

The Impact of Paid Paternity Leave on Expected Life Satisfaction, Expected  
Relationship Satisfaction and Expected Emotion Well-beings

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This research was conducted in the context of the PS 320 Social Psychology Research Course, and was funded in part by a start-up research grant to Corinne Moss-Racusin from Skidmore College.

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### Abstract

Lots of evidence has suggested paternity leave can help build a more equal gender division of labor and much fewer researches focus on paternity leave's impact on satisfactions. Our research recruited 253 participants from MTurk users and assigned them to either the paternity leave condition or the no leave condition to assess their life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and emotional well-being. The result showed paternity leave can increase both men and women's satisfactions but gender didn't have an impact on participants' satisfactions. Also, we failed to find any interaction effects between gender and the existence of leave on participants' satisfactions. This research has a few limitations, including sampling biases, drawbacks of online data collections and possible-selves method, lack of control, etc. Future research need to be done to modify these limitations and explore more about paternity leave's impact.

### The Impact of Paid Paternity Leave on Expected Life Satisfaction, Expected Relationship Satisfaction and Expected Emotion Well-beings

In today's society, is it still true that a "good" mother is supposed to stay at home and take care of her household and her children? (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). This belief is derived from the stereotype that women are more likely to do domestic work and are less likely to do paid work outside of the home (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). This stereotype might potentially influence couples' romantic relationships. In our current study, we wanted to determine whether paid paternity leave could have a positive

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

influence on adults' predicted relationship satisfaction, life satisfaction and their emotional well-being.

Demonstrating the stereotype described above, although the division of household labor might differ significantly among different countries, generally, women take responsibility for the majority of household labor (Davis & Greenstein, 2004). Another study on men's and women's expectations about future division of labor also showed this labor pattern (Fetterolf & Eagly, 2011). When participants were asked about their future expectations of division of labor, even women themselves reported that they expected they would have more domestic labor than men (Fetterolf & Eagly, 2011). This gender inequality in division of labor can be attributed to many reasons. The stereotype that a good-mother should stay at home might be one of the several important reasons leading to gendered divisions of house labor. Mothers who are employed outside are commonly perceived as selfish and irresponsible mothers (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002). This idea pressures young mothers to act like traditional mothers and sacrifice more time working on household labor. Consequently, the question shifts to how we can achieve a more equal division of labor.

### **Difference of attitudes between Spain and U.S.**

Previous research has suggested that divisions of domestic labor vary significantly among different countries (Davis & Greenstein, 2004). However, what causes this difference? Will evaluating this difference between nations help us to discover factors that can help build a more equal division of domestic labor? In Gartzia and Fetterolf 's experiment (2016), the researchers used the possible-selves method to compare men and women's expected gender divisions of labor between

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

Spain and the USA. The result showed that Spanish university students were more optimistic about future gender equality in labor than the U.S. students. One plausible explanation of this result might be the difference in the speed of social change in terms of gender equality between the two nations. Spain's fast change from a traditionally-gendered country to a nation that strongly supports gender equality gave Spanish people more confidence to achieve gender equality in division of labor. On the contrary, the U.S.'s attitude towards gender equality has not differed too much in the past decades. Spain's progressive attitude presents a striking contrast with the U.S.'s invariable attitude, which is enough to explain why people in Spain are more optimistic about gender equality in division of labor than people in the U.S. At the same time, this experiment also indicates that national policies can significantly affect people's expectations of gender equality.

### **The impact of government policies on gendered division of labor**

Maternity leave is one of the most important family-friendly policies and this policy aims to help young mothers balance their employment with family responsibility. Maternity leave has been proven to have a lot of benefits for infants and women. However, to achieve gender equality in division of labor, paternity leave seems to be a more reasonable way, although the government is far less likely to implement paternity leave than maternity leave throughout the world. (American Journal of Public Health, 2017) Existing evidence has suggested that paternity leave does increase equality in division of labor (Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011). Through paternity leave, fathers have more time spent contributing to domestic labor. In this process, fathers learn to take their parental responsibility and become co-parents instead of fathers who take just workplace responsibility without family

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

responsibility. This transformation of the paternal role will shift the family relationship from a manager-helper style to a more harmonious co-parenting style. (Rehel, 2014)

### **Benefits of paternity leave**

A co-parenting relationship significantly improves the gendered division of labor. In Kotsadam and Finseraas's research, they evaluated the influence of the implementation of the Norwegian daddy quota on family relationships and division of labor. The participants reported that they were 50% more likely to share household labor. Additionally, the study also found that couples experienced significantly less conflict over household labor. Another study has shown a similar result—researchers found that Sweden's paid maternity leave had positive influences on fathers' participation and relationship satisfaction with their children (Haas & Hwang, 2008)

There is clearly enough evidence that suggests paternity leave could spur the gender equality in division of labor. As a result, the question shifts from whether paternity leave can lead to gender equality in division of labor to what a more equal division of labor can bring about. According to Coltrane's research (2000), a more balanced division of housework was associated with higher marital satisfaction. Women would feel less depressed and believe the relationship was more fair when men would contribute to housework. However, the information about the relationship between equal division of labor and satisfaction is currently limited. Therefore, more research is needed to further explore the relationship between paternity leave, gender equality, relationship and life satisfaction and emotional wellbeing.

