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## **Fatherhood regimes and father involvement in France and the UK**

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## **Fatherhood regimes and father involvement in France and the UK**

### **Abstract**

This article contrasts and compares the institutional framework for fatherhood and father involvement and the survey evidence relating to fathers' contribution to child-care and domestic work in the two countries. It shows that while men's contribution to such activities appears to be increasing in both France and the UK, change is slow and father involvement does not necessarily seem to correlate directly either with patterns of female labour force participation, or with the support offered by the institutional framework. The authors explore the theoretical frameworks most appropriate for explaining their findings and situate them primarily in terms of Pfau-Effinger's (1998, 2002, 2004) theorization of the gender arrangement. The authors conclude that while change in father involvement is slow, the introduction of statutory and organizational work-life balance measures which alter the gender order open up opportunities for negotiated change in the division of the labour in the home.

Key words: fathers, fatherhood, father involvement, domestic division of labour, work-life balance, France, UK.

### **Abstract (French)**

Cet article compare le cadre institutionnel de la paternité en France et au Royaume-Uni ainsi que les résultats des études nationales et internationales relatives au temps consacré par les pères aux activités de garde des enfants et au travail domestique. Cela montre que bien que la contribution masculine à ces tâches semble augmenter dans les deux pays, les progrès sont lents et l'engagement du père ne semble être lié directement ni au taux d'activité féminine du pays concerné ni au cadre institutionnel de la paternité. Les auteurs étudient les cadres théoriques les plus appropriés et concluent que celui de Pfau-Effinger (1998, 2002, 2004) qui développe l'idée du « gender arrangement », fournit la meilleure explication de leurs résultats. Elles concluent également que si les pères accroissent lentement leur engagement, la mise en vigueur des lois et l'application des mesures organisationnelles en faveur de l'articulation vie professionnelle et vie familiale, qui modifient le « gender order », donnent au couple la possibilité de renégocier la division traditionnelle du travail au sein de la famille.

Mots clés : les pères, la paternité, la participation des pères, la division du travail domestique, l'articulation vie professionnelle-vie familiale, France, Royaume-Uni.

## **Fatherhood regimes and father involvement in France and the UK**

Fundamental social change and uncertainty – divorce, rising activity rates among mothers, the growth of single-parent and reconstituted families – and a growing policy concern with “problem fathers”, has generated a flurry of research on fatherhood since the 1980s, including a nascent body of comparative work (Duyvendak and Stavenuiter, 2004; Hobson, 2002; Lamb, 1987; Pease and Pringle, 2001). Against this backdrop the reconstruction of fatherhood and the notion of a new father ideal have come to the fore across the industrialized world (LaRossa, 1997). Fathers (as we will see below for France and the UK) have been encouraged to increase involvement with their children essentially as it is seen as having positive outcomes for children’s cognitive and educational development and future life chances (Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb, 2000)<sup>1</sup>. Further pressure on men to assume greater caring responsibilities has been created by changes in welfare state provision and also policy-makers’ desire to ease the burden on working mothers, in the context of concerns about falling fertility rates in OECD countries (Barrère-Maurisson, 2004). Public opinion appears to support the “involved father” model: for example, in a survey of 13 000 fathers across the EU (cited by Hester and Harne, 1999) more than three quarters of them felt that a father should be involved in raising their children from the earliest age.

Contemporary researchers (following Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine, 1987) suggest that father involvement can be studied in terms of three main components: (1) interaction, including a father’s direct contact with his child through caregiving and shared activities;

(2) availability (or accessibility), a related concept concerning the father's potential availability for interaction by virtue of being accessible to the child (whether or not direct interaction is occurring) and (3) responsibility, or the role the father takes in ascertaining that the child is taken care of and in arranging for resources to be available for the child. As Coltrane (2004) points out, within each of these categories, two further distinctions are often made: (1) distinguishing the amount from the quality of father involvement, and (2) constructing absolute as well as relative (in relation to partner) indices of involvement. Most surveys focus on interaction<sup>2</sup> and do indeed indicate an increase in father involvement in absolute and relative terms since the end of the 1970s (see for example, Pleck, 1997; Sullivan and Gershuny, 2001; Sullivan, 2004; Yeung et al, 2001), although there remains considerable debate over the degree of change (Daly, 2001; Russell, 2001). Furthermore, while overall paternal involvement appears to be increasing, behaviour is polarized between those fathers spending more time caring for their children and those who, because of divorce and separation, are reducing contact (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003).

Social theories have provided various explanations for this apparent shift in gender roles, though they do not specifically focus on changes in fathers' "caring" roles in themselves but include them within the generic term of "domestic labour". These include application of the notions of *negotiation* and *reflexivity* derived from the work of Giddens and Beck on the growth of individualization in late modern societies (Beck, 1992; Brandth and Kvande, 2002; Giddens, 1992; Lupton and Barclay, 1997) In addition, the contemporary version of convergence theory – labelled globalization – suggests that the twin processes

of socio-demographic change and changes in the nature and structure of capitalism will result everywhere in a democratization of the family and a more equal domestic distribution of labour (as, for example, suggested by Giddens, 1999).

An alternative theory of “lagged adaptation”, propounded by Gershuny, Godwin and Jones (1994), posits that men will devote more time to domestic work if women are not there to do, that is, if women are engaged in full-time employment, but argues that change will come about slowly, possibly over a number of generations. The direct correlation between paternal contribution to childcare and mothers’ full-time participation in the labour market has been born out by two nationally-representative longitudinal American studies (see Pleck, 1997; Yeung et al, 1998) and prominent American researchers (such as Coltrane, 2004) suggest that greater father involvement is likely as female partners increase their hours, earn more and are better educated. Proponents of the “lagged adaptation” thesis, based on time-use surveys, suggest that the domestic division of labour is only weakly related (if at all) to common classifications of public policy regimes, unlike paid work time (Gershuny and Sullivan, 2003). Morgan suggests that the private sphere is indeed particularly resistant to changes in the public sphere in the sensitive area of childcare (Morgan, 2001) while Walby (1997) has theorized this notion in her dual-system theorization of public and private patriarchy.

