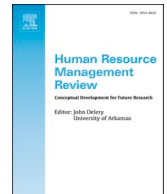




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Paternity leave: A systematic review and directions for research

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ABSTRACT

Public debate and research on absence care leaves of men (paternity leaves) is growing in the last years. Practitioners and scholars alike are seeking evidence-informed answers on whether and how paternity leave can help overcome the domestic division of labor, with growing interest in identifying factors that facilitate men's use of this leave. To assess and synthesize this field of study from a theoretical and empirical perspective, we carried out a systematic literature review putting together existing knowledge into a common framework that can inform future research in the field. We analyse trends of paternity leave research over time and its main thematic areas. Findings from this systematic process of synthesis evidence the growing interest of academics (mostly women, and European) in the topic. An organizing framework is presented for understanding male involvement in parenting work suggesting that men's use of paternity leaves is determined by both political/regulatory forces (legislation) and organizational forces (firm's culture and practices), with an impact in a varied range of organizational, psychological and family-related areas including career development, health, and relations with children. We invite future practices and lines of research that more interactively cover regulatory, organizational and family forces that hinder men's use of paternity leave and organizational development, and outline how male-focused practices such as those implemented in European policy should help pursue these goals.

With important changes in the division of labor and more dual-earner families, working parents' challenges to combine household and work responsibilities are growing dramatically (Aunkofer, Meuser, & Neumann, 2018). These difficulties to combine domestic and career work have persisted in contemporary organizations and economy and become even more exacerbated after the pandemic (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Power, 2020), with particularly negative effects for women's career (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, & Tertilt, 2020; Kmec & Gorman, 2010). In this context, parental leave is one of the most important available resources for working parents, providing them with a formally supported period of absence from work after a child is born (ILO, 2014). Yet, scholars have found that these parental leaves are not yet achieving the aim of facilitating work-family balance for all employees and advancing into a sustainable organization of care (Gartzia, Sánchez-Vidal, & Cegarra-Leiva, 2018; Van Engen and Gartzia, 2022; Kvande & Brandth, 2017; Kluge & Tamm, 2013). Because these leaves represent one of the longer formal absences from work particularly in European countries, new questions and challenges are emerging about how paid leaves of absence at work can improve families, children and gender equality goals.

From a gender perspective, the parental component broadens the scope of leaves, referring to leaves that can be shared between both parents -women and men. However, the fact that parental leaves can be shared between parents is still not fostering fathers to

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become primary carers (Duvander et al., 2019; Gartzia, 2023). Compared to other forms of domestic and family work such as housework, childcare work is a particularly distinctive component of domestic life with critical negative effects for both women's career and work-life balance (European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, et al., 2018; Flood and Gräsjö, 1998). For instance, in EU Member States gender inequalities in childcare work range from 13 hours in Nordic countries to over 18 hours in Southern European countries (EIGE, 2021). Therefore, within the many domains and organizational practices that are available to facilitate work-family balance of working adults, organizational practices and measures that facilitate men's childcare work are particularly relevant. In particular, because parental leave represents a special form of childcare with decisive effects on one's career and parents' later sharing of domestic functions (Mundy, 2013; Pilkauskas & Schneider, 2020), understanding the antecedents and components of fathers' paternity leave practices represents a particularly critical challenge for organizational research and gender equality (Gartzia et al., 2018; Jurado-Guerrero & Muñoz-Comet, 2020).

Responding to these gaps and challenges, in the current paper we seek to both review the existing research on men's use of paternity leave across different disciplines, research methods, and fields of research, and to formulate an organizing framework to understand the relevance, antecedents and effects of men's paternity leave at different levels. We provide information about how much research has been concentrated in different conceptual areas and topics, with the aim of understanding current gaps and challenges for future research. In an attempt to serve applied action for policy makers and organizations, potential differences in scholarly work about paternity leave between countries are also examined, with a particular focus on Europe and its unique approach to gender action, addressing the topic with cultural and conceptual specificities. With this approach we broaden our current understanding of paternity leave action as a key measure to reduce the domestic division of labor and provide a comprehensive review on determining causes, dimensions, and consequences in how the topic is currently covered in research.

In the forthcoming sections, the structure of the paper is as follows. First, we describe the most relevant theoretical foundations for the analysis of paternity leave and men's engagement in domestic work. Second, we describe the methodological aspects of the SLR (Systematic Literature Review) that we followed to conduct our systematic analysis of current research. In relation to this, the search methods, the inclusion and exclusion criteria and the composition of the final sample are outlined. The third section provides an organizing conceptual analysis of the topics that are covered in paternity leave research, grouped into several relevant streams based on the specific topic and keywords addressed. Finally, the most relevant conclusions for each category are presented, discussing implications for the theory and practice of work-life balance, organizational behaviour, and gender and policy research.

1.1. The gender division of labor and remaining challenges involving men

A critical challenge in most if not all countries around the globe is to reduce the domestic division of labor (Mills et al., 2014). The reality shows that inequalities and limitations to successfully implement actions to effectively promote gender equality still exist. Some factors contributing to these limitations are the domestic division of labour and the stronger dedication of women to care and education of underage children, as well as care for people who are in situation of dependency (Angelov, Johansson, & Lindahl, 2016). For instance, in EU Member States gender inequalities in domestic work range from 2/3 hours in Nordic countries to over 13 hours in Southern European countries (Eurofound, 2020). Also, women are generally more likely to make decisions that prioritize a work-family equilibrium and look for work-life balance arrangements (Barbulescu & Bidwell, 2013). These inequalities result in negative effects for women's career, including lower income, limited access to managerial roles, and selection and evaluation biases (Budig & England, 2001). As a result, the situation of discrimination against women in a wide range of organizational dimensions remains. Work-life balance challenges are thus one of the most critical elements for the broader goal of achieving gender equality (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Fernández-Cornejo, Del Pozo-García, Escot, & Castellanos-Serrano, 2018).

Because the bulk of domestic work continues to rest on women, difficulties to achieve work-life balance result in negative consequences for women's career including lower income, limited access to managerial roles, and selection and evaluation biases (Budig & England, 2001), but also in more limited achievements of work-life balance overall (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011; Mills et al., 2014; Power, 2020). These trends seriously compromise family life, gender equality and organizational development, so a critical goal is to increase specifically men's engagement in domestic work (Gartzia et al., 2018; Haas & Hwang, 2019). Contrasting these challenges, little is known about how men engage in domestic functions. Still today, women are widely perceived as being the primary agents for domestic work and family care (Apak, 2022), with a limited understanding of the factors that can increase men's engagement in domestic work and whether and how the adoption of family-related organizational and legislative policies can help improve these trends.

Connected to changes in domestic and family structures, the literature is moving from a markedly women-focused gender perspective to a broader approach that includes broader organizational issues and work-life benefits as a critical dimension in work dynamics (Kalwani & Mahesh, 2020; Muse, Harris, Giles, & Feild, 2008). This emerging tradition is also connected to a growing literature on work-life balance, which captures the challenges that working adults face to combine family and work responsibilities and can result in low levels of family, job and life satisfaction (Allen, French, Dumani, & Shockley, 2020; Van Engen and Gartzia, 2022).

1.2. Paternity leave as a special form of domestic work

Consistent with the relevance of work-life balance in contemporary life where dual-earner families are the norm (O'Brien, Brandth, & Kvande, 2007), many policies and regulations have been emerging in the last few decades worldwide covering men's use of leaves. This form of leave involving care work is necessary for working parents during the critical initial stages of child-rearing after a child is born and thus understanding how working men's paternity leaves operate is critical to understand organizational behaviour in the

current context of work-family balance demands. Traditionally, research and action around maternity leaves have been widely implemented, with a vast number of academic papers examining their effects for women’s career (Schultheiss, 2021; Xu, Yang, Wu, Ma, & Wang, 2021). More recently, the notion of “parentality” has captured more attention in academia in view of a majority number of countries advancing into care leave regulations (ILO, 2014).

