

The London School of Economics and Political Science

*Understanding Daddy Quotas as a Part of the Gender
Structure: The Case of the Slovak Leave Policy for Fathers*

Zuzana Dančíková

A thesis submitted to the Department of Gender Studies of
the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, London, November 2023

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made.

In accordance with the Regulations, I have deposited an electronic copy of it in LSE Theses Online held by the British Library of Political and Economic Science and have granted permission for my thesis to be made available for public reference. Otherwise, this thesis may not be reproduced without my prior written consent.

I warrant that this authorization does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

My thesis consists of 51,289 words.

Statement of co-authored work

I confirm that Chapter 4 (Paper III) was jointly co-authored with Professor Wendy Sigle, and I contributed 65% of this work.

I prepared the data, carried out initial analyses and interpretation of the findings and wrote the first draft of the paper. Wendy Sigle contributed to conception and design of the paper, the analysis and interpretation of the data and provided critical comments on drafts of the paper.

Abstract

Over the past decades, daddy quotas have been gaining popularity as a solution to the inequality in the gendered division of leaves, however, their uptake by fathers has varied within and across contexts. In my thesis, I argue such variation in effectiveness of daddy quotas can be better understood if we conceptualize them as a part of a context-dependent, multi-dimensional, interconnected, and dynamic gender structure. To illustrate my argument, I focus on a case study that has received little attention in academic literature: the Slovak daddy quota with “best practice” characteristics, introduced into a gendered context with inegalitarian features. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods, I explore the effects of the policy on the gendered division of leaves, why they have been limited and how to best study the relationship between policy and behaviour.

In my first paper, I argue that to understand the effectiveness of daddy quotas, it is helpful to focus not only on changes in parents’ division of leave in response to policy reform, but also on changes to further dimensions of the gender structure, including gendered norms or gendered identities – which, if unaffected by the policy, may continue constraining parents’ decision-making on their division of leave.

In the second paper, I explore why gendered norms on the division of leaves have remained unchanged in response to the Slovak daddy quota. Building on scholarship that suggests policy may contribute to normative transformation, I argue such changes will be context-dependent.

In the final, co-authored paper,¹ we consider how the policy might be studied by quantitative researchers interested in isolating causal effects of daddy quotas and then argue that such an approach makes for an uneasy fit with understanding policy as a part of a dynamic gender structure – as set out in the first two papers.

¹ The final paper of this thesis is co-authored with Wendy Sigle, one of my supervisors. Accordingly, while I speak in the first-person singular throughout the thesis, first-person plural is used when referring to the co-authored paper.

*To Dita,
my grandmother, role model and friend*

*Dite,
mojej babine, vzoru a priateľke*

Acknowledgements

I cannot do justice to all those whose support I relied on in the years it took to complete this project, but would like to thank at least some who have been invaluable:

my brilliant supervisors Ania Plomien and Wendy Sigle, for always expecting more of me, but never more than I could do,

the endlessly passionate Chisels and Hammers of the LSE Department of Gender Studies,

the indefatigable Youngcho, for being my comrade in arms,

and finally, my steadfast sister Johanna and my parents, Renáta and Igor, who were there when it mattered.

Contents

1	Thesis Introduction	10
1.1	Introduction: How I Discovered a “Best Practice” Daddy Quota	10
1.2	Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations	12
1.2.1	An introduction to daddy quotas: history, aims and “best practice” characteristics	13
1.2.2	Understanding the relationship between daddy quotas, the gender structure and parents’ division of leave	15
1.3	Setting the Scene: The Unique Case of the Slovak Policy	22
1.3.1	The Slovak gendered context: policy, norms, behavioral patterns, and individual attitudes	22
1.3.2	The Slovak daddy quota	26
1.4	Methodology, Data and Analytical Approach	29
1.5	Thesis Outline.....	34
2	Paper I: Undoing or Unstructuring Gender: The Effects of the Slovak Daddy Quota on the Change of the Gender Structure	37
2.1	Introduction	37
2.2	Undoing or Unstructuring Gender: Theorizing the Relationship Between Policy and the Gender Structure	40
2.3	The Slovak Daddy Quota and Its Gendered Context.....	43
2.4	Data and Analytical Approach.....	45
2.5	Findings: Persistence and Change of the Gender Structure	50
2.5.1	Gendered interactional patterns as a site of considerable change.....	50
2.5.2	Individual gendered identities resist change and persist in shaping division of leaves ..	52
2.5.3	Institutional-level norms moderated uptake with few signs of change.....	55
2.6	Discussion & Conclusion	57
3	Paper II: Why Gendered Norms Do Not “Fade Away”: The Case of the Slovak Daddy Quota..	60
3.1	Introduction	60
3.2	Conceptual Framework: Theorizing the Relationship between Policy, Context and Normative Change	63
3.2.1	Behavioral and attitudinal mechanisms of normative change.....	63

3.2.2	Normative change and the pre-existing context	67
3.3	Setting the Scene: The Slovak Daddy Quota and its Gendered Context	68
3.4	Data and Analytical Approach	71
3.5	Analysis: The Normative Power of the Slovak Daddy Quota	73
3.5.1	Normative messaging in “best practice” policy characteristics	73
3.5.2	Normative messages in policy debates	73
3.6	Discussion & Conclusion	79
4	Paper III: How Not to Study the Effect of Daddy Quotas: A Case Study from Slovakia.....	82
4.1	Introduction	82
4.2	Conceptual Framework.....	84
4.2.1	Quasi-experimental designs, temporality, and context.....	84
4.2.2	“Best practice” and other policy characteristics	87
4.3	Scene Setting: The Slovak Daddy Quota and its Gendered Context	88
4.4	Data and Analytical Approach.....	90
4.4.1	Analytical approach.....	90
4.4.2	Data	91
4.5	Analysis	94
4.5.1	Causality, temporality, and context	94
4.5.2	“Best practice” and other policy characteristics	98
4.6	Discussion & Conclusion	99
5	Conclusion.....	102
5.1	Summary of Research and Findings	102
5.2	Contributions to Knowledge: Conceptual, Methodological and Empirical	105
5.3	Implications for Knowledge-Exchange and Policymaking	107
5.4	Thoughts on Further Research.....	109
5.5	Postscript on Building Better Worlds	110
6	Bibliography	112
7	Appendix	123

List of Tables

Table 1.1: Leave and Associated Benefits Available to Slovak Mothers and Fathers before and after the 2010 Reform	29
Table 1.2: Methods and Data Used in Project.....	34
Table 2.1: Composition of Interview Sample	49
Table 7.1: Documents Used for Frame Analysis.....	123
Table 7.2: Guiding Questions for Frame Analysis.....	125
Table 7.3: Media Outlets Searched for Frame Analysis.....	126
Table 7.4: Logistic Regression of Fathers' Benefit Uptake, Odds Ratios.....	127
Table 7.5: Median Time of Entry into Employment after Giving Birth of Mothers Who Entered in 2019 (descriptive results).....	129

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Policy as a Part of the Gender Structure.....	42
Figure 3.1: Policy Reform, Behavioral and Normative Change	64
Figure 3.2: Behavioral and Attitudinal Mechanisms of Normative Change in Response to Policy Reform.....	67
Figure 4.1: Fathers' Uptake of Maternity Benefits.....	96
Figure 4.2: Fathers' Income from Employment Contracts While on Maternity Benefits.....	99

1 Thesis Introduction

1.1 Introduction: How I Discovered a “Best Practice” Daddy Quota

When I first came across the 2010 Slovak *daddy quota* in 2016 – as an MSc student looking for a dissertation topic – I could not believe my luck. An aspiring researcher with a background in policymaking, I was motivated by the injustice of continuing inequalities in the gendered² division of labor (Kan et al., 2011; Sullivan et al., 2018) and women’s double burden of work (Hochschild and Machung, 2012; Hook, 2006; Smith and Williams, 2007; Gregory and Milner, 2008; Kan et al., 2011; Duvander and Johansson, 2012) in countries around the world and interested in policies that could help achieve a more gender-equal division of labor. My coursework had introduced me to literature suggesting that fathers’ quotas or daddy quotas³ – well-remunerated non-transferable leave policies for fathers – could motivate fathers to take leave to look after their young children and at the same time facilitate mothers’ earlier return to paid work. In doing so, these policies could help achieve a less gendered division of leaves by mothers and fathers (Smith and Williams, 2007; Haas and Rostgaard, 2011; Duvander and Johansson, 2012) and, though there was more debate on this point, a more gender-equal division of labor in general (O’Brien and Wall, 2017a).

Hence my excitement about the new Slovak daddy quota: the policy granted fathers six-months of well-remunerated, non-transferable benefits – on par with post-birth maternity benefits available to Slovak mothers. These were characteristics understood in the literature as “best practice” and made the new quota perhaps the most generous policy of its kind globally. What made the policy even more remarkable was that its egalitarian “best practice” features meant it was an unexpected and rare occurrence in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), which, following the fall of the communist regimes at the end of the 1980s, was characterized by increasingly inegalitarian family policy. Based on my reading of literature on leave policy, heavy on the extensively researched Nordic countries where daddy quotas had been pioneered in the 1990s, I had high hopes for what the new policy could do to transform the division of leaves and labor by mothers and fathers in Slovakia. After all, in several Nordic countries, similar policies had been linked to quick and widespread change in the division of leaves by mothers and fathers (Haas and Rostgaard, 2011) – even if the proportion of leave taken by fathers compared to mothers remained limited (*ibid.*).

² Though I do not understand gender as binary or fixed, in this project I focus on the division of labor by mothers and fathers. Consequently, when I speak of gendered division of leaves or labor, I refer to the division of work between men and women.

³ While my research is primarily concerned with daddy quotas, when I refer to research on fathers’ leave-taking, this sometimes also covers fathers’ leaves from paid work with the help of non-quota leave policies.

As an apprentice researcher I was also excited for one other reason: the Slovak daddy quota was a scoop. Although five years had passed since this unique policy was introduced, it was completely absent from both academic and non-academic literature, a status quo that remained unchanged at the start of my PhD project two years later and provided an opportunity for my project to break new ground with dedicated research. With a previously unstudied “best practice” policy on my hands, my research was to be guided by a straightforward question: what are the effects of this new daddy quota on fathers’ uptake and parents’ division of leave?

But as I gradually familiarized myself with the policy, it became increasingly clear that the radical transformative potential that I had come to associate with daddy quotas could be significantly dampened by the specifics of the Slovak case. First, the policy was introduced into a gendered context that didn’t seem particularly supportive of fathers’ leave-taking. At the time the policy was adopted, fathers had already had a right to three years of parental leave for almost two decades, but rarely used it. Though parental leave had been an individual entitlement, equally available to mothers and fathers, it was overwhelmingly used by women, which earned Slovakia the distinction of the lowest at-work rate of mothers of children under three in the OECD (Adema et al., 2016). This highly gendered pattern of leave-taking was supported by the norm of threeness (Saxonberg, 2014), an unwritten rule that children below the age of three should stay at home in the care of their mothers, even if mothers were expected to return to full-time paid work afterwards. The norm and the unequal division of leaves were also reflected in widespread individual attitudes supportive of this arrangement.

But the policy held in store another twist that could further limit its transformative potential. Parliamentary transcripts suggest that the policy had been originally discussed as a means to grant benefits only to adoptive fathers (NRSR, 2010a), even if ultimately written and passed in a way that extended benefits to all fathers who had a track record of “*illness insurance*” contributions. This meant that, unlike in other countries, the unequal division of leaves and societal gendered norms did not come under scrutiny in public debates leading up to the introduction of the new policy, nor was the reform accompanied by debates on policy goals like gender equality, mothers’ earlier return to paid work, or the right of *all* fathers to spend time with their children. In the absence of such debates, it seemed all the more likely that any effects of the policy would be moderated by the pre-existing gendered context.

Finally, along with its “best practice” features and unexpected manner of introduction, the policy stood out due to another, controversial characteristic. A prominent interpretation of the relevant legislation, promoted by one of the authors of the policy, suggested that due to a technicality, fathers

could continue with paid work while drawing on daddy quota benefits, if self-employed or working on a new contract (Mihál, 2017). While such an interpretation might have attracted less support in a setting more encouraging of fathers' leave-taking, in the inegalitarian Slovak context it was supported by a range of political actors and widely covered in the media: one popular online news outlet called the policy a "loophole" (topky.sk, 2016), which first and foremost allowed fathers to boost their family income – rather than facilitated their time with children or mothers' earlier return to work.

Gradually, my analysis confirmed that I had been overly enthusiastic about the "best practice" policy and its promise of radical change. My quantitative data showed that fathers' uptake was growing only at a moderate pace – in 2019, nine years after the policy was introduced less than a quarter of eligible fathers were projected⁴ to make use of the daddy quota (Dančíková, 2020). In Germany, more than a third of fathers had made use of the daddy quota seven years after it was introduced (Reimer, 2020) and in Norway, almost nine in ten fathers had (Lappegard, 2008). Moreover, my analysis showed that a considerable proportion of fathers made use of the option to continue with paid work while drawing on benefits. In 2018, at the peak of the trend, almost half of fathers who availed themselves of benefits had some income from employment (Dančíková, 2020). My qualitative data suggested that parents' response to the policy was affected by gendered norms (understood as unwritten societal rules on how one ought to behave), gendered identities (or individual self-understanding), and parents' gendered interactional patterns (or gendered patterns of behavior), specific to the Slovak context.

As I grappled with the dissonance between my expectations and preliminary findings, the guiding questions of my thesis gradually became three: along with my initial question – *what* are the effects of the Slovak policy, I added two more: with the gendered context on my mind, I couldn't help but also ask *why* the effects of the Slovak policy have been limited and finally, *how* to study the effects of daddy quotas to better understand and predict their effectiveness. In the remainder of this chapter, I introduce the literature and theoretical considerations that informed my thinking about the effectiveness of daddy quotas, set the scene of my research, present my methodology and discuss my analytical approach and finally, outline the rest of my thesis.

1.2 Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations

In this section, I discuss literature that has informed my thinking about the effectiveness of daddy quotas, proceeding in two steps. First, I introduce daddy quotas as a specific type of leave policy for

⁴ Based on data for the first six months of the year, the most recent data available at the time of my analysis.

fathers, their history, aims, and key characteristics. Second, I delve into theory and empirical research on the effects of daddy quotas on the division of leave by mothers and fathers. To account for the specifics of the Slovak gendered context, I focus on how gender has been understood to moderate the effects between policy and fathers' behavior and argue that to better understand the effectiveness of daddy quotas, it is useful to conceptualize policy as one dimension of a multi-dimensional, interconnected, and dynamic gender structure.

1.2.1 An introduction to daddy quotas: history, aims and "best practice" characteristics

Leave policies were first extended to fathers in Nordic countries in the 1970s. Aiming to contribute to gender equality, Sweden pioneered leave policy for fathers in 1974, soon followed by Norway, and in the 1980s, Finland, Denmark and Iceland (Haas and Rostgaard, 2011). However, even though these early policies enabled fathers to take leave, parents could divide leave time as they saw fit – and compared to mothers, fathers' uptake was limited. In response, in 1993, Norway was the first country to introduce a daddy quota (Ellingsæter, 2021), a portion of leave reserved for fathers to encourage their greater uptake. In short order, the Norwegian policy was followed by quotas in Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland. By motivating fathers to change their behavior, the daddy quotas were meant to help reduce gendered inequalities in the division of paid and unpaid labor, facilitate fathers' time with children and improve women's standing in the labor market (Bergman and Hobson, 2002; Haas and Rostgaard, 2011).

Though the design of daddy quotas varies considerably, typically, they are a part of longer parental leave⁵ and considered "best practice" when they meet two criteria linked to the idea that they should motivate fathers' greater uptake. First, daddy quotas should not be transferable to mothers: if fathers fail to make use of the time set aside for them to look after their children, the parents "lose" it – their overall time with the child is shortened. And second, daddy quotas should be well-paid to offset fathers' forgone income: due to gender pay gaps fathers typically out-earn mothers and unless leave is well-compensated, income presents an economic barrier to fathers' uptake.⁶

⁵ Fathers in a growing number of countries are entitled to paternity leave, parental leave, or both. Paternity leave generally means several days to several weeks of leave available to fathers around the time of the birth of their child and so at the same time as mothers' maternity leave, though typically shorter than mothers' entitlements (Kosłowski et al., 2022). Parental leave is often longer and can be shared or divided by both parents, unless specified otherwise – as in the case of daddy quotas (ibid.).

⁶ Consensus is lacking on what a well-remunerated policy means. For example, the International Network on Leave Policies and Research defines well-paid policies as ones associated with an earnings-related payment at 66% of earnings or above (Kosłowski et al., 2022), but others have proposed a 100% wage replacement rate, albeit with a benefit cap (Gornick and Meyers, 2008).

Even if not always explicitly articulated as such, well-paid non-transferable daddy quotas have come to be widely accepted as “best practice” in both academic (Haas and Rostgaard, 2011; Dearing, 2016; Moss et al., 2019) and non-academic literature (OECD, 2016a; Van Belle, 2016). Researchers have argued that additional characteristics are also key to the effectiveness of daddy quotas: some have suggested that portions of leave reserved for mothers and fathers should be symmetrical (Gornick and Meyers, 2008; Dearing, 2016) to foster gender equality, though what proportion of such symmetrical entitlements should be non-transferable from one parent to the other continues to be debated (Gornick and Meyers, 2008; Gheaus and Robeyns, 2011; Browne, 2013). Others have argued daddy quotas should have a minimum length, though figures have ranged considerably, from one or two months (O’Brien and Wall, 2017c) to six (Gornick and Meyers, 2008) or seven months (Dearing, 2016); or that for leave policies to be effective, fathers should take them solo, without the mother present (see Doucet and McKay, 2020). However, no other policy feature has acquired the “best practice” status accorded to high-remuneration and non-transferability of daddy quotas.

Though the Danish quota was discontinued several years after it was introduced, the Norwegian, Swedish, and Icelandic policies resulted in quick and wide uptake by fathers (Haas and Rostgaard, 2011). These early successes raised hopes that similar policies could succeed elsewhere, too: daddy quotas have become academic “hot topics” and gained a reputation as a “magic solution” to gendered inequalities in the division of labor (Doucet and McKay, 2020). They also increasingly became studied for additional, potentially unintended effects like increased fertility rates (Duvander et al. 2020, Lee, 2022a). But as similar policies spread from the Nordic pioneers to further settings – albeit still a limited number of mostly rich countries in the Global North⁷ – their effects have increasingly varied both within and across contexts (see Koslowski et al., 2022). In Nordic countries, uptake remains high. For instance, in 2014, 70% of fathers in Norway took their quota (Bungum and Kvande, 2020) and in 2019, 87% of fathers in Iceland took parental leave (Arnalds et al., 2022). Some non-Nordic contexts have reached high uptake rates, too. In Quebec, 70% of fathers made use of their designated benefit in 2020 (Doucet et al., 2023), and in Spain, 73.7% of fathers compared to the number of children born took leave in 2021, though six weeks of leave are compulsory for fathers (Meil et al. 2023). However, in Germany, only 42.1% of fathers took leave for births in 2018 (Blum et al., 2022) and in Japan, only 12.65% of male workers applied for parental leave in the 2018-2019

⁷ Policies with similar features have now also been introduced in Austria, Québec, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain (see Blum et al., 2023), though they vary significantly in timing and length. Moreover, while dozens of countries now offer fathers well-paid paternity leaves (ibid.), in a smaller number of countries paternity leaves are of considerable length, between 4-6 weeks (Belgium, Estonia, France). However, these are to be taken immediately after mothers give birth and so likely to overlap with mothers’ leave-taking.

period (Nakazato et al., 2022). Consequently, the status of daddy quotas as a gender equality panacea is increasingly questioned (Lee, 2022), gendered contexts are receiving more explicit attention in research on quota effectiveness (Marynissen et al., 2019; Mussino et al., 2019; Lee, 2022b), and how to measure the effects of quotas to understand them continues to be debated (Doucet and McKay, 2020; Doucet and Duvander, 2022).

1.2.2 *Understanding the relationship between daddy quotas, the gender structure and parents' division of leave*

Compared with parental leave in general which *enables* fathers' leave-taking, daddy quotas are expected to *motivate* fathers to take leave with sticks and carrots – the stick is the time lost if fathers don't make use of their entitlement, the carrot the benefit making up for lost income. This expectation aligns well with an understanding of parents as rational actors who should recognize a daddy quota as a chance to maximize their family's utility and accordingly change their behavior.

The focus on implementing policy premised on *motivating* rational fathers to take leave has been critiqued for overlooking institutional and cultural constraints on fathers' leave-taking (Browne, 2013). In line with such critique, most research on the effects of daddy quotas rightly recognizes that the relationship between policy and behavioral change is moderated by a multiplicity of factors that help explain the differences in policy use by fathers within individual countries as well as between different settings.

Research on the effectiveness of daddy quotas typically explores what I understand as their primary, secondary, and tertiary effects. Studies of primary effects, the focus of this thesis, have investigated fathers' behavioral response to policy in terms of uptake, length of leave or their leave as a proportion of time taken by both parents combined – in single-country or -area studies, including Finland (Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Eerola et al., 2019), Germany (Reimer, 2020), Norway (Lappegard, 2008), Quebec (Patnaik, 2019); South Korea (Lee, 2022) Spain (Lapuerta et al., 2011); Sweden (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Duvander and Johansson, 2012; Duvander, 2014), as well as in comparative studies (Bergqvist and Saxonberg, 2017; Mussino et al., 2019). Beyond such primary effects, a growing body of literature investigates what I understand as secondary behavioral effects – whether fathers' leave-taking translates into their greater involvement in unpaid labor beyond their immediate leave (see e.g., O'Brien and Well, 2017a, Duvander and Johansson, 2019; Wray, 2020; Lee 2023). Finally, literature also increasingly explores tertiary effects – the effects of fathers' leave-taking on additional outcomes, ranging from parents' labor market outcomes in terms of participation, employment, or wages (Ekberg et al., 2013; Kluge and Tamm, 2013; Rege and Solli, 2013; Andersen,

2018; Kluge and Schmitz, 2018), to fertility rates (findings across different countries are also inconclusive, for an overview, see Duvander et al. (2020) and Lee (2022a)).

Studies on primary effects typically attempt to identify the main factors driving variation in such effects, in other words the main factors moderating the effectiveness of daddy quotas. Researchers have explored a host of factors shaping fathers' leave-taking and parents' division of leave, especially in quantitative micro-level studies.

Most literature has understood gender, the conceptual focus of this thesis, as a key factor moderating fathers' response to policy. However, the conceptualizations and operationalizations of gender in dedicated studies have been varied. I identified three prominent approaches to understanding gender in literature on fathers' leave uptake. The first, perhaps most common approach focuses on the micro-level and understands gender as a characteristic of individuals, suggesting individual beliefs about or attitudes to gender roles (Lappegard, 2008; Meil et al., 2016) or to gender equality (Duvander, 2014) affect fathers' decision to take leave. Empirical evidence has confirmed that fathers with more egalitarian attitudes are more likely to take leave (Lammi-Taskula, 2008) or stay at home longer (Duvander, 2014). The second approach locates gender on the meso-level, for example in leave-taking patterns in employment-related contexts, particularly parents' workplaces (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Haas and Hwang, 2019). Studies have found that fathers are more likely to take leave if their colleagues had already done so (Bygren and Duvander, 2006) and that one of the barriers to fathers' leave-taking is that it hasn't yet become an established practice in the workplace, especially among managers (Haas and Hwang, 2019). Links between leave-taking and gendered workplace characteristics are also featured in studies where the conceptualization of gender is implicit (e.g., Marynissen et al., 2019; Reimer, 2020). Finally, the third approach, often used in comparative studies, focuses on the macro level, and understands gender as acting through gendered policy, like daddy quotas, or through societal gendered norms or widespread cultural values on the division of paid and unpaid labor (Lott and Klenner, 2018; Marynissen et al., 2019; Mussino et al., 2019); in other words, through norms that shape both labor markets and families. Empirical evidence has confirmed that both certain policy designs and egalitarian norms support fathers' leave-taking (Marynissen et al., 2019; Mussino et al., 2019).

Factors understood as largely separate from gender have also been linked to differences in fathers' responses to daddy quotas, for example, parents' bargaining power. In related literature on parents' division of housework, parents' bargaining power and gender have been pitted against each other as explanatory factors (Bittman et al., 2003; Kan, 2008). Though grounded in rational choice theory (Lappegard, 2008; Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011; Reich, 2011; Marynissen et al., 2019), like workplace

patterns or workplace norms, bargaining power is also typically connected to the labor market through parents' incomes. Each parent is expected to use their income to attempt to bargain their way out of unpaid labor, in bargaining theory understood as always unwanted, not distinguishing between the generally onerous housework and possibly more appealing care. Empirical studies have confirmed that fathers' uptake of leave increases with mothers' income (Sundström and Duvander, 2002; Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Lappegard, 2008), though, counterintuitively, fathers' uptake also increases with their own income (Sundström and Duvander, 2002; Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Lappegard, 2008). Another often-researched individual-level factor investigated for its link to fathers' leave-taking is parents' education. Studies have found that fathers' leave-taking is positively associated with both mothers' and fathers' education (Lappegard, 2008), though this may only hold after controlling for income (Sundstrom and Duvander, 2002). However, such factors, too, are often connected to gender: parents' bargaining power is often delineated along gendered lines, with gender pay gaps linked to both gendered labor market segregation and gendered discrimination (Boll et al., 2016), while education has been found to be positively correlated with egalitarian gender role attitudes (Davis and Greenstein, 2009) and has sometimes been used as their proxy in family policy research (Lappegard, 2008; Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011).

There is no doubt that research which sets out to investigate 'a part of the picture' when it comes to factors moderating fathers' response to daddy quotas contributes to theoretical understanding of the effects of gender on policy uptake and provides valuable empirical insight, be it by exploring the role of parents' gendered income differentials, their gendered attitudes, or the effect of observed gendered patterns of behavior or norms.

At the same time, such 'part of the picture' studies, by definition, could lend themselves to a critique that gender is conceptualized too narrowly. Research focusing on specific manifestations of gender provides a fragmentary understanding of the effects of gender on individual behavior and thus a fragmentary understanding of the role of gender in moderating policy effectiveness. Any given policy, however, may be affected by gender more comprehensively than that expressed in 'part of the picture' studies. Research that builds on 'part of the picture' studies towards capturing the 'whole picture' would aim to operationalize a fuller conceptualization of gender and demonstrate how it may moderate the effects of policy on individual behavior through multiple mechanisms. This is by no means to argue that all research should focus on the 'whole picture'. Rather, mine is an argument for supplementing such specific understandings and operationalizations of gender in an effort to better capture the power of gender in shaping lives, and so direct scholarly and political efforts to comprehend and counter its hierarchizing effects more effectively.

To support such “parts-of-a-greater-whole” thinking about gender, conceptualizations of gender as a system or structure have been developed by feminist academics. Barbara Risman (1998, 2004, 2009, 2011) understands gender as a *social structure* that shapes individual behavior through a multiplicity of interconnected dimensions or mechanisms on three levels, the individual, interactional, and institutional, largely aligned with the micro-, meso- and macro- levels on which researchers of daddy quotas have typically conceptualized gender. Risman has written extensively on various gendering mechanisms, but rather than proposing an exhaustive list, she understands dimensions of the gender structure as dependent on context and area of human activity, of which the division of leaves by parents is only one example. Accordingly, when it comes to fathers’ leave-taking and parents’ division of leave-time, the gender structure framework prompts integrating the different approaches to conceptualizing and operationalizing gender as a factor moderating the effectiveness of daddy quotas: within the gender structure framework the relationship between policy and behavior is moderated by *multiple* and *interconnected* gendering mechanisms at the same time. On the individual level, these may include parents’ gender-role attitudes or gendered income differentials; on the interactional level, patterns of parents’ gendered behavior observed in the everyday, including in workplaces in relation to co-workers and managers; and on the institutional level, gendered norms on the division of leaves, labor market participation or parenting.

The gender structure framework also highlights gender as *context-dependent*. This is not to say that simpler conceptualizations of gender, and research that draws on them, are necessarily divorced from context (for instance, comparative studies on daddy quotas pay explicit attention to contextual differences, see for example, Bergqvist and Saxonberg, 2017 or Mussino et al., 2018). However, in the gender structure framework, the complex contextuality of gender is front and center even in single-country studies: the framework invites thinking about how, depending on the setting, different dimensions of the structure may be in or out of line with new policy to different degrees. In some contexts, dimensions of the structure may be mostly aligned, supporting rather than limiting the effectiveness of the daddy quota – playing the role of supportive *team members* (Cartwright and Hardie, 2012) – factors, without which policy may fail to result in fathers’ wide uptake. But in other contexts, one or more team members may be playing for another team: one or multiple dimensions of the structure may be misaligned with new policy and so counter its effectiveness. In other words, the gendering mechanisms supporting or constraining parents’ response to a daddy quota are likely to vary with context. For instance, based on my interviews with mothers and fathers, I identified three key dimensions of the gender structure as constraints on parents’ behavior in the Slovak context: mothers and fathers’ gendered identities on the individual level; parents’ gendered patterns of behavior observed in the everyday on the interactional level; and gendered norms on the division

of leaves and labor on the institutional level (see Paper I). Other gendered factors, which have been identified as central in different contexts, like parents' income differentials or interactional patterns observed specifically in the workplace, have been considerably less prominent in the accounts of parents I interviewed and hence were not included in my analysis in this thesis. The exceptional generosity of the benefit linked to the Slovak daddy quota may help explain why parents saw their income differentials as relatively unimportant in relation to their decision-making on fathers' leave-taking. The benefit is set at 75% of fathers' previous gross income, however, it is untaxed and so amounts to full net previous income for most employed fathers (with the exception of fewer than 10% of fathers, whose prior incomes exceeded the high benefit cap). Consequently, despite parents' income differentials, the vast majority of families will not be worse off when fathers take leave. In fact, if mothers return to paid work full-time when fathers take leave, families will be better off, as mothers' incomes will be higher than the parental allowance they would otherwise be drawing on (the parental allowance is set lower than the minimum wage). It is less clear why workplace behavioral patterns should be of relatively little importance in the Slovak context – this finding warrants more research.

When key dimensions of the gender structure are misaligned with new policy like daddy quotas, they may have to change if the policy is to become (more) effective. This acknowledgement of the importance of context is indubitably widely understood and embraced by academics. And, when context is misaligned with policy, the ensuing need for change of constraining gendering mechanisms may seem an obvious corollary. However, I find it is not always explicitly articulated, nor translated into research or policymaking practice. This was illustrated by a discussion at a recent seminar on the gender equality strategy of the International Monetary Fund at the London School of Economics, where I am writing this thesis. In the presentation, the IMF representative argued that policy trumps culture, in other words, that it is sufficient to change policy, and gendered culture will “fall into place” – or at least not stand in the way of behavioral change, which policy is expected to bring about. Similar assumptions have been critiqued by feminist scholars. Georgina Waylen (2014, p. 213) has argued that it is often assumed that informal institutions, like norms, will simply ‘fade away’ in response to formal institutions, like policy. Along similar lines, Birgit Pfau-Effinger (2005, p. 12) has questioned the idea that changing policy is sufficient to bring about a desirable outcome:

‘It is often assumed that the state determines behaviour: that people respond to policymakers’ policy initiatives in a specific, predictable manner and thus bring about the result intended by politics. The interrelations between welfare state policies and social practices of individuals are a more complex matter, however. The social action of individuals is not a simple outcome and not determined by state policies (...). Such assumptions do not

reflect that the social behaviour of individuals is a process which takes place in a very complex field of influences, where cultural ideals and values also play an important role.'

At the IMF seminar, the presenter responded to follow-up questions about the body of evidence showing that gendered culture often does not simply "fall into place" and instead continues constraining the effectiveness of policy by conceding that policymakers often object to direct attempts to change the gendered "culture" in their contexts. I would like to emphasize that it is not my aim to argue that academics would dispute the role of culture or context in supporting or constraining the effects of policy and much daddy quota research has engaged with contexts explicitly (see e.g., Bergqvist and Saxonberg, 2017; Mussino et al., 2018; Lee, 2022b). However, such objections from policymakers may help explain the comparatively limited focus of researchers – including researchers of daddy quotas – on *changes* to "cultural", context-dependent gendering mechanisms that constrain behavioral change. It may also help explain why policy in particular is not considered as a potential *vehicle* for such changes more often.

In the gender structure framework, policy is understood as one of its constitutive mechanisms, interconnected with the other dimensions in a dynamic manner. This interconnectedness suggests that changing policy – like introducing a new daddy quota – may not only directly affect change in parents' behavior, but also influence shifts in additional, connected gendering mechanisms. Risman (2016, p. 210) likens gender structures to sets of dominoes:

'(t)he gender structure is a dynamic system: when one part changes, it can set off a chain reaction like a game of dominoes. There is a dynamic recursive causality between individual selves, interactional expectations, cultural ideology, and organizational structure. Change one part, and get ready to see that every aspect follows, although not in any predetermined direction or speed.'

Consequently, conceptualizing daddy quotas as a part of the gender structure prompts thinking about primary policy effects in multiple steps: first, considering the effects of policy on behavior directly; second, investigating the moderating effect of the gender structure on the relationship between policy and behavior; and finally, exploring the effects of policy on the gender structure, which, if transformed, will continue shaping behavior differently.

Studies of daddy quota effectiveness *have* acknowledged the theorization of gender as a structure (Sundstrom and Duvander, 2002; Beglaubter, 2017; Haas and Hwang, 2019), doing valuable work to draw attention to the complex interplay between policy, gender and fathers' behavior. However, less has been done to directly engage with policy *as a part* of the framework (that is, to study policy in

relation to other constitutive mechanisms of the gender structure) and explore the implications of such a conceptualization for understanding and predicting the effects of policy reform. The framework has been either invoked but not operationalized (Sundstrom or Duvander, 2002), or, having grounded their research in a structural framework, researchers chose to zoom in on exploring the effects of a single gendering mechanism, such as couples' gendered interaction (Beglaubter, 2017) or gendered workplace constraints (Haas and Hwang, 2019). These studies are important contributions to the body of literature on the effects of daddy quotas, but at the same time point to a research gap when it comes to operationalizing the gender structure framework more directly and fully – a gap, to which I respond in this thesis. I do so in three ways, leveraging the multi-dimensionality, interconnectedness, context-dependence, and dynamism of the gender structure to contribute to explaining the effects of daddy quotas. In Paper I, argue for a shift in focus in investigations of daddy quota effectiveness from *undoing gender*, or focusing primarily on policy effects in terms of fathers' uptake and parents' division of leave, to *unstructuring gender* – exploring the effect of daddy quotas across *multiple* dimensions of the gender structure, which, if unchanged, may keep constraining behavioral change. A small body of research has investigated shifts in other gendering mechanisms in response to daddy quotas. Fathers' leave-taking has been linked to changes in fathers' gendered identities by allowing them to incorporate caring into their sense of self (Brandth and Kvande, 2016; Beglaubter, 2017), or to partial changes in ideal parent norms that guide the division of labor by mothers and fathers (Bergqvist and Saxonberg, 2017; Lott and Klenner, 2018). However, compared to studies on the moderating effects of these mechanisms on the relationship between daddy quotas and fathers' behavior, interest in systematically studying the effects of daddy quotas on these additional mechanisms has been relatively limited (for more, see for example Pia Schober and Silke Büchau's (2022) recent review of literature on parental leave effects, in which they reference over two dozen studies exploring the relationship between leave policy for fathers or fathers' leave-taking and parents' division of labor, but only a handful of studies on the link between leaves for fathers and norms or attitudes).

