Chapter 3
Fathers on Leave Alone in Norway: Changes and Continuities

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3.1 Introduction

In the Nordic countries, family policies are based on the ideal of a symmetrical family of two worker-carers, within which time taking care of children is given a high priority. A parental leave system, which includes earmarked leave for fathers, is considered to be one of the main components of the earner/carer models (Gornick and Meyers 2005, 2009). In 1993, Norway introduced a parental leave scheme exclusively earmarked for fathers, while Sweden and Iceland have subsequently later followed suit. The father's quota is a welfare state contribution to mobilize fathers as carers. The aim of this chapter is to explore how using the father's quota and being on leave alone impacts on fathers' caring practices.

In the course of the 20 years that the father's quota has existed, it has been extended and become a mature institution. In this chapter, we are concerned with the consequences that a long leave has for the use and understanding of parental leave for fathers by studying it from the perspective of their everyday practices. The father's quota has changed the norms for fathers, as they are expected to use their quota, to be more than family providers and to be involved in caregiving (Brandth and Kvande 2003a; Brandth and Kvande 2005).

The fathers in this study have recently been home alone with their toddlers, and they represent the second generation of Norwegian fathers who have used the earmarked leave 20 years after its introduction. The first generation of fathers who experienced an earmarked leave was subject to exploration in a study published in 2003 (Brandth and Kvande 2003a). These fathers used the father's quota when it constituted 4 weeks, while the second generation of fathers has experienced a much

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Table 3.1 Norwegian parental leave; changes in the distribution of weeks with a 100 % wage compensation[a] between mothers and fathers during the project period

Year	Total parental leave length	Mother's quota	Sharable part[a]	Father's quota
2009	46	3 + 6	27	10
2011	47	3 + 6	26	12
2013	49	3 + 14	18	14
2014	49	3 + 10	26	10

Source: Nav (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) (2014). Foreldrepenger. (Parent benefits) Statistics per 2013/12/31

[a]If parents choose 80 % wage compensation, the sharable leave period is prolonged by 1 month

longer period of leave, because the leave period had been extended to 12 weeks when they were interviewed. In this chapter we ask how these fathers do fathering alone. How does being home alone for a longer period of time impact on their caring practices? Can we observe any changes compared to the experiences and practices of the first generation of leave-taking fathers?

3.2 The Norwegian Parental Leave System for Fathers

During the past two decades, fathers' rights and obligations to provide care for their children have been the most important focus in the development of parental leave policies in Norway. Since the individual right to leave was granted to fathers as a non-transferable father's quota of 4 weeks, it has been prolonged and more fathers have become eligible. Currently, the total parental leave period is 49 weeks, with 100 % wage compensation.

As seen from Table 3.1, mothers have an earmarked period in 2014 of 13 weeks, of which three have to be taken before birth.

Twenty-six of the weeks are sharable between mothers and fathers. Included in the total parental leave period is also the father's quota of 10 weeks of individual, non-transferable rights for fathers. The 10-week period is down from 14 weeks after the conservative government reduced this in 2014. In addition to parental leave, fathers have 2 weeks of paternity leave to be taken after the birth of the child to assist the mother.

The father's quota may be taken together with the mother at home at the same time. This means that not all fathers in Norway who take up the quota will necessarily have the experience of fathering alone. Before the quota was extended to from 6 to 10 weeks in 2009, surveys demonstrated that approximately 50 % of the fathers who used the quota were home, while the mothers returned to their work on a full-time basis (Brandth and Øverli 1998; Brandth and Kvande 2003a; Grambo and Myklebø 2009). The length of the leave affects the pattern of use, and a longer father's quota has made it more difficult for mothers to be home during the entire father's quota period, as a "double leave" will reduce the total leave length. Most parents are interested in reducing the care gap between leave and the start of kinder-

garten, and in many cases this implies stretching the leave period as much as possible. However, it does seem to have become more common for mothers and fathers to have a shorter period of overlap, which is often defined as a family holiday.

