

# Creating Time for Dads Part-time Work Can Increase Fathers' Involvement, but Parental Leave Can Do More

Mareike Bünning

Many fathers would like to spend more time with their children. They no longer see their role in the family as restricted to being the breadwinner but rather wish to get actively involved in family life. Yet, they often fail to make that wish a reality. In 2012, fathers spent an average of 1 hour and 22 minutes per week-day with their pre-school-aged children, less than half of the time mothers did (2 hours and 59 minutes). One in three fathers felt they did not spend enough time with his children. Long working hours were mentioned as one of the most important barriers to greater father involvement in family life.

One option that allows fathers to spend more time with their children is taking parental leave. During parental leave, fathers can take intensive care of their newborn, and possibly of older siblings, as well; in this way, they can form strong ties with their children. My research showed that this also has positive long-term effects on fathers' involvement in childcare: Even when fathers go back to work after their parental leave period is over, they tend to show stronger involvement in family life.

Another option that has received little attention so far is part-time employment. An advantage of part-time employment compared to parental leave is that it is not limited to the first few months in the life of the newborn. Yet, part-time employed fathers still have less time for their children than fathers who stay at home full-time during parental leave. This raises the question whether part-time employment enables fathers to increase their participation in childcare in a similar way as parental leave. That is why I studied, first, whether fathers spend more time with their children while they work part time. Second, I wanted to know whether greater father involvement persists when fathers return to full-time employment after a period of part-time work.

Studies on the division of labor in couples usually refer to three theoretical approaches: time availability, economic bargaining, and gender ideology. These theories can be used to derive expectations regarding the relationship between part-time employment and fathers' involvement in childcare. According to the time availability approach, fathers are more involved in childcare the shorter their own working hours and the longer the working hours of their partner. When fathers work part time and thus have more time available, their participation in childcare should increase, whereas it should decrease to previous levels as soon as they return to a full-time position.

According to the bargaining perspective, parents negotiate the division of household work based on their relative resources. The parent with the lower income has less bargaining power and therefore has to do a greater share of unpaid work. As fathers earn less while working part time, they should take on a greater share of childcare responsibilities. Fathers' loss of bargaining power during part-time employment should be greatest if their partners work full-time, as their loss of income relative to their partner is greater the more the partner earns. Moreover, as previous research has shown, part-time employment is associated with a long-term wage penalty. As a consequence, fathers' greater involvement in childcare should continue even after they return to a full-time position.

**Summary:** Fathers spend more time with their children when they work part-time rather than full-time. Yet, once they return to a full-time position, most fathers reduce their participation in childcare to previous levels again. Only fathers with full-time employed partners continue to spend more time with their children after their period of part-time employment has ended. Parental leave, by contrast, is associated with a long-term increase in paternal childcare irrespective of the partner's employment status.

According to the gender ideology perspective, fathers' participation in childcare depends on their gender role attitudes: Fathers with egalitarian gender role attitudes are more involved at home than fathers with traditional attitudes. While working part time, fathers deviate from the norm of the male full-time earner. By experiencing this less traditional work arrangement, they may develop more egalitarian gender role attitudes, which in turn should lead fathers to become more involved in childcare in the long term, as well.

The 2001 law on part-time and temporary work gives all employees in Germany the legal right to work part time. Although this right is used mostly by mothers, there has also been a notable increase in part-time employment among fathers. According to the microcensus definition of part-time employment, which I use in my analyses as well, a part-time employee is someone who reports his employment status as part-time and works fewer than 32 hours per week. In 1996, only 2 percent of employed fathers worked part time, compared to a respectable 5.5 percent in 2012. Considering the fluctuation in part-time staff, the proportion of children whose fathers worked part-time at least once during their childhood may be considerably higher. In fact, part-time employment among fathers, unlike part-time employment among mothers, is usually a short episode. As my analyses of Socio-economic Panel data show, half of all part-time employed fathers switched back to full-time employment within one year.

