

PARENTAL LABOUR ARRANGEMENT DURING PARENTAL LEAVE: GENDER ASPECT

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Abstract

At present, in many countries, spouses may share parental leave between each other or take it simultaneously. Researchers argue that the involvement of both parents in child rearing positively influences child's development, the climate in the family, and mother's physical and emotional state. Our study aims to explore the arrangement of parental labour within the family during parental leave. We held a large survey of mothers and fathers whose families at the time of the study were eligible for parental leave. The survey involved 1000 respondents from 80 regions of Russia. We obtained the following results: 1. There is an obvious imbalance in the distribution of parental responsibilities between family members—the greatest part of household and child rearing functions is shouldered by women. 2. Almost half of women surveyed are not satisfied with the allocation of parental load between family members during parental leave. 3. More than half of women surveyed claim that the weak involvement of fathers in childcare is due to their high workload on the labour market. Our results may be used to improve the existing design of parental leave in Russia and to encourage a more proactive contribution of fathers to child rearing.

Key words: parental labour, parental leave, division of labour, leave-takers, gender equality

JEL Code: J13, J18

Introduction

For many years, society was dominated by a common gender contract where men acted as breadwinners and women as housekeepers (Chesley & Flood, 2016). Traditionally, the head of the family was entrusted to find income and maintain the family. The woman, as a rule, was responsible for everyday life and childrearing. The middle of the last century saw the beginning of the active emancipation of women; they became increasingly involved in economic activities, but still continued to do most of the housework.

According to many researchers, eventually, traditional gender stereotypes about the roles of men and women gradually began to fade into the past (Pfitzner et al., 2018). Men became more and more involved in the housework and childrearing; there appeared new models of fatherhood—"new fatherhood", "responsible fatherhood", etc. (Doherty et al., 1998;

Lengersdorf & Meuser, 2016). However, not all countries made such progress. For example, according to the International Labour Organisation, Russian women spend on average 200 working days a year on unpaid domestic work, which is three times more than men.

On the government level, the problem of the weak participation of fathers in children's upbringing is addressed through the transformation of parental leave policy. In particular, in recent decades, many countries have introduced so-called paternity leave or paternity quotas, which are given to fathers after the childbirth (Duvander et al., 2019; Tamm, 2019). They introduce additional flexibility that allows both parents to be on parental leave at the same time. Researchers claim that fathers' involvement in childcare in the early stages of childhood (i.e., during parental leave) has a positive impact on mothers, children, and fathers themselves. Children of "responsible fathers" are less susceptible to emotional disorders, more psychologically resilient, and demonstrate a higher level of intellectual abilities (Rollè et al., 2019). Mothers of children whose fathers are actively involved in childrearing face a lower level of risk to have postpartum depression and are less likely to experience emotional and physical overstrain (Norman et al., 2018). As for fathers themselves, they become more attentive and responsible by participating in the lives of their children (Philpott et al., 2022). Researchers argue that such fathers display a much higher level of parental competence (Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007).

Our study aims to explore the arrangement of parental labour during parental leave in Russia.

1 Data and Methods

In March-May 2022, we held a large survey of parents whose families at the time were eligible for parental leave. The survey involved 1000 respondents from 80 regions of Russia. For our research, we applied a quota sample; quotas were calculated for the federal districts of Russia (Table 1). Data was collected through the respondent search service.

Tab. 1: Distribution of respondents' quotas by federal districts of Russia

Federal districts	Quota
Central Federal District	269
Northwestern Federal District	96
Southern Federal District	113
Caucasian Federal District	69
Volga Federal District	198
Ural Federal District	84
Siberian Federal District	115
Far Eastern Federal District	56
Total	1000

Source: own elaboration

For the analysis, we selected questions related to the distribution of parental functions between spouses during parental leave and respondents' attitude to such arrangement in the family. We processed and analysed data using IBM SPSS Statistics 23.0. We also used descriptive statistics and frequency analysis.