In Paper II, I consider why Risman's dominoes may not tumble in response to policy reform. Specifically, I explore why gendered norms may not simply "fall into place" or "fade away" when new policy is introduced, but rather, may keep limiting its effects on changes in behavior. Family policy scholarship has suggested that norms may change in response to policy reform (Saxonberg, 2014; Bergqvist and Saxonberg, 2017), but the understanding of why daddy quotas may or may not affect normative transformation and to what timeline is still underdeveloped. I draw on feminist institutional scholarship that suggests gendered societal norms may act as a policy feedback

mechanism and change with policy reform to support it – but argue that such effects may vary with time and pre-existing gendered context.

Finally, in the co-authored Paper III, we explore the context-dependence, temporality, and dynamism of behavioral change in response to daddy quotas. In some contexts, a well-aligned gender structure, supportive of fathers' leave-taking, may already be in place at the time of policy reform. Andrea Doucet and Ann-Zofie Duvander (2022, p. 134) speculate that the fast and broad uptake of the Swedish daddy quota may have happened because the policy was implemented at the 'right moment', when

'social norms across communities, workplaces, and households coalesced and combined with changing workplace cultures, gender equality discourses, and public campaigns that urged new masculinities (...) which encouraged Swedish fathers to use parental leave.'

While Doucet and Duvander draw attention to the relatively egalitarian gender structure in Sweden to argue for patience in evaluating policy effects elsewhere, we argue for a greater focus on the *temporal variation in change* in response to policy, depending on the pre-existing gender context: when similar daddy quotas are introduced into different contexts, the *pace* of change is likely to vary depending on the extent to which the various dimensions of the gender structure are aligned or misaligned with fathers' leave-taking. The specifics of the Slovak gender structure are what I turn to in the next sub-section of this chapter.

1.3 Setting the Scene: The Unique Case of the Slovak Policy

My theoretical approach to studying the effectiveness of daddy quotas was shaped by the specifics of the Slovak case – the combination of a gendered context characterized by inegalitarian gender norms on and patterns of leave division with a policy with "best practice" characteristics. In this section, I first introduce the Slovak gendered context that can be expected to moderate the effect of the policy on parents' behavior but may also be transformed by the new daddy quota. And second, I sketch the outlines of the policy itself.

1.3.1 The Slovak gendered context: policy, norms, behavioral patterns, and individual attitudes

The gendered context into which the Slovak daddy quota was introduced was considerably shaped by labor market and family policies implemented by the pre-1989 Czechoslovak communist regime. The context differed from Western European settings: in the post-war period, women's employment grew faster than in Western Europe (Hašková and Klenner, 2010), the result of a deliberate government strategy overtly meant to "emancipate" women (Saxonberg, 2014), but also to make

sure that enough workers were available for the industrializing economy (Pollert, 2003). Unlike in Western Europe, where the male breadwinner model was dominant, wages in planned economies were kept low, prompting women to engage in paid work (Haney, 2002), typically full-time. The Czechoslovak regime was less eager to intervene in the division of unpaid work within households (Saxonberg, 2014), where an unequal distribution of labor persisted (Haney, 2002), resulting in a widespread double burden of work for women (Pollert, 2003) – decades before Hochschild and Machung’s (1989) influential *The Second Shift* drew attention to the phenomenon in the United States. In the 1970s, when Nordic countries were beginning to extend leave policies to fathers to support gender equality (Haas and Rostgaard, 2011), Czechoslovakia strengthened the unequal division of paid and unpaid work by introducing a two-year extended maternity leave (Hašková and Klenner, 2010), in addition to the six-month standard maternity leave already available to mothers (Saxonberg, 2014). The move was a reaction to the poor reputation of nurseries, a slowing of the economy and falling fertility rates and underpinned by communist leaders’ inegalitarian attitudes to mothers’ role in childcare (Saxonberg, 2014). Pollert (2003) argues women’s “natural” responsibility for the family was central in public debates of the time and, in the course of the 1980s, the extended maternity leave was further lengthened to three years (Hašková and Klenner, 2010). Only in 1991, two years after the fall of communism and two years before Czechoslovakia split into the Czech and Slovak Republics, was the policy transformed into parental leave and made available to fathers.

After the fall of communism, mothers in Slovakia retained their entitlement to maternity leave of six months post-birth (an additional six weeks were available before the planned date of giving birth). Maternity leave could be combined with income-related maternity benefits, also available exclusively to mothers – if they had a track record of “illness insurance” contributions, linked to paid work or paid on a voluntary basis. If ineligible for maternity benefits, mothers could combine maternity leave with a low flat-rate parental allowance.

More often, the flat-rate parental allowance was combined with the newly renamed parental leave. Like parental leave, parental allowance was available to all parents during the first three years of their child’s life, irrespective of their gender, employment track record and insurance contributions. Hence, mothers could take six months of maternity leave after giving birth, combined with the income-related maternity benefit, followed by two and a half years of parental leave combined with the flat-rate parental allowance. If ineligible for maternity leave, mothers could take three years of parental leave in conjunction with parental allowance. By contrast, fathers could *only* draw on the three years of parental leave combined with the low parental allowance.

However, although parental leave was an individual entitlement and mothers and fathers could take it at the same time, the associated parental allowance could only be accessed by one parent at a time. Given a significant gender pay gap, it was more likely that the low, flat-rate parental leave would be used by mothers. In 2002, the earliest year for which relevant Eurostat data is available, the pay gap in Slovakia reached 27.7% (Eurostat, 2023) and though by 2010, the year the new daddy quota was introduced, it narrowed to 19.6%, regional comparison shows it remained the seventh largest in the EU (ibid.). By 2021, the most recent year for which data has been published at the time of writing, the pay gap shrunk further to 16.6%, but widened compared to other EU countries, becoming the fifth largest in the Union (ibid.).

The policy mix was mirrored in prevalent norms on the division of leaves, behavioral patterns and, to a large extent, individual attitudes widespread in the population. Steven Saxonberg (2014) argues that the division of leave in Slovakia was shaped by the norm of threeness. While women are expected to be in paid work full time for most of their adult lives; according to the norm, it is not only right, but natural for children to be in the care of their mothers until they reach the age of three (Saxonberg, 2014; Saxonberg and Maříková, 2023). Saxonberg (2014) traces the origins of the norm back to policy, including the three-year extended maternity/ parental leave, but also a lack of suitable childcare alternatives and the absence of strong voices calling for them. The long leaves may have been welcomed by mothers due to their double burden of work (Pollert, 2003), which may also contribute to explaining the ongoing persistence of the norm of threeness. And while I have not found literature explicitly speaking of an equally clear norm related to the role of fathers, it is implied in the norm of threeness:

‘(e)ven though [the norm] is more about the mother than the father, it obviously includes the father, since it shows that most respondents think that the mother should stay at home, which excludes the father from staying at home.’ (Saxonberg and Maříková; 2023, p. 7)

The policy mix and norm of threeness were also reflected in the dominant patterns of parents’ leave division: while mothers’ use of parental leave was almost universal (Miani and Hoorens, 2014), fathers’ uptake was negligible (Schulze and Gergoric, 2015). And though mothers’ leaves from paid work were not uniform in length, they were generally long: higher-earning women tended to return to work earlier, but on average, mothers stayed out of paid work for 29 months (Hidas and Horváthová, 2018). These long leaves contributed to the lowest at-work⁸ rate of mothers with young children in the OECD: only 8.85% of Slovak mothers of children aged 0-2 years worked, compared to

⁸ Includes all who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the week of survey, it excludes those employed but absent from work for reasons including maternity or parental leave.

an OECD average of 39.8% (Adema et al., 2016, p. 24). The unequal pattern of leave division and the resulting low employment rate of mothers with young children were particularly striking in comparison with a much higher overall employment rate of Slovak women. In 2010, at the time the daddy quota was introduced, 52.3% of women in Slovakia were in paid work, only a slightly lower share than 57.3%, the EU average (EIGE, 2023). And, as most Slovak women worked fulltime jobs, at 42.9%, the 2010 employment rate converted to full-time equivalents (FTE) was in fact higher than the European average of 38.4% (EIGE, 2023a). Both men's employment rate and FTE rate were considerably higher than those of women, 65.2% and 57.9% respectively, reflecting fathers' limited leave-taking (EIGE, 2023, 2023a). Similar to Slovak women, fewer Slovak men were in paid work compared to the European average of 67.1%. However, on average, they were working more: the FTE rate of Slovak men exceeded the EU average of 55.9%. By 2022, Slovak men's employment rate increased to 75%, outpacing the rise of the EU average to 74.7% (EIGE, 2023). Slovak women's employment rate remained lower than men's, though it grew at a faster pace, rising to 67.7% and exceeding the EU average of 64.9% (EIGE, 2023). While I have not come across EU FTE data for 2022, part-time employment statistics suggest that the considerable increase in women's employment was likely not driven by a turn to part-time work: in 2022, Slovak women's part-time employment rate reached a mere 4.4%, more than double the rate of Slovak men at 2%, but only a fraction of the EU average women's part-time employment rate, which amounted to 28.4% (Eurostat, 2024). Among other factors, the narrowing of the gap between women's and men's employment rates may be a reflection of a trend towards a more equal division of leaves by mothers and fathers.

Finally, compared with other rich countries in the EU and OECD, people in Slovakia were more likely to hold inegalitarian individual views on the gendered division of labor and leaves. Slovaks were the most likely in the EU to believe that fathers must put their careers ahead of childcare, at 48%, compared to the EU average of 29% (EC, 2014) and the third most likely to think men's most important role was to earn money, at 75%, compared to the EU average of 43% (EC, 2017a). Slovakia also tied for the third highest proportion of people in the EU who held inegalitarian views on men staying at home to look after children. Half of Slovaks were against men taking care of children, well over the EU average of 36% (EC, 2009). Slovaks were not only concerned with fathers' careers – they were also comparatively unlikely to support the idea of men looking after children professionally. Only 31% were in favor of men's greater involvement in the childcare sector, the second lowest share in the EU, where on average, 57% were in favor (EC, 2014).

Slovaks were comparatively more likely to see mothers as caregivers. At 60%, people in Slovakia were the most likely in the OECD to believe that paid leave should be taken entirely by the mother, even if both parents are in a similar work situation. Fewer than 10% thought leave should be split by

mothers and fathers equally (ISSP, 2012 in OECD, 2016b). This inegalitarian position aligned with a belief in the primacy of family in women's lives: at 73%, Slovaks were much more likely to believe women's main role was to look after the home and family than the average of people in the EU, 44% (EC, 2017a).

Overall, Slovaks' individual attitudes to the gendered division of leaves and paid and unpaid work more generally seem more inegalitarian than those in most EU and OECD member states. However, compared to the prescriptiveness of the norm of threeness and the highly skewed patterns of leave division, individual attitudes show more variation, suggesting potential differences in parents' responses to new policy for fathers.

1.3.2 *The Slovak daddy quota*

Against this backdrop, the Slovak daddy quota was adopted in Parliament in 2010 and entered into force in 2011 (NRSR, 2010a). Fathers' leave-taking is guided by legislation on leaves – the right to time off paid work, and benefits – the right to financial support. And though almost 13 years have passed since, to my knowledge, the policy has yet to be investigated in academic literature.⁹ This absence may be partly explained by its origins. Parliamentary transcripts from debates preceding the passing of the policy suggest that it was originally introduced to provide leave for adoptive fathers to care for their newly adopted children – and passed together with policy for adoptive mothers (NRSR, 2010b). Thus, the transcripts suggest that the policy was not intended for *all* fathers, nor implemented with the aim of reducing overall gendered inequalities in the division of leaves by mothers and fathers. Jozef Mihál, the responsible minister in office at the time the policy was adopted and one of its authors, has contradicted this view, claiming the policy had always been meant for all fathers and not debated as such only out of fear of obstruction from fiscal conservatives, who could raise objections due to a potentially high cost of a wide application of the new benefit (Onuferová, 2017). However, Natália Blahová, another author of the policy, member of parliament and Mihál's party colleague at the time, has denied Mihál's claim and confirmed my understanding that the policy was introduced to facilitate time with children for adoptive fathers only rather than all fathers (Blahová, direct communication). Perhaps due to the lack of intention to extend the policy to all fathers, its passing was not accompanied by official campaigns supporting its roll-out. Though quantitative data on fathers' uptake shows that at least a small number of fathers was aware of the policy from early on after it came into force (see Paper III), the entitlement

⁹ Corroborating this, no studies of the policy were included in the literature review chapters in recent books on leave policy and fathers' leave-taking (e.g., O'Brien and Wall, 2016; Moss et al., 2019; Schober and Büchau, 2022).

increasingly entered public discourse only with a delay, in 2016, when Jozef Mihál publicized it with a book, blog posts and media appearances.

The intention to extend maternity benefits and associated leave to adoptive parents (rather than to introduce leave and benefit entitlements to all fathers and intervene in the gendered division of leave) may help explain the exceptional generosity of the “best practice” characteristics of the policy: instead of introducing a shorter quota for fathers like in other contexts, in technical terms, the Slovak daddy quota was built directly on the existing, generous maternity benefits. The 2010 reform granted fathers 28 weeks (six months) of pay-related non-transferable benefits, mirroring the six months of post-birth benefits available to mothers. While mothers’ benefits were available to them immediately after giving birth, fathers could make use of their new six-month benefit until their child reached the age of three, though not at the same time when the mother was drawing on her maternity benefit or parental allowance. Since 2019, mothers and fathers could make use of their benefits simultaneously if looking after two different children. In practice, this could mean that while a mother made use of her maternity benefit for a newborn, the father could be on leave and drawing on his daddy quota-related maternity benefit with an older child.

Like mothers, fathers were eligible for the benefit if they paid “illness insurance” at least 270 days over the two preceding years, though unlike mothers, fathers also had to be insured at the time they started receiving the benefit.¹⁰ The benefits available to fathers also mirrored mothers’ benefits in remuneration. When the benefits were first extended to fathers, they amounted to 60% of their previous income, by 2017 benefits were increased to 75% of parents’ past earnings. The benefits were not subject to taxation which means that for most fathers they amounted to their full previous net income – except for a small proportion of fathers who earned more than the generous benefit cap (fewer than 10%).¹¹ The length of the non-transferable benefit entitlement, combined with the high wage-replacement rate and benefit cap make the quota one of the most generous of its kind globally. By comparison, countries recognized as leaders in egalitarian leave policy typically grant fathers shorter and less well-paid quotas: fathers in Iceland and Sweden are entitled to 20 weeks of non-transferable benefits and receive 80% and 77.6% of their previous pay respectively, however, benefits in both countries are taxed (Arnalds et al., 2023; Duvander and Löfgren, 2023).¹²

¹⁰ “Illness insurance” contributions are compulsory for all employees as well as for the self-employed with income above a minimum threshold (€6,798 in 2023). Contributions can also be paid voluntarily.

¹¹ The cap amounts to 75% of twice the national average wage from two years before. As of April 2023, the benefit was capped at €1,851 monthly (Kollárová, 2023), well above the average wage, which in the first quarter of 2023 reached €1,327 (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2023).

¹² As of April 2023, the monthly benefit in Iceland was capped at €4,046 (Arnalds et al., 2023). Swedish fathers have a right to 2 weeks of paternity benefits, with a monthly cap of €2,756, and 18 weeks of non-transferable

But the intention to facilitate leave-taking by adoptive fathers rather than a desire to intervene in the gendered division of leave also sheds light on further, paradoxical characteristics of the policy, less supportive of fathers' leave-taking. Rather than introducing a designated *paternity benefit* and so signaling the equal importance of paternal and maternal care, the reform built on extant legislation in that it merely extended the already existing *maternity benefit* to fathers (for a more detailed discussion, see Paper II). Similarly, rather than writing new *paternity leave* into legislation to equal mothers' *maternity leave*, the reform allowed fathers to combine their new benefit with their already existing entitlement to parental leave (see Table 1.1).¹³

Policymakers' presumed lack of interest in changing parents' division of leave can also help understand an additional, contentious characteristic of the policy, at odds with its "best practice" features. According to an interpretation of the legislation, put forward by the ex-minister Mihál (Mihál, 2017), parents can continue with paid work while drawing on their maternity benefits, if they are self-employed or their paid work is based on a new employment contract, as maternity benefits are tied to an interruption of income from a past contract, rather than a mere absence of income. While in a more egalitarian context, this paid-work-while-on-benefits option may have attracted less attention from both policymakers and fathers, in Slovakia, it prompted lengthy implementation battles (analyzed in Paper II) and resulted in widespread use by fathers who continued to work for pay at the same time (explored in Paper III).

The idiosyncratic features and intentions of policymakers notwithstanding, the policy ticks the boxes of a daddy quota and has been used by the general population of fathers, though often under the name "maternity leave for fathers" (Onuferová, 2017).

parental leave benefits, with a higher cap, €3,675, intended to motivate fathers' uptake (Duvander and Löfgren, 2023).

¹³ Paternity leave and a paternity benefit were finally introduced in 2022. The paternity leave of six months can be used within the first six months following the birth of the child, coinciding with mothers' maternity leave. The paternity benefit of two weeks was carved out of fathers' existing "maternity" benefit and is to be used within the first six weeks following the birth of the child, during the same time when mothers draw on their maternity benefits. However, the rest of fathers' maternity benefits cannot be used at the same time when mothers are drawing on their own maternity benefits. Due to this incompatibility, it is likely that fathers will keep combining most of their "maternity" benefit entitlement with parental leave rather than the new paternity leave. However, these changes are outside the scope of this study.

Table 1.1: Leave and Associated Benefits Available to Slovak Mothers and Fathers before and after the 2010 Reform

Mothers		Fathers	
Leave	Benefit	Leave	Benefit
<i>Maternity leave</i> employed mothers 1.5 months pre-birth 6 months post-birth	<i>Maternity benefit</i> eligible mothers 1.5 months pre-birth 6 months post-birth income-related	N/A	
<i>Parental leave</i> all employed mothers 36 months	<i>Parental allowance</i> all mothers 36 months low flat-rate	<i>Parental leave</i> all employed fathers 36 months	<i>Parental allowance</i> all fathers 36 months low flat-rate
			<i>Maternity benefit</i> eligible fathers 6 months income-related

Notes: (1) Shaded area represents change introduced by 2010 reform. (2) For later changes that fall outside of the scope of the study, see Footnote 13.

1.4 Methodology, Data and Analytical Approach

In this section, I briefly outline my methodological approach, the datasets I have generated and used in my analysis, and the analytical approaches used in this thesis (I introduce all in greater detail in the respective papers). But first, I consider three ways in which the methodology of my project was informed by my values as a feminist researcher.

First, in aiming to contribute to feminist theory, my underlying goal has always been to move beyond engaging in academic debates, to ‘imagine better worlds and work to achieve them’ (Ferguson, 2017). This commitment to working towards social transformation underpinned my choice of research topic – a daddy quota, which in my understanding showed radical potential for affecting change in the division of leaves by mothers and fathers. But this commitment also informed the expansion of my research focus from my original interest in studying what the effects of the Slovak daddy quota are – to also explore why they have been limited and how to study the effectiveness of

daddy quotas to better understand it. My commitment to working towards better worlds also prompted an ESRC-funded collaboration with the Slovak Ministry of Finance as a part of my PhD project. This collaboration allowed me to access unique administrative quantitative data on fathers' use of benefits (analyzed in Paper III). It also resulted in the publication of a policy report in which I analyzed variation in fathers' use of benefits and mothers' post-birth entry into paid work (Dančíková, 2020) – the first analytical look at the daddy quota published in Slovakia – and subsequent media coverage on the benefits of and trends in fathers' leave-taking (the media coverage and its possible implications for change of the gender structure are discussed in Paper II). Though the report and its analyses are not part of this thesis, it was an important part of my PhD project, and its findings and associated policy debates are referenced throughout the three papers presented here.

Second, the grounding of my research in feminist values prompted me to critically reflect on my research process (Fonow and Cook, 1991 in Henderson, 1991). Reflexivity has been used as a tool to push back against the belief that research can be objective – often by acknowledging and interrogating the effects of one's own positionality as a researcher on one's assumptions and research process. At the same time, attempts to account for the effects of one's positionality often fall short of this objective and have been criticized as a trope, navel gazing or researchers' 'badge of honor' (Nagar, 2002). I have no doubts that my identity as a feminist, middle-class, professional, and intentionally childless woman has considerably affected the way I conducted my research on the links between daddy quotas and the gendered division of leave and labor between mothers and fathers.

For instance, I felt intense discomfort and annoyance in interviews where parents voiced highly essentializing personal views about the roles of men and women – myself included. After one such conversation, I paused interviewing further parents for several weeks and dedicated my time to other parts of my research project. It is possible that despite my best attempts to keep a straight face, such emotional responses on my part may have been perceived by participants and in turn prompted a response on their part, retreating from certain positions, or, on the contrary, leaning into them. It is also possible that such emotional responses may have affected my analysis of parents' accounts, giving greater value to those which affected me more. However, I ultimately agree with Jenny Chanfreau (2019, p. 58) that

'(i)t is impossible to describe how, or quantify how much, my positionality has shaped the project presented in this thesis – other than to simply state the obvious that me being the researcher has shaped the research.'

Hence, though critical reflexivity fueled a continuous scrutiny of my research practice throughout this project, rather than explore my positionality in detail, I acknowledge the subjective nature of my work, with three aims in mind: as an expression of my epistemological beliefs about the inevitable subjectivity of research, a discursive intervention reiterating this position, and finally, as a reminder to readers who might be reading this thesis looking for “objective research”.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my feminist commitments informed my gradual adoption of the gender structure as framework within which I think about the relationship between policy, gender, and behavior in the form of fathers’ leave-taking and parents’ division of leave. My gradual embracing of the framework resulted from my abductive research process (Doucet & McKay, 2020; Lee, 2022) – rather than working deductively from theory *or* inductively from available data, from the start of my PhD project, I continuously engaged with both, in search of a conceptual framework that would capture what I saw reflected in my data and, at the same time, in search of (more) data that would allow me to better operationalize such a framework. At the same time, I also continuously questioned what analytical approaches would best align with my conceptual framework and data.

My thinking about this PhD project started from the unique administrative data set I had at my disposal: I intended to explore what the individual-level data could tell me to explain fathers’ leave-taking and parents’ division of leaves. Albeit on a smaller sample, I had conducted a similar analysis for my MSc dissertation project and had run up against the limits of what I could learn about the factors shaping parents’ leave-division based on the limited number of variables available in the administrative dataset. Consequently, for my PhD project, I decided to extend this approach by mixing methods and also interview parents of young children. While the quantitative data was to help me understand the broad trends in parents’ leave-division, the qualitative data was to help triangulate those findings, but also interpret them by providing deeper insight into parents’ decision-making on leave-division as well as their practice of dividing leaves. Accordingly, I was aiming to combine findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses within each of the three papers that form my thesis.

Our focus as researchers is affected by data and methods we use and working with individual-level data can support a focus on individual-level theory and concepts, including an understanding of gender as an individual-level characteristic, a fixed property of individual people (Chanfreau, 2019). Hence, to align with my individual-level data, in conceptual terms, I initially engaged mostly with micro-level theoretical approaches to explaining parents’ division of labor: micro-economic bargaining theory (Ferree, 1990; Bittman, 2003), that prompts thinking about gender inequality in terms of gendered differences in individual incomes or approaches that center socialization into

different gender roles (Hook, 2006) and suggest gender becomes an (immutable) identity characteristic of individual mothers and fathers. At the same time, I considered doing gender, a conceptualization that proposes thinking about gender in terms of gendered interaction (West and Zimmerman) and with macro-level frameworks, that focus on the role of gendered culture (Pfau-Effinger, 2012) in explaining parents' division of labor and leaves – but I struggled to combine these approaches with my individual-level data and the micro-level focus of my research.

But as I progressed with data collection and analysis, I was increasingly confronted with a discrepancy between my focus on micro-level theory and my findings. Though initial analyses of my quantitative data directed my attention towards individual-level explanations, the data I collected in interviews suggested gendered interactional- and institutional-level factors were at least equally important to parents' decision-making on the division of leaves. This discrepancy eventually propelled me towards a multi-level understanding of gender, increasingly accepted among feminist scholars (Risman, 2004; Sullivan et al., 2018). Like data and methods, concepts and frameworks that we adopt also direct our focus as researchers and inform the analytical approaches we ultimately choose. Accordingly, my choice of the gender structure framework resulted in my decision to use different data and methods for each of the three papers in this thesis (see Table 1.2). Eventually, I decided to mix methods across rather than within individual papers, as working with the complex, multi-level framework *and* multiple datasets and methods within individual papers, intended for publication in journals with strict wordcounts, would not have allowed me to engage with each type of data in sufficient detail.

Consequently, I used the interview and administrative data in separate papers. In Paper I, I drew on the interview data to engage with the first and second overarching questions of the thesis – what the effects of the policy are and why they have been limited. I used semi-structured interviews with 38 mothers and fathers, focused on understanding parents' decision-making on fathers' leave-taking. Compared to other methods I might have used instead, like surveys or focus groups, the open-ended nature of the one-on-one interviews provided me with the time and flexibility for a detailed exploration of different parents' perceptions of the gendering mechanisms that underwent transformation (what the effects have been) as well as of those dimensions of the gender structure that remained unchanged in response to the policy reform and continued shaping parents' decisions (why they have been limited).

The administrative micro-data covering fathers' leave-taking in 2011-19 was utilized in Paper III, along with aggregate data on fathers' leave-taking for periods which the administrative data did not cover. Attempts to reconcile a multi-level conceptualization of gender with available data can be

frustrating to the point of being abandoned (Chanfreau, 2019). I shared this sentiment on many occasions, in particular when attempting multi-variate analyses of the administrative data, which, due to the limited number of variables collected for purposes other than that of my research, repeatedly frustrated my ability to draw meaningful conclusions about the relationship between the daddy quota, parents' behavior and gender understood as a social structure. Consequently, the eventual, co-authored paper draws on a descriptive analysis of the broad trends of fathers' policy uptake. We use this analysis to respond to the final overarching question guiding this thesis – how to study daddy quotas to better understand their effectiveness – but to highlight some of the challenges involved in combining quantitative analysis with the gender structure framework, we present an argument for how *not* to study the policy. The paper first considers how our data might be interpreted by researchers interested in the causal effects of policy, and then how such an approach, with its associated assumption of quick and stable policy change, may result in misinterpreting the policy effects, which may take longer to materialize as change gradually reverberates through the gender structure. Adopting the gender structure framework also led to a decision to draw on the findings of the qualitative Paper I to help interpret the broad trends of policy uptake, as on its own, the administrative data proved an uneasy fit with the gender structure.

Finally, findings in Papers I and III, about the persistence of the gender structure in the face of the new policy, led me to return to the second overarching question motivating this thesis in Paper II – the last paper in the chronology of writing my PhD project: why the effects of the Slovak daddy quota have been limited. I was interested in the overwhelming perception of the parents I interviewed that the norm of threeness remained unchanged and continued affecting their decision-making on fathers' leave-taking, a phenomenon I could not explain with either the administrative or interview data I had at my disposal. Searching for an explanation, I was intrigued by literature on normative change, including on normative power (Gheaus and Robeyns, 2011; Browne, 2013) and normative messaging (Grönlund and Oun, 2010) of policies and decided to investigate the normative messaging associated with the daddy quota. This focus directly informed my decision to add a third method and type of data to the mix – a frame analysis of both the policy design and media debates associated with the policy. Initially, I considered an analysis focused on the policy process (see e.g., Engeli and Mazur (2018), Plomien (2019)), which would have allowed me to consider the different effects of the promising “best practice” policy design and more contentious policy implementation in the form of legislative amendments and court decisions. However, my engagement with media coverage of relevant implementation steps drew my attention to the discrepancy between ostensibly *gender-neutral* implementation steps, like a legislative amendment equally applicable to mothers and fathers, and a *gendering* interpretation of the same measure in the media, focusing predominantly

on fathers, with potential inegalitarian normative implications for the way fathers use the daddy quota (for more, see Chapter 3). With my attention now on the effects of media coverage and debates, I considered discourse analysis (see e.g., Braun and Clarke, 2013), but finally decided on frame analysis (see e.g., Lombardo and Meier, 2008), as its preoccupation with normativity (Dombos et al., 2012) aligned well with mine.

In the end, my mixed methods approach to this thesis, combining semi-structured interviews with mothers and fathers both in couples where fathers did and did not make use of the daddy quota, a frame analysis of media coverage of debates associated with the policy, and a descriptive analysis of administrative data on fathers' uptake of the benefits, allowed me to explore – and demonstrate – different ways in which the gender structure framework can be operationalized. In doing so, my thesis builds on valuable “part of the picture” perspectives and presents an avenue towards understanding the “whole picture” of the complex relationship between daddy quotas, gender and fathers' leave-taking, of interest to academics and policymakers keen to understand what daddy quotas can and cannot do in different temporal and spatial contexts, and why.

Table 1.2: Methods and Data Used in Project

Paper	Analytical approach	Data
I	Qualitative analysis of interview data	Semi-structured interviews with 38 parents
II	Qualitative analysis of policy frames	Legislative documents, media coverage of policy debates
III	Quantitative analysis of administrative data	Administrative dataset of fathers eligible for benefits in 2011 – mid-2019 (n = 446 thousand observations)

1.5 Thesis Outline

My thesis proceeds in three standalone but interconnected papers, and a conclusion in which I bring the findings and contributions of the individual papers together. The papers have been informed by the three questions guiding this project: what the effects of the policy are, why have they been limited and how to study the effects of daddy quotas to gain a deeper understanding of their effectiveness.

In Paper I,¹⁴ I zoom in on the what and the why – and argue that to understand why the effects of daddy quotas on fathers' behavior and the division of leave have varied within and across contexts, it is helpful to also investigate its effects (or lack thereof) on further gendering mechanisms that

¹⁴ Intended for submission to Gender & Society.

moderate the relationship between policy and parents' behavior. I introduce the analytical framework of the gender structure, emphasizing its multi-dimensionality, and connect it with Francine Deutsch's (2007) call for a research focus on undoing gender: I make a case for a research focus on the effects of policy on *unstructuring* gender rather than *undoing* gender. While a focus on undoing gender points to changes to gendered interactional patterns, unstructuring gender directs attention to the effects of policy on different dimensions of the gender structure and allows for investigating both their change and persistence in response to policy reform. I analyze semi-structured interviews with fathers and mothers of their children, both in families where fathers did and did not take leave. I find that while parents considerably changed their interactional patterns of leave division in response to the reform, they perceived little change to their gendered identities and to gendered norms, which continued constraining their decision-making.

In Paper II,¹⁵ I focus on why the effects of the Slovak policy have been limited. I build on the findings of Paper I – the perception of a lack of normative transformation in response to the daddy quota among the parents I interviewed – and explore why normative change may not have materialized yet. I draw on scholarship that suggests policy may affect normative change, but – based on my understanding of policy as a part of a context-dependent gender structure – I argue that pre-existing gendered norms may limit normative change in response to policy reform. To illustrate my argument, I explore the framing used in connection with the policy and find that although the “best practice” characteristics of the policy communicated an egalitarian normative message, the framing of the daddy quota in policy debates was dominated by a contradictory normative message grounded in pre-existing norms, that was more conducive to their perpetuation, even if in a modified form, than transformation.

The co-authored Paper III¹⁶ is informed by the final guiding question of this thesis – how to study, or rather, how not study the effects of daddy quotas. We conduct a descriptive analysis of a combination of micro- and macro-data on fathers' leave-taking, first considering how quantitative researchers interested in the causal effects of leave policy for fathers might study the effects of the Slovak daddy quota and then problematize such an approach based on our understanding of policy as a part of the gender structure. We highlight the context-dependence and dynamism of the gender structure and argue that to understand policy effectiveness, it is important to first parse the effects of the policy and the effects of the context the policy is introduced into, and second, to consider the effects of policy as they reverberate through the gender structure.

¹⁵ Intended for submission to the Journal of European Social Policy.

¹⁶ Intended for submission to Feminist Economics.

Finally, in a brief conclusion, I summarize my findings and contributions to knowledge and discuss avenues for future research.

2 Paper I: Undoing or Unstructuring Gender: The Effects of the Slovak Daddy Quota on the Change of the Gender Structure

Abstract

Since the 1990s, *daddy quotas* have been gaining popularity as a solution to persisting inequalities in the gendered division of leaves. Accordingly, much research has focused on their contribution to undoing gender – and found that policy uptake and the change in parents' division of labor has varied within and across contexts. I argue that to understand the effectiveness of daddy quotas, it is helpful to look beyond undoing gender (or changes to parents' division of leave), to *unstructuring gender* (or policy effects on additional dimensions of the gender structure, too, which, if unchanged, may limit policy effectiveness). To illustrate my argument, I investigate how parents engage with the Slovak daddy quota, introduced in 2011, into a context characterized by inegalitarian societal gendered norms on the division of leave, inegalitarian individual gender-role attitudes as well as unequal patterns of leave division. Drawing on interviews with 38 mothers and fathers, I find that while the daddy quota has contributed to a change in parents' leave-division, there were few signs of change to the prevalent gendered norms or parents' gendered identities, which continued constraining fathers' uptake of the quota and parents' division of leave.

Key words: daddy quotas, gender structure, undoing gender, unstructuring gender

2.1 Introduction

Over recent decades, a growing body of literature has investigated the contribution of leave policy for fathers to *undoing gender*, in other words, to reducing gendered difference in social interaction (Deutsch, 2007) by changing the division of leave by mothers and fathers. This literature has confirmed a link between *daddy quotas* – typically portions of parental leave reserved for fathers – and fathers' increased leave-taking across contexts, including Germany (Reimer, 2020), Norway (Lappegard, 2008), Quebec (Patnaik, 2019), South Korea (Lee, 2022, 2022b) or Sweden (Sundström and Duvander, 2002; Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Duvander and Johansson, 2012). At the same time, variation in fathers' uptake of leave within and across contexts has fueled research aimed at identifying specific factors moderating the effectiveness of such policy. Research on fathers' uptake has found that such factors moderating the effectiveness of policy include multiple gendered mechanisms, including individual attitudes to gender roles (Lappegard, 2008) or gender equality (Duvander, 2014), gendered interactional patterns in workplaces (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Haas and Hwang, 2019) or societal-level gender ideology or gendered norms (Lott and Klenner, 2018; Marynissen et al., 2019; Mussino et al., 2019). This growing body of research has enabled us to understand daddy quotas as a policy instrument, the effectiveness of which needs to be interpreted in the context of other social mechanisms.

