

Fathers Who Receive Child Rearing Benefits: What Can We Learn About Attitudes Couples ?

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Child rearing benefit (APE) is a system offered indifferently to men or women. In the facts, men rarely stop work to take care of their children. In 2002, only 2% of APE recipients are men. In this context, because the use remains exceptional, the population of APE recipients fathers seemed a pertinent focus field to update the explanatory factors behind the limited number of applicants. Investigation focused on their civil status, their professional situation before receiving APE, the professional situation of their partner and finally the distribution of household tasks.

Couples where the father receives APE are “unusual” compared to couples in the same situation (with two children, the youngest less than three years old) but where the father has not applied for APE.

More than half of the beneficiary fathers live with partners of a higher socio-professional status, 60% of women have a higher professional income than that of their partner, more than six out of ten (65%) of these fathers live with partners holding higher degrees than themselves and, among couples where the father had a job before receiving APE the professional income of the wife is on average higher than that of the husband.

This choice will encourage them to weigh the long term advantages and disadvantages, and to anticipate longer term effects of stopping work on their career. In this context, stopping work appears as a reasoned out option based on the consideration of a number of factors, mainly financial. This solution appears as the result of a financial, professional, family and conjugal game,

The decision for the father to stop work is more than an individual choice; it appears to be the result of steps taken by the couple that do not damage the professional career of one or the other. Sharing of household tasks and childcare are examples of practices befitting an egalitarian model, which although not openly expressed, reveals the current trends.

* APE is a benefit provided by family branch of social security. It can be provided at the full rate or part rate until the youngest child reaches the age of three. To be provided at full rate, the recipient has to have been employed and has to stop his job completely. If he were unemployed, he has to become “inactive”. At full rate the amount provided is about five hundred (500) euros. At the time of the research, it provided to parents who had at least two children, the youngest aged less than three. Since January 2004, this benefit called “Paje” can be provided with the birth of the 1st child.

** Methodology: I compiled a group of one thousand (1000) male recipients at full and part time rate, based on Family Benefit Fund files. I sent questionnaires to men receiving APE at full rate (668), since it was the question of leaving labour market that interested me. Three hundred and sixty nine (369) fathers replied, which is a return rate of fifty five per cent (55%). The study is based on three hundred and sixty nine (369) male recipients at the full rate. - This questionnaire focused on their civil status, their professional situation before receiving CB (APE), the professional situation of their partner and finally the distribution of household tasks. Furthermore, I completed the study with semi-direct interviews among twenty (20) fathers, chosen because they had stopped their work. These interviews were aimed at apprehending the values underlying the decision to stop work, and the reasons of giving priority to a woman's career.