



The Changes in the Parental Leave Policy in Norway
2018/2019
Policy Discourse and Gender Equality

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Abstract

A new parental leave policy was implemented in Norway in 2018. The total parental leave period was divided into three equal parts, giving fathers a historically large paternity quota. The implementation was based on arguments regarding the child's right to a safe and good childhood, and fathers rarely taking out more than the assigned paternity quota. Therefore, additional weeks needed to be added in order for the father to stay longer at home with his child in the first year of life. Weeks were not added to the total length of the parental leave period, but was taken from the shared quota (most often taken out by the mother).

Through document studies, critical discourse analysis, and Carol Lee Bacchi's approach; 'what's the problem represented to be?', this study investigates social and discursive practises related to the new parental leave policy and how it affects gender equality.

Foreldrepengeordningen i Norge ble endret i 2018. Hele foreldrepengeperioden ble delt i tre like deler, og ga far en historisk stor fedrekvote. Innføringen av endringene i foreldrepengeordningen, ble basert på argumenter om barns rett til en trygg og god barndom, og at fedre erfaringsmessig kun tar ut den fedrekvoten som de er tildelt. Derfor ble det ansett som nødvendig å forlenge antall uker i fedrekvoten, slik at fedre ble lengre hjemme med barnet sitt i det første leveåret. Ukene ble ikke lagt til den totale lengden av foreldrepengeperioden, men ble tatt fra den delte kvoten (oftest brukt av mor).

Gjennom tekst studier, kritisk diskursanalyse, og Carol Lee Bacchi's tilnærming; 'Hva er problemet representert som?', undersøker denne studien sosiale og diskursive praksiser relatert til den nye foreldrepengeordningen, og hvordan det påvirker kjønnslikestilling.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Presentation of topic

On July 1st 2018, the Norwegian government under the leadership of Prime minister Erna Solberg (H; Conservative Party), implemented a new paid parental leave policy that affected all families who gave birth on or after this date (Regjeringen, 2018). The total length of the parental leave period of 49 weeks has not been changed, however, the government has earmarked more weeks for the father or co-parent, leaving less weeks to be divided freely amongst the parents (NAV, 2019a).

When one decides to have children, there are a lot of considerations to be made. The parents have to decide who is to stay home and take care of the baby in the first year of life. The considerations regard who has the opportunity to stay home, how long and who wants to stay home with the baby. In addition, family economics needs to be addressed. In making these decisions, one might be influenced by the expectations of family and friends and one might also be influenced by the expectations of society, media and the state. Further, some guidelines are set by the government when it comes to how long each parent can or cannot stay home with the child and qualify for paid parental leave. Even some coercion is involved regarding the weeks earmarked the fathers or co-parents. If the father or co-parent cannot or will not take out the parental weeks earmarked them, the weeks will be taken away from the total period of paid parental leave which in turn will have an impact on the family situation (Barne- og likestillingsdepartementet (BoL), 2017-2018, p. 4).

In this thesis I will look into the history of parental leave policy in Norway, how the parental leave policy has evolved, what thoughts are laid to ground for implementing changes, how the changes are received by the families with children through discourse in media, and how the discourse surrounding paid parental leave and gender equality are evolving.

1.1.1 Aims and objectives

There have previously been written a master thesis on paid parental leave on Iceland, which can draw upon some parallels to the paid parental leave policy in Norway (Øverland, 2011). However, I will not make comparisons between Iceland and Norway in this thesis. I have not been able to locate studies on critical discourse analysis of the paid parental leave in Norway; therefore, I find this relevant as my objective for this thesis.

There are several reports and documents relating to the topic of paid parental leave in Norway, including Norwegian Public Inquiry reports, and statistics and articles from Statistics Norway. Further, NAV have conducted several studies and reports related to paid parental leave in Norway, including a special focus on paternity leave. I will refer to some of these studies, reports and articles in the background chapter and the chapter on findings. However, I see it as useful to look at findings through critical discourse analysis 'glasses', in order to locate how and when discourse 'changes' and have an impact on both discursive and social practises in society.

In this thesis I will look further into the Norwegian parental leave policy implemented July 1st 2018, and amended January 1st 2019. Due to the policy implementation being relatively new, the data are collected through documents, rather than through qualitative interviews and observation. This will be further discussed in the chapter regarding methodology. The focus of this thesis is on how policy is introduced and thought of in regards to critical discourse analysis, 'What's the problem represented to be?' presented by Carol Lee Bacchi. I will focus on how policy potentially changes social and discursive practises and how it can affect gender equality.

1.1.2 Motivation and research question

During spring 2018, when the media started reporting that the government were thinking about changing the paid parental leave policy and earmark more weeks for each parent instead of the parents choosing how to divide the parental leave for themselves, I was pregnant with my first child. This made me think of whom the government had in mind while implementing the new rules. Through media coverage, it did not seem that the government

did account for the different types of families and family situations, and neither for the differences in values, culture and traditions, or even biology. This made me curious to look into it further, and I decided to make the new policy change the topic of my thesis.

I am in general interested in how the welfare state functions for its members, as well as 'how the thought of gender equality only being achieved if one focuses on the private arena with families with children, opposed to in the public arena (market, systems, jobs)'. I have therefore chosen to use critical discourse analysis in order to 'pick apart' and 'put together' how and why this focus on paid parental leave is associated with gender equality.

In the context of implementation of a new parental leave policy in Norway, I have formulated the following research question:

A historical and discursive view on parental leave policy in Norway.
How are discursive and social practises related to parental leave policy affecting gender equality?

1.1.3 Conceptual framework and limitations

I will make clarifications of concepts used in this thesis below:

Paid parental leave – is known as *foreldrepenger* in Norwegian and refers to the period when one is home with the child and the state covers one's salary.

One-time pay-out – is known as *engangsstønning* in Norwegian and refers to the money one is entitled to if one does not qualify for paid parental leave.

Child allowance – is known as *barnetrygd* in Norwegian and refers to the monthly sum that is paid out to all families per child every month until the child turns 18 years of age.

Birth leave – is known as *fødselspermisjon* in Norwegian. It refers to the right to two weeks leave for the father or co-parent related to the birth.

Cash support – is known as *kontantstøtte* in Norwegian and refers to the monthly pay-out one is eligible for if one chooses not to have the child in kindergarten.

National Insurance – is known as *folketrygden* and refers to an obligatory social security scheme which provides economic benefits for Norwegian inhabitants regarding the need for compensation in terms of sick leave, pregnancy and birth, loss of employment, disabilities, death, old age, and loss of a provider.

