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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Father's parental leave use in Spain: the effect of education in the household

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to present empirical evidence on the use of parental leave by fathers under the Mediterranean Welfare State, as a Spanish tribute to the legacy of Dr Rush in politics of fatherhood in a comparative perspective. We will focus on the Spanish case to analyze the use of paternity leave by fathers for the period 2001–2017. We consider the family unit – as a setting for bargaining and socialization – from a longitudinal perspective. The paper presents a very valuable and in-depth analysis of socio-demographic factors influencing the family decision to take parental leave by fathers (age, education, employment status, socio-economics). Based on the literature reviewed, we consider that these factors have a greater impact on how parental leave is used differently and how it has evolved over time. The case of Spain is interesting for the research because it represents a political and social model that combines a recent institutional commitment to the work/life balance through the extension of paternity leave for fathers with a male breadwinner family model still in transition.

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Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been growing interest in paternity leave in Spain, both at a political, institutional and academic level and in terms of public opinion. That mainly stems from the benefits that the extension of this leave has had on the involvement of fathers, gender equality and child wellbeing (Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Duvander, 2014; Huerta et al., 2013; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Pragg & Knoester, 2017). Despite the fact that in recent decades the gap between social expectations and current involvement by fathers has decreased due to the introduction of friendly parental leave policies, there are still significant divergences in parental involvement by country (Crespi & Ruspini, 2016; Rush, 2015). In this regard, Spain is one of the European countries to have made the greatest progress in paternity leave in recent years.

International comparative studies that include Spain have shown the introduction of quotas for fathers, the rise in the proportion of fathers taking parental leave and the involvement of fathers in caring for children (Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016;

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Romero-Balsas et al., 2013; Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016; Meil et al., 2018, 2019; Hagqvist et al., 2017; Arnalds et al., 2021). Also, ideological and cultural discourses have been analyzed, conditioned by institutional and gender contexts as factors in the use of paternity leave in Spain (Barbeta-Viñas & Muntanyola-Saura, 2021; Jurado-Guerrero & Muñoz-Comet, 2021). However, the research has not studied the association between the role of education and the couple's labor market status on gender bargaining in the household and paternity leave in Spain, except some previous studies on the involvement of fathers in childcare (Borràs et al., 2018) and paternity leave (Moreno-Mínguez et al., 2023).

The introduction of the couple's perspective is important because significant progress has been made in Spain on parental leave policies that may conceal hidden situations of inequality when the family dimension is not taken into account as a decision-making unit and the impact of education as an element that drives equal care practices while reproducing social inequality. This knowledge may prove useful in designing public policies on paternity leave to evaluate and assess whether the current paternity leave policy in Spain is producing the aims sought.

Our study presents relevant empirical indicia to cover the existing gap in Spanish scientific literature regarding the incidence of education and the labor situation of a couple on decisions involving paternity leave. International literature has shown that these factors condition the use of paternity leave, and hence gender equality in childcare within the family unit, although there are insufficient empirical studies available in Spain. This analysis follows on from a previous empirical study in which we can observe that the labor supply decisions of women have a key impact on the use of parental leave (Moreno-Mínguez et al., 2023).

The current study attempts to fill this gap in the literature on paternity leave in Spain by utilizing the family dimension (household) of the Labor Force Survey (LFS)¹ to provide a comprehensive examination of the educational level and labor market situation of couples as predictors of the bargaining process in the couple and of fathers receiving paid paternity leave in Spain. Thus, the aim of this study is to (a) explore whether changes in parental leave policies over recent decades in Spain have changed the behavior of couples in terms of paternity leave and (b) analyze the extent to which the capital and social capital of couples (education and labor market situation) predict the likelihood of taking paternity leave in Spain.

These empirical findings will allow us to develop knowledge of the processes that influence the taking of paternity leave, and of the processes of the reproduction of inequality that operate in childcare practiced in families. These empirical outcomes will contribute to redesigning the most efficient and effective parental leave policies to continue enhancing gender equality in care.

Parental leave policies, gender equality and involvement of fathers in Spain

Parental leave policies are integrated into a structure of social protection in which family policies on the Welfare State, gender roles and cultural context play an important role. The comparative studies have developed welfare classifications that include dimensions of family policies, family culture and gender in order to contextualize institutional

