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Paid parental leave, everyday life and gendered practices. An “ideal day” and a “normal day”.

ATGENDER Conference 2023: Feminist Pedagogy of/beyond Borders, Strand 10: Everyday Life.

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1. Parental Leave and Childcare Benefits in Austria

Maternity leave 16 weeks (since 1957/ modified 1979)
8 weeks before birth, 8 weeks after **100% income** replacement (no upper limit) health insurance.

Paternity leave labelled "Family time bonus" (introd. 03/2017), 28-31 days. Moderate income replacement 23.91 € per day, **since 01/2023 about 720 € per month**

Parental leave 24 months – family entitlement (taken by one parent only or on an alternating basis)
(since 1960 until 1999, first including allowances (12 months, later 18, finally 24 if fathers share, 6 months); since 2000 moderate income replacement through "childcare benefits" (see below)

Childcare Benefits:
income-based form
12+2 months, **80% income replacement**
(higher percentage of fathers),
(+2 months if parents share the leave),

flat-rate forms, differing in length (flexible, days)
12+2 month, 1,000 € per month
up to 35 months, 436 € per month

in all forms, additional opportunity
partnership bonus 1,000 €, postponing 3 months (until a child's 7th birthday); parental part-time work until a child's 7th birthday (company less than 20 employees – 4th birthday/agreement – min. 12h/week; guarantee return full-time employment)

2. Gender Gap in the Uptake of Childcare Benefits in Austria

General patterns (Schmidt and Schmidt, 2022; Austrian Country Note, Parental Leave Network)

Length of childcare benefits uptake:
35% of all parents: income-based model 12-14 months
25% 24 or more months (flat rate)
36% 28 or more month (flat rate)

89% of principal recipients were mothers

Men's shares (Statistics Austria 2021, measuring leave days)
30% of income-based model 12-14 months (cases) are taken by men, but number of leave days taken by men is lower
4.5% men's shares of leave days (Rechnungshof/ Austrian Court of Audit 2020)
5.84 % men's shares of income-related childcare benefits form, in leave days

Traditional pathway/ changing societies – sharing the uptake (EU legislation): "*(The) perception of providing parental care has been described as a process in which parents move back and forth along a continuum of gender relations, characterized by sameness, dichotomy, ambiguity, and inequality" (Oláh et al., 2017: 20).*
= strategies in Austria, i.e., dual childcare benefits claims 12+2 months, + unpaid leave or educational leave.

3. Uptake of Childcare Benefits in Austria

Men's Shares in the Uptake of Childcare Benefits in 2017

2017	Old system 2017, birth 1.1.-28.2.		New system 2017, birth 1.3.-31.12.	
	Men's uptake %	Men's uptake in days	Men's uptake %	Men's uptake in days
Income-related childcare benefits	31.2	74	29.6	79
Flat-rate variant, account	14.2	151	11.4	193
Summary	18.8	116	17	132

Source: Administrative Data Competence Center Childcare Allowance/ Verwaltungsdaten Kompetenzzentrum Kinderbetreuungsgeld; OIF, Lorenz and Wernhart, 2022: 10).

4. Part-time Employment in Europe

Part-time employment (%) across countries in 2020

Part-time employment | CEDEFOP (europa.eu), LFS - European Labour Force Survey 2020

Cunha/ Atalaia 2019, The gendered division of labour in Europe. Patterns of practices in 18 EU Countries. p.127: „Cluster 5 brings together the Czech Republik, Bulgaria, Germany and Austria, and reveals a *high gender-unequal with male high commitment to paid work* pattern."

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5. Research Background: Transition to Parenthood

Empirical Research: societal challenges in the realization of "new" parenting forms. Gender and Family in Motion. Parental arrangements (2021-2025): couple interviews with parents in Austria including parents in all 9 federal states in Austria, both parents have claimed childcare benefits for at least 5 months

Structural counterforces : Austrian taxation system, labor market/ employment segments (lower net income for dual earners, single parents), female part-time work (Riederer and Berghammer 2019).
Since 2003: new calculations in pension funds (40 years instead of 15), higher risk of financial and social insecurity in old age for parents

Family values ("Familialism"?), progressive attitudes, importance of gender justice, reducing gender inequalities (OIF/ Lorenz and Wernhart 2022 – in correlation parents' choices – benefits claims and leave uptake in in Austria)

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6. Gender and Family in Motion. Parental Arrangements

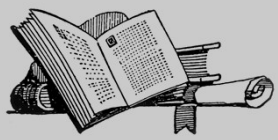
2021–2025, Department of Sociology, University of Vienna
First empirical wave, 42 couple interviews with different gender couples, May 2021–May 2022,
https://genfam.univie.ac.at/en/
2023: follow-up studies, individual interviews with parents

Methods
- semi-structured guideline interviews with couples (Witzel 2010)
- MAXQDA-data-coding and analyses, content-oriented approach (Mayring 2015, Nentwich & Kelan 2014), Informed Grounded Theory (Thornberg 2012), including earlier information/results in the guideline structure and participation prerequisites (i.e., 5 months minimum length of childcare benefits claims) – second empirical wave: approx. 20 individual Interviews (new sample, 2021-2022), 10 (prior research, 2013-2017).
- follow-up study: individual interviews, theoretical sampling (Thornberg 2012; Thornberg & Charmaz 2021), theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978) – i.e., work context, no. of children, residence; and/or theory-driven sampling.