The limits of the lagged adaptation and convergence theses are, however, perhaps nowhere more in evidence than in the example of the pre-1989 Eastern bloc countries, such as the Czech Republic, where very high levels of female employment (state support

for mothers in paid work combined with an equality agenda privileging paid employment) were combined with a very traditional division of unpaid labour and a “double burden” for women (Crompton and Harris, 1999). Crompton and Harris (1999) persuasively argue on the basis of their comparison of gender attitudes and the domestic division of labour in the Czech Republic, Norway and the UK that gender-role attitudes have in fact a “considerably greater impact on the domestic division of labour than women’s employment *per se*” (p125). For these authors shifts in gender relations cannot be separated from the impact of within-couple negotiations, themselves systematically correlated with certain occupations (see also Benjamin and Sullivan, 1999).

Nevertheless, most overviews of fatherhood in a given country assume that public policy regimes bear some relationship to actual fathering practices. Within fatherhood research there is considerable evidence that institutional factors (including notably the workplace and legal frameworks) impinge on father involvement (Singley and Hynes, 2005).<sup>3</sup> The existence of state-regulated policies can encourage a change in fathers’ behaviour (Haas, 1992; Brandth and Kvande, 2002; Bergman and Hobson, 2002). Research on parental leave has demonstrated that it is possible to increase fathers’ take-up as, for example, in the US (Hyde et al, 1996) and in Norway – if the financial conditions are not too disadvantageous and, more importantly, if the legal rights are strong enough for fathers to be able to negotiate with “greedy” employing organizations (Brandth and Kvande, 2002).

Authors (Duncan, 2002; Méda, 2001; Walby, 2004) have also suggested that the international institutional framework in the form of the European Union provides a new

regulatory space providing the opportunity for encouraging a more egalitarian division of domestic labour, as, for example, in the 2000 Resolution (2000/C218/02) on the balanced participation of women and men in family life.

### Conceptualising fatherhood regimes

Hobson and Martin (2002) highlight the importance of institutions in the shaping definitions of fatherhood and examine the institutional framework for fatherhood (which they term the *fatherhood regime*) in Sweden, the US, the UK, Germany, Netherlands and Spain. They explore the link between the welfare regime using Esping-Andersen's well-known typology (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and both *fatherhood obligations* (to provide financial support for children) and *fatherhood rights* (essentially the way the state configures fathers' roles through family policy and legal rights for fathers eg. after divorce, after a child's birth). They find that these fatherhood regimes do not map fully onto welfare regimes and are particularly deficient in relation to explaining national variations in fatherhood obligations. Hobson and Martin (2002) find evidence from the national case studies that these variations have "multifarious social, political, economic and cultural sources". This substantiates their wider contention that men's position needs to be viewed within the two triangles of the state, market and family and the husband, wife and parent/child and that these dimensions can have contradictory elements. In this article we extend the notion of fatherhood regime used by Hobson and Martin to include reference to national family and employment policies and working time regimes in their widest sense, using the definition of the latter provided by Mutari and Figart (2001).



In doing so we seek to draw on Pfau-Effinger's theorization of the *gender arrangement* (1998, 2002, 2004; Duncan and Pfau-Effinger, 2000) which provides powerful theoretical tool for explaining fathers' roles, responsibilities and involvement within a wider gender framework. Pfau-Effinger has used this concept to apply particularly to women's position in the gender division of labour and notably the use of female part-time work in Finland, the Netherlands and Germany. She uses a concept of *gender arrangement* to describe the relationship between the *gender order* – composed of institutions such as the family, the labour market and the welfare state, the *gender structures* – power, the division of labour and the emotional ties between people – and the *gender culture* which confers norms relating to gender roles and the division of labour onto men and women and gives value to certain domains. In her elaboration of the notion of gender arrangement she attaches importance to the role of individual and group actors who, with different resources, differentially negotiate the articulation of *gender culture* and *gender structures*. Pfau-Effinger does not see men's and women's employment decisions as reacting primarily to welfare state policies, but argues that other institutions such as the labour market and the family also affect decisions. These institutions interact, sometimes in contradictory ways. Inconsistencies in the gender arrangement can provide a space for changes to occur. This dynamic representation of the *gender arrangement*, in our view, provides the theoretical space to explain the cross-national differences elaborated below in fatherhood involvement and regimes in France and the UK.

Fatherhood regimes and father involvement in France and the UK

In relation to theories of change in gender relations, the comparison of France and the UK is particularly pertinent: they have been classified differentially in many attempts to provide a model which better explains the relationship between paid and unpaid work for women than that provided by Esping-Andersen's welfare regimes typology (see Table 1). The position of fathers within these countries' welfare/caring/gender regimes has not to date been explicitly compared.

**Table 1 here**

Many of the features which distinguish France from the UK in terms of their "gender regimes" are now well known on the basis of cross-national comparisons of women's employment (Gregory and Windebank, 2000; Hantrais and Letablier, 1996) namely the male-breadwinner/part-time carer model in the UK (reflected in very high levels of part-time working) and the female carer/collective child-care model in France, resulting simultaneously in lower levels of female activity overall than in the UK but higher levels of women in full-time employment. Franco and Winqvist's (2002) recent analyses of the Labour Force Surveys (year 2000 data for France and 1999 for the UK) clearly reveal this: among parent couple households in work the proportion of one earner couples was higher in France than in the UK (36% cf 29.8%). However, the proportion of couples working in a male full-time + female part-time pattern was only 16.3% in France compared with 40% in the UK and, by contrast, the proportion of partners both working full-time was 54.5% in France and only 28.6% in the UK. Furthermore, the international

attitudinal survey evidence reported by Crompton and Le Feuvre (2000)<sup>4</sup> indicates a strong preference for the full-time breadwinner plus part-time carer model in the UK. On the basis of the lagged adaptation theory expounded above, higher rates of full-time female employment in France might be expected to encourage a greater involvement of fathers in both domestic work and childcare than in the UK.

On the other hand, lagged adaptation theory does not take into account the cultural values and institutional arrangements which form an important part of Pfau-Effinger's model. As noted above, a striking difference between the UK and France is the level of collective childcare provision. Alongside a move towards individualized care arrangements since 1994, particularly for higher paid households, France is catching up with Nordic countries in terms of the proportion of children aged under six in public day care, whilst in the UK recent moves to increase childcare places have concentrated on children aged three to four, and informal care still predominates (Fagnani et al, 2004). It may be, then, as Gregory and Windebank (2000) suggest in their comparison of women's work in Britain and France, that higher levels of public childcare provision mitigate the impact of female full-time employment on father involvement, reinforcing rather than challenging cultural models of gender difference.

