



Government
Equalities Office



THE
BEHAVIOURAL
INSIGHTS
TEAM

Increasing men's involvement in parental care

Research report

June 2021

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Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the roles that the following individuals had in this report:

- Philippa Ward at the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) for implementing the trial.
- Abigail Wood and Sanjima De Zoysa at NCT for setting up the project.
- Natalia Shakhina at the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) for writing up the trial into this report.
- Larisa Riedijk and Belle Derks at Utrecht University for supporting with the survey design.
- Tiina Likki, Jessica Barnes, James Lawrence, Chloe Chambraud, Hannah Burd and Tom O’Keeffe at BIT for their quality assurance input.



Executive summary

Executive Summary

In the UK, gender inequality in pay increases dramatically after a woman has a child and the penalty in wages reaches 30% by the time the first child is 18 years old.¹ Shared parental leave (SPL) was introduced in 2015 but its uptake remains very low at about 0.5% to 8% of eligible couples.² Fathers' low uptake of parental leave contributes to an unequal share of unpaid childcare and other household work, with the increased burden falling on women.³

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) partnered with NCT, a charity for parents in the UK. NCT's pregnancy newsletter reaches large numbers of first-time parents, and the vast majority of subscribers are women. We explored whether intervening on their newsletter would increase men's (primarily the male partners of subscribers) intended uptake of parental leave and participation in childcare and housework. We ran a two-armed randomised controlled trial (n = 1,500). Subscribers in the intervention group received behaviourally-informed content about parental leave, and sharing housework and childcare. The control group received the pre-existing newsletter.

The intervention drew on a number of behavioural insights, but at its core it reframed decision-making around unpaid care as a shared responsibility rather than primarily for women, which is often the implication of most pregnancy advice for parents.

The intervention did not increase men's intended parental leave in the overall sample. However, the intervention was designed primarily for women partnered with men, since most pregnancy content is written for women. Among women reporting their male partner's leave (95% of the sample), the **intervention marginally significantly increased men's intended days of parental leave by around 10%** from 32.0 days to 35.1 days. The intervention did not significantly change men's intended share of childcare or housework, or how much couples discussed these issues.

It is likely these intentions are optimistic. Couples in our sample said that they intended to share housework equally on average, and men intended to carry out only slightly less of the childcare, however, evidence shows that currently in society actual differences in housework and childcare are far greater. Similarly, 56% of the sample intended to take longer than two weeks' leave compared to about 10%-16% on average in the UK. There may have been little room for more equal sharing intentions in this sample.

Content to support parents in planning how they would share childcare tasks achieved the highest click-through rate (25%) in the trial, about four times higher than the first main hyperlink in the control newsletters. This suggests that content regarding childcare tasks may be more effective at engaging parents than housework and parental leave.

The results are promising since engagement with newsletters is low. Other channels, such as in the workplace when discussing parental leave with HR, would be worth exploring to have greater impact.

¹ Costa Dias, M., Joyce, R., & Parodi, F. (2020). The gender pay gap in the UK: children and experience in work. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 36(4), 855-881.

² Working Families (2017) [Shared Parental Leave in the UK: is it working? Lessons from other countries](#); Department for Business Innovation & Skills (2013) [Shared parental leave and pay administration consultation – impact assessment](#)

³ ONS (2016) [Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work'](#)



Introduction

Introduction

Women perform the majority of unpaid domestic work, including childcare and housework.⁴ Women's greater participation in unpaid domestic work contributes to the gender pay gap, which increases when men and women become parents.⁵ When men are more involved early on, they are much more likely to stay involved throughout their child's life, making these early weeks an important window of time for setting the trajectory of men's childcare.⁶ ONS research suggests that the gap in time spent on unpaid childcare and household work widened under the COVID-19 lockdown measures in the UK, although the evidence is mixed.⁷

Since the introduction of shared parental leave (SPL) in 2015, uptake has been disappointing. Estimates of uptake vary from 0.5% to 8% among eligible fathers.⁸ Men's low uptake of parental leave beyond two weeks' paternity leave leads to large gender differences in both domestic work and employment experience at the start of men and women's parenting lives. There are a number of likely reasons for the low uptake of SPL, including the design of the policy, financial incentives, and social factors.

The way SPL is designed makes men's uptake of longer parental leave more likely to be experienced as a loss. Statutory maternity leave is one year, while SPL is one year to share between parents, so men's uptake of SPL is perceived by couples as taking leave time away from women.⁹ We know from broader behavioural science that we feel losses more strongly than gains, known as 'loss aversion'.¹⁰ In addition, the complexity of SPL creates friction costs even for couples highly motivated to use it. One survey found that 34% of parents do not understand how shared parental leave works and 49% do not know whether their employer enhances shared parental leave pay.¹¹ Another important factor that prevents men from taking longer leave is financial: most employers do not enhance shared parental leave pay or paternity leave pay beyond two weeks.¹² However, there are also other social and behavioural factors that create barriers for men taking longer leave and having greater early involvement in parenting.

The gender role stereotypes of women as caregivers and men as breadwinners influence, often unconsciously, the behaviours of men and women in parenting partnerships.¹³ These create different social and cultural pressures on men and women to be more involved at work or at

⁴ ONS (2016) [Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work'](#)

⁵ Dias, M. C., Joyce, R., & Parodi, F. (2018). Wage Progression and the Gender Wage Gap: The Causal Impact of Hours of Work. *IFS Briefing Note*, BN223, 1–21.

⁶ Tamm, M. (2019). Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation. *Labour Economics*, 59, 184–197.

⁷ ONS. (2020). [A "new normal"? How people spent their time after the March 2020 coronavirus lockdown](#). Other studies, for example Chung et al. (2020), found that differences reduced. However, ONS typically has a more representative sample than these other studies.

⁸ Working Families (2017) [Shared Parental Leave in the UK: is it working? Lessons from other countries](#); [Department for Business Innovation & Skills \(2013\) Shared parental leave and pay administration consultation – impact assessment](#)

⁹ Twamley, K., & Schober, P. (2019). Shared parental leave: Exploring variations in attitudes, eligibility, knowledge and take-up intentions of expectant mothers in London. *Journal of Social Policy*, 48(2), 387–407.

¹⁰ Kahneman, D., A. Tversky. 1979. Prospect theory - analysis of decision under risk. *Econometrica* 47(2) 263–291.

¹¹ Ndzi, E. (2018). Challenges of Shared Parental Leave: Reasons Why Mothers May/Not Want to Share Their Maternity Leave. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

¹² Employee benefits (2018) [9% of employers provide more than the two-week statutory paternity leave entitlement](#)

¹³ Heilman, M. E., & Caleo, S. (2018). Combatting gender discrimination: A lack of fit framework. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 21(5), 725–744.

home.¹⁴ These social norms can leave both parents frustrated, as women report carrying out more domestic labour than expected,¹⁵ and men feel trapped in long hours jobs,¹⁶ which constrain the time they are able to spend with their children. Even when parents care about having more egalitarian arrangements than gender role stereotypes would dictate, these do not seem to closely relate to the eventual division of labour in couples.¹⁷

Qualitative evidence finds that parents often do not discuss in advance how they will share parental leave, childcare and housework before they have their first child.¹⁸ In particular, they are least likely to discuss how they will share housework.¹⁹ Couples that have these conversations are less likely to fall into a more traditional division of labour, although the causal role of conversations is unclear.²⁰

We partnered with the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) to test whether intervening on the NCT “pregnancy & baby” newsletter with behaviourally-informed content related to parental leave and division of domestic labour would increase men’s uptake of parental leave in the first year after birth and participation in baby-related and housework activities in the first six months after birth.

This trial is part of the Gender and Behavioural Insights (GABI) programme, which is a three-year research programme funded by, and run in collaboration with, the Government Equalities Office (GEO). The purpose of the GABI programme is to support GEO’s strategic objectives by building a robust evidence base and applying behavioural insights to gender equality.

Intervention development

Pregnancy newsletters reach large numbers of expecting parents. The NCT pregnancy & baby weekly newsletter reaches over 5,000 subscribers every week from week 4 to 40 of pregnancy and 8 weeks after birth. Subscribers enter their due date when they sign up so that they receive newsletter content relevant to their week of pregnancy, for example, the likely size of their baby in that week of the pregnancy.

Most subscribers are first-time expectant mothers. Our sample was 95% women, for 91% it was the father’s first child and 87% of the women were pregnant at the time of taking the survey (the rest had just given birth). The intervention was designed to target this primary audience of women who could influence the gender balance of care work within their partnership.

For the intervention, we embedded articles in the NCT pregnancy & baby newsletter with hyperlinks to further content. Subscribers in the control group received the existing NCT newsletter.

¹⁴ Beglaubter, J. (2017). Balancing the Scales: Negotiating Father’s Parental Leave Use. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 54(4), 476–496.

¹⁵ Biehle, S. N., & Mickelson, K. D. (2012). First-time parents’ expectations about the division of childcare and play. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(1), 36–45.

¹⁶ Padavic, I., Ely, R. J., & Reid, E. M. (2020). Explaining the persistence of gender inequality: The work–family narrative as a social defense against the 24/7 work culture. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 65(1), 61–111.

¹⁷ Usdansky, M. L. (2011). The gender-equality paradox: Class and incongruity between work-family attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 3(3), 163–178.

¹⁸ Hachohen, R., Likki, T., Londakova, K., & Rossiter, J. (2018). [Return to work: parental decision making](#).

