

Father Parental Leave Use in Spain: The Role of the Female Partner Labour Situation

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Abstract

This article presents novel empirical evidence of fathers' parental leave usage by introducing a family dimension in Spain. To test this hypothesis, a bivariate probit estimation was used to analyse the effect of the mother's labour force participation on the father's decision to take parental leave. This procedure allowed us to address the issue of simultaneous factors affecting the decisions of both the man and the woman, which were relevant to interpreting for the phenomenon. The results suggested that successfully using fathers' paternity leave as a tool to promote gender equality depends on the family household's characteristics and the woman's connection to the job market. The bivariate probit estimation revealed that the effect of the woman's decision on the man's choice is much stronger than a naive regression would suggest.

Keywords

bivariate probit, fathers, female labour force participation, gender equality, household, parental leave, paternity leave

Introduction

In recent years, an extensive body of literature has emerged on fathers' paternity leave usage (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 2014; Kimmel, 2017). In Spain,

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studies on fathers' parental leave have focused on comparing their evolution in relation to other European countries (Escobedo et al., 2012 ; Escobedo and Wall, 2015), as well as the incidence of sociodemographic and motivational factors (Meil et al., 2018). Other studies measure both the evolution of fathers' parental involvement and explanatory factors (Escot et al., 2014; Flaquer and Escobedo, 2014; Romero-Balsas, 2012), the duration (Lapuerta et al., 2011; Romero-Balsas et al., 2013) and how parents use the maternity leave quota (Escot et al., 2012; Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016; Meil et al., 2017, 2018).

However, few studies have focused their analysis on the family as a decision-making unit from a long-term perspective, taking into account how factors such as a couple's economic, educational and employment situation affect their use of parental leave differently (Hoherz and Bryan, 2019). Even more importantly, when family decisions are analysed, some common underlying factors might affect both the male and the female partner choices simultaneously. If these factors are not properly assessed from a statistical standpoint, they could bias the results in a naive regression. Thus, the main contribution of this article is to fill the gap that exists in the scientific literature concerning fathers' parental leave usage by introducing a family dimension (family bargaining). Additionally, the study addresses the potential simultaneity or endogeneity bias with the objective of isolating the 'true effect' of the female partner's labour supply decisions on her male counterpart's choices.

This approach is key to accounting for the phenomenon, since otherwise the 'true effect' would be strongly underestimated. The reason is that there are confounding factors that operate in the opposite direction (e.g. family financial constraints). To isolate the direct effect, a joint estimate of the decisions of the husband and wife is required. Otherwise, the results will be biased and the implications for family policies of the understatement of the true effect could be potentially enormous.

Two theoretical effects occur simultaneously while operating in opposite directions (i.e. the 'true effect' and confounding factors). The following is an illustrative example: if the couple is experiencing financial difficulties, it could lead to the woman entering the labour force to earn income and the man avoiding using paternity leave in order not to disrupt his professional career (confounding factor). However, when the woman is engaged in the labour force, her partner might be more encouraged to use paternity leave to carry out childcare duties (true effect). The first implies a negative association whereas the second entails a positive correlation (between the woman's labour force participation decision and the man's use of paternity leave). It is necessary to deal with this issue properly to disentangle one from another to measure a true causal effect (Pérez et al., 2015, 2020). The research question investigated in this research note is to analyse the 'true effect' after removing statistical 'noise' created by the confounding factors.

Background

The average duration of fully paid paternity leave in the European Union's 28 countries (including UK) is 2.5 weeks (Moos, 2018). In Spain, the government has promoted several increases in recent years (Figure 1). The extension of paid paternity leave represents an important breakthrough for gender equality, because Spanish family policies have

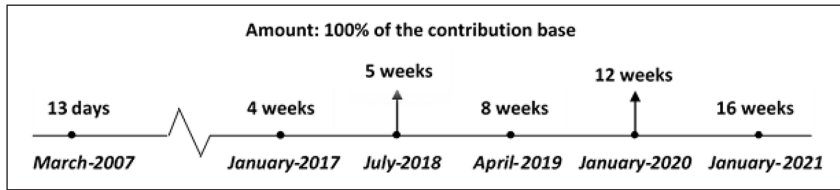


Figure 1. Paternity leave in Spain

Source: Own elaboration.

regularly been typified as biased toward the male breadwinner model family (Abril and Romero-Balsas, 2008).

