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Does paternal involvement in childcare influence mothers' employment trajectories during the early stages of parenthood in the UK?

Abstract

Understanding the conditions that facilitate mothers' employment and fathers' involvement in childcare and housework is important for achieving gender equity in paid and unpaid work. Using Sen's (1992) capabilities framework, the paper explores the effect of paternal involvement in childcare on mothers' employment resumption nine months and three years' post-childbirth. Logistic regression is used on the UK's Millennium Cohort Study. Results show that the probability of mothers resuming employment increase at both time points if the father is more involved in childcare nine months post-birth – and in some cases, this is more important for her employment resumption than her occupational class and the number of hours the father spends in paid work. However, attitudes have an even stronger effect, and appear to drive behaviour, as the probability of mothers resuming employment increase significantly three years post-birth if either parent endorses more gender egalitarian roles in the first year of parenthood.

Keywords: Capabilities, childcare, employment, fathers, paternal involvement, gender division of labour, gender role attitudes, housework, mothers, parenthood

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Introduction

Maintaining a continuous employment profile post-childbirth is a desirable option for most mothers of pre-school children. Not only does this have a positive impact on earnings, career progression, occupational mobility and pensions (Aisenbrey et al., 2009; McRae, 2008); engagement in paid work poses a challenge to traditional structures of gender inequality, particularly if fathers are steered to substitute for mothers' reduction in time spent on childcare and housework (see Norman et al., 2014; Fagan and Norman 2016). Enabling fathers to play an equal role in their child's upbringing is equally important given the positive association with child development, parental wellbeing and a stable parental relationship (Norman et al., 2018; Wilson and Prior, 2010).

Yet parenthood continues to reinforce a traditional gender division of labour in most families. When heterosexual couples have children, mothers usually reduce their hours of paid work to take on a 'second shift' of domestic labour, while fathers maintain or increase their hours to compensate for the reduction in household earnings and the extra expenses that having children generates (Hochschild and Machung, 2012; Bianchi et al., 2012; Craig and Mullan, 2011; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). But there are some variations: Mothers with pre-school children are more likely to resume employment, and resume employment on a full-time basis in some countries, such as Sweden where gender inequalities in time dedicated to childcare and housework are also less pronounced (Francavilla et al., 2013; Hook, 2006; Kan et al., 2011). Within countries, some fathers spend more time on childcare and housework compared to other fathers (Fagan and Norman 2016; Norman et al., 2014; Raley et al., 2012).

Earlier analysis of the UK's Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) showed that fathers were more likely to share childcare equally in couple households with a pre-school child when both parents were employed, but the probability of shared childcare was more strongly associated with the number of full-time employment hours worked by the mother than the volume of hours worked by the father (Fagan and Norman, 2016; Norman et al., 2014). This demonstrates the influence of mothers' and, to a lesser extent, fathers' employment hours on paternal involvement in childcare in families with a pre-school child. Yet the direction of this relationship remains unclear. Do these results suggest that the father's involvement in childcare enables the mother to be employed, or is it the mother's participation in paid work which influences the father to become more involved at home?

Using Sen's (1992) capabilities, the analysis in this paper answers these questions by exploring whether the probability of a mother entering or remaining in employment is higher when the father is involved by doing the most or sharing childcare equally with the mother. Other pertinent factors such as the father's employment hours, the mother's occupational class and parental attitudes towards gender roles are also considered. The analysis also establishes whether paternal involvement in the immediate post-birth period affects maternal employment when the child is older. The results have important social policy implications by clarifying whether efforts to encourage paternal involvement in the immediate post-birth period help to facilitate a continuous employment profile for women. Identifying other structural and individual factors that enable or constrain mothers' employment decisions is also important given this provides a basis for helping to address the persistent gender inequalities within paid and unpaid work.

