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Fathers' use of paternity and parental leave in the Nordic countries

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Abstract

Fathers' use of paternity and parental leaves in the Nordic countries

The first paternity and parental leave schemes were introduced in most Nordic countries in the 1970s. The aim of the paternity leave was not only to give fathers the possibility to build an early connection to the newborn child, but also to allow them to be present and available for assistance when the mother returns from the hospital. The aim of the parental leave was not only to support father-child relations but also to promote gender equality in sharing child care duties and to bolster women's situation in the labour market. Thus, these two leave schemes have both similar and different aims. In order to investigate how these aims are being realised, appropriate information is needed. In the comparative context this kind of information is rarely available. The aim of this working paper is to assess, on one hand, how frequently Nordic fathers use paternity leaves and, on the other hand, what share of the parental leave periods is used by fathers. The results show that Finnish fathers use paternity leaves the most but share parental leave periods the least. Sharing the parental leave is most popular in Iceland, followed by Sweden. The results are, however, not quite straightforward, because the flexibility of the leave schemes has increased. For instance, that which is termed 'parental leave', may, in some countries, be used as paternity leave

Tiivistelmä

Isien isyysvapaiden käyttö ja vanhempainvapaiden jakaminen Pohjoismaissa

Ensimmäiset isyys- ja vanhempainvapaat tulivat voimaan useimmissa Pohjoismaissa 1970-luvulla. Isyysvapaan tavoitteena oli, ei ainoastaan tarjota isille mahdollisuus luoda varhaiset kontaktit vastasyntyneeseen, vaan myös se, että isät ovat kotona äitien tukena ja apuna näiden palatessa synnytyksen jälkeen sairaalasta. Vanhempainvapaan tavoitteena oli paitsi tukea isä-lapsisuhteen kehittymistä myös sukupuolten tasa-arvon edistäminen sekä lastenhoidon jakamisessa että työmarkkinoilla. Vapailla on siis sekä yhteisiä että toisistaan poikkeavia tavoitteita. Jotta tavoitteiden toteutumista voidaan seurata, tarvitaan tietoa vapaiden käytöstä. Kansainvälisissä vertailuissa tietoa on kuitenkin vain harvoin saatavana. Tämän työpaperin tarkoituksena on arvioida kuinka usein pohjoismaiset isät yhtäältä käyttävät isyysvapaitaan ja toisaalta kuinka suuren osan vanhempainvapaista isät jakavat. Tulokset osoittavat, että suomalaiset isät käyttävät yleisimmin isyysvapaita, mutta jakavat pienimmän osuuden vanhempainrahajaksoista. Suosituinta vanhempainvapaan jakaminen on Islannissa, toiseksi suosituinta Ruotsissa. Tulokset eivät ole kuitenkaan aivan yksiselitteisiä, sillä vapaiden joustavuus on lisääntynyt. Esimerkiksi vanhempainvapaaksi nimettyjä päiviä voidaan joissakin maissa käyttää isyysvapaan tapaan.

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1 Different leaves for different purposes

Nordic countries have been pioneers in introducing and promoting fathers' parental rights both in respect of child birth and in taking full responsibility for child care when the mother returns to employment. Fathers' leave-rights, paternity leave and parental leave, have been justified in order to promote both early father-child relationships and gender equality in the family and labour market.

Paternity leave was originally introduced in most Nordic countries for the period immediately or closely surrounding the child's birth when the mother, too, is at home. Paternity leave was justified by the mother's need for rest and help with household work and childcare. Paternity leave periods are rather short (as a rule 2 weeks) if taken when the mother is on maternity or parental leave.

Parental leave allows each parent individual time to take turns caring for the child when the partner is for example employed or studying. Parental leave can be shared between the parents as they wish or taken by one parent only. Parental leave is a transferable, negotiable leave between the parents. In practice, most mothers use up all or most of the parental leave after their non-transferable maternity leave. The possibility to share the leave between the parents has been gradually adopted into the legislation. In the early 1990s the Nordic countries, one after the other, started to introduce individual, non-transferable parental leave rights for fathers. These leaves are also called fathers' quotas. (Rostgaard 2002; Nyberg 2004; Guðný 2005; Ellingsæter and Leira 2006; Haataja 2007.)

The history of fathers' leaves in the individual Nordic countries differs both in practice and in terms of political justifications (Nyberg, Ellingsæter, Emerik, Haataja and Mósesdóttir, forthcoming), even though they have roughly similar main aims as described above. It is, however, astonishing that no comparable statistics are available on fathers' use of their different leave entitlements in the Nordic countries. The aim of this article is to point out this shortcoming and to encourage Nordic co-operation in the area of social security statistics to develop comparable statistics on parental leaves among the Nordic countries. This would, in part, promote understanding of the outcomes of different and similar kinds of parental leave policies.

I start by describing the problems with the information available from contemporary statistics on Social Protection in the Nordic Countries published by the Nordic Social-Statistical Committee (Nososco). I then go on to use national statistics, if available in English on the national websites,

or other national information. My interest is in fathers' use of paternity leaves and parental leaves. Finally I summarise the results and discuss possible developments.

