

# Conclusions

*Isabella Crespi and Elisabetta Ruspini*

As written in the introduction to this book, the aim of this volume was to provide a roadmap through the challenges posed by men's changes, changing fatherhood models, and fathers' work-family life balance in contemporary societies. The main questions addressed in this book are the following: how are contemporary fathers handling this work-life balance today? What specific cultural factors influence work-life balance for contemporary fathers? Do existing institutional practices support fathers in their balancing between work and life? Why are fathers very often left out of the work-life balance debate? By using different methodological strategies, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, the chapters have explored tensions and opportunities at the intersection of the three aspects: fatherhood, family, and working life. The book also intended to discuss the social issues (but also tensions) associated with changing male and father identities and with the existing social and policy agendas. Another aim was to give more insight into the way institutional arrangements form various opportunity structures for fathering; and to understand how changes in the welfare state policies in the recent years have influenced the realities of fathering.

We will now try to sum up the main results and recommendations that have emerged from the 12 chapters that draw upon the work by leading scholars in the work/family field from a number of different countries (Austria, Canada, Italy, Germany, Japan, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States).

- First, as the chapter by Rudy Seward and Michael Rush well explains, there is a need to locate fathering and the social institution of fatherhood within complex cultural frameworks. The need is to reach a global view on fathering patterns and

to achieve a comprehensive understanding of fatherhood and fathering, including the challenges to balance work and family. This requires, on the one hand, a consideration on the multiple cultural levels within societies and between societies including supracultures. On the other hand, it requires embracing multidisciplinary perspectives, ranging from sociology to psychology, gender studies, and comparative social policy, in order to focus on the way culture and institutions combine to shape family, gender, and intergenerational relations. There is also a need to contextualize gender change and the production and reproduction of gender inequalities and stereotypes. Previous cross-cultural research (Crompton et al., 2007) has found that countries differ, for example, in beliefs about appropriate roles and behavior for men and women. In some countries, men and women occupy highly differentiated roles based on biological sex, such as male breadwinners and female caregivers/homemakers, whereas in other countries men and women occupy more similar or overlapping social roles. National gender equality is related to work and family issues because traditional expectations that women will be responsible for their children can be a significant barrier to women's employment opportunities. The legacy of (patriarchal) gendered arrangements and roles is not suddenly forgotten when new demands or policies are introduced, but echoes of past ways of doing things are being gradually eroded. This point is related in particular to how ideas and conceptualizations of "choice" and "preferences," as examined for example in Hakim's (2002) contested theorizations, can be understood and operationalized. These do not occur in a vacuum and contexts (national, historical, and cultural) must be considered to see what apparent "choice" might actually mean in a particular context. Work-family measures aiming to improve fathers' participation in different countries are the outcome of different histories and social policies that take into account aspects related to work, gender roles, family models, and different welfare strategies (Petroski and Edley, 2006; Rehel, 2014). The national context is relevant to work-family issues because employees' work-family balance can be facilitated and supported by national policies and programs. National gender equality reflects a society's support for women's development and achievements, and recognition of the importance of including women in all aspects of life, as well as changes, which are occurring gradually in men's lives

too. Nevertheless, there are of course national variations in relation to how roles and associated responsibilities are regarded, resulting from different cultural contexts and political histories. However, concerns about the national levels of understandings around gender equality remain pertinent because, in relation to work and family issues, traditional expectations about women being primarily or solely responsible for their children can be a significant barrier to women's employment opportunities and to the involvement of men in gender equality.

- Second, care work becomes a significant social field for the construction of masculinity, and women's competence advantage in family work is questioned (chapters by Andrea Doucet and Diana Lengensdorf and Michael Meuser). However, fathers' involvement may significantly vary across cultures and generations. For example, the chapter by Tomoko Matsuda, Saori Kamano, Mieko Takahashi, Setsuko Onode, and Kyoko Yoshizumi differentiates three patterns of fathers' involvement in Japan: low involvement, medium involvement, and high involvement. The authors were also able to identify several factors that related to the ways in which fathers are more or less involved with their children. Fathers with long working hours, a conventional gender attitude, and closed negotiation with the partner were the least involved in rearing children. Moreover, the increased participation of fathers in childcare does not necessarily question the feminine connotation of care. A second example. The chapter by Małgorzata Sikorska shows that, in Poland, the involvement of fathers is blocked by both the public perception of the roles of the mother and father (which refers primarily to the traditional division of duties), as well as by the behavior of mothers—"gatekeepers," and also by structural factors: the situation of women in the labor market, an insufficient number of places in institutions caring for young children, and the unstable rules of social policies concerning the family (see also Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008).
- Third, the general state of gender equality, as well as of the family policy, has a large impact on men's choices regarding care involvement in the family. Family leave regulations, working time regulations, tax systems, and institutionalized childcare systems support men's share of care, and foster gender equality divisions of labor. If this support is lacking and if in reality the state or the economy still favors unequal family arrangements, gender-equal

