

DO FATHERS STILL PLAY A PERIPHERAL ROLE IN DAILY FAMILY LIFE?

In theoretical models of families the father still often plays the role of “bread-winner”, living with a wife who cares for the children (e. g., Algan and Cahuc 2005). There have been considerable increases in female labour supply in OECD countries and changes in women’s attitudes towards family and gender roles over the last few decades. The partners of these women have responded to this changed situation. Statistics indicate that male full-time labour supply is falling and part-time supply is rising moderately. To get an idea of future changes in the full-time labour supply of men, it is important to look at the prospective integration of fathers in family affairs. Current sociological concepts of fatherhood and trends in the attitudes of fathers towards family and their involvement in the labour market can provide insight into this matter.

Different concepts of fatherhood

In comparison to the long-established model of the “patriarchal father” with a strong but emotionally distant father, today the father role model has become increasingly differentiated. The following examples provide a brief overview¹:

- *The modern provider*: In addition to the classical functions of a bread-winner, this type of father takes part in family activities only some of the time, focuses on maintaining good relations with his children and is interested in their future. Routine interac-

tion with the children does not take place because of lack of available time on the part of the father.

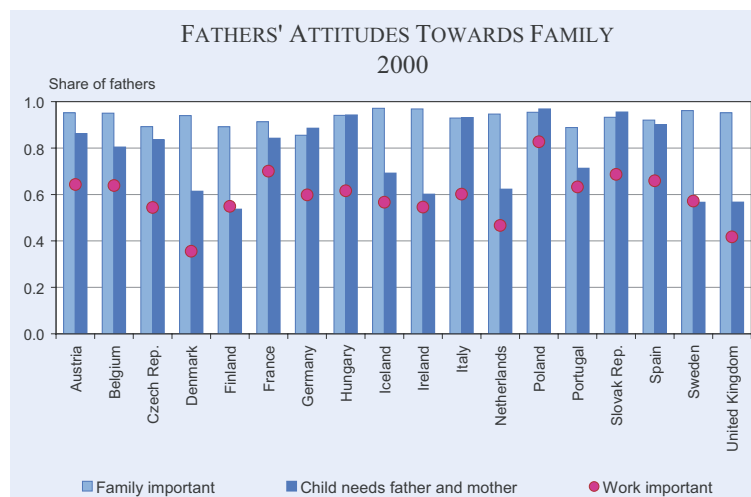
- *The democratic father*: In contrast to the patriarchal role model this father shows more interest in his family and the education of his children. He is socially very active and places importance on broadening the horizons of his children.
- *The holistic father*: This father regards fatherhood as an important aspect in male life, focusing on an emotional relationship to his children. He takes on responsibilities and plays an important role in the daily activities of the family. Household chores are a normal part of his life.

Insight into fathers’ attitudes towards family

To gain insight into the trend of some attitudes of fathers towards family, micro data were analysed from the 1990 and 2000 wave of the World Value Survey. The focus of analysis is on fathers in their prime (aged between 25 and 54), living in OECD-countries.² The answers to the following three questions were investigated:

- 1) “How important is family in your life?”³
- 2) “If someone says a child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happily, would you tend to agree or disagree?”⁴
- 3) “How important is work in your life?”

Figure 1



Note: (a) Questions in survey: 1) “How important is family in your life?” Possible answers: “very important”, “important”, “not very important”, “not important”. Only the answer “very important” is included in our analysis. 2) “If someone says a child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happily, would you tend to agree?” Possible answers: “tend to agree”, “tend to disagree”. Only the answer “tend to agree” is included. 3) “How important is work in your life?” Possible answers: “very important”, “important”, “not very important”, “not important”. Only the answer “very important” is included. Target group: fathers between 25–54 years.

Source: World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org), accessed on 1 April 2009; calculation, design of the figure and additional information provided by the Ifo Institute.