In addition to earmarking a father's quota, another element in the system that concerns the father's use of the quota is flexibility. Since the quota was introduced on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, choice and flexibility have increasingly been accentuated in Norwegian political debates. While the Norwegian parental leave system has always had elements of flexibility, the father's quota, which is the subject of this chapter, was not made more flexible until 2007. Previously, it had to be taken within the first year of the baby's life; now it can be taken over a period of 3 years. One type of flexible use is part-time leave, in which part-time work may be combined with part-time leave. This makes it possible to stretch the father's quota over a longer period of time so that, e.g. a take-up of leave on a 50 % basis doubles its length. A second form of flexible use involves deferring the leave, in which it can be divided into blocks and taken at different times, although these two forms of flexible leave use may also be combined. The alternative to flexible use is full-time, uninterrupted leave, and leave can be taken until the child turns 3 years of age.

In combination with its flexibility, the extension of the leave opens for many choices and variations in how it is used, including what mothers do during the father's quota. When fathers take their quota, the mothers may return to work or stay home with the father on a full- or part-time basis. Because the father's quota has been extended, a combination of models has become quite common.

3.3 Previous Research

Fathering is not fixed, but instead is formed in historical moments and follows shifts in discourses and policies. The idea of equal rights for mothers and fathers was a strong rationale for developing parental leave in the Norwegian context. During the 1980s, the parents had the right to share the parental leave, but this opportunity was little used by fathers. In order to stimulate fathers to take parental leave, the father's quota was introduced in 1993. In addition to equality between mothers and fathers, an additional rationale was introduced – the child's need for a caring father.

During the first 5 years of the quota, there was an increase in fathers' uptake from 4 to 78 %. Every time the quota has been increased (2005, 2006, 2009, 2011), the father's uptake has also increased, which means that more fathers are taking longer parental leave. This is why the earmarked leave has been called a success when it comes to the number of fathers using it to stay home to care for their small child (Brandth and Kvande 2013). On the whole, there is a high frequency of fathers using the father's quota, as approximately 90 % of eligible fathers use some of- or the entire quota. Twenty-four percent of fathers take the leave on a part-time basis (NAV 2014). An effect of the extension is that fewer fathers seem to use other parts of the parental leave in addition to the quota. They take their quota and only the quota, with the average in 2013 being 46 days of leave for fathers (NAV 2014).

Based on representative survey research, Lappegård and Bringedal (2013) show how Norwegian parents are very positive to the father's quota and the parental leave system. Research on why the quota system works (Brandth and Kvande 2013) focuses on two factors. Firstly, that having an earmarked right which is not transferable to the mother prevents negotiations between mothers and fathers on who should stay at home. Secondly, because it is a collective, statutory right for all working fathers it makes employers and employed fathers accept and adopt it. In fact, the top leaders of the employers' and the employee's organizations are very much in favour of the father's quota.

Nonetheless, there are various cultural models for parenting, and it has been pointed out that parents' different class positions may influence how they chose to organize their leave (Stefansen and Farstad 2008). In other words, even if the take-up of the father's quota is high all over, fathers may use and define it differently. Farstad (2010) argues that the meaning fathers attribute to the father's quota is important for their use of it.

Five years after the introduction of the father's quota in Norway, we carried out a study in which we interviewed fathers about their experiences of being on leave. As part of this study, we compared the care practices of fathers who took their 4 weeks of earmarked father's quota while the mother went back to work, with fathers who were home with the mother while they were on leave (Brandth and Kvande 2003b, c). The ones who fathered alone had partners with full-time jobs and often used more of the parental leave days than the quota, whereas the fathers who took their quota with the mother at home had partners who often worked part-time and/or had quit their jobs after they had the baby. This group took a shorter leave.

The results showed that caring for the child alone influenced their narratives of fathering practices in significant ways, and that their practices held characteristics that were less salient among the fathers who were not caring for their child alone. First of all, fathering alone allowed the men to develop their care competence and enhance their sensitivity to children and their confidence in reading a small child. Consequently, they learned to carry out a "need-oriented" care practice in which the child's needs determined the content of the daily realities. Moreover, the days on leave were characterized by "slow time", which implied letting the routines of childcare determine the content of what fathers did during the day, and they did not try to combine care work with many other tasks. The importance of being home alone became significant, in contrast to fathers who did not use their father's quota to have the sole responsibility for the child while the mother went back to work. The mother's main responsibility for the child was not interrupted in these cases, and the father became her support person. These fathers needed the mothers to translate the child's needs for them, and care practices based on knowing the child were not well developed. As a result, they felt more comfortable with older children, often giving a priority to older siblings. Not being home alone also implied putting more priority to work and "fast time".