Limitations: no young parents (female interviewees 30-54a, male 32-52a); no same-sex parents included.

7. First results: emergent themes (3 cases)

C: 7 months/ 7 months
Outdoor meeting in May 2021
Anna, 37, civil servant, legislation law, Marcus, 34, also in legislation law, university lecturer
Nana, born in Mai 2020, attending a public childcare facility since Sept. 2022.



R: 9 months/ 5 months
ZOOM October 2021
Nadja, 35a, tax advisor
Karl, 37a, architect;
2 sons, both 2 times on leave.
Emo, born in July 2019, age 2 years +3 months at the point of the interview (3 days per week in a private nursery since Sept. 2020, half-day with his grandmother
Kai, born in May 2021 (leave sharing 5-5-4 months)

P2: 12 months/ 12 months
ZOOM May 2022
Lisa, 38, self-employed entrepreneur, organic food store; Toni, 33, gardener; energy consultant)
Henri, 1.5 years old, attending daycare three (half) days/week; one day per week with his grandmother.

7.1. "A normal day on leave", "an ideal day"

Getting up with Nadja, he sleeps a bit longer, a quick shower, coffee, mostly when she was still there, that she takes him [...] I usually went out late in the morning, around 11 a.m., something like that, I had a fixed tour over the mountain for an hour. I prepared the food in the mixer with a mobile phone timer. [...] Karl 37, on leave with his first son, a normal day

Markus gets up at 6 a.m., and Nana and I sleep until 8 a.m.. Nana and me, we have breakfast , visit Markus in the home office […] go for a big walk in the morning, […] 2 hours in the fresh air […] Cook, lunch together, usually around noon, 12:30. […] we spend the afternoon at home, basically playing and, when Nana falls asleep again, because she was still sleeping quite a lot, […] use the 2 hours (…) for things I would like to do. Anna, 37, a normal day

So, it would be ideal if he would already sleep through the night. […] It would also be ideal if I could cook my lunch in peace. […] For me, a good lunch is very important, a proper real meal. But chopping vegetables, roasting them, whatever, is difficult with him. […] [And] I still have no social contacts in B., […] I would be ideal to have social contacts in B. [small town in Austria]., […] visiting someone quickly […]. Lisa, 38, an ideal day

7.2. Mental Load, "Family Management"

- "To be honest" – bringing a high demand
- down to earth (domestic work "upon request")
- Length of a normal day in parent's reports
- Men referring to a "normal day" as an "ideal day

Okay, may I add something? Housekeeping, yes, what was there to be done, with the… he has to cook, for both of them. It worked pretty well. And other housekeeping things upon request. … (IP2 laughs). Yes, it's true! [IP1 laughs]. When I said, you should do the laundry or you could vacuum again, well yes, it was done then, but otherwise … [laughs]. (2021, f/couple O, PR/tourism, IT-employee, 1 child)

Regarding domestic work, to be honest, I think regarding such things – things such as cleaning, what must be done regularly, to be honest, Lisa is more involved in doing such things. (2021, m/couple F2, IT/logistics, researcher, 2 children)

Right now, it's mostly 4 days a week when I take him over completely. And completely means we agreed that I take him over at 9 and then at 3 pm mostly, 3 or 4 pm Eva comes along. (2021, m/couple B, video production/ group of artists, landscape architect, 1 child)

8. Summary and Discussion

- Father's' description of daily routines – men being on leave alone (Norman et al., 2016, 2014; O'Brien and Wall, 2017)
- Low impact of gender fluidity (limited impact of caring fatherhood)
- Good opportunities for realizing father-child bonding in selected cases (early uptake: income-related child-care benefits, approx. ¾ in our sample)
- Prerequisite: parents' interest in realizing gender justice (rise in men's shares?)
- Dual childcare benefit claims: higher chances for further dual coordination, although not in all qualitative facets
- Parental leave policies – focus on early childhood, lack of structural support in social politics and economics (i.e. taxation of high income single earners, low impact of "undoing gender" at the company level)

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Thank you for your attention!

Picture Credit: Gerlinde Mauerer

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Recent Publications:

Mauerer, Gerlinde (2023): Paid Parental Leave in Correlation with Changing Gender Role Attitudes. *Social Sciences* 12, no. 9: 490. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12090490.

Mauerer Gerlinde (2022, in German): Eltern zwischen Erwerbstätigkeit und Fürsorge. Familiäre Kinderbetreuung und Karenz im Wandel . ÖIF Newsletter 11/2022, p. 1-4. https://www.oif.ac.at/informationsdienst-beziehungsweise/2022/.

Mauerer, Gerlinde (2021): Work-Life-Balance und geschlechterspezifische Vorannahmen am Arbeitsplatz. Ergebnisse aus der empirischen Forschung zu Elternkarenzen in Österreich. SWS, Heft 1/21, S. 43–62.

Magaraggia, Sveva; Mauerer, Gerlinde; Schmidbaur, Marianne (2019) (eds.): Feminist Perspectives on Teaching Masculinities: Learning Beyond Stereotypes, Teaching with Gender Series Volume 15, Routledge: London, New York.

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