2 Results

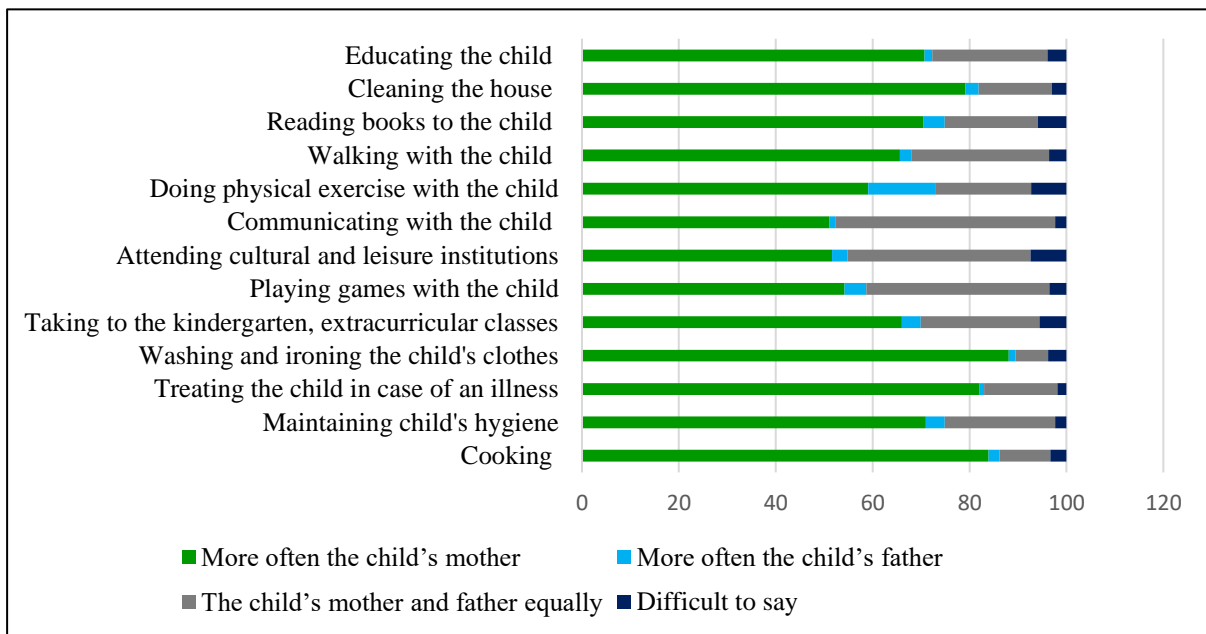
We obtained the following results:

1. The mother is still the main leave-taker in the family—in 97.4% of families, it is the mother that takes leave.

2. There is an obvious imbalance in the distribution of parental responsibilities between family members during parental leave. The greatest part of household and child rearing functions is shouldered by women (Figure 1). This is especially obvious in the case of parental household functions—in more than 80% of cases, the child's mother is in charge of cooking, washing and ironing the child's clothes, and cleaning the house. The second most popular group of parental functions, which mothers most often carry out, is related to the education and health of children—in more than 70% of cases, women control the child's hygiene, treat the child in case of illness, organise their education, read books to the child, etc.

The shift towards more active fathers participation in the children's life is observed in the process of communication with the child and the organisation of leisure. 45.4% of respondents claimed that both parents are engaged in communication with the child equally. Another 37.8% of respondents admitted that both parents play games with their child and attend cultural and leisure institutions with them.

Fig. 1: Distribution of parental functions between parents during parental leave, %

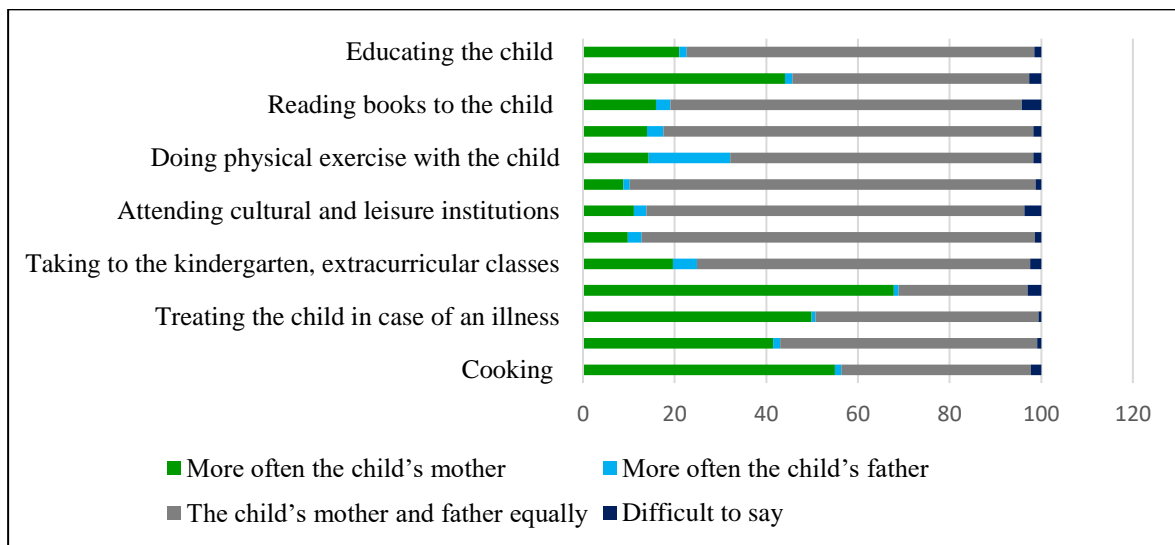


Source: own elaboration

3. We asked respondents how they would like to distribute parental functions within the family during parental leave (Figure 2). There is a pronounced shift towards a more equal participation of both parents in household responsibilities execution. The largest gap between the actual and desired distribution is observed for reading books with the child, walking with them, and educating them. Still, women are assigned the major role of fulfilling household functions (cooking, washing and ironing the clothes of the child) and treating the child.