Note that men’s use of paternity leaves remains particularly limited compared to other work-life balance domains with men representing in general only 10–20% of parental leave users (EIGE, 2021; OECD, 2019). This limited use of paternity leave is particularly marked in contexts in which parents cannot afford it (e.g., unpaid leaves that are typical in the USA compared to paid leave in Nordic countries; OECD, 2019) and also when there is only one leave per family that is available to all parents (EIGE, 2021). Also, in heterosexual couples in which only the mother is birthing (which often requires medical recovery time) and/or breastfeeding, fathers are generally less likely to take leaves. Acknowledging these concerns, in recent times countries are creating specific leaves only for men (i.e. paternity leaves) and with longer duration, consistent with recommendations of international policy and regulations (EIGE, 2021; ILO, 2014). These leaves specifically directed to men attempt to reduce inequalities both at work and in care between working men and women (EIGE, 2021). However, our understanding of the antecedents and effects of paternity leave in organizations and beyond is limited.

Contrasting the relevance of paternity leaves in the political and organizational agenda, only a limited amount of academic research has developed overall. Foegen referred to the term ‘paternity leave’ for the first time in 1980, when acknowledging the need of new benefits for male employees. Yet, little is known about how this domain has evolved in scientific research and organizational practices, calling for a systematic analysis of how this field is evolving in academic research as well as comprehensively addressing its implications for families and the organizational practice. A recent literature review conducted on paternity leaves in the field of education and psychology (Gençten & Genc, 2020) confirmed that research in paid leave of fathers has been growing over time. However, current research does not provide a framework for a broader understanding of antecedents and effects of paternity leave, with a limited understanding of how specific problems and opportunities that occur across different domains could allow researchers more comprehensively understand the field and bridge knowledge from one domain to another.

Because men’s limited use of domestic options seriously compromise gender equality at work, reducing the domestic division of

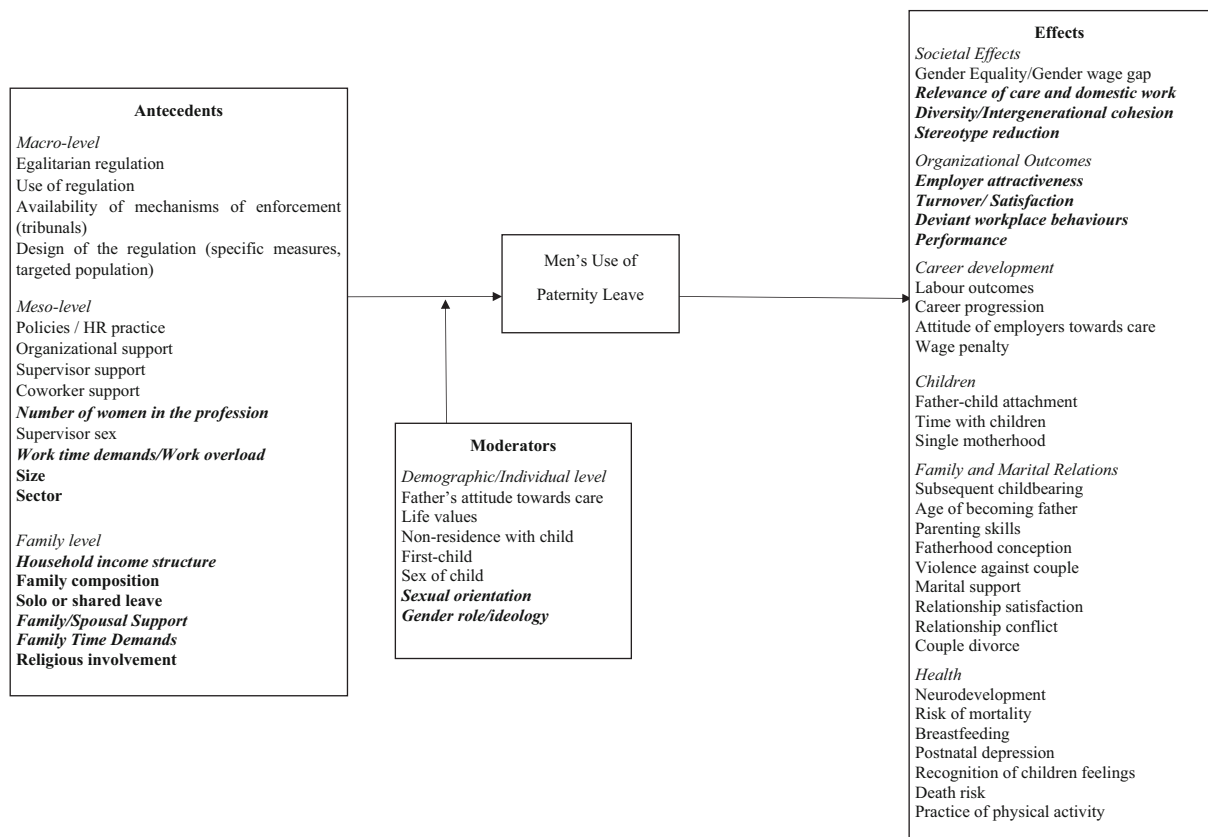


Fig. 1. Organizing Framework of Paternity Leave Antecedents and Effects*.

*Note: The use of plain text/bold and/or italics in Fig. 1 is based on the findings of the systematic literature review that is reported in the next section of the paper. Text in bold and italics refers to areas generally addressed in the literature with a lower degree of empirical maturity in our revised studies, thus representing areas that are still relatively uncovered in the specific area of paternity leave research. Text only in bold refers to areas that have been studied, but in a different role (e.g. not as antecedents, but as moderators).

labor depends on working men becoming more involved in this form of leave (Gartzia et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding the antecedents and effects of working men's use of paternity leave is a particularly relevant and understudied research area. In particular, our purpose in this study is to address and integrate previous gaps in this field by providing a conceptual organizing framework and offering a systematic review of the current state of research looking back over the totality of paternity leave research across different disciplines and areas. To make theoretical and analytical sense of this literature stream, we classify the areas of thematic analysis into the two common underlying dimensions of antecedents and effects of organizational behaviour that are typical in content-analytic reviews (Hassan et al., 2022; Schilke, Hu, & Helfat, 2018). Consistent with previous approaches addressing antecedents and effects in areas associated with work-family balance (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Michel et al., 2011) and social organizational research with a multilevel gender perspective (Gartzia, 2021; Poelmans, 2012), we identified three fundamental antecedents of paternity leaves: macro-level forces (policy/ regulation), meso-level forces (organizational culture and practices) and family-level forces (family structure and demands). Additionally, following the conceptual models developed by Greenhaus and Allen (2011) and Michel et al. (2011), we address the role of individual/demographic factors as potential moderators. For outcomes, we focus on distinguishing the most important categories of potential effects of paternity leaves in relation to health, work, family and social dimensions.

With this approach, we aim to accommodate different disciplinary approaches and outcomes, synthesizing the findings in prior work and family research generally focused on women in coherence to the extant broader body of knowledge and insights in different fields and disciplines. In particular, this analysis extends our theoretical knowledge to the growing fields of work-life balance (Allen et al., 2020; Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Michel et al., 2011), institutional policy (Bartel, Rossin-Slater, Ruhm, Stearns, & Waldfogel, 2018; Escot, Fernández-Cornejo, & Poza, 2014) and gender roles and analyses at work (Eagly, 2013; Gartzia, 2021; Gartzia et al., 2018; Valarino, 2018). This approach results in a comprehensive overall conceptual organizing framework (see Fig. 1) summarizing the most relevant antecedents and effects of men's use of paternity leave, addressing how several specific subdimension represent frequently studied topics or are still relatively uncovered. Given the critical role that organizational and work life plays in this gendered form of absence from work, our organizing framework also revisits the antecedents and effects of paternity leave in organizational contexts in light of what we know about behaviour in the context of work.