differences (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Korpi et al., 2013; Thénevon, 201). Spain belongs to a welfare model known as 'the southern model' (Moreno-Mínguez, 2010; Naldini, 2003; Flaquer, 2004; Ferrera, 1996). It is characterized by the late recognition of family policies marked by reminiscences of the Franco dictatorship, a traditional and patriarchal division of family work and a preponderance of traditional family values. Historically, Spain has enjoyed a low level of female labor participation and a strong tradition of male breadwinners, with a wide gender gap in the division of unpaid work (Moreno-Mínguez, 2010; Hagqvist et al., 2017). However, progress in the educational level of women in Spain has revolutionized the labor market and the training of couples. Studies on pairing in Spain have shown a decrease in homogamy and an increase in hypogamy (higher educational level of women in new couples) as a consequence of the rise in the educational level of women (López Rodríguez, 2021). Women with university studies, in contrast to better trained men, opt to find partners with the same or a lower educational level. This change is explained by adaptive changes in individual decisions in response to changes in the demographic structure. These adaptive processes produce transformations in power relations that structure gender roles toward bargaining between equals (Esping Andersen & Billari, 2015). In short, the educational revolution for women has led to an exponential increase in their employability in Spain. To explain these processes, the theory of multiple equilibria seeks to integrate the change in gender roles, with demographic trends, individual decisions and decisions by couples based on the available resources within the structural processes of regulatory change promoted by cultural institutions (Esping Andersen & Billari, 2015).

A shift toward new regulatory, institutional and family models is taking place in which old stereotypes co-exist with new gender norms reflected in dual earner families and greater involvement and co-responsibility of the father (Dema-Moreno & Díaz-Martínez, 2010; Naldini & Jurado, 2013; Valiente-Fernández, 2013; Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016, 2020). Despite these improvements, empirical evidence shows that gender inequality persists, both in the labor market and in the division of family work.

The Labor Force Survey (LFS) for example, still shows significant levels of vertical and horizontal segregation in the labor market by gender (Dueñas et al., 2014). Surveys also show an unequal dedication to paid work and childcare by gender (Borràs et al., 2018; Flaquer et al., 2018). There are also numerous studies that reveal a notable discrepancy between desired ideals and the family reality in Spain (Abril et al., 2015a, 2016b; Hakim, 2002; Moreno Mínguez et al., 2017). Using the same database as ours (LFS), Guerrero and Muñoz (2020) have found that the political and social institutionalization of paternity leave in Spain has been fundamental in order to change the social norm regarding the uptake of paternity leave to a greater extent at a lower opportunity cost during the economic recovery.

The literature has shown that the differential regulation of parental leave affects parental involvement in childcare. Although family policies have been defined in Spain as minimalist and assistance-based (Abril & Romero, 2008; Meil & Rogero-García, 2015; Moreno-Mínguez, 2017), parental leave in Spain in terms of duration and salary coverage are similar to the European average. With regard to parental leave, it was initially conceived as a right for working mothers that was extended to men in 1980 as a family right and in 1999 as an individual right, independent of that of the mother. Since 1989, in relation to maternity leave, the possibility of transferring a part of it to the

father was provided for. Only in 2007 was paid leave for the father recognized and non-transferable to the mother. It was precisely the 2007 law on gender equality that introduced modest progress in the duration of parental leave from 2 days to 13–15 days with full salary remuneration (Constitutional Law 3/2007) (Escobedo & Wall, 2015; Meil et al., 2018). In 2009, an extension of paternity leave to four weeks was approved (Law 9/2011), although, due to economic issues, its entry into force was delayed until January 2017. It should be noted that each autonomous region has implemented its own regulations to encourage paternity leave (Lapuerta et al., 2011). In 2019, the law extended the quota for fathers to 16 weeks, bringing the rights of mothers and fathers in line. For each parent: 16 weeks (1 extra week per child as from the second child in case of multiple births; adoption or foster care placement of multiple children; and birth, adoption or foster care placement of a disabled child). This was also extended in the case of premature birth or a hospitalized child. Six weeks of leave are compulsory after birth. Parents can take unpaid leave to take care of their children for up to three years for each child, starting from the date of birth or, as the case may be, from the date of the judicial or administrative decision (Royal Decree-Law 6/2019).

From a comparative perspective, Spain had an intermediate place in the European context before 1 April 2019 but, subsequently, became more advanced than some European countries in terms of parental leave legislation and, more specifically, paternity leave. The average duration of fully paid paternity leave in the 28 countries of the European Union is 2.5 weeks (Moos, 2018; Castro-García and Pazos-Moran, 2015), while in Spain it is 16 weeks as from 1 January 2021 under the latest legal reform of April 2019. The extension of paid paternity leave represents an important breakthrough for equality, since it means the possibility of greater involvement of men and women as parents. Comparative studies have found that paternity leave use increased with the introduction and extended duration of the quota for fathers, even after the economic crisis of 2008 (Meil et al., 2018; Arnalds et al., 2021; Hagqvist et al., 2017; Flaquer & Escobedo, 2014; Moreno-Mínguez et al., 2023). According to this contextual introduction, we wondered whether the increase in the involvement of fathers in childcare in Spain was an adaptive change to the extension of the quota for fathers (contextual factors) or is the result of a structural change associated with factors such as the economic and educational status of the couple (structural factors). The combined effect of both processes has transformed the involvement of fathers and parenting in Spain.

