

Chapter 6

Will Separations Lead to More or Less Gender-Equal Parenthood? Mothers' and Fathers' Parental Leave Use in Sweden



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Introduction

Gender equality and shared parenting are closely related in Sweden. The premise that parents should share the responsibility for their children has strong support in Sweden, and is rarely contested in either the public or the political discourse. The concept of shared parenting is supported by research pointing to the positive aspects of gender-equal parenting, and especially of the involvement of the father (Hwang and Lamb 1997; Sarkadi et al. 2007). There is also a growing interest in the use of parental leave by fathers among both policy-makers and researchers. But what does shared parenting mean if the parents are not living together? Is gender-equal parenting practised in such cases? Is sharing the responsibility for care possible after the child's parents separate? Sweden is the ideal setting for investigating these questions, not only because a substantial share of Swedish parents lives apart, but because Sweden has high levels of gender equality, not least among parents. For instance, in Sweden, nine out of ten fathers take some parental leave, and 79% of all mothers with preschool children participate in the labour force (compared to 93% of equivalent group fathers, see scb.se). The country also has strong norms and high levels of agreement about the positive aspects of gender equality, including for parenting (Valarino et al. 2018). In this study, we investigate how parental care is shared by estimating the uptake of parental leave by mothers and fathers.

In Sweden, parental leave entitlement consists of 16 months of parental benefit days that can be used at any time during a child's preschool years. It is common practice for parents to save days for use after the child's first years of life that enable

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them to, for example, prolong holidays or bridge days when the child's preschool is closed. Indeed, around half of the days used by fathers and about 15 percent of the days used by mothers are taken after the child's second birthday (www.forsakring-skassan.se). As mothers use many more days than fathers early in the child's life, these percentages amount to about 40–50 days for both mothers and fathers. As the leave is for each individual child, each of the two parents of the child “owns” half of the days, but is permitted to transfer some of his/her days to the other parent. Swedish family policy has the explicit aim to enable and encourage the sharing of parental leave, regardless of whether the parents are living together. Our investigation of the use of parental leave by separated parents sheds light on the question of whether this policy goal is being achieved for the subgroup of separated parents. Furthermore, our study provides insight into the question of how parents negotiate their use parental leave.

The most common reason cited by parents for why they share the leave unequally is that they face economic constraints. In most cases, this means that the family cannot afford for the father to stay home for a long period. If the parents are living apart, these economic decisions are likely to be made differently. Compared to parents who live together, separated parents may, for example, face greater financial pressures, but will also have more reasons to make decisions individually. Thus, when the parents are separated, the parental leave days taken by one parent are less likely to benefit the other parent, and each parent has a stronger incentive to save his/her own days. In this study, we will compare the use of parental leave between parents who did and did not separate, and analyse how leave use differed depending on the age of the child at the time of separation. Our main question is whether having separated led parents to use parental leave differently. While we control for common confounding factors of parental separation, we will not be able to make a strict causal claim about how separation affects parental leave use. Rather, we see our findings as exploratory and descriptive. Nevertheless, we draw some conclusions for the question of whether the Swedish parental leave entitlement has been successful in reaching subgroups of parents who separated during their child's preschool years. The findings will be discussed based on the assumption that the parents' approaches to negotiating leave, and their preferences for taking leave, is likely to be affected by a separation.

Theoretical Considerations

Earnings-related parental leave provides parents with economic compensation while they are caring for their child at home, while also protecting the parents' employment contracts (Blum et al. 2018). However, even if parents are financially compensated while taking leave, they may have economic reasons for not taking it, such as the fear that being absent from work could damage their career progression and future wages (Evertsson and Duvander 2010; Rege and Solli 2013). Moreover, most parents do not receive 100% of their previous income while on leave. As a

result of these economic incentives and gendered parenting norms – and because of physiological considerations like a desire to breastfeed – the mother usually takes most of the parental leave, and almost always takes the first part of the leave entitlement. When the parents live together, they often seek to optimize their household economy by having the mother take most of the parental leave and become the main carer for the child. Economic reasoning is also the most common justification given by Swedish parents for not sharing leave equally (National Social Insurance Board 2003; Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2013). In the bargaining process used by a couple in deciding which partner takes parental leave, the decision-making power often rests with the partner who has the most power over the family's economic resources (Lundberg and Pollak 1996), or a common decision is reached based on considerations of economic optimisation and specialisation (Becker 1991). The decision of how the leave will be shared might also be based on norms and gendered behaviour that are rarely questioned (Brines 1994; West and Zimmerman 1987); or even on the partners' preferences for providing child care, which may be gendered and contextual (Närvi 2012).

However, when the parents separate, these motivations for the gendered sharing of parental leave may change for several different reasons. First, because the parents live in different households after the separation, the economic gains or losses of the parent who earns the least are not shared with the other parent. If we assume that both parents prefer to be on leave, there are no economic gains associated with not using leave for the parent who earns more, and his/her bargaining position becomes stronger. As each of the parents has a separate household income, they are likely to calculate their gains and losses separately. Nonetheless, the parents still need to negotiate how they intend to share a fixed number of parental leave days. From the perspective of specialisation, neither parent gains from specialising in either care work or paid employment. Indeed, it might be very risky for a separated parent to specialise, as spending too little time on either childcare or waged work may lead to a deficit that is harmful for the child-parent relationship, or for the economic sustainability of the one-parent household.

Furthermore, the norms and preferences regarding parental leave and childcare after a separation are likely to be contextual. In a society in which traditional norms prevail, the external shock of a separation often leads parents to fall back on gendered behavioural patterns, with the mother taking the main responsibility for childcare. But in a society in which gender-equal parenting is highly valued, the separation may actually be a tipping point towards a more equal sharing of parenting responsibilities, especially given that economic considerations would tend to reinforce such an outcome. In this chapter, we will investigate whether separated parents in Sweden are indeed more likely to share parenting responsibilities than their cohabiting counterparts. It should, however, be noted that a separation is usually accompanied by economic constraints that are also likely to influence how parents share leave. Financial pressures could make it more difficult for parents to use their leave benefits, as a single parent may be unable to afford the reduction in income while on leave. It is also possible that when parents face economic constraints, they see their resources as scarce, and thus become less willing to be generous when negotiating how leave days are shared.