In this paper, I argue that focusing on patterns of fathers' uptake and parents' leave-division and *identifying* moderating gendering mechanisms, while crucial, is insufficient: what is required is an

extension of such an approach to studying *change* to such gendering mechanisms which, if unaffected by the policy, may continue constraining the policy's uptake and effects. In other words, I argue for studying policy effects not only through the prism of gendering mechanisms that moderate uptake, but by considering a more dynamic model in which policy may interact iteratively with various moderating mechanisms. I draw on a conceptualization of policy as one of multiple interconnected mechanisms through which gender – understood as a social structure – shapes human behavior (Risman, 1998, 2004, 2009). The interconnectedness of the mechanisms of the gender structure suggests that, along with the often-studied direct effect of policy on individual behavior, policy – as one mechanism or dimension (I use the term interchangeably) of the gender structure – may also contribute to the transformation of other dimensions of the structure, often treated as fixed. Consequently, I propose extending the scope of investigating policy effects from *undoing* to *unstructuring gender*. Like undoing gender, focusing on unstructuring gender allows for exploring the effects of policy on fathers' behavior and the division leave. But unstructuring gender also extends our focus to the effects of policy on other gendering mechanisms that form the structure and constrain the division of leaves, like individual gendered identities (or individual self-understanding) and gendered norms (understood as unwritten societal rules on how one ought to behave), which I also analyze in this paper. More importantly, paying attention to policy effects on multiple gendering mechanisms draws attention to both those that *change* in response to policy reform and those that *persist* despite new policy – crucial for understanding cross-national variations in the limits of policy effectiveness.

To illustrate my argument about the need to investigate the unstructuring of gender, I focus on the 2011 Slovak daddy quota which presents an illuminating case. The policy allows fathers to take six months of well-remunerated leave that is not transferable to mothers. This combination of characteristics makes the policy one of the most generous of its kind globally and could be expected to transform the way mothers and fathers divide leave. At the same time, the quota was introduced into a particular inegalitarian gendered context, characterized by multiple gendering mechanisms that, if unchanged, may moderate the effects of the policy on parents' division of leave. At the time the policy was introduced, Slovakia stood out among European countries for some of the most inegalitarian attitudes to the gendered division of leaves (ISSP, 2012 in OECD, 2016b), reflected in a highly gendered pattern of leave-division (Miani and Hoorens, 2014; Schulze and Gergoric, 2015). The inegalitarian attitudes and unequal behavioral patterns were also mirrored in the norm of threeness (Saxonberg, 2014), which mandates children under the age of three should stay at home with mothers, even if mothers are expected to return to full-time paid work afterwards. Reflecting this set-up, by 2019, the benefit had been taken up by fewer than a quarter of fathers (Dančíková,

2020), a fraction compared to the 85% of fathers who took leave in Norway seven years after a daddy quota was introduced (Breadth and Kvande, 2009). The juxtaposition of the generous quota with the inequalitarian context, combined with fathers' limited uptake, presents an opportunity to explore both the persistence and change of the gender structure following the policy reform.

This paper is part of a wider project combining analysis of policy, quantitative administrative data, and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, which I present here. I analyze data from semi-structured interviews with 20 different-gender¹⁷ couples in which fathers both did and did not take leave, guided by the following research questions:

- (1) in what ways has the policy contributed to the unstructuring of gender – which dimensions of the gender structure have been affected?
- (2) And which elements of the gender structure persist in shaping the division of labor following the introduction of the policy?

The interviews allow me to investigate parents' perception of both the change of different dimensions of the gender structure and their persistence. In line with much existing research, I find that over the period of eight years, the policy has contributed to the creation of new, less gendered patterns in couples' division of leave. However, there were few signs that the policy has begun to unstructure gender in the form of change to fathers' identities and prevalent norms on the division of leaves. The interconnectedness and dynamism key to the gender structure framework suggest more changes may follow with time. Policy uptake may continue growing and affect more pronounced changes in norms and identities too. But for the time being, both gendered identities and norms persisted in exerting power over fathers' decision-making. The focus on unstructuring gender revealed different degrees of change to the dimensions of the gender structure in response to the new policy, warranting closer attention to the mechanisms that persist from both academics and policymakers. In this way, the unstructuring gender approach retains the focus of undoing gender, builds on it and broadens the research agenda of scholarship on fathers' leaves to additional levers of policy.

The paper proceeds with my conceptual framework, where I integrate the conceptualization of gender as a structure with the call for research focused on undoing gender. Next, I introduce the Slovak daddy quota and the context it was introduced into, and my method and data. Finally, I

¹⁷ While it might be more common to refer to couples consisting of men and women as heterosexual couples, in this project, I did not enquire into parents' sexuality. Consequently, in earlier drafts of my work, I replaced the terminology of heterosexual couples with different-sex couples. However, applying similar logic, I have come to realize that just as I did not ask parents about their sexuality, I did not ask about their sex either and have assumed their gender from their gender presentation.

present my findings and conclude by arguing that for leave policy to achieve discernible and sustainable change in the gendered division of leaves it should be designed and evaluated with the concept of unstructuring gender – rather than undoing gender – in mind.

2.2 Undoing or Unstructuring Gender: Theorizing the Relationship Between Policy and the Gender Structure

Gendered inequality in the division of unpaid work, including inequality in the division of childcare leaves, is a way of *doing gender* (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and most research on the effects of daddy quotas has concentrated on their contribution to *undoing gender*, echoing Francine Deutsch's (2007) influential call for a focus on situations where interaction becomes less gendered, in other words, where gendered differences in behaviors become less pronounced. The contribution of policy to undoing gender has been investigated extensively, explicitly (O'Brien and Wall, 2017b; Lee, 2022b) or implicitly, identifying change to gendered interactional patterns in the form of fathers' uptake, length, or proportion of leave (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Lappegard, 2008; Lapuerta et al., 2011; Duvander and Johansson, 2012; Duvander, 2014; Bergqvist and Saxonberg, 2017; Reimer, 2020; Eerola et al., 2019; Mussino et al., 2019; Patnaik, 2019).

Studies have found that changes to fathers' behavior and parents' patterns of leave-division in response to policy have varied within and across contexts and much of the same literature has also focused on gender as a key factor moderating these policy effects. However, conceptualizations of gender in studies have varied and included various gendering mechanisms, from individuals' gender-role attitudes (Lappegard, 2008), or attitudes to gender equality (Duvander, 2014); to parents' leave-taking patterns in their workplaces (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Haas and Hwang, 2019), and societal-level gendered norms or cultural values (Lott and Klenner, 2018; Marynissen et al., 2019; Mussino et al., 2019). The moderating effects of a variety of gendering mechanisms on fathers' leave-taking have also been confirmed by empirical evidence: fathers are more likely to take leave if they hold more egalitarian individual attitudes (Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Duvander, 2014) or if other fathers in their workplace had already done so (Bygren and Duvander, 2006) and fathers' leave-taking has also been linked to egalitarian norms on the societal level (Marynissen et al., 2019; Mussino et al., 2019).

The focus of research on undoing gender fits well with an assumption linked to daddy quotas – that while holding the wider context more or less constant, generous policy not transferable to mothers will motivate fathers to change their behavior and consequently their gendered interactional patterns. However, this focus on undoing gender shifts attention away from investigating the possible

effects of policy on the multiple gendering mechanisms moderating fathers' response to policy – or lack thereof. Though researchers have often treated such additional mechanisms as fixed, if unchanged, they will continue constraining policy uptake and maintain a less gendered division of leaves.

To respond to this gap in research focus, I draw on Barbara Risman's (1998) conceptualization of gender as a social structure, which prompts systematic thinking about the effects of policy on such additional gendering mechanisms. In Risman's framework, gender structures individual behavior through multiple mutually interconnected gendering mechanisms, for heuristic purposes organized on three levels, the institutional, interactional, and individual. A daddy quota is one such institutional-level mechanism of the structure which can affect change in fathers' behavior and parents' division of leave (see Figure 2.1 below). But the interconnectedness of the structure suggests that policy may also affect change in other dimensions of the structure that moderate fathers' response to daddy quotas. So, on the one hand, fathers' or mothers' gendered identities, an individual-level gendering mechanism, may shape fathers' response to policy: inequalitarian gendered identities may discourage fathers from leave-taking. On the other hand, gendered identities are not fixed and may also be transformed by the quota. Likewise, on the interactional level, gendered patterns of behavior observed in the everyday may communicate gendered expectations and shape fathers' response to the policy – just as such patterns may change in response to policy reform.¹⁸ Similarly, institutional-level gender norms may or may not align with individual fathers' identities and so may compound or counteract their effect on fathers' leave-taking. However, the policy may also contribute to a shift in prevalent norms.

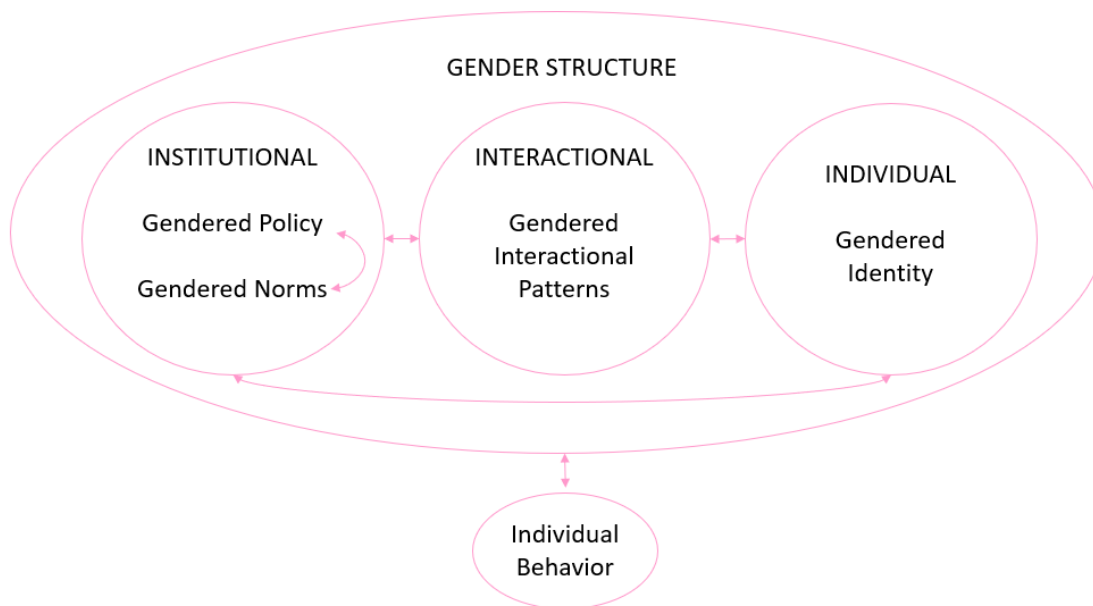
Existing research has not entirely overlooked the effects of policy on additional dimensions of the gender structure. Fathers' leave-taking has been linked to changes in fathers' gendered identities by allowing them to incorporate caring into their sense of self (Brandth and Kvande, 2016; Beglaubter, 2017), or to partial change in ideal parent norms (Lott and Klenner, 2018).¹⁹ However, compared to

¹⁸ Risman's interactional level has been operationalized as the interaction or negotiation of parents whose division of labor is being investigated (Legerski and Cornwall, 2010) and parents' negotiations as a mechanism affecting fathers' leave-taking have also been studied (Beglaubter, 2017). In my conceptualization and analysis, I understand parents' interaction as driven primarily by their gendered identities, a separate, individual-level gendering mechanism. I understand the interactional level of the gender structure as gendered patterns (or cumulated individual behavior) and associated expectations observed among other parents in the everyday.

¹⁹ Related literatures have also explored the effects of fathers' leave-taking on additional outcomes, ranging from secondary behavioral effects – whether fathers' leave-taking translates into their greater involvement in unpaid labor beyond their immediate leave (the results are still inconclusive, see e.g., Schober (2014), Bünning (2015), Patnaik (2019), Wray (2020), Lee (2023), for an overview, see O'Brien and Well (2017a)); to parents' labor market outcomes (researchers in Sweden found no effect on mothers' labor market participation (Rege and Solli, 2013), in Norway, no effects on parents' employment or wages (Ekberg et al., 2013), and in Germany, no effects on fathers' long-term employment (Kluve and Tamm, 2013), but positive effects on mothers' long-

effects on changes to the division of labor, the effects of policy on these intervening gendering mechanisms have received considerably less attention.

Figure 2.1: Policy as a Part of the Gender Structure



And while Deutsch (2007), too, acknowledges the need for institutional- and individual-level transformation of the gender structure – or the need to ‘dismantle the gender system’ (ibid., p. 123) – I find that by proposing to ‘use the phrase “undoing gender” to refer to *social interactions* that reduce gender difference’ (ibid., p. 122, emphasis mine), her intervention draws attention to investigating interactional patterns of behavior at the expense of other gendering mechanisms. Rather than a critique of Deutsch’s understanding of gender, in which social interactions *are* embedded in the gender system or structure, my argument builds on hers in calling for new language: referencing Lakoff (2004), Deutsch (2007) reminds us that ‘(t)he language we use shapes what our minds are drawn to.’ Precisely because I agree with Deutsch that ‘words matter,’ (ibid., p. 123), I propose a research focus on *unstructuring* gender, which forms the analytical framework of this paper. Focusing on unstructuring gender invites a more systematic investigation of policy effects across multiple levels of the gender structure – not only on fathers’ behavior and the ensuing interactional patterns, but also on fathers’ identities and the prevalent gender norms, or other gendering mechanisms that are identified as key in different contexts. More importantly, such a multi-level approach prompts investigating both change *and* persistence of the gender structure at the same time. While I agree with Deutsch’s call for exploring situations where gender difference becomes less pronounced, when it comes to analyzing policy aimed at reducing gendered inequality,

term employment probability (Kluve and Schmitz, 2018); to fertility rates (findings across different countries are also inconclusive, for an overview, see Lee (2022a)).

it is at least equally important to focus on dimensions of gender that prove more resistant to change and so require further attention from both researchers and policymakers.

A systematic investigation of policy effects across the gender structure is easier said than done. In this paper, guided by the data I collected, I engage closely with three key dimensions of the gender structure – parents’ interactional patterns of leave-division, their gendered identities, and gendered norms on the division of leaves (see Figure 2.1 above) – while dimensions less prominent in my interviews, like gendered pay differentials or gendered workplace patterns, remain unaddressed. The focus of my study contrasts with the tens of different gendering mechanisms that Risman has identified across multiple publications on the gender structure framework (2004, 2011, 2016) and operationalized in her book-length projects – *Gender Vertigo* (1998) or *Where Will the Millennials Take Us?* (2018) – more easily reconciled with a full, systematic investigation. The more limited focus of my study is guided by a desire to draw attention to the *key* gendering mechanisms shaping fathers’ uptake and use of the new Slovak benefit and, in operationalizing the multi-dimensional framework, to highlight the extent of the challenges to be overcome if policy is to chisel away at gender inequality.

2.3 The Slovak Daddy Quota and Its Gendered Context

The Slovak daddy quota presents an interesting case for an exploration of the effects of policy on unstructuring gender. The leave-taking of Slovak parents is guided by legislation on leaves – the right to time off paid work, and benefits – the right to financial support. The 2011 daddy quota built directly on pre-existing *maternity benefit* and *parental leave* policies. Rather than introducing a right to a *paternity benefit*, Slovak fathers with a track record of paid work and “*illness insurance*” contributions gained the right to 28 weeks of non-transferable *maternity benefit*, worth 75% of their previous income. Before the reform, maternity benefits were available exclusively to mothers.²⁰ As the benefits are not subject to taxation, for most fathers they amount to their full previous net income – only a small proportion of fathers earn more than the generous benefit cap and receive benefits lower than their previous income (fewer than 10%).²¹ This means that, more than in other countries with lower or taxed benefits, for most Slovak couples, fathers’ leave-taking is not connected with a decrease in disposable income. In fact, if mothers return to paid work while fathers draw on the benefit, most families will be financially better off.

²⁰ Mothers are entitled to 7.5 months of maternity leave, 1.5 months before and six post-leave.

²¹ As of April 2023, the benefit was capped at €1,851 monthly (Kollárová, 2023), the average wage in the first quarter of 2023 reached €1,327 (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2023).

However, while mothers combined their maternity benefits with *maternity leave*, a six-month entitlement in the first six months following the birth of a child and available only to women, both before and after the reform discussed here, fathers were to use their newly available maternity benefits in conjunction with parental leave, a pre-existing entitlement available to all parents during the first 36 months of their child's life (see Table 1.1 in Thesis Introduction). Parental leave had been available to both mothers and fathers since the 1990s, however, before the 2011 reform, it could only be combined with *parental allowance*, a three-year low flat-rate benefit, available to all mothers and fathers irrespective of their work status, but only to one parent at a time. This means that prior to the reform, economic incentives motivating fathers to take leave were considerably weaker.

Importantly, unlike in most countries with daddy quotas, in certain circumstances both mothers and fathers have been able to make use of the full maternity benefit while continuing with paid work part- or full-time – without taking leave in the sense of time away from paid work at all. This paid-work-while-on-benefits option applies to self-employed work or employment based on a new contract²² and is likely an unintended consequence of the way the policy was introduced.²³

Nevertheless, the length of the non-transferable benefit entitlement combined with the high wage-replacement rate make the 2011 quota one of the most generous of its kind globally and could be expected to make the division of leave by mothers and fathers more egalitarian. By comparison, Sweden, one of countries widely considered to be leaders in egalitarian leave policies, reserves 20 weeks²⁴ for fathers, associated with a taxed 77% wage-replacement rate (Duvander and Löfgren, 2023).

Along with its unusual generosity, the Slovak daddy quota stands out due to the inegalitarian gendered context into which it was introduced, which – if unchanged – may moderate fathers' behavioral response to the policy. In this way, the context, misaligned with the policy, provides an intriguing case for this study, interested in the persistence and change of the gender structure in response to a new daddy quota. On the institutional level, the context is characterized by the widespread *norm of threeness* (Saxonberg, 2014), an informal rule mandating that it is natural and right for children under three to be in the care of their mothers, although mothers are expected to

²² Anecdotal evidence suggests some employers merely terminated a fathers' existing contract and issued a new, similar one to enable fathers' use of the benefit in this way.

²³ The policy was modelled on maternity leave, available to mothers following the birth of their child, when paid work is highly unusual in Slovakia. When extended to fathers, the policy was intended for adoptive fathers only (NRSR, 2010b), but written in a way that applies to all fathers with a track record of "illness insurance" contributions (see also the Introduction and Paper II). The small number of adoptive fathers expected to benefit from the policy may explain less detailed scrutiny which resulted in the option to work while receiving benefits.

²⁴ Two weeks of paternity leave and eighteen weeks of parental leave.

return to full-time paid work afterwards and part-time work is unusual. The origins of the norm have been linked to parental leave, until the 1990s available only to mothers;²⁵ as well as to poor availability of nurseries for children under the age of three (ibid.).

Fathers' leave uptake may also be moderated by pre-existing gendered interactional patterns.

Around the time the new policy was introduced, nearly all women in Slovakia took parental leave (Miani and Hoorens, 2014), while fathers took barely any (Schulze and Gergoric, 2015).

Consequently, in 2014 Slovakia had the lowest at-work²⁶ rate of mothers of children aged 0-2 years in the OECD (Adema et al., 2016), even though at 52.6%, women's overall full-time equivalent (FTE) employment rate was higher than the OECD average of 50% (OECD, 2023). By comparison, the FTE rate of Slovak men, while lower than the OECD average of 73.5%, was still considerably higher than that of women, 70.1% (ibid.).

Finally, the gendered pattern of leave division was also mirrored in individual-level attitudes reported by the Slovak population – often understood as a proxy for individual gendered identities (see, e.g., Himmelweit and Sigala (2004)). In 2012, 60% of Slovaks thought paid leave should be taken entirely by the mother, even if both parents were in a similar work situation – more than anywhere else in the OECD. Fewer than 10% thought leave should be split equally by mothers and fathers (ISSP, 2012 in OECD, 2016b). Slovaks also ranked among the most inegalitarian in the EU in thinking that men should not mainly look after children and the home (EC, 2010) and that a father must put his career ahead of looking after his young child (EC, 2014). Together the data suggest widespread inegalitarian views on appropriate parental roles that could further moderate fathers' response to the daddy quota.

2.4 Data and Analytical Approach

I analyzed the relationship of the policy, gender and parents' behavior based on semi-structured interviews with mothers and fathers. The interviews allowed for an in-depth investigation of parents' understanding of and experiences in response to the policy, guided both by the discussed conceptualization of gender as a multi-dimensional structure, as well as parents' context-specific insights about the policy and their decision-making. Compared to other methods I might have considered, for instance, a quantitative survey, the open-ended nature of the interviews allowed me to explore both the persistence and change of *multiple* gendering mechanisms *specific* to the Slovak

²⁵ A two-year *extended maternity leave* was introduced in 1970 and later lengthened to three years (Hašková and Klenner, 2010).

²⁶ Includes all who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the week of survey, excludes those employed but absent from work for reasons including maternity or parental leave.

gender structure, as perceived by the parents I interviewed. I conducted and analyzed interviews with 38 parents, 36 in 18 different-gender couples as well as one mother and father whose partners did not wish to participate. I originally intended to recruit an equal number of couples in which fathers made use of the benefit and couples where fathers were eligible but did not draw on the benefit. However, anecdotal evidence suggested a considerable proportion of fathers engaged in paid work while on benefits, which led to a shift in my strategy to account for this surprising, and to me, counterintuitive use of the new policy. I aimed to recruit equal numbers of couples in three categories: couples where fathers made no use of the benefits, where they used the benefits but continued with paid work, and where they used benefits and took complete leave from paid work. In the end I recruited six couples in which fathers made no use of leave nor benefits and 14 couples in which fathers drew on benefits but combined them with leave in different ways. Among fathers who used the benefits, six took complete leave from paid work, while eight continued with paid work for a part or the entirety of the time they received the benefits. Six fathers worked part-time – either reduced hours in their regular jobs or on new projects. Two continued working with no change to their previous full-time work schedule, facilitated by their partners' continuing primary responsibility for their child. Only five mothers returned to paid work full-time during their partner's leave and a further six mothers returned to their paid work or studies part-time.²⁷ Fathers' leaves also varied in length, ranging from three to twelve months, as three fathers made use of both maternity benefits and subsequently the parental allowance.

I recruited participants through personal acquaintance, social media, and snowballing. I made efforts to recruit interlocutors from various regions, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnicities, reaching out to personal contacts who could aid in contacting diverse potential participants. In the end, I arrived at a sample that reflected various geographical locations and professional backgrounds (for a summary of the sample, see Table 2.1) – though most participants were in their thirties (78%), living in Bratislava (60%), held a college degree (73%), and earned above-average incomes (65%).²⁸ All but two parents were Slovak citizens; in two couples one parent held different citizenship and migrated

²⁷ One mother remained out of paid work for health reasons.

²⁸ The final sample composition was shaped by three key factors: first, as already stated, the intention to recruit similar numbers of couples in which (1) the fathers did not make use of the benefit, (2) made use of the benefit but continued with paid work and (3) both drew on the benefits and took complete leaves from paid work. Second, the sample was shaped by the approaches I used to recruit parents. Finally, the composition of my sample also partly reflects the different odds of benefit uptake by fathers in couples with different characteristics, in particular parents' education, income, and residence. Fathers were considerably more likely to draw on the benefits when they or their partners held a higher education degree and when fathers were above-average earners. Fathers from Bratislava were also among those with the highest odds of using the benefits (Dančíková, 2020) – see also Table 7.4 in the Appendix. While the sample is not representative of the population of parents in Slovakia and findings should not be generalized to the population, it is sufficiently well-suited to an exploratory study of the effects of a new policy.

to Slovakia as adults. Aiming to gain informative data on topics that might be deemed contentious or sensitive, I interviewed parents separately. To assure anonymity and ease of orientation within my data, I assigned parents pseudonyms with the names of each couple always starting with the same alphabet letter (Aleš and Anna, Bruno and Betka, and so on). Following a full transcription, I carried out a thematic analysis (Braune and Clarke, 2013), which was well-suited to my purposes of working within the gender structure framework and paying attention to its context-specificity: I coded the data both top-down, based on the discussed theoretical considerations (I paid attention to persistence and change in parents' division of leave, their attitudes and their perception of norms), and bottom up, based on themes identified in the data itself. I selected examples that both informed my thinking and illustrated my arguments and translated selected representative quotes.

The interviews were semi-structured but allowed to flow naturally to resemble a conversation, which meant not all parents were asked all questions and not all parents answered all questions they were asked. While this might be perceived as a limitation had I intended to obtain a larger sample representative of the population of eligible fathers and their partners and analyze it quantitatively, this had not been my intention. This paper is a part of a larger research project, which also includes quantitative analysis of administrative data on fathers' leave-taking. Hence, my decision to interview parents was guided by a wish to complement my quantitative analysis to gain a more holistic and accurate picture of the complex and dynamic effects of the gender structure on individual behavior. Though the gender structure is not always visible to those it affects – suggesting that interviews, too, are an imperfect method of analyzing its effects – they do yield valuable insight into the workings of gender, allowing me to explore parents' perceptions of factors affecting their decision-making, as well as underlying factors that may affect fathers' leave uptake.

The data allowed me to investigate dimensions of the gender structure that moderated fathers' behavioral response to the new policy, but also parents' perceptions of changes to these mechanisms. The exploration of change was limited by the cross-sectional character of the interview data. To avoid this limitation, I originally considered conducting two rounds of interviews – on the one hand before or during, and on the other hand after fathers' leave-taking. However, I was ultimately more interested in changes that would not have been captured by such an approach. For instance, to explore the effectiveness of policy in shaping parents' division of leave, I was more interested in accounts of changes to parents' identities in response to the policy – but before their leave. In other words, I was interested in changes that could help facilitate fathers' leave-taking (for more on the mechanism of such change, see Paper II), rather than changes to parents' identities following fathers' time off work, which have been investigated by existing research (Brandth and

Kvande, 2016; Beglaubter, 2017). For this reason, I decided to rely on parents' recollection of changes (or lack thereof) of the gender structure.

Table 2.1: Composition of Interview Sample

Father				Mother				Couple	Benefit uptake
Name	Age	Education	Profession	Name	Age	Education	Profession	Residence	
Aleš	30	Higher	Civil servant	Anna	23	Middle	Medical student	Bratislava	Yes
Bruno	30	Middle	User experience designer	Betka	30	Higher	Town planner	Bratislava	Yes
Cyril	42	Higher	Library director	Cecília	32	Higher	Kindergarten teacher	Bratislava	Yes
Dano	36	Higher	Civil servant	Diana	33	Higher	Kindergarten teacher	Bratislava	No
Edo	43	Higher	Manager, private corporation	Elena	34	Higher	Lawyer	Bratislava	Yes
Fero	38	Higher	Manager, private corporation	Frederika	36	Higher	Manager, private corporation	Bratislava	Yes
Gregor	32	Higher	Schoolteacher	Gabika	29	Higher	Accounting analyst	Bratislava	Yes
Hugo	37	Higher	Manager, private corporation	Helena	33	Higher	Store owner	Bratislava	Yes
Igor	39	Higher	Manager, hospitality	Ivana	37	Higher	Structural designer	Piešťany	No
Juraj	31	Higher	Bank branch manager	Júlia	31	Higher	Civil servant	Bratislava	Yes
Kamil	31	Higher	Contract commercial specialist	Katia	29	Higher	Training coordinator	Bratislava	Yes
Lukáš	38	Middle	Technical foreman	Lucia	37	Higher	Public speaking coach	Bratislava	Yes
Martin	37	Higher	Schoolteacher	Mirka	31	Higher	Bank branch manager	Detva	Yes
Krištof	38	Higher	Planning engineer	Katarína	33	Higher	Civil servant	Žilina	No
Ondrej	33	Higher	Training coordinator	Olívia	30	Higher	Community coordinator, NGO	Banská Bystrica	No
Patrik	39	Middle	Transport foreman	Paulína	43	Middle	Sales assistant	Nemecká	No
Richard	28	Middle	Quality technician	Not interviewed	-	Middle	Sales assistant	Spišská Nová Ves	Yes
Samo	37	Lower	Factory worker	Sandra	37	Lower	Kitchen staff	Veľká Lomnica	No
Not interviewed	35	Middle	Construction contractor	Táňa	25	Middle	Sales assistant	Podbrezová	No
Ulysses	40	Higher	Manager, private corporation	Uľa	38	Higher	Researcher	Bratislava	Yes

2.5 Findings: Persistence and Change of the Gender Structure

2.5.1 *Gendered interactional patterns as a site of considerable change*

Like most researchers interested in the effects of leave policies, I first turn to their effect on fathers' behavior and parents' interactional patterns in the form of division of leaves. In my study, the interactional level saw the greatest degree of change, though with considerable limitations. Among the fathers I spoke to, most responded to the reform by taking leave and consequently changing their interactional patterns at home as they re-negotiated the division of labor with the mothers of their children. Though parental leave had been available to fathers and could be combined with parental allowance for decades, the introduction of the non-transferable benefits with a high replacement rate made a difference. Ulysses, an eloquent and engaged corporate manager who took leave with both of his children, drew comparison between Slovakia and his country of origin, which offers no statutory well-paid daddy quota, highlighting the potential of policy to enable behavioral change in fathers open to such an option: 'we live in a place where this is a realistic possibility. So why not? Why not, how could you not take advantage of it.?' Though the paid-work-while-on-benefits option meant that some fathers who availed themselves of the benefit continued with paid work, in line with much existing research, most fathers recounted taking on both more care work and housework during their time at home, especially if their partners returned to paid work.

But even in couples where fathers took complete leave from paid work, there were limits to the transformation of parents' division of labor. This was best illustrated by Fero and Frederika, both high-earning corporate managers, whose redistribution of leave was the most significant of all parents I spoke to. Fero stayed at home for a year with each of their two children, the longest of all fathers in my sample, making use of both the full 28 weeks of maternity benefits and subsequently the low parental allowance typically used by mothers. During his first leave, Fero also took on the greatest share of care work of all fathers, as Frederika commuted to a different city on a weekly basis. However, as Fero didn't cook, Frederika took extreme measures to continue supporting him with care work:

'I did the weekly trips to [another city] (...) and before leaving I would cook until eleven at night (...) so they would have food for two-three days. Then I would leave (...) at midnight or one a.m., and sometimes I would come back during the week to cook again.'

Moreover, the couple's redistribution of labor was scaled back at the end of Fero's leave as Frederika reluctantly took a step back in her career. Both parents agreed that only one of them could accept the attractive job offer they each had lined up, the other would have to take a more active role in

childcare. During our interview, Frederika, until then cheerful and matter of fact, became distressed as she recounted that there was no question it would be her – despite being the main breadwinner, as the mother, she was expected to step up as the primary carer:

‘It left a deep mark on me that will probably last for another decade (...) someone had to take care of the family, and everyone somehow expected it would be me (...) I had been in a higher position, much more successful, so it also had financial implications (...) I thought it was really unfair. Because why couldn’t it be him. When he is also the father?’

Frederika’s account highlights how even the most egalitarian couples limited their behavioral change in the face of interactional expectations in their surroundings. Still, the couple’s redistribution of labor was considerable compared with others, where parents made no use of the new benefit and persisted with a significantly more unequal gendered division of leaves. Such inegalitarian patterns, observed by parents among their friends, colleagues and in their everyday surroundings, continued shaping their gendered expectations about how mothers and fathers should respond to available policies. Ulysses, the corporate manager with a migration background, was a keen observer of gendered interactional patterns and their effects in shaping parents’ perception of gendered expectations and through them their gendered behavior:

‘When I think about my colleagues, most of them, the men are at work. And if you asked them, I bet they wouldn’t necessarily say, oh, well, of course I work, and my wife stays at home and raises the kids. It’s just what happens, right? It doesn’t need to be spoken, it’s these default expectations, (...) grandma wants to be out with her daughter and walking with the grandkid, three generations you know, pushing the pram and so it’s sort of a cycle that just is very easy to fall into and slip into and to be happy in (...) And everyone is sort of comfortable with those roles, because they see them around them and there are opportunities for like being social and (...) meeting expectations.’

The immense power of interactional patterns to shape expectations of appropriate gendered behavior from a very young age was illustrated by an anecdote recounted by Táža, an independent-minded sales assistant living in a small town in central Slovakia who took both maternity and long parental leave with her daughter, as her partner refused to take leave from paid work. Táža spoke at length of a father who lived next door and, following initiative from his professionally-oriented partner, stayed at home with their child, an exception in the neighborhood where most men took no leave. The situation shifted during the Covid-19 pandemic when the local factory struggled, and many fathers were forced to stay at home while the mothers went to work in jobs less affected by the pandemic. When fathers started spending time with their children at the playground, the

deviation from expected patterns of behavior was so stark that even Táňa's three-year old noticed immediately: 'my daughter looks at me at the playground, she sees the daddies with the children and says, "why is their daddy with them on the playground? Daddy doesn't go out!"'²⁹ Though the new daddy quota enabled considerable behavioral change, the pre-existing inegalitarian pattern of leave-division remained dominant and powerful.

2.5.2 *Individual gendered identities resist change and persist in shaping division of leaves*

While my analysis of the effects of the daddy quota on gendered interactional patterns was in line with analytical framework used in most daddy quota research, I now turn to the effects of the policy on other mechanisms of the gender structure. In contrast with the visible – if varied and limited – changes to gendered interactional patterns, exploring changes on the individual level of the gender structure yielded less evidence of change. Most fathers who took leave did so without much hesitation, suggesting the policy merely allowed them to act in line with their already egalitarian identity or beliefs, or their identities were not inegalitarian enough to prevent them from leave-taking. Nevertheless, a small number of fathers recounted changes in their identities in response to the policy. The changes from less to more egalitarian identities happened gradually, through exchanges with their partners whose identities and views had already been more egalitarian. Ulysses, the manager who eventually used the daddy quota with both of his children, was initially hesitant to take leave as he saw his career as a crucial building block of his identity. He changed his mind only gradually, when, despite the norm of threeness, his wife returned to paid work and juggling the care of their two children was increasingly difficult:

'(f)rom a personal-values-perspective, I wanted to take on more of the home-work and didn't feel it was good [for it to be left just to] my wife (...) So it was an emotional (...) journey. Like a process. And I couldn't see it for a while, and then I could and then I felt better about it (...).'

The existence of the new policy prompted Ulysses' interrogation of his own role in his family and facilitated a gradual adjustment of his gendered identity – an individual-level mechanism of the gender structure. Despite his initial reluctance, the shift in his self-understanding eventually enabled

²⁹ An external shock like the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to considerably affect the gender structure and shifts in the division of paid and unpaid labor during the pandemic are continuing to be discussed in literature (see e.g., De Henau and Himmelweit (2021) and Heintz et al. (2021) in the dedicated special issue of *Feminist Economics*). In my sample, the effects of the pandemic were relatively limited as almost half of my interviews took place before its start and further parents, though interviewed during the pandemic, reflected on a time preceding it. However, a small number of parents had experienced a change to the gendered interactional patterns with their partners, which could be investigated in future research.

him to respond to the increasingly challenging juggling of paid and unpaid work between him and his wife by taking leave.

