

Developments in Involved Fatherhood in Hungary: A Register Database Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates developments in involved fatherhood in Hungary. Drawing on the concepts of involved fatherhood and caring masculinities and recent findings on Hungarian caring fathering practices, the analysis employs multinomial logistic regression to examine Hungarian register data from 2011 and 2022. The dependent variable distinguishes between three categories: GYES (childcare allowance paid at a fixed rate), GYED Extra (childcare benefit combined with employment), and GYED Home (childcare benefit without a work commitment). Independent variables include educational attainment, marital status, regional context, employment type, and household status. A key contribution of this study was the emergence of a new group: fathers who interrupt their paid employment to care for their child, demonstrating the pluralisation of paternal roles. The sample shows that the norms of caring fatherhood have differentiated: In addition to the classical role of head of the family, there is more space for forms of care independent of work. The analysis revealed that this form of care has been spreading in Hungarian society independently of other contextual variables (region and educational attainment). These results underscore the interaction between institutional policies and evolving norms, highlighting the diversification of fatherhood models in contemporary Hungarian society.

Keywords

involved fatherhood; gender norms; parental care; parental leave; register data; social policy

1. Introduction

Since the second half of the twentieth century, increasingly emotion-based parenting practices have gained ground (Dermott, 2003), as the emotional bond between parents and children has become regarded as more

important. Compared to the figure of the emotionally distant, breadwinner father, a new image of fatherhood has become more prominent—a father who is emotionally connected to his children, cares for them, and spends increasing amounts of quality time with them. Regarding fatherhood practices, fathers' daily lives have become increasingly characterised by the provision of emotional support and care (Dermott, 2003; Drjenovszky & Sztáray Kézdy, 2025; Takács, 2020).

Some authors have drawn conceptual connections between hegemonic masculinity and the predominance of male breadwinners (Doucet, 2004; Thébaud, 2010), while others have suggested that fathers can express support for equal parenting while maintaining traditionally gendered patterns of division of labour (Doucet, 2004; Plantin et al., 2003). Others have argued that the figure of the father involved in childcare and childrearing neither supports nor challenges hegemonic masculinity and is, in fact, a new type of masculinity (Doucet, 2018).

To explore the Hungarian context of fatherhood, this article examines Hungarian fathers who take some form of parental leave. Given Hungary's traditional gender norms (Makay, 2018; Szalma, 2011) and its relatively long parental leave period, it is important to analyse the characteristics and changes in fathers' behaviour in choosing these benefits. Therefore, this study analyses data from the Hungarian register database for 2011 and 2022 to examine how fathers' behaviour regarding parental leave has evolved over time. The research aims of the article are (a) to identify Hungarian fathers based on the parental leave forms they take, (b) to identify, where applicable, the socio-demographic traits that define distinct groups of fathers, and (c) to assess how these traits have changed over the past decade.

2. Studies on Involved Fatherhood

Men's participation in childcare has increased in recent decades, as has their emotional investment in being good fathers, reflecting a shift toward a more nurturing form of fatherhood that involves active engagement in children's daily care (Doucet, 2004). These findings are based on time-use measurements (Gershuny & Sullivan, 2003) and research examining practices of fatherhood (Bianchi et al., 2006).

Interpretations of caring masculinity, which recognise it as a valuable and valid element of men's identity (Hanlon, 2012), have emphasised that men should become more emotionally available to their children. A new concept of intimate fatherhood (Dermott, 2003) emerged as intimacy and emotional closeness became key factors in the conceptualization of fatherhood practices.

On the other hand, Koslowski (2011) observed that a father's breadwinner role does not preclude active participation in childcare responsibilities. She emphasised that fathers who assume an active role in caregiving may be equally and simultaneously involved in paid labour and childcare. Considering the concepts of involved fatherhood and caring masculinity mentioned above, the following section outlines some characteristics of Hungarian fatherhood and its broader social contexts that may influence the behaviour of fathers who choose to take parental leave in Hungary. This includes the current social policy environment surrounding parental leave and gender norms that have shaped fatherhood over the last decade.

3. Recent Developments on Hungarian Fatherhood

Some Hungarian studies suggest (Makay & Spéder, 2018; Szalma, 2010) that Hungarian society has higher expectations of men to secure stable working conditions to fulfil their traditional role as the breadwinner in the household. Having children often propels men to strengthen their position in the labour market and develop their careers. Furthermore, employers may regard fathers with small children as committed and reliable employees (Szalma, 2011).

At the same time, Hungarian fathers are also often confronted with conflicting expectations regarding their primary responsibilities. As a survey has confirmed (Spéder, 2011), there is broad agreement among both men and women that men's most important task is to support their family financially and that being a father is one of life's most important and beautiful experiences (Spéder, 2011). According to the same survey, almost every fifth respondent stated that they would like to see fathers who are particularly family-oriented and who take an active part in childcare. Every fourth respondent considered a man who earns a substantial income and is career-oriented to be an ideal father type, while almost half of the respondents found these two aspects equally important (Spéder, 2011). In a subsequent study, the authors found that these trends had become even more pronounced in recent years (Makay & Spéder, 2018).