Being home alone, then, means taking greater responsibility for the child, which helped to facilitate a move from being the mother's helper to being a more equal co-parent. Thus, our study confirmed what Norma Radin and Graeme Russell

(1983) reported many years earlier, namely that being in charge of the children alone seemed to be the "cutting edge" with respect to fathers' positive feelings of involvement and competence. Interestingly, Radin and Russell also reported that solo fathering was important when it came to feelings of overload and discontent/distress. The proportion of fathers who took care of their children when the mother was not home was low in their study, and several other studies that have examined the amount of time fathers spend with their children reveal that fathers are more likely than mothers to spend time with the children in the presence of the other parent (Craig 2006; Kitterød 2003). Hence, there should be plenty of room for fathers to increase their level of involvement by parenting alone. In a study in which the father's quota is analysed from the perspective of the child, the findings show how fathers, through having to interpret the wordless language in interacting with babies, develop a relational competence (Bungum 2013).

In our previous study from the early years after the father's quota was introduced, the fathers were very determined that their primary task when on leave was to take care of the child. Ascribing meaning to the leave, the father-child relationship was front and centre, while housework was not understood as part of the deal for fathers on the father quota leave. The study reported conflict and tension between the parents with respect to housework. Moreover, there were many ways in which fathers sought to adjust: outsourcing, reducing and downgrading the standard, but there was also a slow acceptance with some fathers that doing housework was part of being home on leave (Brandth and Kvande 2003a). Norwegian time use studies measure how much time fathers use on family and work, and how this has changed over the last few decades. Recent time use data documents that today most fathers of small children do housework on a daily basis, and that this is a change during the period that the father's quota has existed (Kitterød 2013). It will therefore be interesting to explore what the fathers report when on leave alone for a longer period of time.

The previous study of the father's quota focused on what fathers actually did when they had their quota alone. Thus, it was a contribution to a research question that still requires more exploration (O'Brien et al. 2007). In this chapter, we ask what fathers report when on leave for a longer period of time and in a normative context, in which fathering might have changed during the 20 years it has existed.

3.4 Sample and Data

The analysis in this chapter is based on 12 interviews with heterosexual fathers living and working in Norway who had been home alone on leave with the father's quota. Except for one father who worked every Friday, all the interviewees had been home alone on a full-time basis for a minimum of 8 weeks. As seen from in Table 3.2, leave length ranged between 8 and 40 weeks. The variation in leave length is caused by some fathers using more than the father's quota weeks, and some less, while the father's quota length itself also varied during the interview period.

Table 3.2 Overview of the sample

	Name	Occupation	Total no of p.l. weeks taken	No. of weeks home alone	Full-time (F) Part-time (P)	With mother at home?
1	Adam	Electrician	15	15	F	No
2	Douglas	Designer	8	8	F	No
3	Emil	Painter	40	40	F	No
4	Ian	Social worker	14	14	F	No
5	Omar	Warehouse worker	12	12	F	No
6	Simon	Grad. Engineer	12	12	F	No
7	Roberto	Engineer	10	10	F	No
8	Mons	Photographer	20	20	P (80 %)	No
9	Steinar	Grad. Engineer	14	12	F	Two weeks of overlap
10	Martin	Architect	16	12	F	Four weeks of overlap
11	Johannes	Architect	16	12	F	Four weeks of overlap
12	Max	Painter	11	8	F	Three weeks of overlap

In our previous study, we defined "home alone" as full-time leave during the 4 weeks available at the time. In the current study, we have excluded fathers who use the father's quota on a part-time basis to construct a comparable sample.

Most of the interviews were conducted in late 2012/early 2013, and included questions from the project, "Fathers on leave alone in a changing policy environment." Some participants were found through the researchers' professional networks, and additionally, the snowballing method was employed, as interviewed fathers were asked if they knew of other fathers who might be contacted for interviewing. Information letters to the participants explained the objectives of the project, the ethical research rules and the rights of the participants. To keep the interviewees' identities anonymous, names were not recorded and pseudonyms have been used. The interviews were semi-structured, lasted from 1 to 2 hours, and for the most part the fathers were interviewed in their homes. Nearly all the quotations used in this article have been translated from Norwegian into English by the authors.