¹⁹ Poster presentation by Riedijk, Derks, Van Veelen, Dykstra & Kleingeld at a 2019 European Association for Social Psychology meeting

²⁰ Knudson-Martin, C., & Mahoney, A. R. (2005). Moving beyond gender: Processes that create relationship equality. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 31(2), 235–258.

The intervention newsletter articles covered three key topics: parental leave, housework and childcare. We wanted to prompt parents to discuss how they will share leave, childcare and housework and provide them with guidance for how to approach these conversations. In the newsletter each topic was included as the first main article, with one topic covered per the three weeks of the trial.

The further hyperlinked content included an article with tips for speaking to employers about parental leave and wall charts for couples to plan and assign responsibilities for housework and baby-related tasks. The full intervention content is provided in the Appendices: newsletter content in Appendix 1, 'three tips for speaking to your employers'²¹ in Appendix 3, the housework responsibilities wall chart²² in Appendix 4 and the baby-related responsibilities wall chart²³ in Appendix 5.

The intervention drew on a number of behavioural insights to increase men's parental leave uptake, as well as men's share of childcare and housework.

- **Leveraging loss aversion.** To counterbalance the loss aversion experienced as a result of the design of SPL, the intervention highlighted the potential lost opportunity of family time with both parents at home with the new-born baby, e.g. "Don't miss the opportunity to be together as a family after your baby is born".
- **Making it easy.** To address the friction costs associated with SPL and its complexity, we included multiple elements that would make the process of planning longer parental leave and dividing childcare and housework easier. The intervention article outlined three tips for speaking to employers about parental leave and these were further broken down into actionable steps. Previous BIT experimental research found that framing SPL as a legal right increased men's interest in taking it potentially because it made the conversation with their employer seem easier,²⁴ so the intervention article highlighted that SPL is a legal right. The wall charts to divide housework and baby care broke down these complex high-level domains of responsibility into specific tasks in a visual format that highlighted domestic tasks that may otherwise be invisible. By encouraging parents to use them to identify who is responsible for which task, we hoped that this would encourage constructive and actionable conversations between parents.
- **Making it timely.** Intervening through a pregnancy newsletter allowed us to capture parents before and while they were making key decisions about parental leave and home life. Timely communication is effective at encouraging people to take action.²⁵
- **Encouraging action today.** People are fairly poor at predicting the future and may not follow through with a behaviour even if they intend to, known as the intention-action gap.²⁶ Evidence finds that both first-time mothers and fathers expect fathers to be more involved than they

²¹ BIT (2021) [Three tips for speaking to your employers](#)

²² BIT (2021) [Housework responsibilities wall chart](#)

²³ BIT (2021) [Baby-related responsibilities wall chart](#)

²⁴ Hachohen, R., Likki, T., Londakova, K., & Rossiter, J. (2018). [Return to work: parental decision making.](#)

²⁵ For example, Hoff, G., & Bretthauer, M. (2008). Appointments timed in proximity to annual milestones and compliance with screening: randomised controlled trial. *Bmj*, 337.

²⁶ Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In Action control (pp. 11-39). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

are.²⁷ By encouraging parents to make an early concrete plan, they would be more likely to stick to their preferred behaviours in the face of disruption.²⁸

- **Challenging social norms.** Gendered expectations and identities also play a key role.²⁹ Some of these expectations may not align with how individuals feel privately. Letting parents know that more people than they might think approve of men taking longer parental leave could be effective here. For example, 72% of managers approve of men and women sharing leave equally.³⁰
- **Creating a new status quo.** Language in much pregnancy and parental leave content is written with the implicit assumption that women are the primary caregiver and that responsibility for decisions related to parental leave and sharing household work lie primarily with women rather than as a shared decision within a couple. The intervention content was written in a way that positions these as shared decisions.

We user-tested the intervention content with parents across BIT, GEO and the Cabinet Office. User-testing of the intervention content highlighted that first-time parents are much more likely to have a romanticised view of early parenthood and that most content targeting this group reflects this. For example, highlighting how much work is involved with looking after a new-born is unlikely to be fully grasped by first-time parents, while existing parents would understand this better. Since most NCT pregnancy & baby newsletter subscribers are first-time mothers, we framed the content to have a more sentimental outlook.

Figure 1 below provides an example of a newsletter intervention article about paternity leave. Note that for the parental leave newsletter content, the content slightly differed depending on the week of pregnancy, given the different deadlines for informing employers that are relevant to expecting parents at different stages of pregnancy. However, the housework and childcare intervention content was the same for all subscribers.

²⁷ Biehle, S. N., & Mickelson, K. D. (2012). First-time parents' expectations about the division of childcare and play. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(1), 36.

²⁸ Hachohen, R., Likki, T., Londakova, K., & Rossiter, J. (2018). [Return to work: parental decision making.](#)

²⁹ Birkett, H., & Forbes, S. (2019). Where's dad? Exploring the low take-up of inclusive parenting policies in the UK. *Policy Studies*.

³⁰ Institute of Leadership & Management. (2014). [Shared opportunity: Parental leave in UK business.](#)

Figure 1: Example of parental leave information for Weeks 27-33 of pregnancy as displayed in the newsletter

Paternity leave not long enough?

Have you and your partner explored all the parental leave options you are entitled to? It's not too late to be together as a family after your baby is born.

Most dads have the legal right to spend more time with the baby using shared parental leave, which can be added onto paternity leave at any time with 8 weeks' notice. To start shared parental leave straight after paternity leave, dads should inform employers by Week 34 of pregnancy.

Did you know? In the UK, 72% of managers support partners who want to share leave equally.¹



Three tips for speaking to your employers about parental leave



Research aims and trial methodology

Research aims and trial methodology

We ran a two-armed randomised controlled trial (RCT) to test whether providing expecting parents subscribed to a pregnancy newsletter with behaviourally-informed content related to parental leave and division of domestic labour would increase men's parental involvement in the early months of their new-born child's life.

We hypothesised the intervention would:

- Increase the length of time men intend to take for parental leave in the first year after birth.
- Increase men's intended share in housework tasks in the first six months after birth.
- Increase men's intended share in childcare tasks in the first six months after birth.

Participant journey

When individuals sign up for the NCT pregnancy & baby newsletter they enter their due date. The system then calibrates which week of the newsletter they receive to align with their week of pregnancy, assuming their due date falls in Week 40 of their pregnancy. Thus, an individual in Week 20 of their pregnancy would receive the Week 20 newsletter. The pregnancy & baby newsletter is sent every week to subscribers in Week 4 to Week 40 of their pregnancy and then Week 1 to Week 8 postnatally.

The trial structure is summarised in Table 1 below. Subscribers to the newsletter were randomly allocated into the intervention or control group. Random allocation was automated by the newsletter software. Newsletter subscribers in the intervention group received the intervention newsletter and those in the control group received the existing version of the newsletter. The full intervention newsletter content is available in Appendix 1 and an example of the existing newsletter in Appendix 2.

The intervention took place over three weeks with the intervention group receiving the content as the first article of the newsletter. The first week, subscribers received an article about parental leave (tailored to the pregnancy week), the second week they received an article about sharing housework and the third week they received content about sharing childcare.

From the fourth week of the trial, newsletter subscribers in both control and intervention were invited to take part in a survey. The survey contained questions about their intended behaviour in the first 12 months for parental leave and first 6 months for childcare and housework after the child's birth as well as a number of questions about relevant covariates (Appendix 9).

Table 1: Trial summary

Trial timelines	Control	Intervention
Trial first week	Existing newsletter content	Parental leave (tailored to the pregnancy week)
Trial second week		Housework
Trial third week		Childcare
Trial fourth week onwards	Survey (intentional behaviour)	

Description of data and sample

We sent the newsletter with the survey link to all 5,766 newsletter subscribers involved in the trial (2,867 in control and 2,899 in intervention). To increase the response rate, we offered newsletter subscribers the chance to win a £500 shopping voucher for completing the survey.

We received data from 1,563 people (27.1% response rate) and applied the following eligibility criteria for inclusion in our analysis:

- They had a partner
- Their partner identified as a man if they identified as a woman or a woman if they identified as a man³¹
- One of them was pregnant or had given birth within the last 4 months³²

This left 1,518 eligible respondents. We excluded a further 18 people in the control group due to unlikely survey completion times.³³ This resulted in a final sample size of 1,500.³⁴

Table 2: Sample summary

Final sample	Women	Men	Total
Control	707 (94.5%)	41 (5.5%)	748
Intervention	715 (95.1%)	37 (4.9%)	752

The intervention and control group were balanced across age, education, household income, contracted hours, employment status, and ethnicity (see Appendix 10). Further descriptives

³¹ This and the partner requirement were included to measure gender equality in unpaid care work from a within-couple perspective. We exclude anyone whose data we will not analyse in line with data ethics.

³² To exclude any friends or family who might be receiving the newsletter.

³³ Defined as responding faster than 1/3 of median response time, calculated separately for control and intervention groups due to a different number of questions.

³⁴ After analysis, we discovered that 34 out of 1,500 responses belonged to participants who had responded to the survey more than once on the basis of their email addresses. This meant there were 1,483 unique participants.

relating to the sample regarding whether it is the father's first child, employment status, average contracted hours, housework division before birth, pregnancy stage, if they are still pregnant, ethnicity, education and household income are available in Appendix 8. There was no difference in response rates between conditions.

Outcome Measures

Table 3 summarises the outcome measures in the trial. Further information on the questions, response options and control variables are available in Appendix 9.

Table 3. Summary of outcome measures.