Similarly, Bruno, a thoughtful IT professional who took leave with both his children, originally thought 'he probably wouldn't like to stay at home with a small child.' Bruno came from a large family and spoke with understanding of the unequal division of leave in his siblings' own families. However, affected by conversations with his wife who held egalitarian beliefs, he gradually changed his position and became an advocate of fathers' leave-taking in conversations with others, including his mother or his line manager at work:

'when I was telling my mother about [taking leave], I was already the one telling her I should also be the one staying at home (...) as far as I know, [my manager] hasn't gone [on leave] yet, but he said I inspired him and he would like to.'

Bruno's exchanges with his wife, mother and his manager suggest how changes to individual identities and beliefs may snowball across different interpersonal relationships and so shed light on how change may reverberate through the gender structure following policy reform. Thus, policy may serve but the start of an iterative process of gradual transformation of the gender structure.

Compared to the small number of fathers whose identities and individual beliefs evolved in response to the new policy, a larger number spoke of themselves in ways that aligned with separate gender roles. Fathers' gendered identities alone may not prove a decisive obstacle to their leave-taking. Literature has documented instances of parents' childcare decisions at odds with their views about gendered roles in childcare (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004). But fathers I talked to drew on their gendered identities to help explain their reluctance to change their behavior. Krištof, father of three and civil engineer, had contemplated leave-taking but, together with his wife Katarína, ultimately decided against it. Katarína had stayed at home on consecutive long leaves with each of their three children and her growing fatigue prompted the couple to consider Krištof taking leave from paid work. Ultimately, Katarína did not want to give up what she considered "her" time, an indication of a lack of change in her gendered identity, and Krištof agreed. His equally persisting gendered identity as a breadwinner rather than a caregiver contributed to his explanation: 'I think us men, we're just wired differently, not quite made to provide that daily care to children.' Similarly, Patrik, father of four and foreman in a private company, had considered taking leave with his youngest daughter, but decided against it when he found out that he would be responsible for two children, both his daughter and his toddler grandson. He linked the decision to his lack of self-confidence about his role as carer, indicating his gendered identity was left unaffected by the new policy: 'I didn't know whether I would dare. For some time, sure, but half a year. I didn't dare.' Likewise, Hugo, a high-

ranking manager in a private corporation, drew on maternity benefits for two of his three children, but took no leave from paid work and continued working full-time, while the care of their children fell to his energetic wife Helena. Hugo was one of the few fathers in my sample – and a small number of fathers in the population – whose income exceeded the benefit cap, meaning the family would have experienced a considerable drop in their disposable income, had Hugo taken leave. But he also could not picture himself as a full-time carer and suggested that Helena was better suited to staying at home by virtue of being a woman:

‘If I were her, I would want to get out of that environment for sure (...) There would be some sort of degradation of my behavior, right? (...) But there are women, people, who do not mind it, right? Who can enjoy it.’

In turn, Helena’s view suggested that mothers’ gendered identities also helped prevent fathers’ leave-taking (providing evidence of maternal gatekeeping (Allen and Hawkins, 1999) or mothers’ belief in a gendered division of roles), sometimes at the expense of the mothers’ own well-being. During the time when Hugo availed himself of maternity benefits, it was Helena who shouldered primary responsibility for care of the couple’s children, while also working part-time in her retail business. In the final months before their youngest son started kindergarten, Helena felt burned out: ‘I was already in such a state, I was just going to die.’ But she did not want to ask Hugo to be more involved in childcare. Explaining her thought process, Helena drew on her gendered identity which was unchanged by the policy and shaped her decision-making on the division of leave:

‘Because when my husband is at work, I just feel it deep inside me, that I must give him the peace, because he is the breadwinner, that is just the way it worked out (...). He helps when necessary, but I just feel that way, I don’t know why I feel that way, that I have to unburden him.’

While Helena merely refused to *ask* her partner to take leave, Cecília, like Krištof’s wife Katarína, refused to *allow* her husband Cyril to take leave from paid work. When Cyril, father of three and director of a cultural center, suggested he could take leave with his middle child, Cecília, was unwilling to return to work as a kindergarten teacher, invoking her identity as a mother-carer:

‘When our first daughter was born, he said he could take leave, but I said no way. Because for me, family was always the most important thing, and I couldn’t imagine that I would go to the kindergarten and take care of other children and at the same time, my husband or my child would be at home.’

Eventually, Cyril took leave with their youngest child – while Cecília remained at home at the same time, in line with her persisting gendered caring identity. At the same time, Cyril’s willingness to take on a caring role was challenged by his strong ongoing commitment to his profession: Cyril used part of his leave for work trips related to his second, part-time job. As a result, undergirded by the couple’s gendered identities, Cyril’s leave-taking had a limited effect on the redistribution of leave time and unpaid care.

2.5.3 *Institutional-level norms moderated uptake with few signs of change*

On the institutional level of the gender structure, the policy reform itself amounted to a major change, but my study offers little evidence of change in gender norms - another key institutional-level dimension of the gender structure. All but two parents with whom I discussed the issue of norms were aware of the norm of threeness, only two parents thought the societal norm suggested that parents should divide leave. Of the two, only one father thought the norm had changed specifically to reflect the new policy: in his view the new norm mandated that mothers should stay at home for most of the three years, but fathers should make use of the six-month daddy quota. Even if rare, this new understanding of a normative division of leave suggests the daddy quota may have created an opening for a future questioning of the norm of threeness.

This potential opening notwithstanding, most parents spoke of the persistence of the norm of threeness in the face of the new policy, which continued affecting them. Mothers who transgressed against the unwritten rule by returning to work before their child turned three recounted grappling with guilt. Uľa, a plain-spoken researcher and mother of two, acted on her egalitarian identity and decided to return to paid work irrespective of whether her husband Ulysses would take leave. Though he eventually decided to stay at home, Uľa experienced the persisting effect of the norm:

‘there is a lot of emotional leg work that you, as a woman just have to do when the father takes leave (...) you were [the] primary carer and suddenly it’s someone else, plus the society really gives it to you, right? We’ve seen the statistics and saw how [Slovaks] still perceive it that you’re basically damaging your child when you leave before it is three years old (...) sometimes I definitely feel a kind of a guilt.’

Similarly, Júlia, a dedicated civil servant and mother of one, struggled with remorse after returning to paid work when her daughter turned 18 months. Though Júlia was self-deprecating and laughing during our Zoom interview, she told me she used to cry at night despite knowing that her daughter was in good hands in her husband’s care: ‘what kind of a mother am I to leave her at her father’s mercy? But it’s the cultural barriers’, she blamed the societal norms. Júlia thought her return to work

would have been easier in a context with more egalitarian norms, where her decision would have been less unusual and would have stood out less in the everyday: 'I believe that if I would have made that choice in Sweden, it would have been more normal, right? I am not saying they judge me, but still when you go to the playground, it's mostly mothers.' Though the norm of threeness did not deter Júlia and Uľa from an earlier return to paid work – and so from allowing or motivating their husbands to take leave – other mothers may be less inclined to diverge from norms to avoid social sanctioning: compared to mothers who complied with the norm, Uľa and Júlia may have been more conscious of it due to their transgression. Investigating women's labor supply, Wilfred Uunk (2015) found that while individual gender-role attitudes were a strong predictor of women's decisions on joining the labor force, their decision-making was also linked to attitudes prevalent in the society. This suggests that if widespread daddy quota uptake is to materialize, both inegalitarian individual identities and societal norms may have to undergo broader change.

Fathers' accounts also suggested that the male breadwinner norm persisted after the reform and continued constraining their decision-making on leave-taking. Despite both the pre-existing legal entitlement to parental leave and the new non-transferable benefit, fathers were confronted with the unwritten rule about their role as paid workers and accordingly adjusted the length of their leave, continued with part-time paid work throughout or decided to take no leave at all. Bruno, the father of two and IT developer, stayed at home with both his children, but his first leave was the shortest among all fathers I interviewed. Despite no explicit pushback at work (perhaps explained by the fact that Bruno's manager was interested in taking leave himself), Bruno explained that he did not want to ask for a leave longer than three months:

'more seemed a bit unfair towards my employer. I assessed this for myself and thought three months are not that much for them to really miss me, to need a replacement (...) six months would have seemed a bit brazen.'

Bruno's unwillingness to take more than three months of leave was in stark contrast with the leave of his wife Betka, who stayed at home for two years, even though both parents agreed Betka was more invested in her career than her partner and it was her strong professional identity that allowed her to transgress against the norm of threeness.

Unlike Bruno, Ulysses made use of the entire six months of available benefits but found a different way to avoid completely breaking with the breadwinner norm: his fear of 'burning bridges' with his manager was the driving force behind his decision to stay on part-time throughout his leave 'to maintain my connection to the portfolio.' For Patrik, the foreman who did not trust himself to look after both his infant daughter and toddler grandson, concern about losing his position if he

transgressed against the breadwinner norm also contributed to his decision to take no leave at all. Patrik's case was striking as his wife Paulína, an experienced salesclerk, was perhaps the most determined to quickly return to paid work of all the mothers I spoke to. Paulína was the oldest mother I talked to and had complied with the norm of threeness with her three older children. With her youngest child, age and child-rearing experience allowed her to transgress against the norm and start part-time work three months after giving birth. However, juggling her job and childcare was becoming increasingly difficult and, as Patrik was reluctant to take leave, it was more and more likely that Paulína would have to step back from her position. Explaining his decision, Patrik distinguished between the formal institution that allowed him to take leave – and the informal one stopping him:

‘The law says the employer must provide the position back to me, but I’m not sure that would really be the case. I wasn’t quite sure. If I left, they would have to replace me, right? (...) The law says one thing, but reality may be somewhere else?’

In the inegalitarian Slovak context, the generous daddy quota was not enough to bring Patrik to take leave, as his response to the policy was moderated both by his gendered identity and the persisting norm of threeness. Patrik's case illustrates that for his behavior to change in response to the new policy, multiple additional dimensions of the gender structure would have to come into alignment.

2.6 Discussion & Conclusion

Francine Deutsch's (2007) call for a focus on undoing gender has drawn a generation of academics to investigate situations where interactions become less gendered. Among those who heeded the call were many researchers interested in understanding the effects of policies aimed at reducing gender equality like daddy quotas. In this paper, I build on Deutsch's approach, but argue for its extension. Combining undoing gender with Barbara Risman's (1998, 2004, 2009) structural conceptualization of gender, I argue that researchers' focus should be broadened to investigate unstructuring gender – whether and when gendered difference is being reduced not just in gendered interactions, but across the different mechanisms that together form the gender structure and structure individual behavior. Using this lens to study the 2011 Slovak leave policy for fathers, I find that while the daddy quota has contributed to undoing gender by enabling notable change in parents' interactional patterns of leave-division, to date it has done less to unstructure gender – there were only moderate signs of change to parents' identities and the gendered norm of threeness perceived by the parents who participated in my study seemed even less affected by the policy.

At the same time, the gender structure framework suggests further change may yet follow. Understanding gender as a structure means understanding gender not only as context-dependent and interconnected but also as dynamic:

‘when one part changes, it can set off a chain reaction like a game of dominoes. There is a dynamic recursive causality between individual selves, interactional expectations, cultural ideology, and organizational structure. Change one part, and get ready to see that every aspect follows, although not in any predetermined direction or speed’, argues Risman (2016, p. 210).

The framework predicts not only that the transformation of interactional patterns may continue, but also that more change of norms and identities may gradually follow – in response to the changes in interactional patterns already observed as well as their potential future development. However, data on fathers’ benefit uptake after the end of my data collection provides little ground for such optimism without further efforts to address the various elements of the gender structure constraining a more egalitarian division of parental leave and caring labor: while fathers’ leave-taking grew steadily until 2019 (Dančíková, 2020), it fell in the first year of the pandemic and hasn’t recovered since (Horváthová and Salamonová, 2022). The external shock of the pandemic with the associated insecurity cannot be discounted as a major factor moderating fathers’ leave-taking during this time. But nor can the interpretation that Risman’s dominoes got – at least temporarily – stuck: egalitarian parents ready to make use of the new benefit may have “run out”, and the policy hasn’t spurred a wide change in individual identities of further parents or a transformation of gendered norms. It might be too early to say which of the above is the case. Oriel Sullivan and her colleagues (2018) have theorized that transformation of the gender structure can span a generation – and to fully understand the effects of the Slovak daddy quota in the long-run, the case should be revisited in several years.

In the meantime, the multiple dimensions of the gender structure will continue moderating parents’ response to the new policy and so limiting its effectiveness. This includes parents’ pre-existing gendered identities and inegalitarian gender norms, but also the persisting unequal pattern of leave division competing with the emerging more egalitarian one. Irrespective of potential future effects of the policy, these findings suggest that the variety and complexity of the persisting dimensions of the gender structure – and whether they could be more effectively transformed by policy – require more attention from academics and policymakers. After all, most policymakers design and implement policies hoping to see their effects more or less immediately, not in a generation.

It may be that within leave policy research we have seen more evidence of change to interactional patterns than to norms and identities because researchers have spent more time looking for them. However, two more explanations warrant consideration. First, we may see more change to gendered behavior than to gendered norms and identities because it is easier to both change – and detect change – of the former than the latter. Detecting change to behavioral patterns may indeed be easier compared to change to identities or norms. But my findings notwithstanding, we have too little evidence to conclude that behavior *is* easier to change. While researchers have documented changes to fathers' identities following their leave from paid work, more research is needed to establish whether leave policies have also resulted in changes in identities before fathers take leave and so helped facilitate fathers' leave-taking. Similarly, research should attempt to establish whether cases exist where daddy quotas have contributed to a shift in gender norms. It is also not just empirical evidence that is lacking: within family policy research, we have a limited understanding of *how* identities and norms may change with policy reform. We need more of both theorizing and theory testing.

And second, more change to interactional patterns may have occurred because policies have been designed with this intention. This is understandable. In some contexts, even efforts to allow individuals to align their gender-unequal behavior with their more egalitarian attitudes are contentious and it is considerably more controversial for policymakers to set out to change prevalent gendered norms or individuals' gendered identities. However, acknowledging that for policy to be effective, policymakers must think about changing more than just behavior is both crucial – and not entirely new. Jenny Chanfreau (2019) recently reminded us of Ron Lesthaeghe and Camille Vanderhoeft's (2001) framework, which argues that policy proposals should ensure that individuals are *ready, willing, and able* to make use of policy. Applied to daddy quotas, this means policymakers should not only enable fathers to take leave by making them eligible for the policy and make sure fathers are ready, in that leave-taking is affordable due to generous benefits. Policymakers should also focus on ensuring that fathers are willing to take leave, in that leave-taking is socially and morally acceptable. Combined with a structural understanding of gender, in the Slovak case, this means policymakers should explicitly strive to overcome constraints individuals might face in the form of gendered norms and identities.

3 Paper II: Why Gendered Norms Do Not “Fade Away”: The Case of the Slovak Daddy Quota

Abstract

While prevalent societal gendered norms have been found to constrain fathers’ uptake of *daddy quotas*, emerging evidence shows policy may help transform norms and scholars have suggested that such change may happen due to normative power or normative messages of policy. However, we still do not understand when such normative transformation happens. To contribute to filling this gap, I draw on insights from institutional scholarship that suggest that policy may also influence behavior indirectly, through recursive effects in shaping norms, but also that such effects may depend on the extent to which the normative message of policy is congruent with, and how it interacts with the gendered context the policy is introduced into. To illustrate my argument, I investigate the case of the Slovak daddy quota, introduced in 2010. Granting fathers six months of well-remunerated non-transferable benefits, the policy has “best practice” characteristics and suggests potential for normative transformation. However, it was introduced into a context characterized by inegalitarian norms on the division of leaves. I explore why normative transformation may *not* follow policy reform quickly or uniformly and by analyzing the normative messages associated with the policy find that, although its “best practice” characteristics communicated an egalitarian normative message, the framing of the daddy quota in policy debates was dominated by a contradictory normative message grounded in pre-existing norms and so militated against transformation.

Key words: daddy quotas, normative change, gendered context

3.1 Introduction

Academics and policymakers have been increasingly turning to daddy quotas as a solution to ongoing inequalities in the division of leave times by mothers and fathers.³⁰ Daddy quotas are expected to enable and motivate change in fathers’ behavior, especially when they conform to “best practice” characteristics – are non-transferable to mothers and well-remunerated. However, though daddy quotas have become academic “hot topics” (Doucet and McKay, 2020), empirical research has shown that even such policies are far from a “magic solution” (ibid.) to the gendered inequality in leave division, as fathers’ uptake has varied within and across contexts (Koslowski et al., 2022).

In response, family policy researchers have been working to identify factors that limit the effectiveness of daddy quotas. Societal gendered norms on the division of labor have been identified as a key constraining factor (Lott and Klenner, 2018; Marynissen et al., 2019; Mussino et al., 2019),

³⁰ At the same time, daddy quotas have been investigated for their potential links to a range of other concerns, including women’s position in the labor market (Haas and Rostgaard, 2011), increased tax revenue (Birkett and Forbes, 2019), children’s rights (Brandth and Kvande, 2009) and fathers’ rights (Ellingsaeter, 2012), as well as a concern about low fertility rates, which have been linked to gendered inequality in the division of labor (McDonald, 2006; Lee, 2022a).

suggesting that when a daddy quota is introduced into an inegalitarian context, norms on parents' leave-taking may have to change if the policy is to succeed in changing parents' behavior.

At the same time, emerging empirical evidence shows that such norms *may* change *in response* to policy reform (Saxonberg, 2014; Bergqvist and Saxonberg, 2017). However, my interview-based research on the Slovak daddy quota suggested that, although it led to noticeable changes in fathers' behavior and parents' division of leave with eight years from its introduction, gendered norms on parents' division of leave remained largely unchanged at this time and continued affecting parents' decision-making (see Paper I). Theoretical understanding of such different developments – why daddy quotas may or may not affect normative transformation – is still underdeveloped and presents a gap to which I respond in this paper.

With their “best practice” characteristics, daddy quotas have been designed to motivate a change in fathers' behavior (Browne, 2013): fathers have been expected to respond to the material aspects of policy design. However, various family policy researchers have suggested that policies also have normative aspects – they have normative power (Gheaus and Robeyns, 2011; Browne, 2013) or communicate normative messages (Grönlund and Oun, 2010) that can contribute to changes in norms. Others have specified that policies may ‘influence beliefs about what is possible, desirable, and normal’ (Soss und Schram, 2007, p. 113). Building on these insights, I find it plausible that while policy may enable and motivate changes in behavior, normative messages associated with policy may also change or reinforce individuals' understanding of the appropriate division of leave – in other words, change or reinforce their individual attitudes. And, as individuals experience this attitudinal change in themselves and observe it in others, a new group norm is established – understood here as an unwritten societal rule on how one ought to behave – enabling additional behavioral change.

However, drawing on insights from feminist institutional scholarship, I argue that – policy design notwithstanding – whether a daddy quota will have such normative power may depend on the context it is implemented in, in particular on the pre-existing gendered norms. Georgina Waylen (2014, p. 220) posits that new formal rules, like policies, may either be counteracted by ‘the continuation of pre-existing norms (...)’ or result in the development of new ones – and outcomes of the interplay between policies and norms vary with context. In other words, a “best practice” daddy quota may communicate an egalitarian normative message, however, if introduced into a context characterized by pre-existing inegalitarian norms, these norms may counteract the egalitarian message of the policy.

To illustrate my argument and investigate why normative change may not happen in response to policy reform, I focus on a 2010 Slovak leave policy for fathers, an instructive case for two reasons.

First, the policy ticks many of the “best practice” boxes of policy design for daddy quotas: fathers are entitled to six months of leave with benefits, not transferable to mothers, with a high wage-replacement rate. This combination of characteristics makes it perhaps the most generous of its kind globally, a standout even when compared to leaders of egalitarian leave policy like Sweden or Iceland which grant fathers shorter periods of well-paid leave (Duvander and Löfgren, 2023; Arnalds et al., 2023). These “best practice” features could be expected to have considerable normative power and so transform attitudes, norms, and behavior. And yet, uptake by fathers remained limited compared to other countries that have introduced daddy quotas: less than a quarter of eligible fathers were projected to make use of the daddy quota in 2019, eight years after the reform came into force (Dančíková, 2020).³¹ By contrast, more than a third of fathers had taken the German daddy quota seven years after its introduction (Reimer, 2020) and in Norway, almost nine in ten fathers had (Lappegard, 2008).

Second, unlike in Nordic countries, the focus of the largest body of research on leave policy for fathers, the Slovak policy was introduced into a context characterized by an entrenched inegalitarian gendered norm – *the norm of threeness* (Saxonberg, 2014). While full-time paid work is expected of women for most of their adult lives, the norm of threeness mandates children under three should stay in their mothers’ care. Moreover, eight years after the policy introduction, parents interviewed for this project still perceived the pre-existing norm as widespread and affecting their decision-making regarding their leave division (see Paper I). And though the sample of parents I interviewed was small and the time elapsed since the reform may be too short to draw strong conclusions about normative transformation in the long run, the combination of the “best practice” characteristics and perceived persistence of the norm of threeness presents an opportunity to explore why norms may or may not change in response to policy.

My aims in this paper are twofold. First, I interrogate the idea that policy has normative power and can drive or block change through normative messaging – however, that it is important to pay attention not only to the normative messages communicated by the policy itself, but also to the interplay of new policy with pre-existing norms. And second, I specifically explore the normative power of the Slovak daddy quota, answering the following research question: what are the normative messages communicated by the “best practice” policy characteristics and in the policy framing adopted by policymakers and amplified by the media?

I proceed by setting out my conceptual framework, in which I theorize a link between policy reform, the gendered context and normative transformation. Then I set the scene and explain why the Slovak

³¹ Based on data for the first six months of the year, the most recent data available at the time of my analysis.

case is a good fit for my exploration. Next, I briefly introduce my analytical approach – a frame analysis of normative messages communicated by the policy’s “best practice” characteristics and in public debates associated with the policy. In my findings, I demonstrate that, while the policy’s “best practice” characteristics communicated a normative message that cast fathers as carers, the framing that dominated policy debates emphasized fathers’ role as economic providers with a normative message that was both grounded in and reinforcing of the pre-existing gendered norms related to the division of leave rather than challenging them. I conclude by arguing that if a policy is to become an effective tool of normative change – and by extension, behavioral change – both “best practice” policy design incentivizing daddy quota uptake and the degree of consistency of normative messaging with such “best practice” must be taken into account.

3.2 Conceptual Framework: Theorizing the Relationship between Policy, Context and Normative Change

Though both academics and policymakers have greeted daddy quotas with much optimism as a means to reduce inequality in the gendered division of labor, the policies have not always lived up to their promise. In response, gendered norms on the division of labor have been theorized as a key factor constraining leave uptake by fathers (Lott and Klenner, 2018; Marynissen et al., 2019; Mussino et al., 2019). Research has emphasized the role of gendered ideal parent norms (Lott and Klenner, 2018), which cast mothers as primary carers and fathers as breadwinners who are expected to provide for their families economically by continuously working for pay.

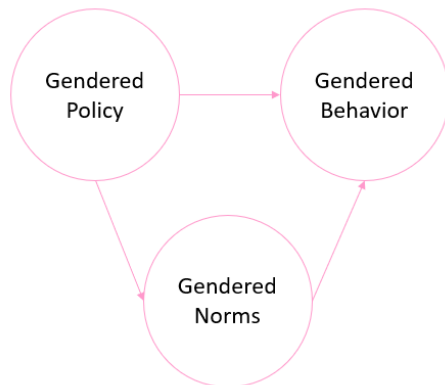
At the same time, a smaller body of research has suggested that policy may change such norms. Comparing Sweden and Norway, Bergqvist and Saxonberg (2017) found different national ideals of care have developed, mirroring policy differences in the two countries. Similarly, Saxonberg (2014) argues the inegalitarian norm of threeness, which mandates prolonged leave-taking for mothers in Slovakia, developed in reaction to the policy of long leaves for mothers which was introduced by the pre-1989 communist regime. However, an understanding of when such normative change happens is still insufficient.

3.2.1 Behavioral and attitudinal mechanisms of normative change

Feminist scholars have long argued that gendered norms are dynamic and feminist institutional scholars in particular have suggested that norms may change in response to policy reform, which might strengthen or create additional support for its use, and so aid and amplify the behavioral change that the policy promotes (see Figure 3.1 below). In other words, norms may function as a

policy feedback mechanism (Ellingsæter et al., 2017), where policy creates ‘normative feedback’, by providing individuals ‘with a sense, not only of what their material interests are, (...) but also the desirable state of affairs’ (Svallfors, 2010, p. 2010).

Figure 3.1: Policy Reform, Behavioral and Normative Change



Feminist institutional scholars have also understood norms as informal institutions that structure the behavior of the public (Waylen, 2017) – in other words unwritten rules that dictate how one *ought to* behave.³² Applied to family policy research, this conceptualization suggests norms can be general – for instance, that fathers are to provide for families financially and mothers are to care (Lott and Klenner, 2018) – but also quite specific – for example, that mothers are to stay at home with their children *for three years* (Saxonberg, 2014). The conceptualization also suggests that although some scholars have distinguished between the creation and the dispersion of informal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004),³³ a norm is in fact created when a new informal rule is dispersed, i.e., as it is recognized and learned by the public.

This understanding – that a norm is created in its dispersion – aligns with at least two mechanisms through which new policy may shape normative change, *behavioral* and *attitudinal* (see Figure 3.2 below). I first discuss the behavioral mechanism, before turning to the attitudinal – the focus of this paper. The first, behavioral mechanism, theorized by Juliet Allen (2021), suggests that a new leave policy for fathers enables and motivates change in fathers’ individual behavior and so in their division of leave-time with mothers. As a growing number of fathers gradually enact and observe these

³² Both family policy research (Lott and Klenner, 2018; Haas and Hwang, 2019) and institutional scholarship (see Waylen, 2014) has, at times, investigated the operation of norms within organizations, like firms or parliaments – entities typically associated with the interactional- or meso-level of analysis. This paper is grounded in Barbara Risman’s (1998) gender structure framework and accordingly understands norms as an institutional- or macro-level mechanism, shaping the individual behavior of the Slovak population.

³³ Helmke and Levitsky (2004) in fact argue that informal institutions are *not* cultural norms, however other institutionalists understand norms as a subcategory of institutions (Waylen, 2017).

individual behavioral changes, a new group norm is recognized.³⁴ Accordingly, it should suffice to put in place a “best practice” daddy quota, which will enable and incentivize fathers to change their behavior and take leave – and as an increasing number do, gendered norms should follow suit and change too.

The theory behind this mechanism is underpinned by an assumption that if only a limited number of fathers had been taking leave, even if norms may have been at odds with fathers’ leave-taking, the behavior of those who hadn’t taken leave was predominantly constrained by the absence of motivating policy. But multi-level understandings of gender, which are increasingly accepted in literature (Chanfreau, 2019), suggest that such an understanding of fathers’ leave-taking behavior is incomplete. Barbara Risman’s (1998) framework of gender conceptualizes policy as only one of multiple interconnected parts of the gender structure that shapes human behavior. This conceptualization suggests that when other dimensions of the structure – societal gender norms or individuals’ gendered identities or attitudes – are opposed to fathers’ leave-taking, they are likely to constrain fathers’ behavioral response to egalitarian policy reform and so also limit normative change through the behavioral mechanism. This theorization is compelling particularly when the other dimensions of the gender structure are significantly misaligned with policy, entrenched and widespread: though some parents may not be deterred from making behavioral choices at odds with nonegalitarian norms, such egalitarian parents may “run out” (Paper I) and their numbers may not be sufficient (or confined to a too small number of population subgroups, like white, middle class, educated parents) for a new norm to materialize.

Of course, in some contexts, transformation of norms and attitudes into more egalitarian ones may precede the introduction of egalitarian policy. In such cases egalitarian policy reform will merely bring the various dimensions of the structure into alignment and large-scale behavioral change may happen virtually overnight, as it did when the Swedish daddy quota was introduced (Doucet and Duvander, 2022). However, in contexts like Slovakia, widespread inegalitarian pre-existing norms and attitudes may be expected to stand in the way of quick and wide uptake and consequently, in the way of normative transformation through behavioral change. Indeed, interviews conducted for my PhD project confirmed that fathers’ leave-taking was affected by the pre-existing inegalitarian norms and attitudes which were misaligned with fathers’ leave-taking (see Paper I) and therefore, the uptake of the Slovak daddy quota has been limited. By 2019, eight years after the policy came into force, 23.2% of fathers as a proportion of the number of children born during the same period were

³⁴ While Allen focuses on the relationship between behavior and group norms, others have considered the link between behavior change and changes in individual attitudes or individual identities (Rehel, 2013; Brandth and Kvande, 2016; Beglaubter, 2017).

projected to take leave (Dančíková, 2020),³⁵ compared to 34% of fathers in Germany (Reimer, 2020) and 85% in Norway (Lappegard, 2008) at similar points in time after each country had introduced their own daddy quotas.

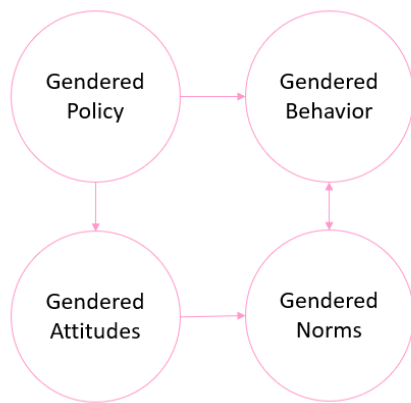
Drawing from this, I argue that a second, attitudinal mechanism – which forms the conceptual focus of this paper – may have more potential in settings where the gender structure is significantly misaligned with fathers' leave-taking. Researchers have hinted at inherent normative qualities of policies that can affect societal-level gender norms more directly through the policy's cultural script (Kaufland and Grönlund, 2021), symbolic messages (Gangl and Ziefle, 2015), normative connotations (Schober and Büchau, 2022), normative power (Gheaus and Robeyns, 2011; Browne, 2013) or normative messages (Grönlund and Öun, 2010). While these contributions do not explain how such normative power of normative messages may work, institutional scholars Joe Soss and Sanford Schram (2007) argue that policies may affect individual views on what is considered *right*. These insights suggest that normative messages expressed by and linked to policy,³⁶ may shift individuals' personal *attitudes* towards the appropriate gendered division of leave, and as they experience this shift in themselves – and became aware of a shift in others by interacting with them – a new group norm is established.³⁷ For a new gender norm to materialize, a sufficiently high number of individuals may have to change their attitudes, in other words a threshold or a tipping point may have to be reached (institutionalists speak of *tipping models* (see Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). In addition, changes to individual attitudes may also lead to more fathers taking leave and so contribute to normative transformation through the behavioral mechanism at the same time.

³⁵ Based on data for the first six months of the year.

³⁶ Some researchers have linked the normative power of policy to default policies – which require fathers to take administrative steps if they don't wish to use them and so make opting out costlier (Gheaus and Robeyns, 2011; Browne 2013). However, such power has also been linked to policies more generally (Grönlund and Öun, 2010).

³⁷ Daddy quota literature has explored changes to fathers' gendered identities in response to policy (Brandth and Kvande, 2016; Beglaubter, 2017). However, such changes were identified *following* fathers' leave-taking, rather than directly in response to the policy and so *preceding* fathers' taking leave. This suggests that the gendered identities or attitudes of fathers in these studies were relatively egalitarian to begin with, or at least not sufficiently inegalitarian to prevent them from taking leave in the first place.

Figure 3.2: Behavioral and Attitudinal Mechanisms of Normative Change in Response to Policy Reform



3.2.2 Normative change and the pre-existing context

However, I argue that as with the behavioral mechanisms, pre-existing context may also constrain normative change through the attitudinal mechanism. Bergqvist and Saxonberg’s (2017) theorization of the link between daddy quotas and normative change is situated in Nordic countries, in contexts that are presumably already quite egalitarian. Similarly, in their quantitative multi-country study, Grönlund and Öun (2010) assume normative effects of policies within relatively normatively aligned contexts: for example, an egalitarian policy within an egalitarian context is expected to have an egalitarian norm-reinforcing effect (raising questions about reverse causality). In these theorizations, policies broadly reflect the contexts they are embedded in, which may help explain why context remains in the background of the respective analyses. But context becomes harder to set aside when we consider transplanting a Nordic-style daddy quota into a non-Nordic context like Slovakia, with a gender structure less supportive of fathers’ leave-taking.

Feminist institutional scholarship warns that it is often assumed that informal institutions, like norms, will simply “fade away” when formal institutions, like policies, are established (Waylen, 2014, p. 213). In fact, while new formal rules may result in the development of new informal institutions, they may also be counteracted by ‘the continuation of pre-existing norms (...)’ and the outcome varies with context (Georgina Waylen, 2014, p. 220). It seems plausible that normative change in response to policy reform is more likely when the normative messaging associated with new policy is largely congruent with pre-existing norms – when normative adjustment is required rather than normative transformation. For example, when a daddy quota is extended from two months to three in a context where two months of fathers’ leave-taking is already the norm, an adjusted new norm may develop to reflect the new, longer quota. By contrast, normative change may be less likely when there are greater gaps between new policy and pre-existing context – when a similar, three-month (or six-month, as in the Slovak case) quota is transplanted into a setting where the norm dictates solely

mothers' leave-taking. Family policies tend to be linked to cultural struggles (Ellingsæter, 2012), controversial and so widely debated (Knijn and Ostner (2008) in Lewis and Campbell (2008)). In such debates, pre-existing norms may be invoked and the greater the difference between the normative messaging grounded in old norms and the messages communicated by new policy, the less likely it is that the old will be transformed.

Following this logic, to understand whether policy will contribute to normative change via attitudinal change, it is important to pay attention not only to the normative messages communicated by the policy itself, but also to the interplay of new policy with pre-existing norms.

3.3 Setting the Scene: The Slovak Daddy Quota and its Gendered Context

The Slovak daddy quota consists of two elements: a monetary benefit entitlement and a right to a period of leave from paid work. Specifically, in terms of benefits, the 2010 policy reform gave fathers the right to six months of wage-related non-transferable “maternity benefits”, on par with mothers' pre-existing right to six months of post-birth benefits.³⁸ Though while mothers could make use of their benefits in the six months directly following giving birth, fathers' benefits could be used anytime until their child reached the age of three. Amending legislation to grant fathers access to already existing maternity benefits rather than introducing specific paternity benefits is likely a by-product of the original aim of the policy: although it is now widely known as “maternity leave for fathers”, the original parliamentary debates suggest the policy was intended to facilitate leave-taking only by adoptive – rather than all fathers – and introduced along with similar legislation for adoptive mothers to facilitate bonding with their newly adoptive children (NRSRb, 2010).³⁹ The policy's applicability to all fathers with a history of “*illness insurance*” contributions was negotiated only in the implementation phase of the policy.⁴⁰

In terms of a right to leave, fathers' newly introduced “maternity benefits” could be combined with parental leave. Fathers had been entitled to parental leave since the 1990s, however, before the

³⁸ In addition, mothers were entitled to six weeks of pre-birth benefits.

