An increase in day-care volume was one of the main political emphases of the electoral alliance of parties left of the centre with the centre party in Reykjavík in the local elections held in 1994. The alliance won the elections and the increase in the volume day-care was rapid in Reykjavík. However, this was also the case in most municipalities regardless of the political composition. From 1990-2006, the Icelandic municipalities increased pre-school volumes, both in regards to the number of children enrolled and the hours attended (Eydal and Ólafsson, 2008). Following table shows the change clearly, the Icelandic volumes of day-care are among the highest in the Nordic countries. Only Denmark provides more care for the children under two years old.

Table 2. Children enrolled in day-care institutions and family day-care in the Nordic countries in 2005 as percentage of all children in the age groups

	0-1 years	1-2 years	3-5 years	0-5 years
Denmark	15	85	95	79
Finland	1	37	69	47
Iceland	6	76	94	73
Norway	3	54	91	64
Sweden	0	67	95	71

Social Security in the Nordic Countries 2005, 2007.

At this point in time, Finland is the Nordic country that provides the lowest day-care volume and Denmark the highest. Denmark provides more services to the age group under two than does any other Nordic country. Iceland also provides relatively high volumes of care for this age group, followed by Sweden and Norway. All countries except Finland provide care for more than 90% of the age group 3-5 year olds. The main explanation for the differences in volumes of day-care is on one hand the length of the paid parental leave, as is the case in Sweden and on the other hand cash for care schemes. Examples of the latter are of importance both for Finland but also Norway.

The Finish system of cash grants for care of children came gradually into force in 1985-1990. Such a care grant is available if a child under three year old does not attend public day-care, but in most cases it is the mother of the child that stays home and cares for the child (Salmi, 2006). However, it is important to keep in mind that Finland has provided legal rights to day-care for all children from 1990 (as do Denmark and Sweden), while neither Norwegian nor Icelandic children enjoy such rights (Eydal and Satka, 2006). In 1998, Norway introduced the cash for care scheme (*kontantstötte*) in order to ensure the possibility of choice between care solutions and flexibility. The grants are paid for care of children under three; full payment if the children are not placed in a day-care institution but if the child attends part-time, the parents are entitled to a proportion of the grant equal to the number of hours the child is placed in care (Lov om kontantstøtte til smabarnsforeldre nr. 73/1997-8). The grants may be used to pay for day-care and were introduced as a policy to increase parents' choices in childcare (Morgan and Zippel, 2003). The Norwegian scheme of cash grants has been heavily

criticized and Leira (2006) points out that, "interpreted as supporting the traditional male-breadwinner family and as a backlash to gender equality, cash grants also had their antagonists. Regarded by some as undermining the right of children to attend state-sponsored day-care, cash grant schemes met with opposition on these grounds, too" (p. 41). Furthermore, from 1st of July 2008 a scheme of cash grants for care came into force in in Sweden.

Table 3. Overview of care support for parents of children 0-5 years old in 2005 in the Nordic countries.

	Parental leave no weeks	Cash for care	Day-care % of age group
Denmark	Total period: 50 -Mother:18 -Father: 0 -Father with mother: 2	No state policies but exists in some municipalities	Under one year: 15 1-2 years: 85 3-5 years:95
Finland	Total period:44 -Mother:18 -Father: 0 -Father with mother:3	State program: Cash for care for children under three	Under one year: 1 1-2 years: 37 3-5 years:69
Iceland	Total period: 39 -Mother:13 -Father:13 -Father with mother:0	No schemes	Under one year:6 1-2 years: 76 3-5 years:94
Norway	Total period:53 -Mother:9 -Father:6 [From 2006] -Father with mother:2	State program: Cash for care for children under three	Under one year: 3 1-2 years: 54 3-5 years:91
Sweden	Total period:69 -Mother:8 -Father:8 -Father with mother:2	No schemes/ [A scheme came into force in 2008]	Under one year: 0 1-2 years: 67 3-5 years:95

Social Security in the Nordic Countries 2005, 2007.

Thus, as stated above the Nordic countries have chosen different paths to enable parents to work and care. Iceland has moved from being the Nordic country with the least public care support given to parents of young children, to that of being the Nordic country which policies most clearly supported the dual-earner model in 2005, with high day-care volumes and increased rights to paid paternal leave resulting in the high volume of fathers utilizing their benefits (e.g. Finch, 2006). However at the same time it offers less total support than the other countries do, shorter total period of paid parental

leave and in 2005 no cash for care schemes. Hence, in 2005 the childcare gap, to use the terminology of Ellingsæter (2006) to describe the period from end of paid parental leave until the child gets day-care service, is biggest in Iceland. The existence of the care-gap has to be considered in sharp contrast to the goal of the laws on paid parental leave.

The most recent development in Icelandic care policies, cash for care schemes on local level, clearly shows the need parents have for support in bridging the gap and will be further discussed in the conclusion. But given this context of Icelandic care policies the next section will examine if the Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave from 2000 has influenced the division of labour among Icelandic parents and enforced the dual earner/carer model.

Effects of the law- has the goal been reached?

The caring mother and the working father are among the two most persistent gender roles. This division of labour between parents has historically been reinforced by welfare systems based on a breadwinner model (Sainsbury, 1996). However, welfare systems that emphasize indistinct gender roles through support based on an individual basis maintain the assumption that women and men share both the economic and care responsibilities of the family (op cit.). The Icelandic law on maternity and paternity leave from 2000 is based on such vision and according to Moss and O'Brien (2006, 22): "this scheme contains one of the most generous "father-targeted" leave entitlements so far developed in modern economies in terms of both time and economic compensation (80 per cent of prior salary)". Overall, Icelandic fathers have made use of their new rights as already discussed in Chapter 1, and furthermore the Icelandic fathers were using the highest proportion of total benefit days when compared to the other Nordic countries (see Table 6 in Chapter 1).

In order to estimate the effects of new Act on Maternity/Paternity and Paternal Leave (no. 95/2000) the research project *Childcare and Labour Market Participation of Parents of Children under 3* was conducted. The project compares how parents of young children balanced labour participation and the care of their children before and after the legislation took effect.

The data comes from two questionnaire surveys. The first survey was conducted in 2001 among parents that had their first child in 1997, thus their children were three year old when the act came into force. The list was sent

to the home addresses of the mothers, drawn from the national registry, and it was left to the parents to decide which one of them completed the survey, though it should be noted that the mothers were the ones who completed the questionnaire in almost all cases. This may have lead to the role of fathers in caring for their children being underestimated, as surveys where both parents respond indicate that fathers feel that they contribute more than do the mothers (see e.g. Seward, Yeatts and Zottarelli, 2002 on this). The Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave (no. 95/2000) came into full effect in 2003 and in spring 2007 a comparable survey was sent to parents who had their first child in 2003.

1551 questionnaires were sent out in 2001, 890 of which where completed and returned. The resulting response rate is therefore just under 57%. The population for the latter survey was similar in size. 1572 questionnaires were sent out (2007-2008), of which 874 where completed and returned (making the response rate 56% for that year). In order to achieve the same response rate as in 2001 respondents in the second survey in 2007-8 were invited to complete the survey online and 39% of them chose to do so. The University of Iceland Social Science Research Institute analysed the non-response. That analysis revealed that the sample did not deviate significantly from the population, except in that there was a higher response rates from areas outside the capital city region. This is a well-established tendency in Icelandic surveys.

