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Introduction

Although many countries have witnessed substantial increases in women's participation in public domains such as the labour force since the second half of the twentieth century, the so-called second stage of the gender revolution – in which men take up more unpaid labour – is lagging (Goldscheider et al., 2015; England, 2010). Unequal gendered household divisions of (un)paid work are typically exacerbated after the transition to parenthood (Maes et al., 2022; Neilson and Stanfors, 2014; Wood, 2023) and mothers' parental leave uptake by far exceeds levels among fathers (Koslowski et al., 2020). As fathers' leave uptake potentially entails multiple dividends¹ regarding involved fathering, child development, household gender equality and maternal employment (e.g. Bünning, 2015; Almqvist and Duvander, 2014; Haas and Hwang, 2008; Pragg and Knoester, 2017; Spiess and Wrohlich, 2008; Wilson and Prior, 2011), policy-makers voice concerns about fathers' low uptake.

A large body of academic literature puts forward several complementary explanations for fathers' parental leave uptake, including parenting ideologies, policy design features, but also micro-economic considerations (e.g. Escot et al., 2014; Karu and Tremblay, 2018; Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Naz, 2010; Van Gasse et al., 2021; Wood and Marynissen, 2019). With respect to the latter, the so-called *relative resources hypothesis* assumes that – be it through agreement or bargaining between partners – the partner with the lowest wage potential is more likely to use parental leave as this minimises forgone household income. Although the relative resources hypothesis is widely established as a micro-economic determinant of couples' decision-making, our understanding of whether and when the relative resources hypothesis holds as an explanation for male leave uptake remains limited, particularly for non-Nordic European countries. This is problematic given the Nordic forerunner positions regarding highly paid and

¹ Dividends in term of realisation of fertility intentions are also often discussed, yet available empirical literature remains very inconclusive (e.g. Wood and Neels, 2019; Duvander et al., 2020; Lee, 2022).

long duration earmarked leave quota for fathers (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran, 2016; Koslowski et al., 2020; Karu and Tremblay, 2018) and unique cultural settings in which gender equality is a long-standing, cross-cutting and highly ranked social policy aim (Haas and Hwang, 2019a; Saxonberg, 2013; Almqvist, 2008). Consequently, this study aims to improve our understanding of the role of relative resources as an explanation for fathers' parental leave decisions in a non-Nordic context. Similar to many other European countries, Belgium exhibits low parental leave benefits and a laissez-faire approach to gender equality in leave uptake (Saxonberg 2013).

This mixed methods research provides three main contributions to the literature. First, the scarcity of empirical research about relative wage positions and fathers' parental leave uptake outside Nordic countries (Wood and Marynissen, 2019; Naz, 2010; Lappegård, 2008; Lammi-Taskula, 2008) is strongly related to high data requirements (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011), such as longitudinal couple data on eligibility, wages and leave uptake. This study benefits from detailed longitudinal administrative data on cohabiting heterosexual couples to assess the association between partners' relative wage positions and fathers' parental leave uptake.

Second, previous literature is lacking process knowledge on how relative resources function as a determinant of male parental leave uptake. Consequently, this study relies on in-depth individual and/or couple interviews with 22 couples providing interpretative knowledge on whether couples' decision-making is impacted by relative wage positions as couples alter their decision together, or due to the impact on bargaining positions partners have in comparison to one another. Available qualitative studies focussing on non-Nordic contexts are mostly explorative (Koslowski and Kadar-Satat, 2019; Kaufman, 2018; McKay and Doucet, 2010; Romero-Balsas et al., 2013; Birkett and Forbes, 2019) and do not focus on the relative resources hypothesis, let alone provide evidence for specific underlying mechanisms (Kaufman and Almqvist, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2015; Neumann and Meuser, 2017; Barbeta-Viñas and

Muntanyola-Saura). This study assesses whether or not evidence can be found for two often cited mechanisms underlying the relative resources hypothesis: unitary decision-making and conflicting utility entailing bargaining between parents, which are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Third, in addition to the well-accepted finding that different factors affect male leave uptake alongside one another (e.g. Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Naz, 2010), it is also possible that the relative resources mechanism itself is dependent on other moderating factors. As a result, this mixed methods study is not only geared towards a comprehensive test of the relative resources hypothesis as a determinant for fathers' leave uptake, but also studies moderation by other factors. Consequently, benefitting from our mixed methods approach, this study will address the questions whether, how and when the relative resources hypothesis can be put forward as an explanation for gender differences in parental leave uptake.

Micro-Economic Rationality in perspective

In line with our research aims to (I) address the significance and magnitude of the relative resources pattern, (II) provide qualitative indications of the existence or absence of couples' unitary decision-making or bargaining as potential mechanisms underlying the relative resources pattern, and (III) address moderations of the relative resources mechanism, this section discusses the relative resources hypothesis in relation to fathers' parental leave uptake, as well as the underlying decision-making models, and also factors that might moderate the relative resources mechanism.

The relative resources hypothesis assumes that the partner with the lowest wage potential will be more likely to invest time in unpaid activities such as leave uptake or unpaid labour (e.g. Aassve et al., 2014; Wood & Marynissen, 2019; Wood, 2023). Higher earning parents on the contrary are assumed to be more likely to invest in labour force participation in comparison to their lower earning partners, as the forgone income of desinvesting in paid labour is higher. Hence

the relative resources hypothesis puts partners' potential monetary gains from paid employment forward as the central driver of parental leave decisions and implies that *fathers will be more likely to use leave when they have a lower wage potential than their partner* (hypothesis 1).

With respect to the processes underlying the relative resources hypothesis, two main behavioural frameworks are often cited. First, Becker's unitary (1991) New Home Economics theory on within household specialisation argues that partners' time allocation is directly related to their relative marginal productivity in paid and unpaid labour. Couples' joint utility will be highest in case the partner with the highest wage potential specialises in paid work and the other specialises in unpaid work, regardless of gender. With respect to fathers' parental leave uptake, this approach thus hypothesises that leave uptake will be more likely in case the male partner has a lower wage potential compared to the female partner. Following the New Home Economic theory, *unitary decision-making can be expected in which both partners prefer the partner with the lowest wage potential to take up parental leave* (hypothesis 2a). Second, bargaining models, in which household utility is a function of both partners' individual utility functions, assume that relative wage potential elevates bargaining power to pass on unpaid labour to the other partner (Lundberg and Pollack, 1996). The implicit assumption made is that housework and childrearing tasks are considered 'unpleasant' and bargaining is geared towards minimising one's time-investments in unpaid activities (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011). Based on bargaining theory, *it can be assumed that the assignment of parental leave to the partner with the lowest wage potential is related to conflicting utility functions and processes of bargaining* (hypothesis 2b).

As the potential impact of relative wage positions on fathers' leave uptake does not operate in a vacuum, it is possible that the degree to which fathers' parental leave decisions vary as a function of their relative wage positions in turn depends on moderating factors. Based on the available literature on fathers' leave determinants, we discuss four factors that potentially moderate the relative resources mechanism. First, a central assumption made in micro-economic

behavioural frameworks, and also the relative resources hypothesis, is that individual actors make rational decisions based on full information. This implies that parents not only are fully aware of their wage potential, but also fully understand the impact of parental leave uptake on their income position, given parental leave policy design features. Consequently, limitations in information cast doubt on the relative resources hypothesis (Gauthier, 2007). Hence, we assume that *limited information on parental leave uptake and wage positions is likely to hamper the relative resources mechanism from manifesting itself in couples' decision-making processes* (hypothesis 3a).