2 Problems with the comparability of outcomes

The yearly statistical report titled 'Social Protection in the Nordic Countries', produced by the Nordic Social-Statistical Committee (Nososco), has since the early 1990 published information about 'Recipients of daily cash benefits in the event of pregnancy, childbirth and adoption during the year' (e.g. 1997:7). The statistics divide the recipients according to gender but do not distinguish between different leave schemes[1]. Actually, the following leave schemes, at least, are counted as parental leaves: Non-transferable maternity leave or mothers' quota in parental leave, paternity leave, fathers' quota in parental leave and transferable part of parental leave. In some countries pregnancy leave is equivalent to maternity leave taken before childbirth and is universal, while in others it is not universal. This leave must be provided on top of the regular maternity or parental leave for women whose work is too heavy or dangerous during the pregnancy and whose employer is unable to arrange other work. Only Sweden includes these pregnancy leave days in the parental leave statistics[2].

Included in the number of women on parental leave and the number of leave days taken by women are women on maternity leave or on mothers' quota before and/or after childbirth, women on transferable parental leave, and in Sweden also women on the non-universal pregnancy leave. That is, mothers' leave consists of both a pre-natal leave, which is aimed to protect the health of the mother and the unborn child and not only to offer time for child care and provide a leave after childbirth.

Included in the number of fathers on parental leave and the number of leave days taken by men are fathers on transferable parental leave, on fathers' quotas and on paternity leave. When the

[1] In this paper I use the recipients of leave benefits as a synonym for leave use. To be more exact, some recipients of maternity, paternity and parental leave benefits are not on leave, but are entitled to at least minimum daily benefits for the same periods as those on leave from the labour market.

[2] The Nordic countries treat the 2 weeks preceding and, as a rule, also the 2 weeks following the delivery according to the EU directives, i.e. as a period of compensated or non-compensated leave from work. In Sweden there are no rules concerning when mothers can start their mother's quota or parental leave. In 2007 about 24,000 Swedish women received pregnancy benefit (havandeskapspenning). That was on average 23 mothers per 100 live births and 6 percent of all mothers who received parental or pregnancy leave benefits in 2007. The share of net pregnancy days of all leave days taken by mothers was about two percent of all net benefit days in the same year. In Finland the maternity benefit period is regulated to begin 30 or 50 weekdays before the calculated date of delivery. Special maternity benefit during the pregnancy is very rare, because the eligibility rules are very strict. About 550 women (0.5%) and one mother per 100 live births received this benefit in Finland in 2007. In Norway about 2,000 women (nearly 4 percent) received pregnancy benefit in 2007. (Calculated from the statistics of RFV, Kela and NAV.)

focus and interest is on comparing mothers' and fathers' participation in child care and in taking turns to share child care duties, the existing statistics are not comparable, because they include maternity leaves before birth and paternity leaves taken while the mother is on leave. Fathers' share of total leave days in the context of child birth is presented in table 1 according to Nososco.

The statistics from Norway consist only of fathers' parental leave days within the fathers' quota, not paternity leave days as in the other countries. This is understandable since paternity leave days are not compensated by social security in Norway as they are in the other Nordic countries. Rather, paternity leave days are often defined as paid leave in employment contracts or collective agreements. This means that no statistics on paternity leave take-up rates are available from Norway.

The Swedish statistics presented in table 1 include parental leave days, pregnancy days and paternity days (pappadagar) and mothers' and fathers' quota days. In Sweden (and in Norway) parental leave days can be used on either a full-time or part-time basis. The amount of total parental leave days in Sweden has been converted into full-time benefit days, i.e. net benefit days. Finnish and Danish parental leave days include maternity, paternity and parental leave days, but not special pregnancy leave days (see footnote 1).

Iceland has had paternity leave only for three years (1998–2000). The whole pattern of existing leave schemes was transformed in a major parental leave reform implemented gradually in 2001–2003. Paternity leave was abolished and both parents received non-transferable parental leave quotas of 3 months each, with 3 new months available as transferable parental leave. There are no regulations on how the leaves should be used. Fathers can take their leave wholly or partially at the same time as the mother, just as was the case with the traditional paternity leave, or wholly or partially after the mother's leave, i.e. as a parental leave. However, the longer the father's leave coincides with the mother's leave, the shorter the child-care time while in receipt of benefit will be.

Table 1. Fathers' shares of total maternity, paternity and parental leave benefit days per year, %.

Year	Finland	Denmark	Norway	Sweden	Iceland
1990	2.4	4.3	0.6	8.8	
1991	3.2	4.4	0.7	9.2	
1992	3.3	4.6	0.8	9.9	
1993	3.4	4.5	1.0	10.8	
1994	3.6	4.6	3.9	12.0	
1995	3.6	4.6	5.8	10.8	0.1
1996	3.6	4.5	6.3	11.7	0.1
1997	3.8	4.5	6.7	11.1	0.1
1998	3.9	5.1	7.0	11.6	2.3
1999	4.0	5.8	7.0	12.8	3.2
2000	4.2	6.0	7.2	13.7	3.3
2001	4.3	6.2	8.3	15.0	11.5
2002	4.8	5.5	8.6	16.6	19.6
2003	5.2	5.1	8.6	18.3	27.6
2004	5.4	5.5	9.0	19.7	31.8
2005	5.5	5.9	9.3	20.5	32.7
2006	5.7	6.0	10.4	21.5	32.2
2007	6.1	6.2	11.4	21.7	31.2

Source: Social Protection in the Nordic Countries 1995, ..., 2005, 2006/2007
(Nososco website: March 2009: http://nososco-eng.nom-nos.dk/default.asp?side=209); Norway 1990–1994: Rigmor Bryghaug, Statistics Unit, Section for Statistics and Research, Directorate of Labour and Welfare 6.5.2009.

