

PATERNITY LEAVE: FIRST RESULTS OF INTRODUCTION IN MOLDOVA

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ABSTRACT

Parental leave policies are important instruments regulating how the men's and women's concurrent role as parents and employees is valued and encouraged. Although paternity leave in Moldova was introduced in 2016, the share of fathers who benefit from this leave remains low.

The article presents the results of the qualitative sociological study conducted in 2022 with fathers who took paternity leave and fathers who did not take it. The aim of the research was to determine the barriers faced by fathers in taking paternity leave.

The benefits of paternity leave for both fathers and the whole family were found: formatting strong emotional bonds between father and child, developing newborn care skills, strengthening confidence in their ability to care for children, improving family relations. In the implementation of this leave, fathers face social, professional, financial and cultural difficulties. Traditional stereotypes of behavior and ideas that a woman (mother) should take care of a child have a negative impact on the position of men (fathers) about the possibility of using parental leave. The level of education and the position on the labor market are determining factors in the use of paternity leave. Respondents who took paternity leave have higher education, stable occupational position and relatively high incomes; and those who did not take this leave have secondary education, unstable occupational position, and low incomes. Most of the fathers who used parental leave had the first child in the family, and those who did not use it had a second or third child. The study found that some employers do not encourage their employees to take paternity leave. Often this is due to a shortage of workers in the organization / enterprise, and is also more typical for the private sector.

Keywords: paternity leave, paternity allowance, family policy

Politicele de concediu pentru creșterea copilului sunt instrumente importante care reglementează modul în care este valorificat și facilitat rolul bărbaților și femeilor ca părinți și ca angajați. Deși concediul de paternitate în Moldova a fost introdus în 2016, ponderea taților care beneficiază de acest concediu se menține la un nivel redus.

Articolul prezintă rezultatele studiului sociologic calitativ desfășurat în 2022 în rândul taților beneficiari de concediu de paternitate și taților care nu l-au utilizat. Scopul studiului a fost de a identifica barierele cu care se confruntă tații atunci când doresc să folosească concediul de îngrijire a copilului.

În baza datelor obținute s-au constatat beneficiile concediului de paternitate atât pentru tați, cât și pentru întreaga familie: formarea legăturilor emoționale dintre tată și copil, dezvoltarea abilităților de îngrijire a nou-născuților, întărirea încrederii în capacitatea de a avea grijă de copii, îmbunătățirea relațiilor conjugale. În implementarea acestui concediu tații se confruntă cu dificultăți de ordin social, profesional, financiar și cultural. Stereotipurile tradiționale de comportament și reprezentările, conform cărora femeia (mamă) ar trebui să aibă grijă de un copil au un impact negativ asupra poziției bărbaților (taților) cu privire la posibilitatea de a folosi concediul paternal. Nivelul de educație și poziția pe piața muncii sunt factori determinanți în utilizarea concediului paternal. Respondenții care au luat concediul de paternitate dețin studii superioare, poziție ocupațională stabilă și venituri relativ înalte; iar cei care nu l-au luat au studii medii, poziție ocupațională instabilă și venituri mici. Majoritatea taților care au folosit concediul paternal au avut primul copil în familie, iar cei care nu l-au folosit au avut al doilea sau al treilea copil. Studiul a constatat că unii angajatori nu încurajează angajații să ia concediu de paternitate. Adesea, acest lucru este cauzat de insuficiența de angajați în organizație/întreprindere și este, de asemenea caracteristic pentru sectorul privat.

Cuvinte cheie: concediu de paternitate, indemnizație de paternitate, politică familială

Политика отпусков по уходу за ребенком является важным инструментом, регулирующим то, как оценивается и поощряется роль мужчин и женщин как родителей и работников. Несмотря на то, что отпуск по уходу за ребенком в Молдове был введен еще в 2016 г., доля отцов, им воспользовавшихся, остается на низком уровне.

В статье представлены результаты качественного социологического исследования, проведенного в 2022 г. среди отцов, использовавших отпуск по уходу за ребенком, и

среди тех, кто его не использовал. Целью исследования явилось определение барьеров, с которыми сталкиваются отцы, когда желают использовать отпуск по уходу за ребенком.