Second, following the basic principles of micro-economics (Becker, 1991), a budget constraint implies that individual rational actors' opportunity structures in which they can freely make rational decisions are confined by their financial resources. Consequently, although secondary-earner fathers are assumed to be more likely to use parental leave as they have a higher-earning partner, this strategy is only feasible in case the couple has the financial resources to do so, as his forgone wage will decrease the household budget. Consequently, we expect that *the occurrence and strength of the relative resources mechanism as an explanation for fathers' leave uptake depends on the financial resources at the couple level* (hypothesis 3b).

Third, it is also possible that the relative resources mechanism as an explanation for fathers' leave uptake is moderated by external factors, such as workplace characteristics. The presumable positive impact of being a secondary-earning father on leave uptake is potentially discounted by barriers at the workplace, a domain of negotiation with colleagues and superiors involving only the male partner (Bloksgaard, 2015; Brandth and Kvande, 2019b; Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Haas and Hwang, 2019a; Haas and Hwang, 2019b; Kaufman and Almqvist, 2017; Koslowski and Kadar-Satat, 2019). Such barriers might be caused by organisational features – such as firm-specific leave arrangements - but also the behaviour of peers, managers and employers (Callan, 2007). Available literature routinely highlights the difference between male-dominated and female-dominated workplaces, both in terms of organisational features and workplace cultures,

depicting female-dominated workplaces as contexts in which parental leave uptake is more institutionalised, normalised and embedded in a broader family friendliness (Van Gasse et al., 2021; Wood, 2023) and requires a lesser degree of negotiation with superiors compared to male-dominated workplaces. As a result, *the positive impact of being a secondary-earning father is assumed to be discounted in case he is employed in a male-dominated workplace* (hypothesis 3c).

Fourth, the term ‘*gendered moral rationalities*’ was coined to argue that, in addition to economic rationality, individuals also act according to the collective understanding of what is best for men and women to do (Duncan and Edwards, 1997). Gender Identity Theories shed more light on individual-level agency, by describing how individuals or couples conform to and reproduce gender norms in everyday social interaction (Blumberg, 1984; Coltrane, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Despite ongoing changes in parenting roles in European countries, it is safe to say that contemporary normative expectations around fathering still do not include equally shared responsibility and involvement in household and child-care activities (Vinkenburg et al., 2012). These normative expectations potentially affect the relative resources mechanism. It is possible that some couples value gendered moral rationality above micro-economic rationality in case both mechanisms prescribe different leave-taking decisions, thus prioritising the display of their cultural identity as men and women. Available literature supports the thesis that traditional gender norms can dismantle the relative resources mechanism by “discounting” women’s bargaining power connected to her relative wage position (Blumberg, 1984), and by enticing so-called compensation behaviours re-installing gendered normative behaviour (e.g. female leave uptake) after a culturally deviant situation (e.g. female main earner) (Brines, 1993). As a result, we hypothesise that *the relative resources mechanism in couples decision-making processes may be discounted by gendered parenting norms* (hypothesis 3d).

The Belgian Parental leave system

In Belgium, parental leave - which is studied in this article – is a schedule which coexists alongside maternity leave and paternity leave. Concerning the latter schedules, after the birth of a child working fathers are eligible to 10 days of paternity leave², whereas mothers have the right to take 3 months of maternity leave (1-8 weeks of which must be taken preceding birth). Available evidence indicates that virtually all mothers use some maternity leave, and the overwhelming majority of fathers takes up at least some paternity leave. This contrasts strongly with much lower uptake of parental leave (Mortelmans & Fusulier, 2020).

Parental leave in Belgium is a legal entitlement for mothers and fathers employed in the public sector (conditional on having an employment contract) and private sector (conditional on having worked for the current employer for at least 12 months in the last 15 months prior to filing the application). Leave can be used until the child is 12 years old with varying degrees of working hour reductions and maximum duration: 100% for a maximum of 4 months; 50% for up to 8 months or 20% limited to 16 months³, which is the most popular option, particularly among fathers (Mortelmans & Fusulier, 2020). Regarding flexibility, parental leave can be split up in blocks of minimum 1 month of full-time leave, 2 months of part-time leave, or 5 months of 1/5th reduction of working hours. However, legislation in force since 1 June 2019 allows uptake of full-time leave in weeks and part-time leave in single months if the employer agrees. The full-time parental leave benefit amounted to 750.33 EUR per month⁴ after taxation in 2020 (Mortelmans and Fusulier, 2020), whereas the median disposable wage after taxes fluctuates around 2000 EUR depending on the household composition and related tax rates considered.

Belgian leave systems as well as other accompanying work-family reconciliation policies exhibit three factors potentially affecting fathers' leave taking in relation to their relative wage potential. First, the relative resources mechanism can only impact leave decisions within the legal

² Belgian paternity leave was recently reformed and amounts to 15 days from 2021 onwards and 20 days from 2023 onwards.

³ In 2019, a fourth option was introduced: 10% working hour reduction for 32 months.

⁴ This benefit is reduced proportionately in case of lower working hour reductions.

barriers of eligibility criteria, which in Belgium provide an ambiguous incentive structure towards fathers. The individual non-transferable right to parental leave in Belgium might empower fathers to take up leave. However, the contrast between 10 days of paternity leave and 3 months of maternity leave might install fathers in a position as a secondary carer or, as Castro-García and Pazos-Moran put it (2016) “incidental collaborator”. This might discourage parental leave uptake, particularly amongst main-earner fathers.

Second, the relatively low level of parental leave benefits entails substantial forgone income in case of leave taking and thus is likely to exacerbate the relative resources mechanism in which forgone income is minimised by allowing the lower wage partner to use (more) leave. In this respect Saxonberg (2013), focussing on the (de)genderising nature of work-family policies in different countries, identified Belgium as a “borderline case” as the degenderising potential of individual non-transferable eligibility is potentially undermined by low flat rate parental leave benefits implying that households suffer more financially in case higher wage partners use leave.

Third, Belgian work-family policies rely strongly on working parents’ outsourcing of childrearing and household tasks, with a high availability of formal childcare for children under 2.5 as well as care for 2.5-6 years olds as a part of the school system, but also the subsidized outsourcing of household work, with a very generous system of Service Vouchers (Marx and Vandelannoote, 2015). This policy setup geared towards outsourcing is likely to stimulate couples, particularly those with high wage potential, to rely on outsourcing options, thus mitigating decision-making processes about which partner should use leave altogether.

Data and Methods

Both the quantitative and the qualitative sample selections were geared towards a meaningful assessment of the importance of gendered relative wages for fathers’ leave taking. We select dual-earner cohabiting heterosexual couples with at least one child under twelve and exclude migrant couples, for whom previous research has shown substantially different uptake patterns

(Kil et al., 2018; Marynissen et al., 2021). In line with our research aims to (I) address the significance and magnitude of the relative resources pattern, (II) study whether couples' decision-making is impacted by relative wage positions as partners both prefer wage maximalisation at the couple level, or due to bargaining between partners, and (III) test moderations of the relative resources mechanism, the analyses consist of three stages.