The use of paternity leave in Spain: interpretive factors

The increasing use of paternity leave in Spain, thanks to progressive development in paternity leave policies in Spain, is a well-known phenomenon that has been analyzed in scientific literature (Escobedo & Wall, 2015; Escot et al., 2014; Romero Balsas *et al.*, 2013; Escot et al., 2012; Fernández Cormejo *et al.*, p. 2020). The regulatory changes introduced in parental leave as a response to the growing participation of women in the labor market and growing interest in child wellbeing have been key factors in explaining the involvement of fathers in childcare through paternity leave (Castro and Pazos, 2015; Abril & Romero, 2008; Crespi and Moreno-Mínguez, 2017). In line with this literature, the study of dual-earner couples in Iceland and Spain show that the mother's length of leave was not associated with paternity leave in either country. However, the increasing

use of paternity leave was associated with the length of paternity leave in both countries through the reduction in working hours (Arnalds et al., 2021, p. 13). These findings provide an important contribution to the literature in order to show that the quota for fathers is relevant for genderization in work and care practices.

However, it is less well-known how this involvement varies according to the labor situation and educational level of couples. The participation of women with children in the labor market, as well as the level of education of parents have been identified as key factors in explaining greater involvement by fathers in childcare in Spain (Gracia, 2012; 2014). Despite this evidence, the studies carried out in Spain on the use of paternity leave have not paid close enough attention to the variability use according to the socio-economic status of the members of the couple in the family unit, except for the odd exception that has focused the attention on the labor characteristics of the members of the family (Moreno Mínguez et al., 2022). According to this study, the labor situation of women in the household is a good factor for predicting the use of paternity leave.

The literature has focused on identifying the determining factors for the use of parental leave in different institutional contexts. According to these studies, socio-demographic and institutional factors stand out, but the determinants that affect the family unit as a bargaining unit and decisions have rarely been considered. Regarding the case of Spain, the studies suggest that the probability of the father using paternity leave is higher among those fathers whose partner works (this also occurs among mothers but not to the same extent), while the probability is lower among parents who have temporary jobs and among immigrant parents (Escot et al., 2014). In short, studies show that parental involvement through paternity leave increases when women are active or work and when the working conditions of women improve (Romero-Balsas, 2012; Flaquer & Escobedo, 2014). From these results, it follows that greater involvement by men in childcare through parental leave affects the career paths of women, although less is known about the effect of the labor market status and education of women on the use of paternity leave. This links directly to changes in family models and gender relations.

In the case of Spain, the studies carried out provide relevant information on the determining factors of the use of paternity leave at an individual level (education, income, job situation), but there are few studies that consider the household as a unit for the construction of identity and bargaining according to the socio-economic characteristics of the couple. The previous study showed that the labor situation of women increases the likelihood of the father making use of paternity leave, but this study does not provide enough information on how the factor of the educational level of the members of the couple acted, interrelated with the job situation from an analytical perspective of the home as a space for bargaining and as a driver of social change (Blossfeld and Bucholz, 2009; Moreno-Mínguez et al., 2023). From this approach, the educational composition of couples with children and selective matching in couples exerts a significant influence on the labor participation of parents, transferring the effects to decisions about childcare and the use of parental leave.

The literature has also underlined the impact of factors such as the socio-economic, work and educational situation of both parents, as well as gender attitudes. Studies have shown that egalitarian attitudes of men have a positive effect on the involvement of the father in childcare through the use of paternity leave and in reducing the work penalization of mothers (Fernández Cornejo et al., 2020 Kaufman, 2013; Romero-Balsas et al., 2013;

Abril et al., 2015). According to Borrás et al. (2018), working conditions and educational level are socio-demographic factors to consider in combination with symbolic and structural aspects such as gender attitudes and identity. In Spain, according to the findings of this study, the involvement of fathers in childcare depends on individual and couple resources, partner time availability and socio-cultural factors.

The studies carried out in the United States have provided significant empirical evidence on the increase in the gap and inequality in childcare time among parents according to their level of education, backing the argument of the incidence of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and diverging destinies (Altintas, 2016; Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016; McLanahan, 2004). In the case of Spain, we do not have sufficient empirical evidence based on the likelihood of the impact of these factors on the involvement of fathers. According to the studies carried out at an international level, the inequalities resulting from different educational levels between partners in the couple have increased in the last decade. This has led to better positioned families at a socio-economic level and in social capital making better use of paternity leave than those worse off (Petts et al., 2020).

