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Empirical evidence on shared parental leave in Austria: Pathways for shared parenting?

Panel MEN AND MASCULINITIES: CHANGES AND CHALLENGES (RN 33, Women‘s and Gender Studies)

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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. Research interest and methodological approach
4. Re-/adjustments in parents' dual reconciliation, examples (quotes)
5. Results: Typology of Fatherhood – between free will and obligation
   - Examples: Parents' cognitive and mental challenges
   - First steps in going beyond gendered parenting roles
6. Outlook & further studies

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)

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, 5+ months on leave per parent (May 2021–May 2022) **(1% - men's leave uptake, specific sample group)**

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 interviews with couples (Witzel 2010), including earlier information/results in the guideline structure and participation prerequisites (i.e. **5 months minimum** length – both parents' childcare benefits claims)

Second wave (without incentives): **follow-up study with individuals**, theoretical sampling (Thornberg 2012; Thornberg & Charmaz 2021), theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978) – variety in terms of employment, regional aspects/ residence, nr. children) – 25% prior sample (2013-2015)

Research interest and methodological approach

Qualitative sociological research, **focus on details in couples' narratives: everyday actions, couple arrangements, work/childcare arrangements, organization of family life**

RQ: How do both parents make agreements on the joint/dual matching of work and family? (with each other; both receiving childcare benefits – new social arrangements, both on the couple level and in meeting agreements with employers)

Coding 2nd wave: Results from 1st wave**: "caring fatherhood" is still an uncharted field in terms of included knowledge, skills and activities -> challenges in dually reconciling both parents' employment and childcare; however, first steps towards gender equality in partnerships**

Key questions, evaluation of the 2nd wave (focus on cognitive work):

1. What are the reasons for the fact that cognitive work increasingly remains with mothers?

2. What characterizes fathers who take on cognitive work in the sense of a "caring pioneering role"? (i.e. social capabilities in managing caring for two children in different age groups)

Objective: **Examining the sustainability of parental arrangements and the development after both parents have received childcare benefits.**

(international knowledge exchange: sustainability@leave, COST CA 21150, https://www.sustainability-at-leave.uni-hamburg.de/about.html)

Results: 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)*

Examples: Parents' cognitive and mental challenges

Constant Readjustments, in a short-term, middle and long run as a parent:

Getting partners on board (couple performance in an interview; Wimberger and Mokatef 2017)

Keeping an overview, careful planning (matching different persons'/children's interests - "Ella Lego")

Navigating through everyday life: "constant loop in the head" (full-time job as a mother of an infant)

Conversation time, being emotionally challenged (puberty, peer group; making decisions as parents, sometimes "in the second" – i.e. discussing media consumption; mental challenges)

Special needs (nutrition; group behavior/kindergarten/school; social difficulties - balancing: more interview partners; "feeling"/being addressed/responsibility through competence).

Parental meetings - argumentation (discussion time, explanations – **teamwork without "sovereignty of interpretation"**, questioning experts; educational ideals; e.g. non-violent communication) - persuasion, relying on getting a result and or doing/organizing without finding a common agreement: i.e. appointment with doctors, orthopedic insoles; health issues in general)

Mothers partly "translators"/mediators of needs (children, other people) – traditional expectations

First steps in going beyond gendered parenting roles

In which areas and how are traditional role models in relation to household and family management already being overcome? How does this affect the argumentation/negotiation of couple arrangements?

In relation to actual To-do's in the household: **Cleaning, vacuuming, cooking => these tasks are often done independently by fathers**

In contrast, **women** are often still responsible for laundry, shopping and activities that require more **active planning and contact with others** (vacation planning; kindergarten; children's circle of friends)

Delegating - to (grand-)mothers/parents, childcare facilities (fathers mainly claim the second part/ “shift”, if both parents claim childcare benefits – less burden here, already developed “habits” /i.e. sleeping routines)

Gain in knowledge, confirmation of previous research: **Time as a sole responsible parent - high significance for the development of caring skills - important prerequisite for the (further) development of caring masculinities**; O'Brien/Wall 2017: Fathers on Leave Alone) – important role of a small group of fathers in Austria (and internationally)

Quotes: Constant re-/adjustments, cooperation

*“He's also cooperative, at least in the last year and a half. Because, as I said, we already had a mega crisis in 2021 (...). And since then, yes**, I have to say that the division works better when I say do it**."* (**Hannah** 2023, mother of two children)“

“(...) ***she now perhaps has more details and more things in view and*** *that's where we have the feeling, okay, we don't have to carry the same load, and* ***I have to work on that a bit****. You notice that and I have the feeling that we divide things up in the household, so we do the same, we do different things a bit and I* ***think we need to make sure that they are roughly the same****."* (**Walter** 2023, father of a child)