change will be delayed and progress will be more costly for the individual, for the family, and for the society as a whole. A policy to involve men in care should be developed, together with a policy to ensure parity or gender balance in economic and political top positions and redress imbalances that contribute not only to the discrimination of women in public life but also to the persistent lack of gender balance in the family sphere (see Scambor et al., 2012, for details). Such policies could have also a number of positive side-effects: an increase of one's own life satisfaction and well-being for fathers, a reduction of mother's stress and strain, a positive effect on children's well-being (Hughes and Bozionelos, 2007; Tanturri and Ruspini, 2015). We should not forget that in the Beijing Declaration, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, governments expressed their determination to encourage men to contribute fully to gender equality. The Platform for Action emphasized the principle of shared power and responsibility between women and men at home, in the workplace, and in the wider national and international communities. It stressed that gender equality could only be achieved by both men and women.

- Fourth, there is unfortunately great heterogeneity in welfare regulations for men and fathers (see the chapters by Andrea Doucet; Piotr Teisseyre; Lluís Flaquer, Almudena Moreno Mínguez, and Tomás Cano López; Colette Fagan and Helen Norman; Nadja Bergmann and Helene Schiffbänker; Maria Letizia Bosoni, Isabella Crespi, and Elisabetta Ruspini; and Katarzyna Suwada). Parental and paternity leave schemes vary greatly across Europe and beyond, and some types of reforms have a more positive effect than others. In some countries, such as Italy, the social construction of paternity is the story of absence of fathers from family policy. Italian legislation has dealt very little with paternity and support to the fathers' care functions. In other countries, such as the United Kingdom, a state policy has only recently been introduced, targeted at increasing father's involvement in childcare. In 2003, employed fathers gained a statutory right to paternity leave, consisting of two consecutive weeks of leave after the child's birth, paid at the same low flat rate as statutory maternity leave. In 2011, Additional Paternity Leave (APL) was introduced, giving fathers the opportunity to take 26 more weeks of leave (including 19 weeks paid at the statutory rate) provided that the mother shortened her maternity leave. This was replaced in April 2015 with a more generous system

of Shared Parental Leave (SPL), which allows eligible parents to share 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of statutory pay more flexibly in blocks of 1 week or more interspersed during the periods of work. The Swedish welfare state shows a strong pro-fatherhood family policy. There are special incentives to enhance men to take long parental leaves and engage in care work. The state assists in care work to allow parents to come back to work 1 year after the birth of a child, by providing access to public childcare institutions for all children aged over 1 year.

- Fifth, work-life imbalance incurs tangible costs to both men and women, society, and organizations (chapter by Anna-Lena Almqvist and Gayle Kaufman). Hence, organizations need to establish human resource systems to deal with it. A change in workplace culture is needed, so that active fatherhood is accepted and the prevalence of long working hours reduced (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003). Excessive working hours reduce satisfaction with work-family balance and fathers' involvement with children. Pertinent legislation may need to be developed and enacted. It may be appropriate to consider employment legislation too; as the work-life imbalance may seriously decrease the quality of life and compromise the job performance of workers.
- A final consideration. An informed public debate is needed about the ways fathers balance their economic responsibilities and other commitments related to children and partners. Thus, in order to understand the challenges and opportunities offered by changing fathers and fatherhoods, there is a need to implement research on fathers to produce adequate data about them—nowadays extremely fragmented or even nonexistent—by combining different methodological approaches. This would show the difficulties and/or the resistance of different typologies of men in fully assuming the role of the fathers, and it would also allow to design and implement measures to effectively support fatherhood.

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