

THE CHILD'S BEST AND NASCENT COUPLES ANTICIPATIONS FOR THEIR PARENTHOOD IN GERMANY

Anna Dechant & Annika Rinklake (ifb)

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INTRODUCTION – GERMAN BACKGROUND

- Fundamental changes in the society related to family and family structures

- More egalitarian divisions of paid and unpaid labor in childless couples

- Shift to specialized division after the birth of first child

- Change parental leave and leave allowance legislation – old ones valid for interviewed couples

--> What do parents-to-be judge as the best for their child and how is this ideal related to their ideas on the role of mother and father as well as their concrete plans for their future as parents? Role of institutions?

DATA AND METHODS

- DFG-funded project: „The Household Division of Domestic Labour as a Process. How does the Division of Housework Change over the Course of Relationships? “
 - 14 couples
 - living together
 - expecting their first child
 - both gainful employed
 - similar (and high) educational attainments
- Methods: qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2008)

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- Four important topics with regard to the construction of the best for the child and parental roles:
 - Breastfeeding and bonding
 - The role of the mother
 - The role of the father
 - External child care

BREASTFEEDING AND BONDING

- The child's best:
 - Breastfeeding is important for the child's health
 - Too short is not good for the child – nor too long
 - Social pressure: woman should breastfeed
 - Bonding
- Related to the mother-to-be:
 - Compatibility vs. incompatibility with paid work
 - Woman wants to / plans to nurse
 - Unique female ability – excluding the father-to-be
 - Worries and fears

THE ROLE OF THE MOTHER

- The child's best:
 - Mother better in taking responsibility for the child than the father or someone else --> parental leave for a longer time (min. one year)
 - For some time (up to one year) maternal care and mother staying at home best for the child – then others can step in -> partial main carer
 - Mother and father equally caring and continuous maternal employment is best
- Other aspects related to the child:
 - Staying at home for the child is more important than female paid work
 - Care by the mother is more important than by the father

THE ROLE OF THE MOTHER

- Related to the mother-to-be:
 - Wish to see the child growing up, to enjoy the time or to have a break from paid work
 - Maternal instincts and feelings about having to care
 - Legal regulations:
 - Three years as omnipresent time span
 - Inflexibility
- Anticipated behavior
 - Exclusion of the man
 - Gatekeeping
 - Compatibility vs. incompatibility of motherhood and paid work

THE ROLE OF THE FATHER

- The child's best:
 - The father and his role is not discussed as important for the best of the child
 - One exception: best if both parents care equally
- Related to the father-to-be:
 - Father as ante- and postnatal support: accompany woman to antenatal classes, to childbirth, taking vacations etc.
 - Wish to spend time with the child – in the evenings and at the weekends after the paid work
 - Hypothetical considerations to have more time
 - Two cases: reduction/interruption of paid work to care for the child

EXTERNAL CHILD CARE

- The child's best:
 - Only parental care during the first year(s)
 - Benefit to go to day nurseries, contact with other children
 - External child care at least not bad for child's development
 - Crèche on all working days is better than on fewer
 - Grandparents are better than public child care
- Other aspects:
 - Costs too high
 - Necessary to have two incomes
 - Tax benefits
 - Woman's paid work central: autonomy, identification etc.
 - Availability of family and friends and wish to use this help
 - Institutional constraints
 - Not yet decided

CONCLUSION

Four different anticipations for the time after childbirth:

- She stays at home for min. one year, main caring
- She stays at home for max. six months and cares mainly in this time– afterwards others come in
- Both care for the child equally
- He stays at home and cares mainly for the child

CONCLUSION

Four different anticipations for the time after childbirth:

- She stays at home for min. one year, main caring --> Breastfeeding is the best for the child, paid work and motherhood are incompatible while child is young, father is supportive, public care at the age of three

- She stays at home for max. six months and cares mainly in this time– afterwards others come in

- Both care for the child equally

- He stays at home and cares mainly for the child

CONCLUSION

Four different anticipations for the time after childbirth:

- She stays at home for min. one year, main caring
- She stays at home for max. six months and cares mainly in this time— afterwards others come in
--> Breastfeeding is the best for the child, leave according to nursing time, paid work important to mothers, father supportive first, then active or supportive, different plans for external child care – but according to child's best

- Both care for the child equally
- He stays at home and cares mainly for the child

CONCLUSION

Four different anticipations for the time after childbirth:

- She stays at home for min. one year, main caring
- She stays at home for max. six months and cares mainly in this time– afterwards others come in
- Both care for the child equally

--> Breastfeeding is the best for the child and compatible with paid work, woman wants to be active in the labor market and share child care responsibility with partner, man wants to care for the child actively, different external child care wishes according to the best for the child

- He stays at home and cares mainly for the child

CONCLUSION

Four different anticipations for the time after childbirth:

- She stays at home for min. one year, main caring
- She stays at home for max. six months and cares mainly in this time– afterwards others come in
- Both care for the child equally
- He stays at home and cares mainly for the child
--> Breastfeeding is planned, woman will return to labor market quickly, man will stay at home and be the main caregiver, no public care planned

Introduction

QUESTIONS

Data and
Methods

- What shall we do with the institutional change and the couples hypothetical considerations about it?

Breastfeeding

- How to include doing gender and undoing gender better?

The role of
the mother

- ...

The role of
the father

External child
care

Conclusion



THANK YOU!

Anna.Dechant@ifb.uni-bamberg.de
Annika.Rinklake@ifb.uni-bamberg.de