³⁹ Jozef Mihál, the responsible minister at the time when the policy was passed and one of its authors, contradicted this view in 2017. Mihál claimed that the policy had been intended for all fathers from the start, but such plans were kept quiet to prevent pushback from policymakers who may have been concerned about the financial consequences of such a new, expensive benefit for the state budget (Onuferová, 2017). However, the intention to introduce leave benefits for all fathers was denied by Mihál's party colleague Natália Blahová, member of parliament and another author of the policy. Blahová confirmed the policy was introduced to facilitate time with children for adoptive fathers only (Blahová, direct communication). Her account is also supported by the simultaneous introduction of leave and benefits for adoptive mothers.

⁴⁰ “Illness insurance” contributions are compulsory for all employed fathers, as well as for self-employed fathers with income above a minimum threshold (€6,798 in 2023). Contributions can also be paid voluntarily.

2010 reform, they could only combine it with a low flat-rate parental allowance and so rarely made use of it. The reform did not introduce new, separate paternity leave. By contrast, mothers could make use of their maternity benefits while taking designated maternity leave.

When the maternity benefit was first extended to fathers, it amounted to 60% of their previous income. By 2017, benefits were raised to 75% of each parent's previous earnings. However, the benefits are not subject to taxation, which means that for most eligible fathers they amount to their full net income – the only exception is a small proportion of fathers who earn more than the generous benefit cap (fewer than 10%).⁴¹ The high, tax-free wage-replacement rate, combined with a high benefit cap, mean that fathers' leave-taking is very affordable for Slovak couples. The joint income of the vast majority of couples increases when fathers stay at home and draw on their benefits and mothers return to work. The high-remuneration, non-transferability and length of the Slovak benefit make the policy one of the most generous of its kind globally, in line with scholars' and policymakers' "best practice" recommendations (Gornick and Meyers, 2008; Dearing, 2016; OECD, 2016a). By comparison, countries recognized as leaders in egalitarian leave policy typically grant fathers shorter quotas, for example, fathers in Iceland and Sweden are entitled to 20 weeks⁴² of well-paid non-transferable benefits (Arnalds et al., 2023; Duvander and Löfgren, 2023).

However, compared to Nordic countries – most often associated with leave policy for fathers and often understood as a blueprint for similar reforms in other countries – the Slovak daddy quota was introduced into a less egalitarian context, characterized by inegalitarian societal gender norms on the division of leaves, which could be expected to moderate fathers' behavioral response to the policy. Saxonberg (2014) argues that the division of leave time in Slovakia has been shaped by the norm of threeness – a post-socialist Central European version of the ideal parent norm – which mandates it is natural and right for women to stay at home to take care of their children until they reach the age of three and become eligible for kindergarten.⁴³

Saxonberg (2014) argues that the norm of threeness evolved in response to a mix of policies introduced by the pre-1989 Czechoslovak socialist regime. In the post-war period women's

⁴¹ As of April 2023, the benefit was capped at €1,851 monthly (Kollárová, 2023), the average wage in the first quarter of 2023 reached €1,327 (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2023).

⁴² 20 weeks of non-transferable parental leave in Iceland and two weeks of paternity and 18 weeks of non-transferable parental leave in Sweden.

⁴³ In the absence of survey data asking respondents specifically about their perception of prevalent gender norms, Saxonberg inferred the existence of the norm of threeness from data on prevalent individual gender-role attitudes. This is a less than ideal approach as, though closely interconnected, gendered attitudes and perceived gendered norms may differ. However, his analysis is also backed by interviews with experts, who confirm the pervasiveness of the norm. My own interviews with parents also confirmed a widespread familiarity with the norm as well as its frequent misalignment with parents' individual beliefs (see Paper I).

employment was supported by the government, both to “emancipate” women (Saxonberg, 2014) and secure enough workers for the growing economy (Pollert, 2003). But as the economy slowed and concerns about the poor quality of nurseries grew, an *extended maternity leave* was introduced alongside the already existing maternity leave. From 1970, two years of the extended maternity leave were available exclusively to women, which was largely in line with pre-existing gendered norms on the division of labor. Later the leave was extended to three years (Hašková and Klenner, 2010) and so contributed to the development of the norm of threeness. Although in 1991, the extended maternity leave was transformed into *parental leave* and made available to fathers, no further attempts were made to increase fathers’ uptake (Saxonberg, 2014). Parental leave coincided with a three-year *parental allowance*, which, although available to all parents irrespective of their previous or current employment, remained flat-rate and low. Moreover, though parental leave could be taken by both parents at the same time, the allowance could only be accessed by one parent at a time, making joint leave-taking financially challenging.

Accordingly, in line with the norm of threeness, the parental leave policy was overwhelmingly used by mothers. Around the time the new benefit for fathers was introduced, men took barely any time off work to look after children (Schulze and Gergoric, 2015), while almost all mothers in Slovakia took both maternity and long parental leaves (Miani and Hoorens, 2014), even if their length varied depending on income and education (Hidas and Horváthová, 2018). The uneven gendered division of leave time resulted in the lowest at-work rate of mothers of children aged 0-2 years in the OECD, at 8.85% well below the average of 39.8% (Adema et al., 2016). The low at-work rate of mothers was in contrast with women’s overall employment rates. In 2010, Slovak women’s employment rate was 52.3%, only a slightly lower proportion than the EU27 average at 57.3% (EIGE, 2023). But as most Slovak women work fulltime jobs, in line with the structure of the labor market characterized by few part-time jobs, their 2010 employment rate converted to full-time equivalents (FTE), 42.9%, in fact surpassed the European average of 38.4% (EIGE, 2023a). Mothers’ long leaves were also reflected in the difference in women’s and men’s employment rates: the 2010 FTE rate of Slovak men was 57.9%, considerably higher than that of women (ibid.). Due to the specific employment trajectories of Slovak mothers, Hašková and Klenner (2010) have argued the division of labor between men and women in Slovakia amounts to an *interrupted dual-earner model*, a specialized division of labor and responsibility with men’s paid work prioritized over women’s, who are expected to take long childcare-related leave, rather than a shared or overlapping allocation of paid and unpaid labor.

The model was also reflected in individual attitudes to gender roles that, more than elsewhere in the EU, cast fathers as career-prioritizing breadwinners, unsuited for full-time care of children and mothers as full-time workers, but also designated carers and leave-takers. People in only two EU

countries reported less egalitarian views regarding men's role as breadwinners (EC, 2017a). And though relatively few Slovaks thought that families suffer when mothers have full-time jobs (EC, 2014), people in only six EU countries were more likely to believe that women's most important role is to take care of the home and family (EC, 2017a). This paradox can be better understood when attitudes specifically to the division of leaves are considered. Three in five Slovaks believed that paid leave should be taken entirely by the mother, even if both parents were in a similar work situation, more than anywhere else in the OECD (ISSP, 2012 in OECD, 2016b). Similarly, half of Slovaks were opposed to men mainly looking after children and the home, the third highest share in the EU (EC, 2009). Slovaks were also the most likely in the EU to believe that fathers must put their careers ahead of looking after their young children (EC, 2014). Though such gendered attitudes were not uniform, and some Slovaks held more egalitarian attitudes, their numbers did not show great promise for fathers' immediate leave uptake once non-transferable well-remunerated benefits were introduced – only one in 20 fathers thought that leaves should be split equally by mothers and fathers (ISSP, 2012 in OECD, 2016b).

3.4 Data and Analytical Approach

Methodologically, my approach drew on *critical frame analysis* (Lombardo and Meier 2008). Rather than approaching policy as merely a response to an objective problem, frame analysis builds on an understanding that actors identify both problems and solutions to these problems with the help of *framing* or *policy frames*. A policy frame is an 'organizing principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included' (Verloo, 2005 in Lombardo and Meier, 2008, p. 105). Hence, a single issue can be represented – or framed – differently, with different interpretations of the problem that is being diagnosed and the solution that is being prescribed (Lombardo and Meier, 2008). For instance, in their analysis of EU documents relating to family policy, Lombardo and Meier (2008) identify two competing frames – 'sharing tasks between the sexes' and 'women reconciling work and family' – implying two different sets of problems diagnosed and solutions proposed by EU policy. Moreover, as frames identify both fault and remedy and so communicate how things (are not and) ought to be, they are inherently normative (Dombos et al., 2012) and well suited to my focus on normative messages associated with policy.

To explore why normative transformation may not materialize in response to policy reform, I explored the framing of the Slovak daddy quota, paying attention to normative messages communicated about the 'desirable state of affairs' (Svallfors, 2010, p. 2010) – in other words, messages about what the daddy quota is for and how it ought to be used. Specifically, I first

considered the problems and solutions suggested by the policy design, the “best practice” characteristics of the policy as communicated by relevant legislation (see Table 7.1 in the Appendix). I analyzed what the stipulations suggest about who should use this instrument (fathers or others), in what way and for what purpose (to look after children, spend time with them or to provide for the family financially), what this suggests about the problem the policy is meant to respond to (unequal division of leave and labor by mothers and fathers, mothers’ needs, including their position in the labor market, fathers or children’s rights) and what this implies about the role of fathers and the ideal gendered division of leaves and labor (are fathers portrayed as carers or economic providers, is fathers’ care represented as of equal value and importance as mothers’ care) – for a list of questions that guided my analysis, see also Table 7.2 in the Appendix.

Using a similar logic, I then turned to the framing that key political actors used in policy debates on the new quota, as reported in media coverage, as well as the framing adopted and amplified by the media, both of which I illustrate in my analysis with representative quotes. As the Slovak policy was originally intended for adoptive fathers only and discussed in parliamentary debates accordingly, I focused on media coverage of the implementation phase of the policy process, when the quota’s applicability to all fathers was negotiated in publications, administrative action, lawsuits, court decisions and legislative amendments. Mimicking how the Slovak population might access information on the new policy, I carried out a search of media coverage freely accessible online, including web versions of broadsheets, tabloids, television and radio broadcasts (for a list of searched media outlets and analyzed documents, see Tables 7.3 and 7.1 in the Appendix). I collected media output on the daddy quota from the beginning of my PhD project, culminating in a final round of online searching in August 2023. I searched for references to parental leave, paternity leave and “maternity leave for fathers” – all terms used to refer to the Slovak daddy quota. To ensure I gathered comprehensive material, I specifically sought out reports on the multiple, often contentious implementation steps, which repeatedly provided an opportunity for renewed media attention to the policy and included all media coverage I found (14 pieces of media coverage, with an additional nine published after the end of my period of analysis ended (see below)). My analysis was bookended by the passing of the policy in 2010 at one end and at the other end, 2019, when, during my fieldwork for this project, parents reported on the persistence of the gendered norm of threeness (see Paper I). My analysis of the data was initially informed by literature on similar policies in other contexts – the problems identified, and solutions suggested (see e.g., Brandth and Kvande (2009), Haas and Rostgaard (2011), Ellingsaeter (2012, 2021), Birkett and Forbes (2019), Lee (2022a)). However, the two key frames identified in the Slovak debates (*care* and *economic provision*) emerged inductively, from my engagement with the data, to which I turn next.

3.5 Analysis: The Normative Power of the Slovak Daddy Quota

My analysis shows the Slovak daddy quota has been framed as a tool to support good fathering, however, two contradicting approaches to good fathering have been invoked with different implications for the norms on and practice of gendered division of leaves and labor. First, the policy has been framed in terms of *care*, signaling that good fathers should take leave from paid work to look after their children. A second, conflicting frame portrayed the policy primarily in terms of *economic provision*, suggesting that good fathers could use the maternity benefit associated with the daddy quota to help them provide for their families financially.

3.5.1 Normative messaging in “best practice” policy characteristics

With the 2010 reform, fathers in Slovakia gained the right to six months of well-remunerated maternity benefits before their child reaches the age of three, on par with the six months of post-birth maternity benefits available to mothers (for the original legislation, see Zákon č. 311/2001 Z. z. Zákonník práce). Before the reform, the benefit had been available to mothers and widely used by them to replace their income during maternity leave. Extending the benefit to fathers suggested that fathers’ new entitlement should be used by them to take leave to look after children on a scale similar to that of mothers.

In mirroring the mothers’ maternity benefit, the “best practice” characteristics of fathers’ new entitlement implicitly signals that the problem addressed by the reform is the longstanding gender-unequal pattern of leave division by Slovak parents. The new daddy quota not only enables, but encourages fathers to take leave from their role of economic providers and become carers. By closing the gap between mothers’ and fathers’ rights to benefits, the legislation takes steps towards framing fathers as carers on par with mothers. The care framing is implicit and additional elements of policy design weaken it by hinting at a continuing privileging of mothers’ care over care provided by fathers, including the legal formulation that grants fathers’ the right to “maternity benefits” and “parental leave” rather than dedicated “paternity benefits” and “paternity leave”. The legal language notwithstanding, extending the benefit to fathers implies a new normative message in Slovak family policy – that fathers ought to be carers on par with mothers and should stay at home with children, at least for the period of six months.

3.5.2 Normative messages in policy debates

However, debates in the implementation phase of the policy also offered an alternative framing. Perhaps due to the unintentional applicability of the policy to all fathers, I have found no evidence of

official campaigns advertising the policy in the period directly following its introduction.⁴⁴ Fathers' new entitlement increasingly entered public discourse with a delay in 2016, after a book, blog posts and media appearances by Jozef Mihál, one of the authors of the policy and Minister of Labor, Social Affairs and Family at the time it was passed. But while drawing attention to the recently introduced benefit entitlement for fathers, the ex-minister also emphasized an additional feature of the policy: an interpretation of the legislation that suggested parents were allowed to work for pay while receiving maternity benefits – if they were self-employed, working on a new contract or for a new employer (Mihál, 2017). The interpretation was based on a legislative clause that linked parents' eligibility for maternity benefits to an interruption of income from their pre-leave work contracts and suggested that the legislation did not preclude parents from drawing on benefits if working based on new contracts.

In principle, the paid-work-while-on-benefits option applied to mothers and fathers equally and may have been understood as supportive of a less gendered division of leaves and paid and unpaid labor. It may have been interpreted as inviting a redistribution of paid and unpaid work by enabling fathers to draw on benefits combined with (part-time) leave-taking, without fully giving up paid work, and at the same time inviting mothers to return to paid work part-time while continuing to draw on their maternity benefits. In practice, the interpretation was rarely discussed in connection with mothers, instead it focused on fathers and emphasized the new daddy quota as an opportunity to increase fathers' income. For example, in one of the earliest media mentions of the daddy quota I identified, a popular on-line tabloid, *topky.sk*, presented the benefit as a way to “trick” the system and gain access to additional income: ‘Slovak fathers discovered a trick, which can help their families. Many started using it after it was publicized by former minister Jozef Mihál. Read how to access thousands of euros’ (*topky.sk*, 2016). The news article was directly linked to Mihál's publicity activities and though it did not champion the paid-work-on-leave-option, nor did it mention of the daddy quota as a means to facilitate fathers' time with children or to achieve a more egalitarian division of leave. Instead, it centered the policy as a means for fathers ‘to help their families out’ (*ibid.*). This media representation did not imply that the problem addressed was inequality in the gendered division of labor. Rather, it gestured at the problem of financial need of families with young children and suggested that the problem could now be better addressed by fathers' drawing on their income-

⁴⁴ In itself, the lack of intention to extend the benefit to all fathers conveys a normative message – that fathers are generally not considered to be carers on par with mothers. However, the original connection of the policy to adoptive fathers went largely unnoticed by the media and, consequently, normative messaging related to the lack of intentionality remained absent from public debates.

related maternity benefit – for most families considerably higher than the pre-existing alternative – mothers’ use of the low, flat-rate parental allowance.

Similarly, *Denník N*, an influential broadsheet, emphasized fathers’ role as economic providers and brought the economic provision frame into starker relief by its explicit centering of the paid-work-while-on-benefits option. ‘Mihál encourages fathers to take maternity leave, it makes financial sense, too. Fathers can take a half-year maternity leave before their child is three, they can work at the same time, too (...),’ reads the headline (Onuferová, 2017). The piece also advised that ‘[the policy] is lucrative and the legal conditions are not restrictive. The father can work at the same time, or run a business easily, if he is a freelancer’ (ibid.). While the article recounted the thoughts of a father who was considering taking leave to ‘spend more time with the child, take a break from [paid] work and allow his better-earning wife to return to [paid] work’ (ibid.), such use of the policy was overshadowed by the accounts of *three* fathers who did take leave, but continued with paid work at the same time. Two of the three fathers conceded that without the paid-work-while-on-benefits option they would not have made use of the benefit. In contrast to the care frame implied by the “best practice” characteristics, the media coverage emphasized the financial dimensions of the policy, supporting an alternative, economic provision framing: good fathers could draw on the income-related maternity benefit and augment their families’ income, with their contribution amplified if they simultaneously continued with paid work. While the care frame implied the new policy was a response to the problem of gender-unequal division of leaves, the economic provision frame signaled a different problem was being responded to: the daddy quota was a solution to financial difficulties encountered by families with young children. While the provision of care by fathers was accommodated and alluded to, their role as providers was emphasized. The implied normative message was that fathers’ care was optional and secondary to the imperative that they provide for families financially.

Only as government expenditure grew with an increase in fathers’ benefit uptake (Dančíková, 2020), did the Social Insurance Agency (*Sociálna poisťovňa, SP*), responsible for administering the policy, take to questioning the economic provision frame. In 2016 and 2017, the SP started denying benefits to fathers assumed to be continuing with paid work to an extent that could prevent them from providing direct care to their children (*najmama.aktuality.sk*, 2018), suggesting a shift in discourse towards the care framing of the policy. The practice was grounded in a clause, originally present in the legislation, that linked the benefits to fathers’ care: for a father to claim his benefits, the mother was required to sign a declaration formally transferring the child into the father’s care.⁴⁵ Justifying its

⁴⁵ No similar declaration was required of fathers.

course of action in an article authored by SITA, one of Slovakia's two press agencies, and published by SME, a leading broadsheet, the SP argued the benefits were intended to compensate fathers' forgone income when stepping back from paid work to fulfil the policy's

'basic aim, that is to facilitate a father's care of his child. "The benefit should compensate the father's loss of income due to a shorter working time or change in his work in order to look after his child" (...) the father cannot provide proper care to his child if he has any income from work at the same time. (...) (SITA on sme.sk, 2019).

The agency also argued "that a third of the fathers [who had claimed the benefits] had a concurrent work contract and *the mother had not returned to work (...)*" (ibid., emphasis mine), suggesting that along with addressing a lack of fathers' care, the daddy quota was also intended to address mothers' unequal position in the labor market by facilitating their earlier return to paid work. However, the agency stopped short of elaborating on benefits expected from the use of daddy quotas in more detail.

The discourse on mothers in relation to the daddy quota was complicated by Robert Fico, Prime Minister and leader of the populist SMER-SD party (or PM, in 2016-2020), in a rare statement on the topic in the online tabloid, topky.sk: 'Our goal is that the husband/ partner spends some time with the mother of the child and at the same time, they divide the care of the child' (topky.sk, 2017). Fico implied that while fathers are meant to use the benefit to take leave and look after their children, mothers were not expected to return to work at the same time, rather their role as carers was retaining its primacy. The policy was represented as responding to the problem of fathers' lack of time with their children, but not mothers' prolonged time out of paid work or gendered inequality in the division of leave. This message was underlined by a discussion in the same article of the low parental allowance, typically used by mothers in conjunction with parental leave, after their six months of post-birth maternity benefits and leave run out. Though the parental leave and allowance were equally available to mothers and fathers, it was discussed in relation to mothers only:

'After the end of their maternity benefit, [mothers] are only entitled to parental allowance until their child reaches the age of three. (...) For most of the time spent looking after children, mothers only receive a laughable €213.2. (...) Many are forced to consider a premature return to work.' (ibid.)

Though supportive of fathers' leave-taking, the centering of mothers' care of children in the child's first three years both suggests the normative message of the article was grounded in the norm of threeness and contributed to its reproduction at the same time: it implied that while fathers should

take on the supporting role as the mother's helper or companion, mothers ought to retain their role as primary carers.

However, both the SP casting fathers as primary carers and the PM as companions to the primary carer remained in the background of media coverage which continued to be dominated by a focus on the economic provision framing of the daddy quota. In an article by TASR, one Slovakia's two press agencies, the SP argued its practice of denying fathers' benefit claims was aimed at preventing a small number of fathers from "abusing" the system, including a father about to start a prison term or soldiers deploying on overseas missions (teraz.sk, 2019). The SP's approach was criticized by key political actors. In the same article, SME RODINA, a right-leaning opposition party argued that denying benefits to fathers who continued with paid work would cause families financial hardship. Families would not only lose out on (the denied) maternity benefits, but also on the parental allowance that mothers would have otherwise been receiving but would have lost with fathers' applications for maternity benefits, as parents could not draw on both maternity benefits and parental allowance at the same time:

'The [party] argues that the SP has started denying fathers' maternity benefits, because they signed new contracts, even if only for part-time work or work from home. The most common reason is apparently that the father has not assumed the care of his child. "Many families with small children have ended up in a very dire financial situation as mothers do not draw on the parental allowance and fathers' incomes from part-time contracts are lower. Families are frustrated and cannot even fight for their rights anymore.'" (ibid.)

The position implied that fathers may use maternity benefits and continue with paid work at the same time, from home or away, part-time or full-time, in other words, without combining the benefits with leave. Fathers' responsibility for family income was prioritized and whether they made use of the benefits to look after their children was presented as secondary. The argument was underpinned by an assumption that mothers would stay at home rather than return to paid work while fathers made use of their benefits, and suggests that the party's position was grounded in gendered the norm of threeness.

The number of denied claims was small: in 2018, out of more than 13 thousand claimed benefits, less than 1% (103) had been denied, though as many as a third of fathers combined benefits with parallel income from paid work and the mothers of the children often remained out of paid work (SITA in sme.sk, 2019). However, sympathetic media coverage emphasized fathers' "legal right" to the benefits, irrespective of whether fathers took leave from paid work, as long as they signed a new work contract (najmama.aktuality.sk, 2018a, b, c). The reporting centered the stories of several

couples in which fathers worked full time, were consequently denied maternity benefits, but perceived the decisions as arbitrary and unfair (najmama.aktuality.sk, 2018c):

“Apparently I am not entitled to the maternity benefit as I haven’t assumed the care of my child, since I am continuing with paid work. I have appealed and will file a complaint with the [responsible] Ministry, too. I will consult a lawyer,” wrote Juraj, who also confirmed he had signed a new employment contract with a new employer, working a new job with shorter working hours – 38.75 hours a week.’

In line with this interpretation, a number of fathers took the SP to court over denied benefit claims; by 2021, 82 such lawsuits had been filed (SITA in sme.sk, 2019). The press coverage also confirmed such use of the benefit often hinged on mothers’ continued presence at home: “‘Since I am at home, our daughter would be with her mother,’” said one mother, whose husband’s benefit was denied after he started a new job with a different company, to explain that their daughter would be properly looked after (ibid.) Other mothers also stayed at home and justified their partners’ entitlement to maternity benefits by arguing that the fathers spent time with children after work, or took time off for doctor’s visits or when the mother had an engagement (najmama.aktuality.sk, 2018a, c). These reports suggested that while fathers were entitled to the benefits, they were not expected to combine the benefits with leave-taking and care of their children, instead, full-time care could continue to be provided by mothers. This interpretation and representation of the policy suggested that the purpose of the policy wasn’t facilitating fathers’ time with children, rather, the benefits were a means to augment family income, while the bulk of care would remain with mothers. The leave-sharing arrangements of these parents reflected the norm of threeness, and the media coverage contributed to its reproduction, with fathers represented as full-time providers and occasional or after-hour carers, and mothers as primary carers.

The economic provision framing received additional support in 2019 in debates related to a legislative amendment proposal aimed at delinking maternity benefits from care altogether, proposed by the ex-minister Jozef Mihál and his party colleague and member of parliament, Simona Petřík. The proposal drew on the existing three-year flat-rate parental allowance available to all parents irrespective of their income from paid work, including when care was provided by a third person, like grandparents or nurseries. This feature of the allowance was meant to motivate mothers on long parental leaves to return to paid work earlier – mothers’ earlier return to work was assumed more likely if they could retain the allowance at the same time. The proposed legislative amendment suggested similar conditions should apply to maternity benefits. Like the paid-work-while-on-benefits option, the proposed was overtly gender-neutral: formally, both mothers and fathers were

to have the right to their respective maternity benefit irrespective of their leave-taking. However, as with the paid-work-while-on-benefits option, the associated policy debates were linked to fathers' rather than mothers' continued paid work. For instance, Petrik claimed the amendment was drafted in response to 'hundreds of distressed fathers' who were facing uncertainty about being able to draw on benefits (TASR in sme.sk, 2019). A different news article read 'Mihál and Petrik put forward maternity benefit also for fathers with children in nurseries,' proposing that '(f)athers of children up to three years of age could consequently receive maternity benefits from the SP even alongside paid work,' (SITA on sme.sk, 2019). This representation suggested that when fathers drew on the benefits, they were not expected to stay at home, instead they could put their child in daycare. The caring role of mothers was implied in the coverage. Mihál explained that if the amendment passed,

'(c)are will be provided not only when the person receiving the benefit is looking after the child full-time, but also when another (...) person is helping, for example *the mother*, grandparents or (...) a nursery or kindergarten' argued Mihál (TASR on sme.sk, 2019, emphasis mine).

Consequently, though the amendment – the final major implementation measure within my period of observation – was unsuccessful, the associated coverage of public debates suggested fathers were to be allowed to combine their maternity benefits with paid work, while mothers' continued presence at home was hinted at. In doing so, the reporting both reflected and reproduced the established gendered norms on the division of leaves: while mothers were among those expected to provide hands-on care to children, fathers were to be able to receive benefits irrespective of care provision, leaving space for their continued paid work.

3.6 Discussion & Conclusion

Family policy scholars have identified gendered norms on the division of labor as a constraint on fathers' leave-taking (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011; Lee, 2022b), but have also found that leave policy can contribute to changes in such norms (Saxonberg, 2014; Bergqvist and Saxonberg, 2017). It has been suggested that such change may happen in response to normative power (Browne, 2013) or normative messages of policy (Grönlund and Öun, 2010). However, less has been done to understand when such normative change happens. In this paper, I draw on insights from institutionalist literature to argue that such normative power of policy may depend on the extent to which its messaging is congruent with and reinforces the pre-existing gendered context.

To illustrate this argument, I investigated the 2010 Slovak daddy quota – a policy with strong egalitarian features introduced into a context characterized by an inegalitarian gendered norm on

the division of leaves. I found that the “best practice” characteristics of the policy suggested a framing of the daddy quota in terms of accommodating fathers’ care, a frame supported by the responsible government agency, though weakened by designing the leave and benefits on a policy mix put in place for mothers. However, the debates associated with the policy were dominated by a competing frame which portrayed the daddy quota as a means for fathers to provide for their families financially. While the care frame signaled an egalitarian normative message that fathers ought to partake in care on an equal footing with mothers, the economic provision frame communicated a conflicting normative message that underlined fathers’ role as economic providers. This inegalitarian message reflected pre-existing gendered norms on the division of leaves which direct mothers towards long care-related absences from paid work and fathers towards continuing with paid work without interruptions. In doing so, the normative messaging associated with the policy was more conducive to reproducing, existing inegalitarian norms, albeit in a modified norm, than to transforming them.

The dominance of this message, bolstered by key actors’ struggles over the aims of the policy including attempts to disassociate the benefits from fathers’ leave-taking and care provision, contributes to explaining why, within my period of observation, the policy did not result in a decisive transformation of norms on the gendered division of leaves. The case suggests that policy with “best practice” characteristics may not be sufficient to secure normative transformation irrespective of the ways in which policy is implemented and debated within a specific context, as normative messaging associated with the policy may be informed by pre-existing gendered norms and so contribute to their perpetuation rather than transformation.

In the long run, the balance of normative messaging in policy discourse may keep evolving, as suggested by developments between mid-2019, when the period of analysis for this paper ended, and late 2023, when I write this conclusion. In 2020, the Ministry of Finance published a report on the Slovak daddy quota that emphasized the care frame: the report articulated benefits of father’s care and mothers’ earlier return to paid work (Dančíková, 2020), communicating the normative message that fathers should take on caring responsibilities on par with mothers. The report also proposed a legislative amendment to regulate parents’ paid work on maternity benefits by introducing part-time leave that would allow both mothers and fathers to continue with paid work part-time but would adjust their benefits to only cover time spent away from paid work (ibid.). The egalitarian normative messaging was echoed in subsequent media coverage (Gehrerová, 2020; Haniková, 2020; Žureková, 2020) and was also supported by early court decisions on the lawsuits filed by fathers who were denied benefits due to simultaneous paid work. The courts

overwhelmingly sided with the SP, deciding 17 cases in its favor, only one case had been decided for a father (Kollárová, 2021).

However, further actors also continued promoting the financial provision frame, aligned with pre-existing inegalitarian norms. In 2021, Peter Cmorej, MP for the liberal SaS party, proposed another legislative amendment related to the daddy quota – proposing to discontinue the condition that mothers must formally transfer children into fathers' care when fathers claim maternity benefits (trend.sk, 2021), which had been the basis for fathers' denied benefit claims. Supporting this amendment, the ex-minister Mihál articulated the normative message that fathers should fulfill the role of economic providers in the clearest terms yet when he argued that a father 'best takes care [of his child] by earning as much money as possible for the family' (ibid.) The amendment passed in 2021. However, in response, the SP reiterated its commitment to the care framing of the daddy quota, when it declared it would further focus on paying benefits to 'those who need it', suggesting an intention to allow fathers to continue with paid work only if it doesn't interfere with their responsibility for childcare (Kollárová, 2021). This position hinted that the SP did not deem the amendment as sufficient cause to adopt an interpretation of the policy aligned with the financial provision framing and that implementation battles in relation to the policy may continue.

Future developments notwithstanding, this paper demonstrates that, in line with Georgina Waylen's (2014) argument, gendered norms on the division of leaves may not simply "fade away", solely in response to the adoption of a daddy quota, or more precisely in the Slovak case, a non-transferable benefit for fathers. The implication is that daddy quota research should be more serious about norms related to the division of leave, which are widely recognized as a key factor limiting policy effectiveness. Research should be more deliberate about exploring whether and when daddy quotas can contribute to supportive normative change. The Slovak policy presented a negative case of normative transformation and so could not provide evidence that would support the suggested link between policy reform, gendered context, and normative change. To test the link, positive cases of normative change in response to daddy quotas should be identified to investigate the mechanisms underlying normative change. In addition, comparative studies would provide an opportunity to compare the development of norms (or lack thereof) in response to the introduction of similar policies into different contexts, via both the attitudinal and behavioral mechanisms.

4 Paper III: How Not to Study the Effect of Daddy Quotas: A Case Study from Slovakia

Abstract

Despite promising findings on the impact of *daddy quotas* on the gendered division of leaves in Nordic countries and their subsequent spread to other contexts, their causal effect remains a matter of debate. In this paper we⁴⁶ argue that methods that might be used to establish causality are poorly aligned with a conceptual framework of gender as a dynamic social structure. To illustrate our argument, we consider the 2010 Slovak daddy quota. Unlike in most other countries, it was introduced without much discussion, making it unlikely that parents could strategically adjust their leave-taking to profit from the new benefits. We consider how an interest in causality may motivate attempts to exploit this apparent exogeneity of the policy for a natural experiment. Consequently, the relatively limited uptake of the quota could be interpreted as the causal effect of the Slovak policy but could also be used to draw conclusions about the “true” causal effects of daddy quotas elsewhere. However, we problematize such an approach and show how it might overlook support factors – or lack thereof – that determine whether a policy will operate similarly in two different spatial or temporal contexts.

Key words: daddy quotas, causality, natural experiment, gender structure

4.1 Introduction

Over the past decades, researchers and policymakers have been increasingly turning to daddy quotas as a means to reduce the persistent gendered inequalities in the division of paid and unpaid labor. Much of the interest in fathers’ leave-taking and daddy quotas is motivated by a commitment to gender equality, but also concerns about women’s position in the labor market (Haas and Rostgaard, 2011), increased tax revenue (Birkett and Forbes, 2019), children’s rights (Brandth and Kvande, 2009) and fathers’ rights (Ellingsaeter, 2012), as well as a concern about low fertility rates, which have been linked to gendered inequality in the division of labor (McDonald, 2006; Lee, 2022a). Daddy quotas have been connected to speedy and significant shifts in fathers’ leave-taking in countries that pioneered them – like Sweden or Norway (Lappegard, 2008; Doucet and Duvander, 2022). These early successes have raised hopes that similar policies could lead to similar results elsewhere, too, especially if they come in the form of “best practice” daddy quotas – are well-remunerated and not transferable to mothers. The spreading optimism has led Andrea Doucet and Lindsey McKay (2020) to comment that policymakers and media have come to see daddy quotas as a “magic solution”. The excitement is grounded in an assumption that some policies – and their effects – are transferable: if the cause of their success can be identified in one context, it can be expected to yield similar results elsewhere, too. This assumption has motivated attempts to, on the one hand, isolate the causal effects of such policy and, on the other hand, to identify the key characteristics underpinning the

⁴⁶ This paper has been co-authored with Wendy Sigle.

“best practice” policy – understood as the best solution to a problem and so to be emulated elsewhere (Van der Vleuten and Verloo, 2012).

In this paper, we argue that an emphasis on causality and parsimony in policy evaluation aligns with an understanding of the link between policy and its effects that, with some simplification, can be summarized roughly as: if the right policy is implemented, it *will* lead to swift and stable behavior change. Specifically, a focus on causality may lead to analytic approaches that – in an effort to hold all else equal – focus on the period shortly after a policy was implemented. However, this kind of approach overlooks theoretical contributions from feminist literature, like understanding policy as a component of a dynamic and context-dependent gender structure. When one agrees with understanding the relationship between policy and behavior as context-dependent and dynamic, studying the relationship as a matter of moving rapidly from one equilibrium to a new one makes less sense, and overemphasizing causality and parsimony may result in misunderstanding the factors that lead to change and so misunderstanding policy effectiveness.

To illustrate our arguments, we focus on a 2010 Slovak daddy quota and, drawing on some of our early graduate-level training in econometrics and evidence-based policy, explore how the relationship between policy and behavior *could* – and how, to our minds, it *should not* – be studied. The policy presents an intriguing case for investigation for two reasons. First, it is likely to catch the attention of researchers interested in studying whether “best practice” leave policy can cause a change in behaviors. Like the much-lauded Nordic model, the Slovak policy grants fathers six months of benefits not transferable to mothers which, combined with a high remuneration rate, makes the policy perhaps the most generous daddy quota globally. In line with the logic of “best practice” policy characteristics, these features suggest the reform should have significant potential to transform the gendered division of leaves by mothers and fathers.