На основании полученных данных были выявлены определенные положительные стороны отпуска по уходу за ребенком как для отцов, так и для всей семьи: создание прочных эмоциональных связей между отцом и ребенком, развитие навыков ухода за новорожденным, укрепление уверенности отцов в способностях по уходу за детьми, улучшение супружеских отношений. Вместе с тем, отцы, желающие использовать отпуск по уходу за ребенком, сталкиваются с определенными социальными, профессиональными, финансовыми и культурными трудностями. Традиционные стереотипы поведения и представления о том, что женщина (мать) должна заботиться о ребенке оказывают негативное влияние на позицию мужчин (отцов) о возможности использования отпуска по уходу за ребенком. Уровень образования и позиция на рынке труда являются определяющими факторами в использовании отцовского отпуска. Отцы, воспользовавшиеся отпуском по уходу за ребенком, как правило, имеют высшее образование, стабильную занятость и относительно высокие доходы; а те, которые не воспользовались отпуском имеют среднее образование, нестабильное место работы и низкий доход. Большая часть отцов, использовавших отпуск по уходу за ребенком, имели первого ребенка в семье, а те, кто его не использовал имели второго или третьего ребенка. Исследование показало, что некоторые работодатели не поощряют своих работников брать отцовский отпуск. Часто это связано с нехваткой работников в организации / на предприятии, а также в большей степени характерно для частного сектора.

Ключевые слова: отцовский отпуск, отцовское пособие, семейная политика

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, with the appearance of a child in a family, the father takes care of the financial wellbeing of the family, while the mother assumes the housework and child care. During recent decades, the equal split of household chores and the full employment of both men and women have been promoted. The expectations pertaining to the parenting have changed in recent decades; so fathers are increasingly expected to be involved in their children's lives rather than merely be breadwinners.

Parental leave policies are important instruments regulating how the men's and women's concurrent role as parents and employees is valued and encouraged. Paternity leave is usually a short-term leave after the birth or adoption of a child and is intended to allow the father to spend time with his partner and the new child. The paternity leave policy mainly pursues several objectives: to help fathers achieve a balance between professional and private life; to encourage greater gender equality both in the family and labor market; to involve fathers more in childcare and other household chores to take over some of the mothers' responsibilities; to promote fairer working environments; to challenge gender norms that stereotype women as primary caregivers; to support the mothers' return to the labor market. Policymakers are convinced that paternity leave strengthens women's position in the labor market, reduces the gender pay gap and gives children the chance

to be closer to their fathers - and vice versa (Cools, Fiva, Kirkeboen, 2011).

Balancing work and family has become more difficult for parents in recent decades due to increased demands on them at work and as parents. The uptake of paternity leave and father-specific parental leave has a positive effect on the work-life balance of families, and the work-life balance, as supported by state policies, has been regarded the most important factor influencing female economic activity (Belle, 2016). There are still, difficulties in maintaining the work-life balance in Moldova. These stem from insufficiency of child care and education possibilities, the rigidity of work schedules and the continued unequal division of family responsibilities between husband and wife (Chistruga-Sînchevici, 2021). The implementation of paternity leave in Moldova is important due to gender discrepancies regarding employment. Thus, although women have a higher level of participation in education than men, their employment rate is lower than that of men, being 35,4% and 44,71% respectively in 2021. A significant proportion of women continues to be economically inactive because of family responsibilities, including childcare. According to the data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 23% of the total number of women outside the labor force, do not want to work due to family responsibilities. Based on the above, it is necessary to estimate the particularities, factors, difficulties and benefits of implementing paternity leave.

MATERNITY, CHILDCARE AND PATERNITY LEAVE POLICIES IN MOLDOVA

Paternity leave, together with maternity leave and childcare leave can be considered important instruments of family policy. In the Republic of Moldova, maternity leave is paid and granted to women starting from the 30th week of pregnancy with a duration of 126 calendar days. The monthly amount of the maternity allowance is 100% of the calculation base established by the enterprise in which the employee carries out her basic activity. Childcare leave can only be taken at the end of maternity leave. In 2018, childcare leave was reformed, parents being offered the option to benefit from a higher childcare allowance in proportion to the reduction of the childcare leave period. In the current context where the childcare system for children up to the age of 3 is not well developed, we consider it appropriate to keep the option for parents to be on childcare leave up to the age of three even if the allowance they benefit from is a modest one (30% of the calculation basis).

Paternity leave is relatively new in Moldova, the legal framework being approved on 15.11.2016. It lasts 14 days and is granted in the first 12 months following the birth of the child. During the period of paternity leave, the employee benefits from a paternal allowance that cannot be lower than the average monthly insured income for the respective period and which is paid from the state social insurance budget. According to the data of the National Social Insurance House, the share of fathers

who had benefited from the paternity allowance by 01.01.2021 was 15%. The amount of the paternal allowance is 100% of the average monthly insured income in the last 3 months preceding the month of the child's birth (income from which social insurance contributions were calculated and paid). In 2022, the average value of the paternity allowance was 5309.11 lei (267 Euro).

