



European Commission

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“Work life balance”

FOCUS GROUP – HÄSSELBY-VÄLLINGBY (SWEDEN)

July 20, 2007. In the afternoon from 17.30 to 20.00.

Present at meeting: 6 participating fathers. Born between 1940 and 1976

Group leader: Mr Patrik Edgren of Jämo

Secretaries: Rosmari Ljunglöf (senior social worker) and Johanna Krigström.

Translation to English: Peter Forslund

Sandwiches, light beer, fruit, coffee and tea were served at the meeting with the group.

Four out of six participants have been interviewed (the individual interview).

1.a. Paternity leave:

Did you use your right to paternity leave when your child was born?

One participant (b. 1940) says that he did not have this legal right when his kids were small. The others have been on parental leave in various degrees between 3 weeks and 16 months. Two of the participants went on parental leave in connection with vacation.

One of the participants says that he would probably have spent more time on parental leave if he had been a public servant (working for the municipality) when his kids were small.

1.b. Do you think paternity leave is a good answer to the growing desire of fathers to take an active part in the infant’s education and care?

Most of participants answer “yes”. But there are different opinions about the impact of work life balance among dads in our focus group. What is most important: The amount of time dads spend with (little) kids or the “quality” of the time. Different voices in the group:

- “Working dads can spend evenings and weekends together with kids. The amount of time is less important. Quality and presence is more important.”
- “It is important for dads to be with their little infants.” “No, infants need their mothers more than the fathers.”
- “More equal split of parental leave is good for man and woman. It reduces the risk for future divorce.
- “My own father was more of a kind of second parent.”

2. Discourse of gender equality at home:

Most fathers express their wish to reach an equal sharing of education tasks. How do you manage to bring about this balance concretely?

All participants think that they have shared the responsibility of raising the kids with the mothers. However, the balance varies over time.

The split is usually unequal = mothers/women take a greater share of responsibility at home.

One of the participants thinks his wife (the mother) has closer relation with their son and vice versa he (the father) is closer to the daughter.

3. Factors of change:

It is clear that fatherhood has evolved a great deal for the past decades. Do you think these changes have been brought up by necessity (such as the rise in divorces, new forms of employment), or by changes in fathers' consciousnesses? Do you think policies play any part in bringing about changes in fathers' attitudes and behaviours?

The change ("the new man") is a result of a number of different reasons including:

- women's lib
 - a new different role of men and women in public life
 - new legislation,
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- "The increased number of women at the labour market has had an impact on the new daddy role."
 - "Legislation is less important than attitudes and new values"
 - "I am absolutely sure about the importance of legislation. Thank you legislation for the emancipation of men."
 - "Dads' and men's roles used to be clearer in the past."

4.a. WLB:

Having an understanding supervisor seems to be important to reach a good organization between working activities and family duties. How can you explain that some supervisors are more understanding than others? Does it depend on the company's size, sector, on the responsibilities placed on the father's shoulders in his job?

If your superior (boss) is a parent herself (himself) she (he) is often more understanding (tolerant) to her employee's parenthood.

Superiors and colleagues are more inclined to accept parental leave if the place of work, company, office etc has an elaborated policy programme.

"Equality" and "paternity leave" are on the agenda in many companies. Slowly the attitude is changing. New values, structures, norms and standards are on its way.

- "There is a change going on among construction workers. Skilled workers are more into paternity leave than unskilled."

4.b. What a can company do to facilitate for there male employees (fathers). Suggestions from members in the focus group.

- The parental benefit is an allowance from the government to the individual parent on leave. (Covering maximum 80% of salary.) Suggestion: A concerned employer should pay the remaining 20% (or at least part of that money).
- In Sweden pre schools are usually located to residential areas, close to where people live. Suggestion: Locate pre school to offices, factories (=where people work)
- Since 1974 fathers and mothers have had equal access to paternity leave. Still fathers only take out 20 % of the parent days. Fathers (relatively) low activity is constantly debated. What can make more men eager to take advantage of the parental benefit. Suggestion: The parliament should change the law to force fathers to make an equal fifty-fifty split with the mothers.
- Suggestion: Local programmes for equality on all places of work. “A progressive attitude on parenting” can be a way for the company to market itself as an attractive employer.
- Suggestion: More flexibility: Flexible work hours. Possibilities to work at home.

5. Do you think you can rely on your relatives in order to help you manage tight situations of conciliation, such as sick children and no possibility to get a leave this day?

Sometimes you (as a father) can't stay at home with your sick kids (due to work situation). Then grand parents are great. The support from other parents are less common in these situations (taking care if kids are sick). Parents seem to be more keen on helping each other when it comes to kids afternoon and evening activities (sport etc).

One of the participants is a very active and supportive grand father.

- “It is important that infants develop good ties with the extended family already from the begining.”

6. Did you ever have a bad experience with an institution (school, hospital, etc.) which was not father-friendly? How did you manage this situation?

One participant, born in the 50s, experienced lack of respect from the staff at a local public health centre. He, as a father, felt criticized. “They would not make that kind of comments to me if I had been a mother.

One of the younger participants thinks that the health centre is very pro-daddy.

One participant thinks that he, as a man, experienced arrogance at the health centre.

However, generally fathers with little babies are treated well.

7. Demand on parents of today. Who is perfect?

From the participants:

Demands from women (as a whole) lead to

- More equal men
- More concerned men

- Shared responsibility between women and men

Good self confidence makes men more equal.

Example: If you are an unskilled construction worker you need a lot more of self confidence to stay at home and take care of your babies, than if you are a male social worker.

- Split household work between man and wife.
- Make friends and work together with other parents
- Try to reduce the children's various activities like sport, hobbies etc
- Don't put too much pressure on yourself as a parent.