Theoretical perspectives

Social and economic theory offer ways of understanding female employment patterns and outcomes. Human-capital theory attributes human capital investments, sex-role preferences and the efficiency of a gendered division of labour as the main determinants of women's employment decisions (e.g. Becker, 1981; Hakim, 2000). Here men and women behave rationally with couples' joint economic welfare maximised by the higher earner, usually the man, specialising in employment, and the other partner specialising in domestic work. Hakim's (1991; 1998; 2000) sociological preference theory builds on this rational action approach but recognises that women are not homogenous in their priorities and preferences. She argues that women's agency primarily drives employment decisions given they can choose between different combinations of paid and unpaid work. Thus, 'committed' women who opt to invest in their employment careers have a higher chance of maintaining a continuous employment profile post-birth compared to 'uncommitted' women who prioritise family.

Although useful to recognise the heterogeneity in women's work orientations, Hakim has been criticised for oversimplifying orientations and preferences and treating them as essentially fixed. She also provides a voluntaristic account of women's behaviour, which disregards the influence of structural, institutional and cultural factors (Fagan, 2001; Crompton and Harris, 1998; McRae, 2003; Ginn et al., 1996). It is problematic to suggest that the main determinant of women's employment patterns is their preferences for different combinations of paid and unpaid work because this implies that choices are made freely, without constraint. Decisions about employment are likely to be chosen within a web of limited work-family reconciliation options and gaps in public care services.

Sen's (1992) capabilities framework provides a useful way of theorising the relationship between choice and constraint. Rather than considering what may be possible within the abstract concept of 'free choice', the capabilities approach focuses on what options are feasible or 'genuinely possible' for an individual when arranging paid and unpaid work (Fagan and Walthery, 2011). Capability – expressed in terms of the substantive freedom of an individual to choose between feasible alternative 'functionings' (i.e. ways of doing things) or the 'real options open to them' – are shaped by 'social conversion factors' such as policies, social institutions and norms. The availability of an appropriate job, access to flexible working and having a supportive partner are just some of the social conversion factors enabling a mother to return to employment post-birth.

Human-capital and preference theory focus on employment outcomes as a choice whereas the capabilities framework focuses on the options from which that choice is selected. It also embeds a life course perspective into policy and employment debates due to the emphasis on social conversion factors (policies, social institutions and norms), which enable individuals to move between different work-family arrangements as preferences and situational factors change (Fagan and Walthery, 2011). This framework is therefore used to evaluate how policies, norms and attitudes, organisational and individual factors shape mothers' capabilities to return to employment post-birth.

What influences mothers to return to employment post-birth?

State policies that support a gender equal sharing of parenting and household tasks are pivotal for enabling women to resume employment after childbirth. Good quality, affordable and flexible childcare is key provided it is coordinated with other reconciliation policies to support labour market reintegration such as job-protected maternity leave, parental leave for fathers and access to flexible working (Boeckmann et al., 2014; Fagan and Norman 2012; Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

The effect of reconciliation policy on the employment of mothers with pre-school children has been modelled in empirical research. Gornick et al.'s (1998) cross-country analysis of the Luxembourg Income Study showed that the optimum policy package for enabling mothers to enter and remain in employment post-birth combined job protection and wage replacement at the time of childbirth; provisions for the care of children through extended leave and/or publicly subsidized childcare; and support for the care of children over age three in the form of public childcare and/or early enrolment in public school. Pettit and Hook (2005) also found a positive association between high levels of public childcare provision and women's employment using a later sweep of the same data. Boeckmann et al.'s (2014) cross-country analysis showed that publicly supported childcare for children under three, alongside well paid leave, was associated with lower gaps in employment between mothers and childless women.

However, the level of support for maternal employment varies between countries leading to cross-national variations in employment rates (see OECD, 2018). Working-time regimes and practices also vary with mothers in some countries, such as the UK and the Netherlands, more likely to return to employment part-time (Anxo et al., 2004; Fagan et al 2014; Rubery et al., 1998). Yet in the majority of cross-comparative studies, a similar story unfolds: policy support for mothers is more advanced in the Nordic countries, which has led to some of the highest maternal employment rates in Europe. In Sweden and Denmark for example, the employment rate for mothers with a dependent child exceeds 80%ⁱ (OECD, 2018), which is partly thanks to their systems of high quality, full-time and extensive out-of-school-hours childcare (Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