Stage 1: quantitative assessment of the relative resources pattern

The first stage adopts large-scale longitudinal administrative data to quantify the significance and magnitude of the relative resources pattern in fathers' parental leave uptake. We exploit a register-based panel constructed from the Datawarehouse of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security⁵, representative for the 18-65 year old population legally residing in Belgium (Flanders) between 2005 and 2016. Sampled individuals are followed until the age of 65, death, emigration, or the end of the observation period on 31st of December 2016. Household members of sampled individuals are also included. In order to address fathers' parental leave decisions, a subsample of 1810 couples are observed longitudinally if the father is eligible for parental leave. Hence a total of 30008 quarterly couple-observations are used for the estimation of logit models with a dummy dependent variable denoting 1 in case the father used parental leave in the subsequent quarter and 0 otherwise. Parental leave taking in the subsequent quarter is assessed as a function of time-varying covariates for the current quarter in order to prevent reverse causality. In order to prevent bias due to the violation of the assumption of independence between multiple observations for a couple, the parameter standard errors are corrected for clustering (clustered sandwich estimator). As the sample is disproportionately stratified by age (overrepresentation of ages 18-35), we use inverse probability weights.

Model 1 addresses the relative resources hypothesis by including father's relative wage position compared to the total couple wage. Following previous studies (Marynissen et al.,

⁵ For more information on the source data: <https://www.ksz-bcss.fgov.be/en>.

2019; Shafer, 2011; Zamberlan et al., 2021), we distinguish fathers who provide less than 40 percent of the total couple wage, from fathers providing 40-60 percent, and fathers providing more than 60 percent. The model also includes control variables which have been shown to affect parental leave uptake and are likely to be related to relative wage positions (Kil et al., 2018; Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011; Wood and Marynissen, 2019) (cf. supplementary material table S1).

With respect to demographic characteristics, some parental leave determinants are also likely to function as determinants of fathers' relative wage positions as fertility transitions have been found to associate with more male-oriented divisions of working hours and couple earnings (Wood et al., 2018; Wood, 2023). Consequently, we include parity (distinguishing couples with one child from those with two, and three or more children), age of the youngest child (0-2.5 years [pre-school], 2.5-6 years [pre-primary school], 6-12 years [primary school]), Father's age (up to 30 years, 31-35 years, 36-40 years, 41-45 years, 45+ years), partners' age difference (less than 5 years difference, mother at least 5 years older, father at least 5 years older), and a linear effect of calendar time to control for trends in fathers' leave taking and relative wage positions.

Similarly, potential confounders of the relationship between fathers' relative wage positions and parental leave uptake can also be found at the level of sector of employment. As previous research indicates that employment in the education sector associates with a low probability of parental leave uptake (Kil et al., 2018), and employment in this sector might be self-selective in terms of relative wage positions we control for both partners' sector of employment (education versus others). Additionally, we control for the sex ratio of employees in the sector of employment (distinguishing male-dominated sectors in which more than 60 percent is male from neutral sectors and female-dominated sectors in which men make up less than 40 percent of employees) as sectors with more female employees are not only likely to give easier access

to parental leave, but also yield lower average wages which increases the probability of being in a secondary earner partner position.

Furthermore, additional potential confounders of the linkage between relative wage position and fathers' parental leave uptake might be related to the fact that leave uptake and relative wage position can be considered as elements of a broader couple strategy (Kil et al., 2018). We include a variable indicating mothers' eligibility and leave use (distinguishing not eligible and never used leave, not eligible and used leave before, eligible and never used leave, and eligible and used leave before) as this might affect fathers' leave decisions as well as their relative wage position (e.g. in case female leave was accompanied by wage loss). Finally, we include couples' combined wages in three tertiles (Kil et al., 2018), based on partners' current wages, or in the last quarter preceding leave uptake.

In addition, Model 1b estimates the mother's probability of using parental leave as a function of the aforementioned covariates. As such, by comparing estimated probabilities for Model 1 and Model 1b, our analyses not only indicate whether fathers are more likely to use parental leave in case they are secondary earners, but also whether such fathers also exhibit a higher probability than their female partners to take up parental leave.

Stage 2: Qualitative data and analysis on couples' decision-making

In the second stage of the analysis, 22 semi-structured in-depth interviews (60 to 90 minutes) at the place and time of the respondents' choice were conducted. The data collection took place in two stages from February 2019 to May 2019. In the first stage, we followed previous research (Brandth and Kvande, 2016; Bueno and Grau-Grau, 2021) and used a snowball sampling method starting from seed contacts generated through indirect professional contacts, leaflets and online calls for participants. Priority was given to seed contacts broadening the range of occupations and employment sectors, iteratively increasing sample heterogeneity. The definition of criteria for additional theoretically interesting profiles (e.g. in terms of leave

uptake) precluded the second stage in the data collection in which we sampled theoretically to increase sample heterogeneity (Moser and Korstjens, 2018; Charmaz, 2006).

This sampling strategy resulted in a heterogeneous sample from which the background characteristics can be consulted in Table S3 in the Supplemental Material. Fathers exhibit a wide range of occupations and sectors of employment (e.g. education, policing, marketing, sales, technician, construction) including private and public employment, and male as well as female-dominated sectors. The disposable total couple wages among interviewees ranged from close to the poverty threshold around 2200 euros per month, to 6000 euros per month. With respect to partners' relative wage positions, couples with approximately equal wages as well as couples with clearly higher earning fathers or mothers are included. Each interview was recorded with the respondent's consent and stored using encryption. Interviewees had the option to opt out at any moment or to refuse to answer a question.

The interview guide is designed to reconstruct decisions, negotiations, and motivations underlying fathers' (non-)uptake of parental leave. To safeguard the emergent character of qualitative research, relative resources are never mentioned by the interviewer, yet when mentioned by interviewees, follow-up questions provided an in-depth understanding of this mechanism. As couple interviews might induce bias since individual outspokenness is hampered by the partners presence, and individual interviews might also yield incomplete or erroneous information (e.g. the overestimation of one's parental involvement), we collected 15 couple interviews which are considered to be well-suited to capture decision-making processes and to reconstruct couple dynamics (Neumann and Meuser, 2017), as well as 7 individual interviews, allowing maximum outspokenness.

For the data analysis, we used principles of the Grounded Theory Methodology. Therefore, exploiting the heterogeneity resulting from our respondent selection, we mainly used constant comparison to identify parental leave determinants (Glaser, 1965). Thus, the interviews were

transcribed verbatim and pseudonymised. Confidential details are omitted in all interviews. Interview files were merged in Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to start the coding process. Data analysis started prior to the end of data collection to enable new collection iterations and to approach theoretical saturation in the data collection.

The coding process consists of three steps. First, the interviews are coded using open coding as described by Walker & Myrick (2006). Dominant themes are identified as open codes and added to the initial coding tree. This step is finalised when all interviews were divided in themes through open coding which are used as ‘categories’ in the subsequent coding steps and analysis. In the second – hierarchical axial - coding step, we differentiated case-wise between different cases and codes. This allowed us to envision variations in the different categories that emerged from the open coding process. These axial codes grounded the factors identified in the results section but they remain disorganised at this point. Theoretical saturation is evaluated and theoretical sampling is performed to increase heterogeneity. In a third step, we selectively code within the factor level distinguished in the previous step, with a theoretical focus on the relative resources hypothesis. Factors that did not connect to the relative resources hypothesis were omitted for the scope of this paper and the coding was restructured to answer the question if and when respondents acted according or contrary to the relative resources hypothesis. This results in a selection of the following narratives: narratives including unitary or bargaining relative resources logic, narratives ignoring relative resources, narratives rejecting relative resources logic, narratives putting forward other important determinants and narratives putting forward factors moderating the relative resources logic. Table S.4 in the supplemental materials provides an account of the prevalence of the central narratives in our analyses.