Available studies focus on identifying the determining factors for fathers' parental leave uptake in different welfare states, but the determinants that concern the family unit as a space for negotiations and decisions have rarely been considered. There are few studies analysing the relationship between the labour market status of mothers, fathers' paternity leave and involvement in childcare by fathers. An exception is a study of German couples by Schober and Zoch (2019). Moreover, when considered, research has not addressed the issue of these features affecting the decision of both family members at the same time.

The results suggest that in Spain, the probability of the father using paternity leave is higher among those whose partners work and lower among parents who have temporary jobs and among immigrant fathers (Escot et al., 2014). In short, studies show that father involvement through paternity leave increases when women participate in the labour market and when their working conditions improve (Flaquer and Escobedo, 2014; Romero-Balsas, 2012). Other studies suggest that fathers respond to the work of women by participating more actively in different forms of childcare (Gracia, 2014; Moreno-Mínguez et al., 2018; Raley et al., 2012; Roeters et al., 2009). According to a comparative study by Gracia and Esping Andersen (2015), fathers in Denmark are more involved in childcare than English and Spanish fathers, in part because most women work full time in the Nordic country.

There is also scientific evidence that confirms the decline of the male breadwinner model as well as the fact that fathers who use long periods of leave are more involved in caring for their children (Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016; Hosking et al., 2010; Lamb, 2010; Meil, 2013; Moreno-Mínguez, 2010; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel, 2007).

Studies show that policies that promote the balance of work and family life and parental co-responsibility contribute to greater involvement of the father and reduce work and professional penalisation of maternity (Meil et al., 2018). The fact that the woman is willing to work increases the probability of the father using paternity leave (Duvander et al., 2019; Gracia, 2014; Roeters et al., 2009). This finding confirms the relevance of the egalitarian family model of a dual-earner family to achieve greater involvement of fathers in childcare through paternity leave (Flaquer et al., 2019; Flaquer and Escobedo, 2014; Meil and Rogero-García, 2015; Romero and Balsas, 2012).

Spain has a relevant interest in this research because it represents a political and social model that combines a recent institutional commitment to work and family balance

through the extension of paternity leave, with a male breadwinner family model still in transition. It is an ambivalent family organisation of care and work that is debated between the values of the patriarchal model and the normalisation of the egalitarian model of dual economic providers and caregivers (Lapueta et al., 2011).

The precariousness and dualisation of the Spanish labour market make work and family balance difficult. In this context, the labour market decisions of parents are key factors in negotiating and reaching a family agreement on parental leave usage based on the couple's time availability and economic situation. However, the literature confirms that fathers' parental leave policies developed in the past decade are a fundamental factor for parents with more educational and cultural resources to become more actively involved in caring for their children, thus favouring the children's well-being (Escobedo and Meil, 2016; Hagqvist et al., 2017; Moreno-Mínguez and Crespi, 2017).

Considering the Spanish family's characteristics, household bargaining theories are most suitable for analysing Spain (Lundberg and Pollak, 1996; Manser and Brown, 1980). These theories reflect how couples negotiate agreements on the division of housework and parenting based on educational and economic resources as well as the position that both members of the couple have in the labour market. In other countries where the labour market is less polarised and fragmented and where there is a tradition of family-work balance policies, the decision is made between de facto equals without the filter of negotiation on the family and personal cost of working.

Therefore, based on these characteristics and the existing literature on the conditions for using fathers' parental leave in Spain, a largely positive effect of maternal labour market participation on fathers' parental leave use is expected. However, decisions on taking fathers' parental leave or not are made jointly in the household by the couple and there is more than one theoretical channel affecting the decision-making process. Accordingly, the main hypothesis of this research is that decisions of women affect their male partners' decisions to take paternity leave. However, we do not only test that broad statement but the direction of such a relationship, along with its intensity. In order to make the hypothesis more understandable, we break it down into three different sub-hypotheses. These are the following:

Hypothesis 1: Men's decisions to take paternity leave are associated with their female partners' decisions to participate in the labour market.

Hypothesis 2: Women's participation in the labour market increases likelihood of their male partners taking paternity leave.

Hypothesis 3: When addressing the confounding factors appropriately, the order of magnitude of the effect regarding the relationship between women's labour participation and their male partners' decision to take paternity leave is statistically higher.