At the European level, paternity leave legislation has been introduced or developed in many states, especially in the late 1990s. In Eastern Europe, paternity leave is a new practice. Some countries near and in the vicinity of Moldova have not yet foreseen such a measure (Ukraine, Russia, Belarus). Romania offers fathers the opportunity to be on paternity leave, which was increased in 2023 from 5 to 10 days. In 2022, most EU countries except Germany, Croatia, Slovakia and Luxembourg, offered fathers paternity leave even if it is mostly non-compulsory. As of August 2, 2022, paternity leave was to be at least 2 weeks in all EU countries according to the new Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and careers. Before its adoption, there were no minimum standards regarding paternity leave. Respectively, Moldova as a candidate country for European Union membership, adjusts its socio-demographic policies both in accordance with the trends in the evolution of demographic phenomena and the relevant European policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fathers who took paternity leave were found to have a higher level of involvement in children's developmental activities, such as reading and playing, and this higher level of involvement persisted throughout the children's first two years of life ([Petts, Knoester, 2018](#)). Some research suggests that paternity leave has positive effects on children's cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes and the father's long-term involvement in child care ([Rege, Solli, 2010](#)). Two-week or longer paternity leave is positively related to family cohesion and the mother's satisfaction with couple relationship ([Petts, Knoester, Waldfogel, 2020](#)). In the UK, a father's paternity leave is strongly associated with the mother's well-being at three months after childbirth ([Redshaw, Henderson, 2013](#)). Fathers taking paternity leave could also improve children's health through the enhancement of maternal physical and mental health, including reducing the likelihood of mothers having anti-anxiety and an antibiotic prescription; promoting maternal sleep ([Yeung, Nanxun, 2021](#)).

The analysis of the impact of paternity leave on the father's professional activity, revealed that this leave can reduce the time spent by young fathers at work by ~3.8 hours/week (equivalent to ~24 working days/year). This significant effect is not only due to reduced working time and the use of paternity leave but also other causes such as losing/quitting the job, switching from full-time to part-time work, decreasing overtime ([Zhang, 2020](#)). The given results suggest that, although paternity leave helps to equalize the participation of men and women in the fulfillment of family responsibilities, it affects men employment aspects.

The influence of paternity leave on reducing the gender gap in labor market participation, i.e. a more equal division of specific household tasks, is another widely researched topic ([Canaan, Lassen, Rosenbaum, Steingrimsdottir, 2022](#)). Paternity leave policies reduce the gap between mothers' and fathers' participation in the labor market. These policies will be more effective if they intervene at critical times when

men are most open to changing behavior – for example, when they become fathers. Men are more likely to bond with their children, if they start caring for them at an early age. Thus, paternity leave policies are associated with a 4.9% increase in the women's labor market participation rate (Bettelli, 2020). Childcare during paternity leave can help fathers become comfortable with tasks that have traditionally been performed by mothers and begin to regard themselves as competent caregivers (Rehel, 2014). These processes appear to encourage fathers to become sensitive and responsive parents, these being two parenting attributes fundamentally important for child development and establishment of good parent-child relationships (Petts, Knoester, Waldfogel, 2020). Promoting this policy would encourage employers to overcome their still persisting reluctance to employ and promote young women due to family obligations and exclusive maternity leave.

The influence of employers on fathers' uptake of paternity leave is a widely discussed topic in the scientific literature. The level of employers' support affects the use of paternity leave. International practices reveal that in companies that also offer other facilities to balance professional and family activity, for example, nurseries, childcare services at the workplace etc. fathers are more likely to take paternity and care leave. Management attitudes, the sector a company works in company size, trade union presence and the proportion of female employees can also contribute to the access to paternity leave (Belle, 2016). Overall, the implementation of paternity leave has positive implications for employers as well, because the introduction of paternity leave contributes to equalizing women's and men's employment costs, so employers should no longer discriminate against women in this respect (Zhang, 2020).

