

Workplace peers effects in the uptake of solo paternity leave in Finland

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Introduction

In general, supporting the well-being of families is often seen as the main objective of family policies. Nevertheless, as Daly (2020) states another important aim of family policies is to regulate families i.e. trying to effect for example the care and work practices within families. Recent trends in family leave policies demonstrate a shift from mother-specific to gender-neutral parental leaves, with a specific focus on father-specific paternal leaves (Daly, 2020). Finnish family leave policies mirror this trend, as recent reforms have consistently extended father-specific paternity leaves (Kellokumpu, 2007; Haataja, 2016; Miettinen & Saarikallio-Torp, 2020).

The objective of offering parental leaves earmarked for fathers is to reshape caregiving dynamics within families. This shift also aims to increase maternal employment rates and foster stronger bonds between fathers and their children. Despite these goals, the uptake of father-specific leaves remains relatively low, with fathers often taking significantly shorter leaves than mothers, even in countries with generous leave entitlements (Haas & Hwang, 2019a; Reimer, 2020). In Finland, although approximately 75% of children born in 2016 had fathers using some parental leave, as much as 88% of parental leave days in 2022 were taken by mothers (Kela, 2023).

The low uptake of father-specific leaves has spurred numerous studies examining factors influencing fathers' leave utilization. Previous research highlights the importance of leave design, showing that fathers are more likely to use leaves earmarked for them on a "use-it-or-lose-it" basis (Cools et al., 2015; Dearing, 2016; Mussino et al., 2019; Rosgaard & Ejrnaes, 2019; Kvande & Brandth, 2020). Individual-level factors, such as higher education and partners' educational levels, have also been found to influence leave uptake (Eerola et al., 2019; Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2019, Saarikallio-Torp & Miettinen, 2021). Workplace and organizational culture, as well as societal norms and gender role expectations, contribute to fathers' leave utilization (Bygren & Duvander, 2006; Eriksson, 2018; Haas & Hwang, 2019; Närvi & Salmi, 2019; Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Evertsson et al., 2018; Kaufman, 2018; Pfau-Effinger, 2023; van Gasse et al., 2023).

So far, little attention has been given to the role of peer effects, especially within the workplace, in shaping fathers' leave utilization. Workplace peer effects can shape social norms and gender role expectations, affecting workplace culture. Observing fellow fathers taking leave without adverse career consequences can reassure fathers who fear potential costs (Harvey & Tremblay, 2020). Conversely, a lack of peer role models, particularly among management, can hinder leave uptake, and negative peer effects may discourage fathers from taking leave (Harvey & Tremblay, 2020; Moran & Koslowski, 2019). Existing research on peer effects yields mixed results, with some studies suggesting their importance (Dahl et al., 2014, using Norwegian data) and others finding no significant peer effects (Tallås Ahlén, 2022, using Swedish data).

This study aims to investigate the direct and cumulative indirect workplace peer effects on Finnish fathers' leave-taking, with a focus on the father's quota, which allows fathers to take six weeks of parental leave independently after the mother returns to work. Finland provides an ideal context for examining parental leave utilization within the workplace, with comprehensive administrative records linking individuals to family members and workplaces. This study focuses on the 2013 parental leave

reform, which granted Finnish fathers the independent right to a father's quota, allowing them to take this leave after the sharable parental leave period ends, typically around the child's 10th month, or even delaying it until the child's second birthday.

Data and Methods

We used full-population data from Finnish administrative registers, linking fathers to family members and workplaces (enterprises as well as establishments). To focus on the impact of the 2013 parental leave reform and peer effects within the workplace, we constructed a sample of workplaces meeting specific criteria. These workplaces were selected based on having a male employee with a child born just before or after the 2013 reform and at least one other father who had a child afterward. Due to a lack of information on the organization of work within the workplaces or which fathers worked together, we constrained our analysis to small and medium-sized workplaces with a maximum of 250 employees. This resulted in a sample comprising 2,890 workplaces and 12,387 employed fathers who had children born between 2012 and 2017.