To summarise, on the basis of table 1 we can say that fathers' participation in parenting is at about the same level in Finland and in Denmark, albeit lowest in the Nordic countries. Norwegian fathers have the second highest share of days even though paternity leave is not included. Swedish fathers use more than 20 percent of the parental leave days and fathers in Iceland about a third.

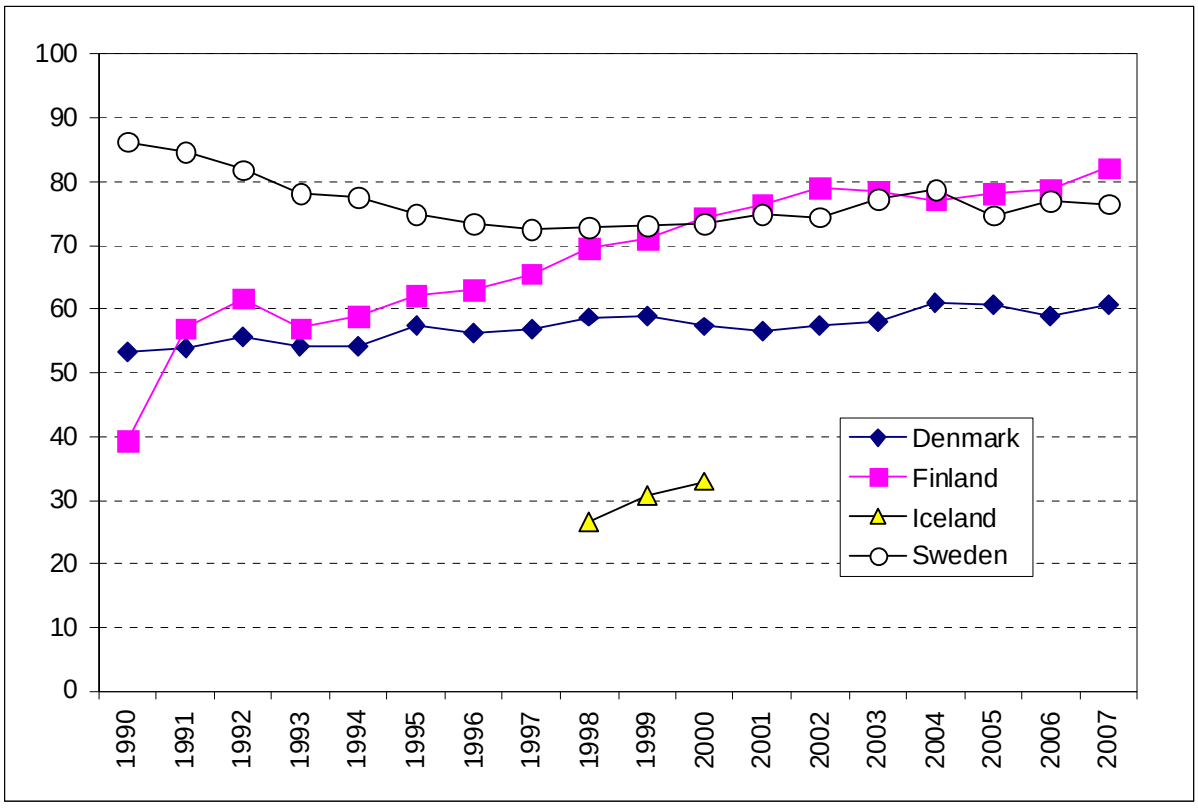
3 Use of the paternity leave

Paternity leave, the time that fathers spend with the new-born baby and the mother, is 2 weeks in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and, for a period of 3 years, used to be 2 weeks also in Iceland. In Finland, too, paternity leave was originally 2 weeks but was lengthened to 3 weeks in 1993. Even though there is some flexibility in the possibility to use and postpone paternity leave, it can be assumed that a majority of fathers use this short option close to the child's birth. Thus, the prevalence of the use of paternity leave can be assessed by reference to the number of children born in the year when paternity leave is used (diagram 1). In Finland, the number of births per year is currently (in 2007) about 59,000, in Denmark 65,000 and in Sweden about 106,000. In

Norway there are about the same number of births as in Finland, but there are no statistics about the paternity leave.

As seen in diagram 1, paternity leave is very popular, but the trends are somewhat different in the Nordic countries. In Denmark its popularity has increased only slightly from the early 1990s to the 2000s, and is nowadays about 60 fathers per 100 children born. In Finland the popularity has increased especially since three weeks of leave became the father's personal entitlement in the early 1990s[3], and is nowadays more than 80 fathers per 100 children born per year. In Sweden the popularity of paternity days decreased in the 1990s from nearly 90 fathers per 100 children born, but has increased again in the 2000s to nearly 80 fathers. In Iceland fathers used their paternity leave rights increasingly at the turn of 2000, even though the benefit level was low before the reform in 2001[4].