Outcome measure	Details
Primary: Men's intended parental leave	If the male partner was in employment (including self-employed and on furlough), respondents were asked to provide the man's intended weeks of parental leave in the first year after birth. If responses were four weeks or less, respondents were then asked how to provide the man's intended days of parental leave.
Secondary: Intended housework share	Respondents were asked about the intended division of household activities between the partners including food shopping, cooking and baking, washing dishes and (un)loading the dishwasher, cleaning, dusting and vacuuming, laundry and ironing, and tidying up.
Secondary: Intended childcare share	Respondents were asked about the intended division of childcare activities between the partners including: feeding the baby, changing nappies, getting up for the baby in the night or early morning, settling the baby to sleep in the day or at night, playing with and entertaining the baby, and bathtime
Exploratory: Conversations	Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they had talked about the division of parental leave, housework and childcare as a couple.
Exploratory: Engagement with the intervention	Respondents in the intervention group were asked to rate the extent to which they remembered and engaged with the intervention newsletter content for parental leave, housework and childcare, and the additional content including the 'top tips for speaking to employers about parental leave' article and the wall charts for planning housework and baby care tasks.
Exploratory: Ideal parental leave	For partners who were both in employment, respondents were asked about the man's ideal parental leave length if their employer provided full pay for men taking shared parental leave.

Analytical strategy

The analytical strategy is explained in Appendix 6. Covariates include age, education, household income, whether it is the father's first child, relative income between parents, employment status, contracted hours, housework division before birth, pregnancy stage, whether they are still pregnant or just given birth and mother's ethnicity.



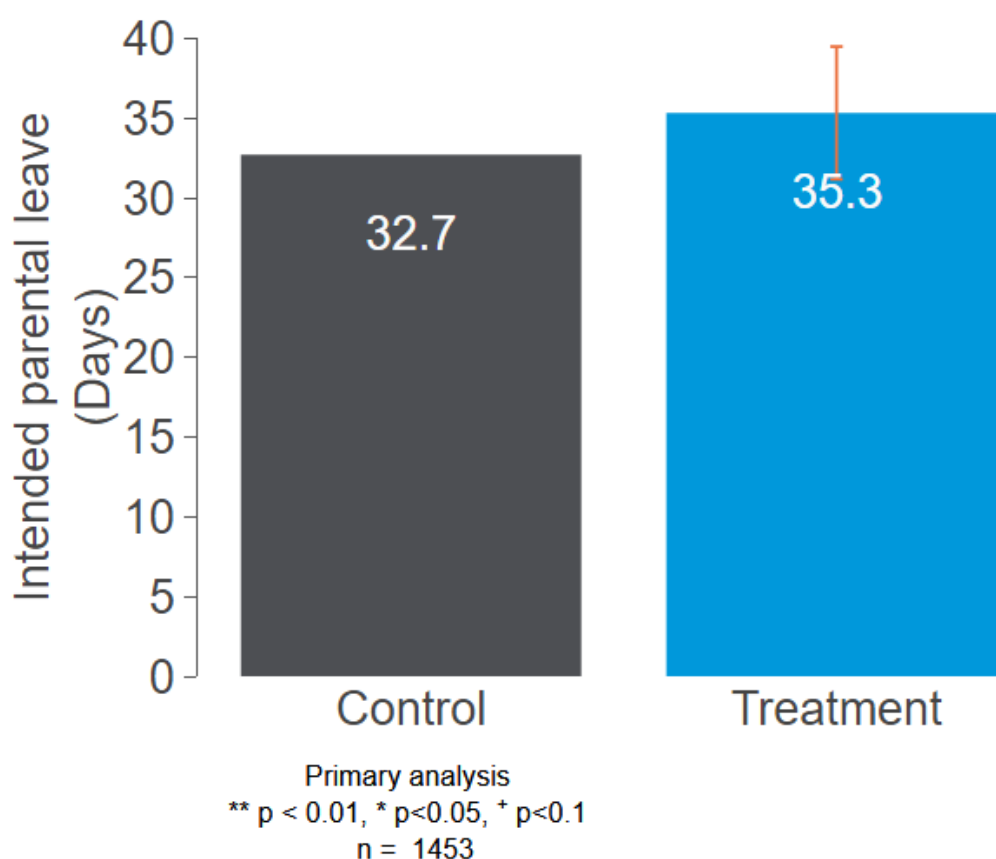
Trial results

Trial results

Primary outcome: Parental leave length

We did not observe a significant effect (at the 10% level) on the intended length of parental leave (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Men's intended days of parental leave



Note: Controls for all covariates.³⁵

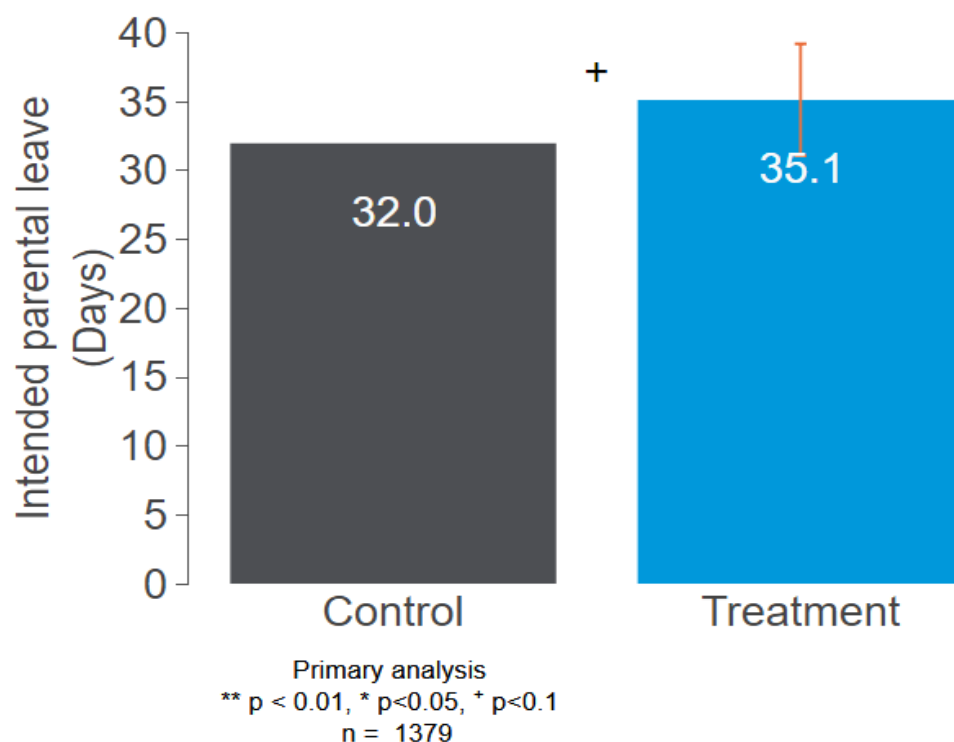
Only participants where the man's employment status was not 'unemployed' or 'not in work' were asked about men's intended parental leave: 730 people in the control group, and 729 people in the intervention group came under this category.

Women only

We repeated the same analysis only with women respondents (who responded on behalf of their male partners), who comprised 95% of the sample. The intervention increased men's intended length of parental leave by 10% to 35.1 days from 32.0 days in the control group. The increase was significant at the 10% level.

³⁵ Relative income could not be imputed for 6 people that indicated 'prefer not to say' and these individuals have been excluded from the analysis.

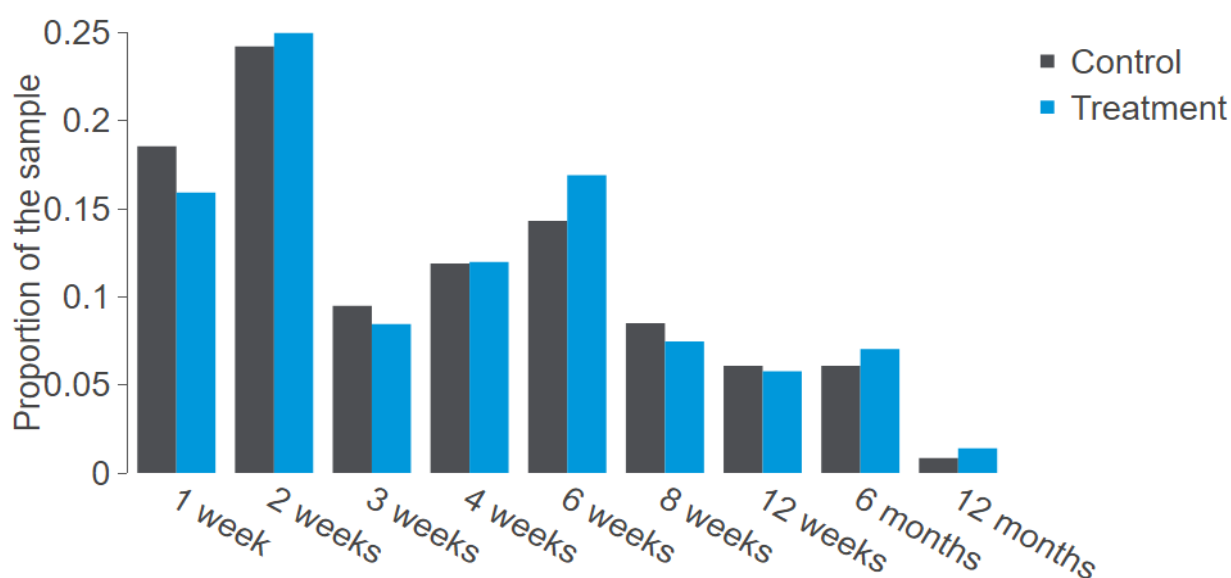
Figure 3: Men's intended days of parental leave (women only)