To test that hypothesis, the article analyses paternity leave usage in Spain from 2001 to 2016. It considers the family (couple, number of children and grandparents) as a setting for negotiation, taking into account the effect of sociodemographic factors. More precisely, this research extends previous studies of Spain by focusing on how women's

labour supply decisions affect the choices of their male partners regarding paternity leave usage. Furthermore, the approach followed herein aims to disentangle this effect from other confounding effects that might occur at the same time. Put differently, this research intends to estimate a true causal effect. This is a novel methodological contribution to studies on paternity leave in Spain. This article contributes to international comparative research by addressing how fathers' paternity leave use is associated with the labour market decisions of women. The difficulties of the analysis stem from the database limitations with respect to existing variables and indicators.

Data and methodology

The data used in this article came from the Spanish Labour Force Survey (SLFS) produced by the National Statistics Institute (Spanish acronym: INE). The 62 waves employed were treated as a pool of independent cross-sectional data following the proposal of Escot et al. (2014). Data were considered as though each sample for each quarter corresponded to a random sample of the working population independent from the previous one.

Two SLFS questions were used to define whether the father was taking paternity leave. Specifically, the man was considered to be taking leave if he stated that he was not working or that he worked fewer hours than usual the previous week because he was on paternity leave for the birth of a child (Escot et al., 2014).

Table A1 in the supplementary online appendix and Figure 1 show that, out of close to 64,500 households, only 1237 stated that the man worked fewer hours or did not work due to paternity leave. Focusing the analysis on how paternity leave was affected by the female partner's involvement in the job market, the differences were also remarkable. Of all the total paternal leaves taken by men, almost three-quarters were produced in households where the woman was active (either employed or seeking work). This fact, which was especially significant as of 2005, stressed the relationship between the two decisions.

The evolution of the percentage of households with fathers' parental leave revealed some interesting results. Over the first few years, there was a sharp increase in the percentage of households taking paternity leave, especially from 2004, coinciding with the peak of the business cycle. This strong increase was maintained at the beginning of the Great Recession, probably as a result of the March 2007 13-day paternity leave law. This growth was abruptly truncated in 2009, and from that moment, it stagnated until 2014. With the beginning of the recovery, a rising trend returned, which placed the percentage of households taking paternity leave in 2016 at 3.3%.

The results of this evolution in terms of the partner's work participation were also striking. The increases seen in the percentage of fathers' paternity leave in 2008 and after the end of the Great Recession were especially significant in households where the wife participated in the labour force (Figure 2).

The article analyses the interrelationship between the decisions for the woman to participate in the job market and for the man to take paternity leave (Perez et al., 2015 and 2020, with a similar methodological approach analysed the complementary leisure effect in older couples). The dependent variable was, therefore, a categorical variable that was one if the man took paternity leave and zero otherwise (Escot et al., 2014), and

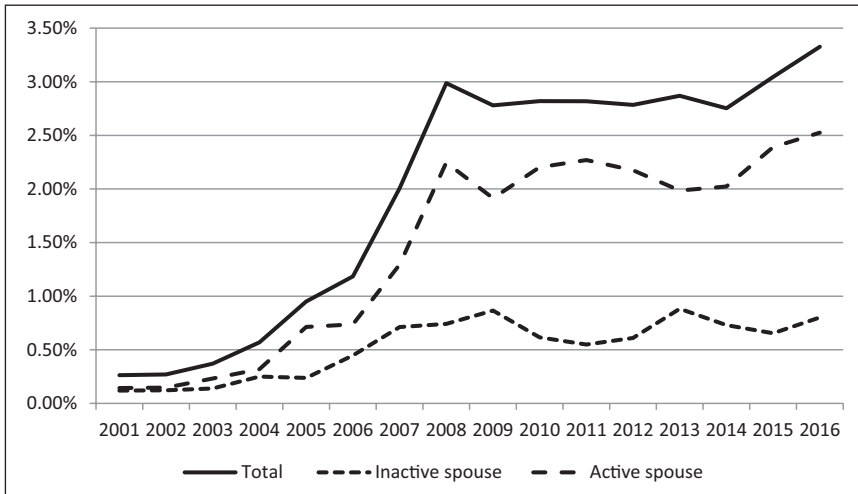


Figure 2. Percentage of households with a zero-year-old baby in which the man took paternity leave.

Source: Spanish Labour Force Survey (INE).

the key explanatory variable was a dummy with a value of one if his partner was active from a labour supply standpoint and zero otherwise.

In addition, since our observational unit was the household, it seemed logical to assume that both decisions were made in a joint manner and there were many variables in the household that might influence both. This situation demonstrated the existence of endogeneity in the model due to the presence of unobservables affecting both variables. This meant that the condition of independence between the explanatory variable and errors was not fulfilled, and it was necessary to resort to techniques that corrected that endogeneity.