NAV – Was originally short for ‘*new work and welfare management*’. Now it is a name protected as a registered trademark. NAV oversees all welfare arrangements and manages pay-outs, both on state level and municipality level.

The Norwegian Directory of Health – is known as *Helsedirektoratet* (HD). It is a Norwegian directorate and authority that contributes to implementing national social and health policy, in addition to advising central government agencies, municipalities and volunteer organizations.

Gender equality and gender equity – is known as *likestilling* in Norwegian and means that men and women have equal rights and opportunities within all of the vital areas of life. The Norwegian law on gender equality and discrimination from 2017 defines *likestilling* as ‘equality’, ‘equal opportunities’, and ‘equal rights’ for women and men. Gender equity is referred to as a fairness in treatment of men and women towards their respective needs, even though their respective needs may be varied. It includes equal treatment or different treatment that is equal in terms of rights, opportunities, obligations and benefits. I will use gender equality when referring to the Norwegian term *likestilling* and *positive discrimination* when referring to gender equity.

EEA Agreement and EFTA countries – “The Agreement on the European Economic Area, which entered into force on 1 January 1994, brings together the EU Member States and the three EEA EFTA States — Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway — in a single market, referred to as the "Internal Market"." (EFTA, 2020).

(G) The basic amount of income – Is a rate that is set by the government each year and is used as a basis to calculate insurance benefits and pension for members of *folketrygden*.

It is important to account for the limitations of this thesis. Due to the length of the thesis and to this thesis containing a certain amount of data in context to history and problem representations related to the paid parental leave policy in Norway, some sources and data have been left out, such as several national inquiry reports written on family policy

in previous years. This choice has been made based on a presentation of relevant data being presented in the background chapter and through the Norwegian Public Inquiry report on family policy from 2017, and in addition, highlighted in Carol Bacchi's critical discourse analysis model. Further, conducting critical discourse analysis on this topic, does not mean that the full extent of the discourse surrounding parental leave policy and gender equality will be taken into account and analysed. This will be further presented in the subchapter concerning data in the methodology chapter.

In the next chapter, I will present background on the Norwegian welfare state, history of parental leave in Norway, including a table which will give an overview on how the parental leave have been distributed over the years, and a presentation of the new parental leave rules implemented in 2018. Last in the introduction chapter, I will present background on gender equality. The presentation of background in this thesis, will be complementary to the findings and analysis chapter.

2 Historical context and background

2.1 History of the Norwegian welfare state

The political parties in Norway decided after the second world war to gather all the social economic benefits and organize them into a system, covering all members in Norway. What previously had been a state of 'social benefits', was now being developed into a welfare state. Due to most of the economic funds going to restoring the state after the war, most of the welfare system in Norway did not occur before the transition between the 1960's and 1970's. '*Folketrygden*' (national insurance) was established in 1966, a law regarding social economic benefits. With some amendments from 1971, this law included benefits related to rehabilitation, pensions, sick leave, work injuries and unemployment. A law on social care was created in 1964, saying that all members of the state should be covered by an economic safety net, even people who was not included in *folketrygden*. For the people who needed economic funding outside of the *folketrygden* regulations, this law was managed on a local level. The revenue spent on these benefits, has been collected through employers and members of the state through taxes, and the state. Through the 1900's, the welfare system in Norway kept developing, with expansions of existing benefits as well as entirely new kinds of benefits (Benum, 2016). Unemployment was not necessarily the only reason why people required economic benefits. Because of new kinds of benefits, such as support persons, relief through weekend homes and a right to a spot in kindergarten, made the welfare system expand to involve several new clients. In the 1970's, the number of clients expanded from 600.000 and 700.000, and thirty years later, to 1,2 million clients. The welfare system has made some adjustments in order to compensate for the pressure to supply social economic benefits to more and more people, and to ease the economic burden. Several changes have been made through the years in an attempt to cut the costs of the state, such as patients having to pay a deductible on prescription medication and doctor's appointments, and employers who have had to pay out more to employees who were sick since the beginning of the 1980's. There were increased costs related to disability benefits, so the 'work line' was introduced at the beginning of the 1990's, where the goal was to reduce pay-outs and get people back to work. The benefits of the welfare state have become

an important factor in people's lives, and a great part of the benefits were given out without concern for the recipients economic and social status in society (Benum, 2016).

2.1.1 History of parental leave

In this subchapter, I will present a historical view on the development of the parental leave policy in Norway from the 1880's until present day. The table below gives an overview of the total number of paid parental leave weeks, and the total length of parental leave over the years, starting in 1977. Further, I will go briefly into the ideology and train of thought leading to different policy regarding parental leave and how it has developed over the years.

Table 1

Year	Weeks in total, 100% coverage	Weeks in total, 80% coverage	Shared quota, 100% coverage	Shared quota, 80% coverage	Weeks earmarked the mother	Weeks earmarked the father/co-parent
1977	18	-	12	-	6	-
1987	20	-	14	-	6	-
1988	22	-	16	-	6	-
1989	24	30	18	24	6	-
1990	28	35	22	29	6	-
1991	32	40	26	32	6	-
1992	35	44 2/5	27	36 2/5	6 (+2 before birth)	-
1993	42	52	29	39	6 (+3 before birth)	4
2005	43	53	29	39	6 (+3)	5
2006	44	54	29	39	6 (+3)	6
2009	46	56	27	37	6 (+3)	10
2011	47	57	26	36	6 (+3)	12
2012	47	57	20	30	12 (+3)	12
2013	49	59	18	28	14 (+3)	14
2014	49	59	26	36	10 (+3)	10
2015	49	59	26	36	10 (+3)	10
2018	49	59	16	26	15 (+3)	15
2019	49	59	16	18	15 (+3) 19 (+3)	15 19

(Table 1 is based on Table 5.1 in Ellingsæter & Widerberg, 2012, p. 107; Brandht & Kvande, 2013; Regjeringen 2018; Samfunnsforskning 2016-2017; Virke 2014; Stortinget 2013).