2. Systematic review of paternity leave work

We conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) to inform our conceptual model and identify the topics and articles that address the study of paternity leave. Although there are different literature review methods to identify and analyse the most relevant results on a topic, SLR is often contrasted with traditional literature reviews because systematic reviews represent an objective, replicable, systematic and comprehensive method in which the process is reported in the same manner as for reporting empirical research (Ayala, Cuenca-Amigo, & Cuenca, 2020; Weed, 2005). Klassen, Jadad, & Moher (1998) define SLR as 'a review in which there is a comprehensive search for relevant studies on a specific topic, and those identified are then appraised and synthesized according to a pre-determined explicit method'. The method needs to be reflected into a protocol (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008), with different phases that will be followed, from the initial selection of keywords, to the inclusion and exclusion criteria and the subsequent analysis of categories and content.

The origin of SLRs is in the medical, health care, and policy fields, where it has been used to assemble the best evidence to make clinical and policy decisions (Cook, Mulrow, & Haynes, 1997). This method has been implemented in other areas of research, such as social sciences (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008) or psychology (Williamson, Williams, Gates, & Lamb, 2008). In general, SLRs in research around management and organizations are used to provide transparency, clarity, accessibility, and impartial inclusive coverage on a particular area (Thorpe, Holt, Macpherson, & Pittaway, 2006). Extending this field, in the current paper we use SLR specifically to explore research studies that have examined paternity leave with the aim of gaining insight about the areas that have been covered in this field and providing an overarching organizing framework that helps identify the potential elements that need to be explored in further research.

The organizing theoretical framework for the review is based on two fundamental building blocks that are typical in content-analytic reviews in organizational behaviour research (e.g., Hassan et al., 2022; Schilke et al., 2018): antecedents and effects. These underlying dimensions allow analysing the most important building blocks of a given phenomenon and their underlying conceptual trends in more detail. By identifying relevant areas in these two dimensions we provide a conceptual lens for understanding current knowledge in the field and identifying areas of influence that involve future research and action, showing that paternity leaves have critical positive effects in several dimensions of analysis and the domestic division of labour. The analysis consisted on developing different searches in the title, keyword and abstract sections in academic databases (see next section).

2.1. Description of the search methods

Following the SLR structure defined above, we carried out our searches in the following databases, available on the university library services of the authors: ISI Web of Knowledge, including its related databases (Main Collection of Web of Science, Current Contents Connect, Derwent Innovations Index, KCI-Korean Journal Database, MEDLINE, Russian Science Citation Index and Scielo Citation Index) Scopus and PsycInfo. Scopus and ISI Web of Knowledge are the most comprehensive databases of peer-reviewed journals in social sciences, and PsycInfo is a referent database in the field of behavioural and social sciences research, and recurrently used on research involving organizational psychology and human resource management.

2.2. Description of the inclusion criteria

The search was restricted using the following criteria: (i) the article should contain the word “paternity leave”, either in the title, abstract or author keyword section. (ii) the language is English or Spanish, as they are the working languages of the authors. (iii) the paper is peer-reviewed. In previous stages of the analysis, we conducted a preliminary comparative analysis about the degree of development of research on the different forms of care leaves: available to mothers (maternity leaves), fathers (paternity leaves) and share between both parents (parental leaves). The results showed that these areas of study differ in the total number of investigations in each domain, with 2246 papers for ‘maternity leave’, 502 papers for ‘paternity leave’ and 2078 for ‘parental leave’. Because the aim of the present study is to analyse leaves available only to men, the number of articles containing the keyword “paternity leave” retrieved from each database was recorded. No restriction was placed on year of publication, performing the searches on June 12, 2020. Next, we examined if there were any external duplicates from the current database being searched and the previous databases that had already been searched. We recorded the number of external duplicates, and then deleted the duplicated journal articles from the last database searched while keeping a running total of new articles found.

Once all possible studies had been identified, we conducted a second screening to assess eligibility against inclusion criteria and then full text articles were retrieved for those that met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for the second screening required that the published peer-reviewed article meet all of the following three specifications: (i) be in the English or Spanish language; (ii) be an empirical study (i.e., not a literature review, an essay, book review, letter, editorial, opinion, journalistic article); and (iii) discuss paternity leaves as the central element. Articles were excluded if any of these components was not addressed in the abstract, results, or discussion sections of the respective study.

2.3. Description of the sample analysis

Fig. 2 contains a visual summary of the sampling process. Following the procedure described in the previous section, the initial search in all three databases delivered a total of 497 records. After checking for duplicated and limiting the sample to the available articles, the sample was reduced to 271 records. A subsequent screening process was conducted, in order to test whether the abstract, title and keyword are linked with the initial search (i.e. some of the articles refer to maternity leave, although the keyword paternity leave was present). Finally, the selected references were carefully read and analysed, an those not fulfilling the eligibility criteria (mainly, not addressing the paternity leaves as a central element of the paper) were discarded. After all the process, the final sample was composed of 154 records.

3. Results

The literature reviewed comprised an in-depth analysis of the articles retrieved from the abovementioned process. The articles were published on a total of 117 journals, mainly related to health (44 journals); the social policies areas of knowledge (43 journals);

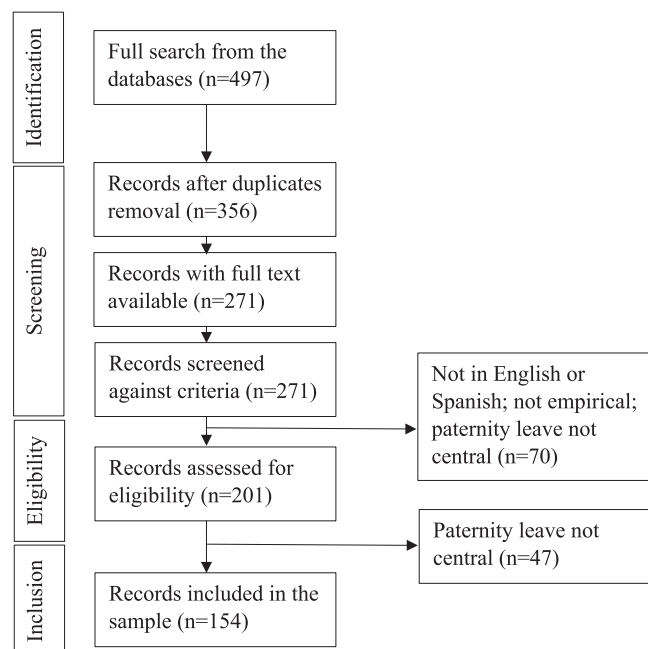


Fig. 2. Methodological Steps Followed in the SLR.

and, to a lesser extent, management (30 journals). Fig. 3 shows the distribution of these publications over time. The trend is positive, meaning that the topic has been growingly capturing the interest of the research community, with more than 53% of the research carried out from 2016 onwards.