Second, the apparently unanticipated and exogenous way in which the policy was introduced may further pique the interest of researchers invested in causal inference: though the Slovak policy applies to most fathers in paid work, it was originally intended only for adoptive fathers and discussed in the public domain accordingly (for more details, see Paper II). Hence, unlike most contexts, where policy reform is typically preceded by campaigns and public debates about the expected benefits, such debate did not take place and so did not affect either the passing of the Slovak policy or fathers’ consequent leave-taking. The unexpected introduction of the new benefit means that families would not have been able to strategically adjust their time of birth or of fathers’ leave-taking to benefit from the new policy. This could lead researchers to consider the effects of the Slovak policy less biased and more directly measurable than elsewhere, where similar policies have

been introduced, in particular in other European countries such as Germany. We argue that an experiment-like research design guided by a range of “best practice” indicators (as in cross-national comparative research) provides limited insights about the ways policies interact with and possibly change the gender structure. The latter, we argue, is key to understanding whether and how change happens.

To explore how the effects of leave policy could and should not be studied, we work with a unique administrative dataset on fathers’ leave benefits obtained from the Slovak Ministry of Finance. We find that while in the first years after the policy was introduced, its uptake was negligible, in the period that followed, it grew considerably. At the same time, a loophole in the policy allowed a considerable number of fathers to remain in paid work while receiving benefits, limiting the effectiveness of the policy in redistributing the division of labor. Drawing on specific aspects of the context and details of the policy design that are not captured by “best practice” indicators, we consider some of the problematic aspects of positivist, experiment-like thinking in cross national comparative policy studies.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

Motivated by early findings from Nordic countries, leave policies for fathers have increasingly gained popularity as a promising solution to the gendered inequality in the division of leave. Underlying this reputation is an idea of policy transferability – that if a policy worked somewhere, it will also work elsewhere (Cartwright and Hardie, 2012). The idea has motivated researchers to attempt to pinpoint the effects (what exactly does the policy cause?) – and, at the same time, the specifics of effective policy (what kind of policy exactly?).

4.2.1 Quasi-experimental designs, temporality, and context

The assumption that universal relationships akin to natural laws exist and can be identified is a cornerstone of positivist approaches to studying the social world. Applied to policy, this means an assumption that the same policy will lead to the same results and within the same timeframe, irrespective of context. And while much theory has moved away from such simplistic expectations about the relationship between policy and behavior, an interest in identifying policy transferable from one context to the next prevails, motivating a continuing search for causal effects. To identify causal effects of policy, researchers zoom in on fathers’ leave uptake at a single point in time, attempting to hold all possible confounding variables constant. Natural experiments or quasi-experimental research designs go one step further by focusing on a specific point in time – namely

the moment of policy introduction or reform, a critical juncture (Neyer and Andersson, 2008), which nudges individual behavior onto a new, different path. The method compares behavior shortly before and after a reform – before anything else has changed – and attributes the difference to the policy. This logic is grounded in two related assumptions – that change from policy follows quickly (Schober and Büchau, 2022) and that during this time, everything else can be held equal. It is this logic that informs the expectation that findings based on such research design should be transferrable across different contexts. With some simplification, this suggests that if a daddy quota *caused* fathers' high and quick uptake in Sweden, we may expect similar results elsewhere, too.

Among social scientists looking to identify causal effects, quasi-experimental research designs that approximate experiments carried out in natural sciences are seen as the gold standard. For example, difference in difference, which can be used to study situations understood as *natural experiments*, has been used to study leave policy fathers in Canada, Germany or Sweden (e.g., Duvander and Johansson, 2012; Kluge and Tamm, 2013; Duvander et al., 2020; Wray, 2020) – as well as suggested to us during Q&A sessions when presenting earlier versions of this paper. However, such research designs have been critiqued for their reductivism: in looking to identify universal causal relationships, they may direct attention away from further factors that may have been in place in one context where a policy has been linked to desired outcomes but may be absent in others (Crompton and Lyonette, 2006; Doucet and Duvander, 2022). Cartwright and Hardie (2012) call such factors additional *team members* necessary to achieve a policy goal. Consequently, similar policies introduced into different contexts may lead to varying results or, if they lead to similar results, they may do so to varying timelines.

In their tendency to underplay the importance of context, approaches modelled on experiments align imperfectly with feminist theoretical innovations like understanding policy as a part of a dynamic, multi-dimensional and context-dependent gender structure (Risman, 1998). This more complex and – when it comes to theory – increasingly accepted understanding of gender points to an accordingly more complex relationship between policy and behavior, in which policy is just one of multiple context-dependent gendering mechanisms forming the structure that shapes individual behavior. Other gendering mechanisms or dimensions of the gender structure include societal gendered norms, interactional patterns observed in the everyday, or individual gendered identities (Risman, 1998). Hence, attempts to isolate change *caused* solely by policy reform may come at the expense of understanding the moderating effect of different gendered contexts, which may have been crucial to a policy's success in one setting, but may be absent – or not yet present – in a

different one. Andrea Doucet and Ann-Zofie Duvander (2022, p. 134) illustrate this compellingly with the case of the Swedish daddy quota, introduced in 1995:

‘overnight, the proportion of fathers using parental leave increased to 77 per cent. Yet, the same reform, if implemented ten years earlier, might not have led to the same impact. Perhaps that was the ‘right’ moment (...) because social norms across communities, workplaces, and households coalesced and combined with changing workplace cultures, gender equality discourses, and public campaigns that urged new masculinities.’

While the balance of mechanisms forming the gender structure in *place* at the *time* of reform may be contributing to policy effectiveness in one context, the mix may be more constraining in a different setting. In other words, focusing on causality may draw attention from context heterogeneity across time and space and open room for drawing over-generalizing conclusions about the effects of policy.

This is not to say that there aren’t considerable benefits to research based on natural experiments. Such studies, when carefully designed and interpreted, provide useful insights into changes prompted by policy, within a *specific* context and timeframe. Findings about policy “success” can serve as a *starting point* for thinking about transplanting policy from one context to another, however, in such thinking, the importance of context should be front and center. Rather than arguing against the use of natural experiments, we aim to contribute to a debate about their limitations and the need for combining them with complementary approaches that are more attuned to context heterogeneity and better aligned with an understanding of the gender structure as dynamic and its mechanisms as mutually interconnected. The gendered context is continuously evolving – due to unrelated, exogenous changes, such as economic shocks (Neyer and Anderesson, 2008) but also due to its internal dynamics, including policy reform itself (see Papers I and II). Policy reform may affect change not only in behavior, but also in different dimensions of the gender structure, which in turn may further shape the effects of the policy on behavior. However, such change, which does not follow from the policy directly, but rather from its ripple effects throughout the gender structure, may take longer to materialize. While a well-paid daddy quota may lead to immediate uptake by fathers whose identities are already egalitarian and are willing to make use of the opportunity despite unequal norms or unequal patterns of leave division among their friends or colleagues, fathers with less egalitarian beliefs may be slower to change their behavior unless additional changes take place. They may need to be exposed to new, egalitarian patterns of labor division in their surroundings or nudged by newly emerging norms that cast fathers’ leave-taking as appropriate and desirable. Attempting to mimic the experimental method as closely as possible may lead to overlooking such gradual transformation that may happen in the medium- to long-run and so

underestimate the overall effectiveness of policy reform (Doucet and Duvander, 2022). By contrast, tracking contextual changes after policy reform and parsing both their causes and effects on behavior helps understand what policy design can achieve on its own and to what extent its effect depends on the gendered context and its transformation.

4.2.2 “Best practice” and other policy characteristics

The idea of policy transferability across different contexts also informs efforts to strip policies to their bones – or, in policy speak – to identify a small number of key “best practice” policy design characteristics. Anna van der Vleuten and Mieke Verloo (2012, p. 75) provide a good definition: ‘(b)est practices are assumed to offer the best solution to a problem, and are presented as a model to be copied in other states or situations.’ The underlying logic suggests that if elements that are crucial to the causal relationship can be identified, transplanting them into a different context will secure the same results. A consensus on two key characteristics of leave policy for fathers is increasingly accepted in much academic research: policy is to be well-remunerated and not transferable to mothers. For example, in their introduction to a volume bringing together research on fathers’ leave policy, Peter Moss, Alison Koslowski and Ann-Zofie Duvander (2019, p. 4) argue that

‘(d)espite a widespread rhetoric of gender equality, relatively few countries have actually designed leave policies in such a way as to promote this goal (for example, by having substantial periods of well-paid and non-transferable father-only Parental Leave).’

More explicitly, these “best practice” policy characteristics now populate policy reports and memos, vying for the attention of generalist policymakers. As an example, an OECD Policy Brief (2016a) entitled *Parental leave: Where are the fathers?* asks: ‘What should policy makers do?’ The answer is: set aside well-paid leave for fathers (and ensure some flexibility). Similarly, a policy brief commissioned by the European Commission (Van Belle, 2016) posits fathers’ greater uptake is likely to come about from well-compensated non-transferable leave entitlements. Without a doubt, shining the spotlight on a limited number of policy characteristics increases their visibility, allows for cross-national comparison, and can boost the likelihood that policies with relevant features are noticed and considered by policymakers and ultimately implemented in further contexts. However, reducing policy to a small number of “best practice” design features can also lead researchers, but especially generalist policymakers, to overlook or underestimate the importance of other factors that may affect policy effectiveness, including context heterogeneity, and additional policy characteristics. It is no easy task to strike a balance between identifying and promoting a small number of key features of successful policy on the one hand and, on the other hand, highlighting other policy

features or the context that may have played an important role in the “success” of such policy. However, as the need to account for complexity gains more prominence in academic literature (the rising acceptance of structural understandings of gender serves as proof (see Chanfreau (2019), complexity should be similarly afforded space in grey literature. Albeit written for an academic publication, the excerpt from Andrea Doucet’s and Ann-Zofie Duvander’s chapter above provides a good starting point. Their focus on the characteristics of the context in which the Swedish policy was an “overnight success” could be well translated into literature aimed at outreach and dissemination, too – and so highlight the combined role of supportive social norms in communities, workplaces, and households, gender equality discourses, and public campaigns (for more on knowledge exchange efforts see also Implications for Knowledge-exchange and Policymaking in the Conclusion of this thesis).

4.3 Scene Setting: The Slovak Daddy Quota and its Gendered Context

In force since 2011, the Slovak daddy quota provides an interesting opportunity to explore our arguments for several reasons. First, the policy could attract the attention of researchers interested in isolating the causal effects of policy due to its manner of introduction. Though the policy’s language allows all eligible⁴⁷ fathers to make use of the benefit before their child reaches the age of three, it was originally intended only for adoptive fathers (for more details, see Paper II) and discussed in parliamentary debates accordingly (NRSR, 2010b). An interpretation of the legislation arguing that the benefits are available to all fathers with a track record of insurance contributions became widely known only several years after the reform. That policymakers did not originally intend to broadly intervene in the gendered division of labor is underlined by the fact that – rather than introduce new, purpose-designed *paternity benefits* – they chose to merely amend legislation already in place for mothers and extend existing *maternity benefits* to (adoptive) fathers, too. Similarly, although fathers’ new maternity benefits mirrored the six months of post-birth maternity benefits already available to mothers,⁴⁸ mothers combined their benefits with a dedicated six-month post-birth *maternity leave*, but no corresponding dedicated *paternity leave* was introduced (see Table 1.1). Instead, fathers were to combine their *maternity benefits* with *parental leave*,⁴⁹ a three-

⁴⁷ Fathers are eligible if they paid “*illness insurance*” at least 270 days over the two years before they start drawing on the benefit as well as at the time when they start receiving the benefit. “*Illness insurance*” contributions are compulsory for all employees as well as for the self-employed with income above a minimum threshold (€6,798 in 2023). Contributions can also be paid voluntarily.

⁴⁸ In addition, mothers are also entitled to six weeks of pre-birth benefits.

⁴⁹ A dedicated paternity leave of six months was introduced in 2022, starting from the birth of the child and so coinciding with mothers’ entitlement to maternity leave and maternity benefits. Though fathers may take paternity leave at the same time when mothers are on maternity leave, both parents may draw on maternity

year individual leave entitlement that had been available to all parents from the birth of their child since the 1990s. Before the 2010 reform that extended maternity benefits to fathers, parental leave was mostly used by mothers after their maternity leave and maternity benefits ended, in combination with a three-year low flat-rate *parental allowance*,⁵⁰ available to both parents, though only to one at the same time.

Due to the unintended manner in which the benefit was extended to all fathers, it is unlikely that parents were exposed to public discourse about the impending change. Consequently, it is unlikely that they would have been able to strategically adjust their behavior to benefit from the new policy by either timing the birth of their child or the time of the father's leave. Such strategic adjustment of behavior would bias a causal investigation and is a concern for researchers interested in natural experiments. Relatedly, as parents are unlikely to have been affected by discourse on the aims of the policy and expected benefits, which in other countries could have contributed both to the passing of reform in the first place and to fathers' willingness to make use of it once in place, in Slovakia, one could expect that parents' behavior was affected purely by the new benefit.

The second reason why the Slovak daddy quota presents an instructive case for our arguments is its exceptional "best practice" characteristics: it grants fathers six months of benefits, not transferable to mothers and remunerated at 75% of their previous income, possibly the most generous combination globally. As the benefit is not subject to taxation, for most fathers, it amounts to their full previous net income – only a small proportion of fathers earn more than the generous benefit cap and receive benefits lower than their previous income (fewer than 10%).⁵¹

But the design of the new policy also stands out for another feature beyond its laudable "best practice" characteristics. According to an interpretation of the legislation that became prominent in implementation debates following the reform, fathers are allowed to continue with paid work while drawing on leave benefits if they are self-employed or their paid work is based on a new work contract (Mihál, 2017).⁵² Proponents of this interpretation have framed the benefits as a means to increase family income rather than to encourage fathers to take time out of paid work to spend time with their children (see Paper II). This paid-work-while-on-benefits option could significantly

benefits simultaneously for only two weeks of this period. As a result, fathers are likely to keep combining most of their benefit entitlement with parental leave (see Dančíková, 2023).

⁵⁰ Maternity benefits and parental allowance cannot be used at the same time. If eligible for maternity benefits, mothers would first draw on those before switching to the parental allowance. If ineligible, mothers would avail themselves of the parental allowance for the entire time on leave.

⁵¹ As of April 2023, the benefit was capped at €1,851 monthly (Kollárová, 2023), well above the average wage, which reached €1,327 in the first quarter of 2023 (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2023).

⁵² This interpretation was likely unintended and argues benefits are tied to pre-leave employment and so do not preclude fathers from work based on new contracts. The same rules apply to mothers.

moderate the effect of the high remuneration and non-transferability of the daddy quota on fathers' leave-taking behavior.

Finally, the Slovak case study stands out due to the inegalitarian gendered context into which the policy was introduced, which allows us to consider how the gendered context may moderate the effects of policy. Around the time the policy was introduced, the division of leave in Slovakia was shaped by the gendered norm of threeness, which mandates it is not only right, but natural for children to spend the first three years of their lives at home with their mothers (Saxonberg, 2014). The norm was mirrored in the prevalent gendered patterns of leave division as well as in widespread inegalitarian individual attitudes to the gendered division of leave-time, often understood as a proxy for gendered identities. Barely any fathers were taking leave (Schulze and Gergoric, 2015), while almost all mothers were taking long leaves from paid work following the birth of their child (Miani and Hoorens, 2014). Slovaks were also comparatively supportive of this unequal division of labor. In 2012, 60% of Slovaks thought paid leave should be taken entirely by the mother, even if both parents were in a similar work situation – more than anywhere else in the OECD. Fewer than 10% thought leave should be split equally by mothers and fathers (ISSP, 2012 in OECD, 2016b). Slovaks also ranked among the most inegalitarian in the EU in thinking that men should not mainly look after children and the home (EC, 2010) and that fathers must put their careers ahead of looking after their young children (EC, 2014). Moreover, while qualitative research has shown that in response to the new benefit, the patterns of labor division by mothers and fathers started changing as some fathers made use of the new benefits, other dimensions of the gender structure remained largely unaltered: the gendered identities of many parents persisted, and parents also perceived the norm of threeness as intact (see Paper I).

4.4 Data and Analytical Approach

4.4.1 Analytical approach

In our analysis, we consider how data on the Slovak policy reform may be interpreted if attempting to isolate causal effects and “best practice” policy characteristics, and then consider how insights from gender theory problematize such interpretation.

We first consider the policy reform as a critical juncture: we describe the patterns of fathers' uptake and use of maternity benefits, compare them to data available on fathers' leave-taking before the policy reform and then explore how the policy effects might be interpreted if attempting to leverage the policy's introduction to come closer to identifying a causal effect. When data permits it, researchers interested in causal effects may be tempted to study unanticipated and relatively

exogenous policies, which brings them closer to a regular experiment in which parents would be randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Such “natural experiments” have been used to study changes in behavior after policy reform (Duvander and Johansson, 2012; Kluve and Tamm, 2013; Duvander et al., 2020). In these kinds of research designs, the time of reform divides individuals into a “treatment” group, consisting of those eligible for the policy just after the reform, and a “control” group, comprising those who would have been eligible just before, had the policy been in place. The Slovak policy might be considered a suitable case due to its manner of introduction, which may be thought to result in less bias. In most countries, the introduction of new leave policy is broadly discussed in the media. This may allow interested fathers to plan their leave from paid work or even the timing of the birth of their child for a time after the policy changes and the conditions become more favorable. Such adjustments would scramble the neat random assignment of potential beneficiaries into the “before” and “after” groups and could overstate the effects of the policy. As Slovak parents were presumably largely unaware of the impending new entitlement, they will not have changed their behavior, and one might expect uptake in Slovakia to be less biased. Moreover, parents’ decision-making is unlikely to have been affected by associated discourse on policy aims and expected benefits, rather than the new entitlement itself, another concern for researchers interested in isolating policy effects. However, we problematize research questions and methods that prioritize causal effects, as they are a poor fit with conceptualizations of gender as a context-dependent and dynamic structure, which portray policy reform as the start of a trajectory of change and require a longer-term analysis to understand its impact.

Second, we consider how fathers’ use of the new benefit might have been interpreted if our focus remained with the “best practice” characteristics of non-transferability and high remuneration. We then problematize this approach by also focusing on the paid-work-while-on-benefits option and explore how this policy characteristic changes our understanding of the policy effectiveness.

4.4.2 *Data*

To illustrate our argument, we draw on unique administrative data from the Slovak Republic Ministry of Finance (MoF). The data was acquired as a part of an ESRC-funded collaboration with the MoF and consequently served a dual purpose. In this paper, we use the data to describe and analyze broad patterns of fathers’ uptake. Along with this descriptive analysis, the data was used for a policy report published by the MoF (Dančíková, 2020),⁵³ which comprised multivariate analyses, a binary logistic

⁵³ Though this paper is co-authored, the dataset was constructed by the author of this thesis, and the report was single-authored. Consequently, first-person plural is used throughout this paper, but first-person singular is used when referring to the dataset and the policy report.

regression of determinants of fathers' leave-taking and an event history analysis of mothers' entry into paid work after giving birth. The report found that fathers were more likely to make use of the new benefit if they had above-average incomes, when either of the parents had completed higher education and especially when both had, as well as when at least one of the parents was self-employed. The odds of fathers using the benefit were considerably lower when fathers were from marginalized Roma communities. I also found that mothers started paid work faster in families where fathers made use of the benefit. While about half of the mothers who started paid work in 2019, did so 33 months after giving birth or earlier and half took longer (speaking to the strong hold of the norm of threeness on mothers' behavior), among mothers in families where fathers made use of the new benefit, half had already started paid work by 25 months after giving birth. Mothers also commenced paid work more quickly if they had above-average incomes, out-earned the fathers of their children and when they had been in paid work shortly before giving birth (for more on the quantitative findings published in the report see Tables 7.4 and 7.5 in the Appendix).

The dual purposes and the terms of the collaboration affected the dataset used in this thesis. The terms stipulated I would be given time-limited access to several original datasets that the MoF collected from multiple institutions, which I could use to construct the final dataset thanks to unique identifiers of each parent. The limited timeframe meant that the dataset had to be constructed early in my PhD project. Working from the separate datasets,⁵⁴ I created my final dataset, covering the entire population of fathers eligible for the new benefits since its introduction in 2011 until mid-2019, the most recent period for which data was available at the time of my analysis.⁵⁵

The dual purpose of the dataset also informed its characteristics: it contained information on fathers' uptake of benefits (rather than fathers' leave-taking as such, for which data was not available) and information on fathers' income from employment during the time fathers were drawing on their benefits, used in this paper; but also individual demographic characteristics of the fathers and the

⁵⁴ The dataset was combined from data from four separate registries: (1) registry of physical persons of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic (register fyzických osôb Ministerstva vnútra Slovenskej republiky) – which allowed for linking fathers to their children and mothers of their children, but also included data on family members' age, usual residence and ethnicity; (2) registry of persons with social security of the Social Insurance Agency (register poistencov Sociálnej poisťovne) – with data on benefits paid out; (3) registry of persons looking for employment of the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (register uchádzačov o zamestnanie Ústredia práce sociálnych vecí a rodiny) – with data on parents' incomes from contract work (on a monthly basis) and self-employment (on an annual basis); and (4) central registry of university students of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (centrálny register študentov vysokých škôl Ministerstva školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu Slovenskej republiky) – with data on parents' education.

⁵⁵ Limits to eligibility of daddy quotas are a key factor constraining policy effectiveness and have been studied accordingly (e.g., Uzunalioglu et al., 2021). However, as my thesis is concerned with how fathers' policy uptake is moderated by the gender structure, I constructed my dataset to include only fathers who were eligible for benefits.

mothers of their children utilized in the MoF policy report.⁵⁶ My unit of analysis was a child associated with its parents rather than individual fathers themselves, which allowed me to account for fathers' drawing on benefits with multiple children and so correctly count how often benefits were used by fathers, compared to how often they could have been used. In the original dataset that I drew from, fathers' use of benefits was noted on a monthly basis for the entire period covered by the data. In other words, each father was associated with all months during which he drew on benefits – even when this amounted to more than the maximum number of six months during which benefits were available per child, and so presumably denoted the father's use of benefits for more than one child. When such spells of benefit uptake were separated by months with no benefit uptake, I assumed the different spells were related to different children and that fathers drew on benefits with the children in their order of birth. When a *single* spell exceeded the maximum number of months, I assumed these were benefits tied to the father's multiple children received *back-to-back*, and again surmising fathers drew on benefits with the children in their order of birth, split the total number of months and assigned each child a portion.⁵⁷

As fathers were allowed to receive the benefit in the period when their child was between one month and three years old, I excluded observations with children who died the same month they were born – before fathers became eligible for benefits. I also excluded children whose fathers died before they reached the age of three – in other words, before the period during which they could decide whether to make use of the benefits was up. Moreover, fathers were only eligible for benefits if they paid “illness insurance” contributions at least 270 days over the two years before they started

⁵⁶ Data on fathers, children and the mothers of their children was linked for purposes of analysis. Variables for each parent included their income from employment, whether they had income from self-employment (binary variable) and whether they had income from both employment and self-employment (binary variable), age, usual residence (one of Slovakia's eight regions), number of living children and ethnicity (binary variable – Roma or non-Roma, to account for Slovakia's marginalized Roma communities). The final dataset also included variables measuring parents' relative income, whether the mother had had income before giving birth, parents' higher education attainment, whether parents' usual residence was in the same region (binary variable), as well as whether the child in question was born during multiple-birth labor and their year of birth. The dataset did not include data on adoption, divorce, custody, or migration outside of Slovakia, so these life situations could not be accounted for and should be considered by future research.

⁵⁷ The practice of fathers drawing on benefits for more than one child back-to-back was highlighted in the interviews I conducted for this project. To account for this phenomenon, I assigned the first of the fathers' children the maximum number of benefit-months and the second the rest. Alternatively, I could have excluded observations with fathers associated with more than the maximum number of benefit-months or counted such observations as instances of benefits paid out in relation to only one child rather than two and disregarded the excess months. However, both options would have resulted in undercounting the number of children with which fathers drew on benefits. I could also have split the total number of months between the number of children equally or assigned the latter child the maximum number and the former the remainder of total number of months. However, from an administrative point of view, I considered it most likely that fathers would exhaust their first “leave” (or maximum number of months during which they could draw on benefits with one child), before starting their second “leave” with the second child.

drawing on their benefits and were also insured at the time of their start. I excluded all fathers who failed to meet these conditions at least one month before their child reached the age of three. As my unit of analysis was a child with whom their father was eligible for the benefit rather than the father himself (for more see above), in cases of multiple births, I only kept one observation relating to one of the children born. Retaining observations for each child born in a multiple birth would have resulted in inflating fathers' eligibility, as a father would have been counted as eligible for leave with each child, even though he was eligible only for a single leave. Finally, I excluded observations with missing characteristics. My final sample comprised approximately 446 thousand children whose fathers were eligible for leave, amounting to 71% of children born in the relevant period; fathers were ineligible for leave in more than 183 thousand or 29% of cases.

The dataset allowed us to describe and analyze trends of fathers' uptake of the new benefit and, combined with qualitative findings on dimensions of the gender structure moderating the effects of the policy from Papers I and II, to draw conclusions about the limits to the effectiveness of the new policy. Our analysis was limited by the fact that the dataset did not allow for a direct comparison of fathers' leave-taking before and after the policy reform as, prior to the reform, leave-taking fathers could only draw on a different benefit – the parental allowance, which was not included in the dataset. Instead, we used aggregate data on fathers' parental allowance use before the reform, published by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family (MPSVaR, 2010). Though this data is far from a perfect equivalent, parental allowance is typically used in combination with parental leave and so serves as an acceptable proxy for an analysis of fathers' leave-taking prior to the policy reform. Similarly, we used MoF aggregate data on fathers' uptake of maternity benefits after our period of observation ended (Horváthová and Salamonová, 2022).

Thanks to variables on fathers' income from employment concurrent with benefits, the dataset also allowed us to analyze fathers' patterns of employment while on benefits. However, the dataset did not contain corresponding information on fathers' income from self-employment, limiting our ability to analyze fathers' paid work on benefits more broadly, despite anecdotal evidence that self-employed work on benefits was a widespread practice.

4.5 Analysis

4.5.1 Causality, temporality, and context

Only a negligible proportion of fathers took leave from paid work to look after their children both before and after the introduction of the new policy. In 1994-2009, the sixteen years for which we have data on fathers' use of parental allowance, a proxy for their leave-taking before the reform,

fathers' uptake fluctuated between one and eleven hundred fathers.⁵⁸ In 2008 and 2009, the years leading up to the reform, one hundred and four hundred men respectively drew on the parental allowance. By contrast, over 68- and nearly 77-thousand women made use of the allowance in the respective years. Following the introduction of the new benefits for fathers, their uptake grew slowly. Only 72 fathers drew on the new benefits in 2011, and 108 fathers in 2012, the first two years after the reform, or 0.2% and 0.3% of fathers compared to the number of children born in those years.

Drawing on a long tradition of micro-economic policy analysis, we might attempt to exploit the apparent exogeneity of the policy to assess the causal effect of the policy. Treating the reform as a critical juncture, we would compare fathers' leave-taking just before and after the policy was introduced. If we built on the logic of natural experiments and overlooked the way the policy was introduced, failing to consider the lack of publicity and debates accompanying its introduction, and merely focused on the first weeks, months or even years after the policy reform, we might be prompted to interpret the negligible uptake as proof of the policy's limited causal effect on fathers' behavior, all else held equal. In the first years following the reform, uptake was even lower than fathers' use of the considerably less well remunerated parental allowance – likely mirroring the fluctuation in parental allowance uptake prior to the reform. Fathers' underwhelming uptake of the new benefits could be understood as evidence that demand for fathers' leave-taking simply did not exist in Slovakia, nor could it be stimulated by the policy reform. In other words, the policy did not *cause* a change in behavior. We might suggest that larger changes that have been observed elsewhere were due to anticipatory behavior or reverse causality, and the real causal effects of leave policies for fathers are far more modest. In fact, if this were the very first policy of its kind globally, these findings could lead us to question the effectiveness of daddy quotas altogether.

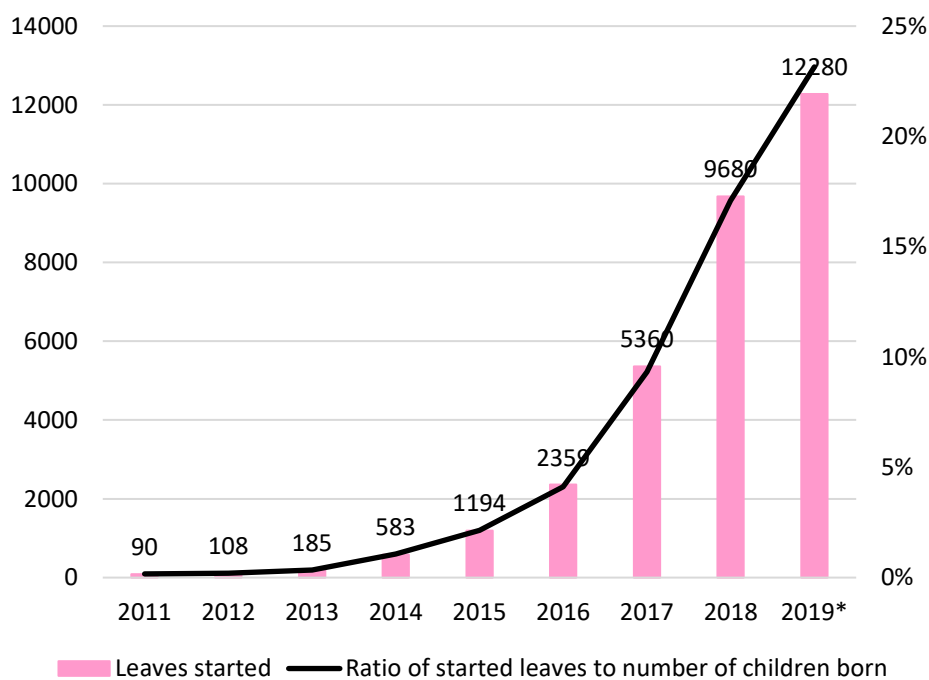
Treating the relationship between policy and behavior as context-dependent and dynamic and extending the temporal scope of our investigation yields different – and slightly more promising – findings about policy effectiveness. By 2019, eight years after the policy came into force, nearly 13-thousand fathers (23.2% of fathers compared to the number of children born during the same period) were projected to take leave.⁵⁹ A first possible explanation of this clear if slow increase is that, due to the unintentional introduction of the benefit for non-adoptive fathers, in the early years after the policy reform, parents were simply unaware of it. This interpretation would suggest that a sharp uptick in uptake should follow once the policy became more prominent in public debates, starting from 2016 (see Paper II). Indeed, our data support this, as demonstrated in Figure 4.1 below.

⁵⁸ Data is only available by calendar years and cannot be related to the number of births in each year.

⁵⁹ Based on data for the first six months of the year.

However, this interpretation does not explain further developments in fathers' uptake reported by the MoF after our period of observation ended: though fathers' leave-taking grew steadily until 2019, it fell in the first year of the pandemic and has not recovered since (Horváthová and Salamonová, 2022). The drop in uptake may be partly attributed to the exogenous shock of the pandemic. However, an additional explanation, in Andrea Doucet's and Ann-Zofie Duvander's (2022) words, is that the time of the policy reform may not have been "right" – despite the new policy, the gendered context, including gendered norms, gendered discourses or fathers' masculinities were not aligned with fathers' leave-taking.

Figure 4.1: Fathers' Uptake of Maternity Benefits



Doucet and Duvander's point about the supportive or constraining effects of the gendered context is supported by a swift comparison of very different paces of uptake rates across *different* contexts. In 2006, the year before the well-remunerated German daddy quota was introduced, uptake of leave by German fathers amounted to only 3.5%. In 2007, the first year with the new policy in place, uptake jumped to 10.5% (Erler and Erler, 2008) and by mid-2008 to 13.7% (Erler, 2009). Seven years after the policy's introduction, 34% of fathers had made use of the policy (Reimer, 2020), considerably more than the 23.2% of fathers taking leave in Slovakia after a similar amount of time elapsed since its policy reform. In Norway, uptake of leave by fathers rose even faster, from 4% in 1993, when a daddy quota was introduced, to 33% the following year and 57% in 1995 (Lappegard, 2008). By 2000, seven years after the reform, 85% of fathers were taking leave (ibid.).

While the discussed experimental logic assumes that behavioral responses to policy change are quick and stable, theories of gender as a structure depict policy as the beginning of a trajectory of change and draw attention to the contextual moderating effects that determine whether a policy will operate similarly in two different settings. This literature suggests that an evaluation of change over time – and one that is attentive to the particularities of the social context – is necessary if we are going to understand policy effects in their context, and the effect they might have elsewhere. Rather than trying to mimic the experimental method in the natural sciences, an approach which takes a longer view and contextualizes quantitative evidence will provide more relevant contributions to knowledge.

Accordingly, paying closer attention to the characteristics of the gender structure helps understand the comparatively slow rise of uptake of leave by fathers in Slovakia. The policy was introduced into an inegalitarian gendered context with strong gendered norms on the division of leaves, highly gendered patterns of leave division and widespread inegalitarian attitudes that were at odds with fathers' leave-taking. Qualitative research has suggested that those fathers who made use of the policy had *already* been egalitarian in their identities as had their partners (see Paper I). These parents were willing to divide leave-taking more equally, and just “waiting” for more favorable conditions for fathers' leave-taking, which materialized with the policy reform. The ranks of these fathers were joined by a small number of others, whose views and identities turned more egalitarian once the reform made leave-taking a more realistic option (*ibid.*). But a considerable proportion of both fathers and mothers spoke of the continuing power of the persisting inegalitarian gender structure in the form of their own or their partners' gendered identities, as well as gendered norms on leave-taking or observed gendered interactional patterns, which remained unaffected by the policy reform (*ibid.*).

This suggests that the Slovak context was indeed quite unlike the supportive ‘social norms across communities, workplaces, and households’ that Doucet and Duvander (2022, p. 134) speak of in the Swedish case. Following the policy reform, the Slovak gender structure did evolve towards more egalitarian, most notably by changing the interactional patterns of leave-division encountered by parents in their everyday lives. In time, this shift may stimulate further changes throughout the structure and, by extension, increased uptake by fathers, however during our observed timeframe this evolution was limited. In sum, in contrast with a focus on identifying a causal effect, understanding policy as a part of the gender structure suggests a more nuanced conclusion: in its specific geographic and temporal context, in the first years after its introduction the policy had a negligible effect; its effectiveness improved gradually over the following years as more egalitarian

parents changed their division of leave; but, due to the persistence of the inegalitarian gender structure, the overall effect of the quota remained below uptake levels achieved elsewhere.

4.5.2 *“Best practice” and other policy characteristics*

Our understanding of the policy’s effectiveness grows yet more complex when we look beyond its “best practice” characteristics – the high-remuneration and non-transferability for a period of 28 weeks – to the paid-work-while-on-benefits option. Though the uptake of benefits by fathers gradually grew, a high proportion of fathers stayed in paid work while on maternity benefits. The share of fathers in employment while on benefits gradually grew until 2018, when 45% had some income from paid work (see Figure 4.2 below).⁶⁰ In the first half of 2019 the share fell for the first time to 29%.⁶¹ More than half of the fathers who continued with employment, 57% (or 17% of all fathers who made use of the benefits), earned no more than half of their previous income, suggesting they continued with employment part-time. However, a further 23% of those who carried on with paid work (7% of all fathers who drew on the benefits) continued earning more than 90% of their earlier income, suggesting they kept working full-time, likely with little room for a greater role in looking after their child. Moreover, although the data available did not allow us to analyze what proportion of self-employed fathers continued with paid work while on benefits, their share may be even higher as, unlike the employed, self-employed fathers faced no administrative obstacles to paid work on leave.