During the period the age of mothers at the first birth rose somewhat. This is reflected in there being fewer young mothers in the second sample (see Chapter 2 on families and fertility for more on that trend). The response rates are quite acceptable considering how extensive the questionnaire was and the fact that this was a self-completion mail survey.[3]

The main priority was to collect detailed information on how people organized employment and care during the year before the birth of the child and during the first three years of the child's life. There were also questions on conditions at work for both parents, e.g. flexibility and support available

[3] The Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland was responsible for the data collection, data entry, and reporting of the data for the 2007 survey, but Capacent Gallup was responsible for the reporting of the 2001 data. Thanks to all respondents in the survey and all that have worked on the project, special thanks to Jón Karl Árnason, Ásdís Arnalds, Heiður Hrund Jónsdóttir that assisted with the data for this particular chapter. Also thanks to Rannveig S. Ragnarsdóttir and Margrét Arngrímsdóttir for their assistance.

to parents and changes in circumstances following childbirth. In addition there were items on care for the child, how the parents had divided it among themselves as well as if other people provided care (such as baby-minders, play-schools, or relatives). Finally there were conventional background variables such as age, education, incomes, and family circumstances.

How did the parents divide their parental leaves?

The surveys included questions on the employment status of parents over a period of four years, starting one year before childbirth and ending three years after it. "Parental leave" was among the response options and there was a distinction between full-time and part-time parental leave. The second survey only included a response option for unpaid parental leave, which can be up to 12 weeks for either parent according to the laws enacted in 2000. Very few parents had availed themselves of that right and so it won't be discussed any further.

In the first survey both parents of children born 1997 were asked about take-up of parental leaves, though at this point in time only few fathers were entitled to 2 weeks of independent leave (see Chapter 1). As one would expect, a very high proportion of mothers (88,3%) were on parental leave during the first month after childbirth (n=887). 9,2% were students and 5,4% said they were homemakers. Only 0,8% said they were working during the first month. The take-up rates of parental leave for mothers declined gradually and 24,3% were on parental leave by the 7th month (15,3% full-time and 9% part-time). Very few fathers took leave, as their individual entitlements were very limited, as has already been noted. Nevertheless, 2,8% (n=820) of fathers said that they had taken parental leave. It is worth noting that 13,4% of the fathers used their summer vacation to stay at home during the first month after the child was born.

The responses of mothers in the second survey were very similar to those in the first (n=853). 86,5% of them were on parental leave during the first month after childbirth and only about 2% were working full-time. The main difference between women in the two surveys is that a larger proportion of mothers in the latter survey were on part-time leave (e.g. 21,3% during the first month, compared to 7,2% in the first survey). As was to be expected, there were considerable differences between men between the two surveys. 56,2% of fathers took parental leave during the first month after the child was born. The take-up rates then decline steeply. In the second month 28% of fathers were on leave, 11,7% during the third month, but then it starts rising again gradually and by the eighth month it was up to 19,4%.

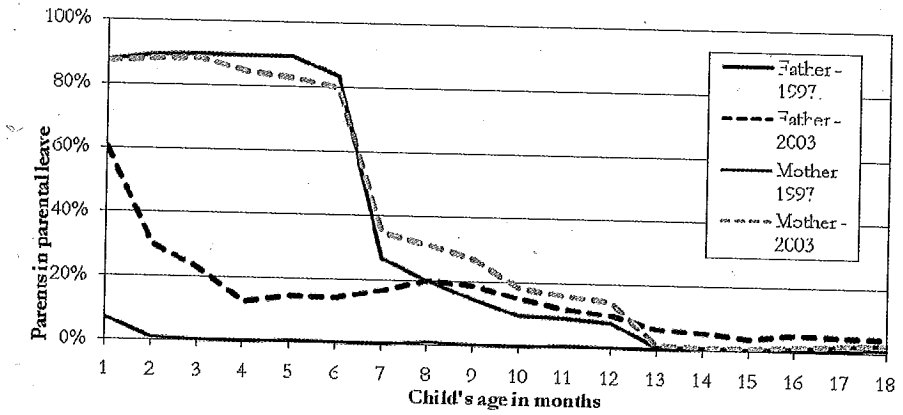

Figure 1. Mothers and fathers of first-born 1997 and 2003: % on paid parental leave from birth - 18 month

Research from both home and abroad shows that in most cases parents make use of the parental leave that they are entitled to individually. The difference between mothers and fathers is that the former use most of the shared entitlements that parents can divide among themselves (Brandth and Kvande, 2003a; Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Social Security in the Nordic Countries 2005, 2007). The results are in line with these previous results. In the former survey only a small number of fathers make use of their parental leave but in the latter survey an overwhelming majority of fathers use the leave that they are entitled to individually. On the whole some 81,6% of fathers take some parental leave (n=740).

Research in the other Nordic countries has showed that there are considerable differences between different groups of fathers in how they make use of their entitlements to parental leave. According to Swedish research (Duvander, 2000; Haas, 1992; Näsmann, 1992) there is a positive correlation between the level of education and employment security and take-up rate of parental leave for fathers. The same research also shows that the level of education and the employment status of the mothers has a positive association with take-up rates of fathers. Duvander and Sundström (2000) point out that the attitudes of Swedish parents towards sharing of parental leaves are more positive the higher their levels of education. They also show that fathers who have incomes above the population mean are more likely to take advantage of their parental leave than those that do not. On the other hand, fathers who had incomes above the replacement cap had

significantly lower take-up rates. It was also more common that parents shared the leave if the mothers were only entitled to small amounts (e.g. hadn't been employed for the minimum duration before going on leave). Fathers were also less likely to take parental leave if both parents had low incomes. Duvander and Sundström also argue that mothers that are unhappy at work might be more inclined to go on parental leave.

We compared the fathers that did take paid parental leave to those that did not (n=800) from the Icelandic survey among fathers of children born in 2003 to see if they differed in some way in terms of age, family circumstances, education, employment status, and incomes. The results showed that there was not a significant difference according to employment status. However, the lowest take-up rates of the leave were among students (n=41) and indeed when students were compared to all working there was a significant difference between the two groups.

There was also a significant difference between income groups (in terms of total household incomes). The higher the incomes the larger the proportion of fathers who took parental leave, 64% of fathers in the lowest income group took parental leave as opposed to 85,1% of those in the highest income group. This is also in line with results from the Nordic research noted above.

Finally there was a significant difference between fathers who lived with the mother and those that did not. 81.9% of the former took parental leave as opposed to 59.6% of the latter. Parents that do not live together have been neglected in research on parental leave (Kiernan, 2006). As lone mothers are relatively numerous in Iceland it is very important to examine the effects that family circumstances have on up-takes of parental leave, especially if the aim is to ensure all children care from both parents.