In sum, the sharing of parental leave after separation becomes a litmus test of whether individual concerns about economic optimisation trump gendered behavioural patterns in a context in which the level of gender equality is fairly high, such as in Sweden. Thus, if the advantages associated with specialisation are lost, or the bargaining positions of parents change after separation, these factors could become more important than normative gendered behavioural patterns, and we would expect to find that the separated fathers in our sample used more parental leave than the fathers who were partnered. If, however, normative gendered behaviour functions as a fall-back position when parents separate, we would expect to see that the separated fathers took fewer leave days than the fathers who were partnered. Moreover, we would expect to find that in response to increased economic pressure after a separation, both the separated mothers and the separated parents combined used fewer days of leave than their non-separated counterparts.

Institutional Background and Research Question

Parental Leave

The parental leave preferences of both parents – that is, whether the father and/or the mother want to stay home or participate in the labour market – are major unknown factors. Caring for a child is not just a task that is likely to be preferred to other household work; it is an investment in the parent-child relationship (Nitsche and Grunow 2018). The childcare provided by parents taking parental leave differs from other forms of childcare, as it is exchanged for labour market work. Moreover, a parent's concerns about the loss of income when taking leave may depend not only on his/her own income level, but on the loss of the other parent's potential income if the parents share a household (Sundström and Duvander 2002).

In Sweden, a mother and a father are entitled to 8 months of paid parental leave each when they have a child, or a combined total of 16 months (480 days). The length of the leave entitlement has been extended in several steps since 1974, when parents were granted a combined total of 6 months of leave. For children born before 2014, these parental benefit days can be used at any time until the child reaches age 8 (see www.forsakringskassan.se). Parental leave benefit levels are linked to earnings. While parents receive approximately 80% of their previous earnings over most of the leave period, 3 months of the leave entitlement are compensated at a low flat rate. Parents who had a low or no income prior to having a child receive a low flat rate for the whole leave period. In 1995, one month of leave was reserved for each parent. This reform, which was aimed at increasing the uptake of leave by fathers, is often referred to as the “daddy month” (or the “mummy month”). Also starting in 1995, the leave entitlement was allocated to each individual parent. This means that a parent who wants to use more than 240 days needs the other parent to sign over days to him/her. This was initially done using a paper form, but can now be done with an electronic signature. It is important to note that these

regulations are the same for parents regardless of whether they are living together. A second month was reserved for each parent in 2002, and a third month was reserved for each parent in 2016. Since these months were reserved, the share of leave taken by fathers has increased substantially (Duvander and Johansson 2012). Today, nine out of ten fathers use some parental leave, and fathers use an average of slightly more than one-quarter of all of the parental benefit days taken in a year (Forsakringskassan.se).

Parental leave legislation also gives parents the flexibility to mix paid and unpaid days, and thus to choose the benefit levels and number of leave days that best fit their preferences and their economic circumstances. It is common for Swedish parents to use both paid and unpaid leave (Duvander and Viklund 2020; Eriksson 2014). However, the numbers of parental leave days taken and the levels of compensation parents receive while on leave vary considerably between families. Moreover, many parents save days for use during the child's preschool years. For example, for children born in 2007, fathers used an average of 48 days and mothers used an average of 54 days after the child's second birthday (official statistics, Swedish Social Insurance Agency, see www.forsakringskassan.se). It should also be emphasised that not all parental leave days are used; on average, parents had not used between 30 and 40 days by the time the child turned age 8, and thus forfeited these days (see www.forsakringskassan.se). In most cases, the days that would have been paid at a low flat rate were the ones that were left unused.

Previous studies have shown that in Sweden, the fathers who use the most leave and the mothers who use the least leave have higher levels of education (Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2013; Duvander and Johansson 2014). Parents who are highly educated tend to have better job situations than parents who have less education. For example, a highly educated father may be in a strong position to negotiate leave, and a highly educated mother may have an incentive to go back to work early. There is evidence that the parents with medium to relatively high income levels take the longest leave, while the parents with the highest income levels take somewhat shorter periods of leave (Duvander and Viklund 2020). The fathers who take the fewest leave days are those who have no earnings and/or no employment. As the mothers in the same situation tend to take most of their leave entitlement, it is clear that gendered norms interact with economic conditions in determining how much leave parents take. Attitudes also seem to affect the uptake of leave, as the fathers who have the most gender-equal attitudes and the mothers who are the most family-oriented tend to use the most leave (Duvander 2014).

Parental Responsibilities after Separation

In Sweden, the principle that both the mother and the father are equally responsible for their children is reinforced, regardless of whether they live together. Rates of parental separation were increasing in Sweden up to the turn of the century, and have since been stable or even slightly declining (Statistics Sweden 2013).

While parental separation is relatively frequent in Sweden, it is less common for a mother to be single from the beginning of her child's life. Only around one in 20 children in Sweden are born to a single mother, and this share does not seem to be increasing over time (Thomson and Eriksson 2013). However, around one in four children experience a parental separation during their childhood years (children aged 0–17 years, Statistics Sweden 2014), and around one in five children experience a parental separation during their preschool years (own calculations). Most Swedish parents have joint legal custody after they separate. Although the expectations for the mother and the father after they separate have been – and still are to a large extent – different, joint custody after separation has been permitted since 1976, provided the parents are in agreement (Government proposition 1975/1976: 170). Since 1998, awarding joint custody has been the default practice (Government proposition 1997/98: 7). Policy developments and legislation in Sweden may be characterised as increasingly gender-neutral and individualised. Thus, in most cases, the mother and the father are granted the same rights and responsibilities in relation to their child, regardless of whether they live together.

However, not all joint custody arrangements are the same. The legal framework that regulates the parents' economic responsibilities to their child has changed significantly over time. While current policy encourages parents to organise these payments themselves, it was still common at the beginning of the 2000s for separating parents to turn to the Swedish Social Insurance Agency for help in managing these transactions, and in determining the amounts to be paid. However, since 2016, the parents have been expected to negotiate and agree on such transactions between themselves. Thus, current family law is based on the concepts of individual responsibility, collaboration, and equal power relations between parents (Government proposition 2014/2015).

A parallel development has been the shift towards joint physical custody arrangements that enable separated parents to continue to share childcare responsibilities (Fransson et al. 2015, 2018). Under such an arrangement, the child lives half the time with the mother and half the time with the father. The popularity of joint physical custody has increased dramatically in recent years. The share of Swedish children with separated parents who live in such an arrangement has risen from just 1–2% in the mid-1980s to 35–40% in the mid-2010s (Statistics Sweden 2014). However, the most common situation for Swedish children is to live primarily with their mother after a separation: 30% live only with their mother, and in addition more than 20% live with their mother most of the time. Less than 5% of the children of separated parents live only with their father, and less than 5% live with their father most of the time (Statistics Sweden 2014). As there are no registers that track where the children of separated parents live, these statistics are based on surveys. Thus, estimates differ between sources, and have large confidence margins.