Finally, the influence of the culture of fathers should be considered as a factor resulting from the meaning and importance of fathering roles in families where both parents work and negotiate strategies. In this context, the figure of the new involved father emerges as a key factor for the children's wellbeing (Marsiglio & Roy, 2012; Pasley et al., 2014). According to the theories about household bargaining (Duflo, 2012; Castilla & Walker, 2013; Lundberg and Pollak, 1996; Manser & Brown, 1980), couples negotiate to reach an agreement on domestic tasks and childcare, based on individual resources such as education and employment. In this regard, the analysis made has observed that the cultural capital of the father favorably conditions the use of parental leave. Fathers with a higher educational level are aware of the benefits for their children of taking leave and this is the group that most frequently signs up for long periods of paternity leave (Winston, 2014; Petts & Knoester, 2019; Petts et al., 2020; Gracia, 2014; Moreno-Mínguez et al., 2023), while fathers with a lower educational level, in contrast, fear that by using their paternity leave entitlement they will prejudice their masculine identity and recognition at work (Coltrane et al., 2013; Dahl et al., 2014). Studies suggest that in the case of Spain, educational level and working conditions of the mother emerge as key factors to explain the increase in the involvement of fathers in childcare (Arnalds et al., 2021; Borrás et al., 2018). These studies point out that the increase in the time mothers spend in paid work would increase the involvement of fathers in childcare. Thus, women will have more power to negotiate the distribution of time between work and family.

On the other hand, cultural and institutional studies on parental leave in Spain are providing relevant empirical evidence on the importance of ideological regulatory factors and legislative advances, as well as on the inequalities that still persist in the use of parental leave (Barbeta and Muntanyola, 2020; Jurado and Muñoz, 2020). According to Guerrero and Muñoz (2020), the institutional progress achieved in recent years has moderated occupational and economic differences in the use of paternity leave, substantially reducing the gender gap. Along the same line of research, Barbeta and Muntanyola (2020) have analyzed fathers' ideological discourses on the use of paternity leave in Madrid and Barcelona. According to their results, the economic and employment contexts of fathers condition the ideological discourse and, therefore, the legitimization and use of paternity leave. Fathers with worse socio-economic positions are those who show more ideological resistance to the

use of paternity leave. These studies connect individual conditioning factors of fatherhood, such as education or occupation, with the context of social policies and changing ideals about masculinity and fatherhood (Rehel, 2013).

However, we do not have enough empirical evidence on how the social capital of mothers affects the bargaining process of couples, and therefore, on the use of paternity leave in Spain. This is one of the aims we seek to achieve through this research. The analysis will provide a valuable contribution to the literature to see whether paternity leave in Spain is associated with the level of education and labor market situation of the couple in the household.

Hypothesis: couple perspective, human capital and paternity leave

Research into the effect of women's and their partner's level of education on a man's likelihood of adapting his working time and childcare is scant. The literature has recently introduced how couples negotiate their division of paid and unpaid work using both monetary recourses and non-monetary forms of bargaining such as education (Carlson and Hans 2020; Lundberg and Pollak 1996; Nitsche & Grunow, 2018). Thus, the couple's perspective may be important to understanding the father's employment and caring transitions.

Educational levels contribute to reducing gender inequalities caused by socialization/ gender identity and a patriarchal culture. The higher the educational level of the members of the couple, the greater the use of parental leave, and also the couple's links to the work market, since education increases the expectations of equal co-responsibility in caring for and raising children. The level of education and employment situation of the mother in the couple increases her empowerment in the household bargaining, leading to a cultural change in the father's involvement (Lundberg and Pollak, 1996). This hypothesis has been proven in the Spanish case by Lapuerta et al. (2011). The higher the level of education within the home, the lower the incidence tends to be of the patriarch in stereotypes and in identity as regards co-responsibility in caring for and raising children (Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016). In short, the studies carried out show that parental leave policies promote the balance of couples' work/life balance, mainly among parents who are better positioned in the work market and have higher educational levels. It is thus to be expected that in those households where the mother has a high educational level, the use of paternity leave will also be higher. Based on these preliminary considerations and on the critical revision we have made of the theory in Spain, we have proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The effect of the participation of women in the labor market on the use of paternity leave by their partner is conditioned by the educational level of each member of the couple.

Hypothesis 2: The higher the educational level of the woman, the higher the probability that their partner will make use of paternity leave regardless of the man's level of studies.