Similarly, a recent Hungarian longitudinal survey, which followed around $N = 8,000$ households from pregnancy to the postpartum period (Veroszta et al., 2022), also included responses from fathers: 63% of fathers thought that they could take care of their small child just as well as the mother, and only 7% believed that a father could not perform as well as a mother in this regard. This may be interpreted as a sign of a shift in Hungarian fathering values, as fathers increasingly see themselves as capable of fulfilling primary caregiver roles.

In recent years, several Hungarian studies have examined fatherhood in Hungary and the notion of caring, involved fathers (Drjenovszky & Sztáray Kézdy, 2025; Makay & Spéder, 2018; Takács, 2017, 2020; Sztáray Kézdy & Drjenovszky, 2023). Some focused on fathers who stayed at home with their child and received some parental leave benefits (Sztáray Kézdy & Drjenovszky, 2021a); others focused on attitudes towards paternal responsibilities (Makay & Spéder, 2018; Murinkó, 2014), while others dealt with paternal roles (Makay & Spéder, 2018; Takács, 2017, 2020) or looked at experiences with the healthcare system in relation to fathers' roles in the family (Neményi & Takács, 2008). Some recent articles focused on the well-being of partners and their division of childcare and parental roles (Sztáray Kézdy & Drjenovszky, 2021b, 2023). More attention has also been paid to paternal caring relationships (Sztáray Kézdy & Drjenovszky, 2021a), including the rejection of hegemonic masculinity and the development of a new image of the caring father who seeks a more profound and meaningful relationship with his child and envisions his relationship with his partner on egalitarian grounds.

In Hungary, Takács (2017, 2020) conducted studies focusing specifically on active, caring fatherhood and examining the relationship between changing social norms and fatherhood. The related interviews were conducted with fathers who regarded themselves as active caregivers. The narratives of these fathers mentioned different types and characteristics of care: physical presence, efforts to balance work and private life, and, most importantly, emotional closeness with their children. Regarding the traits of fathers in the past compared with their present-day counterparts, the increased presence of emotional care, closeness, and

intimacy with one's child (Dermott, 2003) constitutes the most significant difference (Takács, 2017). The mother's better position in the labour market relative to the father was identified as an advantage in terms of motivation for caring practices (Takács, 2017, 2020). In her analysis (Takács, 2017), she further explores the self-definition of fathers who actively care for their children and highlights that fathers define their role based on their memories of their fathers. Many also take a post-materialist approach to their role at home. Furthermore, in a subsequent analysis, Takács (2020) employs categories for narratives of caring Hungarian fathers to describe caregiving relationships in terms of caring father roles.

Sztáray Kézdy and Drjenovszky (2021a) identified fathers in the capital with higher levels of education who were willing to participate in their study. However, they also indicated that it was challenging to involve stay-at-home fathers with lower levels of education from small towns and villages (Sztáray Kézdy & Drjenovszky, 2021a). Later, they distinguished between two groups of Hungarian stay-at-home fathers in their study: Members of the first group did not choose this role—remaining at home was a necessity connected to employment circumstances, such as unemployment; members of the second group made a conscious decision (Doucet, 2004) as they wished to spend more quality time with their children and dedicate more time to childrearing (Sztáray Kézdy & Drjenovszky, 2021a).

In light of the above findings, this study aims to address the research gap regarding the number and characteristics of involved fathers in Hungary. The present study, therefore, examines fathers who chose to take some form of parental leave in 2011 and 2022.

4. The Contexts of Hungarian Fatherhood

4.1. The Hungarian Parental Leave Policy

In Hungary, there are several types of parental leave; some are tied to a parent's previous employment, while others are available to those with no work history. GYES (childcare allowance) is the low-income option paid at a fixed rate equal to the statutory minimum old-age pension, whereas GYED (childcare benefit) is equal to 70% of the applicant's previous earnings with an upper limit of twice the minimum wage (Makay, 2019; Makay et al., 2024). For GYED, the eligibility criterion is proof of 365 days of employment or self-employment within the two years preceding the application, and the benefit can be claimed until the child's second birthday (Herke & Szikra, 2024). In Hungary, all parents are entitled to financial support for the care of their children until they turn three. Both GYES and GYED are gender-neutral and can be claimed by either parent. Only one parent can apply for parental leave (for either the childcare allowance or the childcare benefit) at a time. Those who receive GYED, once it ends on the child's second birthday, may receive GYES until the child turns three. The GYED Extra package, introduced in 2014, allowed work without limitation after one year, and from 2016, after six months.