Paternity leave can have mixed effects on fertility. On the one hand, it can increase fertility, as having children becomes less costly for mothers' careers. On the other hand, recent investigations have highlighted the likelihood that paternity leave will contribute to lower fertility rates and reproductive intentions. So, the introduction of the two-week paid paternity leave in Spain in 2007 led to a reduction in fertility. Fathers who were (only) entitled to the new paternity leave were less likely to have a child in the following six years compared to ineligible parents. This is explained by the greater involvement of fathers in child care, which led to an increase in professional activity among mothers. Also, fathers' low intentions to have

more children may stem from their increased awareness of the costs of raising children and the change in preferences as to the number of children in favor of child quality (Farré, González, 2019). Evaluating the introduction and extension of paternity leave in Norway, Cools (2015) and Hart (2019) found no effect on fertility (Canaan, et al., 2022).

Several studies have investigated the effect of paternity leave on marital stability and have highlighted that the implementation of paternity leaves can contribute to strengthening family relationships. In Iceland parents eligible for paternity leave are less likely to divorce during the first fifteen years of their child's life. It was also highlighted that paternity leave has the strongest impact among couples where the mother has an educational level higher than or equal to that of the father (Olafsson, Steingrimsdottir, 2020). The link between parental leave and family stability is explained by the fact that the leave leads to a lasting change in the division of household chores. If the father becomes more involved in household and childcare activities, the mother's satisfaction with the marital relationship may increase (Hart, et al., 2022). Taking paternity leave can also foster stronger parenting relationships. Similar to the idea that fathers can take advantage of the time off granted by paternity leave to focus on their relationship with their new baby, they can also use this time to focus on their relationship with their wives. Having a baby is an important life event, and parents can strengthen their relationship with each other by spending time together after the baby is born (Petts, 2018).

Descriptions of profiles of fathers who implement paternity leave can be found in several scientific works. Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel (2007) found that fathers are more likely to take paternity leave with their first child. This may indicate either that the financial burden is greater with more children, so fathers cannot afford to take time off, or that mothers with more children are more experienced and, therefore, less likely to need help from the father in caring for a child. Another interesting finding is that in dual-earner couples, fathers who cohabit with mothers are more likely to take leave than those who are married. This suggests that cohabiting couples have more egalitarian and neutral attitudes toward child-rearing compared to those in families with more traditional attitudes. Another study highlighted that the men who take paternity leave are, in the main, highly educated, have high incomes, do not perform manual labor and work in a public place (Mansdottera, et al., 2010).

THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The fundamental theory that served as theoretical basis was social capital theory, suggesting that paternity leave can increase family's social capital by allowing fathers to be more involved in child care and interactions with children, thus strengthening father-child attachment, family cohesion and promoting children's well-being (Yeung, Nanxun, 2021). During the leave, fathers learn more about their children and acquire more human capital necessary for child care (Marshall, Rieck, 2012). Also, increasing fathers' participation in housework after the birth of a child can have a lasting impact on the division of paid and unpaid work in the family, allowing mothers to return to paid work more quickly, and as a result, reducing the depreciation of human capital.

In accordance with the systemic theory, the family has all the characteristics necessary for a subsystem (Morgan, 1985). The family is a system made up of several individuals, whose behaviors and attitudes are interdependent; it is a complex, ever-changing adaptive system with a double opening (external and internal) and is built to cope with disturbances that intervene in the evolution of the family.

According to this theory, the way, each family member fulfills his/her role, influences others. The experience of being a parent is often challenging as parents must adjust to their new roles.

The article was developed on the basis of a qualitative study, carried out between August and November 2022, in which 24 fathers, who have children under 3 years old, were interviewed (of which 10 benefited from paternity leave and 14 did not). The research method applied was the semi-structured sociological interview, and the research tool used was the interview guide. The general hypothesis of the study refers to the fact that access to paternity leave is conditioned by the professional stability, financial security and value orientation of fathers and that its uptake increases the involvement of fathers at home. The respondents were aged between 23-43 years. They were active in various fields of activity – IT, culture, entrepreneurship, health, construction, education, trade, services, and had various education levels, such as higher education, technical professional, secondary school and high school.

MAIN RESULTS

The arrival of a new child in the family brings many changes in the family, as newborns require a lot of attention, being dependent on their parents for physical, social and emotional care. The study data revealed that according to all fathers participating in the study, being on paternity leave had positive effects both for them and for their families: creating strong emotional bonds between father and child; developing newborn care skills; strengthening confidence in their ability to care for children;

increasing the mother's confidence in the husband's childcare skills; changing attitudes towards childcare; providing support to other family members in case of a complicated birth, premature birth, health problem; increasing the responsibility for housework; taking sick leave when the child gets sick; accompanying children to medical consultations; spending more time with the child; improving family relationships; experiencing feelings of joy (Table 1.).