In this article we first compare the published national and EU survey evidence relating to fathers' involvement with their children in France and the UK. We then compare and contrast the fatherhood regimes in the two countries using a wider definition of gender regime than has been previously used and which more fully takes into account these

nations' gender arrangements. In doing so, we recognize that we are inevitably ignoring the complexity of regional and local gender patterns (Duncan and Smith, 2002) which deserve exploration in their own right.

## FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN FRANCE AND THE UK

As we note elsewhere (Gregory and Milner, 2005) measuring fathers' involvement with their children and comparing these findings cross-nationally and over time is plagued by methodological problems. Significant differences exist in the approaches used in terms of survey dates, the ages of children involved and in the methodology used in accounting for paternal involvement, resulting in a considerable disparity in the reported results (see Yeung et al, 2001). In France, for example, De Singly (1996) suggests that time budget surveys seriously underestimate the time men are engaged with their children as they exclude all shared parenting activities from their calculations of paternal involvement. On the other hand, there is a widespread assumption, based on discrepancies between male and female reporting, that men over-report time spent on domestic and childcare tasks. European and international surveys do exist (such as the European Community Household Panel [ECHP] survey data, Eurobarometer studies in 1993 and 1994 and the 1994 and 2002 International Social Survey program's Family module [ISSP]) but their usefulness is often limited by the absence of data for specific countries, years or childcare-related questions.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these limitations in the longitudinal data there is evidence from national time-budget surveys which indicates that in both France and the UK there is a slow trend towards greater father involvement in both domestic tasks and childcare (Anxo et al, 2002; Laurie et al, 2000).<sup>6</sup> Comparative time use surveys suggest a general trend in industrialized countries towards increased parental time for both fathers and mothers; for fathers, increased parental time has been achieved through a reduction of paid work time and personal time (mainly sleep), whilst working mothers have correspondingly decreased the amount of time spent on housework (Gauthier et al, 2004; Gershuny, 2000). However, comparative studies show that, in the UK, father involvement appears to have risen more rapidly after 1990 (Gauthier et al, 2004), whereas national surveys for France indicate that most change occurred in the 1970s and 1980s and slowed down in the 1990s (Anxo et al, 2002; Brousse, 2000).

Although the gap between fathers' and mothers' parental time has narrowed, national and European surveys show that women in both France and the UK continue to carry out the bulk of domestic work, in very similar proportions across countries (Anxo et al, 2002; Barrère-Maurisson, 2004; Eurostat, 2004; Laurie and Gershuny, 2000; Smith, 2004; Sullivan, 2000). Time use surveys from 1998-2002 show that women in both countries carry out about two thirds of this work (Eurostat, 2004) - see Table 2 below – and this gendered division of labour is exacerbated when parents have small children (under 6 years) and more than one child.

**Table 2 and Table 3 here.**

Despite these overall strong similarities, the Eurostat data provide some evidence of differences between fathers' involvement with their children in the two countries, when this is measured in terms of interaction (see definition below Table 3). While it is still predominantly women in both countries who carry out the majority of childcare, men in the UK appear to carry a greater load than their French counterparts (see Table 4). The proportion of men spending any time on childcare on a given day is much higher in the UK than in France (70% compared with 55% for the under 7s, and 25% compared with 18% for children aged 7-17). The Eurostat data need to be treated with some caution as French surveys suggest greater parental time spent by fathers, moving them closer to the proportions recorded for the UK (Barrère-Maurisson, 2004; Méda, Cette and Dromel, 2004).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, when both partners are employed, the differences appear less significant, particularly as regards care of small children.

However, ECHP data (for the period 1994-2001) also indicate significant differences between countries regarding the proportion of fathers of children aged under six who self-report spending "substantial" amounts of time caring for their children: 23% of UK fathers, but only 10% of their French counterparts. The UK thus lies in the top category for percentage of fathers spending substantial time with children, whilst France falls into the bottom category (Smith, 2004).

Other figures lend support to an entrenched pattern of gendered parental involvement in France and the UK. In both countries the proportion of fathers working part-time was

only 2% in 2002 (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003); although in the UK this proportion had doubled by 2005, it remained negligible in comparison with rates of female part-time working. In addition, take-up of parental leave is low. Surveys show that men tend not to leave work in order to care for a sick child. In England, only 28% of fathers of a child aged under 11 left their work for this reason in a recent survey (Harkness, 2003), whilst in France 31.5% of fathers left their work when their youngest child was ill (Fagnani and Letablier, 2003). Traditionally, very few men reduce their working time after the birth of children; quite the opposite, the arrival of children usually leads to a reduction of the mother's working time and an increase in their partner's (Anxo et al, 2002; Dex, 1999; Laurie and Gershuny, 2000). Recent labour force data (Eurostat, 2004: 77), however, suggested that French fathers tend to engage in shorter hours of gainful work when their child is aged under 7 years while the opposite is true for the UK; the explanation for this difference may lie particularly in the fact that a much higher proportion of women reduce their working hours after childbirth in the UK than in France (OECD, 2002:61-125).

More recently still, a survey of British fathers found a significant increase in the number of those changing their working hours after the birth of a child. 71% of new fathers surveyed in 2005 claimed to have changed their working patterns, with 18% working shorter hours, 37% changing start and finish times, and a further 27% changing their hours to suit those of their partner (Smeaton and Marsh, 2006). These changes reflected increased availability of flexible working options in companies, particularly larger firms and those in the public sector.

In sum, the relatively limited cross-national data available suggest that women in both France and the UK are continuing to adapt their professional lives more extensively to their children's care needs than do their partners and that change in the division of domestic labour is slow. Nevertheless it would seem that, contrary to expectations, French fathers do not overall contribute as extensively to childcare as UK fathers when expressed as a proportion of the total time dedicated to childcare by mothers and fathers, and there are fewer French fathers spending substantial amounts of time with their children. This difference is lessened by the effect of maternal employment but remains significant for older children. Moreover, recent legislative changes in the UK appear to have encouraged fathers to change their working practices in order to spend more time caring for their children. We will now examine the fatherhood regimes in the two countries in order to seek explanations for this apparent contradiction.