However, paternal caregiving remains less common in Hungary than in Nordic countries, where a specific type of parental leave is available only to fathers—the so-called “father month” or “father quota”—intended to incentivise fathers' participation in childrearing and caregiving (Duvander & Fahlén, 2025). In Scandinavian countries, it has been shown that the greater the state's compensation of parents' income during parental leave, the more likely fathers are to stay home with their child or to stay home for longer periods despite the loss of income from work. This is because men, who are usually the higher earners, cannot afford to take

longer parental leave, as this would lead to a significant drop in net household income (Duvander et al., 2022; Haas & Rostgaard, 2011).

According to the 2011 census data, 2.27% of parental leave was taken by fathers prior to the launch of GYED Extra; in 2022, their proportion was 7.21%. If we examine the fathers taking parental leave in relation to changes in the types of leave available in recent decades, we find that most growth (proportionally speaking) in leave-taking occurred with the childcare benefit. The number of fathers rose from 5.31% to 8.05% (Hungarian Statistical Office). The most significant factor in this substantial growth was the policy change in 2014, followed by another change in 2016, which made it possible to claim this benefit without any limit on working hours. This provides an example of how policies affect parents' decision-making processes. In this case, the behavioural patterns of parents who receive parental leave benefits while still working are more likely to be rooted in rational calculations about maximising household income, insofar as the father's salary is likely to be higher.

4.2. Perceptions on Hungarian Parental Roles

According to several international surveys, as well as surveys focusing on Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary is among the more conservative countries concerning perceptions of gender roles (Makay, 2018; Spéder, 2023; Szalma, 2014; Takács, 2008; Tóth, 1995). As shown in a previous study (Szalma & Takács, 2013), the global economic crisis shifted the population's perceptions of women's position in the labour market in a more egalitarian direction, and the same can be said for both men and women regarding perceptions of gender roles. A subsequent study based on the ESS survey from 2010 showed that men's perceptions of gender roles returned to the earlier, traditional level, while women's perceptions lagged behind, resulting in a growing gap between men's and women's perceptions of gender roles (Gregor, 2014).

Spéder (2023) used a decompositional method to examine the international survey database, ISSP over 25 years (1988–2013). This approach enabled the measurement of macro- and micro-level changes in Hungarian society related to gender and parenting roles. He found that at the micro level, there has been a liberal transition and a behavioural shift regarding cohabitation patterns and attitudes towards marriage. At the macro, or societal level, Spéder (2023) found that Hungarian society has undergone a process of retraditionalization in recent years. This indicates a discrepancy between individual and societal values regarding gender and parenting norms.

Overall, international data indicate that support for traditional parenting roles remains prevalent in Hungary (Makay & Spéder, 2018; Spéder, 2023; Szalma, 2011; Tóth, 1995). However, some economic and socio-political events may have shifted attitudes towards more egalitarian parenting roles (Szalma & Takács, 2013). Taken together, these findings highlight how institutional settings can reinforce or weaken traditional gender roles, as well as conceptions of motherhood and fatherhood.

5. Data and Methods

This study analyses data from the 2011 and 2022 Hungarian censuses to examine changes in fathers' uptake of parental leave over the past decade. The primary aim was to assess the shifting distribution of parental leave types among fathers and to explore their associated socio-demographic characteristics in 2011 and

2022. The datasets used for this analysis were provided by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH). Fathers identified as taking parental leave were classified based on the economic activity variable in the respective census databases. Males recorded as receiving either “parental leave allowance” or “parental leave benefit” were included in the analysis. Following prior literature (Doucet, 2009), fathers who combined part-time employment with parental leave were also considered, reflecting the dual roles of caregiving and labour market participation.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics fathers exhibit across the diverse categories of parental leave, a subsequent analysis was conducted. This analysis examined the socio-demographic characteristics of these fathers. To this end, a multinomial logistic regression was employed for both datasets for each year. Subsequently, the model's marginal effects were analysed, as these indicate the predicted probability of belonging to a category.

During the analysis, multinomial logistic regression models were run for each year, and marginal effects were analysed using separate interaction analyses for all independent variables. This subsequent analysis examined how factors such as marital status, place of residence, labour market type, household status, and educational attainment influence fathers' decisions to take parental leave across different groups in 2011 and 2022. Regions were classified into two categories, advantaged and disadvantaged, based on the NUTS 3 regional division and unemployment rates. To account for the low number of fathers on leave in some areas, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Counties were grouped as disadvantaged regions, while Budapest and Pest County were classified as advantaged regions.

Regarding the 2011 database, two categories were available for consideration: “fathers not working” and “fathers working.” The former category comprised fathers who did not work during their parental leave, whereas the latter comprised fathers who continued to work. Regarding the 2022 database, three categories were available: fathers on parental leave with no prior employment history, defined as lacking 365 days of employment (or 128 days of self-employment) within the two years preceding the application (GYES), fathers on parental leave while working (GYED Extra), and fathers on parental leave receiving GYED, while not working at the time (GYED Home).