Although a majority of Swedish children are not living with both parents following a separation, the frequency of their contact with the non-residential parent seems to have increased. In Sweden, there is a strong social norm that a father should continue to be involved in his child's life after a separation. Family policy measures,

such as parental leave, temporary parental leave, and child allowance, make no distinction between parents based on whether they live with their children, and are available to all parents with custody. The gender-equal sharing of parental leave is an important component of the aim to create a gender-equal society in Sweden. This overarching goal of gender equality is reflected not just in the country's family policy, but in its labour market policy and other parts of the political agenda.

The strong norm that childcare responsibilities should be shared equally by the parents regardless of gender leads us to expect that fathers will be less inclined to transfer their half of the days to the mother after a separation. Thus, parental leave may be used on a more gender-equal basis following a separation, which would indicate that parents are sharing responsibility for their children. Nevertheless, while there has been a shift towards a more gender-equal and individualised distribution of responsibilities for children, it is also important to keep in mind that even in Sweden, gendered structures still prevail. Parental leave use statistics, data from time use studies, and parents' reports of who is responsible for various childcare tasks all indicate that mothers continue to be the main care providers (Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2013; Neilson 2016). In addition, as there is still a gender pay gap, fathers' opportunity costs are higher than those of mothers when using leave. Thus, it is also possible that when parents separate, the mother takes on the bulk of the care responsibilities, and the father's use of parental leave is reduced.

Our contradictory expectations of whether separated parents in Sweden share leave more or less than cohabiting parents leads us to formulate the following research questions: Did fathers and mothers who separated use more or less parental leave individually than non-separating fathers and mothers? And, what impact did separation have on the total amount of parental leave used?

Data and Analytical Strategy

Data

Administrative register data from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency are used for the analysis. The sample covers the parents of all children born in Sweden in 2002 and 2003, and the observation period is the full 8 years during which parental leave could be used. For these two cohorts, the same parental leave regulations applied. Parents with custody had the right to 8 months of leave, but could transfer all but two of these months to the other parent. To ensure that the parental leave was not used for other children in the family, the sample is restricted to first-born children, and the models control for continued childbearing. To ensure that both parents were engaged in childrearing, we included in the sample only parents who had lived together previously, and had joint custody for the whole study period. For the sake of simplicity, parents who lived with each other again after separating were excluded. We also excluded parents who emigrated or died during the observation period, and

parents of children who emigrated or died. In addition, we excluded parents of children who were born abroad, adopted, or multiple births, as special rules for parental leave apply in these cases. Finally, we excluded same-sex couples, as our interest here is in examining changes in gender equality. After applying the above criteria, the total number of parental couples in the sample was 63,040.

The data provide detailed information on childbearing, annual income, and social insurance benefits, including parental leave benefits. They also contain information on the parents' individual characteristics, such as sex, birth year, educational level, and country of birth; and on the birth order of the child. The dependent variable is the categorised number of days of parental leave used.

Our indicator of the parents' status as living together or separated was based on whether they were registered as living at the same address. We assumed that the parents of a common child who were registered at the same address were living together as a couple. If a parent moved to another address (or if both parents moved to different addresses), we assumed that the parents separated. There is a marginal risk that parents who were registered as living together were not living together as a couple if, for example, they were living in separate dwelling units at the same address (e.g., if they were living in the same building block with multiple apartments). There is also some fuzziness regarding the exact timing of separation, as the separation process can be gradual, and a change of address may come later. As the data do not include information on civil status, we were unable to tell when a potential divorce took place. In the Swedish context, the consequences of separating after cohabiting and divorcing after being married are likely to be similar for parents, as the legal differences between these types of unions are slight, and cohabitation is completely accepted.

It is obviously the case that the number of parental leave days a mother and a father can use is restricted by the number of days provided for in the legislation, and by the number of days used by the other parent. However, we found a surprising amount of variation not just in the extent to which the days the parents used were correlated, but in the total number of days they took. While it was quite common for a father to use no days in the first 2 years of his child's life, the most common pattern observed among fathers was to use exactly 60 days, which corresponds to the 2 months "reserved" for the father. Among mothers, using no leave was found to be very uncommon, but a peak was observed at 240 days; i.e., at the point at which half of all of the days had been used. It is likely that when the mother had used half of all of the days, the father started to use the other half, but spread his days out over the child's preschool years. It is also possible that in such cases, the father was not giving the mother permission to use "his" allocated days, but that he was not using them either. The most common pattern found for mothers was to use 330 days, which in most cases meant that the mother was using days with earnings-related benefits, and not days that would have been paid at a low flat rate.

Description of the Sample

In the descriptive Table 6.1, the distribution of leave use is categorised into the four categories used in the multinomial regression. The table shows in the last column how common the categories of use are by year of separation, and compared to the distribution among parents who did not separate. We see clear patterns. For example, using no leave was much more common among fathers who separated early. Still, it is worth pointing out that almost half of the fathers who separated in the first year of their child's life used more than 2 months of leave during their child's first 2 years. In an international perspective, this number can be considered high.

In Table 6.2, we see the background variables used in the regressions. While separating in the first year of the child's life was quite uncommon, the separation rates were stable thereafter, at between 2% and 3% of all couples separating every year. On average, the mother was younger and both the mother and the father had lower income levels the year before the child was born in couples who separated than in couples who stayed together. The separating couples were also more likely to have a lower educational level. Finally, separation was more common among foreign-born parents.

Analytical Strategy

We will use multinomial logistic regression analysis to investigate whether the separating parents used parental leave to a greater or lesser extent than the parents who were living together over the first 8 years of their first-born child's life. Our main focus is on the question of whether parental leave use differs between the parents who separated and those who did not. First, we analyse the mothers', the fathers', and the total number of days used in interaction with the time when the separation took place. In these analyses, we follow the parents for 8 years, and the outcome is the completed number of days. The models include background variables on each parent's age at childbirth, income the year before childbirth, educational level, and whether s/he is foreign-born. The full models can be found in the appendix. Here, we will focus on presenting the model results by the child's age at separation.