Parental leave is one of the main interventions to support fathers' involvement in childcare but take up is contingent upon its design. Leave that includes an individual portion or 'daddy quota' underlines it as an explicit, father's right, which gives men an incentive to take it up compared to family based allocations that can be shared by either parent (Fagan and Norman 2013; O'Brien, 2009). Quotas of leave have been successful in changing gendered leave-taking in the Nordic countries but only because they are combined with a high level of wage replacement. Norway, Iceland and Sweden boast some of the highest take up rates amongst men in Europe with 78-95% of fathers taking an average of 13-14 weeks of leave. Take up in other countries offering a father quota, such as Italy and Greece, is much lower (less than 12% of fathers) because the wage replacement is low or unpaid (Karu and Trembley, 2017). In the UK, Shared Parental Leave (SPL) was introduced in 2015, allowing fathers to potentially share up to 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of statutory pay previously only available to the mother. Yet it is rarely taken up by fathers because it is not an individual right, reliant on the mother shortening her entitlement and is only paid at approximately a quarter of average gross full-time weekly earnings.

Access to working-time options, such as flexible working hours, supports a return to work by helping parents to make adjustments to accommodate childcare responsibilities (Chanfreau et al., 2011; Chung and van der Horst, 2018). However, evidence from the UK shows that men are less likely to make a request for flexible working and are more likely than women to get their requests rejected when they do (Chanfreau et al., 2011; Fagan et al., 2006).

Cross-national differences in mothers' employment patterns are also shaped by cultural assumptions about gender roles and the position of women (Crompton et al., 2005; Pfau-Effinger, 1998, 2012; Uunk, 2015). However, questions remain around whether attitudes influence mothers' employment behaviour (e.g. see Uunk, 2015), behaviour influences attitudes (e.g. see Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004), or whether attitudes and behaviour mutually reinforce each other (e.g. see Schober and Scott, 2012).

Gender role norms and attitudes vary between countries because they are, partly, shaped by welfare policies, which enable dual partnership and signal what is deemed to be gender appropriate behaviour (Budig et al., 2012; Kremer, 2007; Sjoberg, 2004). Across many countries, dominant gender ideologies suggest pre-school children suffer if their mother is employed, while ideals of care or 'moral rationalities' emphasise the importance of maternal care for young children (Duncan, 2006; Budig et al., 2012; Pfau-Effinger, 2012). Feminist sociologists argue that the traditional gender division of paid and unpaid labour reflects the construction of femininities and masculinities. Domesticity is a marker of feminine identity and a way of 'doing gender', which primarily explains why domestic work continues to be allocated to women (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Empirical evidence suggests that support for the dual earner/dual carer family model arrangement is particularly prevalent in Sweden (Edlund and Oun, 2016; Uunk, 2015). For example, Edlund and Oun's (2016) analysis found that support for an equal sharing for work and care responsibilities was stronger in Sweden than in Denmark, Finland, Germany and Poland. Knudson and Waerness (2001) also found Swedes to be the most positive about mothers' employment in their comparative study of Great Britain, Sweden and Norway. Attitudes towards gender roles are more traditional in countries with limited policy support for working mothers. In the UK for example, attitudes towards work and family roles are becoming more egalitarian although a proportion of society still hold traditional views about gender roles. The prevalent societal attitude is that mothers who have younger, pre-school children should interrupt employment or work part- rather than full-time hours (e.g. see Crompton et al., 2003; Crompton and Lyonette, 2008; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015; Park et al., 2013; Duncan, 2006). And while there is growing support for fathers to take a more active role in their children's upbringing, financial provisioning continues to be synonymous to a 'good father' status (Dermott, 2008; Norman 2017).

Mothers' capabilities to return to paid work are also conditioned by organisational factors and personal attributes. Mothers with a pre-school child are more likely to resume employment if they are a manager or professional, or have high levels of human capital, such as education, training and employment experience because such jobs have better career prospects and earnings, which also provides more scope to cover childcare costs (Chanfreau et al., 2011; Fagan and Rubery, 1996; Fagan and Norman 2012). Women who are employed during pregnancy are also more likely to return to the labour market and resume employment more quickly (Burgess et al., 2008; Fagan and Norman 2012).