In our study, peers were defined as fathers who had a child born while employed at a particular workplace, irrespective of whether they utilized the father's quota or not. We assumed that the main mechanism for potential peer effects was the transfer of knowledge, particularly regarding the attitudes of employers toward fathers taking parental leave. This assumption led us to conclude that peer effects would not be transferable if a father changed workplaces. However, fathers in new workplaces were considered peers to a focal individual, even if they had used their quota before the focal individual joined that workplace, as we believed colleagues would discuss about their experiences.

To account for selection, we accounted for several father- and workplace-specific covariates. Father-specific variables encompassed a reform dummy variable, the order of the father within the workplace (ranging from 0 to 5, with Father 0 being the one who had a child just before or just after the reform), father's education level, father's occupation (categorized into 11 groups), father's log-wage, and father's log-age. Workplace-specific characteristics included industry, region, the number of colleagues who used father's quota before the reform window, the logarithm of the number of employees, and the logarithm of the number of fathers in the workplace.

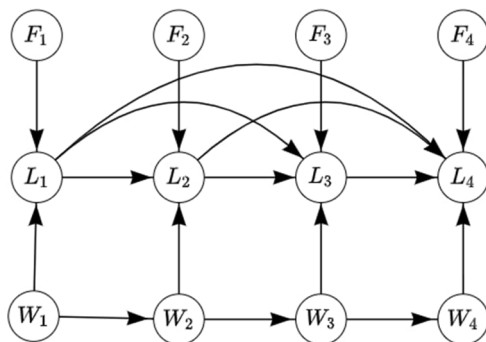


Figure 1: Causal graph of peer effects for the first four fathers. L_i refers to leave uptake of Father i , F_i are father-specific covariates, and W_i are workplace-related covariates. Peer effects are represented by edges between the L nodes.

Our causal inference approach is based on the structural causal modelling framework (Pearl, 2009). Specifically, we employed backdoor adjustment and Bayesian logistic regression to estimate the

causal relationships. Additionally, we assumed that the effect of the same lag remained consistent, regardless of the father's "order." To account for temporal variations in peer effects, we adjusted peer effects by considering the time difference between births, employing double sigmoidal functions. Figure 1 illustrates the assumed causal graph pertaining to fathers' parental leave uptake, focusing on the first four fathers. Our primary interests lie in understanding the direct effects from peer fathers to focal fathers and the overall cumulative effects of Father 0, who had a child just before or just after the reform.

Preliminary results

The direct effect of the 2013 parental leave reform on father's quota utilization was significant, showing a 14 percentage point increase in the full population of fathers, rising from 30% to 44%. In the study sample of wage-earning fathers, this effect was even more pronounced, with a 16 percentage point increase from 35% to 51%.

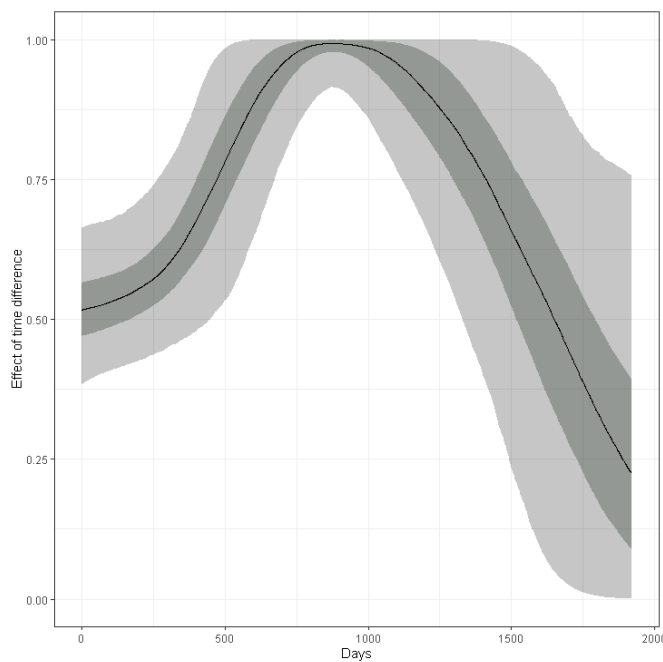


Figure 2: Adjustment of direct effects by the age difference of peer and focal fathers' children (in days), showing estimates with 50 percent and 95 percent posterior intervals.