Database and descriptive analysis

In order to analyze the two hypotheses raised in this work, we need to have information on the socio-economic, labor and family characteristics of households, such as the data

provided by the LFS, drawn up by the National Statistics Institute (INE). The LFS is an ongoing survey issued each quarter aimed at families and has been prepared since 1964. Its main objective is to obtain data on the population in relation to the labor market, active unemployment and inactive people. Specifically, the quarterly statistics corresponding to 63 editions of the LFS have been collated in a single archive starting in the first quarter of 2011 and ending in the third quarter of 2016. An initial data base has been processed with this information, with more than 10.5 million individual observations registered and close to 4 million household observations.

This initial sample is refined in a second phase in order to select those households likely to have fathers using paternity leave. Accordingly, we will only look at those households made up of two partners of different sexes, with new-borns (zero years of age) and where the man is working. Following this new selection, we have a final sample of 64,446 households.

The most important aspect of this point is to determine how the dependent variable is defined, in other words, when it is considered that the man is making use of paternity leave. To achieve this, the responses given by those interviewees to the two questions regarding the LFS are used. Specifically, it is considered that this leave is taken if the man declares that he is not working, or working fewer hours than normal, because he is using parental leave due to the birth of a child (Escot et al., 2014). The other essential aspect of the analysis is how to include the effect of the educational level within this study. In this case, four different types of household are defined according to whether the man and the woman have university studies or not according to the distribution contained in Table 1. Specifically, Household 1 is where the two partners have university studies, Household 2 is where just the woman has university studies, Household 3 is where just the man has university studies and Household 4 is where neither of them has university studies.

Before beginning with the descriptive analysis of the data, some considerations need to be made of the characteristics of the sample we are using. On the one hand, and given that the households are interviewed in the LFS over six straight quarters, the men that appear in one quarter as beneficiaries of the paternity leave will appear in other quarters as not taking this leave (it should be remembered that a child aged zero appears for four straight quarters). On the other hand, it may be that the leave is used in a given quarter but this is not contained in the sample because the LFS data refer to the week prior to undertaking the survey. For these two reasons, we can consider that the sample of households where this leave is taken is clearly under-estimated. However, and taking into

Table 1. Distribution of households according to the educational level of the couple (absolute values and percentage).

		Educational level of the man		Total
		Lower than university	University	
Educational level of the woman	Lower than university	27,306 (42.4%)	6,186 (9.6%)	33,492 (52.0%)
	University	11,934 (18.5%)	19,020 (29.5%)	30,954 (48.0%)
	Total	39,240 (60.9%)	25,206 (39.1%)	64,446 (100%)

Source: LFS (INE).

account these aspects of the sample, it may be considered that this is sufficiently representative as to identify the effect under study. Finally, we should also clarify that, although the LFS is a rotating panel, each edition will be considered as a sample of cross-sectional data independently of the others. This limitation is assumed in this work following the proposal made by Escot et al. (2014) and Moreno-Mínguez et al. (2023). Finally, we should also clarify that, although the LFS is a rotating panel, data were considered as though each sample for each quarter corresponded to a random sample of the working population independent from the previous one. 63 waves were treated as a pool of independent cross-sectional data following the proposal by Escot et al. (2014). In this way, a sufficiently representative sample was obtained.

Methodological notes and results

Figure 1 shows the evolution of the types of household² described above for the period 2001–2016 – a period in which the most progress is made in paternity leave in Spain, with significant changes in the family policy of parental leave (Flaquer & Escobedo, 2014). It can be appreciated that the only households where their importance has increased are those where the woman has university studies (Household 1 and Household 2), although their growth has stagnated in recent years (since 2012). The drop in importance of Household 4, where neither of the partners has university studies, is also particularly significant.

Table 2 contains the percentage of households that report that the man has not worked (or has worked fewer hours than normal) during the week of reference because he is making use of paternity leave. These figures are also presented taking into account the relationship of the couple with the labor market and the four types of previously defined household. The aggregate figures show that for every 100 households analyzed, 1.9 report to be taking paternity leave. This percentage rises to 2.1% if the woman participates in the labor market and drops to 1.4% when not participating. Furthermore,