3.1. Location of studies

Looking at the geographical distribution of the samples, the review shows that paternity leave studies are not consistently spread across different countries as depicted in Table 1. Europe's unique interest on men's paternity leave is represented by the higher number of studies (74) on the topic, followed by America (58), Asia (5), Australia (4) and Africa (3). This is consistent with the fact that European countries are the ones with more advanced paternity leave schemes (i.e. with more duration and wage replacement percentage), in particular Nordic countries (EIGE, 2021). These trends contrast the distribution of research articles by location in reviews examining other research topics in which American research is typically more prevalent (e.g., Atatsi, Stoffers, & Kil, 2019; Kalwani & Mahesh, 2020), pointing to the particular salience of the topic in Europe. The more limited development of this literature on Africa, Australia and Asia may be due to the greater absence of specific policies in the topic in these cultural settings and their lower engagement in gender equality action more broadly, as evidenced in their generally lower position in gender equality indexes (World Economic Forum, 2021). According to Darko-Asumadu, Sika-Bright and Osei-Tutu (2018), men's use of paternity leave is generally low in countries in these locations, with only a few working men engaging in longer paternity leaves. Note, however, that these differences may also be influenced by the vast scientific knowledge gap between economically developing countries and the more industrialized economies of North American and European countries, which limit the number of scientific papers that are produced as a whole (Zoogah, Peng, & Woldu, 2015; World Bank, 2014). As it can be inferred, North America and Europe comprise most of the research in total.

3.2. Sex in authorship of corresponding author

Work-life balance research, as part of research including a broader gender perspective that calls for organizational change and a greater acknowledgement of domestic responsibilities, is often seen as a "women's issue" (Huang, Gates, Sinatra, & Barabási, 2020). Consistent with this view, Table 1 confirms how the pattern applies within the field of paternity leaves. Thus, the review revealed that the papers around this topic are to a greater extent signed by a woman (69.48%) as the first corresponding author. Two different procedures were followed for sex identification (Mauleón, Hillán, & Moreno, 2013): (a) sex was inferred from the name of the authors when they had names whose sex assignment was clear, or (b) search of their academic or institutional webpages.

3.3. Type of sample

Table 1 shows the main characteristics of paternity leave studies. Interestingly, the review revealed that 52.43% of the articles reviewed used samples composed of couples of parents. For instance, Petts & Knoester, (2019a, 2019b), Romero-Balsas (2015) and Wray (2020) examined paternity leave use in the context of married or cohabiting couples. 26.21% of the articles reviewed used samples of only men (fathers; e.g., Bartel et al., 2018; Dahl, Løken and Mogstad, 2014) and 4.85% focused on families as a whole (i.e. parents and their children). Only a relatively small amount of studies (16.5%) focused more specifically on other samples such as students, academics or managers (e.g., Barcus, Tigges, & Kim, 2019; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007). Given that work-life balance

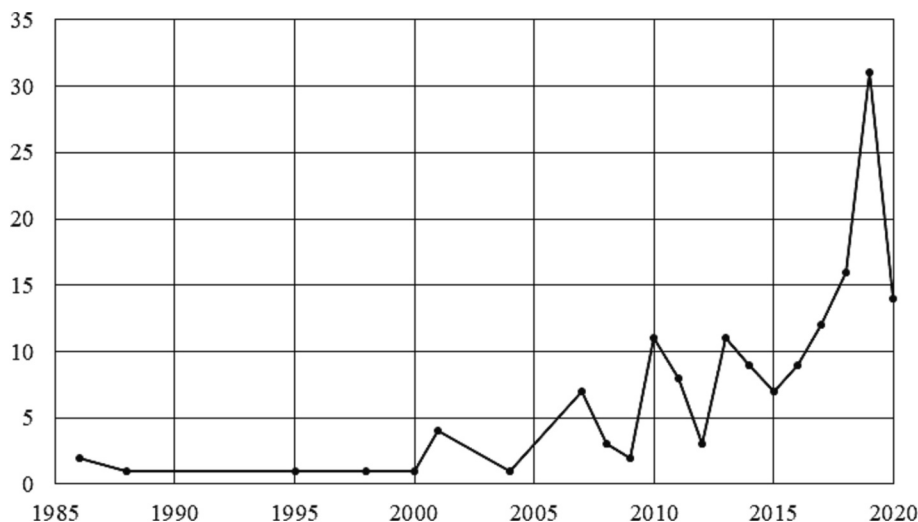


Fig. 3. Number of Paternity Leave Publications per Year, 1986–2020.

Table 1
Description of Sample Characteristics.

Gender of the corresponding author		
Female	107	69.48%
Male	47	30.52%
Continent		
Africa	3	1.95%
America	58	37.66%
Asia	5	3.25%
Europe	74	48.05%
Global	10	6.49%
Australia	4	2.60%
Source of data		
Self-reported questionnaire	41	39.81%
Administrative data	28	27.18%
National or International Survey	34	33.01%
Methodology		
Cross-sectional	75	48.70%
Experimental	1	0.65%
Experimental and Cross-Sectional	1	0.65%
Longitudinal	26	16.88%
Qualitative	51	33.12%
Sample		
Fathers	27	26.21%
Both parents	54	52.43%
Parents and Children	5	4.85%
Others (Academics, Employers, Companies and Students)	17	16.50%

is a relevant topic of interest from an organizational research perspective, the small number of studies looking specifically at paternity leaves from the perspective of the organization and their implications for companies is surprising.

3.4. Research designs and methodology

The sample comprised papers using both quantitative (64% of the sample) and qualitative (33.12%) methods. Of those studies based on quantitative data, 72% were based on cross-sectional data. For example, [Wray \(2020\)](#) acknowledged the establishment of causality between the implementation of paternity leaves and father's involvement as a challenge for the future, given that the majority of papers do not go beyond cross-national analysis. Among the articles using a qualitative approach, [Aunkofer et al. \(2018\)](#) used in-depth interviews to explore negotiations within the couple members and employer-employee negotiations to take leave by men. Longitudinal studies were scarce (16.88%) and only 1.3% of the articles used experimental designs to support their research, suggesting that causality is rarely addressed in paternity leave research. The vast majority of studies (60.19%) used administrative (28 articles) and panel data (34 articles) based on national surveys about domestic time use and use of work-life balance initiatives, with a lower number of studies (41 articles) asking participants more directly through self-reported surveys.

3.5. Conceptual analysis and organizing framework

To identify conceptual trends in the study of paternity leave and provide an organizing theoretical framework, a specific conceptual analysis was performed using a process of analysis and synthesis based on keywords and following recommendations of previous SLRs in other domains of research ([Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016](#)). Keywords of the reviewed articles were used as a reference and uploaded into an ad-hoc database. Following recommendations of previous reviews ([Ayala et al., 2020](#)), the first step was to analyse and complete the keywords in a limited number of articles in which these were not included. In such cases, keywords were generated from the articles that best matched in terms of content. The keywords were then categorised into thematic groups. This inductive process was iterated three times, resulting in 48 groups of keywords (first iteration), 23 groups of keywords (second iteration), and 8 groups of keywords (third iteration), respectively. The reason for grouping articles together on each iteration is the thematic closeness of the keywords or group of keywords, which allowed different sets of papers to be analysed jointly.

Following the organizing framework described in the introductory section, ([Schilke et al., 2018](#)), we accommodated the emergent thematic areas into the antecedents and effects building blocks. In particular, in an attempt to categorise the different predictors of the use of paternity leaves integrating the previous conceptual frameworks in the work-family balance domain (e.g., [Michel et al., 2011](#)) and social organizational gender research ([Gartzia, 2021](#)), we included not only regulatory (macro-level) and organizational (meso-level) factors, but also family level variables as potential antecedents of paternity leave. Following these previous conceptual approaches an in particular studies in work-life balance research ([Le, Newman, Menzies, Zheng, & Fermelis, 2020](#); [Michel et al., 2011](#)), individual factors are represented as moderators in our organizing framework ([Fig. 1](#)). Note that, although family and individual level variables were included in our theoretical organizing framework following this conceptual rationale, these variables were in most cases not addressed as antecedents/moderators in the actual studies located in our searches. For instance, the religious participation of the couple ([Petts, 2018](#)), the use of solo or shared leave ([Bünning, 2015](#)) or the household income structure ([Berrigan, Schoppe-](#)

Sullivan, & Kamp Dush, 2020) were analysed in studies mainly as moderators but conceptualized in our broader framework as family predictors. Similarly, sector or size of the company are studied as moderators in our sample, but conceptualized in the theoretical framework as meso-level predictors. Other individual-level dimensions such as sexual orientation of the father, gender ideology or cultural values were generally not addressed in research but included in our organizing framework because they represent common moderators in work-family research (Allen et al., 2020; Michel et al., 2011).