Diagram 1. Number of fathers on paternity leave per 100 children born per year in the Nordic countries[a].



[a] Paternity leave is not financially compensated through social security benefits in Norway. In Iceland paternity leave was available for only 3 years before the major parental leave reform implemented in 2001–2003.

[3] In Finland, the use of two paternity leave weeks reduced the length of the parental leave correspondingly until 1993. The third paternity leave week, introduced in 1991, was an independent right from the very beginning.

[4] Since the reform 2001 there is no systematic data available about the extent to which fathers use their days simultaneously or in alternation with the mother.

Our next aim is to assess the number paternity leave days taken by fathers as a share of total benefit days. This comparison is possible only between Finland, Denmark and Sweden, since data for a longer period is available only from these countries (table 2, diagram 2). The information is available as days for Finland and Sweden, and as weeks for Denmark. Swedish parental leave days are presented as net days (with partial leave days converted into full-time leave days).

In Sweden fathers have a right to 10 paternity leave days (pappadagar). Fathers who use this right in practice exhaust their paternity leave entitlement. The share of paternity leave days of fathers' total days has decreased from about a fifth in 1990 to below 8 percent in 2007, even though a drop in fathers' use of the paternity leave turned into a slow increase in the late 1990s. The decrease of paternity leave days as a share of total days was a result both of the introduction of a fathers' quota in 1995 and the lengthening of the parental leave and fathers' quota in 2002.

In Denmark, fathers who take up paternity leave weeks (Fødsel, 2 ugers-perioden) use up nearly the full two weeks they are entitled to. Paternity leave weeks accounted for almost 90% of all fathers' weeks until the introduction of the fathers' quota in the late 1990s and 60% before the parental leave reform in 2002. Following the reforms, fathers' total share of parental leave days increased, and the share of paternity leave days decreased down to its current level of one third of fathers' days per year.

In its national statistics, Finland publishes data only about the total sum of days paid to fathers, but data is available also about the average number of paternity and parental leave days per father and per year. For example in table 2, the sums of separate paternity and parental leave days are calculated by multiplying the average number of days by the number of fathers who have used paternity and parental leave days during a year[5]. In Finland paternity leave is longer than in other Nordic countries, consisting of 18 weekdays (3 weeks), of which fathers who take a paternity leave use 14–15 days on average. In Finland the share of paternity leave days of all fathers' days increased until the introduction of the 'fathers' month' in 2003. Paternity leave days still represent the majority (70%) of all leave days taken by fathers.

[5] This method gives rather good estimates, while the calculated sums diverge by –0.3–0.1 percentage points from the total number of days.

Table 2. Average paternity leave period per father, paternity leave days (weeks) as a % of fathers' total days (weeks), paternity leave days (weeks) as a % of total days (weeks), and the number of fathers using paternity leave per year in Finland, Sweden and Denmark [a, b].