## FATHERHOOD REGIMES IN FRANCE AND THE UK

### The legal framework: right and responsibilities of fathers

The legal frameworks in both the UK and France are particularly concerned with the rights and responsibilities of fathers after divorce or separation. In both countries post-war civil law progressively developed moderate rights for father with the establishment of the principle of joint parenting. Nevertheless the financial obligations of French fathers are weaker than those of UK fathers. Very recently, there have been moves in both countries to give positive rights to working fathers, particularly paternity leave,



although it is too early to speak of a “parentalist”, gender-neutral policy agenda (Barrère-Maurisson, 2004).

In France, civil law post 1987 has sought to bring greater rights to fathers after they were marginalized following the implementation of legislation from the 1960s aiming to give greater independence to women (Singly, 1996; Ferrand, 2001) and reinforcing the “ideology of maternal competence” (Blöss, 2001). The turning point was the Malhuret law in 1987 which undid the law of 2 June 1970 to give mothers sole parenting rights where they gave birth outside marriage. The new law gave fathers who recognized their child in law the opportunity to have joint parenting rights. Subsequent laws have supported greater equality between mothers and fathers, with moves to democratize the institution of marriage (Letablier, 2002) more widely from 2001, as discussed below. In particular, a law of 4 March 2002 (Article 373-2-9 of the civil code) authorized judges to award joint custody (*résidence alternée*) for the first time. A study carried out in 2003 indicated that judges were now prepared to grant joint custody, although mainly in non-conflictual cases, thus limiting its impact (Ministère de la Justice, 2003).

In England (the Scottish law being different), Lewis (2002) has argued that civil law has been inspired less by a desire to give equal parenting rights to fathers than by a desire to ensure financial support for the increasing numbers of children living separately from the natural father; in other words, concerns about state support for single parent families (see also Clarke and Roberts, 2002). The financial focus has been seen in the 1989 Children’s Act, the 1991 child Support Act and establishment of the Child Support Agency, the 1996 Family Law Act (which has sought to reinforce joint parenting and the maintenance of

contact between the father and his children if the parents divorce) and the government's proposals to reinforce the Child Support Agency's powers (HM Treasury and DTI, 2003). Collier (2001), however, has argued that the growing emphasis on fathers' parenting responsibilities is partly a reflection of the recognition by policy makers, university psychologists, advisers and professionals in the field that greater involvement of the biological father after divorce is better for a child's well-being. In this vein, the Adoption and Children Act (2002) gave unmarried fathers the opportunity to obtain parental authority over their child. On the other hand the Green Paper *Parental Separation: Children's Needs and Parental Responsibilities*, does not recognize an automatic 50-50 split in parental responsibility after separation.<sup>8</sup>

While the legal frameworks in both countries have supported a move towards greater father involvement in parenting, it is still nevertheless the case that when it comes to determining the place of residence and care of the children of divorced parents, judicial decisions continue to be made on the basis of societal norms relating to maternal competence in the care of (especially young) children. Consequently, many fathers in both countries lose contact with their children after divorce and/or are left with a residual financial role (Blöss, 2001; Collier, 1995, 2001). Both countries have seen the development of active fathers' movements campaigning for automatic mediation after separation, the reinforcement of joint parenting rights in legislation and the application of the principle of joint parenting in judges' decisions. The UK movement has, however, been more vociferous, reflecting perhaps the disparity between official discourse on

fathers' financial responsibility and lack of support for joint parenting after divorce or separation.<sup>9</sup>

### Family and Employment Policy

Against a context of markedly different employment patterns for mothers, both France and the UK have seen changes in family and employment policy. In part motivated by EU policy, there has been a drive towards policies facilitating a better balance between work and family life for both men and women, and encouraging men to take a greater share of childcare in the home. However, not only does existing family and welfare policy influence these new initiatives, it has also responded to other policy objectives (in the French case, the need to reduce unemployment, in the UK case a concern with child poverty) which sometimes leads to contradictory or unexpected effects. As a result, policy on fatherhood may be seen as partial and inconsistent.

It is well known that, primarily for demographic reasons, France has long had a gendered family policy seeking to increase the birth rate and protect maternity. Successive measures from the late 1960s have contributed to achieving what Crompton and Le Feuvre (2000: 338) call "equality in difference", that is to say promoting equality between men and women in paid work, while recognising women's specific role as mothers. Indeed, international attitude surveys show that traditional gender attitudes (Crompton and Le Feuvre, 2000; Künzler, 2002) persist in France despite public support

for female labour market participation, leading to high levels of work-life stress for French working women (Crompton, Brockman and Lyonette, 2005).

French family policy must also be seen in the context of France's high unemployment since the early 1980s. These two strands (the equality/maternal role + unemployment concerns) have led to a series of measures to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life and to create employment: part-time work, parental leave (with a means-tested allocation) and the continuing development of childcare facilities and subsidies.

Many of these measures have, notionally at least, targeted men and women, and rights to time off to look after sick children and for family emergencies introduced in the early 1990s (Laws 1.22-28-8, L 122-28-9 and L226-1 of Labour Law) apply equally to both parents. However, in the context of married women's financial dependence on their husbands (which is reinforced by the tax system), some have led to a more traditional division of labour within the couple and reinforcement of the female carer model through the growth in part-time working by women and the withdrawal of increasing numbers of women with two or more children from the labour market under the parental leave scheme (Anxo, 2002; Commaille et al, 2002; Fagnani, 2000; Letablier, 2002)<sup>10</sup>. "Delegated" childcare, through the growth of childcare services and subsidies for childcare in the home, is also predominantly carried out by women (Fagnani, 2000); moreover, studies show that childcare professionals themselves tend to perpetuate gendered parenting roles, even against the explicit preferences of parents (Blöss and Odena, 2005).

From the end of the 1990s the political discourse on the family in France has shifted from the working mother to the parent. Simultaneously, and motivated by EU policy and objectives,<sup>11</sup> the French government took up the theme of equality between men and women in the family as a major strand of its family policy (Letablier, 2002). At the announcement in 2001 of longer paternity leave<sup>12</sup> and a new “Father’s Record Book”<sup>13</sup> which sets out fathers rights and obligations in relation to their role, and offers sources of advice and information to fathers, the French government made clear that only by creating a fairer division of labour in the family could greater equality be achieved in the labour market. The French paternity leave scheme has met with much greater success than the parental leave scheme instituted much earlier (in 1984): in 2002 59% of men eligible took up paternity leave, 90% of these taking the full additional 11 days leave. However, a recent CREDOC study (Chaffaut, David and Vallet, 2002) found that fathers participated in child-care during leave but only took a secondary role (“helping the mother”) and this did not continue after resuming work.