Continuous or non-continuous parental leave

The decision on how parents divide the parental leave among themselves is a decision that is based on varied interests. They have to consider how they can best use their time to provide care for the child, how to maintain incomes in order to provide for their family, and they have to reach an agreement with employers on when and how to take their leave. Furthermore they might also take in consideration the needs of both parents and child for establishing an emotional bond. Brandth and Kvande (2003a; 2003b) studied how Norwegian fathers arranged their parental leaves. Their results showed that fathers who didn't take the leave at the same time as the mothers, thus had the primary care responsibility, focused primarily on the

needs of the child and gave it the time that it needed. They described how having the primary care responsibility increased their parenting skills and the bond between father and child. On the other hand, fathers that took their leave while the mother was working part-time described their role as being in a support role. This lead Brandth and Kvande to conclude that the best way to achieve the objectives of the Norwegian law is for fathers to be alone with the child during their parental leave.

Statistics from the Icelandic Social Insurance Institute show that fathers are more likely than mothers to divide their leaves into a number of shorter spells (Gíslason, 2007). Gíslason points out that when the parental leaves of fathers are divided up in that way the fathers become a kind of reserve carers (see also Pétursdóttir, 2004). Examination of the proportion of parents of children born in 2003 who took a continuous leaves for a duration of either three or six months reveals a clear difference between mothers and fathers.

Table 4. Mothers and fathers of firstborns that did not take paid parental leave/or did not provide information; did take non-continuous leave; continuous for 3 or 6 months.

n=873	Mothers	Fathers
No paid parental leave/or did not provide information	9,5%	25,4%
Non-continuous periods	22,0%	44,9%
Continued for 3 months	9,4%	25,8%
Continued for 6 months	59,1%	3,9%
Total	**100%**	**100%**

The analysis is based on information from parents that responded to the questions on how they divided the parental leave among themselves. This means that the proportion of respondents who answered "no leave/missing" is larger than it is in the overall sample. The pattern is nevertheless quite clear when the proportion of parents that took continuous leaves for either three or six months is examined: Mothers are far more likely than fathers to take 6 months of continuous leave (59,1% against 3,9%). Over a quarter of fathers say they took three months leave of continuous, which amounts to 35% of fathers that gave information on their parental leaves. Similarly, it is far more common for fathers to divide their leaves up into shorter spells

than it is for mothers. 45% of fathers divide their leaves compared to 22% of mothers.[4]

Many fathers go on leave during the first few weeks, a time during which most of the mothers are also on leave. They will then take the remainder of their leave once the mother's leave is over. This means that parents use the three joint months of parental leave mainly to extend the mother's leave. These findings are in general similar to those that have been found in other countries: Fathers mainly use their individual entitlements and it is highly unusual for them to take up a part of the shared leave time (Armeniaa and Gerstel, 2006; Bruning and Plantenga, 1999; Leira, 2002).

Paid work before and after the law

Haavind and Magnusson (2005) point out that one of the main rationales for parental leave quotas for fathers is the believe that they will do less paid work and become more involved in housework and childcare after the leave period. However, after examining the distribution of paid and unpaid work between Nordic mothers and fathers they concluded:

> ... that change is yet to come. In families with children, it is still usually only the mother who adjusts to the demands of family life by working fewer hours outside the family. Apart from brief parental leave periods, fathers go on working full-time as before. And, not surprising in view of this pattern, recent time-use surveys show that women still do most of the housework and childcare. The discrepancies between men and women have decreased over time, but this seems to be more because many women have decreased their hours of housework, than because of any marked increases in men's hours of housework" (2005, 231-232).

The research did not include questions about housework but it provides information about labour market participation and hours in paid work of both parents the year before the child was born and for the three following years.

Parents' participation in paid labour is only a crude indicator for the situation of mothers and fathers in the labour market. Still, examining this

[4] The official statistics are quite different, see further chapter one. Partly the difference can be explained by the number of respondents that do not provide information about the continuity of their leave taking and partly the parents may answer differently when asked after the leave (they did not follow their plans in the application). However the main pattern is similar: Most mothers take the leave in longer periods and the fathers tend to divide their leaves into shorter periods.

indicator gives a hint to whether the new laws have lead to changes in this respect. The results show that the gender gap regarding both the number of parents in work and working hours is smaller after the implementation of the law. Figure 2 (below) shows the percentage of mothers and fathers of children born 1997 and 2003 in work a year before the birth of the child and until the child is three years old.

Both surveys showed that pregnancy had substantial effects on the participation of mothers in paid labour. The former survey showed that 76,4% of mothers (n=887) and 83,7% of fathers (n=820) were engaged in paid labour a year before birth. The proportion of mothers who worked declined gradually till the time of birth. The employment rates of both parents prior to childbirth were quite similar in the latter survey. 84% of fathers (n=799) and 75,6% of mothers (n=853) were engaged in paid labour.

The surveys also reveal an almost identical pattern for employment rates of mothers after childbirth. Very few mothers work during the first three months following childbirth (1% in the former survey and 2% in the latter). Very few mothers of children born in 1997 had returned to work 6 months after childbirth (7%) but the proportion rose rapidly after that and had reached 62% fifteen months after the child was born. At the end of the study period, 36 months after the childbirth, some 61% of mothers were in paid employment. The proportions were similar for mothers of children born in 2003. 22% of mothers had returned to paid work when the child reached seven months of age. When the children had reached the age of 10 months approximately 42% were working and the proportion was up to 62% 15 months after childbirth. The post-birth employment rates of mothers do not return to their pre-birth rates during the study period, as can be seen from figure two.

A little under 64% of fathers of children born in 1997 worked during the first month after childbirth (n=820) but the proportion had returned to its pre-birth level already during the second month after the child was born (or about 83%). On average some 77% of the fathers were working during the first three months following childbirth. In the latter survey there are considerable changes among fathers relative to the first survey. The proportion of fathers who are employed fell from 84% to 31% between the surveys. Three months after the child was born the proportion had risen back to 68% and rises gradually thereafter. One year after childbirth the proportion was up to 84%, i.e. the pre-birth level.

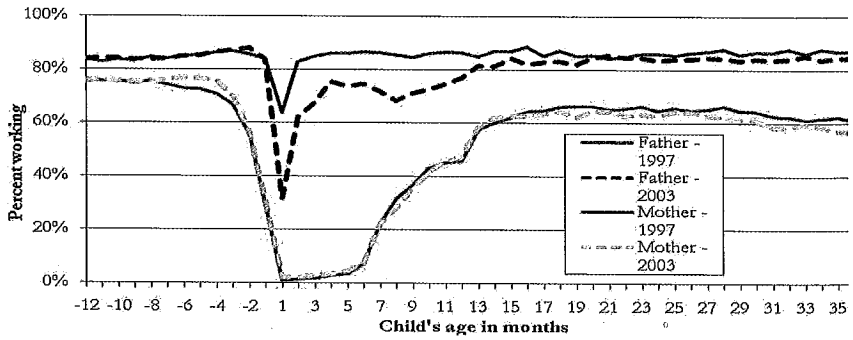

Figure 2. Percent of parents of firstborns 1997 and 2003 in work, year before birth and until the child is three years old

It is clear that the gap between fathers and mothers is smaller in the latter survey than in the first one, as could be expcepted given the increase in take up of paid parental leave among fathers. In the first survey the employment rates of fathers return to pre-birth levels 1-2 months after the child is born. In the second survey this does not happen until 13-15 months after childbirth.