As the dependent variable was dichotomous, to correct the endogeneity problems, a bivariate probit model was estimated in line with the binary choice model of simultaneous and recursive equations presented by Green (1998) (see the supplementary online appendix for a technical note). This was the baseline model, although its outcomes were compared to those of the simple probit model that was considered a naive regression to better understand the size of the bias as to the true causal effect of interest for the purposes of this research.

To model the fathers' parental leave equation, in addition to the spouse's participation in the labour market, a set of regressors was also included to measure workers' qualifications, age, number of children in the household, type of contract, nationality and a series of year dummy variables. In the participation rate equation, the model also included the age gap between spouses, controls for occupation and the number of ascendants living in the household. These variables were relevant to explain the female labour supply decisions and as exclusion restrictions to identify the model. (Tables A2 and A3 in the supplementary online appendix present a descriptive analysis of the explanatory variables.)

Results

Two ways of estimation, standard (naive regression) and bivariate probit, were proposed (Table 1). The results showed that the decision for the man to take leave and for the woman to participate in the labour market took place in the family, and household determining factors affected the two decisions simultaneously, which made a joint estimate necessary. This conclusion was drawn from the Wald test and the significance of the rho statistic, indicating the existence of a correlation between the residuals in the two equations. However, a bivariate probit estimation was used to address the endogeneity problems to avoid the bias involved in the naive regression that could be misleading.

This could be seen clearly by comparing the coefficients of the probit and biprobit estimates in Table 1. Whereas the marginal effect in the probit estimate was 0.002 with a weak statistical significance at a 10% level, the estimate of this effect with the bivariate probit procedure reached 0.024 (i.e. more than 2 percentage points) and significant at 1%. The naive regression identified a positive effect of female labour market participation on their partners' decisions to use paternity leave, but the biprobit estimate concluded that this effect was 10 times higher and much more significant in statistical terms. These results confirm the hypothesis proposed in this article.

Table 1 also shows that the results were robust to changes in the sample. The effect reached 3 percentage points when the estimation only used the second quarters or when the years before the methodological change in the SLFS were eliminated (see columns 3 and 4). Using the second quarters allowed us to correct the possible repetition of households in the sample.¹

The previous observation could be justified with an in-depth analysis of the social phenomenon being analysed herein. First, using the statistical information shown in Table 1, the highly significant negative sign of the rho statistic signified that there were factors operating at the same time on the two decisions made within the family. Furthermore, those factors affected these decisions in opposite ways (i.e. increasing female labour market participation and reducing the use of paternity leave simultaneously or vice versa).

This is precisely what was observed in the data and the main contribution of this article. If those other factors influencing family decisions were not considered, the true causal effect investigated herein would apparently be lower since they operate in the opposite way. Therefore, a key result obtained in this research was that it was necessary to control those other confounding factors to properly account for men's decisions regarding paternity leave usage. This result also seemed to indicate that the woman participating in the labour market was a sign that this was a more egalitarian family model of two breadwinners where it was easier for them to be involved in childcare.

Moreover, the empirical work carried out allowed us to set a number of other relevant results. Fathers with better work conditions or a university degree will find it easier to take paternity leave. Finally, the time dummy variables showed an increase in taking paternity leave from 2005. This growth accelerated in 2007 and 2008 and remained stable until 2015, increasing again in 2016. A possible explanation for this growth that began during the economic crisis could be the 2007 approval of paid and non-transferable paternity leave.

Table 1. Estimation of the use of paternity leave.