Following this process, the resulting classification of papers based on their content was: a) 24 articles focused on the importance of policy/regulation for use of paternity leave (*macro-level* category); b) 27 articles focused on how organizational variables and cultures shape the use of leaves (*meso-level* category); c) 17 articles focused in the effects of paternity leaves on relationships with children (*children* category); d) 16 articles focused on effects of paternity leaves on the couple (*family and marital relations*); e) 16 articles focused on effects of paternity leaves on professional life and career development (*career development* category); f) 15 articles focused on effects of paternity leave on health (*health* category); g) 5 articles focused on effects of paternity leave on the domestic division of work (*gender equality* category); and h) 33 articles addressing paternity leaves in specific sectors (such as medical, law, or managerial levels). All the references were included at least in one of these categories. Areas a, b and h were subsumed into the antecedents block, and areas c to g into the effects domain. All the moderators identified in all the a to h areas were collected in a separate block in the figure, to acknowledge their moderating role. In the following section, we provide an overview of the current state of the art in each area.

3.5.1. Antecedents of paternity leaves

This section includes the *macro-level forces* and *meso-level forces* categories.

Effects of Policy/Regulation (Macro-level Forces). One of the areas in which the literature has shown greater interest is in relation to the evaluation of the effect of current regulations regarding leaves. Leave regulations are politically controversial, due to the different political debates that evidence the tension between a hyper-maternalised traditional model and men's growing willingness to use care leaves provided to them (Doucet & McKay, 2020; Drew & Watters, 2014; Milner & Gregory, 2015). In relation to this, there is general agreement that regulations regarding leaves have a different effect on men and women. In particular, there is general agreement that reforms towards more egalitarian leaves make the proportion of men asking for leaves rise (Bartel et al., 2018; Escot et al., 2014; Zagorsky, 2017) and reduce possible discrimination from employers that identify parenting as a women's issue (Arnarson & Mitra, 2010). In contrast, some authors claim that the availability and use of leaves should be explicitly separated, given that in contexts where both maternity and paternity leaves are available, women still make more use of them (Amin, Islam, & Sakhonchik, 2016; Bueno & Grau-Grau, 2020; Whitehouse, Baird, Diamond, & Soloff, 2007).

In general, studies on the paternity leave literature identified public policies as an effective tool either to remove barriers in the use of leaves by men, or to avoid reproducing existing patterns of inequalities in this field (Alio et al., 2011; Dobrotić & Stropnik, 2020; Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2018; Jurado-Guerrero & Muñoz-Comet, 2020; Petts, Knoester, & Li, 2020; Tsai, 2012). However, in order to be effective, it has been suggested that these policies should create individual rights to fathers, such as reserved weeks in parental leaves (Duvander & Johansson, 2019; Farré, 2016; O'Brien, 2009) rather than general childcare measures (Chau, Foster, & Yu, 2017; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Weldon-Johns, 2011). McClellan (2018) also acknowledged the relevant role of judges and tribunals in evaluating existing policies, underscoring the need to ensure organizations' adherence to laws and regulations with legal punishment if necessary.

Effects of Organizational Variables (Meso-level Forces). Organizations have also been studied as a relevant antecedent and domain of influence in domestic life and the way work-life balance policies can be successfully implemented (e.g., Haas & Hwang, 2019). Some studies have addressed how the way in which organizations incorporate policies into human resources processes and culture can have an impact both in the use of leaves and organizational performance (Duffy, van Esch, & Yousef, 2020; O'Brien, 2013; Burke, 1986; Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006).

A set of studies have tried to understand the role of cultural norms of the organization (e.g., shared values) in the use of leaves, as well as their outcomes. The vast majority of the literature agrees to underscore the role of the workplace as a reinforcer of social norms present in the society and/or within the couple (Flaquer & Escobedo, 2014; McKay & Doucet, 2010), perpetuating the gendered division of work (Aunkofer et al., 2018; Romero-Balsas, Muntanyola-Saura, & Rogero-García, 2013; Valarino, 2018). The outcomes examined include the effects of traditional organizational norms on incongruity between availability and use of family arrangements (Thébaud & Halcomb, 2019; Waner, Winter, & Mansfield, 2007), and the negative impact on men's evaluations and promotions, especially when the leave is long (longer than five weeks for Canadian data, Harvey & Tremblay, 2020, and up to three months with European data, Gartzia et al., 2018).

Other research studies focus on understanding the impact of organizational support on individual responses regarding parental leave, underscoring how subjective perceptions of support by the organization is one of the most important factors that determine the use of leaves by men (Barcus et al., 2019; Eerola, Lammi-Taskula, O'Brien, Hietamäki, & Räikkönen, 2019; Gordon and Szram, 2013; Kaufman, 2018; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; Pavicevic & Herrera, 2019; Tremblay & Genin, 2010; Valarino & Gauthier, 2016; Whitehouse, Diamond, & Baird, 2007). Together with this organizational support approach, coworkers also play a key role in fostering the use of leaves (Dahl et al., 2014; Miyajima & Yamaguchi, 2017). Finally, the salience of gender stereotypes in a profession is also understood as a factor that can facilitate a more equal use of family leaves. In particular, there is evidence that working in female-dominated professions is associated with an expansion of the gender-neutral leave (share of leave beyond reserved days for fathers) taken by men (Naz, 2010). In male-dominated professions such as the banking sector, challenges are more marked and thus there is a call for human resource practitioners and social workers to educate people in these sectors to ease the shift process towards a higher use of paternity leaves (Darko-Asumadu, Sika-Bright, & Osei-Tutu, 2018).

3.5.2. Effects of paternity leaves

This section comprises findings related to four categories: effects on relationship with children; effects on health; effects on family and marital relations; and career development effects.

Effects on Relationship with Children. The most studied topic related to effects of paternity leave is in relation to the relationship between fathers and their children. For instance, researchers have focused on positive associations between the provision of paternity leaves and father-child attachment. [Cygan-Rehm, Kuehnle, and Riphahn \(2018\)](#) showed how paternity leave improved father-child attachment and a subsequent reduction on single motherhood (i.e. without a spouse or live-in partner). Children's perception of father involvement has shown to be higher when using paternity leave, improving also father-child closeness and communication ([Petts, Knoester, & Waldfogel, 2020](#)).

Research examining moderating factors in these associations have found that the positive effects that parental leave can bring to relationships with children are higher under several conditions: positive attitudes towards care ([Fernández-Cornejo, Escot, Del-Pozo, & Castellanos-Serrano, 2016](#); [Petts & Knoester, 2018](#)); non-residence with the child ([Knoester, Petts, & Pragg, 2019](#); [Pilkuskas & Schneider, 2020](#)); more religious participation of parents ([Petts, 2018](#)); or being the first child ([Miller, 2011](#); [Romero-Balsas, 2015](#)). A large number of papers also found that father general involvement in caretaking increases when they spend time at home after birth, which is typical in paternity leave ([Meil, 2013](#); [Nkwake, 2009](#)). For instance, research looking at time with children has shown that paternity leaves increased solo time of fathers with children, irrespective of the duration of the leave ([Hosking, Whitehouse, & Baxter, 2010](#); [Wray, 2020](#)). Interestingly, research in this field has also shown that this effect persists once the father gets back to work ([Meil, 2017](#); [Tamm, 2019](#)) and is durable over the first 28 months of life of the child, decreasing when entering preschool and school ([Lamb et al., 1988](#); [Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007](#)).

