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# Swedish fathers home alone

**Contribution to project "Fathers on Leave Alone"**

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# Why are Swedish fathers interesting?

- Long tradition of right to use leave (since 1970s)
- Coherent policy in support of gender-equal parenthood
- Use it or lose it benefit
- Norm to use leave
- All mothers and almost all fathers use

But...

- What are the hindrances to usage?
- How do they use? Sole responsibility?
- How do they experience their time at home?
- What are the consequences of their use?

# Why is parental leave use important?

- Gender equality indicator
- Leading to increasing gender equality in home ?
- Leading to child interest, contact, development?
- Leading to changed partner relationship ?
  
- Challenges work participation, engagement and work place structure
- Leading to fathers' changed attitude to work?

# Swedish parental leave

- Introduced in 1974 for both parents
- Extended in the 1980s
- Reserved months in 1995 and 2002
- Gender equality bonus
- Increased ceiling in 2006

# Parental leave today

- 6.5 months to each parent, but days can be transferred (except 2 reserved months)
- 80% income replacement (often more)
- Also 3 months at low flat rate
- May be used to child's 8th birthday
  - new regulation 2014
- Large flexibility in possibilities of use
- Can extend leave, can share days and weeks

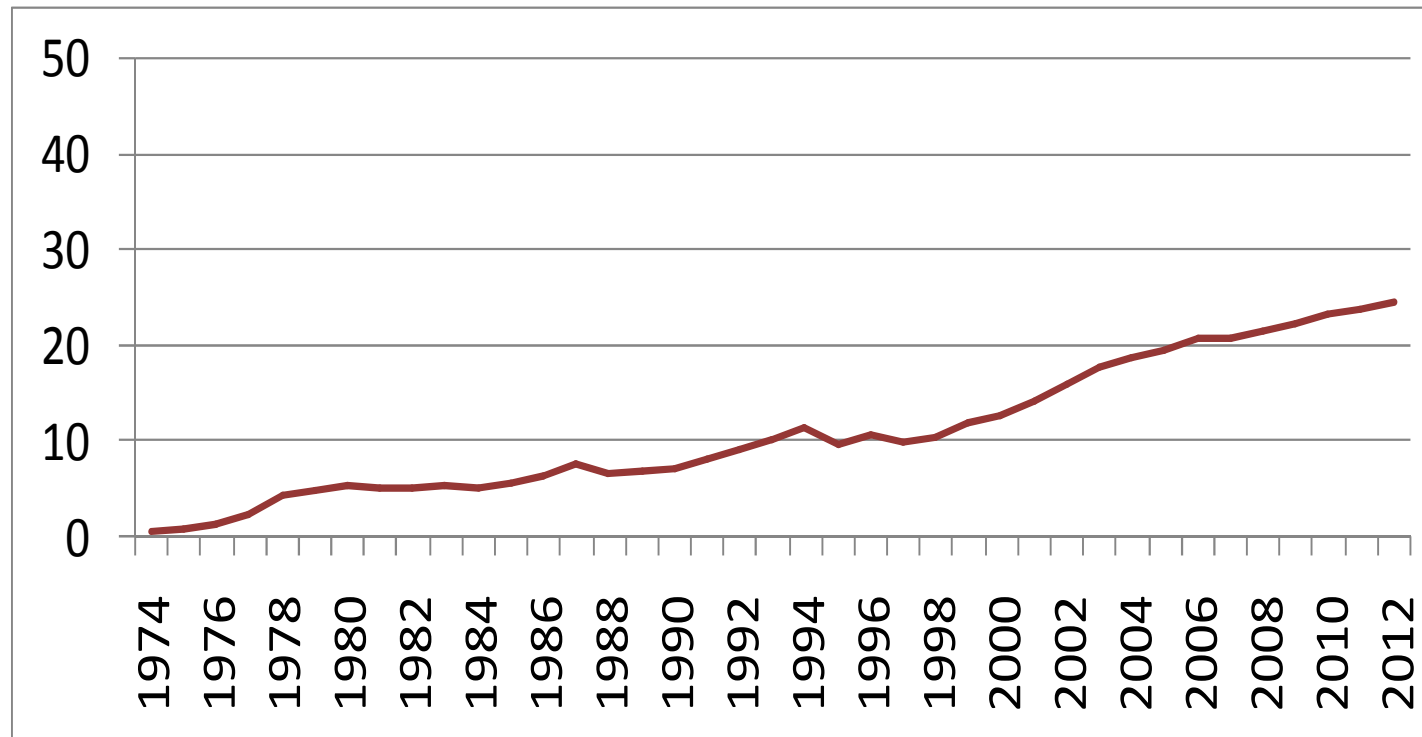
# Other related family policy context

- Parents have extended right to keep employment, position and not be discriminated in salary
- "Guarantee" to daycare 3 months after application for all children (but most start in August)
- Maximum payment for daycare: ~125 Euro for first child
- Right to daycare for older siblings when on parental leave
- Absolute majority of children in daycare (90% of two year olds)