	Probit <hr/> dy/dx	Biprobit		
		All <hr/> dy/dx	2 nd quarters <hr/> dy/dx	2005/2016 <hr/> dy/dx
Wife participation	0.002*	0.024***	0.030**	0.034***
Education (ref. lower than upper secondary)				
Upper secondary	0.002	0.001	0.003	0.002
University	0.006***	0.002*	0.005*	0.004*
Age	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000
Foreign	-0.003	-0.006**	-0.006**	-0.009**
Children	-0.001	0.001	0.004*	0.002
Indefinite	0.008***	0.007***	0.005	0.011***
Year (ref. 2001/2005)				
2002	0.000	0.000	-0.005	
2003	0.001	0.001	-0.004	
2004	0.002	0.002	-0.004	
2005	0.010***	0.012***	0.005	
2006	0.012***	0.014***	0.010	0.002
2007	0.018***	0.021***	0.010	0.009**
2008	0.027***	0.028***	0.035***	0.017***
2009	0.025***	0.026***	0.023***	0.014***
2010	0.026***	0.025***	0.020**	0.013***
2011	0.024***	0.024***	0.027***	0.012**
2012	0.027***	0.025***	0.037***	0.013**
2013	0.029***	0.025***	0.013	0.013**
2014	0.019***	0.018***	0.011	0.006
2015	0.024***	0.022***	0.017**	0.010**
2016	0.031***	0.030***	0.016**	0.018***
Wife participation equation				
Ascendants		0.112**	0.225**	0.123**
Education (ref. lower than upper secondary)				
Upper secondary		0.231***	0.283***	0.130***
University		0.486***	0.514***	0.288***
Age		0.005***	0.003	-0.000
Foreign		-0.211***	-0.266***	-0.201***
Children		-0.060***	-0.053**	-0.026*
Age difference		-0.008***	-0.009**	-0.011***
Year variables		Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupational variables		Yes	Yes	Yes
Rho		-0.397	-0.480	-0.410
Wald test		Chi ² = 56.6	Chi ² = 11.2	Chi ² = 57.8

Notes: Significant at the *10%, **5% and ***1% level.

Source: Own elaboration.

The results for the women's labour supply were in line with what was expected. Wives increase their participation in the labour market if they have Spanish nationality, when their education is higher and when they are older. Their participation also increases when there is less of an age gap with the partner and if there are fewer children at home. The positive effect of the number of ascendants indicated that the existence of ascendants in the household freed the family unit from certain domestic chores and therefore allowed them to have greater attachment to the job market.

Discussion and conclusions

The theoretical starting point of this study was that the use of fathers' parental leave was determined by decisions made within the family household clearly impacting the progress of gender equality. More importantly, the research question investigated was how labour supply decisions of women affect the choices of their male counterparts regarding paternity leave. Furthermore, the interest was in measuring a true causal effect, not simply a correlation calculated using a naive regression. This aspect was quite relevant in the present context as there existed a number of other unobservable features affecting both decisions at the same time that may have biased this effect. A bivariate probit approach was followed to disentangle those other confounding factors from the true causal effect of mothers on fathers.

The results obtained are noteworthy in several respects. A positive association between women's labour force participation and their partners' use of paternity leave was found (hypotheses 1 and 2). As the statistical technique allowed us to control for other factors affecting both decisions, it is possible to state that it is a true causal effect. Moreover, the rho statistic (the statistic indicating the type of effect of the underlying unobservable factors) was negative and highly significant. That means that the unobservables operated in the opposite direction of the effect, which in turn implied that the effect of interest was underestimated in a naive estimation. In fact, when the standard probit estimate was compared to the bivariate probit estimate, the effect size was 10 times higher (hypothesis 3).

The implications of these outcomes are also noticeable. The impact of the household as space for negotiation and socialisation in relation to raising children is decisive in the father's use of fathers' paternity leave. From a policy perspective, those public interventions fostering women's labour force participation also have a positive side effect. This is so because they indirectly increase men's use of paternity leave, fomenting equality regarding childcare within the household. In other words, there is a virtuous circle with feedback effects promoting gender equality in two different dimensions: labour market participation and childcare duties. Owing to the significant size effect found in this research, a major policy recommendation would be to enhance resources devoted to increasing female labour force participation (e.g. public investment in human capital policies, measures reconciling work and family life, and so on).

This analysis also demonstrates other empirical facts. First, the progressive increase in paternity leave since 2005 highlights the positive effect of legislative improvements implemented to extend paternity leave. The policy of work and family life balance more in line with an egalitarian family of dual earners has a clearly positive impact on gender equality (Meil et al., 2019).

The findings suggest that success in using fathers' parental leave as a tool to promote gender equality in raising children and, therefore, a change in patriarchal normalisation of roles, depends on the family's characteristics and the woman's employment. Therefore, it is essential to continue conducting analyses such as this to deepen the understanding of the existing association between the family unit and development of policies related to parental leave that make progress in family and work reconciliation, as well as in sharing chores within the home.

This study shows that the father's involvement changes the need to be analysed in a family context and contributes to international research on gender equality progress.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material is available online with the article.

Note

1. Using all the quarters, the same household may appear taking paternity leave one term and not doing it the next for the same child.

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