Effects on Family and Marital Relations. A notable set of articles focused on the effects of paternity leaves on family and marital relations. The majority of studies in this field fall predominantly in the family subcategory, with the general finding that the use of paternity leaves by fathers is positively associated with future involvement in fathering, including higher subsequent childbearing in the couple ([Duvander, Lappegard and Johansson, 2020](#); [Farré & González, 2019](#)). In terms of marital relations, higher levels of marital support and relationship satisfaction have also been repeatedly reported when using paternity leaves ([McClain & Brown, 2017](#); [Petts & Knoester, 2019a, 2019b](#)). Conversely, some authors found a positive association between the provision of paternity leaves and the probability of couple separation ([Avdic & Karimi, 2018](#)) as well as relationship conflict in contexts where the mother is not working in a paid job ([Petts & Knoester, 2019a](#)).

A lower number of studies focused specifically on violence among heterosexual couples, finding a negative association between the use of leaves and violence against one's partner (e.g., [Chan, Emery, Fulu, Tolman, & Ip, 2017](#)). Interestingly, some studies have reported an identity change by fathers as a consequence of paternity leaves, such that experiences of being at home with a leave make fathers see themselves with a principal role in parenting alongside mothers that goes beyond the traditional breadwinner ideal where men is an occasional collaborator in care duties ([Johansson, 2011](#); [Klinth, 2008](#); [Lim, 2019](#); [Xiangxian, 2020](#)). This can be explained in part because taking a leave allows fathers to be immerse into daily realities of childcare, which leads to develop parenting skills and a sense of responsibility ([Beglaubter, 2019](#); [Rehel, 2014](#)).

Effects on Career Development. This category focuses on the potential effects of paternity leaves for career development, capturing effects for both men and women. Specific research around men's career development suggests that the use of paternity leaves within the company increased the level of acceptance of these leaves by employers ([Duvander et al., 2019](#); [Feldman, Sussman, & Zigler, 2004](#)). On a negative side, [Cools and Strøm \(2016\)](#) and [Rege and Solli \(2013\)](#) identified an increase in their wage penalty for males making use of paternity leaves. Also, [Gartzia et al. \(2018\)](#) showed that longer paternity leaves can have negative effects for male leaders' careers by decreasing perceptions of their effectiveness as leaders. In particular, they showed that male leaders taking a longer paternity leave (from 2 weeks to 3 months, which went beyond the standard in their particular work context) received more negative evaluations than both other male leaders with a shorter statutory leave (from 2 days to 2 weeks) and female leaders ([Gartzia et al., 2018](#)).

In the case of women, there is general agreement that the provision of paternity leaves for fathers has positive effects for women in terms of career development outcomes. These outcomes include general benefits such as a reduced household gender wage gap ([Andersen, 2018](#); [Druedahl, Ejrnæs, & Jørgensen, 2019](#)) or an enhanced probability that women are employed in paid work ([Andysz, Jacukowicz, Stańczak, & Drabek, 2016](#); [de la Corte Rodríguez, 2018](#); for an opposing view, see [Cools, Fiva, & Kirkeboen, 2015](#)). These general trends are connected to the idea that improvements in women's career progression is higher when men (their partners) use paternity leaves. For instance, research in this field found a decrease in the motherhood wage penalty of mothers when their male couples use paternity leaves ([Farré & González, 2019](#); [Hardoy, Schøne, & Østbakken, 2017](#); [Motaung, Bussin, & Joseph, 2017](#); [Naldi, Baù, Ahl, & Markowska, 2019](#)). Finally, the effects of paternity leaves on their female couple's use of sick leave (different to maternity leave) have been explored, with authors finding no direct relationship between them ([Ugreninov, 2013](#)) except when fathers take more time than just the time reserved for them ([Bratberg & Naz, 2014](#)).

Effects on Health. The effects of use of paternity leaves on several dimensions of health have also been a topic of analysis. A first group of studies have focused on health outcomes generally. For instance, men using paternity leave experience a lower death risk ([Månsdotter, Backhans, & Hallqvist, 2008](#); [Månsdotter, Lindholm, & Winkvist, 2007](#)) and an increase in the practice of physical activity ([Johansson, Wennberg, & Hammarström, 2014](#)). Furthermore, several studies have evaluated psychological effects of paternity leave for fathers, finding several effects for fathers: increased their life satisfaction ([Kramer, Bae, Huh, & Pak, 2019](#)), lower postnatal depression of mothers when paternity leave is adopted ([Philpott & Corcoran, 2018](#); [Redshaw & Henderson, 2013](#); [Séjourné, Vaslot, Beaumé, Goutaudier, & Chabrol, 2012](#)), and higher ability to recognize the independent thoughts and feelings of children ([Tharner, Altman, & Væver, 2016](#)). A second group of studies have focused on children's health more specifically. In particular, the provision of

paternity leaves has been associated with higher neurodevelopment of children at an early age (Bjarnadóttir et al., 2019; Burtle & Bezručka, 2016; Earle, Mokomane, & Heymann, 2011), less risk of mortality (Heymann et al., 2017; Månsdotter & Lundin, 2010) and less likelihood to be breastfed (Flacking, Dykes, & Ewald, 2010). An increase in the use of leaves by fathers does not have an effect on children risk for physical injuries (Laflamme, Månsdotter, Lundberg, & Magnusson, 2012). Other studies have addressed specific effects such as use of contraceptive pills by daughters, with evidence of a mild positive association between the use of paternity leaves shorter than 30 days and daughters' use of these pills (Rashid & Kader, 2014).

Effects on Gender Equality and the Domestic Division of Labour. Connected to concerns about career development and women's professional advancement, a set of studies explored specifically the effects of paternity leaves on the domestic division of labour and the assumption of domestic responsibilities at home, with mixed findings. Some studies have found no associations between the provision of leaves and the sharing between men and women of domestic duties (McKie, Bowlby, & Gregory, 2001). In contrast, other articles found a positive effect of fathers' use of leaves on a more equal division of work in the couple in the medium term in terms of both involvement in childcare and housework (Bünning, 2015; Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011; Patnaik, 2019; Schober & Zoch, 2019). In an effort to understand these complexities, some studies suggest that the effects that use of paternity leaves by fathers can generate for gender equality outcomes are limited to situations in which paternity leaves are long or situations of solo leaves – not simultaneously with the couple (Bünning, 2015).

3.5.3. Paternity leaves in specific sectors

A final number of studies have focused on specific sectors when analysing how paternity leave policies are shaped. Surprisingly, the vast majority of studies in this category analysed the medical sector, given that some specificities of this occupation (e.g., long work hours, overall stress, specialisation requirements) contribute to a discouragement of family planning (Tang et al., 2019). Within the medical field, some studies examine whether availability of paternity leaves are a determinant factor when choosing certain residency speciality, in particular Obstetrics and Gynecology (Alston et al., 2017; Davis, Baillie, Hodgson, Vontver, & Platt, 2001), Orthopedics (Clement, Olsson, Katti, & Esther, 2016), Pediatrics (Berkowitz, Frintner, & Cull, 2010), Radiology (Heilbrun, Bender, Truong, & Bluth, 2013), or Surgery (Bourne et al., 2019; Garza, Weston, & Furnas, 2017; Giantini Larsen, Pories, Parangi, & Robertson, 2019; Gong et al., 2019; Humphries et al., 2017; Kwong, Chau, & Kawase, 2014; Mayer, Ho, & Goodnight, 2001; Wijnhoven, Watson, & Van Den Ende, 2008). The most common conclusion is that the existence of paternity leaves is a valued resource either when choosing the residency speciality or when currently exercising the profession, not only among female but also among male prospective employees.

