

Reseñas de libros e informes / Book and Report Review

***Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States. Comparing care policies and practice.* Guðný Björk Eydal and Tine Rostgaard (Eds.). Bristol: Policy Press, 2015**

Olga Molina

Universidad de Barcelona

olga.molina.1401@gmail.com

During recent decades, international inquiry has widened the scope of research on fatherhood in response to the challenges posed by contemporary family life and gender relations. From a Western research perspective, cultural and social changes have unlocked a 'new' or 'modern' image of fatherhood, characterised by men taking an active role in the daily lives of their children; an image opposed to the traditional male breadwinner role. In this context, *Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States* aims to provide insight into contemporary policies and practices of fatherhood in the five Nordic countries; Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, framed by the Nordic dual earner/dual carer model which emphasises both parents sharing labour market responsibilities and childcare, founded on an equal gender basis.

Widespread research literature has recognised how policies in Nordic countries have promoted gender equality in the labour market, achieving high employment rates among men and women, which is in line with the dual earner model. However, there is less evidence of the influence of policies aimed at an equitable distribution of family responsibilities resulting in greater involvement of the father in childcare (the dual carer model). This edited volume offers a broad, methodologically diverse and vibrant body of scholarship analysing the policies that support the Nordic dual earner/dual carer model, examining whether the outcomes of such policies are in line with the goals of Nordic family and gender equality policies to ensure the parental care rights of children, and determining whether they place the fa-

ther as a parent on an equal footing with the mother or not. Likewise, the book analyses the intricate construction of fatherhood shaped by the interaction between practices, policies, family settings, norms and institutional frameworks, to examine the statement of a common universal Nordic model in which active fatherhood takes place.

The book is divided into five themes: *Fathers, the families and family policies; Fathers in everyday life – culture, work and care; Constructing fatherhood in different family settings; Caring fathers and paid parental leave policies; and International reflections on findings*. Spanning these broad topics, each of the eighteen chapters presents a particular analytical approach, relating in different ways to each other about the Nordic policies and practices that construct fatherhood. Opening the first theme, Tine Rostgaard and Rasmus Juul Møberg (Chapter 2) give evidence of a strong relationship between attitudes and male fertility behaviour. Results show that Nordic fathers have more relaxed attitudes towards the importance of fathering for adulthood and towards the choice of childlessness, than other European fathers, thus, being more likely to be childless or have fewer children. In addition, childlessness is associated with higher education levels and the younger generations. Although transition into fatherhood has decreased in these generations, there is support for youngsters to become fathers where that choice is sustained by positive attitudes towards fatherhood and employment stability (see also the influence of attitudes in Chapters 8 and 14).

Hrefna Friðriksdóttir (Chapter 3) gives a broad perspective on contemporary Nordic family law, identifying the bases of the commonalities and differences between Nordic countries. Family law has evolved at a different pace in each of the Nordic countries; nevertheless, contemporary law reforms are based on the common principles of gender equality, and the priority of the best interests of the children. Furthermore, family law emphasises the role of the father, transcending the traditional family model and shifting focus onto the relationships, rights and responsibilities of fathers towards their children. Mia Hakovirta, Anita Haataja, Guðný Björk Eydal and Tine Rostgaard (Chapter 4) conclude theme one, presenting an innovative and complex analysis of family benefits in the Nordic countries. Evidence shows eye-opening contradictions and differences between the family benefits systems: while Norway and Sweden are more supportive of the dual earner/dual carer model, recognising equal rights of fathers in the child benefit system regardless of their family type, Iceland, Finland and Denmark, show a tendency more in line with the breadwinner model. In the last three countries, following separation, the non-residential parent (usually the father) is primarily regarded as the provider. Likewise, equal rights for mothers and fathers, regarding legislation on paid parental leave, only exist in Sweden, Norway and Iceland. Results indicate the need for improving the family benefits systems towards better cohesion with the dual earner/dual carer ideology.

