

Further written evidence from the Equal Parenting Project [SPL 0057]

Also submitted [SPL0052]

Committee questions:

At what level of uptake do you think SPL would have some substantial impact on gender pay gap and wider gender equality?

While we are not aware of any large scale data on this, it is clear from existing research that SPL is most likely to have an impact on the gender pay gap and wider gender equality when Dads are taking it in larger numbers and are taking enough time to potentially be undertaking some care solo. Realistically, this suggests that you'd want to aim for at least six weeks targeted at fathers.

What are the barriers to take up?

As a policy, there are families that have benefited from it over the years and amongst women we are seeing an increase in use. However, our research shows there are many barriers that prevented uptake of SPL and these include organisational, cultural, policy, communication and financial barriers (Birkett and Forbes, 2019). Organisational barriers include line managers having a lack of knowledge of the policy as well as HR not being familiar with the policy. Cultural barriers also exist with our sample recognising gendered expectations for women to be the 'good mother' and for men to be the primary earner and family breadwinner. Policy barriers include eligibility where groups such as agency workers and self-employed fathers are not eligible to use the policy. Communication of SPL was also a barrier preventing uptake because when it is communicated within the organisation (and buried on the intranet), it is often through an abundance of text that is overwhelming for parents to understand. Finally, and importantly, the financial barrier preventing families from using SPL is significant. Our research found that families who wanted to use the policy were not able to because of what it would cost their household.

What can government do to remove some of the cultural barriers that prevent uptake of SPL?

When reforms are implemented there needs to be a concurrent social marketing campaign informed by research on barriers preventing uptake, benefits that can be experienced as well as how parents can become motivated to use it. Without this, there is a risk that the full benefits of increasing pay and accessibility would not be realised by the wider eligible population.

Undertake ongoing engagement with employers and NGOs and academics in the field to continue to share and encourage best practice.

Ensuring that discrimination protection legislation is well communicated so that fathers are not deterred to use extended leave is very important.

Can you explain why you are skeptical of the feasibility of directly replicating the much more equal parental leave systems in other countries.

There are excellent parental leave systems in other countries, such as Spain and the Nordic nations. It is important to look into these systems, understand how they operate and the impact they have, and to work closely with civil servants who have been involved in implementing them. However, we must be careful to recognise that the UK are starting from quite a different point with a very different context in terms of the history and landscape of our parental leave policies. For instance, the UK has some of the most pronounced inequalities in terms of the non-transferable leave between mothers and fathers of any OECD country, with one of the longest periods of leave, and some of the lowest pay rates. There is also a very specific policy landscape around employment and culture in terms of entrenched gendered social and cultural norms around care. It is like comparing apples and pears internationally, so it is impossible to directly enact policy transfer in this field.

Other questions:

Metrics by which success could be measured.

Listed below are some possible metrics.

1. Unpaid work in the home - hours spent by each parent, perceived division of work between parents.

It is important that the policy is measured based on the impact it has both at work but also in the home. It is important that any measurements of unpaid work in the home are broken down to determine changes in the gendered nature of unpaid work in the home. The metrics related to unpaid work should be explored in terms of the hours spent on childcare (from both parents) and the various forms this comes in, for example, education, entertaining and general childcare. Other areas of unpaid work in the home that should be explored include cooking, housecleaning, laundry, DIY maintenance and transport.

2. Gender Pay Gap

This could be explored in the form of taxable income and wage progression over time, which in turn may help with the examination of the gender pay gap.

3. Return to work rates by women

This would help to understand labour market attachment post birth/adoption.

4. Policy duration used

The amount of time being used of the policy (paid/unpaid) is important as it can reflect the accessibility of the policy, prior use of the policy (use with second child) but also a change in the norms related to the use of the policy in organisations.

5. Use of flexible working by men

With increased use of the policy it may be that more fathers are using part time working, compressed hours and jobshare. At the present time research shows that men are likely to use flexitime but increased use of other forms of flexible working may be indicative of sharing the care of children with their partner.

6. Prompted and unprompted recall of the policy

Alongside any changes in desired outcomes (e.g., unpaid work in the home, increased earnings) it is important to understand an improved awareness of the policy. Our research highlights that many parents are unaware of the policy or confuse it for something else (unpaid parental leave).

7. Increased birthrate

With increased accessibility of parental leave (and low-cost childcare) this may result in more families making the decision to have children/more children.

8. Attitudes toward gender equality/ shared care

This is an important metric but it is also important to examine this alongside existing barriers to uptake (e.g., perceived career consequences when men take longer leave).

9. Improve levels of mental health/wellbeing

This could be explored in terms of changes in paternal and maternal mental health. It is hoped that increased accessibility to parental leave by fathers will result in improved mental health of both parents.

10. Changes in perceived likelihood of penalties related to using longer leave

With increased use of the policy it is hoped that the perceived career consequences of using the policy, particularly amongst men, would decrease over time.

11. Outcomes for children

Research has shown that there are benefits to fathers taking longer parental leave over time, for example, the cognitive test scores and positive behavioral outcomes.

What are the take-up rates of paternity/parental leave rights in comparable international examples?

- We just need to be careful with any of these to recognise that these countries only record certain types of SPL use and are therefore not representative of what may occur within the UK.
- Spain is probably the most relevant as it is the most recent and shows how a parental leave system can include SPL in the move toward parental leave equality, but we need to be careful when considering any other systems for policy transfer as the UK context is very different.
- Supportive parental leave systems can reduce barriers to families having more children and potentially increase the birth rate.

- As part of the legislative changes in Spain, six weeks of leave has been made mandatory for both mothers and fathers/co-parents. It has been recognised that introducing a period of mandatory leave could “achieve the kind of cultural change which has remained elusive so far” (Fredman, 2014). In particular, it might prove to be an important step towards a much-needed change in workplace culture. This is because it would help to make men taking leave the norm. This would be particularly important in the lower-paid, more manual workforces, where men taking leave, even paternity leave, has not necessarily become the norm.
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- The UK could follow this lead very easily by equalising the entitlement with mothers, who have two weeks of compulsory maternity leave. This would mean that fathers would also have two weeks of mandatory leave. Of course, it would be very important that this leave is well paid.

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