Note: Controls for all covariates.³⁶

The distribution of men's intended parental leave by condition is available in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Distribution of men's intended length of parental leave



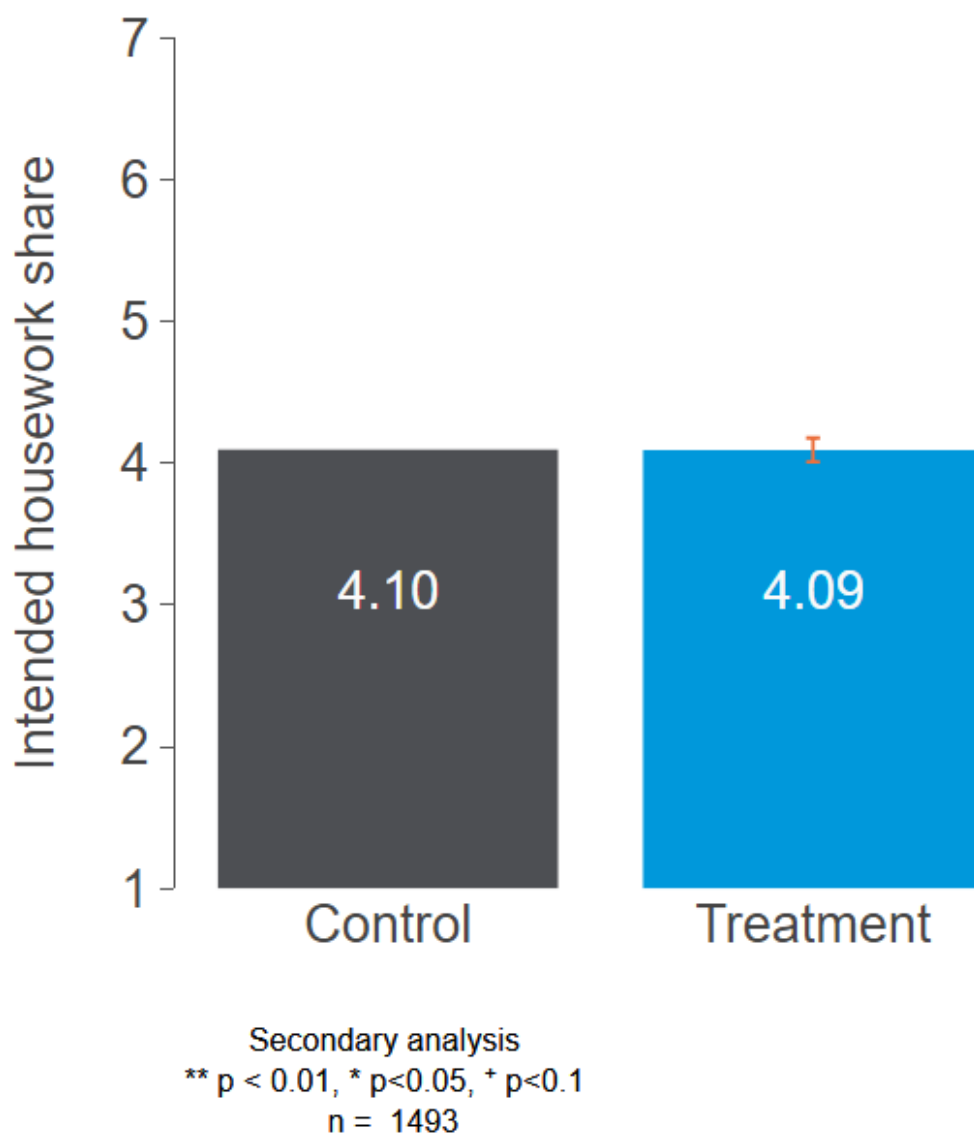
Proportion of the sample intending to take between the previous length up to and including the labelled length by condition.

³⁶ Relative income could not be imputed for 5 people that indicated 'prefer not to say' and these individuals have been excluded from the analysis.

Secondary outcome: Housework share

The intervention did not have a significant effect at the 10% level on men's intended share of housework. The result did not change for the women-only subsample.

Figure 5: Men's intended housework share



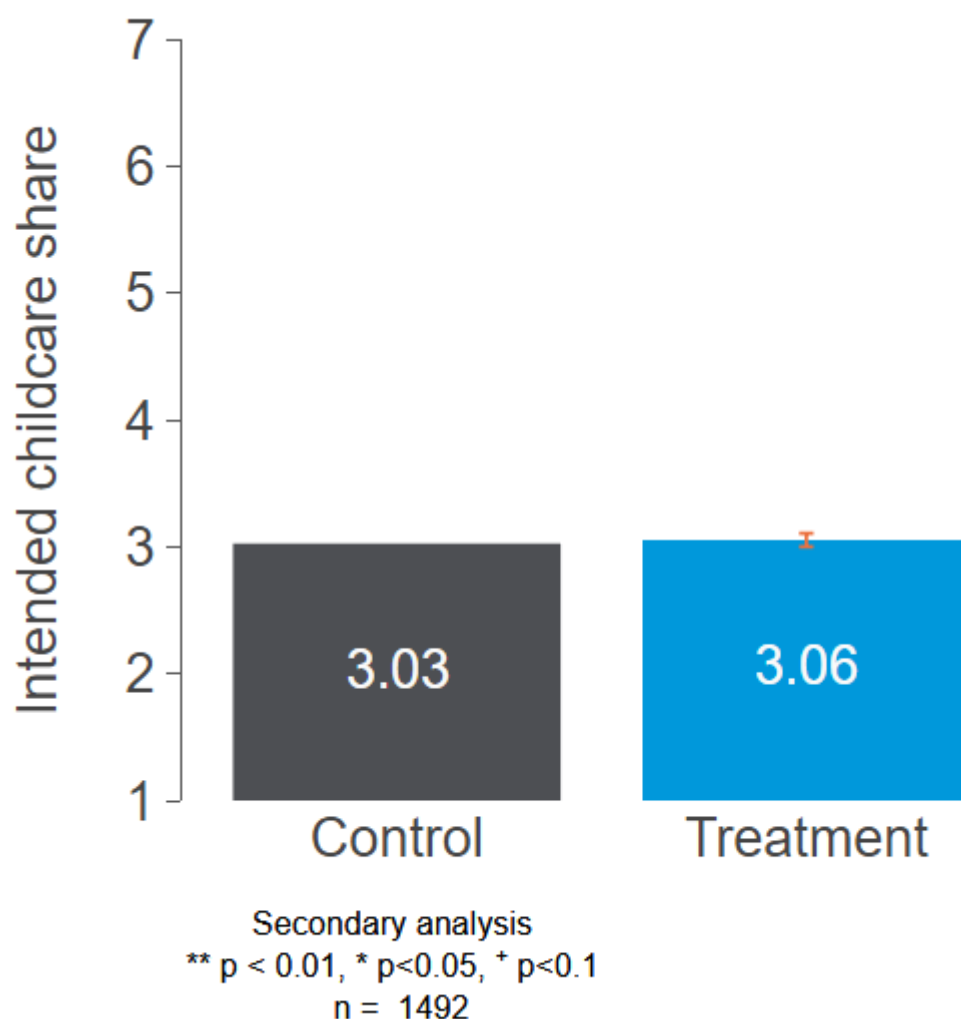
Note: Intended housework share is expressed on a Likert scale 1-7 where 1 = female partner will do everything, 7 = male partner will do everything, and 4 = housework will be split equally. Controls for all covariates.³⁷

³⁷ Relative income could not be imputed for 6 people that indicated 'prefer not to say' and these individuals have been excluded from the analysis.

Secondary outcome: Childcare share

The intervention did not have a significant effect at the 10% level on the intended split of childcare. The result did not change for the women-only subsample.

Figure 6: Men's intended childcare share



Note: Intended childcare share is expressed on a Likert scale 1-7 where 1 = female partner will do everything, 7 = male partner will do everything, and 4 = childcare will be split equally. Controls for all covariates.³⁸

Exploratory analysis

The intervention did not have a significant effect at the 10% level on the extent of conversations about parental leave, housework share and childcare share. The result did not change for the women-only subsample.

There was also no significant effect (at the 10% level) on the ideal length of parental leave for the full sample and the women-only subsample.

Engagement

The click-through rate (percentage of people who clicked on the link to further content out of the total recipients) for the parental leave article and parental pay calculator was around 4% and housework responsibilities wall chart was 6%. The click-through rate for the baby-related

³⁸ Relative income could not be imputed for 6 people that indicated 'prefer not to say' and these individuals have been excluded from the analysis.

responsibilities wall chart was much higher at around 25%. By comparison, the click-through rate for the hyperlink in the first main article in the control newsletters was about 6-7% (Table 4).

Table 4. Summary of open and click-through rates among the whole sample per topic and condition.

Trial week & topic	Opens and open rate		Clicks and click-through rate	
	Control	Intervention	Control	Intervention
Trial week 1 (parental leave)	1950 (75.41%)	1897 (73.73%)	180 (6.96%)	103 (4.00%)
Trial week 2 (housework)	2067 (75.95%)	2093 (75.26%)	178 (6.45%)	153 (5.50%)
Trial week 3 (childcare)	2103 (73.58%)	2101 (72.7%)	181 (6.33%)	722 (24.98%)

Engagement with the content was questionably high among those that replied to the survey considering the click-through rates. About 45% of intervention respondents reported they had clicked on the parental leave article, 51% on the housework responsibilities wall chart and 50% on the baby-related responsibilities wall chart. While it is plausible that those who are more engaged with the newsletter are more likely to respond to the survey, these figures are still impossible.