Heading the second theme, Minna Ylikännö, Hannu Pääkkönen and Mia Hakovirta (Chapter 5) advise a slow and discreet movement towards a more involved fatherhood in Finland. While fathers had spent almost double the time on childcare and less time on paid work in 2009–10 than in the previous two decades, results indicate that the gender gap in childcare responsibilities is almost as wide as twenty years ago. Findings correspond with a truncated fathers' leave quota, based on the 'free choice' rationale, which does not contribute to the policy goal of improved gender equality (see an extended analysis in Chapter 14 and Danish similarities in Chapters 7 and 13). Introducing fathers' leave use in Norway, Berit Brandth and Elin Kvande (Chapter 6) explore fathers' 'told practices' show-

ing that the father's quota is somehow contributing to the transformation of the gendered and classed father practices, promoting reconciliation of care with masculinity norms. Nevertheless, parental leave and the father's quota are still shaped by socially classed attitudes to care, where middle-class parents see fathers as being as fully competent as mothers, while working-class fathers use their leave quota to be supporters, staying home with the mother present (see also the influence of social class in Chapters 10, 12, 13 and 16).

Regarding Danish fathers' use of parental leave, Lotte Bloksgaard (Chapter 7) explores the private workplace arena to highlight the struggles that fathers must face as a result of individual negotiations to use their entitled parental leave. In the Danish context, where there is no fathers' quota that constitutes a normative guide for fatherhood/carer ideals, evidence proves that existence of a paid leave entitlement is no guarantee that fathers will use it (as in the Finnish case, Chapters 5 and 14). Furthermore, the assumed gender-neutral Danish parental leave is still perceived as being 'for mothers', so, fathers' leave take-up is related to an ideal of shared parenthood responsibilities and equal opportunities for women in the labour market, rather than an ideal of the present father (see extended analysis on the Denmark case in Chapter 13). In a comparative approach, Mikael Nordenmark (Chapter 8) gives evidence that in the dual earner/dual carer regime (Nordic countries) fathers are more involved in housework and childcare than fathers in the male breadwinner regime (southern European countries; Spain, Greece, and Portugal). Dual earner/dual carer regimes excel in gender equality values, women's higher education and participation in gainful employment, which are shown to be significant triggers for fathers' involvement in housework responsibilities. However, the relationship between the regime and fathers' involvement in childcare does not seem so strong; furthermore, fathers who were more inclined towards gender equality attitudes appeared to be more involved with household responsibilities and childcare in both the Nordic and southern European countries.

Opening theme three, Steen Baagøe Nielsen and Allan Westerling (Chapter 9) give anecdotal examples of the experiences of Nordic fathers who had

found the space, time and support necessary to become caring fathers. From the fathers' experiences, the authors identify fathering as a learning process that is happening within a diversity of male contexts, although with similar characteristics. Fathers' practices are underpinned by a strong motivation for developing a relationship with their children, and the recognition of their fathering competencies based on active childcare in everyday family life. The learning process also includes orientation of previous experiences and knowledge towards the development of new ways of caring and the creation of intimacy with their children. In Chapter 10, Anika Liversage explores the diversity of fatherhood in Denmark, showing that fathers with minority ethnic backgrounds 'do fatherhood' in very different ways, being more inclined to believe and live according to the patriarchal family model prevailing in their parents' country of origin. And at the same time, they are facing the challenges posed by their immigrant status (weakly positioned in the labour market and confronting divorce struggles) and the difficulties of adapting themselves to more egalitarian gender roles.

Arnfinn J. Andersen (Chapter 11) probes deeper into Norwegian fathers' diversity, casting light on how gay fathers substitute the shared home by creating space and intimacy for their child's upbringing through cooperation with a lesbian mother. Within this new idea of home, gay fathers negotiate a space to develop their fatherhood as independent caregivers. Considering an ambitious research project, Mai Heide Ottosen (Chapter 12) shows the short-term and long-term impacts of paternal involvement in childcare within a Danish context. Overall, results evidenced the importance of fathers' involvement regarding the use of paternity, parental or childcare leave, and their immersion in everyday care tasks as an indicator of commitment to the nuclear family, which is associated with a low risk of family dissolution. Furthermore, a father's parental involvement in daily care tasks, while in an intact family, heralds more equal arrangements after the family breaks up and increased cooperation with the mother, which is associated with the child's perception of the father as a significant person. Conversely, the 15-year-old children surveyed more frequently perceived their unemployed and/

or less educated father as 'less important', which suggests that social class can influence the construction of modern fatherhood, even more so after family dissolution.