6. Results

The analysis of data on fathers who chose a form of parental leave in 2011 and 2022 (Table 1) shows not only changes in the number of fathers taking leave but also shifts in the types of leave selected. A notable change in parental leave patterns occurred from 2011 to 2022: In 2011, the most common type of parental leave was GYES, which applies to fathers with no prior work history in the previous two years. At that time, GYES was the most common form of parental leave among fathers, accounting for 85.29% of all parental leave types. This percentage dropped to 12.24% in 2022.

By 2022, there was a significant increase in fathers selecting GYED Extra. After the introduction of the GYED Extra package, the number of fathers choosing this leave type rose sharply. Initially, only 13.62% of fathers opted to work while on parental leave. By 2022, that number had risen to 81.33%, indicating a major shift in paternal leave-taking norms. This result reflects a notable shift in the sociodemographic characteristics of fathers on parental leave. For example, fewer fathers were taking leave without recent work experience.

At the same time, more fathers were choosing to take leave while continuing to work, perhaps indicating considerations related to household income rather than a strong commitment to caregiving roles.

A significant shift was also observed in parental leave use, with fathers choosing GYED while not engaged in paid employment. The term “GYED Home” will be used in the following analysis to refer to this group, which consists of fathers taking a leave of absence from the labour market to care for their children. Therefore, these fathers may be categorized as a new form of fatherhood, referred to as “involved fatherhood.” This change is illustrated by the fact that while 1.08% of fathers took some form of leave to care for their children in 2011, this figure rose to 6.43% in 2022. This indicates that the idea of involved fatherhood has gained recognition, with a notable increase from 63 to 1,406 fathers over the past decade.

In subsequent stages of the analysis, the decision was made to exclude the GYED Home category from the 2011 study. This choice was driven by the fact that the number of fathers in this category was only 63, which compromised the model’s reliability.

Table 1. Number and proportion of fathers on parental leave per type in 2011 and 2022.

Year	GYES	%	GYED and working	%	GYED Home	%	Total	%
2011	4 969	85,29	794	13,62	63	1,08	5 826	100%
2022	2 676	12,24	17 782	81,33	1 406	6,43	21 864	100%

In 2011, marginal effects indicated that non-working parental leave was predominant across all family statuses (Figure 1). The proportion of working fathers was low. In 2022, the probability of married fathers receiving GYED Extra (benefits while working) was remarkably high (88%). Among unmarried fathers, GYES (31.1%) exhibited a relatively high marginal effect compared to other marital categories. In comparison, GYED Home emerged as a new category with a relatively low rate of 7.7% among unmarried fathers; however, the probability of taking GYED Home was higher among widowed fathers (14.2%).

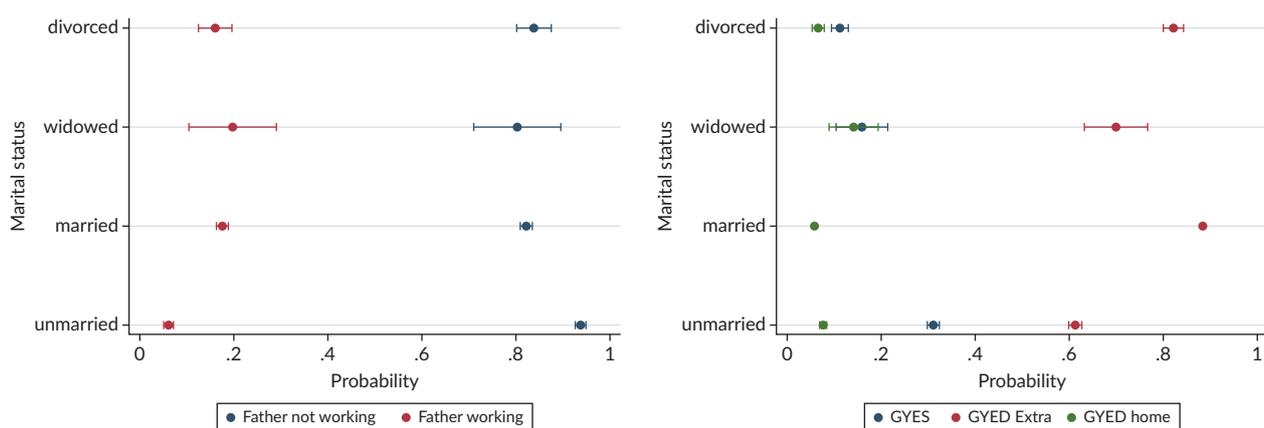


Figure 1. Marginal effects of fathers on parental leave and the variable marital status in 2011 and 2022. Note: The results for 2011 are on the left and results for 2022 are on the right.