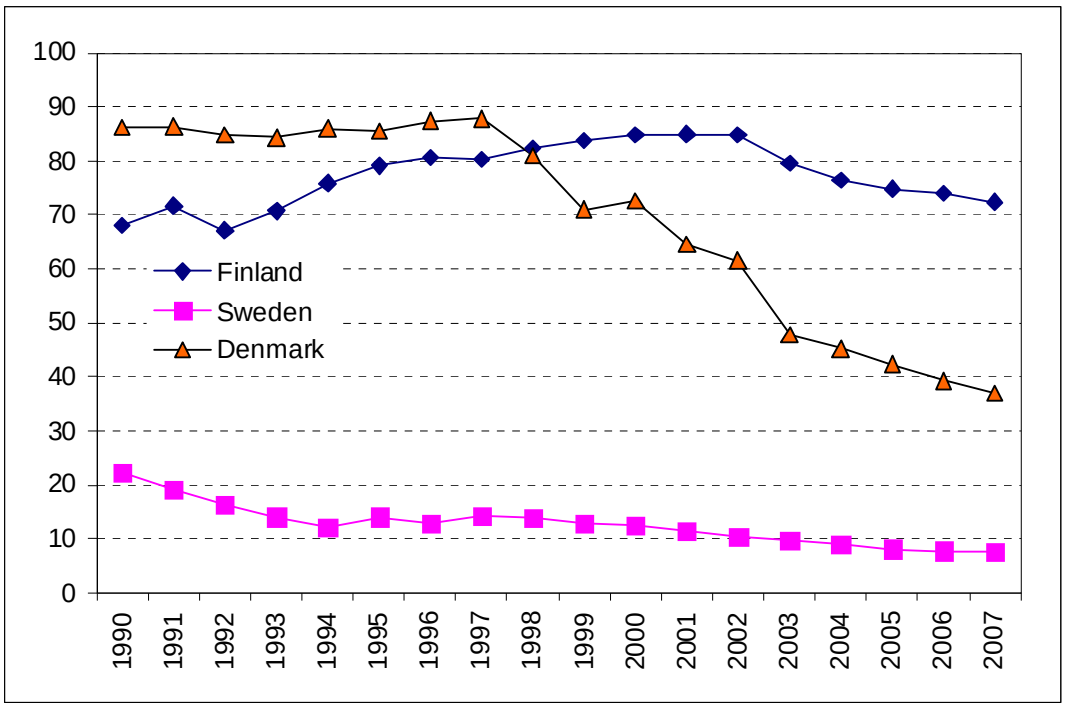
Year	Average paternity leave [c]			Paternity leave days/weeks % fathers' days/weeks			Paternity leave days/weeks % of all days/weeks			Fathers on paternity leave per year		
	Finland Weekdays	Sweden Days	Denmark Weeks	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Finland	Sweden	Denmark
1990	10.7	9.2	1.9	68.0	22.3	86.3	1.6	2.0	3.8	25 800	106 900	33 700
1991	10.9	9.3	1.9	71.7	19.0	86.3	2.3	1.8	3.8	37 300	104 800	34 600
1992	9.9	9.3	1.9	67.2	16.4	84.9	2.2	1.7	3.9	41 200	100 600	37 600
1993	11.8	9.4	1.9	70.7	14.0	84.3	2.4	1.5	3.8	37 000	92 300	36 500
1994	12.4	9.3	1.9	75.9	12.0	86.0	2.7	1.5	4.0	38 500	87 100	37 700
1995	12.2	9.5	1.9	79.1	14.0	85.5	2.8	1.5	3.9	39 300	77 500	40 100
1996	12.3	9.4	1.9	80.6	12.9	87.4	2.9	1.5	3.9	38 300	69 900	38 000
1997	12.5	9.4	1.9	80.4	14.1	87.9	3.0	1.6	4.0	38 900	65 700	38 400
1998	12.5	9.4	1.9	82.4	13.9	80.9	3.2	1.7	4.1	39 700	64 800	38 900
1999	12.6	9.5	1.7	83.7	12.8	71.0	3.4	1.7	4.1	40 900	64 500	39 000
2000	12.7	9.5	1.7	84.8	12.5	72.5	3.5	1.7	4.3	42 300	66 400	38 600
2001	13.0	9.6	1.6	84.9	11.5	64.5	3.7	1.8	4.0	42 900	68 400	37 400
2002	13.9	9.6	1.8	84.9	10.4	61.6	4.1	1.8	3.4	43 900	71 300	36 800
2003	14.2	9.7	1.8	79.6	9.7	47.8	4.1	1.8	2.5	44 500	76 600	37 500
2004	14.7	9.7	1.8	76.4	8.9	45.2	4.2	1.8	2.5	44 500	79 600	39 300
2005	14.3	9.6	1.9	74.9	8.1	42.3	4.1	1.7	2.5	45 100	75 700	39 000
2006	14.4	9.6	1.8	74.0	7.7	39.3	4.2	1.7	2.4	46 300	78 000	38 300
2007	14.6	9.6	1.8	72.4	7.6	36.9	4.4	1.7	2.3	48 300	81 000	38 900

[a] Source: Finland, Statistical year books of the Social Insurance Institution (Kela); Sweden, website statistics of Riksförsäkringsverket (RFV) www.rfv.se / official statistics ; Denmark, website statistics: www.statistikbanken.dk.

[b] Reforms which increased fathers' days: In Finland the paternity leave was extended to 3 weeks in 1991 and the fathers' quota was introduced in 2003; in Denmark the fathers' quota was available in 1998–2002, and a new parental leave scheme was introduced in 2002; in Sweden a fathers quota was introduced first in 1995 and then in 2002, but only the latter quota lengthened the parental leave period. Since 2001 also women have had the right to use paternity leave days, but they are not counted here as paternity days. Swedish days used here are 'net days'.

[c] Maximum length: Finland 18 weekdays (3 weeks), Sweden 10 days (2 weeks), Denmark 2 weeks.

Diagram 2. Paternity leave days taken by fathers, % of total parental leave and paternity leave days taken by fathers, 1990–2007.



Source: National statistics (websites). Norway has no compensated paternity days. (Data from Iceland is summarised and presented in its entirety in diagram 3.)

Diagram 2 summarises the paternity days taken by fathers as a percentage of fathers' total benefit days. The decrease of paternity leave days as a percentage of fathers' total days can be seen in all of the Nordic countries that offered compensated paternity leaves over the period 1990–2007. However, there is no decrease in fathers' use of paternity leave; rather, the opposite is true (diagram 1). It can be concluded that the introduction of fathers' quotas has not affected the usage of the paternity leave, but that the quotas have increased fathers' use of other kinds of fathers' leaves than the paternity leave. In Finland a great majority (70%) of fathers' days still consist of paternity leave days, whereas in Denmark paternity leave days comprise a third, and in Sweden less than 10 percent.