To help ensure a sample of fathers who had taken a leave of some length, the criteria for choosing participants were that they had become fathers after the father's quota was extended to 10 weeks in mid-2009 and to 12 weeks in 2011. Thus, at the time of the interview, their leave experiences were quite recent. Most fathers normally take their leave after the mother, i.e. starting when the child is from 9 to 12 months old, and at the time of the interview the oldest child was two and a half years old. Several of the fathers also already had a child, and some were expecting their next child.

Considering the Norwegian eligibility rules, in which the right to parental leave is earned through employment, the fathers and mothers had been employed previous to the birth of the child. As has become common in interview studies, people with a higher education more easily accept being interviewed, so an extra effort was put into finding interviewees with lower educational backgrounds. All the interviewees lived in one of Norway's largest cities.

In the 2003 study, we compared the fathers who were home alone with the group of fathers who were on leave while the mother was present. In the present analyses, we have concentrated solely on the fathers who have been home alone with their children. The design is comparative in the sense that it analyses the experiences of fathers using the extended father's quota in the light of the experiences of fathers who were home alone on a shorter quota 15 years ago.

The analysis started with an open, inductive approach, in which we carefully read the interviews with our attention focused on how fathers described their doings when being home alone on leave. In the next stage, we read them with the main findings from our previous study of home-alone fathers in mind. We expected similar findings concerning the fathers' motives for taking leave, their enthusiasm in getting to know the child and their description of a newly acquired care competence. The similarities and differences with the fathers' experiences from the earlier study became our point of departure for developing the new categories.

3.5 Care Work as Hard Work

One distinct difference from the first study is that the fathers tended to describe childcare as hard work. They talked about it as challenging and tiresome (and wonderful). In the first study, the fathers' stories were dominated by the positive and thrilling aspects of being able to spend time with their young children. However, staying home alone for a period of 2 months or more seems to give the fathers insight into care work as "real" work. With the extension of the father's quota to two and a half months, the fathers may have raised their expectations as to what they wanted to accomplish while they were home on leave. While staying at home for 4 weeks (fathers in the first study) might be experienced as just "visiting", they were now taking the main responsibility for the child and the household during their leave, and learning that childcare required a reorganization of priorities to focus on the child. In short, the fathers experienced that caring for a baby could be very time consuming, more time consuming than they had expected.

When these fathers are home alone with their young children experiencing how exhausting it is to have the primary responsibility for doing care work, they acquire a new understanding of the amount of work that the mothers have to do. They talked about this as an eye-opening experience. Adam was a 32-year-old electrician married to Siri, a civil servant. He stayed at home alone for 15 weeks, and talked about his experience of being home alone and having the main responsibility for doing the care work:

> It's a big responsibility too. You have to put them first. Before we had kids, you only had to think about yourself. Whereas now you have to think every day okay, there's someone else you have to think about. And that's the way it was when I was on leave, your shoulders were always kind of like this (raises his shoulders) because you had to, you had responsibility for this little person. And as soon as mommy came home I could relax, and I didn't feel that until after maybe eight weeks. And we talked about it, and Siri was like now you understand what it was like for me for a year. I was like: "Wow, yeah." So I bought her some champagne and flowers, and said: *"you're the champ."*

Adam stayed home for quite a long period of time and experienced how having the sole responsibility could be exhausting, but at the same time fantastic. He had to focus on the child's needs and not on himself as he used to do before. It took 8 weeks before he felt he could relax a bit, which gave him a better understanding of the work and responsibility that his wife had experienced. When we ask if he was pleased that he acquired this insight into how his wife might have experienced her year at home with the baby, he said: "Yeah, totally, and I tried to say that to friends too."

He had learned from being home alone: "I was a bit back to the old ways too. Thinking 'okay, Siri has to take a bit more than me.' Changing the nappies and stuff, but now… Before I probably would have argued about changing the nappy, now I just do it. So, it was a really good experience." He accepted that this was a responsibility that they shared and did not bother to negotiate with his wife about whose turn it was to change the nappies. Thus, his previous understanding of care work had been challenged, and he had changed his practices towards more equal parenting.

