

# Fathers on leave alone in Finland

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# Policy context: facilitating fathers' work-life balance

## Direct / specific (fathers)

- non-transferable leave rights for fathers
- individual parental benefits for fathers
- father-specific support services (peer groups)

## Direct / non-specific (parents)

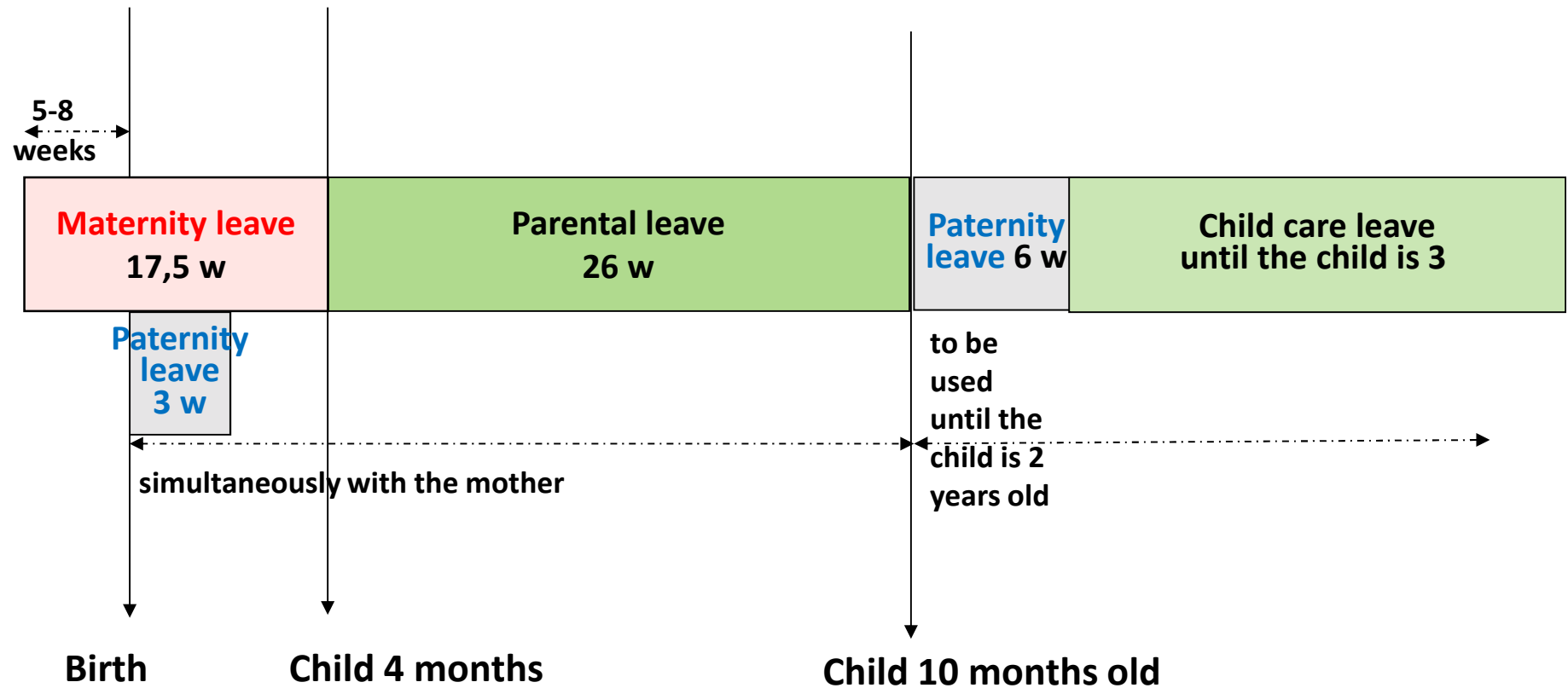
- affordable, high-quality daycare for children
- family-friendly practices at the workplace
- information about rights

} alternative for  
father's take-up  
of leave?