Theme four begins with Tine Rostgaard's and Mette Lausten's (Chapter 13) research on the analysis of the unresolved fathers' quota in Denmark. The introduction of the father's quota (1998-2002) triggered a significant increase in fathers taking leave, which dropped when it was eliminated, but has maintained a moderate increase since then thanks to labour market agreements and the cultural shift towards active fatherhood and gender equality. Moreover, well-educated fathers, working in public sector occupations, with well-educated partners, are the ones who take most parental leave. This reveals that the organisation of statutory leave entitlements has enhanced class differences between fathers, while the introduction of the father's quota in the period 1998-2002 may have contributed to a more gender-equal distribution of leave take-up. Minna Salmi and Johanna Lammi-Taskula (Chapter 14) look deeper into the policy goals and obstacles for fathers' parental leave in Finland. The authors show that the policy goal of gender equality improvement in Finland is obstructed by the leave schemes based on 'free choice' and 'flexibility' rationales. These reproduce the traditional gendered division of labour, as they lead to fathers only taking the earmarked leave periods and mothers "freely choosing" the transferable parental leave. Moreover, an outstanding finding shows that, contrary to conventional thought, couples rarely make calculations regarding the financial consequences of the father taking leave. Instead, the key predictor of a father opting not to take parental leave is his view on men as the main breadwinners.

Exploring the case of Iceland, Guðný Björk Eydal and Ingólfur V. Gíslason (Chapter 15) show that the policy of non-transferable rights to parental leave for fathers has its origins, on the one hand, in the state's ongoing efforts to increase gender equality. On the other hand, it is based in the expressed will of Icelandic men to be able to participate more in family childcare. The quota entitlement strengthens the bargaining position of the employed father with regards to the employer and also supports a

mother's decision to return to work while the father assumes the carer role. Icelandic experience evidences that policies can contribute to meaningful changes in practices and gender relations. At the same time, fathers' practices became a crucial influence on the making of policies and the institutionalisation of a father's quota. In Chapter 16, Ann-Zofie Duvander and Mats Johansson give a broad perspective on the effectiveness of the leave policies in Sweden. Results of the analysis of the three major reforms to the parental leave system evidence that introduction of the first month of the fathers' quota reduced the differences in parental leave usage between fathers, contributing to its universality. Introduction of a second quota month increased men's take-up, albeit the differences between fathers also increased, and the introduction of the equality bonus broadened that gap, leaving those in vulnerable positions lagging behind: i.e. no income/outside the labour market, low education, foreign-born; characteristics that overlap in many cases. Thus, leave improvements in Sweden need to be considered from a comprehensive perspective which includes social class and diverse family structures, as the parental leave assurance is still directed at families with two parents.

Finally, in theme five, following the central remarks that Janet Gornick (Chapter 17) and Margaret O'Brien (Chapter 18) present from an international perspective, it can be concluded that Nordic fatherhood is not a single institution. It is constructed within a diversity of family arrangements, households, and economic contexts, bounded by historical and cultural heritage. Moreover, active fatherhood promotion within the region has been a long and ongoing process of adapting family policies to progressive values based on gender equality, towards a dual earner/dual carer regime

where fathers and mothers have the same opportunities for work and childcare. Despite their shared progress, Nordic countries advance at a different pace towards active fatherhood, confronting obstacles to the implementation and institutionalisation of gender-neutral leave policies, highlighting that gender roles constructed around work and care are still undermining the potential of a policy aimed at promoting fathers' take-up. Likewise, Nordic countries are compelled to even out the differences between fathers resulting from their socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, so that a real universality of the Nordic model can be achieved. Those differences are connected to historical and cultural legacies but also to external factors shared with the international community, as represented in international migration. As O'Brien points out, 'a future challenge for the Nordic region becoming more multi-ethnic and multi-faith is to explore if gender equality can co-exist with different ways of doing fathering and mothering'. (p. 386)

Significant advances towards active fatherhood are underpinned by the relevance of the fathers' quota, considered throughout the volume as an effective measure to enhance father involvement in child care, and consequently, higher opportunities for both parents to succeed in work and family life organisation. In order to achieve reliable agreements regarding policies towards an equitable distribution of family responsibilities, better practices in the Nordic region evidence the importance of high consensus on gender equality values and even more, fathers' eagerness to exercise their parental rights. This shows that policies can contribute to meaningful changes in practices and gender relations, while at the same time, the practices of fathers retain a crucial influence on the making of policies and the institutionalisation of the fathers' quota.