Analyses in medical schools also revealed the remarkable commitment in this field to help medical faculty achieve work-life balance, with generally similar maternity and paternity leave policies (Bristol, Abbuhl, Cappola, & Sonnad, 2008; Socolar, Kelman, Lannon, & Lohr, 2000; Tang et al., 2019; Welch, Wiehe, Palmer-Smith, & Dankoski, 2011; Wendling et al., 2019). Some authors expect even higher development of work-life balance initiatives in this organizational context in the future (Baldwin, Rowley, Daugherty, & Bay, 1995; Gold, Allan, Ralston, Fromme, & Desai, 2019; Gropper, Gartke, & MacLaren, 2010; Itum, Oltmann, Choti, & Piper, 2019; McPhillips et al., 2007; Mohan et al., 2019), being especially relevant in cases of double physician couples (Herath & Herath, 2019). Some studies such as the one by Weiss, Gordon, and O'Connor (1998) suggested that leave policies offered at hospitals do not differ significantly to the ones of big private listed companies, but they offer better support systems for parents returning to work after the birth of a child.

In the case of other sectors, research examining the specificities of the law profession has pointed to the particular limitations of implementing paternity leaves in this field, concluding that those who do take leaves have lower career opportunities. Given that women are still the ones applying for leaves in the law sector and beyond, they are seen as second-level lawyers (Cunningham, 2001; Tremblay, 2013). Looking to research in the specific role of management, research has generally concluded that paternity leave policies in organizations strongly punish men, reducing their promotion potential (Smith, Smith, & Verner, 2013) and worsening general evaluations of leadership effectiveness (Gartzia et al., 2018). In the case of police departments (Rabe-Hemp & Humiston, 2015; Tremblay & Genin, 2010), paternity leave-taking increases are related with maternity leave-taking rates. Finally, research conducted with male members of parliaments also show that men in these contexts are not likely to make use of leaves, due to the fact that they cannot be easily substituted and the commitment culture in parliaments, where people are expected to be always present (Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019).

4. Discussion

As shown in our analysis, existing research on paternity leave is growing rapidly especially among European female researchers and covering a wide range of topics that are important to improve our theoretical understanding of the factors that promote gender equality (Eagly, 2013; Valarino, 2018), work-life balance (Allen et al., 2020; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) and family health and relations (Duvander et al., 2019; Petts & Knoester, 2019a). However, with a substantial fragmentation of research topics, there is a clear lack of common theoretical and empirical grounding across studies, with diverse topics, references, samples and methodological designs. The novelty of the topic may underlie these diverse configurations and analyses. For instance, in spite of evidence that paternity leave policy plays a critical role in men's use of leave options at work, a full understanding on the interactive ways in which regulatory and organizational antecedents influence leave decisions in different organizational contexts has not been achieved. The heterogeneous and interdisciplinary nature of studies likely explains the under-development of theorization around the topic, with few theoretical articles that address the phenomenon integrally.

Our conceptual organizing framework and analysis of areas covered in research help address these concerns, providing a comprehensive analysis on the research that has been performed in these fields overall, and identifying current trends and future

directions for research. In general terms, consistent with content-analytic reviews in other areas of organizational behaviour research (e.g., Hassan et al., 2022; Schilke et al., 2018), we identified two clear blocks of studies focused on antecedents and effects in men's use of paternity leave research. Extending previous approaches in work-family balance (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Michel et al., 2011; Poelmans, 2012) and social organizational research with a gender perspective (Gartzia, 2021), we identified two fundamental antecedents of men's use of paternity leaves: macro-level forces (policy/ regulation) and meso-level forces (organizational culture and practices). Our conceptual scheme also illustrates how paternity leave provision has multi-dimensional effects in a varied range of domains including relationships with children, family and marital relations, health, and career development. We identified areas with a lower empirical maturity, such as family-level antecedents, which are described below.

4.1. Underdeveloped areas and future directions for paternity leave research

A clear learning from our analysis is the confirmation that the existence of formal regulations creating paid and men-directed paternity leaves plays an essential role. First, the way in which the leave is designed in the norm can act as a reinforcer of traditional assumptions regarding care, or instead act as a drive for change (Gartzia, 2021; Jurado-Guerrero & Muñoz-Comet, 2020). Second, because of its mandatory nature, formal regulations make it easier for men to use a leave, while informal measures depend on the willingness of the employer (Romero-Balsas et al., 2013). Our analysis also suggests that male-targeted regulations at the macro-level should be fully paid but include specific mechanisms to oversee the actual implementation in the organizational practice. To do so, research should also more clearly distinguish between levels and categories of paternity leave use (e.g., shorter vs. longer, statutory vs. extended, part-time vs. full-time, organizationally vs. legally provided, etc.) as well as interactive antecedents and effects for example by not limiting the scope of research to a particular discipline, further examining interrelated connections and embracing several theoretical perspectives that integrate family, regulatory and organizational research. For instance, attention could be given to more integrally developing the topic by extending connections between policy/regulatory research (Weimer & Vining, 2017), institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and social/organizational research (Neuman & Robson, 2014).

Regarding meso-level (organizational forces), a number of studies have evaluated the organizational and cultural antecedents of male employees' use of paternity leave, including variables that are common in the organizational behaviour literature such as organizational culture and structure, HR policies or leadership processes (Barcus et al., 2019; Dahl et al., 2014). Our analysis of these studies altogether shows that meso-level organizational forces such as HR policies and practices that are sensitive to work-life balance, perceived organizational support, supervisor support, coworker support and gender equality policies help increase men's use of paternity leave. However, in spite of a relatively high representation of studies in the work and organizational field, we note that important organizational variables and outcomes have been surprisingly ignored. For instance, whereas management research is largely common in the organizational behaviour literature (e.g., Kalwani & Mahesh, 2020), studies looking at the effects of paternity leaves on career promotion and leadership evaluations are virtually absent (see Gartzia et al., 2018). Given the particular challenges that male employees face in managerial positions when asking for a leave (Gartzia et al., 2018) and the role modelling effects that male leaders can generate in firms (Gartzia & Van Knippenberg, 2016), fully supporting paternity leave for men in managerial positions is a particularly relevant future research area.

It is also surprising the scarce number of studies and theoretical development considering effects of paternity leaves on male employees' responses at work, such as work satisfaction, motivation, commitment or related work attitudes. Based on the principles of work-life enrichment theory (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), to the extent that leaves have a positive impact in different facets of men's lives it may also be beneficial at work. The socio-motivational theory of domestic engagement (Gartzia, 2023) may be useful here to understand how institutional and psychological individual factors interact to predict work-life balance. According to this model, institutional and organizational patterns that explicitly encourage non-traditional work-family role standards (e.g., male-targeted fully paid leaves or having referents of involved fatherhood) can activate a motivational psychological process with perceptions that domestic efforts: (a) are feasible (high Expectancy), (b) do not lead to organizational penalties (low Cost) and (c) are personally desirable (high Valence). These motivational mechanisms are understood to be critical for individual decision-making regarding work-family balance (Gartzia, 2023). There is also evidence that a family-friendly organizational culture can boost the take-up rate of leave (Gartzia et al., 2018; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017). Therefore, the way in which the organization is positioned regarding paternity leaves both explicitly (through organizational policies) and implicitly (through shared values, implicit norms, and managerial support) seems to be a determinant factor for men to decide whether or not they actually are able to ask for a leave.

The ways in which these organizational processes influence gender equality outcomes at work also represents a fruitful area of research. In the professional sphere, paternity leaves appear to be a factor that reduces gender inequalities, decreasing the motherhood wage penalty and improving women's labour outcomes and career progression (Farré & González, 2019). However, analyses in this area have focused mostly on how men's use of leaves influence their female partners' career development, with a general lack of research examining more specifically effects at work (e.g., whether and how parental policies directed explicitly to men help improve their female colleagues' career development in the same firm). Our analysis shows that work-life balance research has traditionally been directed to women being only more recently (in the last few years) specifically targeted to men, so directing attention to men to address these gender equality gaps is needed.

