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Adaptations to Ideals: Plans for Child Care of First Time Dual- Earner Parents in Spain

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Sample I

- **N:** 201 individual in-depth interviews (67 women and 67 male partner were interviewed separately) & 67 joint interviews to couples that were expecting first child
- **Four major cities of Spain** (Barcellona, Madrid, Pamplona and Seville)
- **Year interviews:** 2011
- **Recruiting method:** child birth preparation classes, personal contacts, snow ball.
- **Mean age:** women 34; men 36

Sample II

- **Target population:** dual-earner couples, but some jobless individuals (18 out of 136) actively searching for paid work have been included (20% unemployment rate in 2011).
- **Educational attainment:** 18 women and 32 men in with upper secondary education or less; the rest of the sample formed by college educated individuals.
- **Couples' educational homogamy:** 28 homogamous couples, 29 couples where she has a higher level of educational attainment & 11 couples where the man has higher education.

In which context do parents decide about the best child care arrangements?

- Increase in female activity rates (age 25-49): 72% (2005) – 80% (2010)
- Weakening men's position in the labour market - 2008 financial crisis -> men's new roles & identities
- Limited institutional support (unpaid parental leave, shortage in child care...)
- Male dominated culture in the LM
- Economic uncertainty and fear of sanctions

Structure of the paper:

1. Child care strategies for first time parents in dual-earner couples
2. Parents' time (plans for the future use of parental leave and reductions)
3. Externalizing care: institutional care versus family care
4. Ideas about motherhood and fatherhood (motherhood, naturalization and breastfeeding, the role of fathers)

1. Child care strategies for first time parents in dual-earner couples

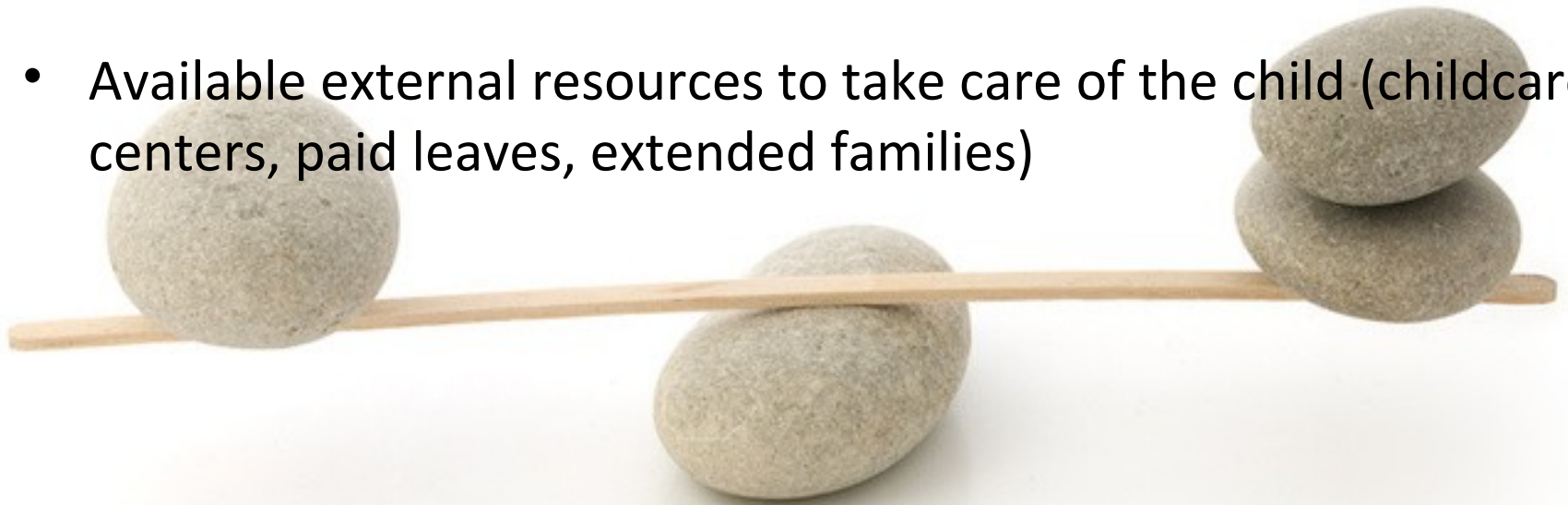
1. Mothers and grandmothers (19%=13 couples)
2. Mainly mothers and external solutions (29%=20 couples)
3. Mothers and fathers taking a small additional part of the care (19%=13 couples)
4. Mothers and fathers (32%=22 couples)