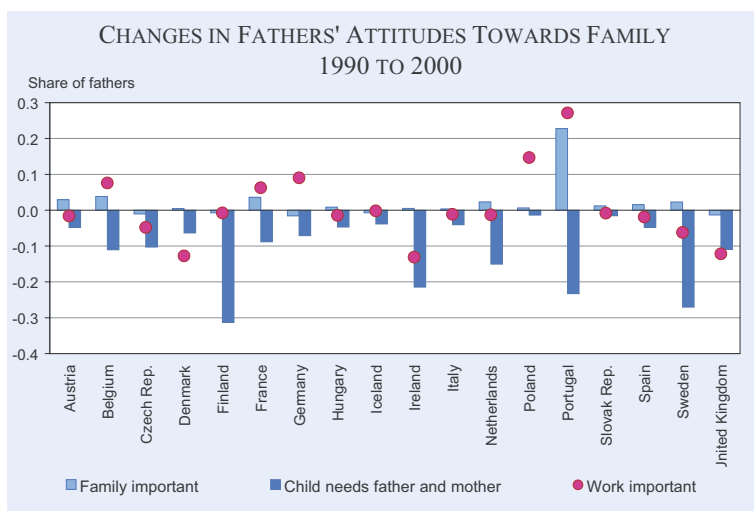
¹ For further information see DJI Bulletin Plus (2008).

² Because of unavailable data Australia, Canada, Greece, Korea, Mexico, Luxembourg, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the US were not included.

³ Possible answers are “very important”, “important”, “not very important”, “not important”. Only the answer “very important” was included in our analysis.

⁴ Possible answers are “tend to agree”, “tend to disagree”. Only the answer “tend to agree” was included in our analysis.

Figure 2



Note: (a) see Figure 1.
Source: see Figure 1.

High values for question one and two indicate a prevalence of modern views of fatherhood. In addition to the information about the personal value of the family in question 1), question 2) provides evidence of how important it is for the father to be involved in the upbringing of his children. Lower values in question 3) signal that the father's main focus in life is not on work and developing his career, indicating that he has more time for parenting. The data highlight considerable differences across countries and across time in the mean values of responses to these questions.

Figure 1 shows the cross-country variation in values pertaining to the three questions in wave 2000. In all countries fathers placed more importance on family than on their work (difference in average over all countries is 37 percent). The variation within "importance of family" is less than a fourth of the variation within "importance of work". Poland shows the highest values in both questions. In contrast, Germany has the lowest value with respect to family and Denmark with respect to work. Further more, Denmark is the country with the highest gap between the values of the two questions. With respect to answers to the second question there is a span of over 40 percent between the highest and lowest value. Countries like Hungary, Italy, Poland and Slovak Republic are the highest; Finland, Sweden and the UK are at the lowest end of the spectrum.

Figure 2 illustrates the changes in the three attitudes in question over time (mean values of responses from the 2000 survey subtracted from those of 1990).

Numerous countries, such as Austria, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Slovak Republic and Spain, have stable values over time (changes smaller than 5 percent). Most of the countries show a slight increase in the importance of family, with the exception of Portugal which showed an increase of more than 20 percent. It is noticeable that there is generally a negative trend with respect to the view that children need both parents to grow up happily. The Scandinavian countries Finland and Sweden demonstrate the most dramatic change with a decrease of more than 25 percent in 10 years. The trend in importance of work is not as clear: in Denmark, Ireland and the UK the values dropped dramatically. On the other hand in Poland and Portugal the importance of work increased sharply.

All in all the results do not show a clear picture with respect to views on fatherhood. On the one hand in countries like France, Poland and Slovak Republic fathers place considerable importance on the family, work and equal family-involvement for both parents. On the other hand fathers in countries like Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom have high family and low work values but the idea of a child needing a father and a mother is not deemed necessary. There is evidence that there is considerable differentiation in the father role model across countries, which may imply a change in associated behaviour relating to the future labour supply of fathers.

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References

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