Had everyone who clicked on the further content responded to the survey, at a maximum only 14% could have clicked on the parental leave article and parental pay calculator, 20% on the housework responsibilities wall chart and 96% on the baby-related responsibilities wall chart.

Two factors call into question the validity of the responses to the engagement scales. There was little variation in engagement rates among survey respondents between the wall charts, despite large differences in click-through rates. The reported clicks were much higher for the parental leave article and housework wall chart than would have been possible even if everyone who clicked on them also responded to the survey, which is unlikely (full results in Appendix 7).



Discussion and conclusion

Discussion and conclusion

We ran a two-armed RCT to test whether providing expecting parents subscribed to a pregnancy newsletter with behaviourally-informed content about parental leave and division of domestic labour would increase men's uptake of parental leave and participation in domestic activities.

The intervention did not increase men's intended parental leave in the overall sample. However, for women responding to the survey, the intervention marginally significantly increased the number of days of parental leave their male partner intended to take by 10% from 32.0 days to 35.1 days. We designed the intervention primarily with women in mind, so it is not too surprising that it worked for this group. It is likely that the small number of men in the sample only served to add statistical 'noise' making the overall result non-significant. Since the majority of pregnancy newsletter subscribers are women, we wanted to design the intervention to work for them. It was also important to design the intervention for women since they are more likely to take on the role of primary caregiver and it is often an unspoken assumption that they will take on responsibility for any major decisions around childcare.³⁹ Most existing pregnancy content reinforces this world view. Reframing the decision-making responsibility as shared relieves some of this burden and gives women permission to expect greater responsibility and involvement from men.

The intervention did not significantly change men's intended share of housework and childcare. Interestingly, men's intended share of childcare was lower than housework. For housework, respondents in both control and intervention indicated their intended division of tasks was close to equal on average, while for childcare the female partner 'would do slightly more' on average. This suggests that there was little room for men to increase their share of housework. As for childcare activities, this is likely due to women taking greater parental leave in the first six months than men. However, there is room for greater equality here even if it could mean men increase their share of housework to counterbalance their lower share in childcare. Future research should consider drawing attention to both aspects of domestic labour at the same time, although we chose not to out of concern that it could be overwhelming.

We find promise in the marginally significant effect, given that it is likely all reported intentional behaviours are optimistic. Men tend to overestimate and women underestimate their share of domestic work in typical survey measures compared with time use data.⁴⁰ We know that intentions often do not translate into actual behaviour. Especially since their existing division of labour was not equal: men's existing average share of housework before birth was less than equal, closer to their female partner doing 'slightly more'. Research finds that in practice housework is rarely split equally: on average, women spend more than twice as much time on housework than men.⁴¹ Among first-time parents, mothers tend to do more childcare and fathers less childcare than expected before the child was born.⁴² However, these optimistic intentions may lead parents to underestimate the importance of planning in advance. It is important to conduct a follow-up survey to see whether the intervention impacted the actual division.

The click-through rates on the parental leave article and housework wall chart were low, which means that the newsletter content was more important for changing behaviour. This part of the intervention activated loss aversion by emphasising the potential lost opportunity of family time

³⁹ ONS (2013) [The gender gap in unpaid care provision](#)

⁴⁰ Yavorsky, J. E., Kamp Dush, C. M., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2015). The Production of Inequality: The Gender Division of Labor Across the Transition to Parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(3), 662–679.

⁴¹ ONS. (2016) [Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work'](#).

⁴² Biehle, S. N., & Mickelson, K. D. (2012). First-time parents' expectations about the division of childcare and play. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(1), 36.

with both parents and highlighted the social norm that most managers support longer leave. Given the purpose of the newsletter, we were able to target expecting parents at a time when these kinds of decisions are live. The baby-related responsibilities wall chart achieved the highest click-through rate (25%), which was nearly four times higher than the main article in the control newsletter. It is possible that seeing the key childcare responsibilities laid out concretely encouraged parents to consider the tasks ahead more thoroughly and think more carefully about men taking longer parental leave. This also suggests that content around baby care may be more effective and engaging for new parents for interventions that target parental leave.

The intervention did not significantly change how much parents discussed parental leave or the division of childcare and housework. Couples talked least about housework ('a little'), slightly more about childcare (between 'a little' and 'a fair amount'), but interestingly, mostly about parental leave (between 'a fair amount' and 'quite a lot'). This supports other research that finds that couples talk about housework the least in advance of having their first child.⁴³ Couples may also have talked less about housework if they assumed they would be sharing it equally. However, as already established, this is likely to be an illusion and result in unmet expectations given the evidence that women usually undertake the majority of household responsibilities.⁴⁴ In this way, the illusion of equality may ironically prevent parents from taking steps to ensure equality.

The small effect size may be due to some of the characteristics of the sample, in particular that there may have been a ceiling effect. We know that financial security is a major positive factor in men taking longer leave and 35% of the sample had a household income above £85K compared with about 19% of taxpayers in the UK earning above £42.5K.⁴⁵ The sample also had much higher rates of higher education (91%) than the UK average in the employed population (44%).⁴⁶ Men in the sample reported a much higher number of intended days of leave (46) than the women reporting their male partner's leave (34). Only 5% of the sample were men and it is highly likely that they may not be representative of men more generally. The intended parental leave length in this sample far exceeds that of the UK average. Estimates vary, but only around 10-16% of men take parental leave longer than two weeks, yet 56% of our sample intended to.⁴⁷ All of these factors suggest that there may have been a ceiling effect for the impact on the intervention due to the kind of people who are subscribed to NCT's pregnancy newsletter.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that interventions via newsletters are always limited in terms of their potential impact given that a relatively small portion of readers are highly engaged with them. We recommend exploring a wider range of channels and touchpoints that could have greater engagement, such as through the organisation's HR department at the point of employees asking them about parental leave.

Future research should look at responses to a follow-up survey that measures actual behaviours once subscribers become parents.

⁴³ Poster presentation by Riedijk, Derks, Van Veelen, Dykstra & Kleingeld at a 2019 European Association for Social Psychology meeting

⁴⁴ ONS. (2016) [Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work'](#).

⁴⁵ HMRC (2020) [Percentile points from 1 to 99 for total income before and after tax.](#)

⁴⁶ ONS (2018) [UK employment with higher education or post-graduate qualifications, UK, 2017](#)

⁴⁷ ILM (2014) [found 10%](#) and DWP (2010) [found 16%](#)



Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1: Intervention newsletter content

The intervention content was sent across all weekly editions of the NCT pregnancy & baby newsletter as the first main article. Note that the parental leave content was tailored to the pregnancy week, whereas the housework and childcare content was the same across all pregnancy weeks. Each topic was delivered in a one-week period to subscribers across all pregnancy weeks.

4.1 Parental leave (pregnancy weeks 4-11)

Paternity leave not long enough?

It is never too early to explore all the parental leave options you and your partner are entitled to. Don't miss the opportunity to be together as a family after your baby is born. Have a chat with your partner today.

Find out how much parental leave pay you and your partner are entitled to with this [calculator](#). Dads can spend more time with the baby using shared parental leave, which can be added onto paternity leave at any time with 8 weeks' notice.

Did you know? In the UK, 72% of managers support partners who want to share leave equally¹.



Hyperlinked to the government's parental pay calculator.⁴⁸ This content did not hyperlink to the article 'Three tips for speaking to your employers' as parents typically do not speak publicly about their pregnancy before 12 weeks.

All parental leave content referenced a statistic from a study by the Institute for Leadership and Management that found 72% of the managers they surveyed would support partners who want to share leave equally.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ GOV.UK [Check if you can get leave or pay when you have a child](#)

⁴⁹ Institute of Leadership & Management. (2014). [Shared opportunity: Parental leave in UK business.](#)

4.2 Parental Leave (pregnancy weeks 12-18)

Paternity leave not long enough?

Have you and your partner explored all the parental leave options you are entitled to? Don't miss the opportunity to be together as a family after your baby is born.

Dads can spend more time with the baby using shared parental leave, which can be added onto the two weeks of paternity leave at any time with 8 weeks' notice.

Did you know? In the UK, 72% of managers support partners who want to share leave equally.¹



Three tips for speaking to your employers about parental leave

Hyperlinked to the 'Three tips for speaking to your employers' article.⁵⁰ Parents can speak publicly about their pregnancy at this point, but it is still relatively far away from the deadline to notify employers about maternity and paternity leave (week 26).

4.3 Parental Leave (pregnancy weeks 19-25)

Paternity leave not long enough?

The deadline to inform employers about maternity and paternity leave plans is coming up in Week 26 of pregnancy. Have you and your partner explored all the parental leave options you are entitled to? Don't miss the opportunity to be together as a family after your baby is born.

Dads can spend more time with the baby using shared parental leave, which can be added onto the two weeks of paternity leave at any time with 8 weeks' notice.

Did you know? In the UK, 72% of managers support partners who want to share leave equally.¹



Three tips for speaking to your employers about parental leave

Hyperlinked to the 'Three tips for speaking to your employers' article. In this period, building up to the deadline on Week 26 to inform employers about maternity and paternity leave.