## Indirect: facilitating mothers' employment & career

- individual taxation
- anti-discrimination laws
- (female) quotas in politics and business

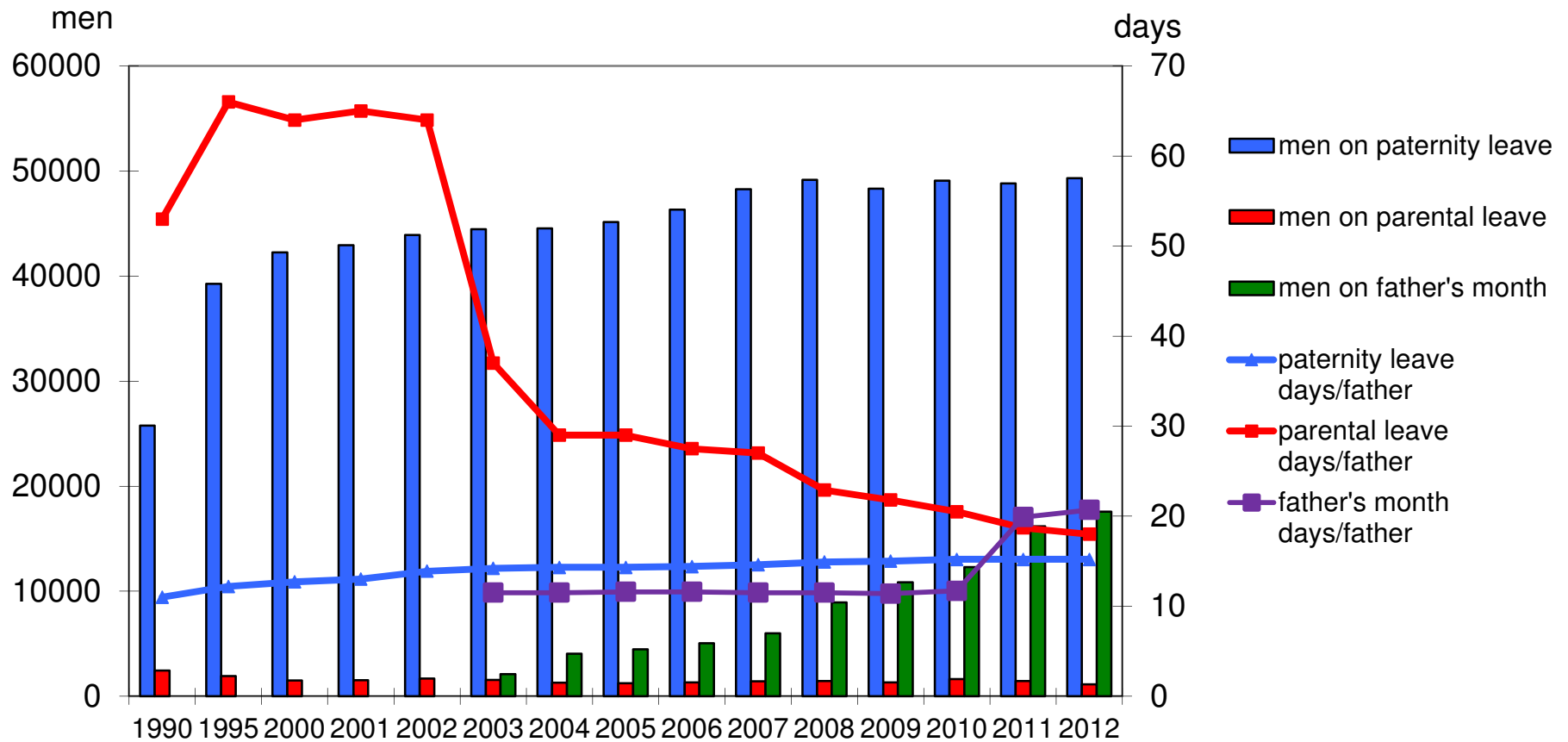
# Leave scheme in Finland



## Development of leave schemes for fathers

- Paternity leave (1978-)
- Parental leave, transferable (1985-)  
Part-time parental leave (2003-)
- Home care leave, transferable (1985-)
  
- Father's month (2003-2013)  
2003: 2+2 weeks  
2007: more flexible use  
2010: 2+4 weeks
  
- Paternity leave + Father's month = Paternity leave  
2013: 9 weeks

# Take-up of leave by fathers in Finland 1990-2012



# Paternity leave (home together)

”Everyman’s mass movement” regardless of socio-economic status.

Full three weeks taken more often by

- first-time fathers
- students
- self-employed

Positive correlation between 3w paternity leave and marital satisfaction:

- mutual respect and understanding (fathers)
- division of labour in childcare (mothers)

## Parental leave (home alone)

Fathers are more likely to take parental leave when

- his spouse is highly educated & white-collar
- his first child is born
- he is employed in the public sector
- he would like to take a break from employment  
(not necessarily communicated to the spouse)

Family economy is often reported as an obstacle (based on assumptions rather than calculations).