When considering the proportion of mothers who engage in paid work it is important to remember that many mothers withdraw from the labour market a second time because of a second childbirth. Considering only mothers that did not have a second child during the period (only one child in 1997) covered by the first survey, the proportion of working mothers reached the same level as 5 months prior to childbirth only some 2 years after the birth (70%). The results are quite similar in the second survey. The rates of mothers in work for same group (only one child in 2003) in the latter study reached 70% some 25 months after they gave birth and is fairly stable at that rate for the remainder of the study.

With regards to the employment status of parents it is worth noting that a sizable proportion of respondents were students. 10% of mothers and 11% of fathers were students in the month following childbirth in the first survey, and 10% of fathers and 8% of mothers in the second survey. The proportion rises gradually as the children mature. When the children in the first survey reached the age of two 17,4% of mothers and 9% of fathers were studying, compared with 18% of mothers and 7% of fathers in the latter survey. The Icelandic welfare state does in fact provide incentives for students to have children, as students are entitled to paid parental leaves (see Chapter 1) and

child supplements to their student loans in addition to subsidized day-care (Björnberg, Ólafsson and Eydal, 2006). Thus, at any given time there are very few parents that aren't either students or employed during the period under study.

Here it is important to recall that the employment rates of Icelandic women (and mothers) are among the highest in the OECD, or approximately 80% (op. cit.). It is clear that although the gap between men and women has been diminishing, childbirth still has a greater impact on women's employment rates. The European Union has adopted the objective that women's labour market participation in all the membership countries will reach 60% by 2010. This goal has long since been reached in Iceland (Gíslason, 2006; Périvier and O´Dorchai, 2003). The Icelandic government did not establish any such goals in absolute numbers when the laws of parental leave were passed but it is clear that they have had the effect of reducing the gap between mothers and fathers in this sense.

Working-hours

The proportion of working parents gives certain indications but the number of work-hours is no less important. The first survey showed that the number of hours worked was higher among fathers than among mothers, both prior to and following childbirth. The pattern is similar in the latter survey, but a comparison of the results shows that fathers are in general working fewer hours in the latter survey and mothers are working more hours after the birth, as can be seen in figure three. It is interesting that of those fathers of children born 1997 who did work during the three months following childbirth some 82% worked more than 40 hours per week and 40% of those worked 51 hours or more. In the latter survey at the same point in time, three months after the childbirth, 75% of fathers worked 40 hours per week or more and of those some 34% worked more than 51 hours. The mean hours of work of mothers in the first survey (children born 1997) were around 41.6 hours per week during the 12 months prior to childbirth and 34.8 hours per week three years after childbirth. In the second survey (children born 2003) these numbers were 40.1 hours and 36.7 hours of average, respectively. The working hours of fathers have also changed between the two surveys. Fathers of children born 1997 worked 48.2 hours pr. week when the child was 12 months and 48.4 when the child was three years old. The fathers of children born in 2003 worked 46,0 and 46.7 hours at same time points.

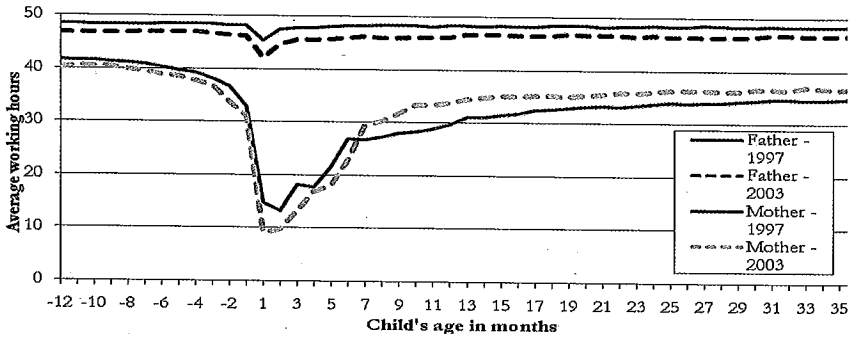

Figure 3. Number of working hours of parents of firstborns 1997 and 2003 in work, year before birth and until the child is three years old.

The results show that the difference between the hours that mothers and fathers work per week when the child is three years old has declined. In the former survey it was 13.6 hours but in the latter one it was down to 10 hours. While this is in line with general trends in the labour market where men's work-hours have been falling and women's hours have been rising the trend in this data is far more pronounced than that shown by general labour market surveys. Gíslason (2006) has shown that the difference between men's and women's work-hours has declined from 16,8 hours in 1991 to 12,2 hours in 2005, or more than four and a half hour over a fifteen year period. Figure three shows that the trends in the data are similar in magnitude but they occur over a shorter period of time (3.6 hours in 6 years). The changes between the two surveys are in line with the goals of the legislation, i.e. reduced gender gap in work-hours. Despite these changes it is clear that parents of young children continue to have long work-hours. That is something that requires attention from both the government and employers and labour unions, if the given goals that the government has set itself in terms of providing both parents with the opportunity of balancing work and family life are to be achieved.

Examining whether parents who worked 40 hours per week or more also had a spouse that had long work-hours, we found that when children born in 1997 had reached the age of three 428 (out of 874 total respondents) mothers had a spouse that worked more than 40 hours per week. Of those mothers 18,7% had workweeks of over 40 hours (n=80). The table below compares the numbers of fathers and mothers from both surveys. The

numbers reflect the number of parents that worked more than 40 hours per week one year before childbirth, 12 and 36 months after birth.

Table 5. Number of fathers and mothers of children born 1997 and 2003 that worked more than 40 hours per week and % that had spouse that also worked more than 40 hours per. week

	12 months before birth		12 months after birth		36 months after birth	
	n that had spouse that worked + 40 hours	% that also worked +40 hours	n that had spouse that worked + 40 hours	% that also worked +40 hours	n that had spouse that worked + 40 hours	% that also worked +40 hours
1997						
Mothers	404	51,4% (n=211)	416	9,1% (n=38)	428	18,7% (n=80)
Fathers	255	82,8% (n=211)	50	76% (n=38)	98	81,7% (n=80)
2003						
Mothers	480	44,2% (n=212)	422	11,8% (n=50)	477	18,5% (n=88)
Fathers	261	81,2% (n=212)	73	68,5% (n=50)	116	75,8% (n=88)

The table shows that it is far more common for fathers to work more than 40 hours per week, which is in line with expectations. A very large proportion of fathers with such long work-hours also have spouses that have as long work-hours (51,4% in 1997 and 44,2% in 2003) a year before the birth of the child in question. The mothers then reduce their work-hours and only 19% of them had returned to their pre-birth work-hours by the time the child had reached the age of three. Fathers that have a spouse that works over 40 hours per week are less numerous but a larger proportion of them work equally long hours. Women's work-hours are affected less than those of the fathers by the age of the child. Further research is needed on how parents of children under the age of three, who both work long hours, organize their daily life.

But how do parents organize the care for their children? The following section covers how parents from both surveys divided care-work between them.

Care from both parents?