Now what is the relation between part-time employment and the time that fathers spend with their children? To answer this question, I analyzed data on 7,046 fathers in the Socio-economic Panel from 1991 through 2012. Every year, the fathers were asked about the number of hours they spent doing childcare on a normal weekday. In addition, they reported whether they were working part time at the point of the survey and whether they had worked part time for one or more months in the previous year. They also provided information on whether they had taken parental leave.

Based on this data, it is possible to trace how paternal childcare participation changes when fathers switch from full-time to part-time employment and then back to full-time employment. Fathers' pre- and post-parental leave childcare participation can be compared this way, as well. As explained above, fathers' participation in childcare is expected to depend not only on their own employment status but also on that of their partner. That is why the analysis was first performed for all fathers together and then separately by their partner's employment status. In addition, the models take account of the age of the youngest child, the number of children, marital status, the educational attainment of both partners, the place of residence (East or West Germany), and the survey year.

The results show that while working part time, fathers spend more time with their children than they did before switching to part-time employment. This association is especially pronounced for fathers with a full-time employed partner: These fathers spend about 1 hour and 30 minutes more with their children each weekday than they did before working part time. But fathers with a partner who does not work or works part time also spend 1 hour per weekday more with their children during their part-time employment. However, the time that fathers spend with their children during the week is reduced considerably again once fathers return to a full-time position. Fathers with a non-working or part-time employed partner do not spend significantly more time with their children after returning to full-time employment than before they worked part time. Only fathers with a full-time employed partner keep up their increased participation in childcare after their part-time employment period is over: After returning to a full-time position, they continue to spend 30 minutes per weekday more with their children than they did before switching to part-time employment.

For fathers with non-working or part-time employed partners, the results thus support the assumption of the time availability perspective, namely that fathers' current work hours are the most relevant factor determining the time they spend with their children. The findings for fathers with full-time employed



Mareike Bünning is a research fellow in the WZB junior research group Work and Care. Her research focuses on family policies, workplace conditions and couples' division of labor. (Photo: David Ausserhofer) [mareike.buenning@wzb.eu](mailto:mareike.buenning@wzb.eu)

partners are more in line with the expectations derived from economic bargaining theory or the gender ideology approach, even though the available data do not allow for final conclusions as to whether changes in fathers' childcare participation result from more egalitarian gender roles or from a loss of paternal bargaining power.

In summary, the results suggest that fathers spend more time with their children while they work part time. That increase in childcare participation, however, is usually limited to the part-time employment period and tends to disappear again as soon as fathers return to a full-time position. Fathers with a full-time employed partner are the only exception to this pattern. These fathers maintain their increased childcare involvement beyond their part-time employment period. However, maternal full-time employment is rare in Germany. In 2012, a mere 18 percent of all mothers worked full time, and the share of full-time employed mothers has even gone down compared to 1996.

The results are different for fathers who return to work after taking parental leave. These fathers spend on average 1 hour more per weekday with their children after parental leave than they did before parental leave. Again, we see some differences depending on the partner's employment status: The more hours their partner works, the more hours fathers spend with their children after taking parental leave. Yet, we even find statistical evidence of an increase in post-parental leave childcare hours for fathers whose partner does not work.

How can we explain the fact that part-time employment leads only to a temporary increase in most fathers' childcare participation, whereas taking parental leave is associated with a long-term increase? One reason might be that the motivation for taking parental leave is different from the motivation to work part time. Whereas most fathers take parental leave explicitly to have more time for their children, they frequently start part-time employment for other reasons. About half of all fathers, for instance, only work part time because they could not find a suitable full-time position. Another explanation might be that fathers on full-time parental leave become much more involved with their children than those who work part time. This means that fathers on parental leave form closer ties to their children during that time and develop better caretaking skills than fathers who only reduce their working hours. As a result, parental leave appears better suited than part-time employment for promoting long-term paternal involvement in childcare. Nevertheless, part-time employment can be a valuable option for (temporarily) enabling greater father involvement in families with older children.

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