

Summary

Employer's attitude towards parental leave?

The Norwegian system of parental leave is an important pillar in the social model and aims at facilitating women's and men's labour market participation and caring responsibilities. A number of studies have been conducted in order to evaluate the effect of these arrangements, particularly the daddy quota introduced in 1993. However, very few studies have examined how employers relate to the requirements.

Employers attitudes towards parental leave and employers' evaluation of the cost and benefits are the main object of this report. The key research questions are:

- What sort of attitudes do employers express towards parent leave?
- Are any potentially negative attitudes based on
 - A normative approach towards gender roles, parenthood and equal opportunities or
 - An instrumental approach grounded in negative consequences for the employer such as efficiency loss and extra costs?
- How do employers organise for parental leave, so that employees can use their statutory rights?

We conducted 24 interviews with employers from four different industries in four different private sector branches: i) hotels, ii) restaurants, iii) transport and logistics and iv) consultancy. It is often considered time-consuming and difficult to access employers for qualitative interviews, and this proved to be the case also in this project. Employers' attitudes to parental leave and the daddy quota has been part of the political debate in Norway for several years. We underline that this is a qualitative report and it is not possible to make any generalization to what Norwegian employers think about parental leave in general. We investigate how employers might act and think, and not how many employers may act this way.

Key findings in this report are:

- Most of the employers we interviewed had a positive attitude toward parental leave. Some of them pointed out that old male employers as well as management in large international corporations may have more negative attitudes towards parental leave.
- It is considered unproblematic to administer parental leave for the employer. It is not considered problematic for the employee that the employee is absent with

parental leave. Employers reorganize work task or postpone some of the work in order to arrange for the leave period. If this is not enough, a temporary employee is brought in. The need for a temporary employee is weighted against the cost and time involved in training a new person. Some employers pointed out that at 4-6 months was the maximum period to manage without a substitute.

- The employers considered the daddy quota as the normal period of leave for a male employee, and that it was normal for the mother to take the rest of the leave period. Exceptions from this 'rule' is found when the employer emphasizes that they are a particular family-friendly company or if the mother of the child is met with particular circumstances (education, illness or work)
- The costs related to parental leave are considered by the employees in the same way as other personnel expenses. The employees do not estimate the cost for the company related to parental leave and do not make any attempts to reduce such costs. When prompted training of temporary employees and reduced turnover is mentioned as costs for the company related to parental leave.
- The employers are eager to accommodate the employees' preferences concerning the period of absence (length as well as possible part-time leave). However, certain circumstances might legitimize efforts in order to convince the employees to adapt to company needs. Such need is mainly considered as the need of certain competences and needs related to periods with extra work load (holidays, new customers etc.).
- No common attitude to the question on part-time leave is found. However, some employers point to extra managerial work, rota trouble and part-time use of costly equipment.
- The employers do not expect employees to be accessible for questions and work (e-mail, phone and working from home) during their parental leave. Some point out that it is the employees themselves who want to be informed about what happens in the company when they are on leave, and that employees often therefore do not to completely 'logg off'.
- The employers had few company plans that expressed equal opportunities and work-life balance. However, all of the employers considered this important and measures were made in order to become a flexible company. Yet, flexibility was mainly an issue of flexible hours or working from home. No measures in order to reduce the strain of work on newly parents were found.
- All in all, the employers wished to be generous and sympathetic towards employers on parental leave, because:
 - Employers needed to attract and keep productive employees.

- Employers were dependant on a give-and take attitude based on fair treatment of their employees (demand much – render much).
- A normative commitment to parenthood is as a central value.