Next, to differentiate any diverging patterns of leave use before and after separation, we analyse these periods separately. We compare parental leave use before and after separation for couples who separated at different ages of the child to the parental leave use of couples who did not separate using a bivariate regression model. Specifically, we perform seven bivariate regressions, with each regression including those couples who separated when the child was k years old, and those who did not separate. In each regression, we use a bivariate outcome vector $(y_{i, < k} \ y_{i, \geq k})$ where $y_{i, < k}$ describes the i :th parents benefit days the years before year k , and $y_{i, \geq k}$ shows the days as from year k (inclusive). We control for the parent's level of education, individual income (in quintiles), and age; and for whether the parent was

Table 6.1 Use of parental leave by calendar year and gender

	Child's age at separation										No separation
	0 year	1 year	2 year	3 year	4 year	5 year	6 year	7 year			
Mother's parental leave days	<=240 days	14.12	13.64	12.92	12.78	13.19	13.6	12.65	12.45	12.14	
	240-325 days	23.4	25.04	26.14	27.17	26.38	28.86	27.31	25.65	28.4	
	326-335 days	7.99	7.36	7.78	8.13	6.87	8.23	6.87	8.3	6.66	
	335-420	54.49	53.97	53.16	51.92	53.57	49.31	53.16	53.6	52.79	
Father's parental leave days	0 days	9.13	7.69	5.87	5	4.61	4.77	3.48	3.6	2.2	
	1-55	19.54	20.25	19.24	16.53	18.34	16.55	16.32	16.33	11.76	
	56-65	22.4	23.22	23.05	22.7	24.12	20.02	21.17	25.92	21.91	
	66-420	48.93	48.84	51.84	55.76	52.94	58.67	59.03	54.15	64.13	
Total parental leave days	0-389 days	24.54	24.38	23.35	21.09	20.87	22.18	17.78	19.46	14.82	
	390-419	22.68	22.98	22.91	23.68	21.59	20.8	24.47	21.77	18.92	
	420-479	45.36	45.79	46.48	46.92	51.22	50.09	50.78	50.46	56.95	
	480	7.42	6.86	7.27	8.31	6.32	6.93	6.97	8.3	9.32	
N	701	1210	1362	1119	1107	1154	1091	1084	1084	39,483	
% of all couples	1.5	2.5	2.8	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.2	81.7	

Table 6.2 Descriptive table for parents' characteristics by separation year

	Child's age at separation								No separation	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Mother's age at childbirth	< 25 years	48.9	50.3	42.8	41	34.7	30.9	31.3	27.1	16
	25-29 years	28.7	28.4	31.6	35	35.5	37.7	38.1	42.3	42.1
	30-34 years	16.3	17.1	18.8	19.4	23.1	24.1	23.1	24.2	33.3
	35-39 years	5.3	3.8	5.7	4	5.7	6.6	6.6	5.7	7.8
	> = 40 years	0.8	0.6	1.2	0.7	1	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9
Income quintile	Father	2.7	2.9	3	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.7
	Mother	2.3	2.2	2.4	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.7	3.1
Educational level	Both parents ≥ tertiary	17	14.4	15	13.3	19.7	21.8	20.4	24.1	34
	Mother ≥ tertiary, Father ≤ secondary	14.9	12.5	14.8	14.9	17.4	15.9	17.9	16.6	19.5
	Mother ≤ secondary, Father ≥ tertiary.	8.6	8.9	8.1	10.7	10.5	9.2	9.5	11.5	10.6
	Both parents ≤ secondary	59.5	64.2	62.1	61.1	52.5	53.2	52.3	47.9	36
Foreign born	No	85.5	88.6	90.6	89.6	91.3	89.8	93.5	90.6	92.5
	Yes	14.5	11.4	9.4	10.4	8.7	10.2	6.6	9.4	7.5
N		724	1224	1376	1140	1117	1166	1100	1097	39,952
% of all couples		1.5	2.5	2.8	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.2	81.7

foreign-born. We also control for the birth cohort of the child being 2002 or 2003, and for continued childbearing during the observation period. The covariates thus include both time-independent as well as time-dependent variables.

We use a bivariate outcome vector as an empirical strategy to control for individual variations in overall benefit use. If we were to use only the benefit days that were taken after separation, any differences found between separated and cohabiting parents may reflect overall differences in use between the two groups emanating from confounding variables; that is, variables that cause variations in both days used and separation propensity (Figs. 6.1 and 6.2).

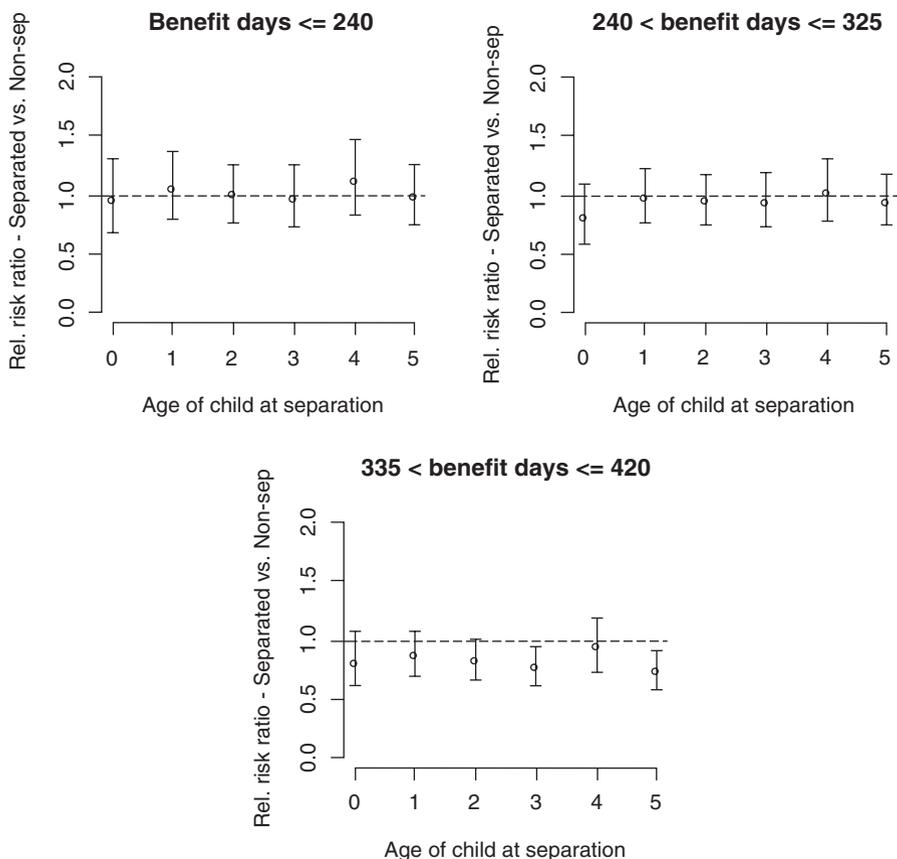


Fig. 6.1 Multinomial regression results. Mothers’ use of parental leave (1) up to 240 days, (2) 241–325 days, (3) 326–335 days (reference), (4) 335–420 days. Relative risk ratios and 95% confidence interval