Table 1:
Impact of the paternity leave on fathers and their families

Creating strong emotional bonds between father and child	"When my first child was born, I used to come home from work late and tired and I didn't manage to spend time with him. After the birth of the little one, I even started to reserve time for her, and do you know what? The relationship is different". "She always looks for me, waits for me. The boy is more attached to his mother because only she took care of him as a child". "The child turns to both parents when she needs something, not only the mother, as it was before".
Developing newborn care skills	"The girl was very small and the wife was afraid to bathe her. I still had some fears but I had to help. Now only I bathe the child".

Strengthening confidence in their ability to care for children	"I never thought I would make it alone with a small child while my wife is at university. I already know that if he cries, something is bothering him - I have to change his diaper, feed him, keep him warm, etc."
Increasing the mother's confidence in the husband's childcare skills	"In the beginning, my wife was like a lioness. She thought that I wouldn't be able to do what she did. But when she saw that I do also wake up at night and can prepare the food, calm the child so that she stops crying, she became calmer".
Changing attitudes towards childcare	"I have always respected women's work, but I also happened to say that it is not very difficult to stay at home and take care of the child. After being on leave for two weeks, I changed my mind. After giving birth, the woman only sees the child, forgets about herself. At the child's every moan she is by her side, that's why someone is needed to take over part of the other housework".
Providing support to other family members in case of a complicated birth, premature birth, health problem	"Our third child was born prematurely. My wife and the little one had to stay in the hospital for 3 weeks to gain weight. There was a school child and a kindergarten child at home. The grandparents are far away and there was no one to help us. That's why, thanks to this paternity leave, I was able to take care of the other two kids - prepare their food, clothes, check their homework etc."
Increasing the responsibility for housework	"At that time I understood that it is not easy to take care of a baby and the household. That's why since then I often do some chores that only my wife did before - cooking, ironing, vacuuming".
Taking sick leave when the child gets sick	"It happened that I also took medical leave with my little girl. She had a virus, fever and my wife was having a hard time at work, so I had to be the one to administer her medicine and take care of her".
Accompanying children to medical consultations	"Me and my wife both work and when the child catches a cold, if I am more available then I go with the child to the doctor, take medicine, and if necessary I stay at home with him".
Spending more time with the child	"I compare myself to other fathers, I can't help but spend enough time with the child, otherwise something is missing".
Improving family relationships	"My wife is very satisfied that I take care of the child, I feel that she values me more. I'm glad that I can make her happy because, after all, happiness in the family depends a lot on the wife".
Experiencing feelings of joy	"I was feeling felt so fulfilled during that period while I stayed at home and once again I came to the conclusion that family is the most important thing and not the work".

Simply providing paternity leave is not enough to achieve the objectives for which parental leave policies are designed. Fathers face a lot of difficulties in up taking it. The reasons for not using paternity leave are multiple, thus in many

cases fathers do not resort to the paternity leave for several reasons. The results of the interviews allowed us to highlight some of the social, professional, financial and cultural difficulties (Table 2).

Table 2:*The barriers preventing fathers from accessing/implementing paternity leave*