A subsequent analysis of fathers’ choice of parental leave categories by educational attainment reveals a slope already visible in 2011, based on marginal effects, indicating that the higher the fathers’ educational attainment, the more likely they were to choose parental leave while working (Figure 2). Among fathers with

low levels of education, the “not working” category was the most prevalent for parental leave, with 97% of those with a primary education choosing this option. Among those with secondary education (78.3%), the proportion who withdrew from work decreased gradually. Among those with higher education, the proportion of care combined with work was the highest (27.3%); thus, fathers with higher levels of education were more likely to opt for the “father working” category.

In 2022, the distinction between forms of care became even more pronounced. Among fathers with low educational attainment, the proportion of taking GYES was higher than in other educational categories (26.0%). In comparison, GYED Home remained even across categories (10.7%). Among fathers with higher education, GYED Extra was the predominant option (93.1%), while the rates of GYES and GYED Home remained negligible (2.7% and 4.1%, respectively). In groups with secondary education (vocational school or secondary school), GYED Extra was predominant (73% and 88%), while GYES remained at 6% and 20%.

Overall, GYED Extra was a prevalent choice among fathers with higher levels of education. At the same time, those with lower levels of education were more likely to choose GYES than those in other educational categories, indicating a relationship with labour market outcomes. The stratification by educational attainment remained pronounced, reflecting differences in employment status and labour market opportunities.

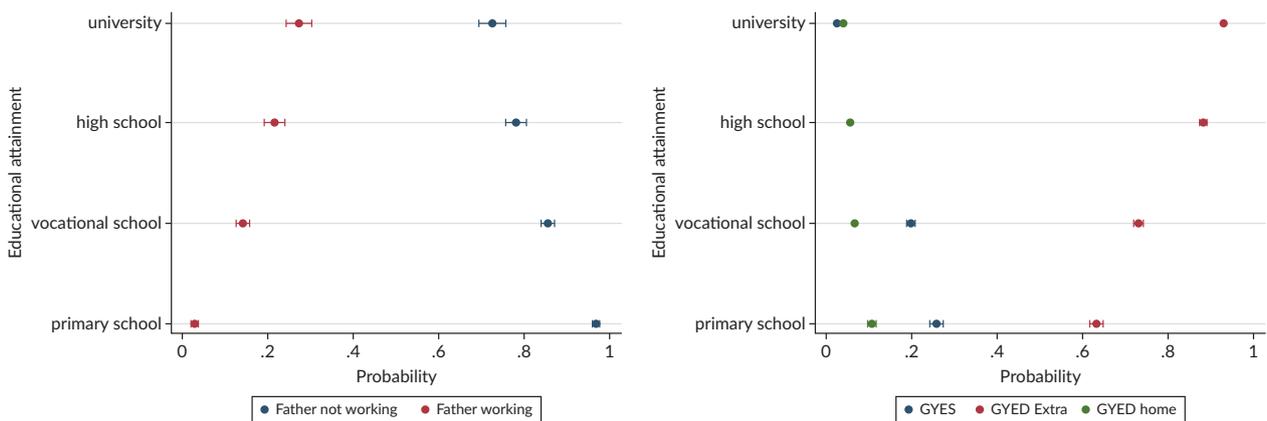


Figure 2. Marginal effects of fathers on parental leave and the variable educational attainment in 2011 and 2022. Note: The results for 2011 are on the left and results for 2022 are on the right.

An analysis of regional distributions reveals that in 2011, parental leave was predominantly associated with withdrawal from employment, particularly among fathers residing in disadvantaged regions (Figure 3). In advanced regions, the proportion of non-working fathers was 81.7%, while that of working fathers was 18.3%. In economically disadvantaged regions, the proportion of non-working fathers was significantly higher, at 92.5%, while only 7.5% were employed. This discrepancy may indicate the influence of local labour-market conditions, unemployment, and institutional or economic disadvantages on fathers’ decisions. This result necessitates further investigation, ideally supplemented by qualitative interviews in future research.

By 2022, the distribution of parental leave forms had become more differentiated, but regional differences remained. In advanced regions, GYED Extra was the most prevalent (83.2%), while GYED Home was less common (6.4%). In economically disadvantaged regions, the proportion of GYED Extra (76.8%) declined, while the selection of GYES has increased from 10% to 16.2%.

This pattern suggests that in regions with greater economic resources, benefits combined with employment (GYED Extra) were more widespread. In contrast, in disadvantaged areas, the choice of GYES (childcare allowance paid at a fixed rate), which is independent of work, remained higher. Overall, regional disparities persisted, although they diminished over the past decade.

A further finding is that in 2022, the new GYED Home category showed similar proportions in both advanced and disadvantaged regions (6–7%), suggesting that this new form of care has spread regardless of regional differences among fathers.