Note: Further controls in the model were parents’ income, education, and foreign origin (see Table 6.3 in the Appendix for the full model)

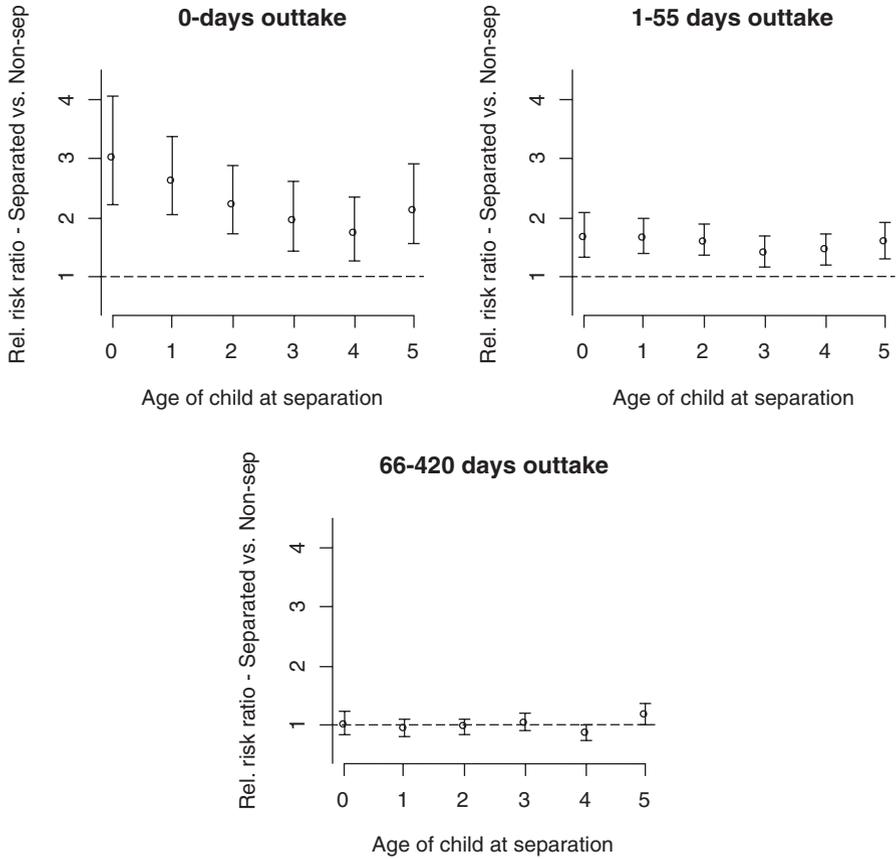


Fig. 6.2 Multinomial regression results. Fathers’ use of parental leave (1) up to 240 days, (2) 241–325 days, (3) 326–335 days (reference), (4) 335–420 days. Relative risk ratios and 95% confidence interval

Note: Further controls in the model were parents’ income, education, and foreign origin (see Table 6.4 in the Appendix for the full model)

One of the estimated regression results that underlies Figs. 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 is found in appendix Table 6.6. The table shows the estimated parameters from a bivariate regression for the father’s leave use among those fathers who separated when the child was 1 year old and those who did not separate during the first 8 years of the child’s life. Note that we have two columns for the two outcome variables: $y_{i, < 1}$ = benefit days before the child turns 1 year old, and $y_{i, \geq 1}$ = benefit days from when the child turns 1 year old up to child’s eighth birthday.

Results

Determinants of Using Parental Leave by Gender: Differences Between Parents Who Did and Did Not Separate

In Fig. 6.1, the relative risk ratio for separated mothers of using different numbers of days depending on when they separated compared to mothers who did not separate is presented. The reference category is using between 326 and 335 days; that is, 11 months of parental leave. The graph in the upper-left corner shows the risk of taking a short leave of up to 8 months (240 days) for mothers who separated at various times. The confidence intervals are quite large for this group, and no significantly different risk of taking such a short leave is detected for separated mothers. The graph in the upper-right corner shows the relative risk ratios for using between 8 and 11 months (240–325 days) of leave. It also indicates that the relative risk ratios are similar for the separating and non-separating mothers. In the graph at the bottom of Fig. 6.1, we can see the relative risk ratios of taking a long leave of up to 14 months (335–420 days). Again, the difference between the separated and the non-separated mothers is quite small. The mothers who separated when their child was 2, 3, or 5 years old were somewhat less likely to have used 8 to 11 months of leave, but the mothers who separated when their child was 4 years old did not differ in their leave usage from the mothers who did not separate.

Next, in Fig. 6.2, we turn to the fathers' parental leave use. Here, the reference category of use is 55–65 days, or around 2 months. The graph in the upper-right corner shows that the fathers who separated at any point during the child's preschool years had a higher probability of not using the leave. It seems that if a father separated early – and especially in the first year of his child's life – he was less likely to take any leave at all. In the graph in the upper-right corner of Fig. 6.2, we can see that the fathers who separated were also more likely to use less than 2 months of leave. There is no visible difference depending on when the father separated. In the graph at the bottom of Fig. 6.2, the relative risk ratios for using more than 2 months of leave are displayed. However, they show no difference between separating and non-separating fathers in their chances of taking such a long leave.

In Fig. 6.3, the total leave is considered; that is the combined days used by the mother and the father. The maximum length of leave is 16 months, and the reference category is having used more than 14 months of leave, but not all of the available leave days. We know from the descriptive table that all of the leave days were used for fewer than one in ten children, and that the parents used more than 14 months of leave (but not the full leave) in only about half of all cases. It thus appears that not using all of the benefits for each child was quite common. The graph in the upper-right corner indicates that among parents who separated, it was much more common with a short leave of up to 13 months. In many cases this means that the low paid flat rate days were not used, and thus forfeited. Moreover, it was also more common to use between 13 and 14 months of leave; again with quite a few days being