Social	Professional	Financial	Cultural
<p>Lack of knowledge about the right to benefit from paternity leave. <i>"Neither I nor my wife knew about this leave, although we both have higher education,".</i></p>	<p>Informal employment. <i>"I work in repairs, construction and I'm not employed by anyone, so I can't get paternity leave. I work when I have an offer. Even after the birth of the boy I went and performed repair works at a citizen settled in Italy".</i></p>	<p>Double salary – one official and one "in the envelope,". <i>"I work for a transport company and we don't receive the whole salary on the card. If I stayed home 2 weeks, I would only receive half of the salary, my wife doesn't work and it wouldn't be enough for us".</i></p>	<p>Supporting the opinion that current paternity leave is too short to contribute significantly to any change.</p>
<p>The pandemic situation. <i>"My wife gave birth during the restrictions related to the pandemic when we had to stay at home more, that's why I didn't even have to request permission from work to take this leave".</i></p>	<p>Specific periods in enterprise/company activity. <i>"Now everything is under pressure. It is the most important period of the year - raw material supply. That's why I didn't fit in the first 56 days after birth".*</i> This aspect denotes the lack of flexibility for fathers to choose when to take paternity leave.</p>	<p>Dependence on additional income. <i>"My salary is official, but working at one of the most luxurious restaurants, I collect another salary from "tips". I wasn't even interested in this leave, nor would it be financially advantageous".</i></p>	<p>Opinions on traditional gender roles in the exercise of housework and childcare, according to which the mother is considered responsible for the care of the child.</p>
<p>Lack of labor force. <i>"With the second child, I am not allowed because there is no one to teach the lessons in my place". "We each do the work for 2-3 employees. A possible paternity leave is out of the question". Many fathers realize that being on leave would put a burden on colleagues and disrupt the work rhythm. "There are no substitutes, this means that my colleagues have to take over my duties while I am on leave,".</i></p>	<p>Impossibility of replacing highly qualified specialists. <i>"I am the only specialist who understands how the whole system works. There is no other specialist who can take over my duties, nor can the director of the company replace me". Shorter periods of leave create more burden and stress than longer periods where organizations are more likely to search and find a suitable replacement.</i></p>	<p>Poverty. <i>"Even if I took such a leave, I wouldn't stay at home because I have five mouths to feed". "With the greatest pleasure I would stay with the child, but the expenses are high, the wife has no more income. I'm the one who has to work for two,".</i></p>	<p>Fear of stigmatization. <i>"My job is at a car repair shop. You realize how the other colleagues would regard me. They would question my masculinity if went on vacation? I wouldn't want to spoil my reputation among my colleagues".</i></p>
<p>Lack of role models/ examples in the community. <i>"In our village, none of the men who have children have been on such leave. Not even our director who still has a small child".</i></p>	<p>The attitude of the employer. <i>"My employer has only men workers. Nobody takes paternity leave, and they won't understand me if I request this leave. In all families the wife takes care of the children".</i> <i>"I am sure that when a situation related to career advancement arises, if the boss has to choose between one who had been on paternity leave and another who had not, he will choose the latter,".</i></p>	<p>Lack of jobs in small towns and rural areas. <i>"I'm glad that I have work in our small town, that's why I can't afford to have such claims. I am happy that I have a salary that is paid to me regularly and with it I can support my family,".</i></p>	<p>Contradiction to the ideal norm that the worker must to prioritize the job. <i>"How will the boss be able to evaluate me during the month I will be on leave? He will say that something is wrong and that I am not interested enough in the work".</i></p>

* Until 01.09.22 the paternal leave was granted in the first 56 days. It is currently granted in the first 12 months. This change provides more room for maneuvering for fathers who face certain constraints related to time and circumstances at work, but at the same time, it reduces the proportion of fathers who will take

paternity leave in the first two months after the birth of the child. Thus, it is most advisable that this leave be used mainly in the first three months after the birth of the child because this would be a rather difficult and demanding period for the mother to face the responsibilities of caring for and raising the child.

Paternity leave is an opportunity for a father to take care of his children from the first days of life and is an effective measure by the state to build responsible fatherhood. This emerges from the reasons why the interviewed fathers resorted to paternity leave:

- **On one's own volition.** *"Our child was long-awaited and desired, so when I found out that there is such a possibility to stay at home with the child after birth and still get paid, I said I'm going to use it,".*
- **The example of other colleagues and close friends** was the stimulus that influenced them to request paternity leave. *"At my service, all fathers take this leave. Of course, the person in charge of human resources informs us and proposes that we use this leave because it does not affect them as employers,".*
- **The health problems of the child/mother.** *"The child was born with several health problems. The birth was very difficult, my wife was extremely exhausted. I had to be with them,".*
- **Facilitating the mother's return to work.** *"My wife is chief accountant. Immediately after the birth she was the one who had to do most of the work. Her boss encouraged her to return to work quickly, and I had to support her. This leave helped us a lot because it was precisely during this period that my grandmother could no longer help us, so it was useful to us. Then I found someone to take care of the little one. I helped her to be less stressed. I would bring the baby to her for breastfeeding".*

Greater involvement of fathers in child care has beneficial effects on children's cognitive and behavioral development. So it is essential to involve fathers in the care of children from the moment of birth, including by offering paternity leave because it has direct effects on the well-being of the child. Despite this, fathers who were on paternity leave used this time in different ways:

