



## Conversation Stream Notes

### What do Fathers Need at Work?

Year of the Dad Conference - 12 February 2016

The 'What do fathers need at work?' conversation stream consisted of three presentations followed by a floor discussion.

#### Parental Leave in Iceland: How Does it Work?

*Ingólfur Gíslason- Associate Professor in Sociology, University of Iceland*

- **Understanding Iceland's Parental Leave 'Revolution'**

- In 2000, Iceland introduced new legislation extending the length of parental leave from six to nine months: three months maternity leave, three months paternity leave, and three months shared leave.
- The new parental leave system also introduced financial compensation at 80% of salary, and included components protecting employment and promoting the accumulation of social rights.
- Today, a majority of fathers in Iceland take paternity leave at an average length of just over three months – though the uptake and duration of paternity leave was considerably higher before the economic crash.

- **Learning from Results in Iceland**

- There are four necessary conditions for a robust and successful parental leave system that works for both fathers and mothers: (1) economic compensation related to salary, (2) non-transferable rights, (3) flexibility, and (4) institutional support.
- The length of paternity leave is crucial. Research in Iceland shows that the longer a father is on leave, the more likely he is to report an increase in: understanding a child's needs, finding enjoyment in parenting, emotional attachment to their child, understanding how much work it is to care for a child, and participating in childcare once parental leave ceases.
- Both phrasing and non-transferability are important factors. The additional three months of 'shared' leave is often perceived as three further months for mothers.
- The 'push' needed to encourage fathers to take paternity leave is real social possibilities.
- Paternity leave has positive effects on fathers, mothers, children, and family co-operation. With regard to gender equality in Iceland, there has been nothing more significant than this for encouraging men to become more involved in parenting and domestic tasks.



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The Price of Love

Caroline Gatrell – Professor of Management Studies, Lancaster University Management School

- **Study Design**

- This mixed methods study explored childcare prioritisation and income earning among fathers in the UK in order to better understand the relationships between flexible working and paternal wellbeing. The fathers recruited held positions at various income levels in two large organisations spanning both the public and private sectors.

- **Results**

- *Quantitative Analysis*
  - Survey results showed that flexibility gives lower paid workers a greater sense of autonomy in their working lives, improves fathers' overall wellbeing, and leads to healthier behaviours. However, most fathers felt discouraged from flexible working. It is thus necessary to understand how fathers in different circumstances perceive and experience fathering.
- *Qualitative Analysis*
  - The analysis of interviews drew on the juxtaposition between 'manly'/'breadwinner' fathers (those prioritising paid work over 'hands on' childcare) and 'involved' fathers (those giving precedence to engaged, 'intimate' fathers). However, this language was not introduced during the interviews. Of the men interviewed, household types and childcare arrangements varied considerably.
  - The findings demonstrated that across a variety of family and working arrangements most men fell into one of the two fathering categories. The ability to work flexibly (or lack thereof) did not appear to impact on men's identification within either category. Links between men's relationship status and the fathering categories were less obvious than anticipated.

- **Learning from Results in the UK**

- Broader research suggests a shift in paternal desires to become involved fathers, which indicates a need for more widely available flexible working and further research on fathering and family practices. This is especially needed amongst separated fathers, as it is still unclear whether experiences of lone fathers are reflected in social statistics.
- This study identified a crucial shift from needing to wanting flexible working. The tendency among some men to prioritise childcare over paid work suggests some men may be redefining 'masculine' fatherhood – perhaps there is a movement from 'manly'/'breadwinner' fathering to 'involved' fathering.
- Access to flexible working does not necessarily equate with the uptake of flexible working. Fathers and mothers both need and desire more imaginative and inclusive flexible working without detrimental impacts on their careers.



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#### Making the Most of Workplace Entitlements

Alison Koslowski – Senior Lecturer in Social Policy, University of Edinburgh

- **Understanding the UK's Parental Leave 'Puzzle'**
  - UK fathers have access to more workplace entitlement to leave and flexible working options and are more engaged with active childcare than ever before. However, substantially more fathers than mothers are not making use of their workplace entitlements.
  - The focus in supporting fathers to make the most of family leave and flexible working must move beyond entitlement. It is essential that the emphasis is instead placed on creating conditions that enable fathers to use their entitlements.
  