If we let ourselves be guided by the policy’s stellar “best practice” characteristics, we might conclude – and indeed, in our initial analysis, we were prone to – that the policy contributed to a significant shift in the division of leave by men and women. An approach committed to parsimony and relying on standard indicators of policy generosity might lead us to pay less attention to further important details of the policy, such as the work on leave option, which, however, weakens the policy’s potential to transform parents’ leave-sharing into a more egalitarian division of childcare. By contrast, the gender structure framework prompts us to speculate that in a more egalitarian gendered context, supportive of fathers’ leave-taking, the paid-work-while-on-benefits option could

⁶⁰ Like data on the receipt of benefits, data on income from employment was available on a monthly basis. Hence, it was possible to establish the months in which fathers’ drawing on benefits and their income from paid work overlapped, though it was not possible to establish the specific days when such overlap occurred. While the incidence of fathers working while on benefits seems very high, it is in line with both reports of high numbers of benefit claims by fathers overlapping with paid work reported by the Social Insurance Agency (see Paper II) and anecdotal evidence. By contrast, data on income from self-employment was only available on a yearly basis, that is why it was not possible to draw conclusions about self-employed fathers’ paid work concurrent with their drawing on maternity benefits.

⁶¹ Intensified policy debates about whether fathers could legally combine paid work with benefits may help explain this development (see Paper II).

have moderated the effects of the “best practice” characteristics to a lesser extent than in the inegalitarian Slovak context. In other words, the framework urges us to consider how such further characteristics may interact with the existing gender structure to produce context-specific outcomes: in a different context, characterized by more egalitarian norms on the gendered division of leaves, the option might have remained little used.

Figure 4.2: Fathers’ Income from Employment Contracts While on Maternity Benefits



4.6 Discussion & Conclusion

The aim of our paper has been to explore how, prompted by approaches used to establish causal effects of policy like natural experiments, a positivist-minded researcher might be tempted to study the Slovak daddy quota and – drawing on feminist theoretical critiques – to argue, why such research designs should be approached with caution. We argue that such a design, grounded in positivism and motivated by the idea of policy transferability, might overly focus on a quick and stable causal effect of the policy and its “best practice” characteristics, which may lead to both under- and over-estimating the true overall effects of the policy.

We underpin this argument by drawing on the concept of gender as structure, which is increasingly accepted in academic theory, but, due to a lag in methodological developments, is much less likely to be operationalized and affect data analysis. Gender as structure directs our attention to the relationship of policy and behavior as context-dependent and dynamic. Consequently, we have found that, despite the policy’s “best practice” characteristics, the rise in its uptake was slow, and though it picked up considerably by 2019, uptake levels remained low compared to other contexts – and eventually stagnated during the pandemic. The delay in the use of the policy was likely partly caused

by its unintentional introduction, and at least in the initial stages, parents' limited awareness of it. However, drawing on the gender structure framework, we posit that the slow and gradual uptake of the benefits may also be linked to the misaligned, inequalitarian context the policy was introduced into and the limited transformation of the context in response to the reform.

Moreover, a considerable proportion of fathers continued with paid work while drawing on leave benefits, both part- and full-time, further limiting the effects of the policy on the gendered division of labor. However, though the aggregate data published by the MoF showed that fathers' uptake levelled off during the Covid-19 pandemic, it did not provide new data points on fathers' paid work on leave and so gave us little insight into developments in the division of leave by mothers and fathers during this period. Based on the decline in the proportion of fathers in employment in 2019, the final year covered in our micro-data, it is possible that while overall benefit uptake by fathers stopped growing, the proportion of fathers who make use of the paid-work-while-on-benefits option continued declining: in other words, it is possible that even if benefit uptake has not been increasing, the division of leave may have continued evolving towards more egalitarian. Further research should be carried out to provide insight into post-pandemic trends of parents' leave division.

Our study has several implications. In theoretical terms, it cautions against an overemphasis on "best practice" policies and over-generalizing their causal effects across contexts. A "best practice" policy that worked somewhere may not work or lead to different outcomes elsewhere, or these outcomes may materialize to a different timeline, depending on further factors at play, including additional policy characteristics as well as contextual factors in place. It is not our intention to suggest that researchers are not aware of the importance of gendered context. Nor is it our aim to argue against the use of causal research designs altogether. Rather, we wish to draw attention to the way using methods that center causality, motivated by the idea of policy transferability, may prompt generalization about policy effects at the expense of greater awareness of the importance of heterogeneous contexts. This implies not only caution when formulating policy recommendations for contexts where leave policies for fathers are yet to be implemented, but also a suggestion to reassess our understanding of the effectiveness of "successful" policies already in place in the countries that pioneered them. In methodological terms, more attention should be paid to developing approaches to studying policy effects that operationalize (de)gendering policies as a part of the gender structure. Finally, in terms of knowledge exchange with policymakers, we should do a better job communicating the complexity of the link between policy and behavioral change. This means stressing the importance of contextual analyses which may result in identifying contextual factors that were instrumental to what may at a first look be understood as the success of an individual policy and consequently to pinpointing additional steps that may have to be taken if policy is to achieve such a

contextual and, ultimately, behavioral change. This requires a careful balancing act if policymakers are not to be put off implementing daddy quotas altogether, but a balancing act worth the effort: as Doucet and Duvander (2022, p. 135) argue that '(m)ore nuanced results are harder to communicate, but they are just as important.'

5 Conclusion

Following quick and wide uptake by fathers in the Nordic countries that pioneered them, daddy quotas have gained a reputation for being a "magic solution" to persisting inequalities in the division of paid work and unpaid care and have become academic "hot topics" (Doucet and McKay, 2020). However, as the body of literature on the effects of these policies grows and research findings increasingly vary, the status of daddy quotas as a gender equality panacea is questioned more and more (Lee, 2022), fueling debates about the effects that we can expect from daddy quotas.

Building on existing research on the effectiveness of daddy quotas, I have posited that conceptualizing these policies as a part of a context-dependent, multi-dimensional, interconnected, and dynamic gender structure helps deepen our understanding of what effects such policies can and cannot achieve in their specific spatial and temporal contexts.

In the following, final part of my thesis, I briefly summarize my research and findings, highlight my contributions to knowledge, consider the implications for knowledge-exchange and policymaking, and finally, propose avenues for further research.

5.1 Summary of Research and Findings

My thesis has been guided by three broad guiding questions. First, *what* are the effects of the Slovak daddy quota on fathers' uptake and parents' division of leaves? Second, *why* have the effects of the policy been limited? And finally, *how* can the effects of daddy quotas be studied to gain a deeper understanding of their effectiveness? In this subsection I recount the ways in which these questions were addressed in the respective papers.

Responding to the first guiding question, I found that within my period of observation, the Slovak daddy quota has had a relatively limited effect on fathers' behavior and parents' division leave in international comparison. Its effect comes across as more substantial when the specificities of the Slovak case are considered: the idiosyncratic policy design that, under certain conditions, allows fathers to combine their benefit with paid work; the conflicting framing of the policy in its implementation phase; and the misaligned gender structure, including a highly skewed gendered pattern of parents' leave-division prior to the policy reform – in other words, very little precedent of fathers' leave-taking. The nuances of the Slovak case notwithstanding, the policy's effects on other dimensions of the gender structure have been considerably less pronounced. In Paper I, I observed that the policy contributed to unstructuring gender in terms of a noticeable shift in fathers' behavior in terms of benefit uptake. However, the change of parents' division of leave and paid and unpaid

labor was less significant than it might seem merely from fathers' benefit uptake, as some fathers continued with paid work while drawing on benefits, part- or full-time and, at the same time, their partners often remained out of paid work. Moreover, turning to the effects of the daddy quota on additional dimensions of the gender structure, I found little evidence of change to parents' perception of gendered norms on the division of leaves and their gendered identities. Instead, I identified pre-existing inegalitarian norms and identities as key factors moderating parents' response to the new policy and so the policy's effectiveness in terms of fathers' leave uptake and parents' more gender-equal division of leave. In the co-authored Paper III, we used quantitative data to analyze broad patterns of fathers' leave-taking and confirmed that fathers' uptake of the daddy quota has been gradual and slow, and the effects of the policy were further limited by fathers' widespread participation in paid work despite being on benefits. Drawing on both the gender structure conceptual framework and the findings of Papers I and II on the persisting moderating effects of the structure, we concluded that the trajectory of fathers' leave-taking was likely shaped by the gendered context that the Slovak policy was introduced into, which was poorly aligned with a more gender-equal division of leaves. We speculated that in other settings where similar policies have been implemented, the pre-existing gendered context may have been better aligned with the pro-egalitarian daddy quotas and may have played a more important role in what research has understood as the effects of daddy quotas, than is generally recognized.

All three papers speak to my second guiding question – *why* the effects of the Slovak “best practice” daddy quota have been limited. Taken together, my findings point to two key explanatory factors: the inegalitarian gender structure and the additional policy characteristics. Based on existing research, the Slovak policy could have been expected to lead to more significant changes along multiple dimensions of the gender structure, including parents' gendered identities or societal gendered norms (Brandth and Kvande, 2016; Beglaubter, 2017; Lott and Klenner, 2018). However, Paper I suggests that at least so far, changes in Slovakia have been limited and the persistence of some dimensions of the gender structure helps explain the limited effect of the policy on fathers' leave-taking and parents' division of leave. In Paper II, I built on these findings and set out to explain the limited normative change in response to the policy reform. I observed that policy frames associated with the daddy quota had communicated conflicting normative messages. While normative messaging communicated by the “best practice” characteristics of the policy suggested that fathers should be caregivers on par with mothers, which provided an opening for normative transformation, the media coverage of the associated policy debates was dominated by a competing normative message that cast fathers primarily as economic providers. This message aligned with pre-existing inegalitarian norms on the gendered division of leave, which helps explain why, at the time of the

analysis, the effect of the policy on normative, and by extension, behavioral change, was limited. Finally, in Paper III, we argued that though the ostensible introduction of the quota for adoptive fathers (and consequently, its delayed recognition as a policy broadly applicable to all fathers) may have played a role in its comparatively limited uptake, the slower uptake may have also been driven by the misalignment of the Slovak gender structure with fathers' leave-taking. However, despite both the slow rise in fathers' benefit use before the pandemic and the subsequent dip, fathers' uptake may yet rebound, and parents' division of leave and paid and unpaid labor may keep evolving towards more gender equality. More change may follow thanks to the internal dynamics of the gender structure – as fathers like Bruno, the IT professional, rethink their gendered attitudes to leave-taking and then continue influencing the beliefs of others, parents and non-parents alike (see Paper I). More change may also follow if the balance of normative messaging associated with the policy is altered, for example through the increased participation of more vocal egalitarian actors in policy debates and consequently, more egalitarian messaging in media coverage of the quota (see Paper II), which may lead to different patterns of policy uptake and use, but also to additional policy reform.

My interest in providing informative and original answers to the two first two guiding questions of this thesis, *what* the effects of the daddy quotas have been and *why* they have been relatively limited, also motivated my preoccupation with the final guiding question – *how* to study the effects of daddy quotas to better understand them. Throughout my thesis, I responded to this overarching question in two interconnected ways: first, in my search for a conceptual framework that would approximate the complex real-life relationship between policy, gender (or rather, the various mechanisms forming the gender structure relevant to the daddy quota in the Slovak context) and individual behavior; and second, in my endeavor to use analytical approaches that align with my conceptual framework and so allow me to operationalize it. This effort resulted in my operationalizing the increasingly acknowledged, but difficult to fully operationalize gender structure framework, using a mix of three different methods and types of data. In turn, the mix of methods allowed me to foreground and more closely engage with several key implications of a structural understanding of gender – its multi-dimensionality and interconnectedness, contextuality and dynamism. These implications, easier to overlook when drawing on less complex theorizations – like understanding gender as an individual property – remind us that gender is inherently changeable, but also conditional and multifaceted and so efforts to change it may need to be tailored to specific contexts and multipronged, too.

In Paper I, I investigated the ways in which the policy contributed to unstructuring rather than undoing gender by using an analytical strategy in which I operationalized gender with multiple

interconnected variables, rather than as a single dependent variable. The exploration of the multiple gendering mechanisms was facilitated by the flexibility and open-endedness of the semi-structured interviews and yielded a more expansive understanding of the gendered impact of the Slovak daddy quota compared to what I could have concluded from a study focusing exclusively on the policy's effects on parents' behavior and interactional patterns. I found that the relatively limited change to parents' behavior and interactional patterns was shaped by persisting gendering mechanisms that have been less affected by the policy reform: parents perceived only little change to their individual gendered identities and the societal gendered norms, which continued affecting their decision-making on fathers' leave-taking. In Paper II, I centered the interconnectedness of the dimensions the gender structure and explored the normative power of policy – in other words, its potential to affect change beyond shifts in behavioral patterns – and in this way to ultimately support or impede changes to said behavioral patterns. My exploration of the normative power of the daddy quota drew on a frame analysis to consider the ways in which the predominantly inegalitarian framing of the policy in associated media debates departed from its more egalitarian “best practice” characteristics. Finally, while attention to appropriate operationalization of my conceptual framework underpinned my entire thesis, Paper III *explicitly* interrogated the alignment between conceptual frameworks and research methods and argued that attempts to identify causal effects of policy by mimicking natural experiments may lead to misunderstanding the effects of policy that may unfold over time, given how policies interact with the gender structures in complex and dynamic ways.

5.2 Contributions to Knowledge: Conceptual, Methodological and Empirical

Together, the three papers that form my thesis make conceptual, methodological, and empirical contributions.

Throughout this thesis, I have elaborated two conceptual contributions to knowledge. In Paper I, I bring together Francine Deutsch's (2007) call for undoing gender with Barbara Risman's (1998) gender structure framework. Echoing Deutsch's argument that 'words matter' (ibid., p. 123) in shaping the agenda of researchers, I make a case for a more explicit scholarly focus on the effects of policy on unstructuring rather than undoing gender. I argue – and with my empirical findings demonstrate – that extending one's focus from policy effects on gendered interactions, the predominant focus of daddy quota research, to effects on multiple dimensions of the gender structure helps achieve a better understanding of what a “best practice” daddy quota can achieve, at least in the short-term, in a specific context. Taking the multifacetedness of gender as a starting point of research prompts thinking about the varying extent of persistence and change to different

dimensions of the gender structure in response to policy – and so about gendering mechanisms that may continue impeding policy effectiveness if left unaffected by it.

In Paper II, I respond to research suggesting that, in addition to enabling or motivating changes in behavior, policies may also have normative power (Gheaus and Robeyns, 2011; Browne, 2013) or communicate normative messages (Grönlund and Öun, 2010). Building on these insights, I demonstrate that, in the Slovak case, such power may be moderated by the gendered context into which the policy was introduced. Therefore, in my second conceptual contribution, I conclude that theoretical claims about the power of policy to contribute to normative transformation should be understood as context-dependent. Although researchers generally agree that context is important when considering policy effects, to my knowledge, the argument has not been made in relation to the normative power of policy and bears explicit formulation.

We make a methodological contribution in Paper III, where we bring together critiques of decontextualized research of policy effects (Cartwright and Hardie, 2012) with the gender structure framework (Risman, 1998) to point out the uneasy fit between research designs modelled on natural experiments and the conceptualization of gender as a dynamic multi-dimensional social structure. In doing so, we demonstrate the pitfalls of adopting a method which prompts researchers to focus on identifying quick and stable change in response to a new daddy quot. Thus, we take a first step towards the development of a method that may better capture the complexity of the relationship between policy and behavioral change – with its inevitable spatial and temporal variability. While we do not spell out a full, alternative methodological approach, we do demonstrate that drawing on qualitative findings from Papers I and II supports a richer interpretation of our quantitative data. More generally, despite challenges involved in mastering different methods and collecting multiple sets of data, I show that combining methods across the three papers, analyzing the reasonings of parents entitled to the new benefit for fathers, the frames dominating the public debates related to the policy in its implementation phase, and the quantitative patterns of leave uptake yields rich insights into policy effectiveness: had I forgone working with quantitative data, I wouldn't have been able to consider the broad trends in policy use – fathers' noticeable uptick in benefit uptake, but a less substantial change in the parents' division of leave. In turn, had I omitted interviewing parents, I wouldn't have been able to gain insight into their understanding of the persistence of key dimensions of the gender structure that constrained their response to the policy – and so, I wouldn't have been able to contribute to explaining these broad patterns in policy use. Finally, had I not carried out the frame analysis, I wouldn't had been able to draw conclusions about the reasons *behind* the persistence of inegalitarian norms, a key dimension of the Slovak gender structure.

Throughout the thesis, I make empirical contributions to knowledge. I have investigated the design, framing, effects and parents' understanding of the noteworthy Slovak daddy quota which, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet been analyzed in academic literature, nor captured in non-academic literature (with the exception of the annual reviews of leave policies produced by the International Network on Leave Policies and Research, to which I have contributed (e.g., Blum et al., 2023)). Fathers' leave-taking has been studied extensively in Nordic contexts, and increasingly in other Western European settings, Canada, and East Asia. My research contributes knowledge on the effects of a unique daddy quota in the Central European context, characterized by a gender structure conducive to women's life-long full-time paid work, but considerably less supportive of mothers' paid work in the first three years a child's life and of fathers' leave-taking and care. My findings on the limited effects of the Slovak daddy quota, the importance of policy design particulars, an aligned gendered context and supportive normative messaging, as well as the relevance of the temporality of change, may be of particular interest to academics interested in contexts with similar features – whether in CEE or elsewhere. However, my research ultimately highlights the vital importance of taking seriously the specific context-dependent gender structures when considering the effects of different daddy quotas anywhere.

5.3 Implications for Knowledge-Exchange and Policymaking

Along with prompting conceptual, methodological and empirical contributions, taking the gender structure seriously also has implications for knowledge exchange between academics and policymakers, as well as for policymaking more generally. This is not to say that the importance of a supportive gendered context is not clear in the minds of leave policy researchers or that it is absent from non-academic writing on leave policies for fathers. Rather, I find that the gendered context is not portrayed as *sufficiently* important, especially when compared with the emphasis on adopting “best practice” policy. This point is illustrated by Andrea Doucet and Ann-Zofie Duvander (2022), when they speculate that the Swedish daddy quota may have been introduced at just the right time, when norms, workplaces and discourses were conveniently aligned. This alignment, however, did not simply materialize out of thin air: Helena Bergman and Barbara Hobson's (2002) intriguing account of 20th century Swedish debates and policymaking on fatherhood details just how much work by various actors went into creating this supportive context: decades of policymakers' interest in daddy quotas, extensive government campaigns aimed at changing the public's understanding of fatherhood, expert commissions committed to gender equality and more involved fathering, and supportive media coverage from sympathetic journalists. In addition, the Swedish daddy quota itself was outstanding not only due to its “best practice” design, but also because of the accompanying

generous implementation efforts, including more campaigns, educational programs and direct communication with both workers and employers (ibid.). Bergman and Hobson's account is in stark contrast with the roll out of the Slovak daddy quota, not only introduced into a context where little previous discussion on fathering had been had and few supportive policies were in place, but also accompanied by no official campaigns. The delay in public debates on the Slovak quota, documented in Paper II, raises questions about public awareness of the policy in the first years following its introduction and the possibility that its effects on parents' behavior may be similarly delayed and pick up with time. However, an alternative explanation worth closer investigation also presents itself: change in behavior in response to policy is not merely a function of time elapsed, rather, it is a function of the efforts expended *during that time* – to raise awareness, understanding, acceptance and use of the policy. The effects of the immense endeavors in Sweden are not yet sufficiently understood, nor sufficiently prominent in knowledge exchange efforts focused on promoting the introduction of “best practice” leave policies for fathers. Consequently, these endeavors, multi-layered and pursued over decades, may be – but *should not be* – lost on policymakers interested in daddy quotas as a vehicle for change in the gendered division of leave.

By exploring the limited effects of introducing a daddy quota with “best practice” characteristics into a misaligned gender structure, my thesis makes a case for knowledge exchange that does more to prompt policymakers to look beyond “best practice” policy features and draw their attention to additional policy characteristics as well as the relevance of pre-existing contexts – whether they are aligned with proposed policy and what has been – and can be done – if they are not.

There is much to be said for identifying key characteristics of policies that have succeeded in achieving goals deemed desirable by academics and policymakers interested in reducing gendered inequalities. It is useful to know that the high remuneration and non-transferability of leave policy for fathers is linked to fathers' higher uptake compared to poorly paid parental leave that can be divided between mothers and fathers as they choose, with no restrictions. A policy summarized in a small number of crucial features is also conducive to inclusion in tools of policymaking like policy briefs, election manifestoes, reform plans and associated media coverage, and to catching and holding the inevitably limited attention of important stakeholders – generalist policymakers, journalists, and wider publics. However, an overemphasis on stressing a few *necessary* policy characteristics may come at the expense of policymakers' understanding that a policy with a small number of key features may not be *sufficient* to bring about the desired changes. Bergman and Hobson's chapter is a case in point. The “best practice” characteristics of daddy quotas liberally populate both academic and non-academic literature on leave policies (attention is also paid to complementary policies that can contribute to daddy quota effectiveness, like additional leave entitlements or early childcare

education and care (for a good overview, see Lee, 2022b)). However, it took me several years of reading scholarly works to come across a description of the complementary framing and discursive efforts in the form of various campaigns and other knowledge exchange endeavors that had both preceded and accompanied the introduction of the Swedish daddy quota and helped create a supportive cultural context as well as raise awareness of the new policy. This relative scarcity of relevant academic literature provides an additional justification for the frame analysis I carried out in Paper II of this thesis. When it comes to grey literature, I have yet to encounter a similar account – and argue this is a gap to be filled.

In addition, in respect to knowledge exchange, my thesis is of specific value for Slovak policymakers. Along with the policy report published as a part of my collaboration with the civil service collaboration during my PhD project (Dančíková, 2020), this thesis provides the first analytical findings on the effects of the Slovak daddy quota on parents' division of leave, and the policy characteristics and gendering mechanisms that limit the policy's effectiveness. In doing so, my thesis offers starting points for designing practical approaches towards improving the effectiveness of the policy in terms of fathers' leave uptake and parents' gender equal leave division. These approaches include pursuing policy that would more closely link benefits to fathers' leave-taking (Dančíková, 2020), but also policy efforts aimed at transforming related gendered norms and parents' gendered identities.

5.4 Thoughts on Further Research

Several possible avenues for further research follow from my thesis. Firstly, my research demonstrates that investigating policy as a part of the gender structure yields fresh insights, recommending the framework for the study of other policies which may be expected to contribute to reducing gendered inequalities – in the division of labor and beyond. My argument here is not that research should attempt to operationalize the gender structure framework in its entirety, rather, that taking a structural understanding of gender as a starting point will both help cumulate a body of literature that insists on thinking about gender more expansively and provide prompts for novel scholarship. This may include single-country studies aimed at documenting the persistence and change of different dimensions of gender structures in response to policy reform. It could also mean comparative research attentive to the deep knowledge of ostensibly similar policies as well as complexities of different gendered contexts and their interaction with such policies, including the different temporality of change in different settings.

Secondly, building on my findings in Paper II, mechanisms connecting the different dimensions of gender structures should be investigated more closely. This may include identifying positive cases of normative change following policy reform to explore conditions in which policy leads to normative change (including interrogating the role of pre-existing context, identified as an obstacle to normative change). However, this may also require revisiting how the effects of daddy quotas on patterns of leave division have been interpreted in existing studies: it might be worthwhile to reassess the extent to which the success of daddy quotas in pioneering Nordic countries can be ascribed solely to policy and what part of the success was due to the relatively egalitarian gender structures in place in these contexts (as suggested in Paper III). Echoing the argument by Andrea Doucet and Ann-Zofie Duvander (2022), the success of the Swedish quota may have been closely tied to the timing of its implementation, when enough supporting factors were in place (Cartwright and Hardie, 2012).

Finally, given my understanding of the gender structure as dynamic, revisiting the Slovak case would be worthwhile after more time has elapsed since the policy's adoption: it would be interesting to return to the relationship between the Slovak policy, the additional dimensions of the structure (both those investigated in this thesis and others that may be revealed by new research, including gendered interactions in workplaces, but also services, like education or healthcare) and parents' behavior. Building directly on my project, future research could include second interviews with parents that I spoke to for this thesis: such longitudinal data would allow for exploring whether additional changes of the gender structure have materialized. Further research could also repeat the analysis of administrative data on fathers' leave-taking to explore whether the trajectory of parents' leave-division continues to change, with data covering both time before the 2010 reform and after the mid-2019 cutoff that bracketed my thesis. Similarly, later developments in policy framing could be explored. But the reverberations of the Slovak daddy quota through the already dynamic gender structure could also be investigated using additional methods, such as surveys designed to capture developments in terms of identities, interactional patterns, or perceived norms, and carried out using a more representative sample of parents.

5.5 Postscript on Building Better Worlds

Before embarking on this project, I would often hear my Slovak acquaintances remark that Slovakia is a “conservative” country, “not ready” for “foreign” ideas like gender equality or fathers' care. Invariably, I would bristle. My background was in policymaking in INGOs and central government, in a country still navigating its post-communist transformation, where imports of “best practice” policies were a fact of life, their effectiveness taken for granted. In short, I was a believer in the

transformative power of policy and understood comments to the contrary as evidence of capitulation: expressions of a belief that, when compared to countries that pioneered policies like daddy quotas, the Slovak context was defined by a cultural difference so deep and unbridgeable that any attempts to work towards greater gender equality would be in vain.

I have since spent a lot of time thinking about gender structures and have come to understand such observations differently: as an awareness of walls that structures erect to shape individual behavior. Indeed, it is both plausible and to be expected that, in different settings and at different times, various dimensions of the gender structure may be misaligned, including in cases where new egalitarian policy is out of line with existing egalitarian norms, behavioral patterns, and identities. In the Slovak case, such misalignment could be summarized as a lack of contextual “readiness” to implement new egalitarian policy.⁶² Nevertheless, I would opt for a slightly adjusted interpretation of this phenomenon: that, at the specific time, certain parts of the country’s population may not have been ready to respond positively to a particular policy to a timeline that may have been observed elsewhere. And instead of a sign of capitulation, I take such observations as an indication of the lay of the land, but also as a prompt for a renewed impetus for future projects, both academic and political, which aim to ‘imagine better worlds and work to achieve them’ (Ferguson, 2017, p. 283).

⁶² Some might object that cases of such misalignment are few and far between. After all, how often does a parliament adopt a daddy quota without intending to – or without the urging or backing of public support for such policy? But such cases may be more common than one would think – literature on policy transfer suggests policies may be imposed by international organizations or dominant countries and may be introduced without thorough consideration (Mossberger and Wolman, 2003).

6 Bibliography

- Adema, W. et al. (2016). Walking the Tightrope: Background Brief on Parents' Work-Life Balance Across the Stages of Childhood. *OECD*. <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/Background-brief-parents-work-life-balance-stages-childhood.pdf>.
- Allen, J.L. (2021). Performative Parenting: Social Norms and Fathers' Use of Parental Leave Entitlements. [Doctoral Thesis, University of Cambridge].
- Allen, S.M. and Hawkins, A.J. (1999). Maternal Gatekeeping: Mothers' Beliefs and Behaviors That Inhibit Greater Father Involvement in Family Work. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 61(1): 199-212.
- Andersen, S.H. (2018). Paternity Leave and the Motherhood Penalty: New Causal Evidence. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 80: 1125-1143.
- Arnalds, A. A., Eydal, G.B. and Gíslason, I.V. (2022). Iceland Country note in Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G. and Moss, P. (eds.). *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2022*. <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/>.
- Arnalds, A. A., Eydal, G.B. and Gíslason, I.V. (2023). Iceland Country note in Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A. and Moss, P. (eds.). *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*. <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/>.
- Beglaubter, J. (2017). Balancing the Scales: Negotiating Fathers' Parental Leave Use. *Canadian Review of Sociology* 54(4) 476-496.
- Bergman, H. and Hobson, B. (2002). Compulsory Fatherhood: the Coding of Fatherhood in the Swedish Welfare State in *Making Men into Fathers: Men, Masculinities and the Social Politics of Fatherhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bergqvist, Ch. and Saxonberg, S. (2017). The State as a Norm-BUILDER? The Take-up of Parental Leave in Norway and Sweden. *Social Policy & Administration* 51(7): 1470-1487.
- Birkett, H. and Forbes, S. (2019). Where's Dad? Exploring the Low Take-up of Inclusive Parenting policies in the UK. *Policy Studies* 40(2): 205-224.
- Bittman, M. et al. (2003). When Does Gender Trump Money? Bargaining and Time in Household Work. *AJS* 109(1): 186-214.
- Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A. and Moss, P. (2023). *19th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2023*. <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/>.
- Blum, S., Reimer, T. and Schober, P. (2022). Germany Country Note in Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G. and Moss, P. (eds.), *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2022*. <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annualreview-reports/>.
- Boll, C., Leppin, J., Rossen, A. and Wolf, A. (2016). Magnitude and Impact Factors of the Gender Pay Gap in EU Countries. *European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Publications Office*. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2838/273601>.
- Brandth, B. and Kvande, E. (2009). Gendered or Gender-Neutral Care Politics for Fathers? *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 624(1): 177-189.

- Brandth, B. and Kvande, E. (2016). Masculinity and Fathering Along during Parental Leave. *Men and Masculinities*: 1-19.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. Successful Qualitative Research A Practical Guide for Beginners. London: Sage.
- Browne, J. (2013). The Default Model: Gender Equality, Fatherhood, and Structural Constraint. *Politics & Gender* 9: 152-173.
- Bungum, B. and Kvande, E. (2020). Norway Country Note in Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G. and Moss, P. (eds.). *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2020*. http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/.
- Bünning, M. (2015). What Happens after the 'Daddy Months'? Fathers' Involvement in Paid Work, Childcare, and Housework after Taking Parental Leave in Germany. *European Sociological Review* 31(6): 738-748.
- Bygren, M. and Duvander, J. (2006). Parents' Workplace Situation and Fathers' Parental Leave Use. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68(2): 363-372.
- Cartwright, N and Hardie, J. (2012). *Evidence-Based Policy: A Practical Guide to Doing it Better*. Oxford Scholarship Online.
- Čerman, M. and Dujava, D. (2021). Koľko stojí dieťa? IFP Komentár 2021/10. <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/financie/institut-financnej-politiky/publikacie-ifp/komentare/komentare-z-roku-2021/10-kolko-stoji-dieta-jul-2021.html>.
- Chanfreau, J. (2019). *Paid Work and Parenthood: Gender, Class and Cohort Differences in the UK*. [Doctoral Thesis, LSE].
- Cislaghi, B. and Heise, L. (2018). Theory and Practice of Social Norms Interventions: Eight Common Pitfalls. *Globalization and Health* 1-10.
- Crompton, R. and Lyonette, R. (2006). Some Issues in Cross-National Comparative Research Methods: A Comparison of Attitudes to Promotion, and Women's Employment, in Britain and Portugal. *Work, Employment and Society* 20(2): 403-414.
- Dančíková, Z. (2017). *To Leave or Not to Leave Determinants of Fathers' Use of Leave in Slovakia*. [unpublished MSc dissertation] Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Dančíková, Z. (2020). Ani muži nemôžu mať všetko. Komentár IFP 2020/06. <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/financie/institut-financnej-politiky/publikacie-ifp/komentare/komentare-z-roku-2020/6-ani-muzi-nemozu-mat-vsetko-materska-otcov-nastup-matiek-do-prace-jun-2020.html>.
- Dančíková, Z. (2023). Slovak Republic Country Note in Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A. and Moss, P. (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*. http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/.
- Davis, S.N. and Greenstein, T.N. (2009). Gender Ideology: Components, Predictors, and Consequences. *Annual Review of Sociology* 35: 87-105.

- Dearing, H. (2016). Gender Equality in the Division of Work: How to Assess European Leave Policies Regarding Their Compliance with an Ideal Leave Model. *Journal of European Social Policy* 26(3): 234-247.
- De Henau, J. and Himmelweit, S. (2021). A Care-Led Recovery From Covid-19: Investing in High-Quality Care to Stimulate And Rebalance the Economy. *Feminist Economics* 27(1-2): 453-469.
- Deutsch, F. (2007). Undoing Gender. *Gender & Society* 21(1): 106-127.
- Dombos, T., Krizsan, A., Verloo, M. and Zentai, V. (2012). Critical Frame Analysis: A Comparative Methodology for the QUING Project. Working Paper. *Centre for Policy Studies*.
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/cps-working-paper-critical-frame-analysis-quiring-2012.pdf>.
- Doucet, A., Lero, D.S., McKay, L., Mathieu, S., Ragued, S., Thomphson, K., Tremblay, D.-G. (2023). Canada country note in Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A. and Moss, P. (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*.
http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/.
- Doucet, A. and McKay, L. (2020). Fathering, Parental Leave, Impacts and Gender Equality: What/How Are We Measuring? *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 40(5/6): 441-463.
- Doucet, A. and Duvander, A.-Z. (2022). Measuring the impact of parenting leaves: grappling with conceptual and methodological complexities in Dobrotić, I. et al. (2022). *Research Handbook on Leave Policy: Parenting and Social Inequalities in Global Perspectives*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Duvander, A.-Z. (2014). How Long Should Parental Leave Be? Attitudes to Gender Equality, Family, and Work as Determinants of Women's and Men's Parental Leave in Sweden. *Journal of Family Issues* 35(7): 909-926.
- Duvander, A.-Z. and Johansson, M. (2012). What are the Effects of Reforms Promoting Fathers' Parental Leave Use? *Journal of European Social Policy* 22(3): 319-330.
- Duvander, A.-Z. and Johansson, M. (2019). Does Fathers' Care Spill Over? Evaluating Reforms in the Swedish Parental Leave Program. *Feminist Economics* 25(2): 67-89.
- Duvander, A.-Z., Lappegard, T. and Johansson, M. (2020). Impact of a Reform Towards Shared Parental Leave on Continued Fertility in Norway and Sweden. *Population Research and Policy Review* 39: 1205-1229.
- Duvander, A.-Z. and Löfgren, N. (2023). Sweden country note in Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A. and Moss, P. (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*.
http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/.
- Eerola, P., Lammi-Taskula, J., O'Brien, M., Hietamäki, J. and Räikkönen, E. (2019). Fathers' Leave Take-Up in Finland: Motivations and Barriers in a Complex Nordic Leave Scheme. *Sage Open*.
- EIGE (2023). Employment Rates by Sex, Age and Degree of Urbanisation (%).
https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/ta_wrklab_lab_emprate_gen_ifst_r_ergau/datatable.