However, French family policy has remained ambiguous and contradictory. Conditions for the French paternity leave do not compensate more highly paid fathers for their leave, hence discouraging its up-take among this group of fathers (Anxo et al, 2002). The criteria for obtaining the new parental leave allocation (known as the allowance for supporting a young child -the *Prestation d’Accueil du Jeune Enfant*) – have been relaxed to allow all parents of a child younger than 3 years old to take the leave, so encouraging even more women to withdraw from the labour market. On the other hand other

measures announced in 2003 were more generally supportive of working parents: tax allowances to companies for the provision of childcare and a growth in the number of state childcare places. In 2005, the government responded to lobby groups' criticisms of existing leave arrangements by introducing a shorter, better paid parental leave (up to one year, at 70% of salary with a ceiling of 750 euros), but available only at the birth of the third child.

The French government recently encouraged companies to bargain on work-life balance issues, in line with European legislation on equality and diversity at work (based on Article 13 of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty). For example, at Peugeot-Citroën, a diversity agreement signed in November 2003 came into force on 1 January 2004, with the aim of “feminizing” the workforce. The agreement covers the creation of support services, including childcare facilities; the possibility of flexible and part-time work for all employees; training for employees returning from parental leave (*EIRR*, 2004). A work-life balance agreement signed at Renault in February 2004 focuses on career development of employees taking up maternity or parental leave, with the explicit aim of increasing the number of female employees in the group. Our own research carried out in the insurance industry<sup>14</sup> also found evidence of reflection on the issue of women's place within companies. Yet at the level of national policy-making, no link has been made between women's lack of presence in top jobs and working time/family-friendly working provisions.

In the UK, where there has been a lack of official family policy and an individualist approach towards the provision of childcare. Until the arrival of the Labour government in 1997, social policy and the tax system has tended to reinforce the male breadwinner/female carer model and this has been reproduced within family law as we have seen. Hence, unlike France, the attribution of caring tasks to women in the UK has taken place without specific policies to protect their role as mothers.

Official UK family policy in the late 1990s was inspired by the values of the “Third Way”, arguing in favour of the democratization of the household with shared rights and responsibilities, including towards children (Collier, 2001), but also reflected the government’s concern with reducing child poverty and increasing labour productivity (HM Treasury and DTI, 2003). The application of this policy was a multi-layered approach. It came partly through changes in employment law on the back of European regulation, that is, directives on working time, parental leave and part-time work (see Gregory and Milner, 2004). It also resulted from its own efforts to improve worklife balance for parents of young children, enacted through the *Employment Bill 2001* (notably paternity leave, which enabled the government to meet its commitments following the Council of Ministers’ resolution of 29 June 2000, the extension of maternity leave and the right to request more flexible working hours). In addition, companies were exhorted to play a role in improving parents’ work/family balance through the government’s *Work-Life Balance* campaign (HM Treasury and DTI, 2003). In parallel with these measures the tax and family benefit system was reformed to encourage parents with lower incomes, and especially single mothers, to engage in paid

work. This reform was linked to the *Sure Start* programme which included funds to develop childcare facilities, itself part of the *National Childcare Strategy*. Finally, greater support for parents, and fathers in particular, was offered through the setting up of the *National Family and Parenting Institute* and various projects to support fathers including the national information and resource centre *Fathers Direct* (founded in 1999).

Positive rights for working fathers have developed in the recent period, with the introduction in 2001 of two weeks' paternity leave paid at a flat rate of £106 per week (as maternity leave). Take-up of statutory paternity leave is lower than in France: although government estimates, based on survey evidence, indicated that upwards of 60% of eligible fathers would claim statutory paid paternity leave, only 19% did so in the first year; however, this figure may underestimate real take-up. Moreover, where paid paternity leave is offered by employers (usually at full replacement rate or at least on more generous terms than the statutory flat rate), it is almost universally taken up (Moss and O'Brien, 2005; Smeaton and Marsh, 2006).

At the 2005 general election, the Labour party publicized plans to extend maternity leave and make some of the leave available to fathers and which have now been confirmed in the newly-published Work and Family Bill (*The Times*, October 20 2005). However, the extension of parental leave in 2005 (see DTI, 2005) was introduced in muted fashion, due to fears of an employer backlash; ministers were at pains to underplay the likely impact of the measure (*The Sunday Times*, 9 October 2005; *The Guardian*, 11 October 2005, 19 October 2005). The initiative was cautiously welcomed by lobby groups, which



nevertheless pointed out that the low replacement rate (£106 per week) meant that in practice the highest earning partner (usually the father) would continue to work. In this respect, UK family policy has moved closer to the French, which as we have seen tends to reinforce the prevailing division of labour in families. As we now discuss, the prevailing gender division of labour in the UK (dual earner/part-time carer) is strongly influenced by the working time regime, that is, by the labour market.

### The Working Time Regime

It is already well documented that the working time regimes in France and the UK differ considerably because of the different configuration of the state, families and social partners in those countries (Gregory and Windebank, 2000; Rubery, Smith and Fagan, 1998). Mutari and Figart (2001) provide a useful categorization of working time regimes in the Europe of 15 which highlights these Franco-UK differences. Their classification is based on two main criteria: the degree of work time flexibility and the degree of gender equity. The former relates to the degree to which the workweek is standardized (the mode of usual weekly hours and the degree to which they are clustered around the mode) and the degree of gendered work time (the percentage of employed married women in part-time jobs and the percentage of employed men regularly working overtime). The latter is measured in terms of the married women's labour force participation rate and the gender-based wage ratio. According to Mutari and Figart a more equitable working time regime exists when: men and women share different working patterns, the proportion of married women in the labour market is high and the gender wage ratio is small. Using

these criteria the authors identify four working time regimes in Europe: the Male Breadwinner regime, the Solidaristic Gender Equity regime, the Liberal Flexibilization regime and the High Road Flexibilization regime.