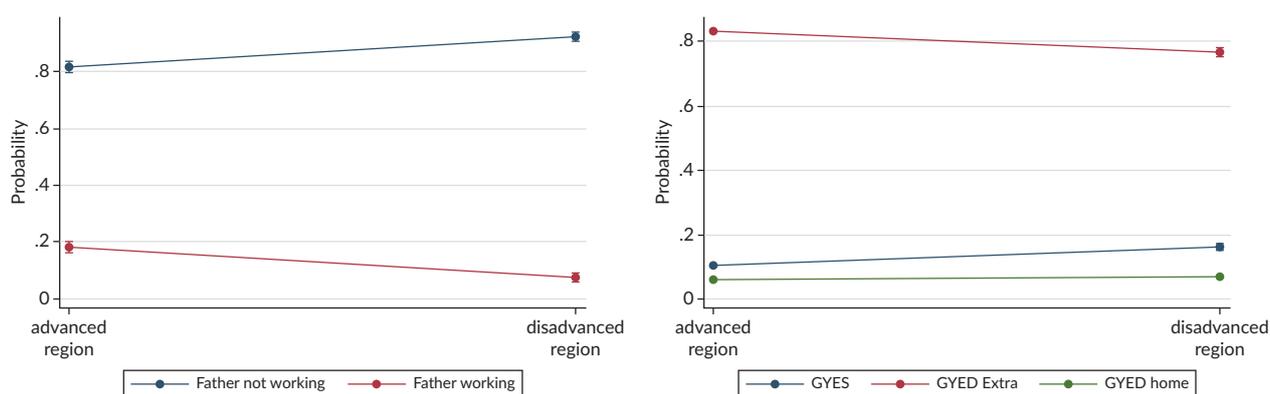


Figure 3. Marginal effects of fathers on parental leave and the variable region in 2011 and 2022. Note: The results for 2011 are on the left and results for 2022 are on the right.

Based on marginal effects, household status also played a significant role in fathers' decisions to take parental leave (Figure 4). In 2011, childcare alongside work was less common across all household statuses: among head-of-household fathers, the vast majority of care was not accompanied by work (86.1%), and among spouses of the head of household, the rate of complete withdrawal from work was even higher (90.9%). In the son-of-the-head-of-household category, almost all care was provided without work (94.6%). The proportion of non-working fathers was similarly high among other persons living with the head of household (85.4%). Among ascending relatives, parental leave without employment was practically 100%. This homogeneous pattern shows that in 2011, caregiving was strongly linked to withdrawal from the labour market.

By 2022, marked differences emerged by household status. Among head-of-household fathers, GYED Extra was dominant (88.3%), indicating a more traditional fatherhood role. The proportion of GYES was low (5.1%), and GYED Home was moderate (6.6%). Almost all fathers in the husband-of-the-head-of-household category were on GYES (99.5%), suggesting that the mother may be the household's breadwinner. A similar pattern was found among spouses of the head of household: the proportion of GYED Extra was low (6.2%), while GYES was exceptionally high (87.9%).

In the son-of-the-head-of-household category, the proportion of fathers receiving GYES was also high (65.4%), while the proportion receiving GYED Extra was lower (31%), and GYED Home was marginal. Among other persons living with the head of household, GYED Extra was dominant (81%), although GYES was also present (11.2%).

It can be concluded that in the spouse-of-the-head-of-household and husband-of-the-head-of-household categories, the proportion of fathers choosing GYES remained exceptionally high. This suggests that labour-market phenomena can influence not only the uptake of parental leave but also gender-role arrangements within households.

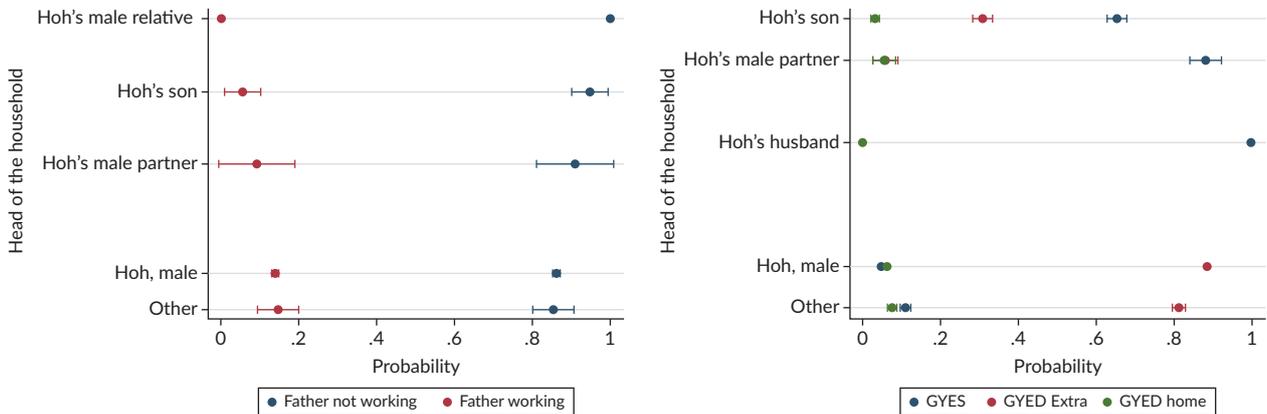


Figure 4. Marginal effects of fathers on parental leave and the variable head of the household in 2011 and 2022. Note: The results for 2011 are on the left and results for 2022 are on the right.