In most countries, maternal employment is reduced by the age of the youngest child although evidence from the UK suggests that this is mediated by the mothers' occupational position with the effect least pronounced for mothers employed in professional and intermediate occupations (Glover and Arber, 1995). Mothers are also more likely to be employed when they have a partner, and have an employed rather than unemployed or economically inactive partner (Harrop and Moss, 1995). Some evidence suggests that maternal employment varies according to ethnicity with Pakistani or Bangladeshi mothers least likely to be employed and white mothers most likely to be employed part-time. Cultural attitudes towards maternal employment may partly explain these variations (Dale and Holdsworth, 1998; Harrop and Moss, 1995).

What do we already know about the relationship between father involvement and parental employment?

Previous research has explored the relationship between becoming a father (i.e. fatherhood status) and men's employment (e.g. Dermott, 2006; Biggart and O'Brien, 2010; Weinschenker, 2015) even though arguably, maternal employment is more susceptible to change after children are born. There are a small number of studies that focus on whether maternal employment affects fathers' contributions to childcare but these show mixed results revealing either a positive relationship (e.g. Norman et al., 2014; Fagan and Norman 2016; Gracia and Esping-Andersen, 2015), a negative relationship or no significant relationship at all (see Zick et al., 2001 for a review). Earlier analysis of the UK's MCS showed an association between paternal involvement in childcare and the mothers' employment hours with fathers more likely to share childcare equally in couple households with a pre-school child when the mother worked full-time. The probability of shared childcare was more strongly associated with the mothers' rather than the fathers' full-time employment (Fagan and Norman 2016; Norman et al., 2014). However, the

direction of this relationship remains unclear as does the relative influence of other key variables such as both parents' gender role attitudes and the mother's occupational class. Raley et al. (2012) analysis of time diary data in the US shows that fathers are more likely to engage in solo care and the routine, physical care of children when their partners are employed. Yet little is known about whether father's actual involvement in childcare helps to facilitate mothers' entry into paid work. This makes the link between paternal involvement and maternal employment outcomes ambiguous. There has also been little consideration of whether father involvement during the early stages of a child's life has a longitudinal impact on maternal employment outcomes as children get older.

To address these gaps, the following analysis examines whether paternal involvement in childcare predicts mothers' employment status nine months and three years' post-birth, taking account of other factors, which may affect this relationship such as the parent's gender role attitudes, the fathers' employment hours and the mothers' occupational class. The longitudinal impact of the father's involvement, both parents' employment hours and gender role attitudes in the immediate post-birth period (i.e. when the child is aged nine months) is also explored.

Data and methods

Logistic regression is used on two sweeps of the MCS - a nationally representative survey following a cohort of children born around the year 2000. The first sweep (2001/02) covers a cohort of 18,819 babies aged nine months old (raised in 18,552 families). The second sweep (2003/04) followed the same cohort of children (now aged three years old), plus 692 newly recruited families resulting in an overall, combined sample size of 19,244 households. The sample for this analysis was filtered to focus on the same, married or cohabiting heterosexual couples across both sweeps (n=11,432, 59.4% of the original combined sample).

To overcome collinearity issues, the sample excluded a small group of mothers (n=648, 3.4% of the original sample) who had never had a paid job by the time the cohort child was nine months old. Occupational class data was missing for this group of mothers and it was not possible to place them in a separate category given this would be collinear with the dependent variable predicting maternal employment (discussed below). Most of these mothers (94%) had invariant employment trajectories over both sweeps, remaining out of work. Only 6% moved into employment when the child reached age three. Although these trajectories would be interesting to explore, including this minority proportion (0.2% of the original sample) would mean omitting a control for occupational class, which causes specification error in the modelsⁱⁱ. The final subset of households represented 55% of the original combined sample (n=10,621 households). Due to the disproportionate sampling design of the survey, the data was weighted with overall survey weights to account for both sampling design and non-response (Plewis, 2007).

The analysis uses two, binary dependent variables that measure whether the mother is in employmentⁱⁱⁱ versus not in employment when the child is aged nine months (sweep one) and three years old (sweep two). When the child was aged nine months, 60.1% of mothers were in employment, increasing to 61.1% when the child was aged three.