Respondents were asked to describe how they divided care-work between them during both nights and days for every month from the time the child was born and until it was three years old.[5] Day time care for children born in 1997 fell to the mother in 89% of all cases (n=879) and it was evenly divided between the parents in little over 10% of cases. The involvement of fathers fell from the second month onward and during the first six months it was almost always the mothers that cared for the children (94%). Thereafter the division of care grows more even as the child grows older. During the next six months (child aged 7-12 months) the proportion of those that divided the care equally grew (to 19% of all cases). During the first year this proportion was 12% on average. During the second year it rose to 29%, and during the third year it reached 34% on average. The proportion of fathers who were primary caregivers was negligible for the whole period under study (ranging from 0,3% to 2,4%; see Figure 4).

The figure of daytime care changed considerably between surveys. Children born in 2003 received more care from their fathers than those born in 1997. The mother was the primary caregiver in 66% of cases during the first month but it was evenly divided in 34% of cases. The proportion of children being cared for by both parents falls gradually after the first month, a pattern similar to that in the earlier survey, and reaches a low point when the children are six months old (15%, which is still 50% more than during the first month in the earlier survey). As in the earlier survey the proportion of shared caring grows steadily after the sixth month and towards the end of the period (month 33) there are as many children who receive care from both parents as there are who receive care primarily from their mother. The proportion of children for whom the fathers are primary caregivers is still quite low, but there has at the same time been an increase between the two surveys. It peaks at 8,1% when the children are 9 months old, as can be seen in figure four, which is a considerable increase over the numbers in the earlier survey.

[5] The question was. How was the child's care at home divided between the parents the first 36 months during the daytime and night-time? There were five options of answers: Mother/father cared completely or mostly for the child, care was dived equally between the parents. For this table, care mostly and completely is combined.

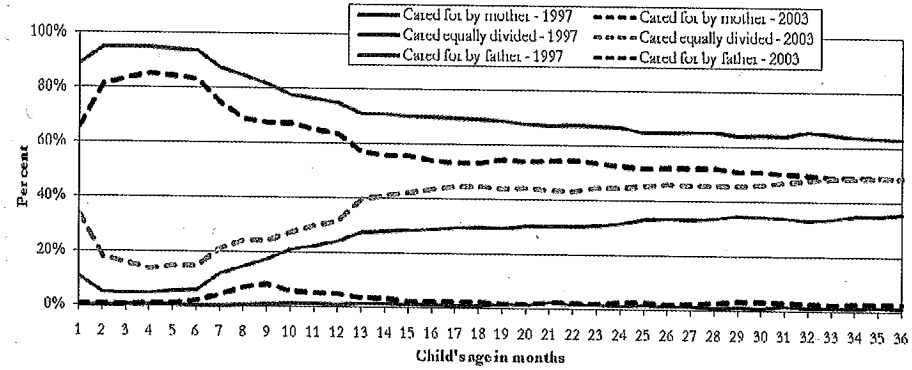

Figure 4. How did parents of firstborns in 1997 and 2003 divide daytime care from birth till the age of three

The figure above shows that the share of care shouldered by fathers rises considerably after the laws of parental leave were passed. It should be kept in mind, however, that this figure shows all parents who were asked. There was, however, a sizable group that did not take parental leave and did not live with their children or who did not share custody with the mother, as was noted above. A comparable figure reflecting only those parents who lived together would show a similar trend but the change would start much sooner. When the children are 15 months old the group that enjoys care from both parents had become larger than the one for whom the mothers were primary caregivers.

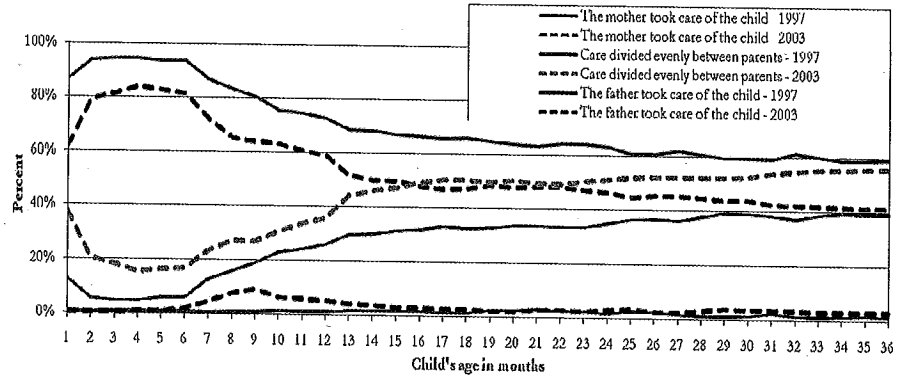

Figure 5. How did cohabiting and married parents of firstborns in 1997 and 2003 divide day-time care from birth till the age of three

The results of the analysis of night-time care for the same group of parents, two parent families, are quite similar. The contribution of care from the fathers shows a similar growth-pattern as that for daytime care, but the care during night-time is more equally shared compared to day time care in both surveys. The figure below shows how parents divided care-work during the night.

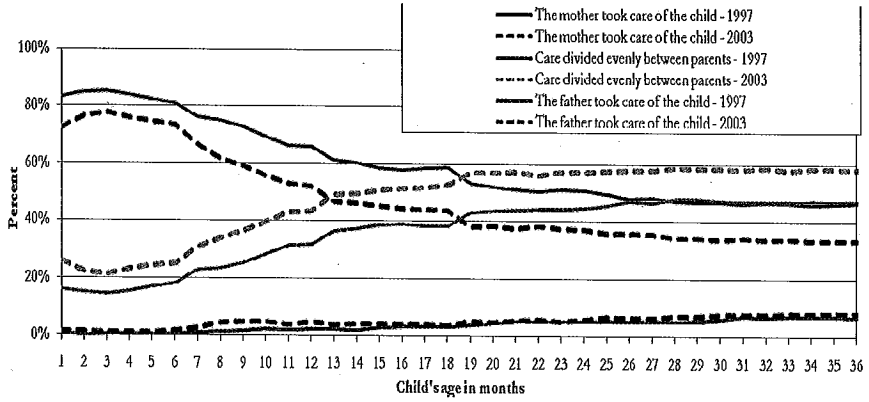

Figure 6. How did cohabiting and married parents of firstborns in 1997 and 2003 divided care during the night-time from birth till the age of three

The pattern in Figure 6 is very similar to that shown in the preceding figures, though it should be noted that the parents from the second survey start sharing care-work during the night earlier than they do during the day, or by the twelfth month compared to the fifteenth. If the analysis for the latter survey would be based on all parents that responded to the survey then this change would occur when the child is around 18 months old. By that time some 49% of parents divide night-time care-work equally.

When the children born 2003 reach the age of three 58,2% of parents divide night-time care-work equally while the mother is the primary caregiver in 33,6% of cases. This is a considerable change from the earlier survey in which mothers remained primary caregivers during night-time throughout the study period. By the end of the period the mothers were primary caregivers in 52,4% of cases and parents shared night-time care in 42,3% of cases.