Let us look further into the development of the parental leave policy. In 1882, women were banned from working for six weeks after giving birth, which mostly affected unwed mothers working in the industry. Obligatory health insurance was introduced in 1909 (Hamre, 2017) which gave women the right to take out six weeks paid leave after giving birth. This arrangement was based on the reasons that mothers needed to recover after giving birth and for breastfeeding considerations. The law regarding health insurance was amended to apply for unemployed women as well in 1915, since this right was only given to women who were employed, this has been disputed from the start. Women got twelve weeks of maternity leave when sick leave benefits were introduced in 1965 for all who had employment. When the universal arrangement of maternity leave was expanded in the 1960's and 1970's, gender equality was the main argument. It was expected that occupational activity amongst women would rise in near future, so it became important to facilitate having children and working at the same time. Some stressed that women who returned to domestic work should also be given better rights. The first parental leave policy was implemented in 1977. It started out with a total of 18 weeks, where the first six weeks was earmarked the mother and the rest of the weeks could be shared between the parents. This arrangement has gradually changed and expanded through the years. The right to full pay while sick, was implemented in 1978, which also included the right to full pay for parental leave. After this, the number of parental leave weeks stood still for almost a decade. In 1993, it was decided that fathers should have four weeks earmarked parental leave, known as paternity leave. Mothers were given three weeks extra before giving birth in addition to their earmarked six weeks after birth. However, these rights only applied to working women. A one-time pay-out, where the amount has increased over the years, were given to the women who did not earn this right. Women should be given greater equal treatment regardless of their attachment to the work force, therefore, unemployed mothers should be allowed an economic benefit, it was argued. The idea of paid parental leave, is that the pay-out should cover the salary you lose by not working, including compensation for sick leave. Furthermore, the amount that is paid out during parental leave is determined by how much your salary is, which means that parents who has a higher salary will gain more by taking parental leave than parents with lower salaries (Ellingsæter & Widerberg, 2012, p. 106-107). However, parents who earn more than the maximum wage coverage of 6G (six times the basic amount of income), which in 2017 was 540.400 NOK before tax, will lose

money when they take parental leave, unless their workplace covers what the state does not (Schou, 2019, p. 7).

Since 1989, it has been possible to get more weeks of parental leave if one takes 80% coverage of wages. Vice versa, one will get less weeks of parental leave if one takes 100% coverage. The number of weeks for 80% coverage has increased in accordance with the total number parental leave weeks over the years (Ellingsæter et al. 2012, p. 107). From January 1st 2019, parents have a right to 19 weeks each in the maternity and paternity quota if one chooses 80% coverage (NAV, 2019a).

Next, a more detailed description of the new parental leave policy will follow, including how it functions in practise given different circumstances.

2.1.2 The new rules and nuances

July 1st 2018, a new policy regarding parental leave were implemented. All who gave birth on or after this day would be affected by these rules. The criteria for getting the right to paid parental leave is firstly, that one has had income for six of the last ten months before giving birth. Secondly, one needs to have earned more than 48.441 NOK in the last year, which is half of the basic amount of income. Thirdly, one needs to reside in Norway. When one qualifies for paid parental leave, the rules are that one can take out the given weeks all at once, or one can combine them with work and vacation. The rules demonstrate that one has to use the given weeks of parental leave before the child turns three years of age, or before a new baby is born (NAV, 2019a).

There are different rules and criteria related to different types of family situations. If both parents have met the three criteria mentioned above, then the maternity leave period and the paternity leave period is 15 weeks each and 16 weeks to share between them how one likes, if one chooses 100% coverage. Then the total number of parental leave weeks are 49. If one chooses 80% coverage, the total number of weeks are 59, leaving 19 weeks in each of the parent's quota after January 1st 2019. The mother also gets three weeks paid leave before the due date. The six weeks earmarked the mother are included in her 15-week or 19-week quota. One can take out 12 weeks of paid parental leave before giving birth.

However, these weeks will be taken out of the shared parental leave quota. There are no requirements of what the father does in order for the mother to get paid maternity leave, and there are no requirements of what the mother does in order for the father to get paid paternity leave. However, the mother has to take out six of her 15 weeks right after birth, the rest of the weeks she can take out whenever she likes. The father can use his paternity leave quota seven weeks after birth at the earliest (NAV, 2019a). If the mother or father gets sick after giving birth and are dependent upon help to take care of the baby, or are committed to an institution, the father can apply to transfer the maternity leave weeks to him. If one gives birth to more than one child, one will get a total number of paid parental leave for 17 or 21 weeks extra if it is twins, and 46 or 56 weeks extra if it is triplets or more. The maximum pay-out one can receive for paid parental leave is six times the basic amount, which totals 581.298 NOK per January 1st 2019. However, the pay-out one gets will be calculated based on average income of the last three months before the period of paid parental leave starts. The application process for paid parental leave can start when the mother is 26 weeks along in the pregnancy. The father has to apply after the child is born (NAV, 2019a).

Regarding the weeks of parental leave in the shared quota, there are some variations to the rules. The number of weeks is 16 if one chooses 100% coverage and 26 weeks if one chooses 80% coverage. However, the number of weeks based on 80% coverage has been changed after January 1st 2019, and the total amount of weeks now is 18 to share. It still makes up the total number of paid parental leave weeks to 49 with 100% coverage and 59 weeks with 80% coverage. The difference is the number of weeks in the paternity and maternity quota has been changed at 80% coverage from 15 to 19 weeks. If the mother takes all or some of the weeks from the shared quota, then there are no activity requirements of the father. However, if the father takes out some or all of the weeks from the shared quota, there are activity requirements of the mother. The mother needs to be working, studying or be otherwise engaged in an approved activity in order for the father to take out paid parental leave in this period. Whatever kind of activity, it needs to be equivalent to fulltime activity engagement outside of the home, and this activity has to be approved by NAV (NAV, 2019a).

However, these rules differ somewhat when only one of the parents qualify for paid parental leave. If only the mother has qualified, she gets 49 weeks of paid parental leave if she chooses 100% coverage and 59 weeks parental leave if she chooses 80% coverage. There are no activity requirements of the father in order for the mother to qualify for this arrangement. However, if only the father has the right to paid parental leave, he will get 50 weeks of parental leave if he chooses 80% coverage, and 40 weeks if he chooses 100% coverage. The three weeks before birth and the six weeks after birth are earmarked the mother no matter the family situation, but the pay-out may vary. However, there is an activity requirement of the mother in order for the father to qualify for paid parental leave, in the same way as when it comes to the father taking weeks from the shared quota if both parents qualify for paid parental leave. Further, if only the father qualifies but is not able to use this right, the whole system of maternity, paternity and shared parental leave quotas disappears, meaning the family will have one income and the mother will get the one-time pay-out (NAV, 2019a).

In the scenario where the mother does not qualify for paid parental leave, she will get a one-time pay-out, which in 2018 was the amount of 63.140 NOK and was upped to 83.140 NOK for mothers who gave birth on or after January 1st 2019. The requirements for getting this one-time pay-out is that you are the mother of the child, and lives in Norway. In some cases, it is possible for the father to apply and get the one-time pay-out, however, this is only in special circumstances, such as if the mother dies or the father gets custody of the child. The mother can apply for this sum in the 26th week of her pregnancy and the pay-out is not taxable. If one has not applied for this sum within six months after the child is born, one loses the right to this pay-out (NAV, 2019b). This will be further discussed in the findings and analysis chapters.