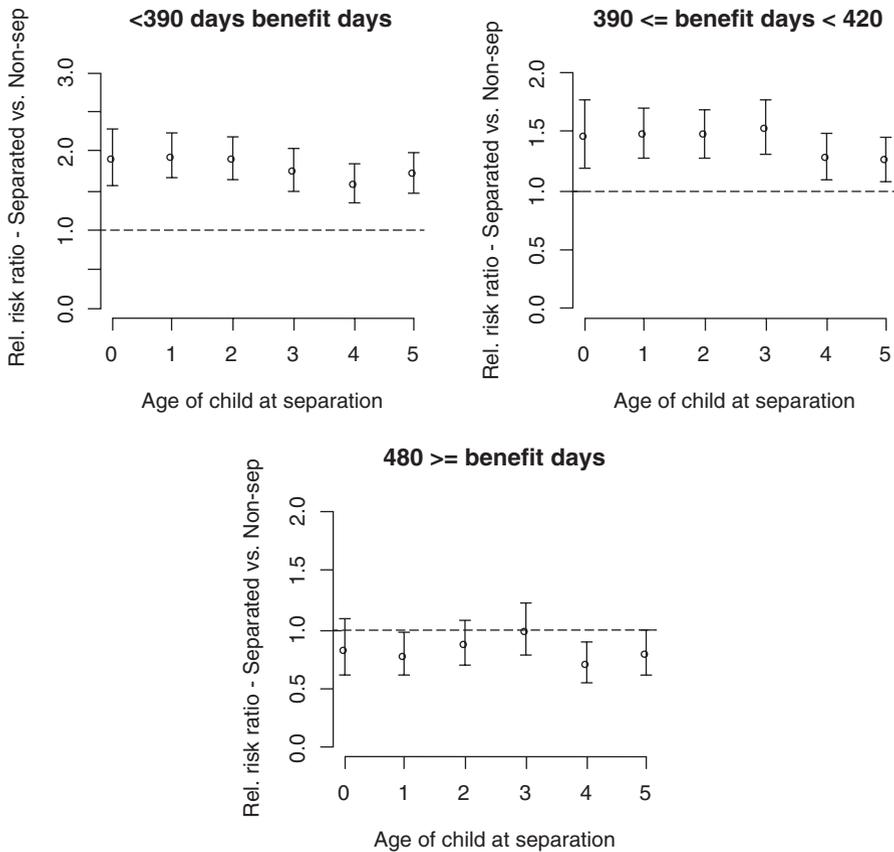


Fig. 6.3 Multinomial regression Total use in categories, (1) 480 days, (2) 479–420 days (REF), (3) 419–390 days, (4) less than 390 days
 Note: Further controls in the model were parents’ income and education, and the foreign origin of both parents (see Table 6.5 in the Appendix for the full model)

forfeited. In the bottom graph of Fig. 6.3, we can also see that the separating parents were less likely to have used all of the days; that is, to have maximised their leave. There are no clear differences based on the child’s age at separation in these models of total leave length.

Taking Leave Before and After Separation

In the above model, we considered the completed number of days of leave depending on when the parents separated. However, the pattern of when the leave days were used can, of course, vary depending on whether we are considering the days

used before or after the separation. Therefore, we also considered how many days were used before and after the separation depending on when the separation happened. These results are summarised in Fig. 6.4 for mothers, in Fig. 6.5 for fathers, and in Fig. 6.6 for total leave use. Here, the model specification is a bivariate regression model with simultaneous estimation of days before and after the separation (see Swedish social insurance inspectorate 2017).

Figure 6.4 indicates that, compared to the mothers who did not separate, the mothers who separated in the first year of the child’s life used, on average, twelve more days before the separation, and 18 fewer days after the separation. For the mothers who separated later in the child’s life, we see no statistically significant higher level of use before the separation, but somewhat fewer days used after the separation, especially for the mothers who separated relatively early.

In Fig. 6.5, we can see that the fathers who separated – and especially the fathers who separated early – used fewer days after the separation. For the period before the separation, we observe large variations in use (seen in the large confidence intervals), and no indication that fewer days were used.

Finally, the total number of days used before and after a separation mirror the combined number of days used by the mother and the father, as indicated in Fig. 6.6. We can see that having separated early was associated with having used more days before the separation, and fewer days after. We also find that having separated later

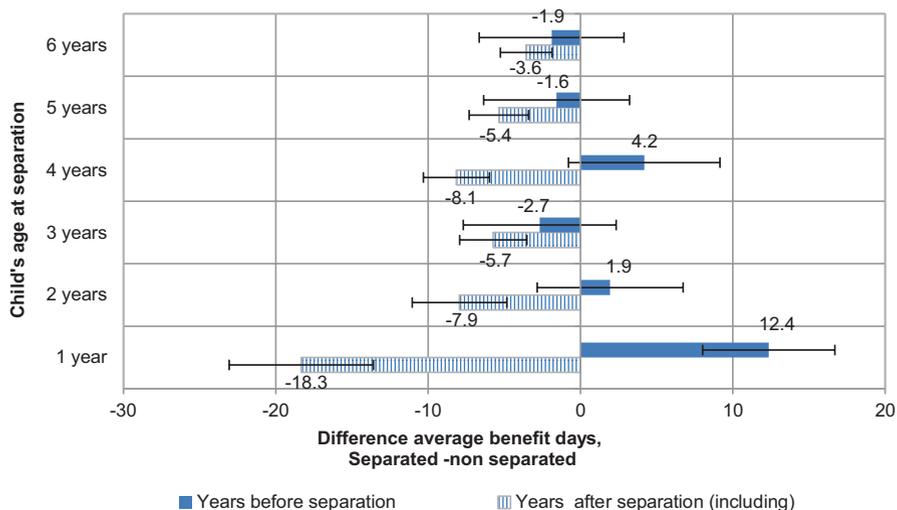


Fig. 6.4 Differences between separated and non-separated parents’ benefit days before and after separation. Average number of days for mothers
 Note: Further controls in the model were fathers’ and mothers’ age, education, birth country, and income quintiles; as well as the child’s year of birth and continued childbearing. See Table 6.6 for an example of regression; all six regressions for the figure are available upon request

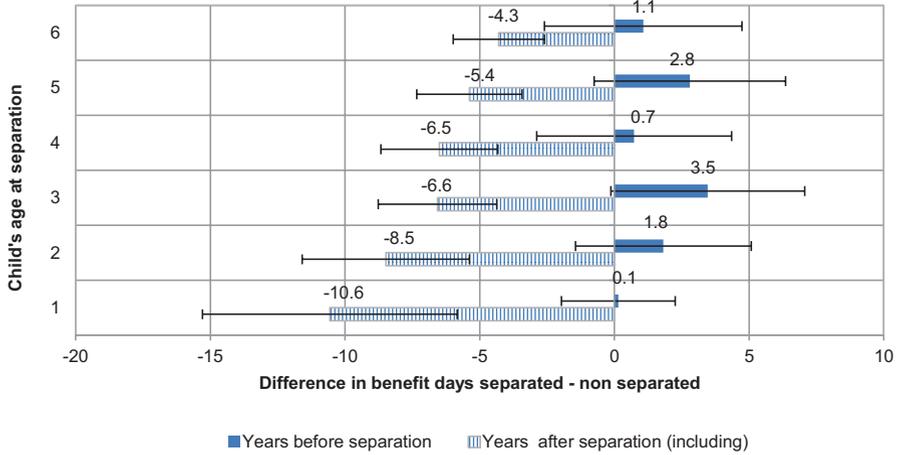


Fig. 6.5 Differences between separated and non-separated parents' benefit days before and after separation. Average number of days for fathers
 Note: Further controls in the model were fathers' and mothers' age, education, birth country, and income quintiles; as well as the child's year of birth and continued childbearing. See Table 6.6 for an example of regression; all six regressions for the figure are available upon request