Conceptions of separate, gendered parental responsibilities have a negative correlation with father's take-up of parental leave.

- Mothers: shared breadwinning + mothercare
- Fathers: shared childcare + male breadwinning

# Paternity leave at the workplace

## interviews with HR-managers

### Paternity leave as "self-evident"

They take at least a week or two, they have to <> I think it is **automatic** that he stays at home minimum two weeks.

*(Restaurant)*

### Paternity leave as "desirable"

We decided to pay full salary during two weeks of paternity leave to **encourage take-up**. Before fathers took a week or only a couple of days <> now nobody can say they can only afford to take one week.

*(Finance)*



# Parental leave at the workplace

## interviews with HR-managers

### Father's parental leave as "positive exception"

He was the first male to take this longer leave <> well there was a little bit like **joking** around it, but no offence meant of course.

*(Traffic)*

### Father's parental leave as "private matter"

It has to do with gender roles <> I don't think we should make a statement in the company intranet like "fathers take leave". But if a father comes to me and proposes a leave, we will definitely do our best to arrange it.

*(Energy)*

## Interviews with fathers

Seven thematic interviews (60-90 min) in 2013

- age 30-41
- 1-2 children
- 5/7 of fathers and 5/7 of their spouses have university degree, other 2 men not blue-collar
- length of "home alone" leave from 2 months to 2 years

Mika 35 yrs, married, 2 children, project manager, took four months of leave with each child.

Olli 39 yrs, one child, divorced when the child was under 1, marketing manager, stayed at home for two years.

## Negotiations with the mother

*Mika:* I think it was during pregnancy that we started to think about leave. It was clear from the beginning that we did not want the children to start very young in daycare.

How to organise it in practice, I think my **wife probably asked** if I wanted to take a longer leave and it felt like a good solution. I was happy to take the opportunity for a break from work and on the other hand, it is good to spend time with children when they are young.

*Olli:* When my daughter was two months old my spouse started to feel quite tired. At the same time **I was re-thinking my values** so I said I could also stay at home. So we both stayed at home.

When the baby was five months old my spouse got a really good job, **I encouraged her to apply** because it was a rare opportunity. She started in the new job when the baby was ten months old, we moved to another city and I stayed at home.

## Negotiations at the workplace

*Mika:* I had a talk with my boss, he was new in the company and somehow he **did not want me to take a very long leave**. I quite understand that as the company is quite small (25 employees) and if people are absent for a longer time they **lose a relatively important input**. Almost all the time someone is on maternity leave or paternity leave, and some have taken longer sick leaves as well so it has quite a big impact. I have a different boss now and **he has actually taken** three months of leave himself, had he been my boss then I maybe could have taken six months instead of four.

*Olli:* I had to argue with my boss (who was not a Finn) and tell him that I have a **legal right** to take parental leave. I gave him the telephone number of my **union layer** in case he wanted to check the facts. At that point I had to consider the **consequences of the leave for my career**. When I told them I was going to continue on care leave after my parental leave they kind of let me know that I was **not welcome back** there any more.



## Home alone

*Mika:* It was very different. When I did not go to work there was a sense of **freedom**, I could do what I want and not be so tied to timetables. There was **less stress**, of course I was sometimes busy during the day having to dress and undress and feed the children, but it was different. That was the main experience, it was quite nice.

With the first child, I have been joking that I learned to organise things and to **manage chaos**, as some things need to be done and they are not always so easy. I have always been quite patient, one really needs patience.

*Olli:* I had **no idea** what it would be like, if it was going to be suffering or something nice. I soon realised that I liked it. After some months I thought I could just as well stay at home longer. Five years ago I could **not have imagined** that I would be a stay-at-home dad. I used think of myself as very work-oriented, but looking at my choices, I guess I was not after all. The choices seemed so easy and natural.

## Discussion

- In addition to the mother's position in the labour market, the value of home care for young children is an important element for the take-up of leave by the father.
- Negotiations with the boss take place when the father has already agreed with the mother about taking leave, so only minor adjustments can be made.
- If support is lacking at the workplace, a highly educated father is likely to choose a more family-friendly workplace.
- Identities and values are involved in choices, but they are also shaped through experience.
- None of the home-alone fathers regretted taking leave.