Table 1 shows mothers' employment trajectories between nine months and three years' post-birth. Although the majority of mothers maintain the same employment/non-employment status trajectory, there are some shifts: 17% of mothers who were employed nine months post-birth move to non-employment when the child is aged three; and just

over a fifth of mothers who were not employed nine months post-birth move to employment when the child is aged three.

<TABLE 1 HERE>

My analysis focuses on establishing whether paternal involvement in childcare has an association with these employment trajectories, once other factors are controlled for.

The independent variable measuring fathers' involvement (i.e. their caregiver status) is binary distinguishing between fathers who were 'involved' by doing the most childcare or sharing childcare equally with the mother, and fathers who did the least amount of childcare (i.e. 'secondary caregivers') because the mother or, in a minority of cases (0.4%), someone else did the most. Over a third (38.2%) of fathers in our sample were involved when the child was nine months old falling to over a quarter (28%) when the child reached aged three.

Three logistic regression models are run to explore the relationship between a father's caregiver role and a mother's employment status nine months and three years' post-birth. The first model uses the fathers' caregiver status at nine months to predict mothers' employment status at that time. The second model uses the father's caregiver status at nine months to predict mothers' employment status when the child is aged three. The third model uses the fathers' caregiver status at age three to predict mothers' employment status at that time.

An interaction of fathers' caregiver status and employment hours is included in each model to test whether the relationship between fathers' involvement and mothers' employment statuses change once the fathers' employment status and hours are taken into account. A measure of both mothers' and fathers' attitudes towards whether they agree that children suffer if the mother works before they start school is included in all models, to explore the relative effect of gender role attitudes on maternal employment, as is a measure of the mothers' occupational class. In the second and third models, I control for the mother's employment status nine months post-birth to establish how far this affects her employment status at age three.

Each model also controls for the mother's employment status during pregnancy, household income (to account for the financial position of the household), the presence of other children in the household, the mother's age and her ethnicity.

Results

Which factors are associated with an increase in maternal employment nine months after childbirth?

Table 2 presents the odds ratios from the first logistic regression model predicting mothers' employment status nine months post-birth.

<TABLE 2 HERE>

Table 2 shows that mothers are more than twice as likely to resume employment nine months post-birth if the father does the most or shares childcare equally with the mother. Interestingly, his involvement nine months post-birth has a stronger effect on the probability of a mother being employed than her occupational class, and the father's employment status, which has no significant effect.

However, parent's gender role attitudes have the strongest effect on mothers' employment status when the child is nine months old. Mothers are almost four times more likely to be employed at nine months if either parent supports gender egalitarian roles by disagreeing

that children suffer if the mother works before they start school, regardless of the couple's caregiving arrangements and the fathers' employment hours. I re-ran the model in Table 2 including an interaction of the mothers' and fathers' attitudes but this was not significant, which suggests that as long as one parent endorses gender egalitarian roles, the mother is more likely to return to employment. Although less important, managerial and professional mothers, and those in the small employers and self-employed occupational category, are more likely to return to employment nine months post-birth compared to mothers in the lower technical and routine groups.

Although model 1 suggests that paternal involvement and, in particular, gender role attitudes have the strongest effect on mothers' employment behaviour nine months post-birth, the direction of these effects is unclear given paternal involvement and parental attitudes are both measured at nine months. This could mean that attitudes rather than behaviour were adapted to endorse or rationalise the mother's employment as acceptable. And it may also mean that fathers became more involved as a result of mothers returning to employment. The direction of these effects is explored further in the next section.

Which factors are associated with an increase in maternal employment three years after childbirth?

Table 3 presents the odds ratios from the second and third logistic regression models, which respectively use father's caregiver status at nine months and three years post-birth, to predict mothers' employment status when the child is aged three. Models 2 and 3 control for the mothers' employment hours at nine months and this is interacted with their occupational class to explore how variations in occupation and working-time affect maternal employment when the child is aged three.