4 Composition of parental leaves

The length of the parental leave period which the parents may share as they wish or allocate to just one parent varies from 3 months (13 weeks) in Iceland to approximately 52 weeks in Sweden. Sweden, Norway and Iceland have, in addition to the parental leave, a non-transferable fathers' parental leave (fathers' quota). The length of the fathers' quota is in Iceland 13 weeks, in

Sweden 8 weeks and in Norway 6 weeks. A fathers' quota of 2 weeks was abolished in Denmark in 2002 and introduced as conditional in Finland in 2003. In Finland fathers receive two more weeks ("bonus weeks") of parental leave if they take at least 2 weeks of the sharable parental leave. This period is called fathers' month. (Nososco 2008, 30).

Comparing parental leaves is more complicated than comparing short paternity leaves. The biggest differences in the leave schemes are 1) the possibility to postpone parental leave periods, 2) the possibility to take parental leave days on a part-time basis and 3) the different lengths of the leaves. The first increases take-up rates in the yearly cross-sectional statistics if the leave periods are postponed for a long time. The second creates fewer difficulties for comparisons, even though it increases the number of leave days used, since the majority of parental leave days are taken on a full-time basis. The third also has an impact on yearly statistics: long periods increase and short periods decrease average take-up rates per year.

The possibility to postpone parental leave days ranges from 18 months to when the child is 9 years old. In Sweden parental leave days can be postponed until the child is 8 and in Denmark, since 2002, until the child is 9. In Iceland, too, there is some flexibility: all parental leave days must be used within 18 months of child birth. In Finland it has been possible since 2007 to postpone the fathers' month until the child is approximately 1.5 years of age[6].

The possibility to postpone means that yearly cross-sectional statistics include mothers and fathers using parental leave rights which may have started several years before. Some studies from Sweden indicate that the share of fathers who did not use at least some part of their leave before the child was 4 years of age decreased between 1993 and 2002 (RFV 2004:4), and that 91% of mothers' days and 75% of fathers' days are used when the child is less than 3 years of age (Nososco 2007, 51). In Denmark, the shares of delayed days, legal or agreed, have increased especially among men since the reform of 2002. Of the total parental leave weeks taken in 2007, as many as 18% were delayed fathers' weeks. Among mothers the corresponding share was only 7% (www.statistikbanken.dk).

In Sweden all parental leave days, including fathers' quota and paternity leave days, can be postponed and used also on a part-time basis. In Norway only transferable parental leave weeks can be used on a part-time basis. Part-time benefit days with part-time jobs increase the total number of days used. For instance, in Sweden 7% of all women's and 11% of all men's parental

[6] This flexibility was introduced partially due the fact that the majority of mothers use up the whole parental leave period but continue to look after their child while receiving child home care allowance (about 80%) immediately after the parental leave period. This made it difficult for fathers to take any parental leave at all.

leave days were taken on a part-time basis in 2007 (calculations by the author from Riksförsäkringverket (RVF) statistics). Part-time benefit days are normally counted as full-time benefit periods, i.e. as net benefit days. In 2007 net benefit days accounted for 96 percent of all women's days and 94 percent of men's days. Men's share of all net parental leave days was 20.8% but 21.2% of all parental leave days. In Finland parental leave days can also be taken on a part-time basis, but the rules and conditions for part-time periods have proven to be difficult. Only about a hundred couples use this option, and single parents are excluded from it (Haataja 2007).

The third factor complicating comparisons is the variation in the lengths of parental leave periods. The length of transferable and compensated parental leaves varies from 3 months in Iceland to 12 months in Sweden. Further, the total length of the leaves varies from 9 months in Iceland to 16 months in Sweden. For example, in Sweden 3.3 mothers and 2.6 fathers per child born received parental leave benefits in 2007. In Iceland corresponding numbers were for mothers 1 and for fathers 0.9.

The longest parental leave period is in Sweden. If taken at a stretch without interruptions, it lasts for 480 days (16 months), of which one parent can use a maximum of 420 days (14 months). For three months of the shareable parental leave period, however, only a flat-rate benefit is available[7]. Parental leave days compensated at the basic benefit level are especially likely to be postponed (Holmberg 2002). The second longest parental leaves are in Norway and in Denmark. In Norway the total leave period is 44 or 54 weeks, depending on the chosen compensation rate[8]. This period includes a maternity leave of 18 weeks and a fathers' quota of 6 weeks.

In Denmark maternity leave before and after child birth is a total of 18 weeks. After this period, parental leave has, since 2002, been 36 weeks per parent, totalling 64 weeks if taken immediately after the maternity leave. However, only 36 weeks are compensated per family, so that the number of weeks compensated totally is 54. In 1999–2001 there was a fathers' quota for weeks 25–26 after child birth. Since the reform of 2002 fathers can take a parental leave also simultaneously with the mother as if it were a paternity leave. Since 2006, days on which a parent cares for a sick child have been counted as parental leave days instead of sickness benefit days.

In Finland maternity leave before and after the child's birth is about 4 months (105 week days) and parental leave is a good 6 months (158 week days in total). The shortest parental leave is in

[7] In Sweden it is possible to opt for a per diem parental benefit payable one to seven days per week. Thus it is possible to collect flat rate benefits at any point in the leave period; e.g., to choose to receive flat rate benefits on weekends and earnings related benefits during the week. (E.g. in Finland only a maximum of 6 weekdays per week are compensated)
[8] If the shorter period is chosen, the wage compensation is 100%, if the longer period, 80%. Today about 75% of mothers take their leave at the 80% compensation rate (www.nav.no).