- **Engagement in the tasks of caring for the newborn child.** *"I helped my wife a lot because she was after the surgery and it was difficult for her to hold the baby". "During those two weeks I would wake up at night and rock him when he started to cry, I would let my wife rest after nursing him". „I learned how to be a parent,".* These fathers definitely become more attached to their children. So paternity leave helps fathers have more opportunities to learn parenting skills. Specifically, paternity leave can reduce the likelihood of role traditionalization by giving fathers time to learn parenting tasks starting at birth.
- **Taking over the activities of caring for and supervising other family members.** *"The eldest boy was very jealous when the second was born, so during the paternity leave I spent most of the time with him so that he would understand that he is also loved and appreciated".*
- **Predominantly dealing with solving household problems during paternity leave.** *"To be honest, I did the facade of the house during paternity leave,".*
- **Continuation of work activities.** *"What I do in the company, no one else can do, so I continued to work from home,".*
- **Being on paternity leave only from the primary employer.** *"I did not request this leave from the other two companies I work with and I continued to fulfill my obligations with them".*
- **Travels, rest.** *"The child was very quiet, so we took advantage and rested at the sea".*

The analysis of the interview data allowed us to outline the profile of the fathers who take it and those who do not benefit from this measure. Thus, the fathers who take leave are different from those who do not in terms of education level, age, working conditions, financial insurance, number of children, wife's professional activity, household composition (Table 3).

Table 3:*Social characteristics of fathers who did/did not take paternity leave*

	Fathers who have taken paternity leave	Fathers who did not take paternity leave
Level of education	High	Medium and low
Age	They are mostly young, the average age of the respondents was 34 at the time of the child's birth.	
The working conditions	Qualified employees. The socio-professional position is stable. Most work in the public sector	Unstable position at work. Most work in the private sector, small businesses. Some fathers are informal employees. A small category was represented by small entrepreneurs who cannot afford to be on paternity leave because they are the only employees.
The financial assurance	High income (around 10000) and mostly official.	Most have low incomes and some are dependent on informal income.
Childbirth assistance	+	-
Number of children	1 child	2 and more
Professional activity of mothers/wives	Employed in the field of work until birth	Not working
Household composition	Husband, wife and child	Extended family

According to the analyzed data of the study, fathers who do not take paternity leave can be classified into the following categories:

- **Aware but constrained.** Fathers who want to be on paternity leave, have intentions to get involved as much as possible in the upbringing and education of their children, consider that this is important for them, but the actual implementation is a challenge for them due to expectations and pressures at work. This is also true for the small entrepreneurs who have to work every day. *"I would love to stay at home with my wife and my little one, but I can't because this is my business and I have loans, I have borrowed equipment. It would be abnormal to stay at home under my conditions".*
- **Traditionalist fathers** who believe that raising and caring for children is strictly a female responsibility. *"Since the world and the earth, the mother is the one who takes care of the children. Yes, I can help her, but no one will take care of the child better than her".* The specialized literature highlights that the father's presence and involvement in the child's development is essential. The father develops such qualities in the child that the mother is not always able to cultivate: initiative, independence, courage, restraint, will, the ability to keep one's word, to defend one's point of view, courage and steadfastness.
- **Undecided fathers** who claim that they do not understand why it is necessary for them to take paternity leave and that it would be important for them to have some examples of fathers who took advantage of this leave to draw their attention to the benefits of this type of leave. Legislation and regulations that promote the uptake of paternity leave by fathers are a valuable tool for social change, but they are not sufficient. Individual ideals, social norms, awareness about the benefits of implementing paternity leave are essential.

The employer is obliged to encourage employees to benefit from paternity leave. Cases in which the employer creates situations disadvantaging employees who take paternity leave are considered cases of discrimination on the part of employers and shall be sanctioned according to the law. The data of the conducted study allowed us to identify several types of employers in terms of their opinion regarding employees being on paternity leave:

- **Employers with conservative views.** *"My employer is old-fashioned. Even if he allowed me to take this leave, he didn't understand me given that my wife doesn't work".* These employers may perceive employees who request paternity leave to be less committed and trustworthy, thus reducing

the likelihood that they will be promoted and receive salary increases. In other words, taking paternity leave can be seen as a sign of being more family-oriented than career-oriented.

- **Employers who understand and support the need for fathers to use paternity leave but who for objective reasons do not accept it.** *"At our workplace, one can't take two weeks off like that. We even plan the annual leave and take it only in the summer".* Thus, the reality shows that some employers do not approve of taking paternity leave to spend time with the family. Many workplaces are structured around the ideal norm that employees prioritize work above all else.
- **Employers who encourage employees to take paternity leave** (especially in IT). In such a situation, paternity leave is compatible with the organizational culture that promotes the balance between work and family.

The employer and the support offered to the employee at the enterprise play the role of intermediary between the legally established norms and individual paternity practices. The attitude of the employer and colleagues determines the extent to which opportunities are used.