⁵⁰ BIT (2021) [Three tips for speaking to your employers](#)

4.5 Parental leave (pregnancy week 26)

Paternity leave not long enough?

This week is the deadline to inform employers about maternity and paternity leave plans. Don't miss the opportunity to be together as a family after your baby is born.

Dads can spend more time with the baby using shared parental leave, which can be added onto the two weeks of paternity leave at any time with 8 weeks' notice.

Did you know? In the UK, 72% of managers support partners who want to share leave equally.¹



[Three tips for speaking to your employers about parental leave](#)

Hyperlinked to the 'Three tips for speaking to your employers' article. This week is the deadline to inform employers about maternity and paternity leave (week 26).

4.4 Parental Leave (pregnancy weeks 27-33)

Paternity leave not long enough?

Have you and your partner explored all the parental leave options you are entitled to? It's not too late to be together as a family after your baby is born.

Most dads have the legal right to spend more time with the baby using shared parental leave, which can be added onto paternity leave at any time with 8 weeks' notice. To start shared parental leave straight after paternity leave, dads should inform employers by Week 34 of pregnancy.

Did you know? In the UK, 72% of managers support partners who want to share leave equally.¹



[Three tips for speaking to your employers about parental leave](#)

Hyperlinked to the 'Three tips for speaking to your employers' article. The deadline for informing employers about maternity and paternity leave has passed, but shared parental leave can start at any time from two weeks after birth. If parents want to do this, they need to inform employers by week 34.

4.5 Parental Leave (pregnancy week 34)

Paternity leave not long enough?

To start shared parental leave straight after paternity leave, dads should inform employers this week. Have you and your partner explored all the parental leave options you are entitled to? It's not too late to be together as a family after your baby is born.

Dads can spend more time with the baby using shared parental leave, which can be added onto the two weeks of paternity leave at any time with 8 weeks' notice.

Did you know? In the UK, 72% of managers support partners who want to share leave equally.¹



[Three tips for speaking to your employers about parental leave](#)

Hyperlinked to the 'Three tips for speaking to your employers' article. This is the deadline week to inform employers about plans for shared parental leave if taking it straight after paternity leave.

4.6 Parental Leave (pregnancy weeks 35-40)

Paternity leave not long enough?

Have you and your partner explored all the parental leave options you are entitled to? It's not too late to be together as a family after your baby is born.

Dads can spend more time with the baby using shared parental leave, which can be added onto the two weeks of paternity leave at any time with 8 weeks' notice.

Did you know? In the UK, 72% of managers support partners who want to share leave equally.¹



[Three tips for speaking to your employers about parental leave](#)

Hyperlinked to the 'Three tips for speaking to your employers' article. The deadline to tell employers about shared parental leave if wanting to start straight after paternity leave has passed. However, a reminder here that parents can initiate shared parental leave at any time with only 8 weeks' notice to their employer.

4.7 Parental Leave (post-birth weeks 1-5)

Paternity leave not long enough?

The early months with a newborn are precious. You can spend more time together as a family with shared parental leave.

Dads can add shared parental leave onto paternity leave at any time with 8 weeks' notice. It can be taken in one block or separate chunks all the way up to the baby's 1st birthday.

Did you know? In the UK, 72% of managers support partners who want to share leave equally.¹



Three tips for speaking to your employers about parental leave

Hyperlinked to the 'Three tips for speaking to your employers' article. Compulsory maternity and paternity leave take place in the first two weeks after birth, but shared parental leave can start at any time with 8 weeks' notice.

4.8 Housework (all pregnancy weeks)

Ever argued over dishes?

Wall charts are a great way to agree on household tasks.

Do your expectations align with your partner's? Aligning expectations is key to working as a team and avoids building resentment. In the first few weeks after a baby comes along, some housework activities can be harder to manage.

Revisit how you divide tasks to support each other's time and energy as those change over time.



Download wall chart for sharing housework

Hyperlinked to the housework responsibilities wall chart.⁵¹

⁵¹ BIT (2021) [Housework responsibilities wall chart](#)

4.9 Childcare (all pregnancy weeks)

Baby to do list sorted

Use this wall chart to look at the most common baby care tasks and figure out the best way to share them as a team.

Every family is different. Having an open conversation between you and your partner can help make sure no one is left feeling let down.

This will not only help develop your relationship with your baby, but science shows with each other too.¹

[Download wall chart for sharing babycare](#)



Hyperlinked to the baby-related responsibilities wall chart.⁵²

⁵² BIT (2021) [Baby-related responsibilities wall chart](#)

Appendix 2: Example of email newsletter received by control group

Depression in pregnancy and booking your antenatal course.

[View in browser](#)



[Courses](#)

[Local activities](#)

[Pregnancy](#)

[Get involved](#)

[Membership](#)

██████████ it's week 11 of your pregnancy!



Your baby's development

Your baby is continuing to grow at a rapid pace and is now developing the buds that will become teeth. The cartilage which formed their skeleton will start to harden into bone. They will also be more flexible, with a little movement in their arms, legs and joints.

Coronavirus and your pregnancy

We know that you'll have a number of questions about coronavirus so we've created a range of articles about how it might affect your pregnancy, birth and early days as a parent.

[Learn more](#)

Depression in pregnancy

Antenatal depression or anxiety can begin at any point during pregnancy. It is characterised as having a higher than normal level of worry about the impending birth and parenthood. Symptoms include lack of energy, feeling emotionally detached, difficulty sleeping, tearfulness, chronic anxiety and feeling isolated and guilty.

If you're suffering from any of these symptoms, talk either to your midwife or GP, or someone else you feel comfortable with.

[Find out more](#)



Vaginal discharge

Early on in pregnancy, increased vaginal discharge is common. Pregnancy hormones increase your normal, mucous secretions. This discharge should be clear or white, and it shouldn't have an unpleasant smell.

Any odour or discoloration (like yellow or brown discharge when you're pregnant) should be checked for infection by your GP.

[Find out more](#)



Booking your antenatal course

In these challenging times, it's so important that we all feel connected. We've moved the magic of our famously social antenatal courses online, so you can experience it all from the comfort of your own home. Interactive, engaging and social, our live online antenatal course is a fun and exciting way to grow your knowledge of birth and early parenthood, and make life-long friends.

[Find out more](#)



Pregnancy tip

"It's important that women with a history of mental health issues tell their midwife so they can discuss how this might affect their pregnancy and birth, and plan the right care and support."

[Find out more](#)



Checklist

Have you considered your rights at work during pregnancy and any changes you may need to discuss with your employer?

[Find out more](#)

Here for you...

We offer accurate, impartial information so you can decide what's best for your family. We are the largest UK charity for parents. We support parents from pregnancy to early parenthood through our many courses, groups and events. Becoming a mum or dad can be difficult. A little reassurance can make all the difference. Call us for support and information about pregnancy, birth, feeding and early parenthood – 0300 330 0700.



Appendix 3: Three tips for speaking to employers

Alongside the parental leave content in the newsletter, the following article was hyperlinked to as a button.⁵³

Three tips for speaking to your employers

Have you and your partner explored all the options with your employers? These tips will help you make the conversation easier.

Share this with your partner!

1. Know your rights

Most working parents have a legal right to parental leave, including shared parental leave. Don't lose out, find out your entitlement with this [government calculator](#).

For more information on all kinds of parental rights at work, [Citizens Advice](#) have plenty of helpful guidance. Click on these links to find out more about [maternity pay](#), [paternity pay](#) and [shared parental pay](#).

“I was initially worried about asking my employer for time off as we are a small company and I was not aware of any other dads taking shared parental leave. But they were really supportive and actually, my HR contact said that now she had understood the UK policy she was discussing shared parental leave with her partner.”

Ben, about to be a first-time dad

⁵³ BIT (2021) [Three tips for speaking to your employers](#)

2. Find out about your employer's policy

You may know about maternity leave and paternity leave, but there are other options. Find out everything your employer offers:

- Ask about shared parental leave and whether there are other kinds of leave for new parents.
- Ask about the paid and unpaid options.
- Ask about their return-to-work support and any [keep-in-touch days](#). Parents using shared parental leave are entitled to 20 paid keep-in-touch days which they can split any way they like. This is twice as much as the 10 days for maternity leave alone!

Your manager or supervisor may not be aware of the latest policy, so ask someone in HR if you cannot find your employer's policy easily.

You can take shared parental leave all together or in separate blocks. For example, you may want to take a few weeks after birth, return to work and then take leave again when your baby is a few months old.

You only need to provide your employer with 8 weeks' notice before each period of shared parental leave. Similarly, you only need to give your employer 8 weeks' notice to inform them of any changes to your maternity leave plans. You can decide to take leave at any time, including after your baby is born.

3. Keep the conversation going

The [earlier you speak to your employer](#) the more time there will be to explore all the options and plan it with them. Your manager will probably support and respect your preference for parental leave, including men taking several months of leave. A survey by the Institute for Leadership and Management found that [72% of UK managers support partners who want to share leave equally](#).

Even if you have a plan in place for parental leave, you may discover that you need more support at home or that you would like to return to work sooner. You can change your plans at any time, including after your child is born. You can take shared parental leave at any time until your child's 1st birthday.

Even if you have a plan in place for parental leave, you may discover that you need more support at home or that you would like to return to work sooner. You can change your plans at any time, including after your child is born. You can take shared parental leave at any time until your child's 1st birthday.