Stage 3: quantitative moderation analyses

In order to also statistically examine potential moderations of the relative resources mechanism by other factors, further quantitative models additionally include interactions between father's relative wage position and workplace sex ratio (model 2) and total couple wage (model 3).

Results

Stage 1: The significance and magnitude of the relative resources pattern

With respect to the relative resources hypothesis, our quantitative findings (table 1, model 1) indicate that a father's wage relative to the couple's total wage is a significant predictor of male parental leave uptake. In comparison to couples in which both partners earn a similar wage (i.e. both contributing 40-60 per cent), fathers who contribute less than 40 per cent of the total couples' wage exhibit $((1-1.79)*100)$ 79 per cent higher odds of using parental leave. In contrast, fathers who contribute more than 60 per cent of the total couples' wage display 32 per cent lower odds of parental leave use.

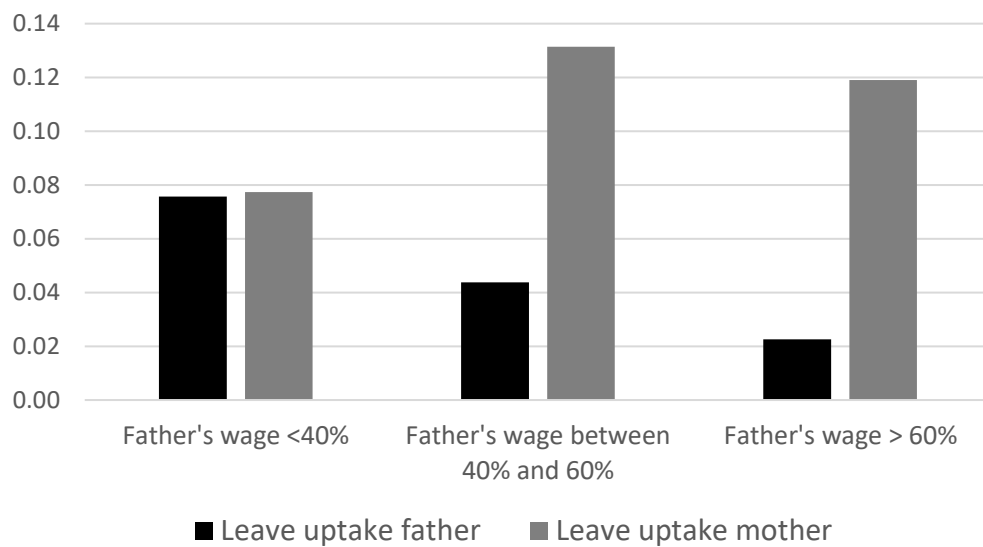
However, a comparison of the predicted uptake probability for fathers (derived from Model 1) and mothers (derived from model 1b) as illustrated in figure 1, exhibits deviations from expectations based solely on the relative resources hypothesis. In contrast to the relatively low male and high female uptake probability in male main-earner couples, the approximately equal probabilities of leave uptake in female main-earner couple contradict the relative resources hypothesis. Hence, our estimations indicate that fathers are more likely to take up parental leave in case they are secondary earners in comparison to fathers with similar or higher wages than their female partners, but also that within couples with a secondary-earner father the probability of male parental leave uptake does not exceed the probability of female parental leave use.

Table 1: Exponentiated effects (Odds-ratios): logit models of fathers' parental leave uptake, covariates of interest, 30008 couple-quarters nested in 1810 couples, Belgium 2005-2016.

	model 1		model 2		model 3	
	OR	sign.	OR	sign.	OR	sign.
Father's relative wage < 40% of couple wage	1.79	*	1.38		0.67	

40-60% of couple wage	ref.		ref.		ref.	
> 60% of couple wage	0.68	*	0.71		0.61	
Father's employment sector sex ratio						
Female-dominated	1.84	**	1.72	*	1.86	**
Neutral sector	ref.		ref.		ref.	
Male-dominated	1.26		1.28		1.25	
Couple wage						
Low	ref.		ref.		ref.	
Middle	.96		.97		0.89	
High	.60	*	.59	**	0.55	**
Father's relative wage * employment sector sex ratio						
< 40% * female-dominated			2.69	*		
< 40% * male-dominated			0.94			
> 60% * female-dominated			1.07			
> 60% * male-dominated			0.89			
Father's relative wage * couple wage						
< 40% * middle					3.16	
< 40% * high					3.51	
> 60% * middle					1.22	
> 60% * high					0.12	
<hr/>						
Couples	1810		1810		1810	
Couples-quarters	30008		30008		30008	
-2Log pseudolikelihood	8831.37		8817.33		8818.30	
df.	25		29		29	
<hr/>						
<i>Controlling for: parity, age youngest child, father's age, partners' age difference, year, education as sector of employment father, mother's sector of employment sex ratio, education as sector of employment mother, previous leave use father, previous leave use and eligibility</i>						
<i>mother Source: Datawarehouse of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security</i>						
<i>Significance levels: p < .05 (*), p < .01 (**), p < .001 (***)</i>						
<hr/>						

Figure 1 Predicted probability of cohabiting father’s (model 1) and mother’s¹ leave uptake (model 1b) by fathers’ contribution to the total couple wage, 30008 couple-quarters nested in 1810 couples, Belgium 2005-2016.



Source: Datawarehouse of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security

Stage 2: Process knowledge on the role of relative resources

Based on the aforementioned quantitative patterns of association, it is impossible to assess whether and, if so, for whom and how relative wage considerations serve as important and deliberate inputs in the decision-making process behind fathers’ leave uptake. The in-depth interviews indicate that couples vary in the degree to which relative wage positions are considered a decisive factor. On one side of the spectrum we find clear support for the relative resources hypothesis, with respondents referring to unitary utility maximisation in which it is only logical that the lowest earning partner takes leave in order to limit income loss (cf. Table 2). Such narratives often refer to the low flat rate parental leave benefit as a direct cause. Additionally, relative resources mechanisms are exacerbated whenever not only fixed wages, but also top-ups and bonuses are forgone whilst leave-taking in some sectors of employment.

“Financially it is better if she would take parental leave because then we lose less income. I get paid extra for overtime and working on the weekends” (Lenny, Policing) “Given that the parental leave benefit is a fixed sum, that’s indeed better” (Anne, Social Work)

Among couples displaying relative resources mechanisms in their narratives on leave uptake decisions, such patterns are not only the result of unitary utility maximisation, but – both in individual and couple interviews – also bargaining logic. The qualitatively reconstructed narratives indicated that fathers’ leave-taking decisions were displayed as a part of a broader and often sequential development of work-family strategies. In many cases couples first consider other preferred sources of childcare, such as formal daycare, informal care, or mothers’ leave use to manage care and mismatches between school hours and work hours. However, especially when other sources of care seem unavailable, mothers’ bargaining positions to achieve paternal leave uptake seem to strengthen.