4. 23.4% of respondents are not satisfied with the distribution of parental load between spouses during parental leave. Another 27.3% are satisfied and dissatisfied with the distribution of parental responsibilities equally. The main reason for the dissatisfaction is the insufficient involvement of the father in the child's upbringing—that was the response of 82.9% dissatisfied female respondents.

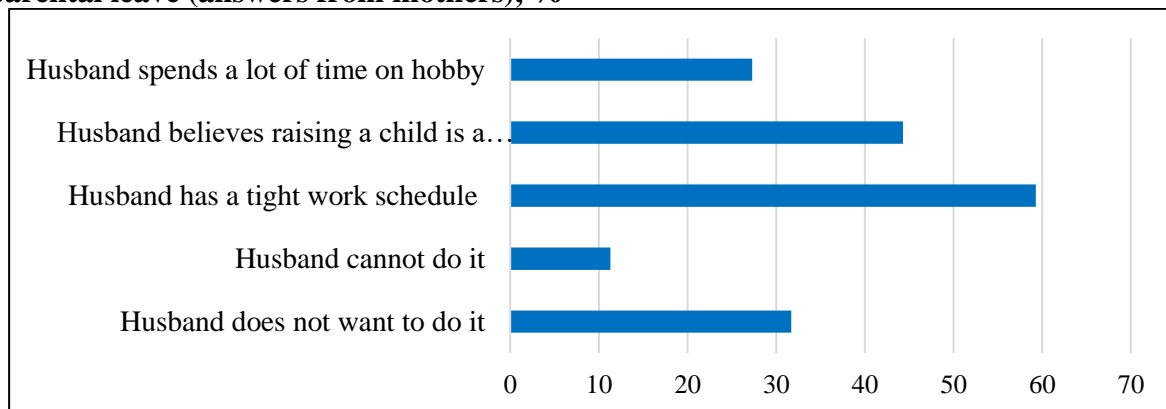
Fig. 2: Desired distribution of parental functions between parents during parental leave, %



Source: own elaboration

3. The main reason for the weak involvement of fathers in the process of raising children, according to female respondents, is their tight work schedule, which does not allow them to devote enough time to children—this stance is supported by almost 60% of mothers who reported insufficient participation of their spouse in the child’s life (Figure 3). The second most popular reason is the husband’s belief that raising a child is an exclusively female duty.

Fig. 3: Reasons for the weak husband's involvement in the child's upbringing during parental leave (answers from mothers), %



Source: own elaboration

3 Discussion

The results of our study indicate that in Russia the main leave-taker is still the mother of the child, which may be explained by economic reasons—as a rule, a spouse with a lower income uses parental leave (Miriam, 2021). In Russia, most often women have a lower income; according to Rosstat, the average salary of women is 1.38 times lower than that of men.

Our results demonstrate an obvious imbalance in the distribution of parental responsibilities between spouses during parental leave. The vast majority of activities connected with the childcare and organisation of daily life are most often performed by the mother. At the same time, respondents advocate for a need in a more equal distribution of household responsibilities between spouses. The only exception is household work (cooking, washing and ironing the child's clothes), which is still assigned to women. It is likely that the gender imbalance in the domestic sphere is due to the traditional ideas of the Russians about the role of men and women in society. This assumption is confirmed by the results of our study—almost half of the female respondents who stated the weak participation of fathers in the children's upbringing, associate it with the traditional beliefs of the spouse that a woman should take care of the child.

Respondents' dissatisfaction with the distribution of household workload in the family during parental leave is most often associated with insufficient involvement of the husband in raising children; this was stated mainly by female respondents. We assume that the introduction of mandatory paternity leave as part of the Russian parental leave system could help overcome or mitigate this problem.

Conclusion

The results of the study suggest that gender inequality still exists in the distribution of household responsibilities within the family during parental leave. Most of the work on raising children and organising everyday life is done by women. At the same time, almost half of the respondents are not satisfied with the distribution of household workload in their family—there is a need for the equal contribution of spouses to parental and household functions. The most common cause of dissatisfaction is a weak participation of the husband in the process of childrearing. Most often, female respondents explain their husband's passivity in the domestic sphere by their tight work schedule or traditional beliefs that raising a child is a mother's responsibility. Our results demonstrate that Russian society has a need to transform the existing parental leave system (in particular, to introduce paternity leave) to ensure gender equality in the domestic sphere. The results of the study can be used to improve the Russian parental leave policy as one of the government demographic policy directions.

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