- EIGE (2023a). Full-time-equivalent (FTE) Employment Rate (% , 15+ population). https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/ta_wrklab_lab_emprate_gen_lfs_adhoc_fter/datatable.
- Ekberg, J., Eriksson, R., & Friebel, G. (2013). Parental leave: A policy evaluation of the Swedish 'daddy-month' reform. *Journal of Public Economics* 97: 131-143.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. (2012). Ideational Struggles over Symmetrical Parenthood: the Norwegian Daddy Quota. *Journal of Social Policy* 41(4): 695-714.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. (2021). Conflicting Policy Feedback: Enduring Tensions over Fathers Quotas in Norway. *Social Politics* 28(4): 999-1024.
- Ellingsæter, A.L., Kitterod, R.H. and Lyngstad, J. (2017). Universalising Childcare, Changing Mothers' Attitudes: Policy Feedback in Norway. *Journal of Social Policy* 46(1): 149-173.
- Engeli, I. and Mazur, A. (2018). Taking Implementation Seriously in Assessing Success: The Politics of Gender Equality Policy. *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 1(1-2): 111-129.
- Erler, W. and Erler, D. (2008). Germany Country Note in Moss, P. and Korintus, M. (eds.). *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2008*. https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2008_annual_report.pdf.
- Erler, D. (2009). Germany Country Note in Moss, P. (ed.). *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2009*. https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2009_annual_report.pdf.
- European Commission (2010). *Gender Equality in the EU in 2009. Special Eurobarometer*. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/808>.
- European Commission (2014). *Gender Equality. Special Eurobarometer 428*. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2048>.
- European Commission (2017). *European Semester Thematic Factsheet. Women in the Labour Market*. https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-06/european-semester_thematic-factsheet_labour-force-participation-women_en_0.pdf.
- European Commission (2017a). *Gender Equality 2017. Special Eurobarometer 465*. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2154>.
- European Commission (2018). *2018 Report on Equality Between Women and Men in the EU*. <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/950dce57-6222-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.
- Eurostat (2023). Gender pay gap in unadjusted form. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/table?lang=en.
- Eurostat (2024). Part-time employment as percentage of the total employment, by sex and age (%). https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_eppga/default/table?lang=en&category=labour.employ.lfsa.lfsa_empftpt.
- Ferguson, K. (2017). Feminist Theory Today. *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 269-86.

- Ferree, M.M. (1990). Beyond Separate Spheres: Feminism and Family Research. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 52(4): 866-884.
- Gangl, M. and Ziefle, A. The Making of a Good Woman: Extended Parental Leave Entitlements and Mothers' Work Commitment in Germany. *American Journal of Sociology* 121(2): 511-563.
- Gehrerová, R. (2020). Nie je pravda, že otcovia chodia na materskú iba formálne, o deti sa naozaj starajú, hovorí analytička Dančíková. Denník N. <https://dennikn.sk/1950379/nie-je-pravda-ze-otcovia-chodia-na-matersku-iba-formalne-o-deti-sa-naozaj-staraju-hovori-analyticka-dancikova/>.
- Geisler, E. and Kreyenfeld, M. (2011). Against All Odds: Fathers' Use of Parental Leave in Germany. *Journal of European Social Policy* 21(1): 88-99.
- Gheaus, A. and Robeyns, I. (2011). Equality-Promoting Parental Leave. *Journal of Social Philosophy* 42(2): 173-191.
- Gornick, J.C. and Meyers, M.K. (2008). Creating Gender Egalitarian Societies: An Agenda for Reform. *Politics & Society* 36(3): 313-349.
- Gregory, A. and Milner, S. (2008). Fatherhood Regimes and Father Involvement and the UK. *Community, Work & Family* 11(1): 61-84.
- Grönlund, A. and Öun, I. Rethinking Work-Family Conflict: Dual-Earner Policies, Role Conflict and Role Expansion in Western Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy* 20(3): 179-195.
- Grzymala-Busse, A. (2010). The Best Laid Plans: The Impact of Informal Rules on Formal Institutions in Transitional Regimes. *Studies in Comparative International Development* 45:311-333.
- Haas, L. and Rostgaard, T. (2011). Fathers' Rights to Paid Parental Leave in the Nordic Countries: Consequences for the Gendered Division of Leave. *Community, Work & Family* 14(2): 177-195.
- Haas, L. and Hwang, P. (2019). Policy Is Not Enough – the Influence of the Gendered Workplace on Fathers' Use of Parental Leave in Sweden. *Community, Work & Family* 22(1): 58-76.
- Haney, L. (2002). After the Fall: East European Women Since the Collapse of State Socialism. *Contexts* Fall 2002.
- Haniková, L. (2020). Počet otcov, ktorí chodia na Slovensku na materskú, rastie. *EURACTIV.SK*. <https://euractiv.sk/section/socialna-politika/news/pocet-otcov-ktori-chodia-na-slovensku-na-matersku-rastie/>.
- Hašková, H. and Klenner, C. (2010). Why Did Distinct Types of Dual-Earner Models in Czech, Slovak and East German Societies Develop and Persist? *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung* 22(3): 266-288.
- Heintz, J., Staab, S. and Turquet, L. (2021). Don't Let Another Crisis Go to Waste: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Imperative for a Paradigm shift. *Feminist Economics* 27 (1-2): 470-485.
- Helmke, G. and Levitsky, S. (2004). Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda. *Perspective on Politics* 2(4): 725-740.
- Henderson, K. (1992). Book Reviews. *Journal of Leisure Research* 24(4): 394-400.
- Hidas, S. and Horváthová, V. (2018). Women Still Can't Have It All. Barriers to Higher Maternal Employment in Slovakia. *IFP Policy Paper 48*. <https://www.mfsr.sk/en/finance/institute-financial->

policy/working-papers/women-still-cant-have-it-all-barriers-higher-maternal-employment-slovakia.html.

Himmelweit, S. and Sigala, M. (2004). Choice and the Relationship between Identities and Behaviour for Mothers with Pre-School Children: Some Implications for Policy from a UK Study. *Journal of Social Policy* 33(3): 455-478.

Hochschild, A. and Machung, A. (1989). *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking.

Hook, J.L. (2006). Care in Context: Men's Unpaid Work in 20 Countries, 1965-2003. *American Sociological Review* 71(4): 639-660.

Horváthová, V. and Salomonová, A. (2022). Zima stále pod vplyvom pandémie. Komentár IFP 2022/4. <https://www.mfsr.sk/files/archiv/4/Zima-stale-pod-vplyvom-pandemie.pdf>.

Kan, M.K. (2008). Does Gender Trump Money? Housework Hours of Husbands and Wives in Britain. *Work, Employment and Society* 22(1): 45-66.

Kan, M.K., Sullivan, O. and Gershuny, J. (2011). Gender Convergence in Domestic Work: Discerning the Effects of Interactional and Institutional Barriers from Large-scale Data. *Sociology* 45(2): 234-251.

Kaufland, G. and Grönlund, A. (2021). Displaying Parenthood, (Un)doing Gender: Parental Leave, Daycare and Working-time adjustments in Sweden and the UK. *Families, Relationships and Societies* 10(2): 213-229.

Kollárová, Z. (2021). Vedľajší príjem otcov na materskej poisťovni nebude skúmať. Odoberanie materskej dávky im už nehrozí. *Denník N*. <https://e.dennikn.sk/2358080/vedlajsi-prijem-otcov-na-materskej-poisťovna-nebude-skumat-odoberanie-materskej-davky-im-uz-nehrozi/>

Kollárová, Z. (2023). Rok 2023: Veľký prehľad zmien nemocenských dávok. *Denník E*. https://e.dennikn.sk/3176044/rok-2023-velky-prehľad-zmien-nemocenskych-davok/#p_lock

Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G. and Moss, P. (2022). *18th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2022*. <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/>.

Kluve, J. and Tamm, M. (2013). Parental Leave Regulations, Mothers' Labor Force Attachment and Fathers' Childcare Involvement: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in *Journal of Population Economics* 26(3): 983-1005.

Kluve, J. and Schmitz, S (2018). Back to Work. *ILR Review* 71(1): 143-173.

Lakoff, G. (2004). *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green.

Lappegard, T. (2008). Changing the Gender Balance in Caring: Fatherhood and the Division of Parental Leave in Norway. *Population Research and Policy Review* 27(2): 139-159.

Lapuerta, I., Baizán, P. and González, M.J. (2011). Individual and Institutional Constraints: An Analysis of Parental Leave Use and Duration in Spain. *Population Research and Policy Review* 30(2): 185-210.

Lee, Y. (2022). *Fathers' Uptake of Parental Leave in South Korea: Determinants and Aftermaths*. [Doctoral Thesis, University of Cambridge].

- Lee Y. (2022a). Is Leave for Fathers Pronatalist? A Mixed-Methods Study of the Impact of Fathers' Uptake of Parental Leave on Couples' Childbearing Intentions in South Korea.
- Lee, Y. (2022b). Norms about Childcare, Working Hours, and Fathers' Uptake of Parental Leave in South Korea. *Community, Work & Family*.
- Lee, Y. (2023). 'Undoing Gender' or Selection Effects?: Fathers' Uptake of Leave and Involvement in Housework and Childcare in South Korea. *Journal of Family Studies*.
- Legerski, E.M., and Cornwall, M. (2010). Working-class Job Loss, Gender and the Negotiation of Household Labor. *Gender & Society* 24(4): 447-474.
- Lesthaege, R. and Vanderhoeft, C. (2001). Ready, Willing, and Able: A Conceptualization of Transitions to New Behavioural Forms. *Diffusion Processes and Fertility Transition: Selected Perspectives*. National Academy of Sciences.
- Lewis, J. and Campbell, M. (2008). What's in a Name? 'Work and Family' or 'Work and Life' Balance Policies in the UK since 1997 and the Implications for the Pursuit of Gender Equality. *Social Policy & Administration* 42(5): 524-541.
- Lombardo, E. and Meier, P. (2008). Framing Gender Equality in the European Union Political Discourse. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 15(1): 101-129.
- Lott, Y. and Klenner, C. (2018). Are the Ideal Worker and Ideal Parent Norms about to Change? The Acceptance of Part-time and Parental Leave at German Workplaces. *Community, Work & Family* 21(5): 564-580.
- Marynissen, L., Mussino, E., Wood, J. and Duvander, A.-Z. (2019). Fathers' Parental Leave in Belgium and in Sweden: Self-Evident or Subject to Employment Characteristics? *Social Sciences* 8: 1-21.
- McDonald, P. F. (2006). Low fertility and the state: The efficacy of policy. *Population and Development Review* 32(3): 485-510.
- Meil, G., Romero-Balsas, P. and Rogero-García, J. (2016). Chapter 7: Fathers on Leave Alone in Spain: 'Hey, I want to Be able to Do It Like That, Too'. in O'Brien, M. and Wall, K. (eds.). *Comparative Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality*. Springer Open.
- Meil, G., Escobedo, A. and Lapuerta, I. (2023). Spain country note in Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Kosłowski, A. and Moss, P. (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*. http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/.
- Miani, C. and Hoorens, S. (2014). *Parents at Work: Men and Women Participating in the Labour Force. Short Statistical Report No. 2*. Rand Europe for the European Commission. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR348.html.
- Mihál, J. (2017). Materská 2017. KO&KA.
- Mossberger, K. and Wolman, H. (2003). Policy Transfer as a Form of Prospective Policy Evaluation: Challenges and Recommendations. *Public Administration Review* 63(4): 428-440.
- MPSVaR (2010). Súhrnná správa o stave rodovej rovnosti na Slovensku za rok 2010. Návrh. https://www.gender.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Sprava_RR_2010.pdf.

Moss, P., Koslowski, A. and Duvander, A.-Z. (2019). Introduction: Much Work Still to Do in Moss, P., Duvander, A.-Z. and Koslowski, A. (2012). *Parental Leave and Beyond*. Bristol University Press: Policy Press.

Mussino, E., Tervola, J. and Duvander, A.-Z. (2019). Decomposing the Determinants of Fathers' Parental Leave Use: Evidence from Migration between Finland and Sweden. *Journal of European Social Policy* 29(2): 197-212.

Nagar, R. (2002). Footloose Researchers, 'Traveling' Theories, and the Politics of Transnational Feminist Praxis. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 9(2): 179-186.

najmama.aktuality.sk (2018a). Akože nemám nárok?! Otcov so zamietnutým materským je veľa, Andrej bol zrejme prvým. <https://najmama.aktuality.sk/clanok/273315/otcov-so-zamietnutym-materskym-prispevkom-pribuda-andrej-bol-zrejme-prvym/>.

najmama.aktuality.sk (2018b). Další otcovia prišli o materskú: Ich rodiny nedostávajú dávky, na ktoré majú nárok. <https://najmama.aktuality.sk/clanok/273305/dalsi-otcovia-prisli-o-matersku-ich-rodiny-nedostavaju-davky-na-ktore-maju-narok/>.

najmama.aktuality.sk (2018c). Šikana slovenských otcov: Najskôr im materské schvália a potom zoberú. <https://najmama.aktuality.sk/clanok/273260/sikana-slovenskych-otcov-najskor-im-materske-schvalia-a-potom-zoberu/>.

Nakazato, H., Nishimura, J. and Takezawa, J. (2022). Japan Country Note in Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufmann, G. and Moss, P. (eds.). *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2022*. <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/>.

Neyer, G. and Andersson, G. (2008). Consequences of Family Policies on Childbearing Behavior: Effects or Artifacts? *Population and Development Review* 34(4): 699-724.

NRSR (2010a). *Návrh zákona z 2. decembra 2010, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 461/2003 Z. z. o sociálnom poistení v znení neskorších predpisov a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov*. <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/Download.aspx?DocID=349594>.

NRSR (2010b). *Vyhľadávanie v prepise rozpravy. Rokovanie o vládnom návrhu zákona, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 461/2003 Z. z. o sociálnom poistení v znení neskorších predpisov a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov. Volebné obdobie 5 (2010-2012), tlač 109*. <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=schodze/rozprava/vyhladavanie&CisObdobia=5&CPT=109&CisSchodze=0&PoslanecID=0&DatumOd=1900-1-1%200:0:0&DatumDo=2100-1-1%200:0:0&TypVystupenia>.

O'Brien, M. and Twamley, K. (2017). Fathers Taking Leave Alone in the UK – A Gift Exchange Between Mother and Father? in O'Brien, M. and Wall, K. (eds.). *Comparative Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality*. Springer Open.

O'Brien, M. and Wall, K. (2017a). Chapter 1: Fathers on Leave Alone: Setting the Scene in O'Brien, M. and Wall, K. (eds.). *Comparative Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality*. Springer Open.

O'Brien, M. and Wall, K. (2017c). Chapter 14: Comparative Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality: Discussion and Conclusions in O'Brien, M. and Wall, K. (eds.). *Comparative Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality*. Springer Open.

OECD (2016a). Parental Leave: Where Are the Fathers? *Policy Brief*. <https://www.oecd.org/policy-briefs/parental-leave-where-are-the-fathers.pdf>.

OECD (2016b). *Use of Childbirth-Related Leave Benefits*. OECD Family Database. www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm.

OECD (2013). *Full-time equivalent employment rate, by sex*. OECD.Stat. <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54749#>.

Onuferová, M. (2017). *Mihál radi otcom skúsiť materskú, oplati sa to aj finančne*. Denník N. <https://dennikn.sk/716005/mihal-radi-otcom-skusit-matersku-oplati-sa-to-aj-financne/>.

Pfau-Effinger, B. (1998). Gender Cultures and the Gender Arrangement – A Theoretical Framework for Cross-National Gender Research. *Innovation* 11(2): 147-166.

Pfau-Effinger, B. (2005). Culture and Welfare State Policies: Reflections on a Complex Interrelation. *Journal of Social Policy* 34(1): 3-20.

Pfau-Effinger, B. (2012): Women's Employment in the Institutional and Cultural Context. *International Journal of Sociology, and Social Policy* 32(9/10): 530-543.

Pierotti, R.S., Lake, M. and Lewis C. (2018). Doing and Undoing Gender through Men's Discussion Groups. *Gender & Society* 32(4): 540-562.

Plomien, A. (2019). Gender Inequality by Design: Does Successful Implementation of Childcare Policy Deliver Genderjust Outcomes? *Policy and Society* 38(4): 643-662.

Pollert, A. (2003): Women, Work and Equal Opportunities in Post-Communist Transition. *Work, Employment and Society* 17(2): 331–357.

Rege, M. and Solli, I.F. (2013). The Impact of Paternity Leave on Fathers' Future Earnings. *Demography* 50(6): 2255-2277.

Rehel, E.M. (2013). When Dad Stays Home Too: Paternity Leave, Gender, and Parenting. *Gender & Society* 28(1): 110-132.

Reimer, T. (2020). Why Fathers Don't Take More Parental Leave in Germany: Comparing Mechanisms in Different Work Organizations. *Community, Work & Family* 23(4): 419-438.

Risman, B. (1998). *Gender Vertigo: American Families in Transition*. New Haven and London: *Yale University Press*.

Risman, B. (2004). Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism in *Gender & Society* 18(4): 429-450.

Risman, B. (2009). From Doing to Undoing: Gender as We Know It in *Gender & Society* 23(1): 81-84.

Risman, B. (2011). Gender as Structure or Trump Card? *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 3: 18

Risman, B. (2016). 2016 Southern Sociological Society Presidential Address: Are Millennials Cracking the Gender Structure? *Social Currents* 4(3): 208-227.

Risman, B. (2018). *Where the Millennials Will Take Us: A New Generation Wrestles with the Gender Structure*. New York: *Oxford University Press*.

- Saxonberg, S. (2014): *Gendering Family Policies in Post-Communist Europe. A Historical-Institutional Analysis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Saxonberg, S. and Maříková, H. (2023). The Central European World of Fatherhood Policies: How Individual Attitudes Mediate the Norm of Threeness in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. *Journal of Family Studies*: 1-15.
- Schober, P. (2014). Parental Leave and Domestic Work of Mothers and Fathers: A Longitudinal Study of Two Reforms in West Germany. *Journal of Social Policy* 43(2): 351-372.
- Schober, P. and Büchau, S. (2022) How parenting leaves impact parental employment, family work, and gender norms: a literature review in Dobrotic, I. et al. (2022). *Research Handbook on Leave Policy: Parenting and Social Inequalities in Global Perspectives*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Schulze, E. and Gergoric, M. (2015). Maternity, Paternity, and Parental Leave: Data Related to Duration and Compensation Rates in the European Union. Study for the FEMM Committee. *European Parliament*.
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/509999/IPOL_STU\(2015\)509999_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/509999/IPOL_STU(2015)509999_EN.pdf).
- SITA (2019). Mihál a Petrik navrhujú materskú dávku pre otcov aj na deti v jasliach. *sme.sk*.
<https://index.sme.sk/c/22131822/mihal-a-petrik-navrhuj-matersku-davku-pre-otcov-aj-na-deti-v-jasliach.html>.
- Smith, A.J. and Williams, D.R. (2007). Father-Friendly Legislation and Paternal Time across Western Europe. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 9(2): 175-192.
- Soss, J. and Schram, S. (2007). A Public Transformed? Welfare Reform as Policy Feedback. *The American Political Science Review* 101(1): 111-127.
- Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2023). Average Monthly Wage of Employee in Economy of the SR in the 1st Quarter of 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/ydtzwuww>.
- Sullivan, O., Gershuny, J. and Robinson, J.P. (2018). Stalled or Uneven Gender Revolution? A Long-Term Processual Framework for Understanding Why Change is Slow. *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 10: 263-279.
- Sundström, M. and Duvander, A.-Z. (2002). Gender Division of Childcare and the Sharing of Parental Leave among New Parents in Sweden. *European Sociological Review* 18(4): 433-477.
- Svallfors, S. (2010). Policy Feedback, Generational Replacement and Attitudes to State Intervention: Eastern and Western Germany, 1990-2006. *European Political Science Review* 2(1): 119-135.
- TASR (2019). Mihál a Petrik navrhnu zmeny v prospech otcov na materskej. *sme.sk*.
<https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/22127007/mihal-a-petrik-navrhnu-zmeny-v-prospech-otcov-na-materskej.html#ixzz5pF35pfjG>.
- teraz.sk (2019). Podľa Sme rodina začala Sociálna poisťovňa otcov zamietat materské.
<https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/podla-sme-rodina-zacala-sp-otcom-zamie/372720-clanok.html>.
- topky.sk (2016). Slováci objavili diery v sociálnom systéme: Otcovia môžu rodinám prilepiť, stačí urobiť toto. <https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1584479/Slovaci-objavili-dieru-v-socialnom-systeme--Otcovia-mozu-rodinam-prilepsit--staci-urobit-toto>.

- topky.sk (2017). Načo chodiť do práce dajte sa na rodinu: Slováci, materská je už vyššia ako plat. <https://www1.pluska.sk/rady-a-tipy/naco-chodit-prace-dajte-rodinu-slovaci-materska-je-vyssia-ako-plat>.
- trend.sk (2021). V materskej pre otcov nastanú zmeny, chystáme aj ďalšie zlepšenia, tvrdí SaS. <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/materskej-pre-otcov-nastanu-zmeny-chystame-aj-dalsie-zlepsenia-tvrdi-sas>.
- Twamley, K. (2021). 'She has mellowed me into the idea of SPL': Unpacking Relational Resources in UK Couples' Discussions of Shared Parental Leave Take-Up. *Families, Relationships and Societies* 10(1): 67-82.
- Uunk, W. (2015). Does the Cultural Context Matter? The Effect of a Country's Gender-Role Attitudes on Female Labor Supply. *European Societies* 17(2): 176-198.
- Uzunalioglu, M., Valentova, M., O'Brien, M., Genevois, A.-S. (2021). When Does Expanded Eligibility Translate into Increased Take-Up? An Examination of Parental Leave Policy in Luxembourg. *Social Inclusion* 9(2): 350-363.
- Van Belle, J. (2016): *Paternity and Parental Leave Policies Across the European Union*, Santa Monica, Rand Corporation. http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1666.html.
- Van der Vleuten, A. and Verloo, M. (2012). Ranking and Benchmarking: The Political Logic of New Regulatory Instruments in the Fields of Gender Equality and Anti-Corruption. *Policy & Politics* 40(1): 73-88.
- Waylen, G. (2014). Informal Institutions, Institutional Change, and Gender Equality. *Political Research Quarterly* 67(1): 212-223.
- Waylen, G. (2017). Gendering Institutional Change. *Oxford Research Encyclopaedias*.
- West, C. and Zimmerman, D.H. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender and Society* 1(2): 125-151.
- Wray, D. (2020). Paternity Leave and Fathers' Responsibility: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in Canada. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82(2): 534-549.
- Zákon č. 311/2001 Z. z. Zákonník práce. (v znení č. [165/2002 Z. z.](#), [408/2002 Z. z.](#), [413/2002 Z. z.](#), [210/2003 Z. z.](#), [461/2003 Z. z.](#), [5/2004 Z. z.](#), [365/2004 Z. z.](#), [82/2005 Z. z.](#), [131/2005 Z. z.](#), [244/2005 Z. z.](#), [570/2005 Z. z.](#), [124/2006 Z. z.](#), [231/2006 Z. z.](#), [348/2007 Z. z.](#), [200/2008 Z. z.](#), [460/2008 Z. z.](#), [49/2009 Z. z.](#), [184/2009 Z. z.](#), [574/2009 Z. z.](#), [543/2010 Z. z.](#)) <https://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/2001-311/znenie-20110101>.
- Žureková, M. (2020). Na materskú odchádza už každý štvrtý otec, prospieva to kariéram žien. *Sme.sk*. <https://zena.sme.sk/c/22434448/na-matersku-odchadza-uz-kazdy-stvrty-otec-prospieva-to-karieram-zien.html>.

7 Appendix

Table 7.1: Documents Used for Frame Analysis

Legislative documents
Zákon č. 311/2001 Z. z. Zákonník práce. (v znení č. 165/2002 Z. z. , 408/2002 Z. z. , 413/2002 Z. z. , 210/2003 Z. z. , 461/2003 Z. z. , 5/2004 Z. z. , 365/2004 Z. z. , 82/2005 Z. z. , 131/2005 Z. z. , 244/2005 Z. z. , 570/2005 Z. z. , 124/2006 Z. z. , 231/2006 Z. z. , 348/2007 Z. z. , 200/2008 Z. z. , 460/2008 Z. z. , 49/2009 Z. z. , 184/2009 Z. z. , 574/2009 Z. z. , 543/2010 Z. z.) https://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/2001-311/znenie-20110101 .
Media output - Main period of analysis
Đurana, R. (2019). Zisk z otcovskej dávky. <i>Denník N</i> . https://dennikn.sk/1370904/zisk-z-otcovskej-davky/ .
Kiššová, K. (2018). Slovenskí muži stále odmietajú rodičovskú dovolenku, hoci by tým zlepšili svoje manželstvo.
Košťalíková, K. (2019). Materská pre oboch rodičov súčasne je od januára realitou. Ďalšie novinky prídu tento rok. <i>regiony.zoznam.sk</i> . https://regiony.zoznam.sk/materska-pre-oboch-rodicov-sucasne-je-od-januara-realitou-dalsie-novinky-pridu-tento-rok/ .
najmama.sk (2018). Akože nemám nárok?! Otcov so zamietnutým materským je veľa, Andrej bol zrejme prvým. https://najmama.aktuality.sk/clanok/273315/otcov-so-zamietnutym-materskym-prispevkom-pribuda-andrej-bol-zrejme-prvym/ .
najmama.sk (2018). Ďalší otcovia prišli o materskú: Ich rodiny nedostávajú dávky, na ktoré majú nárok. https://najmama.aktuality.sk/clanok/273305/dalsi-otcovia-prisli-o-matersku-ich-rodiny-nedostavaju-davky-na-ktore-maju-narok/ .
najmama.sk (2018). Šikana slovenských otcov: Najskôr im materské schvália a potom zoberú. https://najmama.aktuality.sk/clanok/273260/sikana-slovenskych-otcov-najskor-im-materske-schvalia-a-potom-zoberu/ .
Onuferová, M. (2017). Mihál radí otcovi skúsiť materskú, oplatí sa to aj finančne. <i>Denník N [online]</i> . https://dennikn.sk/716005/mihal-radi-otcom-skusit-matersku-oplati-sa-to-aj-financne/ .
pravda.sk (2020). Súd v prípadoch materskej otcovi rozhodujú v prospech Sociálnej poisťovne. https://uzitocna.pravda.sk/ako-vybavit/clanok/542245-sudy-v-pripadoch-materskej-otcom-rozhoduju-v-prospech-socialnej-poistovne/ .
SITA (2019). Mihál a Petrik navrhujú materskú dávku pre otcov aj na deti v jasliach. <i>sme.sk</i> . https://index.sme.sk/c/22131822/mihal-a-petrik-navrhuju-matersku-davku-pre-otcov-aj-na-deti-v-jasliach.html .
TASR (2019). Mihál a Petrik navrhnu zmeny v prospech otcov na materskej. <i>sme.sk</i> . https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/22127007/mihal-a-petrik-navrhnu-zmeny-v-prospech-otcov-na-materskej.html#ixzz5pF35pfjG .
teraz.sk (2019). Podľa Sme rodina začala Sociálna poisťovňa otcovi zamietť materské. https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/podla-sme-rodina-zacala-sp-otcom-zamie/372720-clanok.html .
topky.sk (2016). <i>Slováci objavili diery v sociálnom systéme: Otcovia môžu rodinám prilepiť, stačí urobiť toto</i> . https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1584479/Slovaci-objavili-dieru-v-socialnom-systeme--Otcovia-mozu-rodinam-prilepsit--staci-urobit-toto .
topky.sk (2017). Načo chodiť do práce dajte sa na rodinu: Slováci, materská je už vyššia ako plat. https://www1.pluska.sk/rady-a-tipy/naco-chodit-prace-dajte-rodinu-slovaci-materska-je-vyssia-ako-plat .
webnoviny.sk. (2019). Richterovo ministerstvo sa zaoberá úpravou materskej pre otcov, ale čaká na rozhodnutie súdu. https://www.webnoviny.sk/richterovo-ministerstvo-sa-zaobera-upravou-materskej-pre-otcov-ale-cka-na-rozhodnutie-sudu/ .
Media output - After main period of analysis

Gehrerová, R. (2020). Nie je pravda, že otcovia chodia na materskú iba formálne, o deti sa naozaj starajú, hovorí analytička Dančíková. Denník N. <https://dennikn.sk/1950379/nie-je-pravda-ze-otcovia-chodia-na-matersku-iba-formalne-o-deti-sa-naozaj-staraju-hovori-analyticka-dancikova/>.

Haniková, L. (2020). Počet otcov, ktorí chodia na Slovensku na materskú, rastie. EURACTIV.SK. <https://euractiv.sk/section/socialna-politika/news/pocet-otcov-ktori-chodia-na-slovensku-na-matersku-rastie/>.

Kollárová, Z. (2021). Veďľajší príjem otcov na materskej poisťovňa nebude skúmať. Odoberanie materskej dávky im už nehrozí. Denník N. <https://e.dennikn.sk/2358080/vedlajsi-prijem-otcov-na-materskej-poisovna-nebude-skumat-odoberanie-materskej-davky-im-uz-nehrozi/>

Kovačič-Hanzelová, Z. (2020). Analytička Dančíková: Muži na materskej majú s deťmi hlbší vzťah. sme.sk. <https://video.sme.sk/c/22441678/analyticka-dancikova-muzi-na-materskej-maju-so-svojimi-detmi-hlpsi-vztah.html>.

Žureková, M. (2020). Na materskú odchádza už každý štvrtý otec, prospieva to kariéram žien. Sme.sk. <https://zena.sme.sk/c/22434448/na-matersku-odchadza-uz-kazdy-stvrty-otec-prospieva-to-karieram-zien.html>.

[Materská dovolenka otcov je na Slovensku stále viac populárna](#) (Maternity leave for fathers is ever more popular in Slovakia), Rádio FM, 10 November, 2020

[Počet otcov, ktorí chodia na Slovensku na materskú, rastie](#) (The number of Slovak fathers who take maternity leave is on the rise), EURACTIV.SK, 2 July 2020

[Štedrá materská dávka láka otcov podvádzať](#) (Generous maternity benefit motivates fathers to cheat), Hospodárske noviny, 26 July 2020

trend.sk (2021). *V materskej pre otcov nastanú zmeny, chystáme aj ďalšie zlepšenia, tvrdí SaS.* <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/materskej-pre-otcov-nastanu-zmeny-chystame-aj-dalsie-zlepsenia-tvrdi-sas>.

Table 7.2: Guiding Questions for Frame Analysis

Diagnosis
What is represented as the problem the daddy quota is to address? Unequal division of leave and labor by mothers and fathers? Mothers' needs, including their position in the labor market, fathers or children's rights?
Prognosis
Who is to use the daddy quota? Fathers or others? In what way is the daddy quota to be used? Is the benefit to be used together with leave? Can the benefit be used concurrently with paid work? What is the purpose of the benefit? To look after children, spend time with them or to provide for the family financially?
Normative messaging
What is implied about the desirable state of affairs in relation to the use of the daddy quota? What is implied about the desirable state of affairs in the relation to the division or leaves and labor by mothers and fathers? Are fathers portrayed as carers or economic providers, carers or both? In what ways are mothers portrayed? Is fathers' care represented as of equal value and importance as mothers' care?

Table 7.3: Media Outlets Searched for Frame Analysis

Broadsheets (including online)
Denník N https://dennikn.sk/
SME https://www.sme.sk/
Aktuality https://www.aktuality.sk/
Tabloids (including online)
Topky https://www.topky.sk/
Plus 1 deň/ Pluska https://www1.pluska.sk/
TV & radio stations
RTVS https://www.rtv.s.sk/
TV JOJ https://www.joj.sk/
Markíza https://www.markiza.sk/
TA3 https://www.ta3.com/

Table 7.4: Logistic Regression of Fathers' Benefit Uptake, Odds Ratios

Variable		Odds ratio
Education	No parent has higher education	ref
	Only mother has higher education	1.77***
	Only father has higher education	1.57***
	Both parents have higher education	2.17***
Father's income from employment	1. quartile (up to €182/ month)	ref
	2. quartile (up to €642/ month)	2.10***
	3. quartile (up to €1,240/ month)	3.37***
	4. quartile (up to €170,436/ month)	2.73***
Ratio of mother's and father's income	<= 50 %	ref
	> 50 % & <= 100 %	1.07***
	> 100 %	1.57***
Father's income from both employment and self-employment		2.03***
Father's income from self-employment only		3.02***
Mother's income from both employment and self-employment		1.78***
Mother's income from self-employment only		2.47***
Mothers with pre-birth income		1.12***
Father from marginalized Roma communities	non-Roma	ref
	Roma	0.26***
Fathers' number of living children	1-3 children	ref
	4-6 children	0.93*
	> 6 children	0.52***
Father's age	1. quartile (<= 29)	ref
	2. quartile (<= 33)	1.12***
	3. quartile (<= 36)	1.11***
	4. quartile (<= 75)	0.97
Mother's age	1. quartile (<= 27)	ref
	2. quartile (<= 30)	1.08***
	3. quartile (<= 33)	1.00
	4. quartile (<= 53)	0.94**
Multiple births		1.15**
Father's usual residence - region	Bratislava	ref
	Trnava	0.81***
	Trenčín	1.17***
	Nitra	0.60***
	Žilina	1.08***
	Banská Bystrica	0.78***
	Prešov	0.85***
	Košice	0.72***
Parents' different usual residence		0.90***
Year of birth	2008	ref
	2009	2.75
	2010	12.98***
	2011	36.25***
	2012	100.02****
	2013	240.37***
	2014	586.25***

	2015	1294.71***
	2016	2481.05***
	2017	1827.55***
	2018	813.62***
	q1-2 2019	67.16***
Constant		0.0000207
Log likelihood		-76,073
Observations		445,683

*statistically significant at 10 % **statistically significant at 5 % ***statistically significant at 1 %

****a robustness check showed that coefficients do not vary considerably with the year of birth of the child

Table 7.5: Median Time of Entry into Employment after Giving Birth of Mothers Who Entered in 2019 (descriptive results)

Mothers	Number of months
All mothers	33
Mothers, where fathers drew on maternity benefits	25
Mothers with pre-birth income	23
Mothers' pre-birth income & fathers' receipt of maternity benefits	
Mothers with pre-birth income & fathers who drew on maternity benefits	22
Mothers with pre-birth income & fathers with no maternity benefits	24
Fathers' paid work while on maternity benefits	
Fathers with maternity benefits, no concurrent income from paid work	23
Fathers with maternity benefits, <=50% of previous income from paid work	28
Fathers with maternity benefits, >50% of previous income from paid work	31
Mothers' pre-birth income & fathers' paid work while on maternity benefits	
Mothers with pre-birth income & fathers with maternity benefits, no concurrent income from paid work	20
Mothers with pre-birth income & fathers with maternity benefits, <=50% of previous income from paid work	24
Mothers with pre-birth income & fathers with maternity benefits, >50% of previous income from paid work	27
Mothers, where fathers are self-employed	36