We have only had to deal with a summer school holiday once so far. We have already discussed that he [referring to her partner Brian] will also have to take a month to bridge school holidays at some point (Sandy, Human Resources) “Yeah, I guess we could take turns and do every other year” (Brian, Sales) “Yeah I worked part-time temporarily last summer, but we have talked about taking turns.” (Sandy)

However, at the other side of the spectrum couples regard relative wage positions as less important or even irrelevant. This mostly includes couples who simply do not mention relative wage positions (23 percent), or explicitly state that they did not take wage differences into account. Our qualitative/quantitative data draws attention to four determinants of fathers’ leave uptake which potentially moderate the relative resources mechanism, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of participants by unprobed mentioning of five key factors*

Factor	Mentioned	Not mentioned
Relative resources	77%	23%
Information deficit	23%	77%
Limited total couple wage	36%	64%
Workplace factors	95%	5%
Gendered parenting ideals	45%	55%

Notes:

“Relative resources”: respondents discuss this as a determinant of parental leave (non-)uptake;

“Information deficit”: respondents discuss a lack of information as a barrier to parental leave uptake;

“Limited total couple wage”: respondents discuss financial limitations to parental leave uptake;

“Workplace factors”: respondents discuss workplace factors as determinants of leave decisions;

“Gendered parenting ideals”: respondents discuss gendered parenting ideals as drivers of leave (non-)uptake.

* This table does not allow to compare the prevalence of factors as mentioned in individual narratives, since prevalence is not measured in a standardised manner. The latter implies that the criteria used to determine whether a factor was mentioned or not, cannot be compared across these five factors.

Imperfect information

The in-depth interviews indicate that couples exhibit considerable variation in the degree to which they possessed accurate and full information on the financial consequences of leave uptake, and information was gathered from varying sources, yet mostly dependent on professional and social networks. The most common narrative was that interviewees felt they had easy access to information. However, exceptions occur among couples without easy access to information with respect to the financial aspects of leave uptake, or even unaware of their right to use parental leave.

“We tried [to gain information] but I still don’t know how much the benefit is” (Sheila, Teacher)

“Can I actually use parental leave? [...] Ok I might have to do some research on that then (laughter)” (George, Technician)

This unawareness at least requires a relaxation of the perfect information assumption underlying the relative resources hypothesis, and suggests that the relative resources mechanism is weakened by limited information.

Couples’ total wage

The qualitative analyses illustrate considerable variation in the degree to which couples’ total wage levels are a point of concern. On one end of this spectrum lower-earning couples voice concerns about the low level of the benefits, the fact that benefits are flat rate unlike proportional sick leave and unemployment benefits, and unavoidable (hypothetical) changes in living standards as a result of low leave benefits.

“I think we have had to cut on holidays for instance.” (Rebecca, Nurse) “Yeah, there’s a few things.” (Paul, Accountancy) “We have a second-hand car. We have friends who go on holiday by plane, two cars, big houses. I don’t think it is very realistic then to take up full-time parental leave.” (Rebecca)

On the other side of the spectrum, we find narratives emphasising that a “limited” financial sacrifice does not outweigh the advantages of leave uptake. These couples display more

financial security, which in turn imposes less limitations with respect to leave-taking strategies. Such a more comfortable couple-level financial situation is likely to facilitate free choice in leave-taking decisions, such as male leave-taking in case they are the secondary earner.

Of course you have less income compared to the case in which you would continue working” (Matt, Industrial Food Company) “Yeah, but that doesn’t outweigh the pros. Kids grow up fast, it happens so quickly and I don’t think that the financial loss is as important” (Emma, Nurse)

Workplace factors

The in-depth interviews identify three workplace-related factors influencing the relative resources mechanism as a determinant of male parental leave uptake. First, respondents routinely mention that fathers and mothers work in different types of workplaces. In contrast to male workplaces, female workplaces are depicted as more sensitive to work-family conflict and reconciliation, and also a higher degree of institutionalisation and normalisation of leave use, particularly in public employment sectors. Paternal narratives, in contrast to mothers, often refer to hesitation or even fear regarding parental leave application, even though they are legally entitled to leave. These feelings might overpower relative resources mechanisms.

“I fear that it will be perceived as ungrateful to apply for leave. In contrast, she [female partner] works for the government. If you’re eligible, superiors will never be difficult in that sector.” (Andy, Technician)

Second, in case one of both partners holds a managerial position, this element is strongly highlighted. Recurring justifications of non-uptake of parental leave by fathers who are managers draw upon the perceived necessity of their presence for an efficient and effective work organisation, but also indicate that managers’ role model as devoted ideal workers is considered more important than their potential example in terms of work-family balance.

“In his management function it really would not be appreciated if he uses leave [..] It is not considered normal for managers, he has seen others do it and experience negative feedback and consequences. Despite the fact that it is financially feasible, he was too afraid” (Lucy, Wholesale - Logistics)

Third, in a few interviews, couples also identify mothers' limited access to parental leave as the main cause for fathers' leave taking. Specific examples included temporary non-eligibility due to limited tenure after a job switch, a lack of flexibility in leave taking in the mothers' sector of employment, but also health-related reasons. The case of Alex and Sheila illustrates that relative resource considerations – despite being a deliberate part of decision-making among some couples - can be completely overpowered by her limited access to leave.

“I would have liked to [use parental leave]. First a full-time period and then 20 percent” (Sheila, Teacher) “You mean we would use it together?” (Alex, Marketing Communication) “No just me (laughter)” (Sheila) “So if it were a possibility, you would prefer him not to use leave?” (Interviewer) “Yeah his wage is higher, so it would have made more sense if I would have used leave” (Sheila)

Gendered parenting ideals

Our qualitative findings also indicate that gendered parenting ideals play an important role both alongside as well as influencing relative resources mechanisms. With respect to the former, in traditional male breadwinner female carer households, numerous statements such as “caring is part of the mummy-role”, or “a man should take care of his family financially” are formulated. In addition, even in situations in which mothers are the main earners and leave-decisions reflect relative wage positions as the father uses leave, gendered parenting ideals are a potential source of friction between micro-economic and gendered moral rationality. Ray and June provide an example in which the relative wage mechanism is put forward as the most important reason for the male partner to take up leave. It is noteworthy that - unlike situations in which the male partner is the main earner - June's wish to take leave is strongly highlighted, and their parental leave decisions are portrayed as “abnormal” and even “counter-normative”. Hence, although the relative resources mechanism seems to be the dominant factor in this example, it is clear that normative prescriptions are far from irrelevant.

“Taking 20 percent leave, I have a lot of friends who do that and that's nice. But in my case, that would cost too much. [...] I am jealous though as I would like to do it, but that's out of the question. [...] if it would be a percentage of wages it would work out. But that's not the case.” (June, Pharmacy)

Our results also indicate that gendered parenting ideals potentially influence or even trump relative resource mechanisms. The strongest indications refer to couples – and particularly men - with relatively traditional views on gendered parenting roles. Hypothetical reasoning by our respondents sheds light on how these couples would behave in case relative wage positions were reversed.

“My husband really thinks a man should be the main earner [...] He has told me that he would find it very difficult if the roles were to be reversed. [...] No he would not take up parental leave if I would be the main earner. He would find it very difficult. It’s his pride ” (Lucy, Wholesale - Logistics)

Stage 3: Moderation of the relative resources hypothesis

As a result of the qualitative results in stage 2 – indicating that the other determinants of fathers’ leave uptake not only influence uptake alongside the relative resources mechanism, but also seem to affect its strength, the third and final stage assesses potential quantitative moderations of the relative resources mechanism, based on a representative sample.

Workplace factors

The quantitative results not only illustrate that fathers working in female-dominated workplaces are considerably more likely to take up parental leave (cf. supplementary material table S2), but also that the impact of being the secondary earner varies significantly by employment sector (Table 1: Δdf : 4; Δ -2LL: 14.04; p-value < .01). This association is only significantly positive among men working in female-dominated employment sectors (cf. figure 2A). In case the father is employed in a female-dominated employment sector, being the secondary earner is associated with $((3.74-1)*100)$ 274 percent higher odds of male leave uptake compared to couples in which both partners earn a similar wage. The negative association between being the main earner and leave use among fathers is similar in magnitude in female-dominated, gender equal, and male-dominated sectors of employment.