We noticed the same experience with many of the other fathers who compared care work to having physically demanding jobs, and who became much more tired from being home. This also makes them think about the mother and the work she does when staying at home. Through experiencing both types of work, they are able to recognize the heavy workload that mothers have, as well as commenting on how unfair this division of work between parents has been.

Steinar is a 33-year-old graduate engineer married to Anna, a pre-school teacher. They had two daughters, one who was two and a half and the other 4 months when we interviewed him. He stayed home alone with the oldest daughter when he had his father's quota of 12 weeks. Because the family moved to a new flat shortly after he started on his leave period, he really had two different experiences while staying at home. He started out thinking that he would have ample time for himself, that care work would mean pleasant times and that he might even be a bit bored. Nevertheless, he was warned by his more experienced friends that he would have little spare time. During his period at home, he experienced two phases. He followed his friends' advice in the first phase and focused on only being there for the child, which he called his "good father's quota" period: "And it was … it was just as I had envisioned. Bliss, really. It was so nice, and peace and lots of cosy times with the baby." He talks about his experiences in the following way:

> Sure, you think you'll have oceans of time with a pleasant … and almost boredom. And that's where you go wrong. The funny thing is that I was told by I don't know how many friends who'd been there, done that, that "Don't plan. Don't think you'll be able to do

> redecorating and ridiculous ideas like that, you won't be able to do squat, Steinar. You can't plan loads of projects. Just … buy a book, you'll have time for that when she's sleeping.

His description has very much in common with the fathers in our first study when the leave period was much shorter. They experienced the "slow time" meaning that they concentrated on the child and did not try to combine this with other tasks. The second phase was very different because the new flat needed to be renovated. In this period he tried to combine doing care work with renovation tasks, and he describes this period as "awful" because of the stress of trying to combine care and renovation work.

> …you're chasing breaks from the kid to get things done, and every time you're like doing something and just need to get finished, then you hear her quack and start crying, and then you're working with a totally different sense of stress. You're not only working with the stress of having to hurry to mind the baby, but you're also full of guilt because you aren't there already. And then you can't let go of whatever you're doing, because then water will leak or whatever you were busy with. It really sucks, in other words.

He felt caught between doing the handyman jobs and taking care of the child. Caring for the toddler required total commitment, and he experienced guilt when the child woke up and he was not able to be with her immediately because he was plumbing or in the middle of some other maintenance task. He saw very clearly that this was an impossible combination and he had only negative remarks about this period, which contrasted very much with his first period at home when he experienced unconditional joy from being together with and looking after his baby daughter.

3.6 Integrating Caring, Cleaning and Cooking

As reported in our previous study (Brandth and Kvande 2003a, b), housework was not part of what they expected to be doing when on leave. When fathers in the current study discovered that being home on leave with a young child was very work-intensive, housework was included in their stories about the workload they had to deal with. In other words, the three Cs: caring, cleaning and cooking were all part of their total workload. This might be attributed to the length of the leave period, as they were not just popping in for a short period to be with the child. Being home alone on a longer leave meant more obligations. Steinar's opinion was that doing housework was expected from men today: "It's been two generations since men couldn't manage to do the laundry on their own." He explained that young men have had to learn to do it when they were students and/or living alone before starting a family. "However, the amount of work in a family," he said:

> …can't compare to what you have to do when you have a partner and children. That's how it is … a whole world of difference! And, you can't understand this before you have children yourself. Before I had children I thought that this would be a "piece of cake", and I couldn't see why people made such a fuss about running a house. I could do it with my little finger along with all the rest.

Being home alone for a longer period, the fathers learned what house- (and care) work really meant in terms of effort. It is healthy for men to experience what mothers have been doing, according to Steinar, who stayed home alone for 4 months. The experience helped to develop equal parenting practices. Emil, who took all the parental leave, including the father's quota, while the mother returned to her nursing studies, confirmed that he did most of the housework during the leave. "She wasn't always satisfied, though, ha, ha, because she's very strict about the cleaning." His wife had a higher standard of cleanliness than he had.