Compared with maternity leave, the impact of paternity leave is less studied, since the implementation of paternity leave policies is significantly less than that of

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

maternity leave policies, which makes research hard to conduct. A lot of previous research about paternity leave targets undergraduate students. Current research aims to determine the influence of the existence of paternity leave on male and female adults' predicted romantic relationships and quality as well as explore whether a more equal division of labor leads to higher expected satisfaction. In this experiment, participants were assigned to read one of two mock articles which either indicated that paid paternity leave would be possible within the next 5 years or not. Participants in both no-leave condition and leave condition were required to complete a survey measuring their relationship satisfaction, emotional well-being, and life satisfaction. Specific hypotheses were:

1. Existence of paternity leave and participants' gender will significantly interact, such that in the paternity leave condition, women will predict similar relationship satisfaction to men, but in the no paternity leave condition, men will predict higher relationship satisfaction than women.
2. Existence of paternity leave and participants' gender will significantly interact, such that in the paternity leave condition, women will predict similar degrees of positive emotions to men, but in the no paternity leave condition, men will predict higher degrees of positive emotions than women.
3. Existence of paternity leave and participants' gender will significantly interact, such that in the paternity leave condition women will predict similar degrees of negative emotions to men, but in the no paternity leave condition, men will predict lower degrees of negative emotions than women.
4. Existence of paternity leave and participants' gender will significantly interact, such that in the paternity leave condition, women will predict similar life

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

satisfaction to men, but in the no paternity leave condition, men will predict more life satisfaction than women.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Participants (N = 253, 53.8% women, 46.2% men) were recruited online from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants' race ranged from white (76.7%), black (8.3%), Latinx (4.7%), East Asian (4.0%), South Asian (2%), Southeast Asian (0.4%), Middle Eastern (0.4%), Native American/Pacific Islander (2.4%), multiracial (0.8%) and were compensated 75 cents for the half-hour survey.

(Kraut et al., 2004) MTurk was an online data collection website that can be used to conduct a research and we used MTurk to conduct our research because it has higher demographic diversity of customers and has lower costs of recruitment (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Paolacci et al., 2010). However, online data collection also has its disadvantages, including sample biases, confidentiality, etc (Kraut et al., 2004). The experiment was created in the program Qualtrics.

#### **Materials**

The independent variables were gender (male, female) and the existence of paid paternity leave (paternity leave, no paternity leave). Gender was measured by the survey and the existence of paid paternity leave was manipulated by two mock Wall Street Journal articles. In the paternity leave condition, participants were assigned to read a mock article talking about "Paid Paternity Leave for New Dads Soon Likely in U.S." In the no paternity leave condition, participants were assigned to read a mock

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

article talking about “Paid Paternity Leave for New Dads Not Likely Anytime Soon in U.S.” The dependent variables were life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, negative emotions, positive emotions.

**Anticipated Relationship Satisfaction.** For anticipated relationship satisfaction, there were 8 items made up of questions like “How well does your partner meet your needs? Scale of 1 (*not at all well*) to 7 (*very well*).”, “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship? Scale of 1 (*not satisfied*) to 7 (*very satisfied*)”. Items were averaged to form the anticipated relationship satisfaction, with higher values indicating more anticipated relationship satisfaction. The anticipated coefficient alpha was 0.93. This scale of relationship satisfaction was modified from Hendrick (1998).

**Anticipated Negative Emotions.** For anticipated negative emotions, there were 23 items, including “afraid”, “scared”. Participants answered the questions using the scale of 1 (*not at all well*) to 7 (*very well*). Items were averaged to form anticipated negative emotions, with higher values indicating more anticipated negative emotions. The anticipated coefficient alpha was 0.93. This scale was modified from the Fear, Hostility, Guilt, Sadness, Joviality, Self-Assurance, and Fatigue scales from the PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1994)

**Anticipated Positive Emotions.** For anticipated positive emotions, there were 21 items, including “happy”, “Joyful”. Participants answered the questions using the scale of 1 (*not at all well*) to 7 (*very well*). Items were averaged to form anticipated positive emotions, with higher values indicating more anticipated positive emotions. The anticipated coefficient alpha was 0.93. This scale was modified from the Fear, Hostility, Guilt, Sadness, Joviality, Self-Assurance, and Fatigue scales from the PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1994).



## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

**Anticipated Satisfaction with Life.** For anticipated satisfaction with life, there were 5 items, including “1. In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.”, “The conditions of my life are excellent.” Participants answered the questions using the scale of 1 (*not at all well*) to 7 (*very well*). Items were averaged to form the anticipated satisfaction with life, with higher values indicating more anticipated satisfaction with life. The anticipated coefficient alpha was 0.93, and the scale was modified from Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985).

### Procedure

Participants were first required to read the informed consent form and then they were assigned randomly to different conditions and read either the paternity leave or no paternity leave article. Next, they had to complete a brainstorming task that helped them to envision themselves with whether paternity leave existed or not. Next, they were assigned to finish a questionnaire with scales and items presented in a random order to assess their anticipated life satisfaction, anticipated relationship satisfaction, and anticipated emotional well-being. Then, they needed to complete brief manipulation checks assessing their understanding and feeling of the article. Finally, participants needed to complete a demographic questionnaire and would then be fully debriefed and compensated.

## Result

### Relationship Satisfaction

For relationship satisfaction, there was a significant main effect of paternity leave existence,  $F(1, 249) = 5.23, p = .023, \eta^2 = .021$ . The main effect of participant gender was not significant,  $F(1, 249) = .16, p = .691, \eta^2 = .001$ . Contrary to Hypothesis 1, the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 249) = 1.71, p = .192, \eta^2 = .007$ .

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

To further explore this non-significant interaction, we ran a series of post-hoc tests to determine the nature of the simple effects. Men and women expressed equal levels of relationship satisfaction in both the no leave condition,  $t(129) = -.62, p = .534, d = -.11$ , and the leave condition,  $t(120) = 1.26, p = .211, d = -.23$ . By convention, .20 reflects a small effect, .50 a medium effect, .80 a large effect, and 1.00 a very large effect; (Cohen, 1992).

Contrary to Hypothesis 1, this suggests that there was no gender gap in predicted relationship satisfaction, regardless of whether participants were told to expect paternity leave or not.

Looking at the interaction the other way, men expected more relationship satisfaction in the leave condition relative to the no leave condition,  $t(115) = -2.44, p = .016, d = -.45$ . In contrast, women predicted equal levels of relationship satisfaction in the no leave condition and leave condition,  $t(134) = -.72, p = .471, d = -.13$ . This suggests that the significant main effect of paternity leave on relationship satisfaction for the full sample was driven by male participants, in that only men demonstrated this condition difference (whereas women predicted equal levels of relationship satisfaction in both experimental conditions).

### **Life satisfaction**

For life satisfaction, there was a significant main effect of paternity leave existence,  $F(1, 249) = 35.31, p = .000, \eta^2 = .124$ . The main effect of participant gender was not significant,  $F(1, 249) = .28, p = .595, \eta^2 = .001$ . Contrary to Hypothesis 1, the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 249) = .09, p = .765, \eta^2 = .000$ .

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

To further explore this non-significant interaction, we ran a series of post-hoc tests to determine the nature of the simple effects. Men and women expressed equal levels of life satisfaction in both the no leave condition,  $t(129) = -.16$ ,  $p = .587$ ,  $d = -.03$ , and the leave condition,  $t(120) = -.62$ ,  $p = .537$ ,  $d = -.11$ . Contrary to Hypothesis 2, this suggests that there was no gender gap in predicted life satisfaction, regardless of whether participants were told to expect paternity leave or not.

Looking at the interaction the other way, men expected more life satisfaction in the leave condition relative to the no leave condition,  $t(115) = -3.72$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $d = -.69$ . women also predicted more satisfaction in the leave condition than in the no leave condition,  $t(134) = -4.73$ ,  $p = -0.00$ ,  $d = -.81$ . This suggests that the significant main effect of paternity leave on life satisfaction for the full sample was driven by both male and female participants.

### Positive emotions

For life satisfaction, there was a significant main effect of paternity leave existence,  $F(1, 249) = 37.77$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $\eta^2 = .132$ . The main effect of participant gender was not significant,  $F(1, 249) = .076$ ,  $p = .783$ ,  $\eta^2 = .000$ . Contrary to Hypothesis 3, the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 249) = 1.29$ ,  $p = .258$ ,  $\eta^2 = .005$ .

To further explore this non-significant interaction, we ran a series of post-hoc tests to determine the nature of the simple effects. Men and women expressed equal levels of positive emotions in both the no leave condition,  $t(129) = -.59$ ,  $p = .555$ ,  $d = -.10$ , and the leave condition,  $t(120) = -1.03$ ,  $p = .305$ ,  $d = -.19$ . Contrary to Hypothesis 1, this suggests that there was no gender gap in predicted positive emotions, regardless of whether participants were told to expect paternity leave or not.