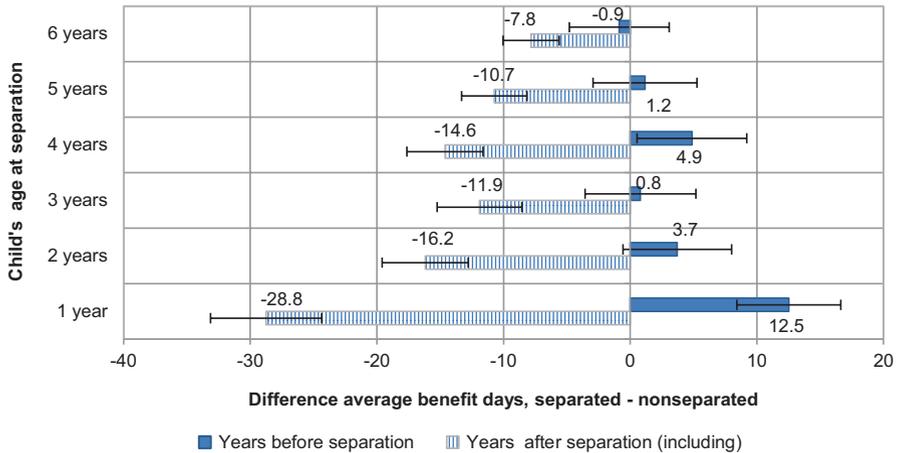


Fig. 6.6 Differences between separated and non-separated parents' benefit days before and after separation. Average number of days for the parents together
 Note: Further controls in the model were fathers' and mothers' age, education, birth country, and income quintiles; as well as the child's year of birth and continued childbearing. See Table 6.6 for an example of regression; all six regressions for the figure are available upon request

was associated with having used fewer days after the separation. Thus, we can conclude that the major differences in parental leave use between the separated and the non-separated parents lie in the patterns of use after the separation.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this chapter, we investigated whether parents who separated used their parental leave differently than parents who remained together. The underlying question was whether parenting responsibilities were shared differently after a separation than they were when the parents were living together. This question is specific to the Swedish context in the beginning of the 2000s. Sweden is the ideal case for investigating this issue for a number of reasons. First, parental separation is common in Sweden, with up to 20% of all first-born children experiencing a parental separation during their preschool years. Second, as parental leave can be used during the whole preschool period, it is quite common for parents to have leave days they could share after a separation. In addition, parental leave is shared between the mother and the father in most cases, also in cases of separation. The leave is set up as an individual entitlement that is allocated to each parent, regardless of his/her living arrangements, but that can be transferred between parents. Thus, it is likely that a separation will change the conditions under which parents negotiate how the leave is shared. For an international audience, it is paramount to point out the uniqueness in Swedish family policy, which emphasises that parents have shared and gender-neutral responsibilities to their children, and which assumes parents to collaborate even after they have separated.

We had conflicting expectations about whether parental leave would turn out to be shared more or less equally after a separation, and about how many days would be used by the mother, the father, and in total. We might have expected that after a separation, the parents revert to traditional patterns of sharing, with the mother taking on the bulk of the childcare responsibilities, given that the children are still more likely live with the mother than the father, and maternal care is still characterised in many studies as forming the foundation of childrearing. However, it might also be the case that having to negotiate sharing leave renders the situation more gender-equal, as the father may be less keen to transfer his days to the mother, and more interested in using the days allocated to him. Any negotiations over leave days are likely to be framed by the economic pressures that many separated parents face, which can make it harder for them to use their leave benefits, and particularly the low flat rate days. When we considered parental leave use over the whole period that leave was available, we found that the separating mothers used about the same

number of days as the non-separating mothers. However, we also found that the mothers who separated early used more days before the separation, and then fewer days after the separation than the cohabiting mothers. We believe that the more intensive use early on was related to the mothers' economic constraints. Moreover, if they were anticipating separating and were already starting to carry the costs of caring for their child on their own, the mothers would often not have had the option of being flexible and taking unpaid leave. The fathers who separated used fewer parental leave days than the fathers who did not separate. The fathers who separated were more likely to have used no days; and, if they used days, they often took a short leave only. However, most of the fathers who separated used some leave, and the probability of using a large number of days (more than 2 months) was as high for the fathers who separated as it was for the fathers who did not. Thus, we observed more variation in leave use among the separating fathers. We also observed that the differences in leave use were mainly related to lower use after a separation. In the analysis of the total leave used by the mother and the father, we found that taking a shorter leave was more common among the parents who separated. Our findings show that these parents together used fewer days after separating, but somewhat more days before separating. This pattern was linked to higher use by mothers before the separation. It is therefore possible that the mothers were taking more leave in anticipation of the coming separation.

As both the mothers and the fathers used fewer days after they separated, our most important conclusion is not about changes in gendered norms or in the strategies parents use to negotiate leave, but rather about the economic constraints that separated parents face. The separated parents did not use the leave to the same extent as the non-separated parents. Thus, it appears that parental leave is seen as less accessible by parents who separated early. In the end, it is the children of separated parents who are most affected by their parents taking shorter leave periods, as they have less access to their parents. This is an obvious policy concern that should be addressed. However, it should also be noted that both mothers and fathers use parental leave after a separation. In particular, our finding that fathers who separated took leave indicates that they continued to be engaged in childrearing after separating. In addition, we should emphasise that the data used in this study are for children born in the early 2000s, and that we would expect the patterns we observed to change over time. Moreover, we do not think that the patterns would be the same across different contexts, especially not in societies in which fathers' participation in childcare is not the norm. In terms of the state of gender-equal parenting after separation in Sweden, we leave it up to the reader to decide whether they consider the glass to be half-full or half-empty.