Couple wage

In line with our qualitative findings highlighting financial barriers to free choice on leave uptake for some couples, the stimulating effect of being a secondary earner on male parental leave uptake only seems to occur under supportive couple wage conditions. The quantitative analyses also indicate that the strength of the relative resources mechanism depends on the couple wage level considered (Table 1: $\Delta df. 4$; $\Delta -2LL: 13.07$; $p\text{-value} < .05$). In the highest couple wage tertile, the occurrence of a secondary earner male partner is associated with $((2.89 - 1) * 100)$ 189 percent higher odds of fathers' leave uptake compared to couples in which both partners earn a similar wage (figure 2B). This association is weaker in the middle and non-existent in the lowest couple wage tertile.

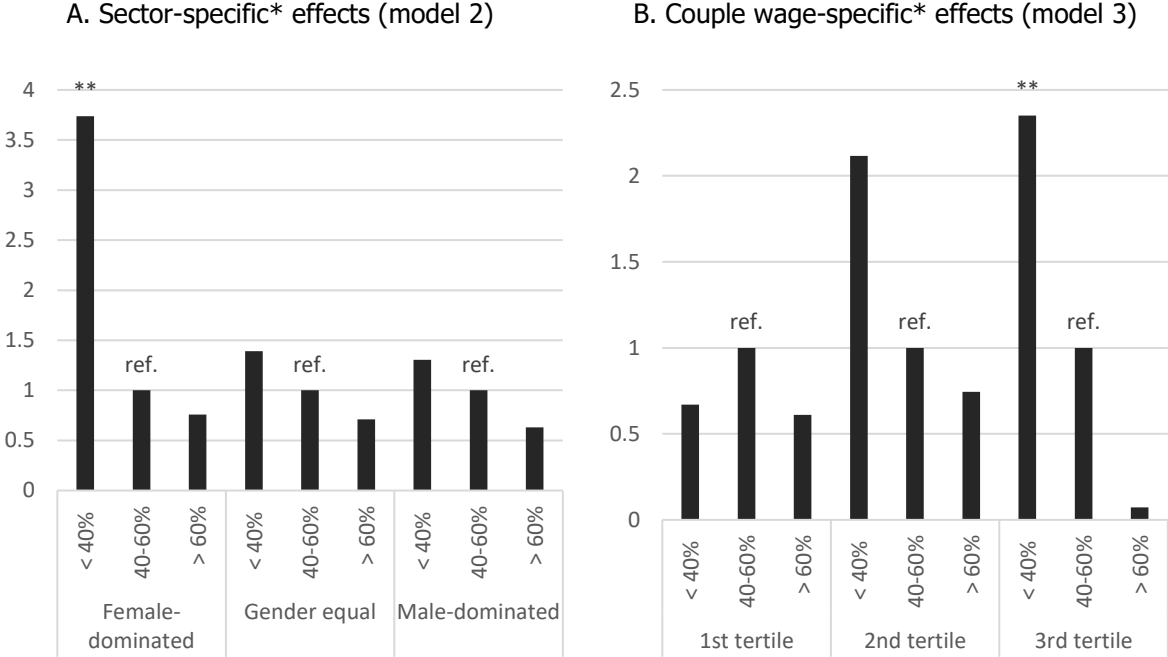
Robustness analyses

We ran two robustness analyses. First, partners' relative wage positions are potentially endogenous, for instance due to the self-selection of career-minded individuals into main-earning positions. Since the identified association between relative wage positions and fathers leave taking might be caused by such unobserved heterogeneity, we performed couple fixed-effects sensitivity checks (cf. supplemental material). As a result of focussing on changes within couples, all time-constant couple-level unobserved heterogeneity is controlled for (Allison, 2009). Although fixed-effects models allow us to examine how changes in relative resources between partners might affect the likelihood of leave uptake between children, this fact that couples that do not exhibit variation over time cannot be included, which limits the external validity of this robustness check. Exploiting a limited subset of 248 couples exhibiting variation in relative wage positions and leave taking over time, we find that – in line with the main findings of this article – fathers with higher wages than their partners are least likely to take up parental leave, and fathers are more likely to take up parental leave in case their female partners

exhibit higher wage positions. However the latter parameter is small does not reach statistical significance based on this small subset. Potential explanations for this deviation from the main findings include the possibility that the limited subset of 248 couples excludes couples with stable male secondary earner positions which might be more likely to take up parental leave.

Second, we also assessed whether the main result hold when using a continuous, rather than a categorical, indicator for fathers relative wage position. This model indicates that a one percentage point increase of the male partner's contribution to the total couple wage is significantly associated to 0.03 lower odds of male parental leave uptake.

Figure 2 Group-specific* effects of fathers' contribution to the couple wage (< 40%, 40-60%, > 60%), 30008 couple-quarters nested in 1810 couples, Belgium 2005-2016.



Note: * All group-specific effects of fathers' contribution to couple wages are calculated by multiplying the main effect of a contribution level (40-60% is reference) by the differential effect for the sector or couple wage level subgroup considered. Hence the figure illustrates group-specific effects of fathers' contribution (40-60% is reference), without taking into account the main effect of sector of employment or couple wage level. This calculation is consistent with our aim to address variation in the relative resources pattern, rather than differing uptake levels between sectors or couple wage levels.

Significance levels: $p < .05$ (*), $p < .01$ (**), $p < .001$ (***)

Source: Datawarehouse of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security

Discussion and Conclusion

The relative resources hypothesis – which is grounded in classical micro-economic household theories (Becker, 1991; Lundberg and Pollack, 1996) – expects that parents will make quasi-fully informed rational decisions on leave uptake based on their relative wage positions in order to minimise forgone income and thus maximise utility. As a result of the scarcity of empirical research about relative wage positions and fathers’ parental leave uptake outside Nordic countries (Naz, 2010; Lappegård, 2008; Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Wood and Marynissen, 2019), but also a limited account of how relative resources might play a role in couples’ leave decision-making processes, and extremely little available information on the conditions moderating relative resources mechanisms, this study adopts a three-stage mixed methods framework to provide three main contributions.

First, assessing the significance and magnitude of the relative resources pattern, this study shows that - in line with our expectations (hypothesis 1) - fathers with lower wages than their partners are considerably more likely to use parental leave compared to fathers with wages more similar to their partners, whereas fathers who earn higher wages than their partners are less likely to use parental leave. Our support for the relative resource hypothesis in Belgium corroborates similar patterns regarding leave uptake in Canada and Luxembourg (Marshall, 2008; Zhelyazkova and Ritschard, 2018), but also the more commonly addressed patterns between relative wages, and couples’ gendered labour force exits or division of working hours, for instance in Belgium, the UK and the Netherlands (Begall and Grunow, 2015; Kanji, 2011; Wood and Marynissen, 2019; Wood et al., 2018). However, our results for Belgium are not in line with previous findings for Nordic countries, with particularly high parental leave uptake among fathers in case of equal parental earnings in Norway (Lappegård, 2008; Naz, 2010) and Sweden (Marynissen et al., 2019), and a non-effect of relative income on fathers’ leave taking in Finland (Lammi-Taskula, 2008). Following available literature, we speculate that this

context-contingency of the relative resources mechanism is potentially related to the forerunner position of Nordic countries with highly paid and long duration earmarked leave for fathers (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran, 2016; Koslowski et al., 2020; Karu and Tremblay, 2018) and gender equality as a long-standing, cross-cutting and highly ranked policy aim (Haas and Hwang, 2019; Saxonberg, 2013; Almqvist, 2008).