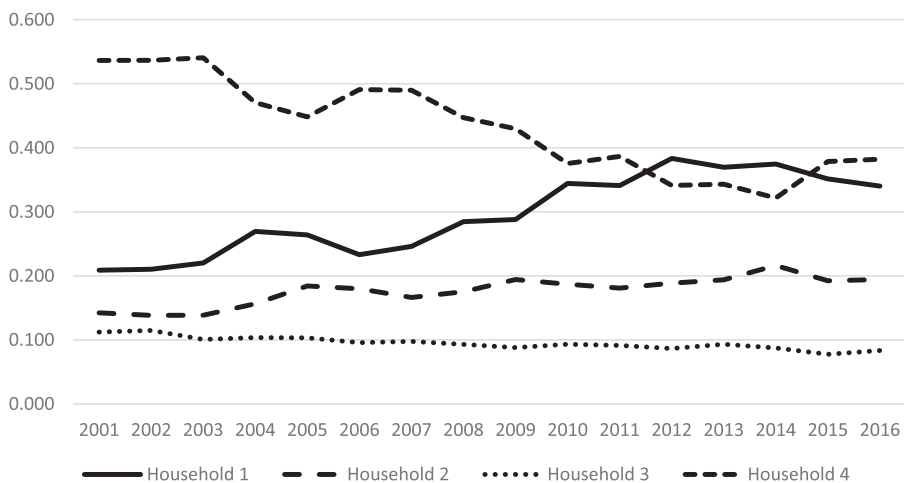


Figure 1. Evolution of households subject to leave, broken down by type, in the period 2001–2016. Source: LFS (INE).

Table 2. Percentage of households that report parental leave by educational level of the partners and participation of women in the labor market.

	Educational level of the woman	Educational level of the man		Total
		Lower than university	University	
Woman participates	Lower than university	1.3%	2.0%	1.4%
	University	2.1%	2.9%	2.6%
	Total	1.6%	2.7%	2.1%
Woman does not participate	Lower than university	1.3%	1.9%	1.4%
	University	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%
	Total	1.3%	1.6%	1.4%
Total	Lower than university	1.3%	2.0%	1.4%
	University	2.0%	2.6%	2.4%
	Total	1.5%	2.4%	1.9%

Source: LFS (INE).

when adding information relating to the educational level, the results show an increase in taking paternity leave when the level of studies completed rises. The highest value is in the case of households where the two partners have university studies and the woman is working in the labor market, which stands at close to 3 paternity leaves per 100 households.

From a methodological point of view, the analysis will be determined by the existing relationship between the variables under study. In this specific case, the aim is to analyze the interrelationship between the woman's decision to take part in the labor market, and the man's decision to take paternity leave. Hence, the dependent variable is a categorical variable that takes value one if the man takes paternity leave, and the same happens with the explanatory variable that takes value one if his partner participates in the labor market.

In addition, and given that this observational unit is the household, it would seem logical to suppose that both decisions are taken jointly and there are thus many household variables that may influence them. This situation makes the existence of endogeneity patent in the model due to the presence of unobservable factors that affect both decisions. This means that the condition of independence is not met between the explanatory variable and the errors of the model, and hence we must resort to techniques that correct this endogeneity.

Once the problem has been posed, and given that both the dependent and the endogenous variables are categorical, a bivariate probit model is estimated along the line of the binary choice model with simultaneous and recursive equations as presented by Green (1998) (Pérez et al., 2015 and 2020 use a similar technique to analyze the presence of shared leisure time between elderly couples in Spain).

To adequately introduce this section on the results obtained, we should make some methodological clarifications. Firstly, it is necessary to determine whether the estimation method is suitable, to which end we resort to a Wald test that indicates whether the mutual dependence between the two decisions analyzed (the taking of paternity leave by the man and the participation of the woman in the labor market) is significantly different from zero (see Table A1 in the Appendix). This condition is fulfilled in all the estimates made and hence we can conclude that the bivariate probit is the ideal method for making our analysis. Secondly, the estimate also provides a correlation coefficient between the unobservable factors that affect the two decisions with implications

according to their sign and significance. As can be observed in Table 3, these correlation coefficients are always negative and significantly different from zero, which indicates that should these decisions not be taken jointly, we would be underestimating the effect that the participation of the woman has on the man’s decision to take paternity leave.³

Once these considerations have been made on the estimate, we will focus on analyzing the effect of the level of education. The first number in each box of Table 3 shows the marginal effect that the participation of the woman in the labor market has on the decision by the man to take paternity leave according to the characteristics of the household they belong to. In other words, the probability of the man taking paternity leave increases when the woman moves from being inactive to active (maintaining the rest of the regressors in their average values) in each household. Although at a global level the participation of women in the labor market increases the likelihood that the man takes paternity leave by 2.7 percentage points, this effect would vary according to the type of household under analysis (Hypothesis 1). Specifically, this positive effect can be more appreciated when the woman has university studies (Hypothesis 2).

Looking more closely at the four types of household defined, it can be observed that the lowest effect takes place when neither of the partners has university studies. In this case, the fact that the woman actively participates in the labor market increases the likelihood that the man takes paternity leave by 2.3 percentage points. This effect rises to 2.9 percentage points when the two partners have university studies.