Having been home on leave with their children, the fathers told us how exhausting it could be, but also that they gradually got better at multitasking. After the first months of trial and error, when the daily routines were better established, things were running more smoothly, and it became less tiring. Adam, who was home alone with his daughter for 15 weeks, starting when she was 6 months old, described his daughter as a very active child who slept much less than he had anticipated she would. "Kids that age usually sleep for 3 hours maybe… she never slept that long. Maybe one and a half hours, and then I had to [entertain her]. (…) I would start with something [in the house], and then I'd just give that up." What he managed to do was "basically cleaning and vacuuming and stuff like that. And making the dinner when she was sleeping". His description of a typical day during his leave showed how care work and housework were intertwined:

> A typical day would be… all the family would get up at the same time because my kids are up at six o'clock. So we'd get up, and me and my daughter would set the breakfast table because I knew I didn't have to rush, so I'd make breakfast for everyone. And Thelma would sit and eat her breakfast. And afterwards we'd tidy up together. And it would be sunny, so we'd go out on the back balcony and then we would have all the toys out. And she'd play and we'd play, and we would go around the garden. Then it would maybe be time for her to sleep. So then she'd sleep, and then I would clean up the breakfast and vacuum and do the washing. And, just like my sister said, you'll be the housewife.

The quotation shows how he involved his daughter in setting the table and making breakfast. Some of the housework became a common project for father and child. Moreover, Adam put value on the housework, as it gave him something to do while she slept, "It's like what I'm used to doing at work," he said. Ian, a social worker, described a typical day as follows: "He [the son] slept twice a day, normally an hour each time, perhaps a little more. (…) In the mornings, I did tasks around the house, like tidying, remembering to take bread out of the freezer and making lunch. And then an activity and a trip in the afternoon."

While some of the fathers anticipated taking trips to town and visiting cafes to have coffee with friends, Max (who was a painter) had thought that he and his daughter "would go for trips in the woods, sleep in a tent, do some climbing and enjoy ourselves". In neither case did this turn out as expected. "I had to be home to make dinner every day," Max explained. Steinar had been warned by his more experienced friends that he would have little spare time. "You need to do the laundry and you must … really, take over the housekeeping." Even though he listened to his friends, he was disappointed that he did not get more done, for example reorganiz-

ing his computer files: "I had to rename the 'father's-quota-to-do list' to the 'when-I-have-retired list.'"

Generally speaking, the fathers described periods of little sleep, exhaustion and loneliness, but at the same time they praised the leave period as having been very positive. This dichotomy was expressed by Steinar, who said: "You really get completely worn out, and then it's worth it. And nobody will understand this before they have their own kid." The Norwegian sociologist Helene Aarseth (2013) has studied the meaning of everyday work in the home as expressed by fathers. She maintains that there is no contrast between delight and responsibility since everyday life practicalities and delight are embedded within each other.

3.7 Embodied Emotions

The fathers usually take their father's quota after the mother has returned to work and the child is approaching 1 year, which often means that the children were awake many more hours than when they were new-borns. This led to fathers doing a lot of activities with their children, and these activities were experienced as very emotionally rewarding. Steinar especially recalled when his daughter went on the swings:

It was great fun. She still thinks it's great fun. But it's one of the first times I remember where I really know she had one of those special moments. Sitting safely on a swing and gaining speed, swinging back and forth, and it was all wonderful laughter. Because that's the true original definition of joy, complete joy, no conditions. That's very good. So this is one of those moments you always recall."

Fathers also talked about this period with enthusiasm: "It's the greatest feeling in the world. It's a beautiful thing I think." Talking about what he did together with his child, Adam said: "And after she woke up, we would sing and read. Old English songs and stuff, and she'd enjoy that. Some days were different; we'd try to make new things." Because he was from another country, he wanted to teach his daughter his native language so he read and sung for her. He took great pride in being able to teach her, and he loved being with her:

> It was just being with… Seeing her grow, and her understanding of English. And everything was just coming, and she just changed so much. I witnessed her saying her first words and teaching her how to eat and everything. It was great! She just makes you laugh as well; Thelma, she's a great character.

When he said, "I witnessed her saying her first words", he implied that this was a combination of interpreting her words and her body language in a special context. Because he had spent a long time with her they had connected, and he understood what she was trying to express. He was also able to describe his emotions in a detailed language. His relationship with his daughter had benefited from the period when he stayed at home with her, and he compared their communication with his son who was older and with whom he had not stayed at home:

> Yeah, I think we have got a lot closer. … I don't know… we seem like a little team. She understands when I talk to her, she just understands like this, whereas I really miss that I didn't do that with John.