<TABLE 3 HERE>

The longitudinal impact of parents' employment and fathers' caregiving activity in the first year of parenthood is shown in model 2. The probability of maternal employment increases when the child is aged three if the father does the most or shares childcare equally with the mother nine months post-birth. Thus, maternal employment three years post-birth has an association with how involved the father is during the first year of parenthood regardless of attitudes, the mother's occupational class and both parent's employment hours. However, model 3 shows that the probability of her employment when the child is aged three is higher if he is involved at that time.

Model 2 also shows that the mother's employment hours nine months post-birth have an even stronger effect (than the father's involvement) on her employment status when the child is aged three although this association is shaped by her occupational class. Regardless of whether the mother is employed part- or full-time nine months post-birth, she is twice as likely to be employed when the child is aged three if she is in a managerial or professional occupation. Mothers in the small-employer and self-employed occupational category are almost four times more likely to be employed when the child is aged three but only if they worked full-time nine-months post-birth. The results suggest that returning to work in the first year on a full- or part-time basis is critical for employment continuity two years later but this is most likely to happen for mothers in managerial or professional occupations. Mothers are significantly less likely to be employed three years post-birth if the father is also out of work (model 3).

Both mothers' and fathers' attitudes nine months post-birth (model 2) increase the probability of the mother being employed when the child is aged three, which suggests that attitudes established in the first year shape the mother's employment behaviour two

years later. Interestingly, when the child reaches age three, the attitudes of the mother have a much stronger effect on the probability of her being employed at that time than the father's attitudes (model 3).

Discussion

Using a capabilities framework, this paper identifies some of the structural and individual factors that enable or constrain mothers' decisions to return to employment nine months and three years' post-childbirth. Three key findings have emerged from the analysis.

First, mothers with pre-school children are more likely to resume employment nine months and three years' post-birth if the father is involved by sharing or doing the most childcare at these times. Although previous studies have found a positive relationship between paternal involvement and maternal employment (e.g. Norman et al., 2014; Fagan and Norman 2016; Gracia and Esping-Andersen, 2015; Raley et al., 2012), none have specifically used paternal involvement to predict maternal employment status. Moreover, the current analysis furthers our understandings about fathers' and mothers' roles by showing that paternal involvement is more important for predicting employment status in the early years of parenthood than other structural factors such as occupational class and the number of hours the father spends in paid work.

Second, the analysis shows that paternal involvement in childcare has a longitudinal impact on mothers' employment decisions. Mothers are more likely to be employed when their child is aged three if their partner was previously involved in childcare nine months post-birth, regardless of her occupational class and attitudes towards work and care. These results highlight the importance of the fathers' involvement at home during the first year of parenthood because it, at least partly, facilitates mothers' employment two years later. These findings build on earlier analysis, which shows that paternal involvement during the first year of parenthood increases the probability of a father's involved caregiver status two years later (Fagan and Norman, 2016). Taken together, this empirical evidence suggests that what fathers do in the early stages of a child's life is pivotal given it has a significant bearing on future parental work and family decisions.

Third, parental attitudes towards gender roles are even more important for predicting maternal employment than the father's involvement at home, with the probability of mothers resuming employment increasing significantly if either parent endorses more gender egalitarian roles. Moreover, attitudes established in the first year shape the mother's employment behaviour two years later, which suggests that it is behaviour which follows attitudes. This implies that cultural ideals and expectations about gender roles continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the organisation of paid and unpaid work, and this has an even stronger influence than the structural and individual factors controlled for in the models. Across the UK, social attitudes have started to shift towards a favouring of more egalitarian gender roles in the family (e.g., see Lyonette and Crompton, 2015; Park et al., 2013) which may partly account for the increasing numbers of mothers returning to employment post-birth (e.g. see Working Families 2019). This analysis suggests that the shift in attitudes may have helped, at least partly, to facilitate this shift in behaviour.