Second, as the aforementioned quantitative tests of the significance and magnitude of relative resources mechanisms in this and previous studies are typically ill-suited to answer the question how such relative positions actually affect couples' decision-making, this study progresses into the analysis of qualitative in-depth interviews. This analysis indicates variation in the degree to which relative wage positions are deemed relevant for parental leave decisions, but also provides some support to our hypothesis that couples decision-making exhibits unitary utility considerations (Hypothesis 2a) as well as micro-economic bargaining processes underlying relative resources patterns (hypothesis 2b). Hence, these qualitative results suggest that – despite strong variation between couples – the statistically significant association between relative wage positions and fathers' leave uptake is mirrored by conscious and deliberate decision-making following unitary utility maximisation or bargaining principles by individual couples.

Third, in order to transcend mere speculation about the context-contingency of the relative resources mechanism based on the comparison of findings for different countries, this mixed methods study puts forward four factors which moderate relative resources mechanisms in fathers' leave-taking decisions: limited information, workplace factors, couple income, and gendered parenting ideals. With respect to limited information, our qualitative analyses highlight considerable variation in access to information about parental leave and its financial consequences, mostly due to variation in social and professional networks. Although the lack of quantitative measurements of policy knowledge typical for register data prevented a true mixed methods assessment of this potential moderator, from a theoretical point of view, this

finding supports an often suggested relaxation of the full-information assumption (Becker, 1991; Gauthier, 2007), and at least suggests that the relative resources mechanism can be weakened by limited information (hypothesis 3a). Policy-makers might be inspired to extend the amount of instruments used to inform employees on parental leave and its financial consequences both directly and indirectly through their employers.

Regarding couples' total wage position, both our quantitative and qualitative results indicate that the occurrence and strength of the relative resources mechanism as an explanation for fathers' leave uptake depends on the financial resources at the couple level (hypothesis 3b). Quantitative results not only indicate differential leave uptake by fathers depending on couple wage position (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011; Marynissen et al., 2019; Wood & Marynissen, 2018), but also show that the stimulating impact of being a secondary earner on leave uptake among men is strongest among fathers in the highest couple wage tertile. Qualitative analyses indicated that low couple wage levels are indeed considered as an important limitation to couples' opportunity structure to make free decisions on parental leave. In addition to the empirical confirmation of the well-cited budget constraint in micro-economic models of household organisation (Becker, 1991), this finding provides input to policy-makers on barriers towards uptake embedded in the design features of parental leave. Whereas previous studies have highlighted employment-related eligibility criteria as drivers of socio-economic inequality in uptake (Kil et al., 2018; Marynissen et al., 2021), our results empirically corroborate the common assumption that low parental leave benefits can create a barrier towards gender-equality in uptake (e.g. Rostgaard, 2005) and more specifically support Saxonberg's (2013) assumption that the degenderising potential of individual eligibility and non-transferability in Belgium seems undermined by low flat rate parental leave benefits.

Adding to the growing body of literature highlighting workplace factors as determinants of fathers' leave uptake (Bloksgaard, 2015; Brandth and Kvande, 2019b; Bygren and Duvander,

2006; Haas and Hwang, 2019a; Haas and Hwang, 2019b; Kaufman and Almqvist, 2017; Koslowski and Kadar-Satat, 2019), both the quantitative and the qualitative results of this study suggest that the stimulating impact of being a secondary earner on leave uptake among men is strongest among fathers in female-dominated employment sectors, in which parental leave is depicted as more institutionalised and normalised (hypothesis 3c). The positive impact of being a secondary-earning father is discounted in case he is employed in a male-dominated workplace. Although future research is needed to disentangle the potentially differential importance of organisational features (e.g. a firm's parental leave arrangements), self-selection into particular sectors of employment, and workplace cultures influenced by peer and supervisor behaviour, our finding that secondary-earner positions for fathers in male-dominated sectors of employment are much less likely to be translated into higher leave uptake, provides useful input to policy-makers seeking to further gender equality in leave-taking.

Finally, our qualitative results not only corroborate previous research in finding that gendered parenting ideals matter as a determinant of fathers' leave uptake (Kaufman, 2018; Brandth and Kvande, 2019a), but also suggest that gendered parenting ideals are a moderating factor which – in case of relatively traditional views on gendered parenting roles – potentially trump the positive impact of being a secondary earner among fathers (hypothesis 3d). Although the lack of quantitative measurements of gendered parenting ideals in register data prevented a true mixed methods assessment of this potential moderator, qualitative process knowledge provides evidence for the assumption that gender moral rationality (Duncan and Edwards, 1997) not only impacts fathers' leave uptake, but also discounts women's bargaining power connected to her relative wage position (Bittman et al., 2003; Blumberg, 1984).

To conclude, our mixed method findings with respect to the significance, magnitude, decision-making processes, and potential moderators of the relative resources mechanism as a determinant for fathers' leave uptake, exhibit the potential to inspire further mixed methods

research⁶ on household gender equality. In line with this study, quantitative associations and moderations can inform on the degree to which significant patterns emerge, whereas complementary qualitative analyses allow to more thoroughly understand the actual process of decision-making among different population subgroups.

⁶ To our knowledge only a handful studies have adopted a mixed method research design to study fathers' parental leave uptake (Valarino and Gauthier, 2016; Närvi and Salmi, 2019; Koslowski and Kadar-Satat, 2019; Brandth and Kvande, 2002), none of which focus on partners' relative wages.

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Table S1: Distribution of independent variables, 30008 couple-quarters nested in 1810 couples, Belgium 2005-2016

	N	%
Father's relative wage		
< 40% of couple wage	1,135	3.78
40-60% of couple wage	20,761	69.18
> 60% of couple wage	8,112	27.03
Parity		
1 child	8,453	28.17
2 children	15,551	51.82
3+ children	6,004	20.01
age youngest child		
0-2.5 years	8,998	29.99
2.5-6 years	10,516	35.04
6-12 years	10,494	34.97
Father's age (age < 31 is reference)		
< 31 years	2,935	9.78
31-35 years	8,679	28.92
36-40 years	9,867	32.88
41-45 years	6,410	21.36
45+ years	2,117	7.05
Partners' age difference		
Mother at least 5 years older	555	1.85
Same age group	24,098	80.31
Father at least 5 years older	5,355	17.85
Father's sector of employment sex ratio		
female-dominated	4,655	15.51
40-60% male and female	12,764	42.54
male-dominated	12,589	41.95
Mother's sector of employment sex ratio		
female-dominated	14,379	47.92
40-60% male and female	11,983	39.93
male-dominated	3,646	12.15
Education as sector of employment father		
yes	2,137	7.12
Education as sector of employment mother		
yes	5,946	19.81
Couple wage (tertiles)		
Low	10,410	34.69
Middle	10,039	33.45
High	9,559	31.85
Previous leave use father		
yes	4007	13.35
Previous leave use and eligibility mother		
Not eligible, never used leave	1,537	5.12
Not eligible, used leave before	677	2.26
Eligible, never used leave	14,401	47.99
Eligible, used leave before	13,393	44.63
	Range	Mean
Year	2005/2015	2010.76
Couples	1810	
Couples-quarters	30008	

