

Fathers' use of family public policies in Japan and Quebec Province

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Family policies have become increasingly necessary in OECD countries as the fertility rate declined. Several states have put in place a set of family policies with various goals, not only to increase the birth rate, but also to promote work-family balance, among other things. The introduction of parental leave is part of this set of family policies.

Thus, despite the fact that women now have access to the same education, have entered the labor market, can control their fertility to choose how many children they will have and can divorce freely, they are still responsible for most of the housework and childcare. The family institution suffers the perverse effects of a reflexive modernity that does not fully exercise the principles of freedom and equality that it carries (Beck, 2001: 248).

Through a documentary research, the purpose of this study is to compare in Quebec, with a successful paternity leave, and Japan, where only a small proportion of Japanese fathers use parental weeks. In order to do that, I will use the results of my thesis about fathers in Quebec, completed in 2019. Through 29 interviews with fathers, I tried to understand the challenges fathers still have to face when they return to work after a paternity leave in Quebec (Harvey, 2019).

In fact, Quebec fathers stand out in Canada as a whole. Only 15% of Canadian fathers outside the province of Quebec took parental leave in 2016, a number that has not changed since 2010 (Doucet et al., 2018: 106). If 32% of Quebec fathers did the same before the implementation of the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) in 2005 (Statistics Canada: 2014), their participation jumped after 2006. In 2015, it was nearly 79% of Quebec fathers who had taken a leave, with an average of 7 weeks (Board of Management of Parental Insurance, 2016: 38). On the contrary, in Japan, even if the Government's plan aims to entice at least 10% of fathers to take the allowable parental leave, they are still very few to use the public programs available, around 3.16 % in 2016 (Nakazato, 2017: 6), even if 30% of fathers say they want to take a

parental leave (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan, 2009: 12).

It is interesting to compare the Province of Quebec with Japan, because they share some common points. The Nordic countries are part of a system called the social democrats' countries in the typology of Esping-Andersen (2009). Taxes are high and the value of equality is strong in these countries. As the other side of the typology, Quebec Province is inside the same group as Japan because it is a province of Canada, a country of the liberal type, as defined by Esping-Andersen. Thus, economy is perceived as dominant over redistribution, and lower taxes are characteristics of this model. So how can a province inside a liberal country deal with politics policies inspired by Nordic countries?

The Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) comes into force in 2006. The mother has a maximum of 18 weeks reserved for her use, while the father is entitled to a paternity leave of 5 weeks. Parents have the freedom to choose, at their convenience, which parent would take the 32 parental weeks. After 2006, not only do the employment rates of Quebec mothers with young children surpasses that of most other Canadian provinces, but the birth rate has increased since then, even if it does not reach the replacement rate of the population. Furthermore, paternity leave, the five weeks assigned to the father by the QPIP, is widely used. However, a recent study shows that fathers are still reluctant to use parental weeks, not feeling that they are the main beneficiaries of this leave. But the time spent by fathers with their children has had the same effect as on Swedish fathers who started sharing child care more equitably after paternity leave (Haas and Hwang, 2008: 88). Quebec fathers are moving towards parity in the sharing of direct child care, which designates them as the Canadian champions in this area (Pronovost, 2015: 48).

On the contrary, since 2002 and Measures to Cope with a Fewer Number of Children Plus One's Plan, the Japanese Government has been denouncing the non-assumed role of the father as an important reason for the decline of fertility in Japan, and studies confirmed this tendency (Retherford and Ogawa, 2005: 32). A national poll conducted in 2009 found reasons which explained why fathers did not take their leave: "[...] reluctance to cause *meiwaku* (inconvenience for others) at work (35 percent); too busy (30 percent); no precedent (23 percent); atmosphere at work not conducive (20 percent); income loss (20 percent); never thought of taking leave (18 percent); and wife quit work due to birth (14 percent)" (North, 2014:67).

In the reform of the Quebec Civil Code in 1977, the father's status changed from "paternal power" to "parental authority" to be shared equally with the mother, a responsibility that both parents retain after separation or divorce (Pelletier, 2017: 121). During the 80s, an economically difficult decade, the breadwinner father can no longer assume this role alone, and, according to Lévesque's hypothesis (2012: 101), the Quebec father has transferred this

working time to a longer and richer family time. It confirms to fathers their status of "parent" who has not only a monetary obligation (alimony), but also a minimum amount of time to spend with his child.

The situation is different in Japan. The role of the father is not considered equivalent to that of the mother. The frequent practice of tanshin funin (単身赴任). Furthermore, in a divorce, parental authority is transferred to one of the parents, usually the mother who will then fully assume custody (Shiki-no-Kaze Law Group, 2012).