When his son was born he had only been in Norway for half a year, and did not have the right to parental leave. He compared the two situations, stating: "It seems that it worked out a lot better when I had the time." He learned how to interpret the unspoken words (Bungum, 2013) of his daughter: "But she's really clever. I understood. She actually would come up and grip the chair, and I knew after a while that it meant she was hungry." Because he spent a lot of time with her, they developed a way of communicating between them. In fact, in the end the baby understood English better than Norwegian, and therefore understood the mother less well. He said:

> After a while I think… I saw that Thelma didn't understand Norwegian after the 15 weeks [of father's quota]. Siri would talk to her after she came home from work, and Tea would be like: "Huh, what are you saying?" And then I would talk to her and she understood. Later, she went to daycare so she understands both languages now, so it's just amazing that they can adapt like that.

This pattern might exemplify a father who developed a close relationship with his child because he was alone with her at home while on leave for a long period. He was the parent who spent time at home when his daughter started to talk, so she learned his language. Again, he made the comparison to his son: "I know… we have a little bond. I have that with John as well, but it just seems a little different." When he is asked if that might be because he had time off and stayed at home alone, he answers: "Because of the father's quota, yeah." His best memory from when he was home with his daughter also illustrates their close relationship:

> I had a hammock sitting out on the lawn, and on sunny days she would lay on top of me and I would read my book, and she would just play with the trees and stuff. It was awesome. And I bought a trampoline, and that is what we did in the morning. We would go on the trampoline and roll some balls, and I would just lie in the middle and she would just roll around on top of me and it was a great time.

Both in the hammock and on the trampoline they would be together, and the baby girl would be close to his body while he was reading or while they were playing. This is a story about how he experienced the days on leave as "slow time", in which he could concentrate on the child and be emotionally absorbed with her.

Max also focused on how being home alone has impacted his relationship with his daughter. When we ask if it would have been the same if he had not been home alone, he talked about how nice it was to feel that she was dependent on him and to show her that he was a care person for her. An illustration of this bonding was that his daughter no longer automatically reached out for her mother when she was crying and needed comforting: "Yes, like suddenly it was … she wasn't interested in her mother when she came home from work, and her mother was almost in tears. So then it was like … it's so nice." These stories illustrate that the fathers staying home alone for a long period of time developed a need-oriented care (Bungum, 2013). Having had the main responsibility for their children, they had learned how to read

and understand their emotions. The fact that the toddlers had not yet developed a spoken language when the fathers were staying at home meant that they developed a different repertoire for understanding their children. They were doing fathering and taking part in the process of developing a dual caring in these families.

Adam told us about feeling tense and not being able to relax for 8 weeks because he had the sole responsibility for his little daughter. His story might be understood as an example of bodily alertness, with his lying in the hammock with the baby on top of him also being an example of embodied care. Another example was helping out when it was time to breastfeed the baby. Steinar's wife was working as a preschool teacher in a daycare centre and had time off to breastfeed while he was home with their baby. He told us how he would go to his wife's workplace every day with the baby so that she could be breastfed:

> Then I would put on my cross-country skis every morning and ski with Anna strapped to my body, and I would ski to her mother's workplace in the morning. And when I arrived, there would be a break for breastfeeding, and I would sit and read part of a book for Andrea while she was breastfeeding. Fantastic to have an hour or one and a half hours off in the middle of the busy working day, where we just sat and read a book and enjoyed being with the baby. And then … skiing back home. Really nice!

He explained how he actually took an active part in the breastfeeding by strapping the baby to his own body and skiing to the mother's workplace. While his wife was feeding the baby, he read for both of them. In this way they could both be together with the baby during the feeding session, and the baby could also hear her father's voice while she was being fed. By constructing a place for himself in the breastfeeding, he also deconstructed this as a strictly motherly or feminine practice. In spite of this he reflected on the biological difference, which represented limitations for what he could do while home on leave: "Because it's of course a drawback, that I'm not as free during my father's leave as she is in her mother's leave, because of the breastfeeding. And that's a little bit hard. I wouldn't mind having breasts. That would have been truly smart." Instead, he had to remember to bring "packed lunches" with him when he took his daughter outdoors, but he preferred this because it made him feel freer to plan his day with her.