But the most striking aspect can be seen in those households where the woman has university studies but the man does not. In this case, the participation of the woman in the labor market increases the positive decision by the man to take paternity leave by 4 percentage points. This effect is 1.6 percentage points higher than in Household 3, where the man has university studies while the woman has a lower level of studies. A tentative explanation of this result can be found from the perspective of the opportunity cost. It seems logical to suppose that the higher the level of studies of the woman, the higher the opportunity cost would be to dedicate time to childcare. In this regard, and assuming that paternity leave is used to help the work/life balance and childcare, it is in this type of household (where the woman has a higher level of education) where the effect of participation in the labor market most influences whether the man takes paternity leave. This result is particularly important if we consider that these are the

Table 3. Marginal effect of participation of women in the labor market on paternity leave of her partner and correlation coefficient (in brackets) between residuals according to the educational level of the couple.

Educational level of the woman	Educational level of the man		Total
	Lower than university	University	
Lower than university	0.023*** (-0.534***)	0.024** (-0.467**)	0.024*** (-0.523***)
University	0.040*** (-0.512***)	0.027*** (-0.227***)	0.028*** -0.281***)
Total	0.029*** (-0.537***)	0.024*** (-0.269**)	0.027*** (-0.426***)

** , *** Significantly different from zero to 5% and 1% respectively.

The equation for the participation of the woman in the labor market includes the following explanatory variables: age, nationality, number of children at home, age difference from her male partner, number of ascendants at home and such control factors as employment and year.

The equation for paternity leave includes the following explanatory variables: age, nationality, number of children at home, type of contract and annual controls.

Source: Own preparation.

households with women with a higher level of education, which has become more prevalent in recent years.

Finally, we should clarify that these coefficients are the result of bivariate estimates where different explanatory variables are included in both the equation of the participation of the woman in the labor market and of the man taking paternity leave. In general, it can be appreciated that the participation of the woman grows with age and falls in the case of having children at home, if she is a foreigner or if the age difference with her partner is higher. An increase in her participation in the labor market over time has also been observed, particularly since 2005. As regards the equation that reflects whether or not the man takes paternity leave, as well as the positive effect of the participation of his partner in the labor market, the probability also rises of taking paternity leave as from 2005 and also if the individual is Spanish or has a permanent employment contract (See Table A1 in the appendix).

Conclusions and discussion

This article contributes to the emerging literature on paternity leave in Spain (Escot et al., 2012; Escot et al., 2014; Gracia, 2012; Gracia et al., 2015; Flaquer & Escobedo, 2014; Meil et al., 2017a and 2017b; Meil et al., 2018) through the analysis of how employment and a parent's education affect paternity leave in Spain and the involvement of fathers. The main new feature of the study is that it examines variations in the use of paternity leave *vis-à-vis* education and the labor market status of the mother in the family household. Our study has contributed to the literature focusing on the relationship between paternity leave, the labor situation and educational levels of couples in Spain, introducing the perspective of social capital. The analysis of data has revealed that an active mother in the labor market and the educational level of parents in the household emerge as socio-demographic variables to explain the involvement of fathers in combination with symbolic aspects of bargaining and identity of parenting by fathers. These findings confirm previous research that the increasing involvement of men in childcare is related to the increase of hypogamy, as an opportunity for the egalitarian distribution of power in couples more than an improved gender equal distribution of paid work and care work (Borrás *et al.*, 2018; López Rodríguez, 2021).

The results presented in this article show that the effect of the level of education of the parents according to the type of household is not constant in each of them. More precisely, they show, on the one hand, that the educational level of parents has a positive effect on the use of leave when the woman participates in the labor market, something partially observed in previous studies (Gracia, 2012). On the other hand, the results reveal that this effect is greater in households where the mother has higher education studies and the father does not (hipogamy). This may be due to the higher opportunity cost for women with higher education studies, a family situation that incentivizes the father to take paternity leave to share the childcare workload, showing that the household is an equal decision-making unit in terms of care when the mother has higher education studies (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Borrás *et al.*, 2018; Sullivan et al., 2014).

Another interpretation that can be extracted from these results is the possible increase in the equality gap within households in the entitlement to the use of paternity leave according to the educational level of the couple. The use of paternity leave rises in

those households where the woman is active in the labor market and has higher education studies and falls in those households where the woman is not active in the labor market and has a social capital deficit. In the latter case, the mother has less bargaining capacity *vis-à-vis* the father in ensuring that the father takes paternity leave and shares the childcare in the early years. The results show that the empowerment of women in bargaining through education contributes to a more equal distribution of power within the family and, therefore, to an equal use of parental leave. Although this interpretation cannot directly be derived from the results obtained, this points to the fact that the pattern of diverging destinies is also being reproduced in Spain (Altintas, 2016; Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016; McLanahan, 2004). According to literature on household bargaining, those households that are better positioned socio-economically (both in work with higher educational levels), would make better use of the development of paternity leave policies through bargaining in couples, while those in which women have less capital could lead to family inequalities regarding childcare and labor activity. In line with previous research, the results reveal that greater male involvement through paternity leave in Spain is related to the labor market, the educational level of the mother and the working timetable of both parents (Borrás *et al.*, 2018; Arnalds *et al.*, 2021). As regards the proposed hypothesis, the results suggest that socio-demographic factors (level of education and relationship with the labor market) are relevant in the arrangements of couples in explaining the greater involvement of fathers in childcare.