Although work-life balance research highlights a range of family-level variables that may influence use of domestic options available to employees (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011), the role played by family factors as antecedents of men's use of paternity leave remains uncovered in current research. For instance, although variables such as the household income structure, family time demands or family/spousal support have been consistently studied in the work-family literature (e.g., Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Michel et al., 2011), they have been generally omitted as antecedents or men's paternity leave decisions. Given that these family-level predictors are

fundamental for understanding work-life balance, this is a clear gap to be addressed in future studies. Likewise, father's sexual orientation or gender ideology/values are uncovered areas. Our analysis overall reveals that research on paternity leaves has been carried out considering conventional family models (e.g., traditional, heterosexual couples). As the diversity of family compositions and structures continues to grow (same-sex parents, single-parent households, blended families, and families with non-traditional caregiving arrangements), it is necessary to understand the factors that influence work-family balance and the use of leaves in these diverse family compositions, as well as their specific dynamics. Future studies identifying non-traditional family compositions involving men specifically (e.g., male-male, single father, father with female/male family members to provide support) are also needed.

In terms of research methods, our analysis indicated that a broader set of quantitative designs that more precisely analyse cause-and-effect relationships would allow for theory development and hypothesis testing. In our review, the majority of the studies were cross-sectional, which are limited in their potential to make causal claims and providing deeper insight into the specific directions and underlying mechanisms among the variables affecting or affected by paternity leave use. Longitudinal and experimental designs have not yet been adopted. Although these designs are difficult to implement in the context of paternity leave, future research should consider applying related methods. For instance, in contexts in which paternity leave regulations are anticipated with a sufficient timeframe, it may be feasible to collect several waves of data in line with studies in which regulatory changes are compared *ex ante* and *ex post* situations, as with state-sanctioned care leaves (D'Addio et al., 2014).

4.2. Limitations of the study

Although this review was conducted in a structured manner, it is not devoid of the constraints that are commonly observed in other literature reviews of this nature (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). The primary limitation pertains to the predefined criteria, necessary for the inclusion of studies in this review. Specifically, papers were selected based on well-defined terms within their abstracts through references available online, and corresponding to scientific articles indexed in the abovementioned databases. Consequently, this approach has led to the exclusion of articles published in journals not featured in these databases, along with books, book chapters, conference proceedings, and any references not accessible online. The second limitation revolves around a bias that disfavours languages beyond English. Although this issue has been partially addressed by the inclusion of Spanish references, other languages have not been included. Concerning the geographical origin of the references, a bias persists towards studies developed in North America and Europe, potentially leading to an imbalance in perspectives from other geographical contexts.

In light of these limitations, the potential exists for crucial research work or papers to have been inadvertently omitted. To mitigate these concerns, a possible avenue for future research expanding the scope of this review could encompass additional databases in other contexts and cultures, a comprehensive review of meta-analyses and reviews, as well as the inclusion of articles published in languages other than English. Such extensions would undoubtedly uncover captivating areas for exploration. Note that absence leave policies for parents vary considerable among countries on duration, flexibility and payments (Koslowski, Blum, Dobrotic, Moss, & Macht, 2019), which makes it difficult to identify general conclusions that can be applied universally and across firms in different locations.

4.3. Practical implications

Our review shows that both macro-level and meso-level forces can move paternity leave decisions significantly forward. Consequently, our findings invite policy makers and practitioners to fully appreciate the value that regulatory perspectives of parental leave can have for gender equality in organizations, and critically assess their contribution in shaping individual decision making. In general, there is agreement that greater use of paternity leaves can help reduce the division of domestic work: when men make use of longer paternity leaves (i.e. more than the statutory norm; e.g., Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007), positive and persistent effects towards a more gender-equal housework emerges. Thus, paternity leaves have the potential to contribute to the attainment of better gender equality levels, by closing the gap in the domestic division of work and by contributing to the advancement of women's career.

The European Union has set the pace for ensuring men's leave right, with the introduction of a minimum 10-day paternity leave. Of particular relevance are the Spanish 16-week fully compensated leave for each of the parents, Finnish 160-day leave also for each of the parents, as well as the 64-day paternity leave of Lithuania compensated at a 77% rate (EIGE, 2021). These EU policies may serve as inspiring practices for the advancement in the provision of leaves targeting specifically men in other geographical areas. Because our findings overall suggest that there are several positive outcomes that can be achieved in terms of health, family, and organizational outcomes, men's use of paternity leave has multiple benefits that policy makers should more ambitiously manage. Ambitious domestic policies and regulatory action that challenge traditional gender norms and are more specifically targeted to men may move societies and organizations closer to gender equality and a healthier implementation of work-life balance policies. Managers and human resource practitioners in firms also need to more fully understand the role they can play in individual decision making for male employees in organizations, and how their role interact with other individual and family level variables (e.g. some HR policies might be ineffective to certain family structures). It is thus important that HR policies consider not only firm variables but also individual and family needs of employees, in order to achieve good fit between paternity leave policies and the employee's reality.

Because the experiences and outcomes that an individual can develop in a given life domain can transfer to outcomes and experiences in other domains, particularly those related to work and family (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), life experiences and outcomes acquired through paternity leave practices should be understood in interaction. Note for instance that, from the organizational perspective, generating a culture of line manager and co-worker support to paternity leave will contribute to the development of a more family-friendly culture that is key for the success of human resource management and, in particular, employee retention

(Lamane-Harim, Cegarra-Leiva, & Sánchez-Vidal, 2021; Van Engen and Gartzia, 2022). Although some attempts have been made to increase the number of men who take paternity leaves in the workplace (e.g., Deloitte; Behnson, 2014; Dove Men+Care, Dove, 2022; Mutua, Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades, 2016), more efforts are needed so that families, firms and societies can benefit from the many positive outcomes that paternity leaves can bring. As illustrated in our review, these positive outcomes include multifaceted benefits not only for working fathers but also for their partners and children, fostering enhanced family bonding and leading fathers to actively engage in the nurturing and care of their newborns. Moreover, it contributes to dismantling traditional gender norms, promoting equitable distribution of childcare responsibilities between partners. Investment in early father-child interaction can bolster the child's cognitive and emotional development, while simultaneously help cultivating a more supportive and egalitarian family environment.

5. Conclusion

All in all, our study contributes to a more holistic and multidisciplinary picture of men's use of paternity leaves. We reviewed all studies in this field to provide a comprehensive overarching model about the various dimensions, antecedents, and effects of paternity leaves for men, women, families and organizations. We highlighted the growing interest in paternity leave in recent years, suggesting that scholars (particularly female, and European) are reorienting the study of work-family dynamics to more specifically account for men's experiences. The growing interest in the topic strongly supports the theoretical and applied value of paternity leave research and suggests that additional research is required to more fully understand the complexities and interdisciplinary nature of paternity leave action and research. However, given the multidimensional and multidisciplinary nature of the topic involving theories and variables from different disciplines (e.g., law, social policy, organizational behaviour, gender theory, social psychology), we pointed to an unresolved disconnection between disciplines that requires additional efforts towards further unifying the field and more integrally understanding the multidimensional nature of men's decision making. Responding to this concern and broadening our knowledge in this field, we provided an organizing framework that synthesizes current interactive challenges into three main areas of action: regulation/law, organizational norms (explicit and implicit), and family options that more equally distribute family-work demands. Our review also points to a wide variety of family, health, and organizational outcomes to justify these efforts. We hope that our findings help provide further convergence in this field, pointing to boundary conditions and contingencies that shape men's use of paternity leaves, and help advancing this fruitful area of research.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Jon Pizarro: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Data curation. **Leire Gartzia:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Supervision.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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