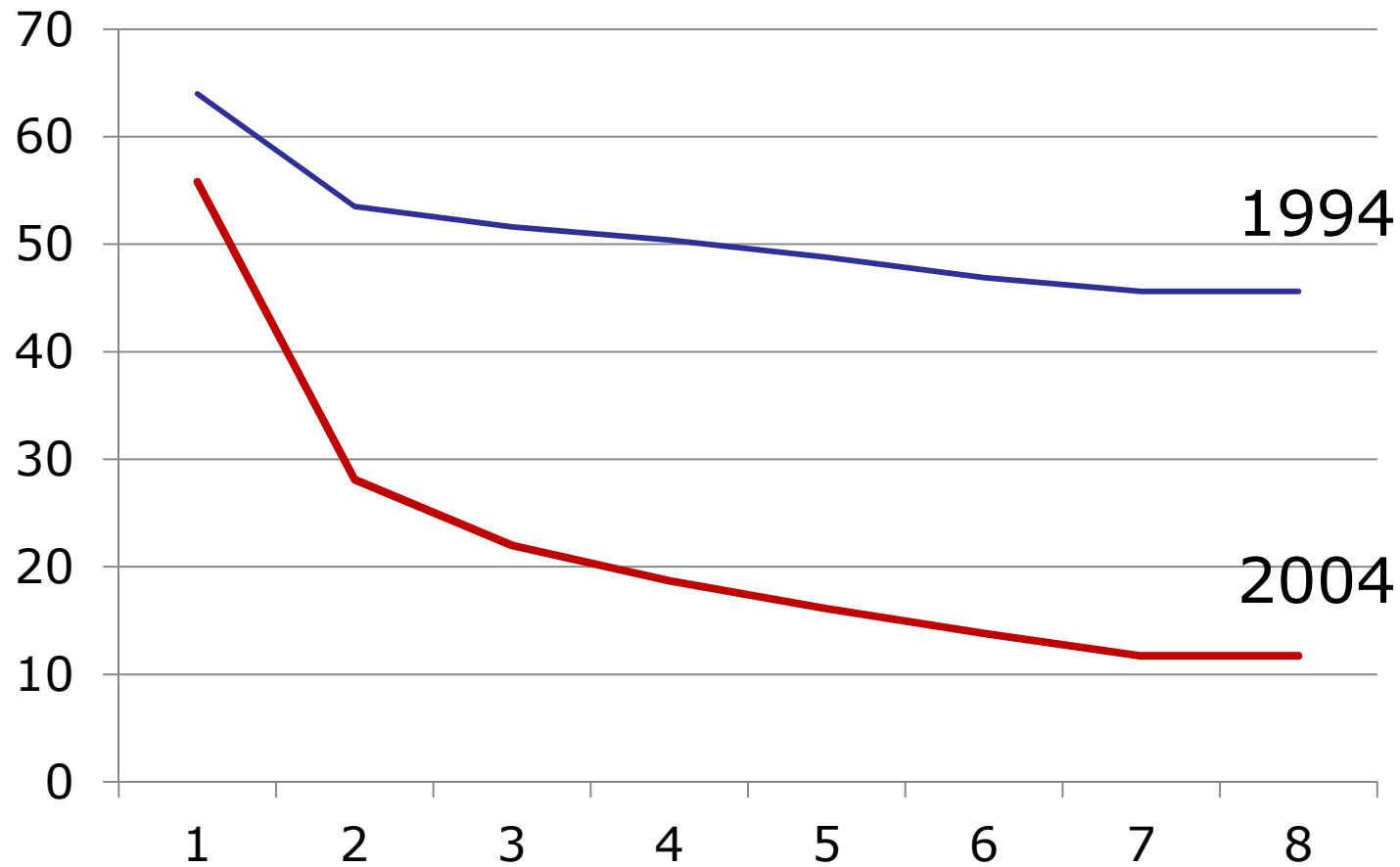


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# Fathers' share of parental leave days



# Share of fathers to children born 1994 and 2004 who use 0 days by child's age



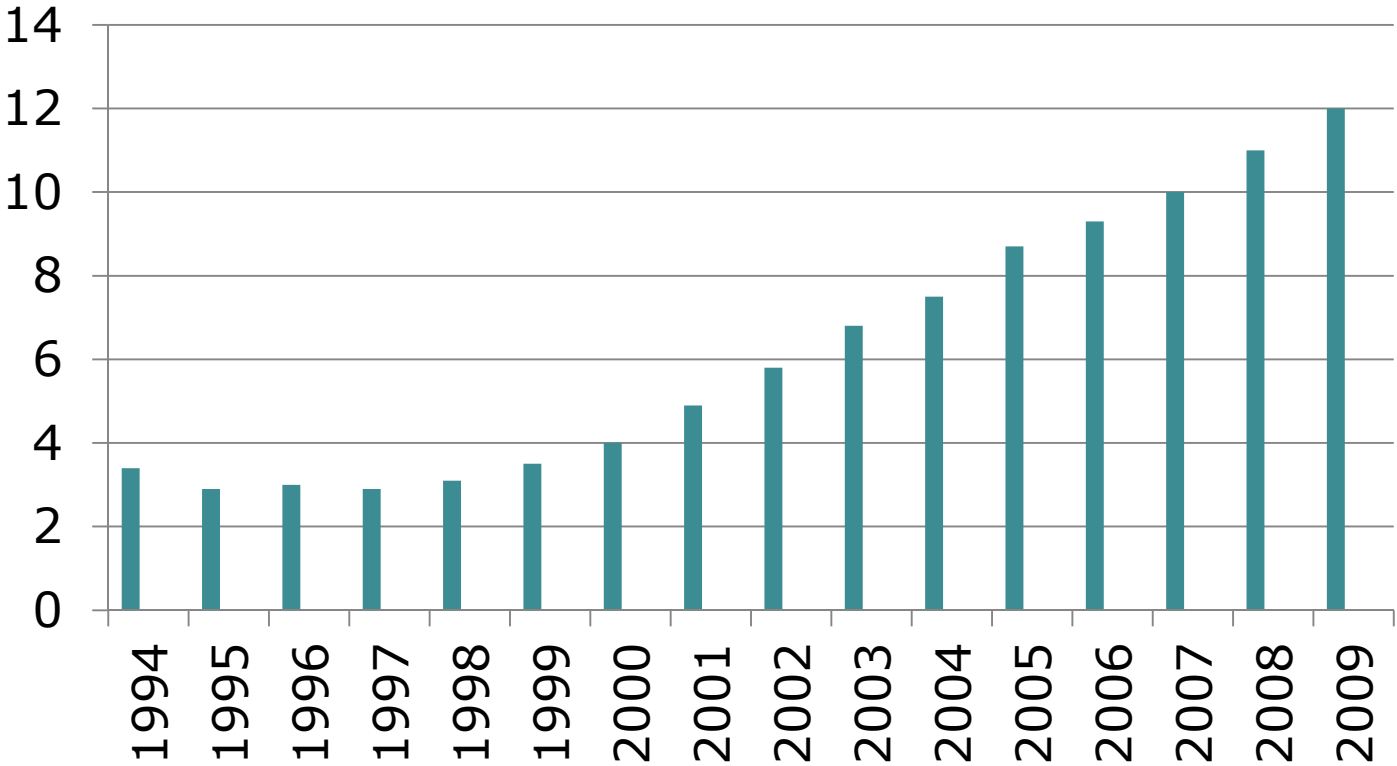


# Share of children whose parents have share the leave within 40/60 %

Use during first 2 years



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## Fathers' days used by educational groups before and after major reforms