It is also of interest to consider whether the extent to which fathers make use of their parental leave is related to their contribution of care for their children. O´Brien et. al (2007, p. 376) points out that the rule has been that if

given the opportunity to take part in care of their newborns fathers will tend to be more involved in their children's care in future. Swedish studies in the 1990s showed that fathers that took parental leave were more likely to share the general responsibility for childcare with the mothers than fathers who did not take leave (e.g. Haas, 1992) and more recent studies have also supported such results. Hook (2006) compared data on men's unpaid work from 44 time use studies in 20 countries spanning from 1965-2003 and concludes that it increases in accordance with women's employment hours, length of parental leave and men's eligibility to take parental leave.[6] Furthermore, Tanaka and Waldfogel (2007) addressed the issue and used data from the UK Millennium Study of cohort of children age 8-12 months, (n=18.819) and their results shows that there are significant differences between fathers that do and do not take parental leave regarding their involvement in the care of their children. The fathers that did take parental leave are more involved in three out of four types of care activities examined. Similar results were obtained for fathers in the United States. Nepomnyaschy and Walfogel (2007) used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Birth Cohort, a panel study of over 10.000 children born in 2001 in order to investigate the involvement of fathers in care. From that sample they used 7.241 fathers that were working during the period in question and living with the children in two-parent families. They conclude that the fathers that take at least two weeks of from work are more involved in their children's care nine months after the birth than fathers that take less time off.

In light of these results it is interesting to see if there was a relation between the Icelandic fathers take up ratios and their involvement in care during the first three years. The results show that there is a significant difference between the involvement of fathers in the daily care of their children depending on how long paid parental leave they take. The fathers were divided into four groups: those who did not take parental leave (n=147), those who took less than three months (n=105), three months (n=368) or more than three months (n=244) and then their share in daily care in the home for the children was calculated.

The results can be seen in the figure below. It shows that the proportion of care provided by mothers is largest when the fathers do not take any parental leave and smallest when the fathers take three months or more of parental leave.

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6 Iceland was not included in the study.

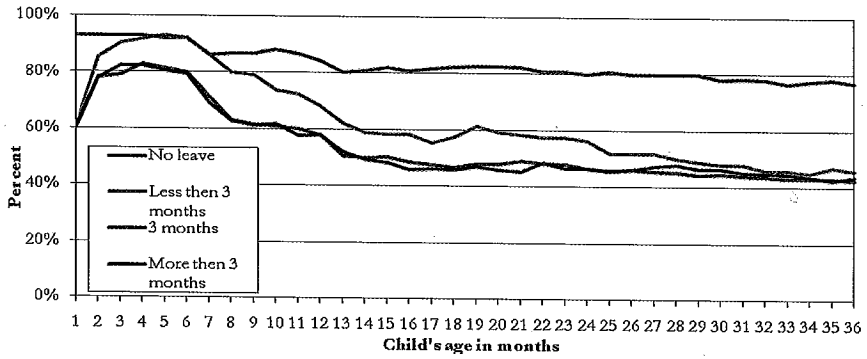

Figure 7. Proportion of mothers of firstborns 2003 that are the primary care-providers during daytime from birth till the age of three - sorted by the length of father's parental leave.

The difference between the groups was statistically significant throughout the study period, i.e. not only for the duration of the parental leave. Mothers are primary caregivers of children by the age of three in 77% of cases when the father did not take parental leave but only in 43,8% of cases where fathers were on leave for at least three months. The results for care during the night-time were similar.

While the statistical patterns are quite clear they require careful interpretation as it is quite likely that they are in part the product of a selection effect in that fathers that want to prioritize their children and who want to spend more time with their children are also more likely to take longer parental leaves. As O'Brian, Brandth and Kvande point out (2007, 382) "Leave taking cannot be viewed in isolation or in purely quantitative terms as it is embedded in a complex web of parenting styles, parental work practices, infant behaviour and wider socioeconomic factors…". Mindful of this caveat it nevertheless seems safe to conclude that parental leave, in interaction with other factors, increases the probability that fathers provide as much care as mothers, even after the parental leave is over. It would be interesting to gather further data on the two samples and attempt to measure the respective contribution of care by both parents e.g. at the age of twelve. It would also be interesting to examine the gender-role attitudes and attitudes towards gender equality of both parents and children in order to gain further understanding of interplay of values and daily habits of the parents in question.

Once the parental leave is over there ensues what can be termed a "care-gap", as was discussed above. During this period parents have to bridge a gap between parental leave and day-care. Results on how parents arranged the day-care for their children during the first three years are presented in the next section.

Day-care of the children born 1997 and 2003 until three years old

The parents were asked about regular daily care of their children from birth to age of three. In 1997 the youngest children are most usually cared for by grandparents, which is interesting when the fact that most Icelanders work till the age of 70 years is kept in mind (Eydal and Ólafsson, 2008). By the age of nine month the proportion of children in family day-care exceeds the number of children cared for by grandparents. Similarly when the children are 19 months old the number of children in day-care institutions exceeds the number of children in family day-care. From that time point onwards the proportion of children in day-care institutions grows rapidly and 68% of the children are enrolled in formal day-care institutions by the age of two.

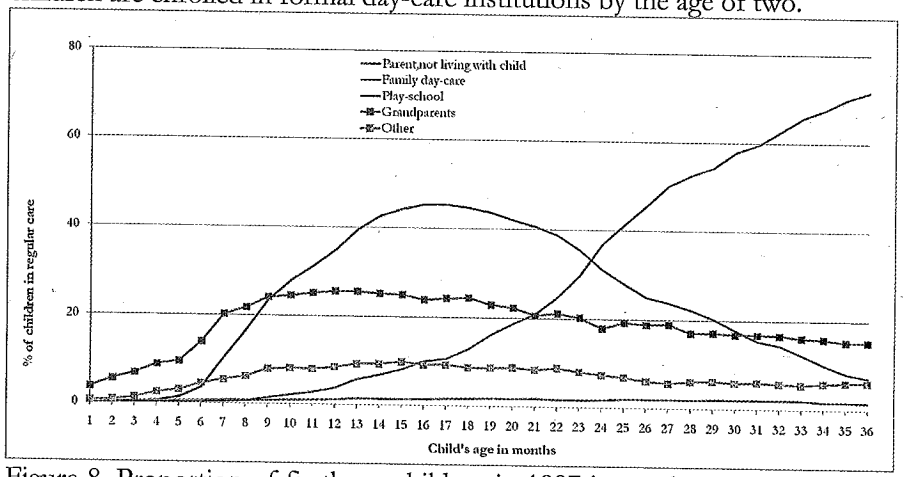

Figure 8. Proportion of firstborn children in 1997 in regular care from birth to age of three.

When the children are 2 years they spend on average about 10 hours pr. week in preschools but at the age of 3 around 22 hours.

An inspection of care for children born in 2003 shows a similar pattern of care providers as that for children born in 1997, i.e. the grandparents are the largest providers of day-care early on. Family day-care gradually replaces the grandparents and eventually the children move on to play-schools. The change between surveys is mainly that children start play-school earlier and in total a larger proportion of children get into play-schools.