According to Mutari and Figart's classification France, like Denmark, Belgium and Finland, are Solidaristic Gender Equity regimes, based on the fact that these countries have made progress towards greater equality between the sexes by modifying work time norms, have a relatively high proportion of married women in paid work and a relatively small gender wage ratio. The United Kingdom, by contrast, is classified, along with Ireland to a lesser extent, as a Liberal Flexibilization regime, by which its liberal economy had led to a gendered working time regime and division of labour characterized by: a considerable disparity in the full-time working hours of men and women, a very high proportion of men working overtime and married women working part-time (see Table 4)<sup>15</sup>.

**Table 4 here.**

Further evidence for these different working time regimes is also found in the analysis of the 2000 Labour Force survey by Franco and Winqvist (2002). This shows the impact of the tradition of full-time working for French mothers and a highly regulated working time regime limiting working hours, well before the 35 hour week came into effect. Their survey showed that 58% of French couples – the highest proportion in the EU - who were working full-time with at least one dependent child worked between 30 and 40 hours a

week, compared with only 12% of couples in the UK. The proportion of such couples where the father worked more than 40 hours per week by contrast was very low in France – only 10% compared with 35% in the UK. The proportion of couples working long hours (the father more than 40 hours and the wife between 30 and 40) was much higher in the UK than in France (45% cf 22%). Crompton and Lyonette (2004) note the particularity of the UK long hours culture by which high income dual-earner couples are both working long hours engendering particular stress for working mothers, while in low-income couples men are driven to long hours on low pay.

The figures relating to part-time working are also revealing, showing a strong polarization in parents' hours in the UK (as we have seen elsewhere, see Fagan, 2001). The UK has the highest proportion of couples where the male partner works more than 40 hours a week and the female less than 20 (45%), more than four times higher than the French level. The French specificity lies in the high proportion of couples where the husband works between 30 and 40 hours and the wife 20 hours or more a week (42%). Part-time work is closely associated with “atypical” working or unsocial hours (Rubery, Smith and Fagan, 1998). Atypical work accounts for half of all jobs in the UK, whereas France with under one-third is closer to the EU average. The high incidence of unsocial hours and relative lack of control over working hours associated with this – heavily feminized - type of employment suggests that the gender contract creates a specific form of “time squeeze” for working mothers in the UK in which women compensate for men's longer working hours by working around school time and partners' work commitments.

In France, universal working time reduction has appeared to offer a more egalitarian division of paid and unpaid employment between men and women. The Aubry laws of 1998 and 2000 established a maximum legal working week of thirty-five hours for all companies, although the limit was subsequently relaxed for small companies. The result of this legislation, coupled with generous incentives for companies agreeing reduced working time in return for the creation of new posts, was a decrease in the number of hours worked per employee over the year. However, there are signs that working hours have increased more recently. Not only has the legislation been substantially relaxed by the current government, but there is widespread evidence that the legal limit is flouted (Boisard, 2004; Lojkine and Malétras, 2002). In a depressed economic climate, there has been considerable pressure to increase working time and intensify the pace of work (Jacquot and Setti, 2006). The outcome has been marked inequality of access to working-time limits in France, which is reflected in variations in public support for the Aubry laws. In surveys, professional women have shown the highest levels of support for working-time reduction (Méda and Orain, 2002).

Nevertheless, a majority of working parents (around 60%) report that working-time reduction has made it easier to combine work and family life, and this is true of men as well as women (Fagnani and Letablier, 2004; Méda and Orain, 2002). However, Fagnani and Letablier observe that perceptions of the 35-hour law's impact depends on employment circumstances, and note that for many employees working time flexibility means irregular schedules and loss of control over working hours. Moreover, the same authors (Fagnani and Letablier, 2002) question the extent to which working time

reduction has encouraged greater paternal involvement, and argue that it is principally women who have taken on greater domestic responsibility in day-to-day life as a result. The unevenness of the law appears to have reinforced gender roles, with female employees in particular using it to spend more time with children. Nevertheless the reduction in working time is freeing up more time for fathers to be with their children at weekends and during longer vacations (Fagnani and Letablier, 2004; Méda and Orain, 2002). On the other hand, there is evidence that French men are involved in childcare only when “forced” to do so by their partner’s work schedules, and that even then they rely heavily on the mother’s primary care role within the household (Boyer and Nicolas, 2006).

Organizational working time policies and practices, more generally, clearly influence men’s involvement with their children. Very long working hours seem to put a brake on men’s availability for and involvement with their children (Fagnani and Letablier, 2002; Ferri and Smith, 1996) particularly in the UK when fathers work more than 50 hours a week and working hours are among the longest in the EU. However, it difficult to separate organizational imperatives for long hours working from men’s attitudes towards work and drive for performance, as revealed in the work by Chaffaut et al (2002 and 2003) and Hatten, Vintner and Williams (2002). A survey of two high-technology engineering firms in France found that a small number of highly qualified men choosing to work part-time in order to spend more time with their family also distinguished themselves from their colleagues by more distance from business objectives and a more hedonistic attitude (valuing creativity and self-expression) towards their paid

employment (Lojkine and Maletras, 2002). This provides some support for sociological theories of reflexivity or negotiation of gender roles, within the context of a broader societal shift towards postindustrial attitudes (Inglehart, 1977). However, evidence to date indicates that such attitudes are in the minority, and their realization depends on the opportunities offered by organizations and underpinned by statutory benefits and regulation.

Research from France and the UK has shown that organizations with a flexible approach to both working hours and family commitments facilitate men's involvement with their children (Chaffaut et al, 2002; Hatten et al, 2002; Fagnani and Letablier, 2004). A French survey of fathers who have taken parental leave and benefits shows that in certain sectors with poor working conditions (such as in retailing), and in those which are highly feminized and where men have also integrated work-life balance measures into their way of thinking, fathers are more likely to stop work in order to take parental leave (Boyer and Renouard, 2004). Another important factor is a consideration of the employment risks associated with taking this type of leave (Boyer et Renouard, 2004; Chaffaut et al, 2002 and 2003).