Resources

[Download the Baby-Related Responsibilities Wallchart](#)

[Download the Housework Responsibilities Wallchart](#)

Appendix 4: Housework responsibilities wall chart

Alongside the housework content in the newsletter, the following wall chart was hyperlinked to as a button.⁵⁴

Housework responsibilities								
	Task	Name						
Overall Tasks	Meal planning and writing the shopping list							
	Food shopping							
	Laundry (clothing)							
	Ironing							
	Washing/changing bed sheets and towels							
	Cleaning the kitchen							
	Cleaning bathrooms							
	Vacuuming							
	Dusting							
	Taking out the rubbish and recycling							
	Other (add your own)							
	Daily Tasks		M	T	W	TH	F	S
Preparing and cooking meals								
Washing dishes/(un)loading dishwasher								
General tidying up								
Family, Social & Repairs	Other	Name						
	Managing family schedule (appointments, etc.)							
	Making social arrangements							
	Organising quality time as a couple							
	Gardening and watering plants							
	Car/bike maintenance							
	Managing home improvements or repairs							
	Managing domestic services (cleaners, etc.)							
Admin, Financial & Shopping	Other							
	Sorting post and online mail							
	Paying bills							
	Paying rent/mortgage							
	Budget planning							
	Managing savings, investments and insurance							
	Buying household items (tableware, towels etc.)							
	Buying gifts for friends/family							
	Researching major purchases							
	Planning and booking holidays/leisure activities							
Pet Care	Ordering and buying pet supplies							
	Other							
		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
	Feeding							
Pet Care	Dealing with waste							
	Exercise, play and training							
	Other							

Tips on the next page

Adapted with permission from "Domestic Division of Labor: A Worksheet", copyright of Alvson Downey at Here's the Plan (<http://herestheplanbook.com/>)

⁵⁴ [BIT \(2021\) Housework responsibilities wall chart](#)

Top tips

- Find what works for you, every couple is different
- Move on from disagreements and come back to them at the end
- Complete the baby care wall chart alongside
- Does it seem fair once completed?



Adapt it to suit your needs



Frequency

In your household, some tasks might be performed weekly rather than daily, and others multiple times a day. For example, you might split out who makes lunch and dinner, or organise meals on a weekly basis. Customise the wall chart to suit your rhythm.



Tasks

Some tasks may be irrelevant for your household and can be removed, for example, you may not have a pet. You might also want to break down some tasks, for example, if one person washes dishes and the other dries them. Add new tasks and sub-tasks into the 'Other' lines.



Split responsibilities

If both of you are responsible for a task, decide how that will work between you. Do you split it based on time of day (e.g. morning vs. evening), by different sub-tasks (e.g. energy vs. council tax bills), or by alternating? If it is not clear, one of you will probably end up doing most of it.

Handy Pointers

Most couples have different expectations and standards for how things should be done. That is fine as long as you discuss it and come to an understanding.

Don't forget 'hidden' work. If you are responsible for a task, that means remembering to do it, any research related to it and keeping track of it. If you find you have to remind each other about tasks you are not responsible for, there are probably different expectations worth discussing.

Update as often as needed. If your situation changes or you find something is not working, come back to the chart and update it.

Some tasks take longer than others. For example, cleaning the kitchen takes longer than taking out the rubbish. Account for that when dividing responsibilities.



Appendix 5: Baby-related responsibilities wall chart

Alongside the childcare content in the newsletter, the following wall chart was hyperlinked to as a button.⁵⁵

Baby-related responsibilities		
Task	Name	
Overall Tasks	Washing, folding and putting away baby laundry	
	Scheduling medical appointments	
	Stocking baby essentials, e.g. nappies, clothes	
	Tidying baby's room	
	Emptying nappy bin or washing reusable nappies	
	Administering medicines	
	Organising baby's activities, e.g. baby swimming	
	Packing/unpacking for family travel	
	Other (add your own)	
	M T W TH F S SU	
Daily Tasks	Overnight shift (before 4am)	
	Early morning wake-ups (after 4am)	
	Dressing the baby	
	Changing nappies	
	Feeding (formula, breast milk or solids)	
	Preparing and storing solids	
	Settling to sleep in the day	
	Playing with, reading to and entertaining	
	Bathtime	
	Bedtime routine, including settling to sleep	
	Washing bottles or pump parts	
	Other	
	Name	
Overall Childcare Tasks	Finding childcare	
	Managing day-to-day relationship with childcare	
	Booking back-up, evening and weekend childcare	
	Other	
	M T W TH F S SU	
Daily Childcare Tasks	Preparing food and bottles for childcare	
	Packing the baby's bag for childcare	
	Childcare drop-off or nanny transition	
	Childcare pick-up or nanny transition	
	Other	

Tips on the next page!

Adapted with permission from the "Family Division of Labor: A Worksheet" copyright of Alyson Downey at Here's the Plan (<http://herestheplanbook.com/>)

⁵⁵ BIT (2021) [Baby-related responsibilities wall chart](#)

Top tips

- Find what works for you, every couple is different
- Move on from disagreements and come back to them at the end
- Complete the baby care wall chart alongside
- Does it seem fair once completed?



Adapt it to suit your needs



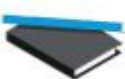
Frequency

Many of these tasks will be performed multiple times a day such as feeding, settling and changing nappies. Others you might carry out on a weekly basis, such as preparing solids. Customise the wall chart worksheet to suit your rhythm.



Tasks

Some tasks will only become relevant at a certain age, for example, preparing solids or managing childcare. These can be ignored until then. You might also want to break down some tasks, for example, the bedtime routine. Add new tasks and sub-tasks into the 'Other' lines.



Update often

Different tasks become relevant and take more or less time as the baby gets older. You may also be taking parental leave at different times. Come back to the chart and update it as often as needed.



Split responsibilities

If both of you are responsible for a task, decide how that will work between you. Do you split it based on time of day (e.g. morning vs. evening), by different sub-tasks (e.g. energy vs. council tax bills), or by alternating? If it is not clear, one of you will probably end up doing most of it.

Handy Pointers

Most couples have different expectations and standards for how things should be done. That is fine as long as you discuss it and come to an understanding.

Don't forget 'hidden' work. If you are responsible for a task, that means remembering to do it, any research related to it and keeping track of it. If you find you have to remind each other about tasks you are not responsible for, there are probably different expectations worth discussing.

Some tasks take longer than others. For example, cleaning the kitchen takes longer than taking out the rubbish. Account for that when dividing responsibilities.



Appendix 6: Analytical strategy

Primary outcome: Men's parental leave uptake

We used the following OLS regression model, with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors:

$$\log(Y_i + 1) = \alpha + \beta T_i + \Psi \Gamma_i + \epsilon$$

Where Y is the intended number of days of parental leave a father takes, α is the intercept, T the treatment indicator variable, where 0 = control and 1 = treatment, β is a corresponding regression coefficient, Γ is the matrix of control variables from the table earlier in this AR, Ψ is a vector of corresponding regression coefficients, and ϵ is a vector of residual errors.

Secondary outcome1: Childcare share and Secondary outcome 2: Housework share.

We used the following OLS regression model, with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta T_i + \Psi \Gamma_i + \epsilon$$

Where Y is either an index of childcare share or index of housework share, α is the intercept, T the treatment indicator variable, where 0 = control and 1 = treatment, β is a corresponding regression coefficients, Γ is a vector of control variables, Ψ is a vector of corresponding regression coefficients, and ϵ is a vector of residual errors.

For the primary and secondary analysis, we performed an additional robustness check, including only a sample of people who had internally consistent answers. Consistency of answers was judged based on the question about the intended weeks of parental leave and intended days of parental leave (the latter question was asked whenever a person responded 4 weeks or less). As an example, if a person indicated that the father intended to take 3 weeks, but more than 21 days or less than 15 days, then this answer would be counted as internally inconsistent.

Exploratory analysis 1: First time child

We estimated the following OLS regression (with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors):

$$\log(Y_i + 1) = \alpha + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 T_i F_i + \Psi \Gamma_i + \epsilon$$

Where Y is intended number of days of parental leave a father takes or index of childcare share or index of housework share, F is a dummy variable indicating if it's a person's first child, α is the intercept, T the treatment indicator variable, where 0 = control and 1 = treatment, β is a corresponding regression coefficients, Γ is a vector of control variables, Ψ is a vector of corresponding regression coefficients, and ϵ is a vector of residual errors.

Exploratory analysis 2: Conversations

We used the following OLS regression model, with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta T_i + \Psi \Gamma_i + \epsilon$$

Where Y is either the extent of conversations about childcare share, housework share or parental leave expressed on a 7-point Likert scale, α is the intercept, T the treatment indicator variable, where 0 = control and 1 = treatment, β is a corresponding regression coefficients, Γ is a vector of

control variables, Ψ is a vector of corresponding regression coefficients, and ϵ is a vector of residual errors.

Appendix 7: Engagement data

Engagement with the article about parental leave	
Response	Proportion of the intervention sample
My partner and I both spoke to our employers using tips from this article	0.020
I spoke to my employer using tips from this article	0.043
My partner spoke to their employer using tips from this article	0.024
I read and shared the article with my partner	0.085
I read the article, but did not share further	0.188
I opened the article, but did not read it	0.086
Never seen it	0.553
Engagement with housework wall chart	
Completed it and have used it or still use it	0.015
Completed it, but did not use it	0.008
Started to fill it in, but did not complete it	0.027
Looked at it, but did not start to fill in	0.458
Never seen it	0.492
Engagement with childcare wall chart	
Completed it and have used it or still use it	0.012
Completed it, but did not use it	0.013
Started to fill it in, but did not complete it	0.031
Looked at it, but did not start to fill in	0.444
Never seen it	0.500

In the table below, all variables are expressed on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates parents did not talk at all about the division, and 7 parents talked about the division in extensive detail.