If the mother is a student, she will be allegeable for student loan and grant, in addition to the one-time pay-out. The basic pay-out of student loan in the academic year 2018/2019, amounts to 108.250 NOK. 40% of this amount will be turned into a grant after one has passed the expected exams and requirements to complete the education, which means one only has to pay back 60% (Lånekassen (LK), 2019a). One can also be allegeable for a 'breadwinner' grant and get 1.687 NOK per child per month. However, there are some criteria, including the income of the co-parent of the child/children (LK, 2019b). One can also

be eligible for a 'parent' grant. The criteria include that one has been a student for the last four months before giving birth, and the amount depends on the co-parent's use of his/her right to paid parental leave. The mother cannot receive this grant while the co-parent takes out paid parental leave (LK, 2019c).

Child allowance will be given to all parents who have custody of a child under the age of 18 years, per child. The amount of child allowance has been stable at 970 NOK every month from the first month the child is born, until the month before the child turns 18 years old. The amount was changed in February 2019 to 1.054 NOK. The child allowance is tax free, and the right to it depends on if you are a member of *folketrygden*. The amount is usually paid out to the mothers account automatically, unless other arrangements with NAV has been made. One may have the right to extended child allowance from the state if certain requirements are met. It is not necessary to apply for this benefit, unless one needs extended child support due to being the sole provider of the child, or if the parents does not live together, than the child allowance can be split equally between the parents (NAV, 2006).

Last in this chapter, an overview on the thought related to gender equality will be presented.

2.1.3 Gender equality

When looking at policy documents regarding gender equality, both national and international, one usually finds that women are subject to political discourse. Women groups, women panels, department for women, etc. When talking about discrimination based on gender, the language is usually portraying women as the group needing protecting and men are sometimes portrayed as 'predators', especially when it comes to issues regarding violence. Men is usually referred to as something in the background regarding gender equality, and raising issues in regards to boys and men can be problematic, without making it about 'men's rights', or having to move the discussion outside the gender framework altogether. The way the political discourse is shaped around gender equality, mentioning women in policy documents and giving men the 'backseat', creates a divide between feminists and anti-feminists, even though it is in a small scale. Attempts can be made in order to diminish the divide, for example Australia added a 'men's health'

document to a 'women's health' document. However, this may cause the main equality rationale of the original policy to weaken, even though it acknowledges a wider scope of issues related to gender. By diminishing the divide between men and women in policy documents, may result in creating an even bigger divide and forgetting the rationale of gender, causing more gender segregation, not less. When bringing a bigger focus on men's issues into the existing policy framework regarding gender, may weaken the authority of women in that particular policy area. Further, White (2000), makes it a point that men still have the most institutional authority and wealth, therefore 'bringing men into it' will not help, rather undermine the drive for gender equality (Connell, 2011, p. 10-12). The biggest change regarding the want of gender equality amongst men have been present in the Nordic countries, in term of the implementation of paternity leave which men are willing to take, in order to change gender practise. The research and practical experience are summed up by Øystein Holter:

The Nordic 'experiment' has shown that a *majority* of men can change their practice when circumstances are favourable . . . When reforms or support policies are well-designed and targeted towards an on-going cultural process of change, men's active support for gender-equal status increases (Holter, 2003, p. 126 in Connell, 2011, p. 17).

According to Connell, there are mainly four reasons why men want change in relations to gender equality. Firstly, boys and men have social relationships with girls and women, as partners, wives, mothers, neighbours, colleagues, aunts, sisters and daughters, and so on. They will support change because they have a relational interest in gender equality. Secondly, gender order may have a toxic effect on men, and they therefore want to avoid it. Being male and holding a masculine role, may cause men to not seek medical help when they need it. Men are more prone to drug abuse, homicide and suicide, premature death due to accidents and occupational injuries. One of the most powerful constraints on gender reform comes from economic and social pressure on men to compete in the workplace. Therefore, men have a wish for better balance between home life and work life. Thirdly, a wish for better conditions in their communities, may be a reason for men to want change. They may see gender equality as relevant for the well-being of their community. Lastly, men may want change due to their ethical or political principles, which may have a basis in socialist, religious or democratic beliefs (Connell, 2011, p. 17-18). In order to ensure

gender equality policy, there needs to be an alliance between women and men. Already, there is a shift in the culture in the form of historical consciousness regarding gender and an understanding that customs related to gender came into existence at specific moments and can always be altered through social action (Connell, 2011, p. 22).

Policy regarding gender equality are trying to steer the gender change process, however, whether it is working is hard to tell. We live in an era where gender change, gender relations, gender identity and gender performance are all in a flux. The state is the actor who is attempting to steer the process of gender equality through reforms. According to Borchorst (1999), a large number of feminist researchers have shown how the lives of women are being regulated by policies and agencies, both in the public and family arena. One might perceive 'the state' as one single actor, however, the state consists of a complex gathering of several agencies, all pursuing different agendas and following different gendered lines. Every organisation and every agency have to be accountable for their way of relating to gender equality in order for the state to succeed in procuring gender equality in society. In addition, how state agencies relate to gender equality may come into conflict with other reforms the state sets, according to Yeatman (1990) (Connell, 2011, p. 25-26).

The gender equality perspective of the parental leave policy, and the implementation of paternity leave in 1993, goes towards making the parents more equal in the caretaker responsibility, as well as ensuring that women did not have to let go of their jobs when becoming mothers. Further, the parental leave policy of 1993 made consideration towards the children's need of togetherness with both parents during their first year, as well as gender equality, and in regards to the health of mother and child (NOU 1996:13, p. 215-216 in Hamre, 2017). Further, in the period from 2008 to 2018, more fathers take out the paternity quota. However, one can locate an indicator towards less gender equality when one looks at the numbers concerning higher education. In the same period where the number of fathers who take out paternity leave has gone up, the gap between men and women with higher education has become larger. There are now more women with higher education than men, and this is explained by the group of women with higher education grows more rapidly than the group of men with higher education. The gap was 3% in 2008, and have risen to 8% in 2018. It should be mentioned that overall, the level of education in the Norwegian population has gone up (Gram, 2019).

In the next chapter, I will present methodology, including document analysis and a presentation of critical discourse. I will further account for ethics and my role as researcher. Data, with an emphasis on my most important source, the Norwegian Public Inquiry report (2017), will be presented. Further, I will present literature I have used, an assessment of these, and theoretical framework, mainly Carol Lee Bacchi's critical discourse analysis model; 'what's the problem represented to be?' I will further supply additional theories in order to highlight the six questions in Bacchi's critical discourse approach.