	Primary education		Secondary education		Tertiary education	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
1995 1st month	<b>19,8</b>	<b>33,0</b>	<b>24,1</b>	<b>35,1</b>	<b>34,7</b>	<b>38,9</b>
2002 2nd month	35,2	33,8	<b>37,5</b>	<b>46,0</b>	<b>50,6</b>	<b>55,2</b>
2008 Bonus	44,3	40,9	50,8	47,2	70,6	72,6

# Sample

## 14 fathers

- Age 30-42
- 1-4 children
- Leave alone 2-10 months, average: 6.8 months
- Educational level:
  - Compulsory: 1
  - Secondary: 5
  - Tertiary but no degree: 3
  - Tertiary: 3
  - PhD: 2
- Work sector: Private 9/ Public 5
- All in Stockholm with suburbs

## Method

- All but one respondent found through social network
- About 1 hour interview – using interview guide provided by *Leave network*
- Compensation voucher 20 EUR
- Interviews recorded, transcribed and coded
- Coded by Thalberg and Haas, discussed by all authors

# Themes within results

Division of leave, importance of...

Partner

Economy

Work

Experience of leave

Most positive

Most difficult

What they learnt

Impact of leave in different domains

Career and attitudes to work

Father-child bond

Divison of housework

Being a father and man

Opinion of current leave policy

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## Division of leave

- Taken for granted by them and partner they would take leave
- No real discussions or conflict
- Total length mainly determined by daycare start
- Negotiations of length, "switch" dominated by their and partner's work
- Economy mentioned by some

“Where I live all dads take parental leave, and at my work place all dads take leave, it would have been considered strange if I did *not* take leave”

“We both knew that we wanted to split the leave. So there was not much to discuss really.”



## Reactions at work to leave use

- Most fathers got positive or neutral, unsurprised reactions:

“Congratulations! How nice for you!”

“To take paternal leave at my workplace is something taken for granted. They knew I had a baby so they weren’t exactly surprised that I would take leave.”

- Some fathers in male dominated workplaces encountered incomprehension and negative comments, mainly from colleagues. They claim it did not affect their leave-taking.

“It just made me more determined, it’s just nonsense. I pity those who haven’t taken the opportunity when it was given. You miss so much.”

## Experience of leave, most positive

- Overall very positive!
- Following the child's development day-to-day
- To create their own close relationship to their child, undisturbed by work, mother and siblings
- Doing things their own way, finding their own routines
- "Cozy", being in a "leave bubble"

## But...

- Difficult to become parents

“ I loved Tindra from the moment I saw her, I would do anything for her, but I did not like being a parent. Do you understand? I got a life I did not like. I could not sleep, I could not do anything and I felt trapped...well, I suppose many feel like that in the beginning.”

## But...

- Take time to disconnect work
- Few mentioned lonely, many very social
- Organized activities, some hard to participate, many liked
- Hard to get stimulu for both father and child in end

## What they learnt

- Prioritize, reflect on work and family
- Appreciate the amount of household work
- To respond to the child's needs

“When something goes wrong I understand why and what happened and how to handle it”

## Impact of leave

- Work less important for all respondents
- Several had made adjustments: declined position, worked fewer hours, seeking more father-friendly workplace

“The real deadline is picking up the kids at day-care in time, not the ones you have at work”

## Preliminary conclusions

- Taking leave taken for granted
- Work no hindrance for most respondents
- Present positive experience of leave
- Changed attitudes towards work
- Closer bond with their child