Appendix

Table 6.3 Multinomial regression result. Mothers' use of parental leave in categories (1) up to 240 days, (2) 241–325 days, (3) 326–335 days (Reference), (4) 335–420 days

	Parental leave days							
	0–240		241–325		326–335		336–420	
Age at sep								
Age 0	0.937		0.796		1	–	0.801	
Age 1	1.048		0.961		1	–	0.861	
Age 2	0.985		0.935		1	–	0.813	
Age 3	0.959		0.933		1	–	0.755	*
Age 4	1.104		1.015		1	–	0.934	
Age 5	0.972		0.931		1	–	0.724	**
No separation	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	
Income quintile								
1	3.686	***	1.206	**	1	–	1.084	
2	1.376	***	0.937		1	–	0.879	*
3	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	–
4	1.303	***	1.159	**	1	–	0.877	**
5	2.012	***	1.267	***	1	–	0.58	***
Education								
Basic	0.406	***	0.551	***	1		1.02	
Secondary	0.452	***	0.633	***	1		1.143	**
Tertiary ≤2 years	0.84		0.808	**	1		0.928	
Tertiary >2 years	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	
Migration background								
Foreign born	0.725	***	0.639	***	1		0.854	**
Swedish-born	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	

Relative risk ratios. (see also Fig. 6.1)

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 6.4 Multinomial regression result. Fathers' use of parental leave in categories (1) up to 240 days, (2) 241–325 days, (3) 326–335 days (Reference), (4) 335–420 days

	Parental leave days							
	0–240		241–325		326–335		336–420	
Age at sep								
Age 0	3.004	***	1.66	***	1	–	0.992	
Age 1	2.628	***	1.655	***	1	–	0.93	
Age 2	2.219	***	1.588	***	1	–	0.944	
Age 3	1.94	***	1.394	***	1	–	1.028	
Age 4	1.711	***	1.44	***	1	–	0.854	*
Age 5	2.133	***	1.578	***	1	–	1.158	
No separation	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	–
Income quintile								
1st quintile	2.876	***	1.012		1	–	0.56	***
2nd quintile	1.859	***	1.11		1	–	0.868	**
3rd quintile	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	–
4th quintile	0.595	***	0.896	*	1	–	1.043	
5th quintile	1.555	***	1.115	*	1	–	0.913	*
Education								
Basic	1.356	**	0.929		1		0.376	***
Secondary	0.931		0.91	*	1		0.516	***
Tertiary ≤ 2 years	1.110		1.009		1		0.706	***
Tertiary > 2 years	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	
Migration background								
Foreign born	0.756	***	1.191	**	1		2.264	***
Swedish-born	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	

Relative risk ratios. (see also Fig. 6.2)

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 6.5 Multinomial regression result. Total use of parental leave in categories (1) up to 389 days, (2) 390–419 days, (3) 420–479 days (Reference), (4) 480 and more days

	Parental leave days							
	0–389		390–419		420–479		480 and more	
Age at sep								
Age 0	1.898	***	1.456	***	1	–	0.813	
Age 1	1.919	***	1.475	***	1	–	0.767	*
Age 2	1.898	***	1.471	***	1	–	0.861	
Age 3	1.735	***	1.524	***	1	–	0.975	
Age 4	1.560	***	1.271	**	1	–	0.696	**
Age 5	1.707	***	1.254	**	1	–	0.783	*
No separation	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	–
Income quintile mother								
1st quintile	1.695	***	1.164	***	1	–	1.722	***
2nd quintile	1.276	***	1.137	***	1	–	1.116	*
3rd quintile	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	–
4th quintile	1.130	**	1.090	*	1	–	1.097	
5th quintile	1.806	***	1.420	***	1	–	1.034	
Income quintile father								
1st quintile	1.220	***	1.127	*	1	–	1.352	***
2nd quintile	1.194	***	1.151	**	1	–	1.180	*
3rd quintile	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	–
4th quintile	0.858	***	0.910	*	1	–	1.105	
5th quintile	1.170	***	1.085	*	1	–	1.137	*
Education								
Both low	0,817	***	0,959		1		0,985	
Mother low, father high	0,904	*	0,928		1		1,1	
Mother high, father low	0,764	***	0,883	***	1		1023	
Both high	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	
Migration background								
Foreign born	0,897	*	0,977		1		0,578	***
Swedish-born	Ref.		Ref.				Ref.	

Relative risk ratios. (see also Fig. 6.3)

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 6.6 OLS-regression results for the fathers' benefit days before and after the child turned 1 year old

	Before $y_{i,t} < 1$	After $y_{i,t} \geq 1$	
Separation			
Separation at child's age 1	0.1	–10.6	***
No separation			
Fathers' age	–0.3	–0.8	
<25 year	–0.1	0.3	
30–34 year	0.0	–1.0	

(continued)

Table 6.6 (continued)

	Before $y_{i, < 1}$		After $y_{i, \geq 1}$	
Separation				
35–39 year	–1.0		–5.6	***
≥ 40 year	Ref.		Ref.	
Mothers age	2.5	***	–2.1	**
<25 year	–0.3		1.9	**
30–34 year	0.8		0.6	0,618
35–39 year	0.5		6.7	*
≥ 40 year	Ref.		Ref.	
Parents education				
Both parents ≥ post secondary	5.4	***	24.4	***
Mother ≥ post secondary. Father ≤ secondary school.	3.3	***	11.4	***
Mother ≤ secondary school. Father ≥ post secondary.	0.8		7.2	***
Both parents ≤ secondary school.(Ref)	Ref.		Ref.	
Migration background				
Parent(s) have foreign background	–7.8	***	–11.3	***
Both parents Swedish-born	Ref.		Ref.	
Income percentile father				
1st quintile	–10.3	***	–14.0	***
2nd quintile	–0.7		–4.9	***
3rd quintile	0.3		1.1	
4th quintile	–3.5	***	–7.6	***
5th quintile	Ref.		Ref.	
Income percentile mother				
1st quintile	17.6	***	7.1	***
2nd quintile	4.8	***	1.3	**
3rd quintile	0.0		6.8	***
4th quintile	2.3	***	16.5	***
5th quintile	Ref.		Ref.	
Cohort first child				
2002	0.1		–3.0	***
2003	Ref.		Ref.	
New child				
1st year	7.0	*	–16.5	**
2nd year	1.1	*	–4.4	***
3rd year	Ref.		Ref.	
4th year	0.3		0.5	
5th year	2.2	**	–0.1	
6th year	1.3		–2.0	
7th year	–0.4		–1.3	
8th year	1.2		4.0	
No new child within 8 years	3.6	***	–4.5	***

$y_{i, \geq 1}$ = benefit days before the child turns 1 year old and $y_{i, < 1}$ = benefit days from when the child turns 1 year old up to the child's eighth birthday

Note: Only fathers who separated when the child was 1 year old and those who did not separate at all during the first 8 years of the child's life. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

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