Figure 2 illustrates the adjustment of direct peer effects based on the age difference between the peer's and focal father's children. Notably, the most informative age difference fell within the range of 27–31 months. Within this timeframe, the children were close enough but not too close in age, enabling fathers to observe the immediate career impact on their colleagues when they took leave. For age differences shorter or longer than this optimal range, the direct effect was smaller, such as approximately 50 percent of the maximum when the age difference was less than 6 months.

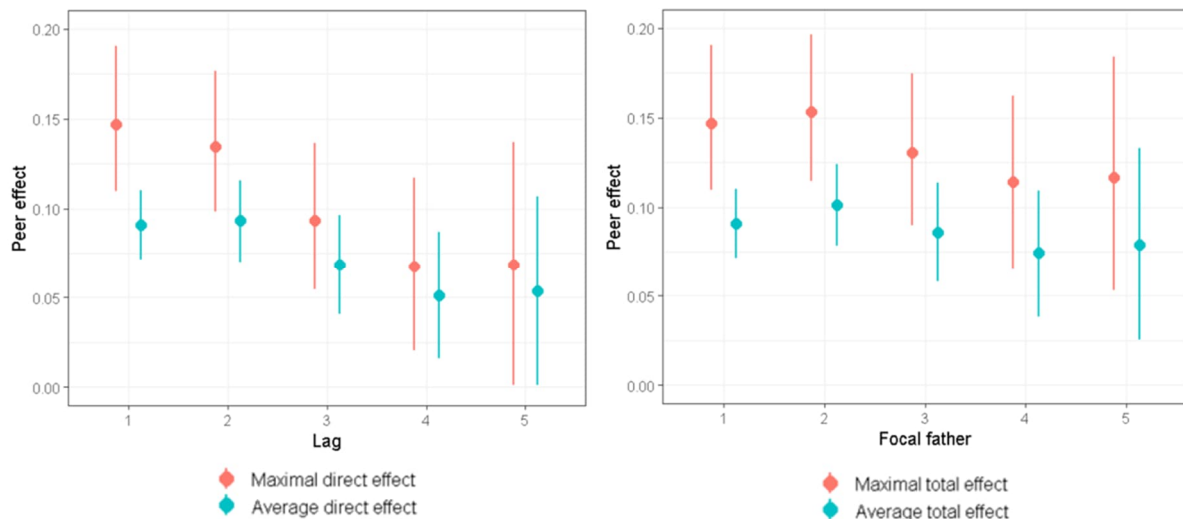


Figure 3: Direct peer effects on the left and cumulative total effects of Father 0's quota use on the right. Estimates with 95 percent posterior intervals.

Figure 3 presents direct peer effects on the left and cumulative total effects on the right. Both figures include maximal direct effects (peer effects under optimal age differences) and average effects that account for observed age differences. The maximal peer effect from the previous father was close to 15 percentage points, decreasing to about 9 percentage points for those fathers who were 4–5 ranks apart. Average effects, adjusting for observed age differences, were slightly smaller, around 9 percentage points for the two previous fathers and 5 percentage points for a lag of 4–5 fathers.

Cumulative total effects accounted for Father 0's quota use, who had a child just before or just after the reform, and all fathers situated between Father 0 and the focal father. These cumulative effects appeared higher, ranging from 12 to 15 percentage points in the presence of optimal age differences and between 7 and 10 percentage points after adjusting for observed age differences.

As a robustness check, we compared our one-step estimate to findings from a regression discontinuity design using two-stage least squares (2SLS) on Father 1, employing the timing of Father 0's child as an instrument. The peer effect estimated using 2SLS was 0.17 (0.11), which is comparable to our estimate of 0.15 (0.02), although it should be noted that the 2SLS estimate is very imprecise.

Conclusions

Our study sheds light on the significant direct and cumulative peer effects on fathers' parental leave uptake, particularly in the context of the 2013 parental leave reform in Finland. These findings underscore the importance of workplace dynamics and the influence of colleagues on fathers' decisions to take parental leave. Our research provides valuable insights for policymakers and organizations aiming to encourage fathers' active participation in caregiving.

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