Iceland. The reform in 2001–2003 increased the total length of the leave by 3 months. Three months became transferable leave, and mothers' and fathers' quotas, 3 months each, were introduced. The total parental leave period, including the quotas, is 9 months.

5 Use of the parental leave

The available statistics suggest that, due to differences in parental leave regulations, fathers' use of the parental leave does not foretell accurately how long the child will be looked after at home after birth. Nor do the statistics indicate to what extent the parents divide caring duties with each other. Specifically, no published, comparable data are available from the Nordic countries to assess how the sharing of child care duties after the child's birth is really developing in the Nordic countries.

In table 3, the percentages of fathers' days/weeks on parental leave (columns a) are calculated from the leave periods, from which paternity leave days/weeks are excluded. The shares represent, as nearly as possible, similar kinds of information from all of the Nordic countries. For Norway and Iceland the information is the same as in the published statistics by Nososco (see e.g. 31:2007, table 4.6, on page 50). In the case of Norway, this is because there are no paternity benefit weeks at all, and in the case of Iceland, because no information specifically about parental leave weeks as such is available from the late 1990s, when the paternity leave existed.

In Sweden fathers' share of all parental leave days is somewhat smaller than their share of all leave days, which include both paternity and pregnancy days (see footnote 1). The share of paternity and pregnancy days of total days is rather small, as seen above. For this reason, the difference between the two ways of presenting the statistics is small, about one percentage point.

Table 3. Parental leave periods taken by fathers as a % of the sum of total compensated leave periods without paternity leave (a) and total payment periods (b) per year. [a, b]

Year	Finland		Sweden		Denmark		Norway	Iceland
	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a=b)	(b)
1990	0.8	2.4	7.1	8.8	0.6	4.3	0.6	
1991	0.9	3.2	7.7	9.2	0.6	4.4	0.7	
1992	1.1	3.3	8.6	9.9	0.7	4.6	0.8	
1993	1.0	3.4	9.6	10.8	0.7	4.5	1.0	
1994	0.9	3.6	10.9	12.0	0.7	4.6	3.9	
1995	0.8	3.6	9.6	10.8	0.7	4.6	5.8	0.1
1996	0.7	3.6	10.6	11.7	0.6	4.5	6.3	0.1
1997	0.8	3.8	9.9	11.1	0.6	4.5	6.7	0.1
1998	0.7	3.9	10.4	11.6	1.0	5.1	7.0	2.3
1999	0.7	4.0	11.6	12.8	1.8	5.8	7.0	3.2
2000	0.7	4.2	12.4	13.7	1.7	6.0	7.2	3.3
2001	0.7	4.3	13.8	15.0	2.3	6.2	8.3	11.5
2002	0.8	4.8	15.5	16.6	2.2	5.5	8.6	19.6
2003	1.1	5.2	17.2	18.3	2.8	5.1	8.6	27.6
2004	1.3	5.4	18.7	19.7	3.2	5.5	9.0	31.8
2005	1.4	5.5	19.5	20.5	3.6	5.9	9.3	32.7
2006	1.5	5.7	20.6	21.5	3.9	6.0	10.4	32.2
2007	1.7	6.1	20.8	21.7	4.2	6.2	11.4	31.2

[a] In (a) paternity days are excluded from total days, except in Iceland, where paternity leave was available for only 3 years. For Sweden pregnancy days and paternity days taken by women or men are excluded from the figures in column (a). The Swedish days are calculated from net days. Column (b) has the same information as in the Nososco statistics, see table 1 above.

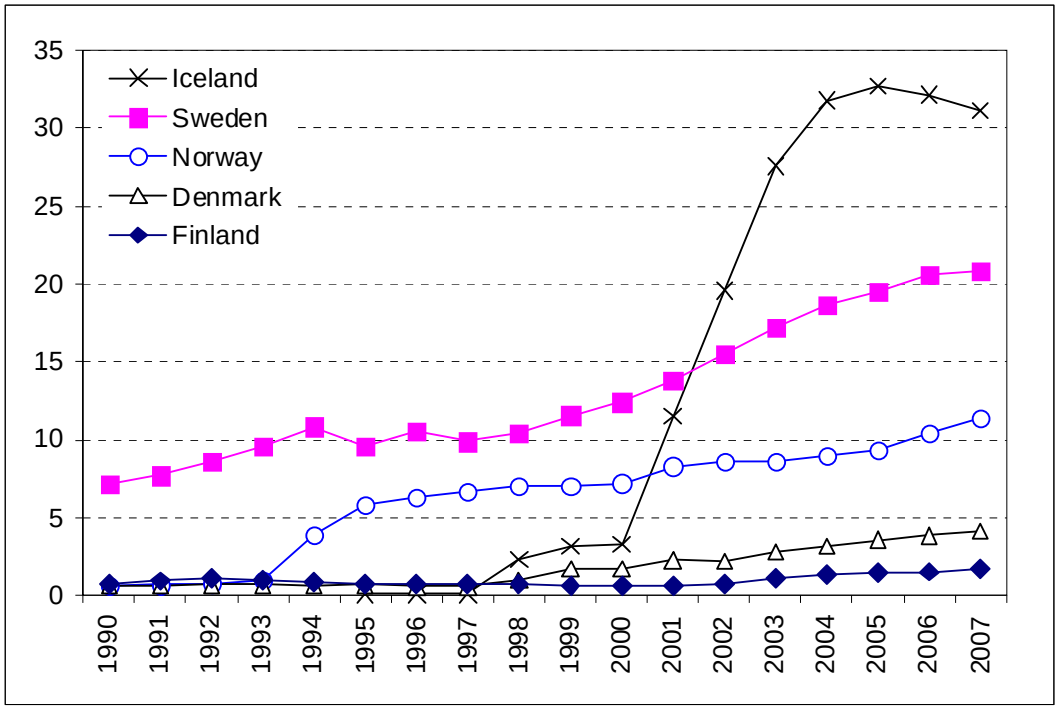
[b] Sources: Finland: Calculations from the yearly Statistical Yearbooks of the Social insurance Institution; Sweden: www.rfv.se; Denmark: Calculations from statistics, www.statistikbanken.dk; Iceland: http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Health,-social-affairs-and-justi/Social-insurances; Norway: Nososco and Directorate of Labour and Welfare, Section of Statistics and Research, Statistics Unit.