Marginal effects also indicate that labour-market type may influence parental leave arrangements (Figure 5). In 2011, parental leave was predominantly associated with complete withdrawal from employment, except for a few specific occupations: in the public work category, it meant almost complete withdrawal from work (99.8%). In the entrepreneur and casual worker groups, the proportion of parental leave taken while continuing to work was relatively higher (23–24%). The presence of working fathers was also measurable among employees (15%), but non-working fathers continued to dominate.

In 2022, differences according to labour market type became much more pronounced: GYED Extra dominated among employees (88.3%). In the public work group, the proportion of GYES remained higher than in other labour-market types (34.9%). Among contributing family members, GYED Home reached a high rate (36.7%), indicating that this group is particularly likely to choose full-time care without working. Further analysis is needed to explore this result. The high proportion of GYES among casual workers (18.2%)

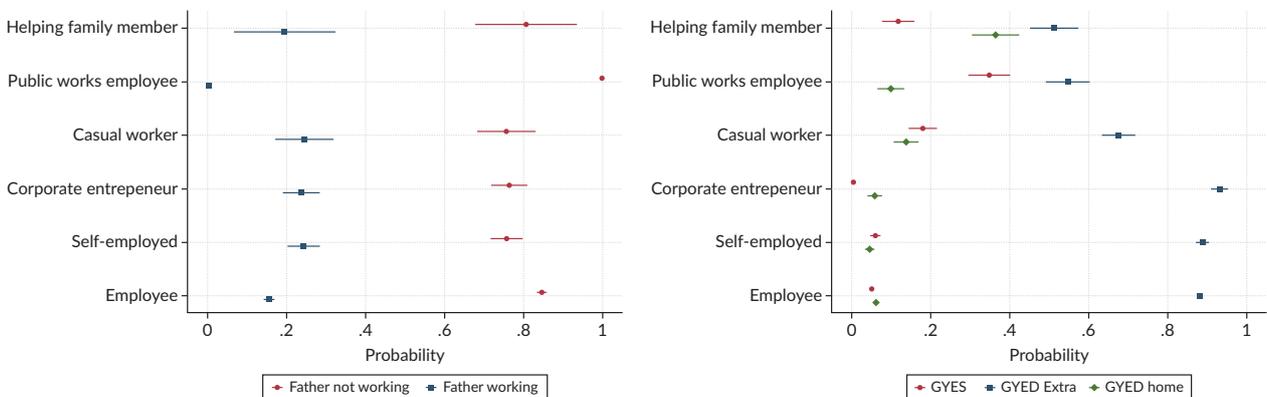


Figure 5. Marginal effects of fathers on parental leave and the variable employment type in 2011 and 2022. Note: The results for 2011 are on the left and results for 2022 are on the right.

suggests that this may not reflect a preference for GYES, but rather that some were ineligible for GYED (70% of previous earnings, capped at twice the minimum wage) as they could not prove 365 days of employment (or 128 days of self-employment) within the two years preceding their application.

Overall, the results demonstrate that labour market type continued to have a significant impact on the distribution of parental leave categories among fathers.

7. Discussion

This study employed multinomial logistic regression on Hungarian register data from 2011 and 2022 to analyse a marked reconfiguration of paternal leave-taking in Hungary. In 2011, the majority of fathers accessed parental allowance, GYES, often within households where mothers assumed the breadwinner role, as low-educated fathers were excluded from the labour market. This indicated an erosion of the traditional male-breadwinner norm in Hungary, leading to changes within these households in a rather traditional society (Szalma, 2011; Szalma & Takács, 2013). The proportion of fathers on GYES among all fathers on parental leave declined from 85% to 12% by 2022; however, the characteristics of these households remained consistent, with breadwinner mothers and fathers excluded from the labour market remaining a stable pattern.

By 2022, after the introduction of GYED Extra (which combines benefits with paid employment), the uptake had surged to over 80% among all fathers on parental leave. Among fathers with higher education, GYED Extra became the predominant option (93.1%), and they were very likely to be head-of-household fathers (88.3%), indicating the dominance of a more traditional fatherhood role. This finding also reinforces the suggestion that GYED Extra was not typically based on involved fathering practices, with childcare responsibilities most likely falling upon the mother.