3 Methodology and theory

3.1 Qualitative research and document analysis

I will use qualitative research method in the form of text analysis and critical discourse analysis for the purpose of this thesis.

When doing qualitative research, one is expected to use multiple sources of evidence to seek corroboration and convergence through the use of different methods and data sources. The documents one collect can have five functions; documents used to shed light on context, documents that illuminates situations that needs to be observed and questions that needs to be asked as part of the research, documents that supplements research data, documents that can help track development and change, and documents that can be analysed as a way to corroborate evidence or verify findings from other sources (Bowen, 2009).

Document analysis can be used as one of several methods (observation and/or interviews), or it can be used as a single stand-out method. Using document analysis may be the most effective way to gather data when information/informants have forgotten the details or the events can no longer be observed. But as any qualitative research method, document analysis has both advantages and limitations. The advantages to conducting document analysis are efficiency, cost-effectiveness, availability, stability, exactness, coverage and lack of obtrusiveness and reactivity. The limitations include low retrievability, insufficient detail and biased selectivity (Bowen, 2009).

Qualitative research tries to understand the communicative actions of people in specific contexts and meanings that may be connected to those actions. When working with text, one tries to get an overview of the incomplete pieces or representative parts of something larger, which researchers call discourse. Simply put, discourse is the available language that people have to express something or to talk about some phenomenon, which researchers try to decipher, explain and interpret when they analyse specific texts. In doing discourse analysis, it is important for the researcher to understand social, cultural and political context where the discourse is operating (McKinnon, 2014).

In working with text and document analysis one forms categories through a coding process. Each category needs to be interpreted as significant in order to form argumentation. During the interpretation process one needs to locate previous research conducted on the topic in order to not replicate knowledge and bring something new. When writing, it is important to account for the text data and the method used. Also, the role of the researcher must be highlighted (McKinnon, 2014).

3.1.1 Discourse analysis – A critical approach

The basis of discourse analysis is to interpret intention and meaning. Discourse analysis generates natural 'images of the audience', therefore, it requires no testing. There are several qualities to discourse analysis, as well as issues. The field is very philosophical, epistemological and self-aware, and it is hard not to enter into debates surrounding what is discourse and what is non-discourse. Further, the discourse analysis field is worried about its warranty for taking political position, and at the same time is concerned to be politically and culturally relevant. Some of the issues concerning discourse analysis includes the field as not explaining the world, only help us to understand parts of it. Further, there are presumptions about associated concepts of power and persuasiveness. The researcher conducting discourse analysis, will already have a sense of what aspects of the topic that may have the most relevance, from knowledge of the people concerned. Lastly, it is important not to make assumptions as to how the 'audience' feel or react towards the message/s the researcher is analysing. One has to be honest about boundaries and limits (Barker, 2008).

Critical discourse analysis is more specifically used to shed light on the relationship between text, social practise and discursive practice (Bratberg, 2014, p. 43). The ambition of critical discourse analysis is to criticize, describe and explain language use that may cover up or disguise social conditions that may be problematic. There is an assumption that language always carries with it a particular perspective, and never or rarely portrays a neutral world image. Critical discourse analysis tries to explain and describe how different views of the world and ideology are mediated through language (Grue, 2011, p. 112). According to Fairclough (1992), there are three levels in critical discursive analysis. The first level is text, the second level is discursive practise and the third level is social practise. Text can be seen

as an articulation of the particular discourse, and can confirm and build up under the current discourse. The text level and the discursive practise level are connected through reciprocal relationship that affect each other, in the way that text has an effect on the discourse and the way discourse sets limits to the text. Further, there can be a tension between discourse practise and text. The same goes for the connection between the discursive practise level and the social practise level. The third level; social practice, entails all the things we do that contributes to enhance the discourse practice. The discourse paints a line for social practise to follow, and social practise must be maintained in order for the discourse to be kept alive. One of the main theorists within critical discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough, has a background in linguistics and tried to find out how the way we use language contributes to maintain social practise and vice versa, how the dominance of specific discourses maintain particular practises, that in turn confirms the discourse. Fairclough has been critical of researchers in social science not giving much attention to how social processes have an important level of language in them. Linguistic science on the other hand, was critiqued for a lack of understanding regarding power, and how power plays a role in social practise, how discourse both creates and reproduce power relations between different social groups. Fairclough brought together a combination of concrete political and social studies, and detailed linguistic analysis. In addition, the thought that text has a connection to other texts which contributes to give them a joined frame of reference for the sender and receiver, has been borrowed from comparative literature studies. In conducting critical discourse analysis, one continues to focus on the relations between text, which part of the discursive practise this text fits into, and the social practise that makes up the context. All three levels; text, discursive practise and social practise, are reciprocal of one another, meaning that text shapes discourse which leads the way for social practice, and vice versa; social practise influences the discourse, which are represented through text (Bratberg, 2014, p. 43-46).

Ideology is a part to consider when using critical discourse analysis. Firstly, ideology is often what is not said or written, but is implicitly there in the text or language that goes into the particular discourse. Further, ideology can be located in what is presupposed, already said or written, or preconstructed. Second, ideology can sometimes be located in interpersonal meaning and norms. Thirdly, ideology and power are linked in the way that ideology/power shapes the discourse and decides which discourse is the dominating one

(Fairclough, 2010, p. 27). Theory within the 'school' of critical discourse analysis can explain how politics and language affect each other and the method and approach within the discipline are used to investigate specific areas of society where language contributes to aggravate or maintain distortions in the social, economic and political power relations (Grue, 2011, p. 113).

Fairclough have been critical towards researchers within social sciences, not to pay enough attention to how language plays an important part in social processes. This is something I want to highlight when conducting the analysis of my findings. I will present the specific analysis approach I am using in my thesis within critical discourse thoroughly below in the theory chapter, the 'what's the problem represented to be?' approach.

3.2 Ethics and my role in the research process

It is important and necessary to apply reflexivity or self-analysis in doing the analysing (McKinnon, 2014). What type of policy one choses to analyse and how one conducts the analysis, will be coloured by who we are as well as by one's own situation being immersed in the conceptual logic of our era (Bacchi, 2009, p. 19). By applying the six questions from the 'what's the problem represented to be' approach, one shows a commitment to include one's thinking and oneself into the 'material' that is to be analysed. By investigating problem representation, one will be set to be subjective in the way one forms a problem representation to be elicited, which in turn will have an impact on how one sees others and ourselves. Therefore, reflexivity, or 'self-problematization' will play a crucial part in the analysis (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, p. 22).