Looking at the interaction the other way, men expected more positive

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

emotions in the leave condition relative to the no leave condition,  $t(115) = -3.22$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $d = -.60$ . women also predicted more satisfaction in the leave condition than in the no leave condition,  $t(134) = -5.67$ ,  $p = -0.00$ ,  $d = -.97$ . This suggests that the significant main effect of paternity leave on positive emotions for the full sample was driven by both male and female participants.

### Negative emotions

For negative emotions, there was a significant main effect of paternity leave existence,  $F(1, 249) = 27.48$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $\eta^2 = .99$ . The main effect of participant gender was not significant,  $F(1, 249) = 2.62$ ,  $p = .107$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Contrary to Hypothesis 1, the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 249) = 0.318$ ,  $p = .574$ ,  $\eta^2 = .001$ .

To further explore this non-significant interaction, we ran a series of post-hoc tests to determine the nature of the simple effects. Men and women expressed equal levels of negative emotions in both the no leave condition,  $t(129) = -.73$ ,  $p = .468$ ,  $d = -.12$ , and the leave condition,  $t(120) = -1.59$ ,  $p = .114$ ,  $d = -.29$ . Contrary to Hypothesis 4, this suggests that there was no gender gap in predicted negative emotions, regardless of whether participants were told to expect paternity leave or not.

Looking at the interaction the other way, men expected lower levels of negative emotions in the leave condition relative to the no leave condition,  $t(115) = 4.22$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $d = 0.79$ . women also predicted lower levels of negative emotions in the leave condition than in the no leave condition,  $t(134) = -3.28$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $d = .56$ . This suggests that the significant main effect of paternity leave on negative emotions for the full sample was driven by both male and female participants.

Table 1

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

*Dependent Variables by existence of leave and gender*

	<u>No Leave</u>				<u>Leave</u>			
	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>		<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relationship Satisfaction	5.18	1.41	5.33	1.29	5.77	1.16	5.49	1.26
Life Satisfaction	4.03	1.74	4.08	1.44	5.10	1.32	<b>5.25</b>	1.45
Positive Emotions	3.87	1.42	3.74	1.16	4.65	1.18	4.87	1.17
Negative Emotions	2.86	1.17	3.01	1.24	2.01	1.01	2.33	1.19

*Note.* Means and standard deviations for each dependent variable for the men and women participants, by leave conditions.

## Discussion

The present study explored the effect of paid paternity leave on adults' life quality by evaluating the participants' relationship satisfaction, life satisfaction, positive emotions and negative emotions. Surprisingly, we did not find significant interaction effects between gender and leave conditions on any of the dependent variables. This means there was no gender gap in predicted positive emotions, regardless of whether participants were told to expect paternity leave or not. For all dependent variables except relationship satisfaction, both men and women showed increased life satisfaction, and positive emotions and decreased negative emotions. However, for relationship satisfaction, only men showed increased satisfaction and women showed an equal level of satisfaction, but this gender gap is not large enough to describe an interaction effect.

Overall, paternity leave had a significant impact on the participants' scales, such

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

that in paternity leave conditions, both men and women showed greater relationship satisfaction, greater life satisfaction, higher levels of positive emotions and lower levels of negative emotions, than in the no paternity leave condition. However, we did not find a significant impact of gender on any of the dependent variables.

From the result in the current research, we found the paid paternity leave could significantly increase both men and women's predicted satisfaction levels. Therefore, ideally, the implementation of paid paternity leave could have a positive influence on family relationships and life quality, which is highly important for the government to consider. In addition, since the number of nations with paternity leave policies are far fewer than nations with maternity leave, our findings can serve as a valid reason to encourage governments to consider paternity leave.

Our research utilized online research to recruit participants to do our research. Although online research has many advantages compared with traditional research methods, it still has many drawbacks that might affect the research results. First, our experiment is not random sampled and the users of Mturk arbitrarily chose whether they were willing to participate in this research. Therefore, the sample in the current research is biased. Also, conducting our research online might allow people to participate frivolously. All these drawbacks might undermine the validity of our findings. Future research can avoid online data collection to replicate our research.

Another issue of current research design was that we didn't include a control group to make a comparison with the experimental group because we had difficulty in creating a neutral article without implying any gendered information. This issue needed to be fix in the future research.

In the current research, we used the possible selves to ask the participants to

## PATERNITY LEAVE'S EFFECT ON SATISFACTIONS

predict their satisfaction levels in the future. However, the gap between expectation and reality needed to be considered. Future research could focus on evaluating the actual satisfaction levels instead of predicted ones.

In the present study, we found that paternity leave had a positive influence on both men and women's relationship satisfaction, life satisfactions and emotional well-being. This finding provides evidence of emotional benefits of paternity leave and has an important meaning on helping implement paternity leave in more countries. Since this topic is less explored currently, more research needs to be done to discover the impact of paternity leave on different things like children development, social influence, etc.

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