6. Outlook & further studies

- **Caring activities in the private sphere: focus on the organizational level, less regard to assessments of caring as a mental attitude and reproductive care in the social and generational context => re-thinking caring concepts and narratives** (Tronto 2013; Doucet 2008).
- **PL Policies** need a “fertile ground“ in terms of implemented & effective gender equality policies, (Austria: individual arrangements(challenges, low/slow societal changes.
- **Some fathers in the sample: Development of Caring Masculinities** (Elliott 2016), Rejecting domination, towards other men, towards women, towards children (minor group in our sample, 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 sphere, partly also in the public sphere, vs. type III – following an individual pathway in reconciling employment and childcare (partly restricted to the period of leave uptake/childcare benefits claims) – representing hybrid/hegemonic masculinities (“patriarchal dividend”, Connell 2006; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014).
- **Overall widening/ degenderizing parental responsibilities:** Men as carers – women in paid work (Doucet 2018, p.293; Schmidt 2018); **demand in providing of further structural support in education (child-)care** (Brennan et al. 2023; Faircloth 2021; Mauerer 2023).

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Thank you!

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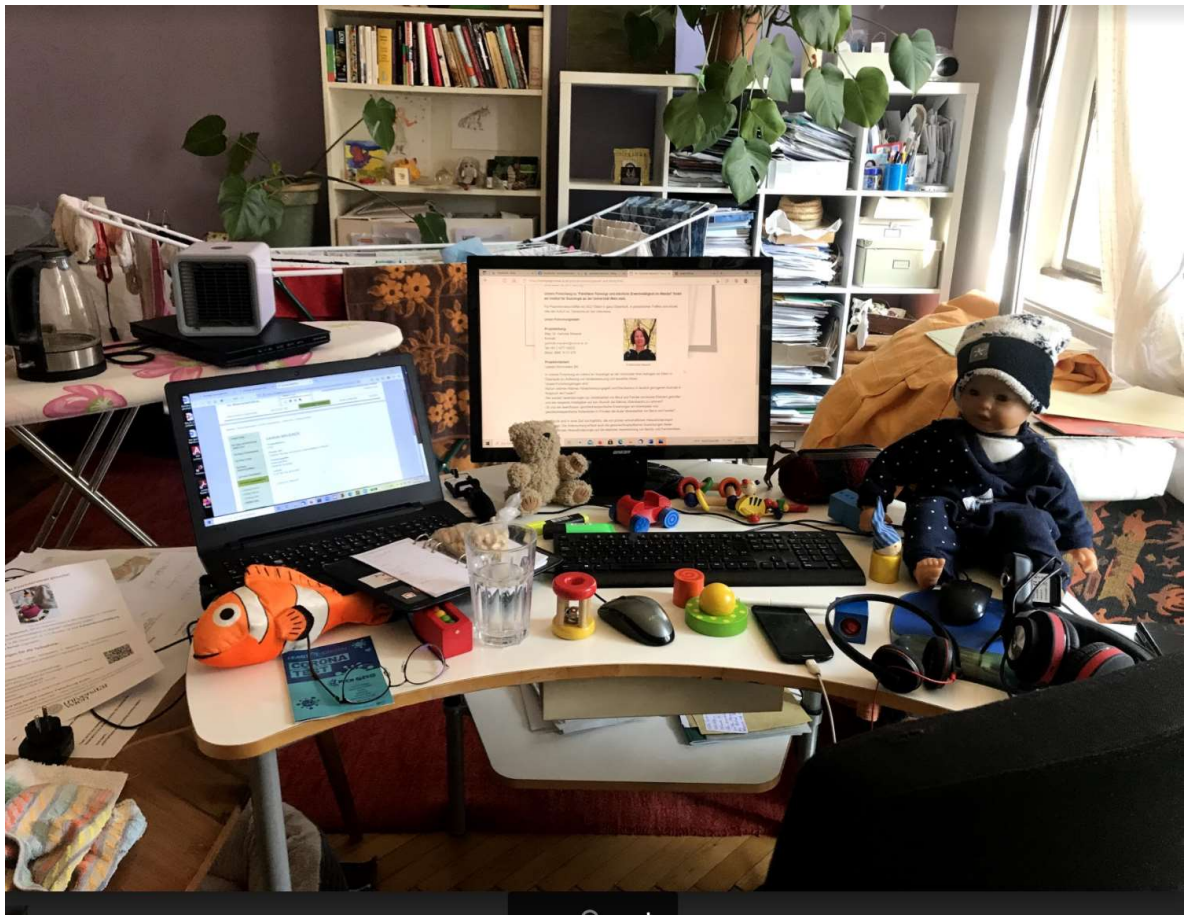

Picture Credit: Gerlinde Mauerer

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