DISCUSSIONS

Our study shows that the use of paternity leave leads to greater father involvement, and this is important because it is associated with many positive outcomes among children and spouses, this fact being confirmed in other studies. Paternity leave develops fathers' confidence in their parenting skills, influences them to appreciate the importance of involvement in child care, and makes them feel that this aspect should not concern only mothers (Rehel, 2014). The results of our study revealed that fathers, after using paternity leave, value mothers' work more and believe that they can perform childcare tasks as well as their partners. This has created a certain confidence in their own strength. As a result, they are committed to carrying out childcare duties even after the period of paternity leave.

Researchers Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine 1985 highlighted the importance of father involvement in raising and educating children along three dimensions: direct interaction with children, accessibility (being available to children), and responsibility (making decisions about or arrangements for children). The study shows that paternity leave has effects on these three dimensions. Thus, the interviewed fathers who benefited from paternity leave interacted more with their children (care, play), they took the time to be available to the children when needed (consulting the doctor, taking care of the child when he has health problems etc.) and have become more responsible (e.g. looking after babies at night).

Another important aspect worth discussing is the duration of paternity leave. Both the results of the study carried out by the author and a series of international investigations highlight that in order to have the most optimal results, it is necessary for this leave to be longer. Longer periods of paternity leave are associated with

more frequent involvement in child development and caregiving tasks (Cabrerá, Fagan, Farrie, 2008). Thus, some interviewed fathers did not take paternity leave for the reason that the period is very short and would not allow him to assimilate the child care skills. Both the author's study and other international studies highlight that limiting the legal period to two weeks is particularly inappropriate in certain specific circumstances, such as when the mother or child is ill or was born prematurely (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2018). As a result, the opportunity to allow the father to take a longer period of paternity leave for such complicated situations needs to be considered.

Particular attention is needed for fathers who wanted to be on paternity leave but who for objective reasons could not afford it – dependence on unofficial wages, employment at several jobs, lack of staff in enterprises/organizations, discrimination against fathers on paternity leave by employers and co-workers. So, on the one hand, the economic reason proves to be an important obstacle in accessing paternity leave, on the other hand, the problem of gender stereotypes according to which the care of the child/children is a main responsibility of women and not of men. Gender stereotypes are deeply rooted in the mass consciousness of the population of the Republic of Moldova and hide the loyalty to the established tradition: for a man work is more important and he is the one who has to earn money, provide for his family. The spread of such traditionalist approaches denotes that women are the main subject of child care and that the society does not approve of deviations from certain situations that have been previously established in terms of gender relations. Thus, the care and education of children is perceived in a stereotypical way, as being the fundamental responsibility of the

woman and not of the man. Upholding traditional parenting practices does not allow couples to balance work with family life. In such situations, employees find themselves in a certain conflict because, on the one hand, they want to be more involved in raising children, but on the other hand, the current socioeconomic context creates constraints for them to achieve this desire. So, given that children are parents' priority, but they also care a lot about their careers, measures are needed to facilitate the implementation of paternity leave on a large scale.

At the same time, the study raises uncertainties as to whether taking paternity leave will encourage fathers to remain involved in the process of child rearing and education while they are growing up. There are fears that even if society goes through a process of change from a traditional type to a modern type,

progress in the division of labor within the family will be low. Women continue to bear the primary burden of childcare and household responsibilities. Men only partially share these responsibilities, and the division of domestic and childcare activities between men and women is very limited.

The tendency for women to take full responsibility for child care is maintained. This was highlighted by the fact that not all fathers who were on paternity leave devoted time to caring for the newborn. In this sense, some fathers took care of household tasks, and others, even worse, continued to perform professional tasks even though they were on paternity leave. This aspect shows that it is still necessary to promote the "responsible fatherhood" model, i.e. increasing the participation of men in the care and education of children.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the immediate benefit of sharing the joy and responsibility of caring for a newborn child for fathers, the paternity leave has a medium- and long-term impact on the well-being of children and the family. The use of paternity leave can also influence changing gender norms and parenting attitudes, cultural ideals of the general population, thus stimulating behavioral changes in mothers and fathers (Wray, 2020).

In Moldova, the right to paternity leave is correlated with the father's work situation (the father who benefits from paternity leave: the

income is predominantly official and significant; the father who does not benefit from paternity leave: is dependent on unofficial income; unofficial employee). Although the benefits of paternity leave are essential (increasing the level of involvement of fathers in household responsibilities, including caring for the newborn), the duration of this leave is short and does not always allow for the development of caring skills. Increasing the paternity leave uptake rate requires time and long-term intensive involvement of authorities, employers and parents.

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