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Exploring Pathways towards Gender Justice during the Uptake of Parental Leave. Empirical Evidence from Austria

Panel „Emotions, Empowerment, and Reproductive Justice: Global perspectives“
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Empirical Evidence on Shared Parental Leave in Austria

1. Background: Parental Leave and Childcare Allowance Model in Austria
2. Gender and Family in Motion. Parental Arrangements
3. Methods and RQ – Focus of this presentation: *Hybrid masculinities*
4. Results I: Typology of Fatherhood – between free will and obligation
5. Results II: Maternal “Cushioning”, Fathers’ Backup
6. Summary and Conclusion

Parental Leave and Childcare Benefit in Austria

See Austrian Country note, https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2023/Austria2023.pdf; 2024 forthcoming.

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), **1 month**. Since 01/2024 income replacement **52,46€ /** day, since 01/2024 / 1626,26€ /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 benefit" – childcare benefit account (see below)

Childcare Benefit: income-based benefit

refunds 80 per cent of net income in the previous six months, for 365 days (if only one parent receives the childcare benefit) and up to 426 days after the birth (if both parents share the childcare benefit, with **61 non-transferable days**). The amount of the income-related option ranges up to a **maximum** of €76.60 per calendar day (**€2,300 per month**).

Childcare benefit account, flat-rate benefit, differing in length (flexible, days)

overall sum of about €14,355 (if only one parent receives the benefit) or €17,933 (if both parents receive the benefit)

since 2024: € 39.33/day = approx. € 1200/month

Or: max. **35 months**, since 2024 € 16.87/day = **approx. € 515/month**

Additional income limit €18,000/year

social insurance benefits included

If both parents receive and share the childcare benefit (respecting a **minimum of 20 per cent non-transferable days of all childcare benefit days requested**), the money can be used within a timespan between 456 days (at a daily amount of €39.33) and 1,063 days (at a daily amount of €16.87).

For the flat-rate childcare benefit account, **a parent may additionally earn 60 per cent of the income he or she earned in the calendar year prior to the child's birth**, max. €18,000 per year. **For the income-related option, additional earnings may not exceed €8,100 a year.**

in all benefit variants, 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)

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Gender and Family in Motion. Parental Arrangements

Empirical Austrian Research, 03/2021-02/2025 (Austrian Science Funding; Department of Sociology, University of Vienna)

2021-2022: First empirical wave, 42 couple interviews (May 2021–May 2022)

2023: Second empirical wave, 41 individual interviews, follow-up study (2023) (25% male and female interviewees / earlier research, 2013-2016: age children; career development)

Open and inductive data coding, according to the methodology of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1998; Glaser 1978), using MAXQDA

semi-structured guideline interviews with couples (Witzel 2010), including earlier information/results in the guideline structure and participation prerequisites (i.e. 5 months minimum length of childcare benefits claims)

Second wave (without incentives): follow-up study with individual interviews, theoretical sampling (Thornberg 2012; Thornberg & Charmaz 2021), theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978) – i.e. variety in terms of employment, regional aspects/ residence, number of children, residence)

Results I: Typology of Fatherhood

Types of fatherhood	Motivation, decision	Goals, orientation
1. highly committed fatherhood, active **fatherhood as an obligation** (orientated towards motherhood; based on "measuring up"/competing an orientation traditionally associated with masculinity")	Parenthood for both **"right from the start"; clarity regarding the** division of childcare responsibilities; clear agreements (planning even before the birth of the child)	**Couple orientation** *(development towards caring masculinities)*
2. rationally argued fatherhood, **starting a family** as a **joint** (financial) **project**, family performance as an incentive, also as a basis for building a bond with the child/children)	Organising family leave, partnership bonus incentive; **parental leave/part time work as an (interim) step in career planning** (optional educational leave)	**Family orientation** *(financial / emotional rewards as a father – hegemonic/hybrid M.)*
3. fatherhood based on equal opportunities (in income generation) (income of both parents as a right/ideal/necessity), **individual social security**	**Supporting the partner in earning an income, individual social security;** mutual financial support; (financial necessity for both parents to work).	**Orientation towards the individual** *("patriarchal dividend", Connell 2006; hybrid masculinities – changing hegemonic concepts and remaining g. inequalities)*

Results II: Maternal „Cushioning“, Fathers’ Backup

... => competences of mothers (“first shift” on parental leave) lead to their additional workload ("mental load"):

(1) What are the reasons for/how does it happen that more of the **cognitive work** remains with the mothers interviewed?

[Attribution from outside - "mum can't let go" ... why?]

(1) have clearer ideas (e.g. with regard to the concrete distribution of family management and household tasks, kindergarten and school choice, reflections on childcare benefits opportunities & uptake, etc.) – in that respect fathers rather “service providers” than “self-thinkers”

(2) cushion their partner's less flexible working conditions by investing more time and energy themselves take a more active approach to their own life time

(3) often focus: family time as "we time", planning time with children that is as free as possible from everyday work (being in nature, without cars, fewer rules)

BUT: reflections of fathers on the additional cognitive burden on mothers are taking place! ... based on this, solutions can be found in the partnership (esp. fatherhood type I, couple orientation)

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Summary and Conclusion

Hybrid Masculinities – transformed hegemonic masculinities/ in correspondence with transitionals (Tanquerel & Grau-Grau 2019, p. 4; Halrynyo 2009), higher evaluation of work-place/ income orientation (fatherhood type III).

Caring Masculinities: Rejecting domination, towards other men, towards women, towards children (a minor group in our sample, showing caring masculinities (reflecting education methods, **non-violent education**; pro-feminist attitudes) – including **sustainable caring concepts** (fatherhood type I – obligation; type II – family orientation, rather award oriented) – **heading towards realizing Gender Justice in the Private, partly also in the Public Sphere**

Re-thinking caring concepts and narratives (i.e. Tronto 2013; Doucet 2008) – reflections on how men's decisions / couples' agreements are met – parental dialogues (couple interviews), being in dialogue, discussing (re-)adjustments in parental arrangements (couple orientation/ clear focus: sharing parental responsibilities; also, in case of a separation, as results of the 2nd empirical wave show – 3 couples, 6 follow-up individual interviews)

Widening/degenderizing parental responsibilities: Men as carers – women in paid work (Doucet 2018, p.293; Schmidt 2018): **demand in the provision of further structural support, going beyond the provision of childcare benefits** (Brennan et al. 2023; Faircloth 2021; Mauerer 2023).

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Thank you!

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