The data that becomes collected by the researcher, are dependent upon the researcher's interest. By obtaining a particular focus while collecting data, translates to other data not being collected. If, however, one should be able to remain neutral during the data collection process, the researcher will become more selective in narrowing the theme during the analysis process. This will perhaps result in the researcher favouring one theme which captures his or her interest, though it leads to other themes being given less or no focus at all (Johannessen, Tufte & Christofferesen, 2016). My role in this process will make a mark on this thesis and should therefore be mentioned here. The choices I have made in

connection to theoretical framework, method and selection of data, will characterize the analysis, as well as the conclusion. In accordance with Bowen (2009), when compiling data related to the paid parental leave policy, I have focused on data that sheds light on the context, such as official documents on government pages, documents that supplements research data (SSB), documents that can help track development and change, such as the National Public Inquiry report and Nav reports. In addition, documents that can be analysed as a way to corroborate evidence or verify findings from other sources. Media documents have been used to highlight the discursive and social practises in relations to the implementation of the new parental leave policy. Less focus has been given on the variety of families who are affected by the change and the social practises, due to implementation of the new parental leave policy being relatively new, and also due to document studies being a poor choice of method in terms of collecting these data. Qualitative interviews and observation of families who are affected by the new policy would be a better choice. I have tried my utmost to remain neutral in collecting data and writing the analysis, and explain my choices. My choices and my role as a researcher will colour the analysis and conclusion.

3.3 Data

My main source of data consists of findings from the Norwegian Public Inquiry report regarding public support for families with children from 2017. The main data will be presented more thoroughly below in the next subchapter.

In collecting data for my thesis work, I have read a variety of books and articles with topics concerning gender equality, history of the Norwegian welfare state, and policy making. I have searched through documents published on the official government pages, *Regjeringen.no* for data collection surrounding the new parental leave policy, and *Nav.no* for data concerning the practise surrounding the implementation of how the new parental leave rule is put into effect. Further, I have followed the debate in the media through chronicles and online groups who are opposed to the new parental leave policy. Some of these chronicles and media articles will be used in the analysis chapter, not as a factual rendition of reality, but in order to highlight the discursive practises surrounding the new paid parental leave policy. I consider the newspaper chronicles and interviews as parts to explain

certain parts of the discourse, however, I do not consider them to be representative for the whole discourse.

In regards to method and theory, I have collected data related to discourse analysis through various research articles, and through Carol Lee Bacchi's, professor in politics at the University of Adelaide, work and books, and uses her book; 'Analysing Policy: What's the problem represented to be?' as theory for analysing my findings. In addition, theory that can help build up the questions in Bacchi's analyses model, have been located in Martinussen's book regarding the field of sociology.

When using data collected and analysed by SSB (Statistics Norway) regarding fathers' uptake of parental leave and paternity quota, the author makes a note of taking into consideration that the numbers can be difficult to compare and analyse, given that the statistics regarding paternity leave cannot directly be linked to the number of births in the same year (Hamre, 2017). The comparison will be difficult, since a statistics period is shorter than the three years it is possible to take out parental leave.

I could have used several more data, however, due to the limitations of this thesis, I have ruled out additional reports regarding the Norwegian welfare state and families with children. I consider the Norwegian Public Inquiry 2017 report to sum up a fair amount of studies and findings. More data could also have been included in order to document a greater scope surrounding the discourse regarding parental leave, however, it is nearly impossible to get a full oversight over the whole parental leave discourse. In addition, knowing when you have gained enough information to present the parental leave and gender equality discourse is hard, since one cannot know to the full extent where the discourse ends as it is still in progress.

Below, a more in-depth presentation of my main source will follow.

3.3.1 The Norwegian Public Inquiry 2017

By royal decree a commission was put together in June 2015 with several experts, and was charged with the task of forming a report based on the study of support for families with children. This commission was led by Anne Lise Ellingsæter, professor at the department of

sociology and human geography at the university of Oslo, and their findings were published in 2017 (NOU 2017:6, p. 7). The previous study on this topic was conducted and published in 1996 by the Longva commission (NOU 2017:6, p. 11). The Ellingsæter commission discussed what should be the goal regarding social economic benefits to families with children and how one could make changes to the existing welfare arrangements in order to secure good use of resources and reduce the number of children living in poverty (NOU 2017:6, p. 12).

The Norwegian Public Inquiry report from 2017 includes an overview of a number of areas concerning families with children, and presents recommendations for different areas of family policy. For the purpose of this thesis, I will only use findings in relations with the parental leave arrangement in accordance with my research question.

3.4 Theoretical approach

The main theory for analysing the findings, is Bacchi's analysis model. The 'what's the problem represented to be?' approach to policy analysis is critical. In a world where we are taught to 'solve problems', this model encourages us to question problems instead. Thereof the naming of the analysis model, 'what's the problem represented to be?'. The model will provide further scrutiny into how policy makers form problems that they in turn try to solve. The theory used in this thesis will be presented thoroughly below.

3.4.1 What's the problem represented to be?

Policy is perhaps thought of as something good, which will help fix things. If there is a problem, policy can help to get things in order. If one believes something needs to be fixed, it is assumed that there is a problem. We are governed by problematisations. The problem can be explicit or implicit, and often government policy does not really point out a problem that a policy is going to fix. However, it builds on the notion that policies will change something that needs changing. This is where the 'what's the problem represented to be?' approach will take something implicit and make it explicit in order to scrutinize it further (Bacchi, 2009. p. x). *"A problem representation refers to the understanding of the 'problem'*

implied in any policy or rule" (Bacchi, 2009, p. xii). This analysis model consists of six questions that one applies to a problem representation. The six questions are:

1. What's the 'problem' (e.g. of 'problem gamblers', 'drug use/abuse', domestic violence, global warming, health inequalities, terrorism, etc.) represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced? (Bacchi, 2009, p. xii)

The research and work of Carol Bacchi, is mainly conducted in the context of Australian and American context, however, the 'what's the problem represented to be?' approach have also been applied in other national settings. In this thesis I will do a parallel displacement of Bacchi's approach to the Norwegian context. Below, I will look more thoroughly on the six questions in the 'what's the problem represented to be?' approach. Further, other theorists will be mentioned to highlight the general thought behind the question to underline the importance of the question in conducting the analysis.

Question 1 (What's the 'problem' (e.g. of 'problem gamblers', 'drug use/abuse', domestic violence, global warming, health inequalities, terrorism, etc.) represented to be in a specific policy?) is used to clarify the problem representation in the policy one is analysing. Since policy is based on the assumption that there is a problem, there will be implicit problem representation in all policy. This approach encourages one to work backwards. In order to reveal what the problem representations are within the policy proposals; one needs to study everything about how the proposals came to be. One might find more than one and different problem representations within a policy, given that policies are complex and often consisting of arrange of proposals. The different problem representation one might find, may be contradictory or in conflict with one another (Bacchi, 2009, p. 2-4).