## CONCLUSION

There is evidence from secondary data sources of a slow increase in fathers' involvement with their children in the UK and France which may bear out social theories of convergence in post-industrial society. Our comparison of fatherhood rights and

responsibilities in these two countries has also found an increasing recognition, partly inspired by EU policy, of fathers' need for involvement with their children in both countries. Nevertheless, the notion of "joint parenting", while offering the hopeful perspective of more equal parenting roles in the future, is not yet anchored in practice following divorce and separation, and this is fuelling the debate over the place of fathers in their children's lives.

On the other hand, secondary source data also suggests that, contrary to what might be expected from the application of the theory of lagged adaptation propounded by Gershuny et al (1994), French fathers may be less involved in childcare than fathers in the UK. This surprising finding requires substantiating through further research but nevertheless finds some explanation in the contradictory effect of the fatherhood regimes in the two countries.

Comparing fathers' rights and responsibilities in France and the UK using the narrower notion of fatherhood regime proposed by Hobson and Martin (2002), we found that both countries had regimes which were emergent and modern and that post-war civil law had progressively developed moderate rights for fathers with the establishment of the principle of joint parenting. Nevertheless the financial obligations of French fathers for their children remain weaker than those of UK fathers.

But significant differences also exist in relation to the national policy frameworks which constitute part of the gender order in which fathers' rights and responsibilities are

embedded. The two countries continue to be influenced by the individualist/collectivist divide regarding childcare and the individualistic/familialist divide regarding the operation of the tax system and benefits. These national differences reflect different social policy priorities, distinctive gender orders and deeply-rooted gendered cultures. Contradictions exist within both policy settings: in the UK, fathers' rights to engage jointly in parenting have not kept pace with their obligation to support their children financially, although there has been significant recent progress in this area. In France, by contrast, new incentives to engage in joint parenting (laws giving married and unmarried men the right to jointly parent their children, paternity leave) are undermined by the gendered nature of family policy, itself a feature of France's gender culture.

The working time regime, in the sense implied by Mutari and Figart (2001), is clearly also an important structural factor in influencing individual behaviour and can undermine social policies which aim to produce a more equitable division of labour between men and women. Hence, in the UK fathers' long working hours coupled with high levels of married women's part-time work (and corresponding lower wage equality) tend to reinforce the gendered division of labour and place constraints on men's greater involvement with their children. On the other hand, in France the working time regime (married employed women working more extensively on a full-time basis, similar working hours for men and women, low levels of male overtime) is more favourable to a more equitable division of childcare responsibilities, but is undermined by deeply-rooted norms regarding the gendered division of labour. The impact of changes such as the



increased length of paid holidays and the growing flexibilization of working time in France has yet to be fully measured within this equation.

In sum, there is strong evidence that, as suggested by Pfau-Effinger (1998, 2000), the gender culture, which we have encompassed through the medium of the working time regime, is an important component of the disparate gender orders we find in the UK and France and that, while acknowledging the importance of the gender order is useful of itself, it cannot be separated from the gender culture from which it derives and in which it operates. Pfau-Effinger's conceptualization also helps us to explain the different rates of change in fathers roles and responsibilities in France and the UK: hence in a period of social modernization there may be non-alignment in the evolution of different gender structures so that the gender order (fatherhood regime) may advance at one pace, but another (the gender culture) may lag behind such that there could be an effect of lagged adaptation. In addition her construction of the gender arrangements with its various component parts allows for societal (and indeed regional and local) specificity to be explained. In this sense Pfau-Effinger provides perhaps the most effective theoretical framework to date for explaining differing fatherhood regimes and patterns of fatherhood involvement.

In the light of this research can there be hope for greater father involvement in France and the UK? We have seen changes in the gender order in terms of the introduction and gradual extension of paternity and parental leaves in both countries and the growth of work-life balance policies in companies. This has not yet had a major impact on

behaviour, although the level of take-up of available statutory measures and the strong support expressed in opinion surveys for more and better paid leave both indicate that change is underway. Indeed, it could be argued that policies are lagging behind societal demand for more equal parenting.

It is our view that improvements in statutory and organizational provision offer a window for change, as individuals, couples and groups can use such opportunities to negotiate and/ or campaign for a more egalitarian division of labour in the home. Singley and Hynes (2005) argue, for example, that work-life policies interact with couple-level dynamics to both create and challenge gender differences. Those couples who are not strongly committed to traditional, gendered parenting may therefore be more open to creative, more equitable solutions if they are aided by available work-life balance policies. However, change in the division of labour and fathering behaviour is likely to be diffuse and disparate as fathering practices are highly contingent: they differ in relation to social circumstances such as family structure, occupation, ethnic group, work orientation of wives and stages in the lifecourse (Brandth & Kvande, 1998; Coltrane, 2004) and cultural context. As Brandth and Kvande (1998:295) note, “Fatherhood is constantly being shaped and reshaped according to cultural context, work and family relations”. In sum, changes in the gender order alone do not adequately capture the degree, diversity and pattern of change underway.

If greater father involvement is sought then, the challenge for governments, organizations and individuals in our view is to facilitate a shift in each component of the gender

arrangement (order, structure and culture) such that fathers and mothers can assume their parenting roles on a more equal basis.

## FOOTNOTES

1. This paper's focus is on employment, gender equity and fatherhood. Children's perspectives are not explicitly addressed. For a full summary of the benefits of increased father involvement derived from the extensive body of US and European research, see Lamb, 2004; Lewis and Lamb, 2004.
2. Criticisms have been leveled at Lamb and Pleck for their relative neglect of the issues of responsibility and the role of the paternal provider: see the discussion in Pleck and Stueve, 2001.
3. For a complete overview of factors influencing father involvement on the basis of US research see Pleck, 1997.
4. In response to the question "What would be the best situation for a couple with a child aged under three?" 47% of men and 49% of UK women felt that the mother should stay at home to look after the child and 42% of men and women opted for the woman working part-time only. The French results were equally distributed between the mother and father both working, part-time work for the mother and the mother staying at home to look after the child.