These results are novel and of great importance in evaluating paternity leave policies, in identifying those groups that are benefitting from these and those that are being left behind. This also represents progress in helping to design more effective leave policies in terms of equality between and within families in their work/life balance, and thus in terms of equality.

Some limitations of this study should be considered. First, the mother's involvement in childcare is not analyzed. Previous research has addressed the fact that greater involvement by fathers in childcare has not produced less dedication to childcare by mothers (Borrás *et al.*, 2012; Bjornholt, 2011). Second, the data have not provided information about the age and economic situation of the couple and sex of the child. Third, the quantitative data present empirical evidence supporting the importance of the social capital of mothers in household bargaining over childcare and father parenting arguments but a qualitative analysis will be necessary to explain this development.

In short, knowledge of the socio-labor and educational level characteristics of family couples associated with the use of paternity leave is highly useful in evaluating and designing leave policies that contribute to reducing inequality in childcare patterns between parents in a household. The research carried out to date has revealed the positive effects of the use by parents of parental leave, fostering gender equality in childcare tasks and in the remunerated employment of women (Huerta *et al.*, 2013; Patnaik, 2018), along with other positive effects on the well-being of both children and parents. These conclusions have academic and political implications. Accordingly, these findings offer greater understanding of the complex bargaining process of parents in families to make use of parental leave. This progress on parental leave in Spain should be reinforced by policies on child care services and flexible work time in order to foster the structural and cultural change toward gender equality in the couples. This progress in knowledge

contributes to providing information on policies and generating multiple positive effects in the long term.

The policy implications of these results are clear. The progress in paternity leave policies provides a suitable context to shift from traditional parenting and fatherhood to new involvement by fathers. Public leave policies must provide favorable structural contexts to reduce the socio-economic and employment inequality that underpins traditional ideological discourses of fatherhood. This is a necessary first step toward achieving greater gender equality in both parenting practices and attitudes.

Notes

1. A detailed explanation of this survey is included in the database section.
2. These are households made up of two partners with children aged zero, in which the man is working and entitled to take paternity leave.
3. A detailed analysis on the implications of the Rho value on the estimate can be consulted in the work by Moreno-Mínguez et al. (2023).

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Appendix 1

Table A1. Estimation of the use of paternity leave.

	Household I Coefficient	Household II Coefficient	Household III Coefficient	Household IV Coefficient
Wife's participation	0.503***	0.762***	0.541***	0.632***
Age	0.005	0.005	-0.013	-0.002
Foreign	-0.259**	0.202	-0.248	-0.148*
Children	-0.023	0.040	0.226***	0.002
Permanent	0.084	0.284***	0.066	0.179***
Year (ref. 2001)				
2002	-0.022	-0.448	0.336	0.138
2003	0.485	-0.372	0.365	0.051
2004	0.498	-0.230	0.168	0.228
2005	0.898***	0.138	0.393	0.567**
2006	0.880***	-0.054	0.473	0.703***
2007	1.109***	-0.029	0.792**	0.779***
2008	1.160***	0.543**	0.843**	0.797***
2009	1.149***	0.565**	0.728**	0.716***
2010	1.309***	0.234	0.900***	0.590***
2011	1.148***	0.326	1.057***	0.635***
2012	1.249***	0.350	0.432	0.743***
2013	1.232***	0.232	0.687*	0.721***
2014	1.072***	0.180	0.666*	0.652***
2015	1.192***	0.311	0.565	0.674***
2016	1.103***	0.459*	0.965***	0.920***
Ascendants	-0.028	0.403***	0.068	0.093
Age	0.008*	0.013**	0.000	0.005**
Foreign	-0.560***	-0.430***	-0.204**	-0.054
Children	-0.084***	-0.070**	-0.037	-0.089***
Age difference	-0.017***	-0.015***	-0.014**	-0.006**
Year variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupational variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
rho	-0.227	-0.512	-0.467	-0.534
Wald Test / chi2(1)	6.542**	9.347***	6.000**	47.059***

*, **, *** Significantly different from zero to 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.