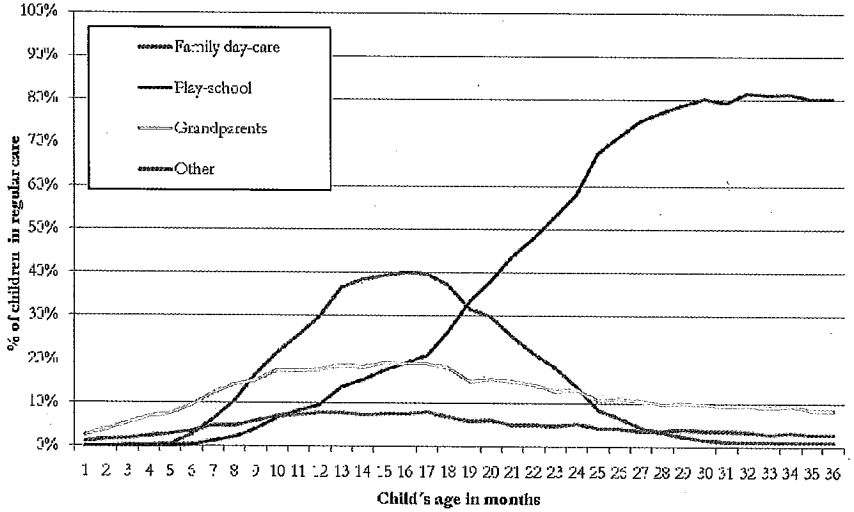

Figure 9. Proportion of firstborn children in 2003 in regular care from birth to age of three.

Hence in 2003 the number of hours in care in day-care centres is much higher than among the children born in 1997, which is in line with the general trend in volumes of day-care. Not only has there been an increase in number of placements but also in available number of hours for each child. Thus a larger portion of children are in full-time day-care than before (Eydal and Ólafsson, 2008). There is a corresponding drop in the hours in family day-care.

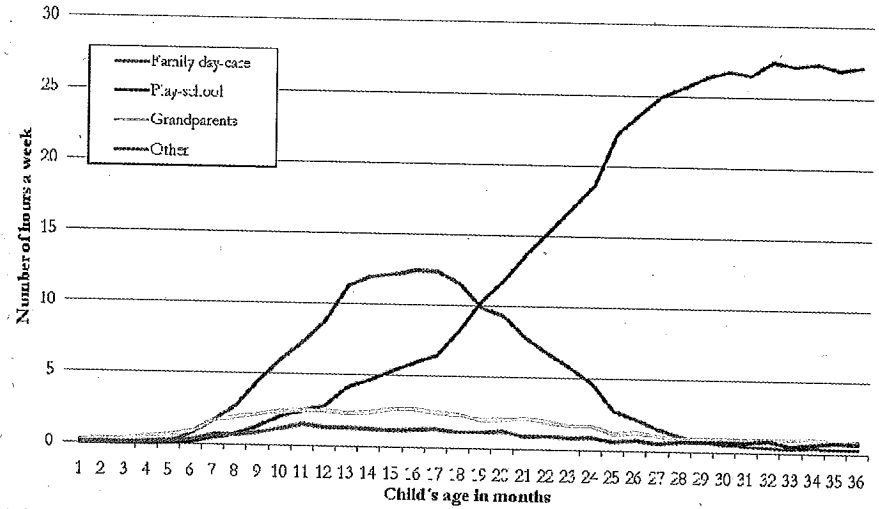

Figure 10. Children born in 2003: Number of hours in regular care from birth to the age of three.

The parents were also asked if they had needed support from family or friends regarding the care of their children for shorter period, e.g. in case of sickness or shorter travels of the parents. The answers show that in both groups approximately 50% of the parents had asked for help and got it. Smaller groups had not asked for the help they needed (3.3 /1.8) and few had asked but without success (0.7/1.1).

Table 6. Did you need support from relatives or friends for care of the child for shorter periods? Parents of firstborns in 1997 and 2003

	1997	2003
Yes I got help	50.2%	49.2%
Yes but I did not ask for help	3.3%	1.8%
Yes but I did not get the help I asked for	0.7%	1.1%
No	45.8%	47.9%
n=	873	828

Thus, there were no significant differences between the answers of the parents in the two surveys. More importantly there were absolutely no differences between the answers to the question whether they would have liked to have more care support or care services between the two surveys.

Table 7. Parents of firstborn children in 1997 and 2003: Did you want more care support or care services?

	1997	2003
No	68.3%	68.3%
Yes	31.7%	31.7%
n	86.5	87.4

Thus, despite the great changes regarding both length of paid parental leave and volumes of day-care that have taken place between the first and the second survey, increased rights to paid parental leave and increased volumes of public day-care, the surveys show exactly the same results.

Deven and Carrette, (2004, 11) point out that while children are important stakeholders "an explicit child perspective is a common omission in related research and policy. Moreover, statistical data rarely take the child as a unit of analysis." However, the importance of parental leave policies for children's health and wellbeing is well documented (e.g. Kamerman, 2006; Tanaka, 2005). One of the factors influencing children's health and other outcomes is the length of breast-feeding. The World Health Organization recommends 6 months exclusive breast-feeding and continuation up to two years of age (World Health Organization 2002 in Galtry and Callister, 2005). The recommendations of Icelandic health care authorities are similar (Aradóttir, 2004; Ívarsdóttir and Bachmann, n.d.).

There is a lack of recent research about breast-feeding in Iceland but Miðstöð heilsuverndar barna (Gunnlaugsson, 2005) conducted a research on the length of breast-feeding periods for children born 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002. The results show that at the age of 6 months 65% of the children were breast-fed but 89% did get other food as well.[7]

7 All health care centres were asked to collect information about length of breastfeeding and data was collected on 62% of the children.

Table 8. Breastfeeding: children born in Iceland 1999-2002 % of children breastfed at the age of one week, two, four, six, eight and 12 months

Age of child	n	% only breast feeding	% breast feeding
1 week	1210	92.8	97.2
4 months	1185	46.0	78.4
6 months	1180	13.1	65.8
12 months	1157	0.2	15.6

Figures from Gunnlaugsson, 2005

Unfortunately the question about the length of breast-feeding was only asked in the latter survey among parents of children born in 2003. The parents were asked how many months the child had been breast-fed.

Table 9. Breastfeeding: First born 2003, length of breastfeeding period

	n	%
Less than month	12	1.4
1 month	39	4.7
2 months	42	5.1
3 months	51	6.1
4 months	38	4.6
5 months	38	4.6
6 months	88	10.6
7 months	64	7.7
8 months	90	10.8
9 months	100	12.0
10 months	57	6.9
11 months	43	5.2
12 months	61	7.3
13 months	23	2.8
14 months	25	3.0
Longer than 14 months	59	7.1
Total	830	100

It is interesting that a large majority of children are breast-fed for more than six months (74,3%), which is somewhat higher than the proportion found by Gunnlaugsson (65% of children were still being breast-fed when they were six months old in his study). We can only speculate about why the length of the breast-feeding period seems to have increased after the law came into force, but one possible explanation might be that the opportunity for parents to be on parental leave together during the first month after birth, and the increased flexibility that they enjoy, somehow facilitates breast-feeding. The different design of the studies, the fact that Gunnlaugsson included all mothers whereas only mothers that were having their first child were included in the present study means that the results are not comparable. But nevertheless it seems safe to conclude that the changes of the parental leave schemes have not resulted in shorter breast-feeding period, and if anything there is quite an increase between the studies above.