After identifying the implied problem representation/s, **Question 2** (What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?) looks into what is taken-for-granted, what is assumed and what is not questioned in this or these

problem representations. This question in the analysis involves what we believe we can know about the nature of things and the study of the nature of existence. These meanings are necessary to make a problem representation coherent and shed light on what is taken for granted in a specific problematisation (Bacchi, 2009, p. 274-276). For clarification, this question should not be used to locate biases amongst the policy makers, rather to locate the biases that are lodged within the problem representation/s. One is interested in the forms of 'knowledge' the arguments are based upon so one might find out how it is possible for something to happen, rather than why something happens. One is looking for deep-seated values, as well as cultural premises that is the basis for problem representation/s. It is important to realize that policies are elaborated in discourse and it is useful to investigate key concepts, categories and binaries functioning within a policy (Bacchi, 2009, p. 4-7).

Question 3 (How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?) focuses on understanding and reflecting upon the decisions and developments that contribute to how identified problem representation is formed. The other objective in this question is to understand that both over time and across space, competing problem representations exists, meaning that things could have developed differently. In a way, this question seeks to get an overview over the genealogy of the problem representations, tracing the roots and history in order to understand how a problem representation has been formed (Bacchi, 2009, p. 10-12). "The purpose of question 3 (...) is to highlight the conditions that allow a particular problem representation to take shape and to assume dominance" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 11). In order to substantiate this question, a view on values and attitudes needs to be addressed. Fredrik Barth (1966, 1994), was one of the first to embellish the term 'value integration'; the actors in society becomes familiar with each other's preferences and judgement calls through repetitive exchange within the same kinds of situations and under the same conditions of decision making. The different actors will adjust themselves slightly based on the interaction with others, resulting in a joined understanding on how to act in a new repetition of the same kinds of situations and under the same conditions of decision making. Through this process, individuals will make use of other's experience when making decisions instead of continuing the process of trying and failing. This makes people join a collective effort in order to find the 'value consistency'. The actors will measure their point of view to that of the fellow actor, and create a standard through repetitive interaction. The

result entails values and norms being reshaped and integrated into a culture. Further, when the norms and values form a pattern of what is considered 'good' or 'right', it has formed a 'social institution' (Martinussen, 2008, p. 153).

Question 4 (What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?) is starting to explore the critical potential of the analysis. The point of this analysis is to problematise the problematisations and putting the problem representation one finds in policies under critical scrutiny. This question considers limits in the problem representation, what fails to be addressed and problematised, bringing forth the perspectives that are silenced (Bacchi, 2009, p. 12-13). "The objective of Question 4 (...) is to raise for reflection and consideration issues and perspectives that are silenced in identified problem representations" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 13). Basil Bernstein (1974), points out the distinction between two language forms, 'the evolving code' and 'the limiting code'. The limiting code expresses language used between smaller or larger groups with the same joined universe of meaning and entails less need for detailed or complete explanations, including short sentences and expressions. Language in the form of limiting code, can 'express less and say more' due to the message receiver's familiarity with the message sender. The evolving code, which is what is central here, the language consists of complex reasoning, and a more varied and circumstantial language use. The ones who will benefit in situations of interactions, where the importance of exchanging information and argumentation exists, are the ones who possesses a verbose language. Bernstein goes further, saying that particular codes of language are reserved for certain kinds of people. People of lower social classes have access to the limiting code, the evolving code however, are reserved for the middle class. Since exchange of information and forming of argumentation happens through the evolving code, people of lower social classes can be shut out of the discourse. Situations like this, are becoming more and more frequent in society. Power is located in language (Martinussen, 2008, p. 200-201).

Question 5 (What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?) is continuing the critical analysis. The question and the whole approach in general builds on a presumption that problem representations can cause more difficulties (forms of harm) for some members of a social group than for other groups of members. However, these difficulties do not form a predictable and standard pattern necessarily. It is therefore of the

utmost importance to investigate the problem representations in order to see how they function to harm some and benefit others and where, as well as what can be done about it (Bacchi, 2009, p. 15). The effects one can identify is sorted into three categories:

1. Discursive effects: effects which follow from the limits imposed on what can be thought and said;
2. Subjectification (or 'subjectivisation) effects: the ways in which subjects and subjectivities are constituted in discourse;
3. Lived effects: the impact on life and death (Bacchi, 2009, p. 15).

Question 6 (How/where is this representation of the 'problem' produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?) is a continuance of question 3, and focuses on processes and practices that allow certain problem representations to dominate. One needs to direct attention to the means of which the problem representation reaches the targeted audience and achieves legitimacy. If there is resistance, this needs to be included. "Foucault asks, 'What individuals, what groups or classes have access to a particular kind of discourse? How is the relationship institutionalized between the discourse, speakers and the audience?'" (Foucault, 1991, p. 60 in Bacchi, 2009, p. 19). It is important to pay attention to the role of the media in supporting or disseminating specific problem representations and include it in the analysis (Bacchi, 2009, p. 19).

When conducting the analysis according to Bacchi's approach, not all questions will be followed in a chronological order, or even applied to each category of findings. Question three; 'how has this representation of the 'problem' come about?', have already been focused on in the chapter on background. However, I will review some of the history of parental leave policy from a different angle in order to form an argument. Further, the question which I consider the most important in the analysis model is question five; 'what effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?'. This question will help to shed light on my research question; 'A historical and discursive view on parental leave policy in Norway. How are discursive and social practises related to parental leave policy affecting gender equality?' in the analysis and conclusion chapters. But first, a presentation of findings in relations to the changes made in the parental leave policy in Norway will follow.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The sources of research in regards to the topic of this thesis has been presented in the methodology chapter, in the subchapter concerning data. In this chapter, findings related to the implementation of the new parental leave policy in Norway will be presented. Before moving onto the findings and analysis of this thesis, a repetition of the research question is in order; 'A historical and discursive view on parental leave policy in Norway. How are discursive and social practises related to parental leave policy affecting gender equality?'. With this research question in mind, the first subchapter will give a presentation of the general idea of conducting the Norwegian Public Inquiry.