- **Workplace Entitlements for Parents in the UK**
  - *Statutory Workplace Entitlements*
    - This category of leave describes the level of entitlement an employer is required to provide – like paternity, shared parental, emergency, and annual leave.
    - The aim of these entitlements is to give every child the best start in life and to reduce the level of child poverty by helping more parents (mothers) into work. However, an often-overlooked objective of the parental leave system is the achievement of greater equality in labour market outcomes and caring opportunities for both mothers and fathers.
    - There are three key issues with these entitlements: (1) income replacement is too low (below minimum wage), (2) the amount of non-transferable leave for fathers is too low (only two weeks), and (3) there is no seamless integration between leave and publicly funded childcare.
  - *Extra-statutory Workplace Entitlements*
    - This category of leave describes workplace entitlements employers may choose to offer as a benefit alongside salary – like sick pay and pensions.
    - The aims of these entitlements are primarily economic. By their nature, they will not be offered by all employers and will vary widely in their provision, within which management support plays a key role.
    - Importantly, these entitlements are much less likely to be available to those on low incomes.
  
- **Recommendations for Increasing Fathers' Uptake of Leave**
  - Fathers' uptake of leave and flexible working entitlements could be improved in six key ways: (1) reviewing additional pay benefits for fathers, (2) HR delivery of awareness programmes, (3) training and informing line-managers, (4) targeting fathers in information, (5) creating a learning culture beyond HR programmes, and (6) reserving some leave for fathers.
  - As demonstrated in the Icelandic context, in the UK it is also necessary to provide financial compensation related to salary and become more explicit about increasing non-transferable leave for 'fathers' specifically, rather than just 'parents', which is often perceived as 'mothers'.



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#### Chaired Discussion

*Sarah Jackson - Chief Executive, Working Families*

- Results in Iceland demonstrate a sociocultural readiness for a parental leave 'revolution', which raised the question of to what extent the UK is ready for this. This also begged the question of whether men's involvement in parenting and domestic tasks has actually impacted women's advancement in Iceland.
  - There is no data in Iceland available on women's career advancement as of yet. With regard to sociocultural readiness, there is clear evidence in the UK that shows young fathers have the largest desire for flexible working and are the unhappiest with work-life balance. Improving work-life balance and thus workplace happiness has benefits that extend beyond parenting – happier workers are more engaged and have higher levels of performance.
- Better understanding the drivers toward fathering and the various descriptions of fatherhood helps us to understand how self-identification as a father functions in the workplace. In the observed shift toward needing to wanting more support for parenting opportunities, men are now experiencing more typically 'female' dilemmas in the workplace. This raised questions of whether men's involvement in improving parental support in the workplace will be a good thing for everyone.
  - Some women in attendance wonder whether there is a possibility that fathers will carve out a space for themselves while leaving women behind. While fathers need to work together to improve working fatherhood, it is also necessary for mothers and fathers to work cohesively. It is not enough for fathers to feel entitled to higher salaries, promotions, and parenting support – everyone needs equal entitlement to opportunities at home and at work.
- It is particularly necessary to further investigate the impact that workplace leave entitlements have on small charities and businesses. For small charities particularly, there is much work to be done to create the conditions for the uptake of leave for parents, especially fathers.
- Fathers tend to need support negotiating parental leave and flexible working, whereas women tend to need support learning how to negotiate salary increases and promotions amidst parenting responsibilities.
  - This support could perhaps take the shape of fathers learning from mothers and vice versa, fathers supporting each other, or even cross-sector mentorship. Working fathers in attendance expressed that 'fathers' networks' in their workplaces have low attendance and that further work needs to be done to understand barriers to engaging fathers in the workplace.
    - However, there is a notable lack of visibility of fathers in the workplace compared to mothers. Fathers in attendance also expressed the lack of role models and senior figures that are visible fathers. The discussion suggested that perhaps men are 'looking up' for encouragement to change, whereas women's movements have historically been more grassroots. It seems that a combination of both 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches are necessary for parenting in the workplace to become normative.
- Shared parental leave should carry more non-transferable leave for fathers and needs to be more straightforward, user-friendly and accessible. It also needs to be discussed more in the workplace, so that it becomes easier to communicate.
- All three presentations noted that men do not always perceive 'fathering' as synonymous with 'parenting'. There is still work to be done in leveling the role of mothers and fathers, which requires more fathers to become actively engaged with tackling gender issues like parenting.



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