✓ For most couples the dual earner model is taken for granted (most mothers plan to return to their jobs after paid leave)

✓ Fathers attitudes are more mixed (some will not make use of 15 days paid leave)

1. Child Care Strategies... How do nascent couples come to these plans?

- Parents' willingness to spend time with the child - often altering their working schedules
- Available external resources to take care of the child (childcare centers, paid leaves, extended families)

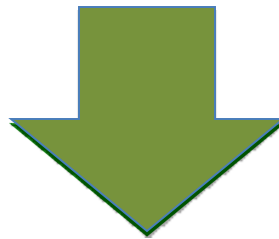


- Ideas about motherhood and fatherhood (gender roles)

1. Child Care Strategies...

A common trend in the sample

Difficult for the interviewed couples to separate their ideal plans about child care from their more realistic plans



Individuals and couples develop adaptive strategies to cope with mismatches between ideals and realities (family unfriendly institutional context)

2. Parents' time and plans

- Most women planned to take all the available paid time off : 4 to 6 months (maternity leave + breastfeeding leave + annual holidays); only 6 will transfer part of their maternity leave.
- Most fathers plan to use 15 days paternity leave (+annual holidays); very few envisage longer periods of leave during the first year

2. LEAVES I: Small group of men (13), typically with a strong work-orientation, are reluctant to use the 15 days paternity leave

Main arguments:

- Unfavorable working conditions such as long working days
- Need to avoid 'fatherhood penalty' in the workplace
- Recurrent reference to economic crisis & pressing need to show 'work commitment'

ROBERTO: buf, no, right now for instance I am thinking if I took a maternity leave the most probably, I think, I would get fired... Yes, yes, which is something that I can understand to a certain extent, you know? Because, it really is not a big enterprise, it is a small one, we are, well, the enterprise has other enterprises working for us, and some independent contractors... Maybe forty or fifty people, so... If I am one of the persons doing a high volume of work, so, so part of the enterprise depends on me, if I take a leave, they have to replace me with someone, and well, replacing me now is difficult, because I have been there for seven, eight, no, almost nine years, so in the end, a lot of work, it is a personal issue.

[Roberto is 41, works as a sales manager and has college education]

2. LEAVES II: Few of the interviewed women, and no men, plan to apply for long leaves (parental leave).

- They cannot afford to lose one income
- It should be fine for men to reduce their work in order to spend time with their children BUT labour market has not adapted to this idea & they are not allowed to do so
- Many men express the feeling they cannot be easily replaced (discourse almost absent among women).

2. LEAVES III: In many cases women consider the option of a part-time leave for some time (i.e. reduced working hours with the consequent wage penalty)

→ the only way to have time off for care in unfriendly work environments

→ based on economic arguments (couples' relative resources & labour prospects)

→ feeling that they have reached a glass ceiling at work (already achieved their goals at work; job is instrumental)

→ with the exception of public workers : it's expected to have negative consequences

Plans and self-fulfilling prophecy

- being pregnant is already seen as a signal that woman will be less involved with her work
- taking some time off is seen by others as a lack of compromise with the job
- there is general agreement (social norm) that society is more used to women taking time off rather than men



- (1) She gets pregnant, company expects her to take time off
- (2) She will face negative consequences at work
- (3) She believes that the battle is already lost & behaves as expected
- (4) She reduces dedication to paid work or resigns to the negative consequences.