Mons, a photographer married to Elise who worked as a hair-dresser, was home alone with his 11-month-old son during 20 weeks of father's quota 4 days a week. He described how this experience had an emotional impact on him, and he felt that being home alone with his son had affected their relationship: "I notice that now he's just as pleased whether it's me or Elise who comes in the door, but earlier it wasn't so important whether I came home or not. See? He probably feels more confident." His son displayed the same type of feelings whether his mother or his father was home. The child accepted both parents as his close care persons:

> That's really wonderful. You really go all soft and are touched and proud. Many strange emotions come to the surface in this context. But there aren't so many of these "finally I have managed to procreate" emotions. It's a bit more infinite, sounds a bit tacky, but infinite love. And I get even more emotional over these feel-good stories than before. I get a feel for things more in situations others may have experienced. I'm probably getting more empathetic, if that's what it's called? Sympathetic? To the situations of others. And then it's how

> you understand that he's more important than you are. There is no half-way, plain and simple. It's difficult to explain.

He focused on the emotional impact from having a child and getting to know him well, and felt that he had changed, though not dramatically, but felt that he had become less categorical. In addition to having an effect on the relationship between his son and himself, he explained how his caring qualifications had increased by becoming what he labelled as more "empathetic".

3.8 Conclusion

For more than 20 years, Norway has had an earmarked quota of leave for fathers as part of the parental leave system. The father's quota has received a lot of attention, both nationally and internationally, and there has been a great amount of interest in how the father-child relationship has been affected by this measure. Over the years, the father's quota has been substantially extended. Based on interviews with fathers who have used the longer quota and have been home alone with their young children, we have explored in this chapter how being home alone has impacted their caring practices. We find that staying home alone for a longer period of time (12 weeks) works together with general changes in the normative context of parenting and cultural models of fathering that have taken place during the 20 years that the fathers' quota has existed. During these years, there has taken place what might be labelled a "normalization process" of fathers as carers in the Norwegian society. The long duration since the implementation of earmarked parental leave for fathers may have created an historical path dependency. Seeing fathers alone (without mothers) with prams in the middle of a normal work day has become a common picture in the Norwegian context. The father's quota has contributed to this general change by providing fathers with the opportunities to stay at home. When it comes to fathers doing housework, there has also been a general change towards fathers doing more housework. In spite of these general changes, we are also able to identify the impacts of having a longer period at home alone.

The chapter is an answer to the question put forward by several researchers: What do fathers do when they are home on leave? When the fathers describe their practices when they are home alone, they focus on care work as hard work. In the first study, the fathers primarily tended to talk about the positive aspects of staying home alone looking after their toddler. This change may be interpreted as a result of fathers being home longer with their child due to the extension of the quota. By staying home alone for a longer period of time, the fathers experience the total commitment that caring for a small child requires, as they are not only "visitors" staying for a short period. This is an "eye-opening" experience, which challenges their previous understandings of care work and leads to a greater respect for the care-work that mothers have done.

Their stories of hard work also include the housework. While the fathers in our first study concentrated on taking care of their children when they stayed at home, and housework was an area of conflict in the family, the current fathers integrate cleaning and cooking with caring. This may reflect the general pattern of a gendered change in society, in which fathers' take-up of housework works together with having a longer period of leave, and manifests itself in them taking on more responsibility for the household. Thus, they also experience how staying at home on leave with the baby means taking on many tasks, and they learn how to do multitasking. They do not see themselves as assistant carers, but as full-fledged carers and house-persons.

The fathers in both studies expressed enthusiasm with being given the opportunity to stay at home. Because the second generation of home-alone fathers were home for a longer period and had the primary responsibility for their children's well-being, they seemed to develop a close bond to them and a possible intensification of the emotional ties. When the child only understands the fathers' language, when they turn to him for comfort just as often as to the mother, it gives the fathers a confirmation of these emotional ties to their children. Consequently, being given the opportunity to spend time alone with the child for a longer period seems to promote the development of relational competence.

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