The impact of excluding paternity days (columns a) is rather big for Denmark and very big for Finland, compared with the fathers' share of total parental leave periods (columns b). In Denmark fathers' use of parental leave has increased from less than one percent to over four percent in almost 20 years. The difference between fathers' use of total leave days and their use of parental leave days only has decreased from about four percent to two percent. The take-up rates of paternity leave have not decreased as seen in diagram 1, but fathers today use new options for parental leave more.

In Finland, parental leave days as a share of all leave days, paternity leave days excluded, has been and still is the smallest, below two percent. However, more fathers today take a parental leave, and fathers' use of "bonus weeks" increases the number of fathers' days. The small increase in fathers' use of parental leave stems from the fathers' month. More fathers use parental leave but the average leave period per father has decreased. Before the 2003 reform, the average parental

leave period of fathers was more than 60 days, whereas after the reform it has fallen to less than 30 days.

Diagram 3. Fathers' parental leave days, % of all parental leave days[a] taken in 1990–2007.



Sources: See table 2.

[a] Total days include compensated maternity and parental leave days, and exclude paternity and non-universal pregnancy leave days.

Diagram 3 summarises fathers' shares of parental and maternity leave days, when paternity leave days and non-universal pregnancy days are excluded. In principle this information demonstrates fathers' share of the total child care period, when parents take turns to care for their child after birth. In practice this is not true, as described above: varying shares of parental leave days consist of postponed days, maternity leave periods taken before the child's birth cannot be excluded and varying shares of parental leave days are used as paternity leave days, simultaneously with the mother, in different countries.

6 Summary

The aim of this paper is to shed light on fathers' use of different parental leave schemes in the Nordic countries. The starting point was to separate fathers' use of paternity leave from fathers' use of parental leave. Mixing these two phenomena is counterproductive if our interest is in analysing the sharing of child care duties in turns between the parents, i.e. separately from simultaneous care periods. Both paternity and parental leaves are rather modern options to encourage fathers to participate and share in child care at home, and thus to promote gender equality in private life. Having fathers share long parental leaves in turn with the mother may also have a greater impact on gender equality in the labour market than if they only use short paternity leaves. One of the original aims of the parental leave was to give fathers individual responsibility in child care and to shorten mothers' absences from employment.

On one hand the differences of paternity and parental leave schemes are obscured in contemporary parental leave statistics, yet on the other hand the differences between these leave schemes are real only in some Nordic countries. Increased flexibility of parental leave schemes may increase options for different parental choices, but does it also affect the justifications for parental leaves? Increasing participation by fathers in child care has long been on the political agenda in the Nordic countries. The politics of fathers' leaves are, however, not very well known or analysed so far (Nyberg, Ellingsæter, Emerik, Haataja and Mósesdóttir, forthcoming).

In summary, the statistics show that especially Finland but also Denmark in some respect are countries where a great deal of fathers' days consist only of paternity leave days. Denmark is the only Nordic country without any kind of fathers' quota, yet the fathers' share of parental leaves is increasing more rapidly than in Finland, where a conditional fathers' quota exists. Is this due to the possibility to postpone leave days in Denmark, the possibility to take parental leave days as paternity days simultaneously with the mother or an increase in fathers sharing child care in turn with the mother? In Sweden and Norway the sharing of child care duties while on parental leave increases steadily and is of much greater social significance than in the aforementioned countries. Iceland is an exception, having recently implemented reforms that represent a radical change from its former system. Fathers in Iceland share parental leaves more than in any other country in the world.

However, statistics only give a hint, although a rather good one, of fathers' use of paternity and parental leaves. Yet they do not tell exactly how fathers use their days in all of the countries. How long do fathers really look after their child on their own, and how long are they co-carers, for

example while on paternity leave or while the mother is on vacation? In order to arrive at a better understanding we need more detailed information drawn both from statistics and from research.

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