However, the most striking development in fathers' parental leave uptake was the emergence of the GYED Home group, comprising fathers who interrupt paid employment to provide full-time care for their children and to be involved in their early development. Their proportion among all fathers taking parental leave rose from 1% in 2011 to 6% in 2022. Another finding related to the new, emerging group of fathers—GYED Home—is that similar proportions of fathers opted for this kind of parental leave in both advanced and disadvantaged regions (6–7%), suggesting that this new form of care spread regardless of regional differences among fathers. This phenomenon is significant, as the emergence of involved fatherhood represents an ongoing process in most post-socialist countries (Suwada, 2015).

These findings align with international studies examining caring masculinities (Doucet, 2004; Hanlon, 2012). The results of this study demonstrate that in Hungary, a new form of fatherhood is emerging, characterised by fathers' willingness to temporarily postpone labour-market participation in their child's early childhood to be involved in their children's care and daily lives (Sztáray Kézdy & Drjenovszky, 2021a; Takács, 2020). This phenomenon can be interpreted as reflecting a shift towards pluralised models of fatherhood (Plantin et al., 2003).

In contrast, the rapid expansion of GYED Extra seems to be driven less by egalitarian motives and more by the rational maximisation of household resources. Overall, while the increased uptake of GYED Extra underscores

ongoing economic considerations, the emergence of the involved fatherhood group indicates the weakening of the male breadwinner ideal. Furthermore, the rise of involved fathers marks a substantial shift towards the pluralisation of fathering norms in Hungary.

8. Conclusion

The present study contributes by using comprehensive register data to document the quantitative expansion of paternal leave in Hungary. Whereas previous research has focused mainly on qualitative samples (Sztáray Kézdy & Drjenovszky, 2021a, 2023; Takács, 2017, 2020), this analysis demonstrates, at the micro level, that fathers are increasingly willing to interrupt paid employment to assume involved, full-time caregiving—a form of involved fatherhood. This finding extends Doucet's (2004) framework of caring masculinities by identifying a category of fathers emerging in Hungarian society, independent of contextual variables (such as regional differences and educational attainment).

In analysing the databases, another process was identified, demonstrating changes in parental leave uptake behaviour at the macro level, as observed in previous studies (Spéder, 2023). Following the introduction of GYED Extra in 2014, the number of fathers taking parental leave while continuing to work increased significantly. This suggests that these fathers prioritised the economic advantage of this benefit, aiming to maximise household income rather than taking on a more active fathering role. With this shift at the macro level, a new form of retraditionalisation (Spéder, 2023) has emerged alongside the continuation of traditional male breadwinner models (Makay, 2018), as evidenced by the uptake of the GYED Extra benefit.

A comparison of the two databases suggests that by 2022, new patterns of paternal roles had emerged (Doucet, 2004). The data also reflect a diversification of caring roles, with paternal roles becoming more varied and traditional patterns being replaced by new forms of caregiving (Sztáray Kézdy & Drjenovszky, 2021a; Takács, 2017, 2020). This pluralisation signifies a shift in the norms of caring fatherhood (Hanlon, 2012), which has become less dependent on traditional family statuses and offers men a range of socially accepted role models. The emergence of more involved fatherhood in Hungary demonstrates that the intensity and nature of care are becoming more diverse, representing an important step towards rebalancing role expectations between parents.

Future research should incorporate qualitative interviews, building on the findings of Takács (2017, 2020) and Drjenovszky and Sztáray Kézdy (2025). This approach would facilitate the exploration of the motivations and lived experiences that underpin these divergent trajectories. Additionally, it would enable an evaluation of their long-term implications for child development and couple well-being.

As a policy recommendation, the study's results indicate that eliminating work-hour restrictions under GYED Extra has not in itself promoted egalitarian caregiving. Economic rationality remains the dominant driver of mixed work-and-leave uptake. In order to establish authentic father-caregiver parity, a non-transferable "father quota" should be introduced. Setting a limit on working hours would also help to promote more involved fatherhood among those accessing GYED Extra. This should be complemented by outreach initiatives and employer incentives designed to normalise full-time paternal leave. Such measures, when combined with public campaigns, could build on the emergent pluralisation documented here and support more equitable family outcomes.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

This article has been prepared using datasets from the KSH, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2011 and 2022 Censuses). The calculations contained in this document and the conclusions drawn from them are the sole intellectual property of the author, Júlia Galántai. The study used the following databases: Census 2011, 2022. The analysis was prepared by the author after access to the databases in the KSH-KRTK research room. The dataset in its current form is not publicly available.

LLMs Disclosure

The author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to review the manuscript for grammar and style. ChatGPT was used exclusively for language editing and not for any other aspect of the manuscript.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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