Source: Datawarehouse of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security

Table S2: Exponentiated effects (Odds-ratios) from logit models of fathers' parental leave uptake, covariates, 30008 couple-quarters nested in 1810 couples, Belgium 2005-2016.

	model 1		model 2		model 3	
	OR	sign.	OR	sign.	OR	sign.
Parity (1 child is reference)						
2 children	1.14		1.13		1.15	
3+ children	1.33		1.31		1.33	
age youngest child (0-2.5 years is reference)						
2.5-6 years	0.47	***	0.47	***	0.47	***
6-12 years	0.37	***	0.37	***	0.37	***
Father's age (age < 31 is reference)						
31-35 years	0.85		0.86		0.85	
36-40 years	1.02		1.03		1.02	
41-45 years	1.07		1.08		1.08	
45+ years	1.58		1.59		1.62	
Partners' age difference (same age group is reference)						
Mother at least 5 years older	0.87		0.86		0.86	
Father at least 5 years older	0.89		0.86		0.87	
Year						
Linear	0.94	*	0.95	*	0.95	*
Father's sector of employment sex ratio (40-60% male and female is reference)						
female-dominated	1.84	**	1.72	*	1.86	**
male-dominated	1.26		1.28		1.25	
Mother's sector of employment sex ratio (40-60% male and female is reference)						
female-dominated	0.72		0.74		0.74	
male-dominated	0.64		0.65		0.64	
Education as sector of employment father						
yes	0.50	*	0.44	*	0.48	*
Education as sector of employment mother						
yes	0.98		0.96		0.99	
Couple wage (low tercile is reference)						
Middle	0.96		0.97		0.89	
High	0.60	*	0.59	**	0.55	**
Previous leave use father						
yes	21.40	***	22.29	***	21.39	***
Previous leave use and eligibility mother (not eligible and never used is reference)						
Not eligible, used leave before	1.38		1.40		1.39	
Eligible, never used leave	1.04		1.04		1.03	
Eligible, used leave before	1.24		1.25		1.24	
Couples	1810		1810		1810	
Couples-quarters	30008		30008		30008	
-2Log pseudolikelihood	8831.37		8817.33		8818.30	
df.	25		29		29	

Significance levels: $p < .05$ (*), $p < .01$ (**), $p < .001$ (***)

Source: Datawarehouse of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security

Table S3: Participant and interview characteristics

Couple	Interview	Age	Sector of employment	Contract	Any leave uptake	Age children
Paul	couple	33	Accountancy	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	1, 3
Rebecca		34	Health care	Parttime	Yes, 100%	
Pat	couple	33	Municipal civil servant	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	2, 4
Kath		37	Administration in wholesal	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	
Alex	couple	31	Marketing Communicatio	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	pregnant
Sheila		29	Education	Fulltime	No	
Tim	couple	37	Purchasing in wholesale	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	5, 12
Dawn		41	Supply Chain in Industry	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	
Chris	couple	32	Sales	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	4
Karen		32	Childhood and youth work	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	
Ray	couple	30	Communication training	Fulltime	Yes, 100%	pregnant, 2, 4
June		33	Manager in big pharma	Fulltime	No	
David	couple	30	Education	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	0, 4
Jennifer		31	Education	Fulltime	Yes, 100%	
Tony	couple	35	Policing	Fulltime	Yes, 100%	4, 6
Lisa		33	Paper and packaging	Fulltime	Yes, 100%	
Neil	couple	39	Services	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	2, 4
Trudy		38	Health care	Fulltime	No	
James	couple	35	Purchasing in Petrochemic	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	0, 3
Valerie		34	Education	Parttime	Yes, 50%	
Simon	couple	40	Sales	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	4, 7
Daphne		37	Health Care	Parttime	Yes, 20%	
Lenny	couple	33	Policing	Fulltime	Yes, 100%	2, 4
Anne		32	Social work	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	
Matt	couple	32	Food industry	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	2, 4
Emma		27	Health care	Parttime	Yes, 100%	
Brian	couple	33	Sales	Fulltime	Yes, 100%	1, 4
Sandy		32	HR consultancy	Parttime	Yes, 20%	
George	couple	34	Technician in big pharma	Fulltime	Yes, 20% and 100%	0, 3
Jill		32	Education	Parttime	Yes, 100%	
Jon	individual	39	Paper and packaging	Fulltime	No	9, 13
Lucy	with Lucy	42	Wholesale - Logistics	Parttime	Yes, 20%	
Ted	individual	39	Logistics – Director	Fulltime	No	6, 7
Pauline	with Pauline	36	Human Resources	Fulltime	Yes,100%	
George	individual	27	Bus driver	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	1
Amy	with Amy	22	Pool supervisor	Fulltime	No	
Andy	individual	44	Technician	Fulltime	No	6, 9
Maggie	with Andy	41	Policing	Fulltime	Yes, 100%	
Darren	individual	44	Consultancy	Fulltime	Yes, 100%	6, 9
Kimberly	with Darren	40	Finances	Fulltime	Yes, 20%	
Gavyn	individual	39	Care Conculancy	Parttime	Yes, 100% and 20%	4, 7
Kate	with Gavyn	37	Physiotherapist	Parttime	Yes, 100% and 20%	
Tom	individual	32	Purchasing & Administrati	Fulltime	No	1
Jade	with Jade	35	Client services manager	Fulltime	No	

Table S4: Exponentiated effects (Odds-ratios) from **fixed effects** logit models of fathers' parental leave uptake, 5623 couple-quarters nested in 248 couples, Belgium 2005-2016.

	model 1	
	OR	sign.
Father's relative wage		
< 40% of couple wage	1.05	
40-60% of couple wage	ref.	
> 60% of couple wage	0.61	*
Parity (1 child is reference)		
2 children	1.68	**
3+ children	3.88	***
age youngest child (0-2.5 years is reference)		
2.5-6 years	0.67	**
6-12 years	0.71	
Father's age (age < 31 is reference)		
31-35 years	0.54	**
36-40 years	0.53	*
41-45 years	0.30	**
45+ years	0.17	**
Year		
Linear	1.06	
Father's sector of employment sex ratio (40-60% male and female is reference)		
female-dominated	2.19	*
male-dominated	3.09	***
Mother's sector of employment sex ratio (40-60% male and female is reference)		
female-dominated	1.20	
male-dominated	1.41	
Education as sector of employment father		
yes	0.07	**
Education as sector of employment mother		
yes	0.86	
Household wage (low tercile is reference)		
Middle	0.64	**
High	0.48	**
Previous leave use father		
yes	2.29	***
Previous leave use and eligibility mother (not eligible and never used is reference)		
Not eligible, used leave before	0.92	
Eligible, never used leave	0.80	
Eligible, used leave before	0.69	
Couples		248
Couples-quarters		5623
-2Log pseudolikelihood		3934.55
df.		23

Significance levels: $p < .05$ (*), $p < .01$ (**), $p < .001$ (***)

Source: Datawarehouse of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security

Extra robustness analyses

Following reviewer comments, we also performed a robustness check using only one observation per birth. In line with the main findings, this robustness check indicates that – taking couples with similar wages as reference category - the odds of fathers’ parental leave uptake are 140 percent higher in case they are secondary earners, and 30 percent lower in case they are primary earners. As a result of the occurrence of many time-varying characteristics which also vary within observations per birth and the resulting loss of information in this approach, these findings are not reported (yet available on request).