Other exploratory outcomes	Control	Treatment
Talked about parental leave	4.44 (1.54)	4.55 (1.50)
Talked about housework share	3.15 (1.44)	3.27 (1.48)
Talked about childcare share	3.56 (1.33)	3.60 (1.38)

Appendix 8: Further descriptives

Covariate	Control	Treatment	Overall
Gender: woman	95%	95%	95%
Father's first child	90%	92%	91%
Men in employment (employed, self-employed or on furlough)	98%	97%	98%
Women in employment	95%	94%	95%
Men's average contracted hours	35.83	36.68	36.26
Women's average contracted hours	33.66	33.76	33.71
Housework division before birth (1-7, where 7 means man does all)	3.50	3.54	3.52
Pregnancy stage ⁵⁶	Early 52% Mid 29% Late 10% Post 8%	Early 52% Mid 31% Late 10% Post 6%	Early 52% Mid 30% Late 10% Post 7%
One partner is pregnant (vs. given birth)	85%	88%	87%
Ethnicity: Asian ⁵⁷	5%	6%	6%
Ethnicity: Black	1%	1%	1%
Ethnicity: Mixed/Multiple	2%	3%	3%
Ethnicity: White	90%	86%	88%
Ethnicity: Other	1%	2%	1%
Education: higher education	91%	90%	91%
Household income above £85K	34%	36%	35%
Household income between £40K and £85K	45%	42%	44%

⁵⁶ Early pregnancy is up to week 25; Mid pregnancy is week 26 to 34; Late pregnancy is week 35 to 40 and post-natal is week 1 to 8. This refers to the week of pregnancy respondents were in in the first week of the trial.

⁵⁷ Note that 1% in control, 3% in intervention and 2% overall indicated 'prefer not to say' for ethnicity

Appendix 9: Outcome measures

Outcome measures	Data to be collected	Variable transformation
Primary 1: Men's intended parental leave	Intended length of parental leave in the first year after birth. Responses: number of weeks (for those intending to take less than 4 weeks, additional question about the number of days)	Continuous variable (weeks converted to days)
Secondary 1: Intended childcare share	Intended division of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feeding the baby - changing nappies - getting up for the baby - settling the baby to sleep - playing with and entertaining the baby - bathtime Responses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) My partner will do it all 2) My partner will do the majority 3) My partner will do slightly more 4) Equally 5) I will do slightly more 6) I will do the majority 7) I will do it all 	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 7-point Likert scale. We will create an index of childcare share based on an average response to all items. If a respondent is a man, the responses will be reverse coded.
Secondary 2: Intended housework share	Division of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food shopping - Cooking and/or baking - Washing dishes/(un)loading the dishwasher - Cleaning, dusting and vacuuming - Laundry and ironing - Tidying up Responses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) My partner will do it all 2) My partner will do the majority 3) My partner will do slightly more 4) Equally 5) I will do slightly more 6) I will do the majority 7) I will do it all 	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 7-point Likert scale. We will create an index of housework share based on an average response to all items. If a respondent is a man, the responses will be reverse coded.
Exploratory 1: Conversations about parental leave share	Responses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Not at all 2) Very little 3) A little 4) Moderately 5) A lot 6) Very much so 7) In great detail 	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 7-point Likert scale

Exploratory 2: Conversations about childcare share	Responses: 1) Not at all 2) Very little 3) A little 4) Moderately 5) A lot 6) Very much so 7) In great detail	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 7-point Likert scale
Exploratory 3: Conversations about housework share	Responses: 1) Not at all 2) Very little 3) A little 4) Moderately 5) A lot 6) Very much so 7) In great detail	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 7-point Likert scale
Exploratory 4: Engagement with the intervention newsletter content	Responses: 1) Strongly remember 2) Remember 3) Moderately remember 4) Slightly remember 5) Do not remember	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 5-point Likert scale Note that only intervention participants will be asked this question
Exploratory 5: Engagement with the tips for speaking to employers about parental leave article	Responses: 1) My partner and I both spoke to our employers using tips from this article 2) I spoke to my employer using tips from this article 3) My partner spoke to their employer using tips from this article 4) I read and shared the article with my partner 5) I read the article, but did not share further 6) I opened the article, but did not read it 7) Never seen it	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 7-point Likert scale Note that only intervention participants will be asked this question
Exploratory 6: Engagement with the wall charts (both baby-related and housework responsibilities)	Responses: 1) Completed it and have used it or still use it 2) Completed it, but did not use it 3) Started to fill it in, but did not complete it 4) Looked at it, but did not start to fill in 5) Never seen it	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 5-point Likert scale Note that only intervention participants will be asked this question
Exploratory 7: Ideal parental leave	Ideal parental leave length if employer provided full pay for men taking shared parental leave Responses: number of weeks	Continuous variable

CONTROL VARIABLES		
Father's first child	Responses: 1) 0/1 - This will be/is my/their first child 2) I/he have/has other child(ren) 3) Don't know (if partner)	Categorical, recoded to 0 if first child, 2 if 'don't know' and 3 if he has children.
Mother's age	Responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under 20 20 to 24 25 to 29 30 to 34 35 to 39 40 to 44 45 and over Prefer not to say 	Categorical
Father's age	Responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under 20 20 to 24 25 to 29 30 to 34 35 to 39 40 to 44 45 and over Prefer not to say 	Categorical
Mother's education	Responses: 1) No qualifications 2) GCSEs or equivalent (at school until aged 16) 3) A Levels or equivalent (at school until aged 18) 4) Undergraduate degree or professional qualification 5) Postgraduate degree 6) Prefer not to say	Responses will be recoded to a categorical response: 1) If has higher education (undergraduate, professional, postgraduate) 2) If doesn't have higher education 3) Prefer not to say
Father's education	Responses: 1) No qualifications 2) GCSEs or equivalent (at school until aged 16) 3) A Levels or equivalent (at school until aged 18) 4) Undergraduate degree or professional qualification 5) Postgraduate degree 6) Prefer not to say	Responses will be recoded to a categorical response: 1) If has higher education (undergraduate, professional, postgraduate) 2) If doesn't have higher education 3) Prefer not to say
Household income	Responses: 1) <£20K	Responses will be recoded to a categorical response:

	2) £20K - £24K 3) £25K - £29K 4) £30K - £34K 5) £35K - £39K 6) £40K - £54K 7) £55K - £69K 8) £70K - £84K 9) £85K+ 10) Prefer not to say	1) If above median (determined based on the median response in the entire sample) 2) If below or equal to median 3) Prefer not to say
Relative income	Responses: 1) I earn all the household income 2) I earn more than my partner 3) We earn about the same 4) My partner earns more than me 5) My partner earns all the household income 6) Prefer not to say	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 5-point Likert scale. Prefer not to say responses will be treated as missing values, and imputed using a multiple imputation method, based on the following predictors: household income, education, partner's education, age, partner's age, number of children, first child
Mother's employment status	Responses: 1) On furlough 2) Self-employed 3) Employed 4) Unemployed (and looking for work) 5) Not in work	Categorical
Father's employment status	Responses: 1) On furlough 2) Self-employed 3) Employed 4) Unemployed (and looking for work) 5) Not in work	Categorical
Mother's contracted employment hours	0 - 80	Continuous
Father's contracted employment hours	0 - 80	Continuous
Housework division prior to birth	Division of: - Food shopping - Cooking and/or baking	Responses will be treated as a continuous variable on a 7-point Likert scale; we will create an index of housework share based

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Washing dishes/(un)loading the dishwasher - Cleaning, dusting and vacuuming - Laundry and ironing - Tidying up <p>Responses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) My partner does/did it all 2) My partner does/did the majority 3) My partner does/did slightly more 4) Equally 5) I do/did slightly more 6) I do/did the majority 7) I do/did it all 	on an average response to all items.
Respondent gender	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Man 2) Woman 	Categorical 'Prefer to self-describe another way' and 'Prefer not to say' both ineligible
Pregnancy stage	Inferred from the newsletter week when receiving the parental leave content.	Transformed into the following categories: Early pregnancy (Until week 25) Mid pregnancy (week 26 to 34) Late pregnancy (week 35 to 40) Post-natal (postnatal week 1 to week 8)
Pregnant or given birth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) One of us is pregnant 2) We have had a baby within the last 4 months 	Categorical 'We have not had a baby in the last 4 months and neither of us is pregnant' and 'N/A - I don't have a partner' both ineligible
Mother's ethnicity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Asian 2) Black 3) Mixed/Multiple 4) White 5) Other 6) Prefer not to say 	Categorical
Father's ethnicity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Asian 2) Black 3) Mixed/Multiple 4) White 5) Other 6) Prefer not to say 	Categorical

Appendix 10: Balance checks

We observe balance between treatment groups across age (Chi-squared(7) = 8.94, $p = 0.26$), education (Chi-squared(6) = 7.43, $p = 0.28$), household income (Chi-squared(9) = 9.08, $p = 0.43$), contracted hours (t-test(1497) = 0.16, $p = 0.87$), employment status (Chi-squared(4) = 2.68, $p = 0.61$), and ethnicity (Chi-squared(5) = 7.83, $p = 0.17$), suggesting that the randomisation was balanced on these observable characteristics.



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