Comparative studies have shown a relationship between the length of the paid parental leave and duration of breast feeding, e.g. Galtry (2003) found out that at the age of six months 29 per cent of American mothers and 28 per cent of British mothers breast-fed, compared to 73 per cent of Swedish mothers.[8] Thus in light of these results the Icelandic mothers are doing very well, since their total rights to paid parental leave are quite lower than the Swedish mothers.

A number of studies have found an association between length of leave of absence from work after childbirth and the duration of time off work and breast-feeding duration, thus the longer the leave the longer the breast-feeding period (e.g. Berger, Hill and Waldfogel, 2005; Galtry and Callister, 2005). When the length of breast-feeding of Icelandic children born in 2003 is examined in light of when their mothers started to work the conclusion is that the length of leave of absence from the labour market did not appear to have impact on how long the Icelandic children born in 2003 were breast-fed. The following table shows the length of breast-feeding charted against the timing of the mother's return to paid work. It is interesting that there was no significant difference between the groups.

[8] Galtry (2003) points out that socio-cultural support and labour market/health/early childhood policies are important if a country wants to reach high rates of both breastfeeding and women's employment.

Table 10. Mothers of firstborns 2003: Time of returning to work and the length of breastfeeding

When does the mother return to paid work?	Length of breastfeeding
1-8 months (n=147)	7.5 months
9-12 months (n=172)	7.9 months
13-15 months (n=190)	8.7 months
16-18 months (n=63)	8.6 months
19-36 months (n=172)	8.3 months

There were no significant differences between mothers that started to work and those who did not and neither were there any differences between mothers working full-time or part-time. Thus, for the group of mothers of firstborns in 2003 the conclusion is that the length of absence from labour market did not influence the length of the breast-feeding period. Thus these results are not in line with the studies mentioned above that concluded that the duration of time off work affected the breast-feeding duration (e.g. Berger et al., 2005; Galtry et al., 2005). Hence, the Icelandic results challenge existing theories. Given the high importance that health authorities, not only in Iceland but also internationally, give to breast-feeding for at least 6 months it is important to study further how the Icelandic mothers manage to combine breast-feeding and active labour market participation.

Conclusion

This chapter reports analyses of the effects of the new Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental leave by comparing how parents of young children balanced labour market participation and care of their children before and after the legislation took effect. The analysis is based on results from two surveys conducted among all parents of firstborns in 1997 and 2003.

The overall conclusion of the study is that parents are dividing paid work and the care of their young children more equally after the law came into effect, thus the development is towards the twofold goal of the law on paid parental leave from 2000. The results show that the gender gap regarding both the number of parents in work and working hours is smaller after the implementation of the law. The number of fathers in work is lower after

birth in the latter study while the number of mothers remained similar in both studies. Also, the gap in working hours between parents is smaller after birth, thus mothers increased their number of working hours between studies. Once the child has reached the age of three the gap between the parens in work-hours has narrowed between the two studies by four hours, from 13 hours to 9 hours. While this is in line with the general trend in labout market the change among the parents is realatively larger. The care of the child is also divided more equally among the parents after the law came into force. More fathers are actively engaged in their children's care and not only during their leave taking periods but also until the child reaches the age of three. Furthermore the fathers that do take parental leave are significantly more involved in their children's care than fathers that do not take leave. The length of the leave period also matters. Furthermore results on length of breast-feeding showed that 74,3% of children are breast-fed for 6 months or more and that neither their mothers return to labour market nor the timing of the return did affect the length of the breast-feeding period.

The studies provide insights into what groups of fathers are not using their entitlements to paid parental leave; fathers with low incomes, students, and fathers that do not live with their children are over-represented in this group. This provides opportunities for government to increase counselling services for parents in order to ensure all children care from both parents.

Furthermore this chapter examined the care policies and the care options the parents had after the parental leave. There has been a constant increase in care support in Iceland and both the paid parental leave and public day-care has been increased in volume. Children born in 2003 get a place in pre-school earlier than the children born in 1997 and they get to stay for longer hours. However the overview of the care policies and the comparison to the other Nordic countries revealed a care gap. Thus the paid parental leave is still shorter than in the other Nordic countries. Furthermore, all the Nordic countries, except Denmark, provide some kind of home care allowance in addition to paid parental leave. Icelandic parents are left to bridge the gap between the paid parental leave and day-care. They use various methods, help from grandparents, friends and family, and family day-care is often mentioned.

However, since autumn 2006, when the children in the latter study were almost all three years old, some of the larger municipalities in Iceland have started to pay cash grants for childcare in those instances when the children are not enrolled in day-care. These schemes are quite different in character. One of the arguments for implementing such schemes on a local level is that

the municipality in question was forced to make such arrangements while waiting for the state to extend the parental leave to one year (Einarsdóttir and Ólafsdóttir, 2007). In December 2006, changes in tax legislation made such payments tax-free (Fjármálaráðuneyti, 2006). During 2007, more municipalities' implemented cash for care grants and Reykjavik, by far the biggest municipality in Iceland, will implement cash grants, service insurance, for parents waiting for day-care in autumn 2008 (Borgarbörn, 2008).

Keeping in mind the critique that the cash for care schemes have received in the other Nordic countries and the fact that they are used mainly by mothers makes it difficult to see such schemes as policies in line with the goals of equal participation of both parents in work and care (e.g. Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006a; Finch, 2006). Hence while the local policies on day-care services are supportive to the aim of the Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave (no. 95/2000) the policies of the same local authorities on home care allowances can hardly bee seen as supportive to that goal. It must be kept in mind, however, that most municipalities have emphasised expanding the availability of play-school places but many of them have had difficulties meeting that goal because of staff shortages.

Iceland has in a relatively short time implemented a scheme of paid parental leave that other countries look to, pioneering the independent entitlements of fathers to parental leave and for enacting legislation that promotes the involvement of both parents in caring for their children. The results of this analysis clearly show that there has been a fundamental change in the division of care-work between mothers and fathers. The policy of the present government is to extend the duration of the parental leave. If the implementation will continue to emphasise the entitlements of fathers then there are reasons to expect that Iceland will be among the first countries to realise the rights of children to care from both parents in practice.

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6.

Summary and conclusions

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This book has provided an overview of key research on the Icelandic law on parental and paternity/maternity leave. It has covered a wide range of issues and addressed them through diverse data and methodologies. What remains is to sum it all up and to see if it allows us to draw a coherent set of conclusions about the effects of the parental leave and to identify unanswered questions. There are a number of ways to approach this task. In what follows the focus will be on two effects that allow us to address simultaneously the two objectives of the law, i.e. children's rights to care from both parents and gender equality. The two effects we consider are the gendered division of labour, on the one hand, and gender attitudes, on the other. But before moving on to those it may be useful to review the content of the law and the context in which it was implemented.

Background and the content of the law

Iceland was a laggard compared to the other Nordic countries when it came to developing entitlements to parental leave. This was so despite having comparatively high fertility rates coupled with some of the highest employment rates and the longest working hours of both men and women in the industrialised world, which is something of a puzzle as Garðarsdóttir pointed out. In the year 2000 the Icelandic legislature took bold steps to remedy this situation by extending the parental leave and introducing relatively long non-transferable entitlements to both parents.

The new law stipulated that 1) the total period of the parental leave would be extended incrementally from six to nine months; 2) three months were earmarked to the father, three to the mother, and three months that