It is worth noting that occupational class continues to shape mothers employment status trajectories post-birth - a finding consistent with previous research (e.g. Fagan and Norman, 2012; McRae, 2003; 2008). The resumption of employment nine months post-birth, on a full- or part-time basis, is critical for mothers' employment continuity two years later but this is still more likely to occur if she is in a managerial or professional occupation. This finding compliments earlier research by Fagan and Norman (2016) who suggest that

the higher probability of managerial and professional mothers' resuming employment is likely to be driven by the higher earnings associated with these occupations, which also makes formal childcare more affordable. Moreover, a longer absence from these occupations is more likely to incur a higher risk of stalling career progression. Mothers in the self-employed and small employer occupational category are also more likely to return to employment three years post-birth but only if they are employed full-time nine months post-birth. This may partly be down to the more limited state support that is available for the self-employed and small business owners in the UK, which could drive an earlier return to paid work (e.g. see O'Connor, 2017).

There are several policy implications from this analysis. If the policy objective is to enable mothers to resume employment after having children, it is important to provide the conditions for fathers to be more involved at home, particularly during the first year of parenthood. Access to well-paid, non-transferable parental leave and flexible working hours is pivotal for facilitating paternal involvement in the pre-school years so that men are able to adapt their paid work schedules to accommodate childcare responsibilities. However, it is important that this is combined with other reconciliation measures to support maternal employment such as good quality, flexible and affordable childcare. The facilitation of gender egalitarian roles through policy reforms that better support fathers to take time off work, and mothers to return to employment post-birth, may start to address traditional cultural norms and ideologies that shape behaviour and thus lead to gender inequity in work and family roles. Providing support for fathers to take time off paid work for raising children provides a signal that work-family reconciliation is also an issue for men, helping to normalise their childcare involvement whilst shifting embedded ideologies that posit pre-school children suffer if their mothers return to paid work.

I recognise that other factors are likely to shape mothers' capabilities to return to employment, which have not been accounted for in the analysis due to limitations with data. This includes preferences, motivations, in line with Hakim's (1991; 1998; 2000) thesis, but also other contextual (i.e. social conversion) factors such as how easy it is to access supportive networks of relatives and friends, formal and informal childcare and parental leave. I also note that the empirical analysis does not take account of how the policy context may interact with gender role attitudes and employment behaviour given the data used is from the UK. Furthermore, while the analysis shows a clear association between paternal involvement and maternal employment, even when we control for attitudes, occupational class and other employment and socio-demographic factors, it does not shed light on causal relationships. It is possible that both mothers' employment and father's involvement is associated with some other endogenous factor such as the mother's childcare involvement. Future research should not only examine the associations between paternal involvement, attitudes and maternal employment at the cross-national level to establish whether policy context has a significant and stronger effect, but also the causal mechanisms that underlie mothers' employment trajectories. It would also be interesting to explore what influences mothers to return to part- and full-time employment given recent research from the UK suggests that the latter option is becoming increasingly common in some families (e.g. Working Families, 2019).

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Endnotes

ⁱⁱ Data from 2014

ⁱⁱ Specification error occurs if the model does not include all the relevant variables that are likely to affect the outcome (see <https://stats.idre.ucla.edu/stata/webbooks/logistic/chapter3/lesson-3-logistic-regression-diagnostics/>)

ⁱⁱⁱ A minority of mothers (4.4% in sweep one and 5.9% in sweep two) in the employment group were 'on leave'. The type of leave being taken included maternity, parental, sick, holiday and 'other' leave.

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Data Analysis Initiative to develop her ESRC-funded doctoral research on fathers to explore what influences paternal involvement in childcare as children age from nine months to eleven years old. This paper builds on the analysis conducted for that project.

Table 1: Mothers' employment status trajectories from nine months to three years after childbirth

9 months after childbirth	3 years after childbirth		
	Not employed	Employed	Total
Not employed	71.6	28.4	100
Employed	17.1	82.9	100
Total	39.4	60.6	100

Source: MCS sweep 1 and 2, n=10,611 (weighted by the overall weight for sweep 2: bovwt2)

Table 2: What influences mothers to be employed when the child is aged 9 months old?