AMAIA: In for a penny, in for a pound, you know? It's like, we have talked about this [...] To some extent, I have already tried my luck, because always, if you have a problem during pregnancy, like in my case, and you have to take leave earlier or, mainly the, the weeks of maternity leave that you have to take compulsorily, eh, in a job like mine in the end that has consequences, you know? [...]. So in for a penny, in for a pound

[She is 32, works as an engineer and has college education]

Time Use I: Participating fathers (planning to do less overtime, arrive home a bit earlier, reduce working hours, change working shift or somehow modify the working conditions)

- The relationship & the baby appear as important references, a purpose to their life.
- Work has a more instrumental meaning: attitude present in highly educated men & also in some men with lower education, long work experience & precarious job trajectory (i.e. disenchanted with the labor market)

3. Externalizing care: institutional care versus family care

- Most couples **against the idea of child care before 1** BUT still few couples plan to use licensed child care after 4 or 6 month (as a painful but unavoidable choice)
- Women with strong work orientation & **against ‘overloading grandparents’** usually express positive views about child care: ideal place to play, socialize & learn from children.
- Use of licensed child care **legitimized as a ‘healthy choice’ for their child under certain conditions** = if women are able to reduce working hours & child does not need to go through long school days.
- Many parents **anticipate difficulties to access public child care.**

3. Strong divisions about the role of extended family: grandmothers

- Views in favor: **grandparents are willing to care** for the child (couples with strong family ties for whom the best for the child is family care), it's a normal practice, best replacement for 'real mother'
- Grandparents as the '**best second alternative**' to rely on occasionally (child care is a heavy burden for elderly & children need to socialize).
- Uncomfortable with the idea of delegating child care responsibilities (abusing & overloading relatives): again **only occasional if no other alternatives are available.**

4. Ideas about motherhood and fatherhood

- Ideas on **gender are seldom elaborated or explicit**; not a consistent gender identity, couples combine egalitarian & more traditional elements
- In most couples **mothers appear as naturally more responsible or more connected** to children → care & **breeding as a female responsibility often related to a process of naturalization** (biological change, breastfeeding, maternal instincts...)
- Only **few women** with elaborated ideas on gender believe this is a social norm & they **question its validity and consequences**.
- Men often show less proactive attitudes than women in **anticipating** → less prepared to make **adjustments** in their (working) life

Breastfeeding



- The best for the child (for at least 4 but ideally 6 months = the time-off from paid work that mothers regularly have)
- Actively recommended by the Spanish Health System
- Widely accepted to be the healthiest choice for the child
- All couples in the sample (except for one with health problems) plan to breastfeed
- Main argument for mothers to take all possible time off themselves & for men to legitimize their initial lower presence

The role of the father



All to-be fathers expect the arrival of the child with excitement; often opposing the idea of the “absent father” & the need to spend “quality time” with them BUT plans reveal at least two different ideas about fatherhood and its implications:

- (1) Most fathers plan to take the role of **secondary carers**
- (2) a group of men (1/3 aprox.) close to a **dual-carer model** = new fatherhood

Conclusions: common trends

1. **Dual earner** model is taken for granted.
2. **Women are more ready to reduce** work.
3. All couples plan to **breastfeed** & most women plan to stay at home as long as possible.
4. Very few couples plan to take **unpaid parental leave** & it is taken up by women.
5. For most parents **public child care** is a valuable option, more so than grandparents.
6. Children should not go to **school in the first year**.

Final remark I

- a. Ideals about 'the best for the child' shall be framed in the Spanish context characterised by great difficulties to balance work and family.
- b. Men who want to take the role of carers are highly concerned with social and workplace-related sanctions.
- c. YET couples seldom articulate a discourse from a gender perspective & neither an explicit critique to the institutional constraints for a shared parenthood.

Final remark II

- d. Few men anticipate a shared fatherhood – it's mainly considered by men with disillusionment from their job prospects or stronger gender egalitarian ideology.
- e. The economic crisis has forced many men to reconsider the centrality of their jobs & their role as caregivers.
- f. Couples often find difficulties defining their ideals about childcare or about spending time with their child (awareness of institutional constraints & unwritten social norms about job commitment).