5. For example the Eurostat survey cited here is unable to compare leisure time of French and UK parents because in the French data restful leisure time is coded as sleep. Similarly, Gauthier et al's (2004) comparative overview does not allow a direct comparison of France and the UK, because only standardized data for 1965 and 1974 are available for France.
6. It is difficult, however, to compare the surveys directly as they use different measurements of childcare. For example Anxo, Flood and Kokuglu (2002) include elder care and separate out domestic work in their research, whereas in Laurie and Gershuny (2000) childcare and domestic work are measured separately and elder care is not included.
7. For France, the 1999 MATISSE survey sought to improve on existing INSEE time budget data by focusing on "parental time" (which includes "taxi" services accompanying children to school or out-of-school activities, help with homework, playing with children or watching TV with them, as well as domestic work related to care of children). In relation to the time-budget surveys used in the Eurostat comparison cited here in Tables 3 and 4, the MATISSE data identify greater parental time for both men and women: 2 hours, 10 minutes per day for French women, 1 hour for men (Barrère-Maurisson, 2004). This brings the proportions of time spent by men and women closer to those in the UK than in the Eurostat survey.
8. For a more detailed review of the legal frameworks in both countries see Gregory and Milner (2004).

9. At the time this article was completed (January 2005), the UK government had just announced its intention to promote obligatory family mediation rather than the principle of shared parenting advocated by the fathers' rights movement (which the opposition Conservative party decided to adopt).

10. The small proportion of men (2% of beneficiaries of the *Allocation Parentale d'Education*) taking up parental leave have been shown to be lower qualified and less well paid than their wives and tend to be in feminized occupations such as retailing.

11. See European Commission (2004) *Equality and Diversity in an Enlarged European Union*, Green Paper, Luxembourg: Official Publications of the EC. The Treaty of Amsterdam which came into force in 1999 set targets for women's activity rates across the EU of 60%. It also continued to put pressure on member states to reduce inequalities between men and women and to improve childcare facilities. The resolution of the Council of ministers for Employment and Social Policy of 29 June 2000 reinforced this thrust with a resolution calling for a more modern division of labour between men and women and the development of measures to improve the work/family balance for men and women. Its resolution called for new measures to be developed such as paternity leave, other measures enabling men to give greater support to their families and to encourage companies to recognize employees' non-work lives in their management practices (Duncan, 2002; Hantrais, 2000; Letablier, 2002; Méda, 2001).

12. A further 11 days' leave were added to the existing 3 days statutory leave from January 2002. They are paid at 80% of salary up to a ceiling of 2,352 euros (2002 figures).

13. The *Livret de Paternité* was introduced in 2001, alongside the extension of paternity leave, as part of a package of measures to encourage paternal involvement. On notification of pregnancy, the family benefits agency CNAF sends the document, which includes reference to paternal rights and responsibilities as well as useful addresses, to the future father. The sociologist Christine Castelain Meunier, who had long campaigned for a *livret de paternité* to complement the already existing *livre de maternité* for mothers, called the move “a real turning point in the way we think of parenthood”: see Castelain Meunier and Delaisi de Parseval, 2002; Castelain Meunier, 2002.

14. See Gregory and Milner (2005a).

15. These figures have also been substantiated by Gornick and Meyers (2003) in their cross-national comparative work.

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d'un nouvel équilibre entre responsabilités familiales et professionnelles – une comparaison franco-britannique”).

**Table 1. Gender regime modelling for France and the UK**

<b>Model</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>France</b>
<b>Welfare regimes</b> (Esping–Andersen, 1990, 1999)	Liberal/residual	Continental/conservative
<b>Breadwinner regimes</b> (Crompton, 1999)	Strong breadwinner Male earner, female part-time carer	Modified breadwinner Dual earner, marketized carer
<b>Care regimes</b> (Lewis, 1992; Sainsbury, 1994)	Mixed Breadwinner/individual (moves toward tax individualization)	Breadwinner ( <i>salaire maternel</i> ) Household taxation
<b>Family policy regime</b> (Hantrais, 2004)	Partially decommodified Weak legitimacy of public intervention	Decommodified, explicit Strong consensus around state intervention
<b>Gender regimes</b> (Pfau-Effinger, 2004)	Dual earner /female part-time carer	Familialist (female primary carer) modified by collective childcare provision; dual earner/state carer



**Table 2. Time spent engaged in domestic work\* per day (in hours and minutes) and proportion carried out by women: France and UK**

	France	United Kingdom
Women	4.30	4.15
Men	2.21	2.18
% women	66	65.5

\*Food preparation, dish washing, cleaning and upkeep, laundry, ironing and handicrafts, gardening, construction and repairs, shopping and services, childcare and other domestic.

Source: Eurostat, *How Europeans Spend their time. Everyday Life of Women and Men*, Eurostat: 2004:46.

**Table 3. Time spent on childcare\* among parents with children aged up to 6 and between 7 and 17 in France and the United Kingdom. All parents living as couple. Hours and minutes per day. In brackets time spent by employed parents living as couple.**

	Youngest child up to 6 years		Youngest child aged 7-17 years	
	France	UK	France	UK
Women	1.57 (1.41)	2.22 (2.08)	0.30 (0.25)	0.26 (0.23)
Men	0.40 (0.37)	1.00 (0.58)	0.09 (0.09)	0.12 (0.12)
% Women	79% (79%)	69% (78%)	77% (74%)	68% (64%)
% Men	21% (21%)	31% (22%)	23% (26%)	32% (34%)

\*Childcare includes active care given to a child living in own household. In addition to physical care, teaching, reading, playing and talking with a child, accompanying a child to a doctor, visiting the school and so on are also included. Going together to the cinema, watching television with a child and so on are excluded. Childcare as a simultaneous activity, for example, while preparing food, is not included.

Source: Eurostat, *How Europeans Spend their time. Everyday Life of Women and Men*, Eurostat: 2004:66 and 68.

**Table 4. Indicators of gender equity and work time flexibility: France and United Kingdom**

	United Kingdom	France
Gender indicators:		
Married women's LFPR	57.5%	52.6%
Wage ratio	0.737	0.766
Work time indicators:		
FT men's mode	46-50	38-39
FT women's mode	38-39	38-39
FT men's kurtosis <sup>1</sup>	-1.00(low:destandardized working hours)	10.32 (high: standardized working hours)
FT women's kurtosis	0.34 (low:destandardized working hours)	10.64 (high: standardized working hours)
Married women part-time	53.2%	34.4%
Men overtime	63.5%	20.3%

1. Degree of cluster around the mode

Source: Adapted from Mutari, E. and Figart, D.M. Europe at a crossroads: harmonization, liberalization and the gender of work time, *Social Politics*, tables 2 and 3.

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