	MODEL 1 n=10,566 B [std error]
Fathers' caregiver status when child is 9 months old	
Does the most childcare or shares it equally with the mother <i>Ref: Does the least childcare</i>	2.4 (.2)***
Father's employment status when child is 9 months old	
Not employed	1 (.2)
Employed part-time (1-29 hours per week) <i>Ref: Full-time employed (30+ hours per week)</i>	1.3 (.4)
Father's caregiver X employment status when child is 9 months old	
Father does most or shares childcare and is not employed	.7 (.2)
Father does most or shares childcare and is employed part-time <i>Ref: Father does least childcare and is employed full-time</i>	1.1 (.3)
Mother's occupational class when child is 9 months old	
Managerial or Professional	1.3 (.1)**
Intermediate	1.1 (.1)
Small employers and self-employed <i>Ref: Lower supervisory and technical or Semi-routine/routine</i>	2.2 (.3)***
Mothers' attitudes towards whether children suffer if the mother works before they start school when child is 9 months old	
Strongly disagree/disagree	3.8 (.4)***
Neither agree nor disagree <i>Ref: Strongly agree/ agree</i>	1.5 (.1)***
Fathers; attitudes towards whether children suffer if the mother works before they start school when child is 9 months old	
Strongly disagree/disagree	3.8 (.5)***
Neither agree nor disagree <i>Ref: Strongly agree/ agree</i>	1.6 (.1)***

Source: MCS sweep 1, (weighted by the overall weight for sweep 1: aovwt2)

1 The model controls for mother's employment status during pregnancy, household income, the number of other children in the household, the mother's age and the mother's ethnicity.

Table 3: What influences mothers to be employed when the child is aged 3 years old?

	MODEL 2 n=10,556 B [std error]	MODEL 3 N=10,498 B [std error]
Fathers' caregiver status	...at 9 mths	...at age 3
Does the most childcare or shares it equally with the mother <i>Ref: Does the least childcare</i>	1.3 (.1)**	2.7 (.2)***
Father's employment status	...at 9 mths	...at age 3
Not employed	.7 (.1)	.3 (.1)***
Employed part-time (1-29 hours per week) <i>Ref: Full-time employed (30+ hours per week)</i>	1 (.3)	.8 (.2)
Father's caregiver X employment status	...at 9 mths	...at age 3
Father does most or shares childcare and is not employed		
Father does most or shares childcare and is employed part-time <i>Ref: Father does least childcare and is employed full-time</i>	.7 (.1)	1.3 (.4)
	.9 (.3)	1.5 (.4)
Mother's employment status at 9 months		
Part-time (1-29 hours per week)	4 (.4)***	4.3 (.4)***
Full-time (30+ hours per week) <i>Ref: Out of work</i>	4 (.6)***	3.5 (.6)***
Mother's occupational class¹		
Managerial or Professional	1.1 (.1)	1 (.1)
Intermediate	1 (.1)	1 (.1)
Small employers and self-employed <i>Ref: Lower supervisory and technical or Semi-routine/routine</i>	1.1 (.3)	1.1 (.3)
Mothers employment hours at 9 months X occupational class		
Part-time X Managerial or Professional	2 (.3)***	2.1 (.3)***
Part-time X Intermediate	1.6 (.3)**	1.5 (.3)**
Part-time X Small employers and self-employed	1.1 (.3)	1.1 (.4)
Full-time X Managerial or Professional	2.4 (.5)***	2.2 (.5)***
Full-time X Intermediate	1.4 (.3)	1.43 (.4)
Full-time X Small employers and self-employed <i>Ref: Out of work X Lower supervisory & technical / semi-routine-routine</i>	3.5 (1.6)*	3.9 (1.9)**
Mother attitude towards whether children suffer if the mother works before they start school¹	...at 9 months	...At age 3
Strongly disagree/disagree	1.8 (.1)***	3.6 (.3)***
Neither agree nor disagree <i>Ref: Strongly agree/ agree</i>	1.1 (.1)	1.3 (.1)**
Father attitudes towards whether children suffer if the mother works before they start school¹	...at 9 months	...At age 3
Strongly disagree/disagree	1.5 (.1)***	1.4 (.1)***
Neither agree nor disagree <i>Ref: Strongly agree/ agree</i>	1.2 (.1)**	1.1 (.1)

Source: MCS sweep 1 and 2 (weighted by the overall weight for sweep 1: bovw2)

¹ Recorded at 9 months

² The model controls for mother's employment status during pregnancy, household income, the number of other children in the household, the mother's age and the mother's ethnicity.