4.1.1 Background on main findings in the Norwegian Public Inquiry report 2017

The most pressing question has been whether the government should work against or support mothers' occupational activity, or stay neutral. If the social economic benefits are too generous, there is a risk of challenging the welfare state in the long run and reduced incentives to partake in the workforce. Institutional structures accommodate individuals' behavior but can also be limiting. Welfare policies will affect families and individuals' opportunities. A trend in general, is that policy moves further and further away from the traditional 'housewife' family and the male breadwinner model. The focus is moving towards that caring for children should be split between the parent, and also split between societal institutions and the parents. When investigating questions related to family policy, one might experience some difficulties in how one should define parenthood and families. Norway has come to terms with that the family definition should be widened to include more than the 'core family', and there is respect and acceptance for a variety of different family constellations. The relationship between the private and the public family is essential in understanding how families change. How society and institutions are structured have an impact on family life. When the best time is to have children, will be influenced by how society facilitates this through policy. Our private lives affect the public sphere, and vice versa. Further, family policy is often critiqued in two ways; by treading too heavily into the

private domain and the family's rights to choose for themselves, and also for not going far enough to ensure a higher level of gender equality. The institution of family has proven to be a dynamic and faceted entity which is hard to capture into a linear understanding of history. Families are opposed to, initiate, and plan change, therefore, it is always an interaction between societal change processes and the family's responses to limitations and opportunities (NOU 2017:6, p. 17-28).

The Ellingsæter commission, refers to Crompton (2006):

Family structures and cultures, and the change within them, are central mechanisms in the reproduction of social differences. Simultaneously, empirical studies show that the reproduction of class distinctions in a large scale are affected by the social surroundings. Both the nature of the class distinctions and how they are affecting individuals and families, can be controlled to a considerable extent, and especially through government policy (NOU 2017:6, p. 31) (My translation).

Further the commission refers to McLanahan et al. (2015):

...it is an important strategy to counteract these unfortunate differences by creating incentives for women who are not planning higher education, to postpone parenthood. Women who bear children later in life, invests in education and career. Women will be more mature when they become mothers, and this will raise the quality of parenthood (NOU 2017:6, p. 31) (My translation).

Women's lives are more and more structured to fit with the work market and state, and policy rewards women for work experience prior to giving birth. Men's lives are structured to fit their family role, but has changed less, and women giving birth later in life does not solve the problem unless the economic prospect for young men improves. This situation can often be characterized as an uncompleted gender equality process – gender equality light, or an 'uncomplete revolution'. The Nordic countries have come the farthest in this development. But because of society moving from one equilibrium model to another, the situation will remain unstable with ambiguous norms for the family and breadwinner models. The middle class has moved the closest toward equality practices which leads to increased inequality in the short run. However, in the long run, a new social equilibrium based on equality may result in lesser social difference in society, and may also cause more stable family patterns (NOU 2017:6, p. 31-32).

4.1.2 International commitments and the EU

Norway is obligated to coordinate the social economic benefits in accordance with the EEA agreement (NOU 2017:6, p. 12).

There are directives from the EU that affects the parental leave policy in Norway, such as the pregnancy directive that gives women rights to 14 weeks of continuous maternity leave before and/or after birth. Before the implementation of the new parental leave policy July 1st 2018, the number of weeks earmarked the mother was only 13 (see table 1 in chapter 2). After the implementation, 18 weeks are earmarked the mother, which no longer comes into conflict with the EU's pregnancy directive. There have been a couple of cases brought before the European Court regarding paid parental leave, and the father's right to take out leave if the mother has not qualified for paid parental leave. The commission behind the Norwegian Public Inquiry disregards this area in their report on the basis that it is not within their mandate (NOU 2017:6, p. 145).

There has been some debate whether Norway is compliant with the pregnancy directive in the EEA agreement. In newspaper chronicles, Nylander, obstetrician and author, argues that Norway is not complying with the rule that the mother should have 14 earmarked maternity leave weeks before the period of shared parental leave quota begins, therefore, mother's loose rights that they are entitled to. Further, she argues that in Norway, the goal of gender equality and splitting the parental leave equally between the parents, trumps the professional advisement regarding birth and maternity care. Another point, is that the reason why many mother's feel that this parental leave arrangement is unfair, is that the shared quota was previously 'the mother's right', and now mothers have to argue, negotiate and beg their partner for more weeks. This has in turn has led to an uprising amongst mothers, now having the experience of giving birth and care for a new born, to refuse to have any more children due to the new parental leave policy. Nylander questions if it is possible to have different terms for women and men when it comes to pregnancy, giving birth and breastfeeding, considering the law on equality and discrimination from 2018 states that 'positive discrimination under certain terms' (gender equity) (Nylander, 2020). A chronicle is posted by Heggelund, state secretary in the Children and Family Department, answering Nylander's chronicle. She writes that a complaint was

made in 2016 to EFTA Surveillance Agency. At this time, the parental leave quota was ten weeks each for the mother and father. Due to Norway in 2016 had a quota of ten weeks earmarked the mother, in addition to three weeks before birth, Norway fulfilled the EU's directive. Further, Heggelund argues that the ESA was content with the answer, and therefore, closed the case (Heggelund, 2020).

There has also been a complaint made against Norway for breach of the directive regarding gender equality. The complaint regard Norway setting requirements for mothers to be 100% active in job or education in order for fathers to have the right to paid parental leave, but not vice versa. ESA have been investigating the complaint since fall 2015. In November 2017, EFTA concluded that Norway is in breach of the discrimination directive because the rights to paid parental leave are connected to gender and therefore, gender discriminating. However, the Norwegian government did not agree and ESA maintained that paid parental leave did not satisfy the terms of 'positive discrimination', therefore, the case went to court. The EU court have finally concluded (2019) that Norway is not breaching the EU gender equality directive. The verdict has concluded that paid parental leave does not fall under the category 'work', which is the basis for the gender equality directive, therefore, Norway is in line with the EU policy (Wernersen, 2019).

4.1.3 Arguments for change and the process of implementation

A presentation of background, ideas and research conducted in regards to changing the parental leave policy will be addressed, in addition to viewing the process of implementing the new parental leave policy.

Thus far, the number of weeks of paid parental leave has increased to approximately a year (depending on chosen coverage), and the number of weeks that are earmarked the mother and father have increased, meaning that the number of weeks where the parents can themselves decide how they want to use them, has decreased. One of the political goals in Norway has been that women keep working after they give birth and that men should become more involved in domestic work. There is an expectation in Norway, that men and women both partake in the work force as well as being involved in the domestic arena (Schou, 2019, p. 22). However, the government specifies that when it comes to taking paid

parental leave, fathers only take out the exact number of weeks that are earmarked them. Few take out more or less than the established paternity quota, and seven out of ten fathers take the exact number of weeks earmarked them. The government therefore argues, that in order for fathers to take more paid parental leave, there need to be more weeks added to their quota. By dividing the period of paid parental leave into three equal parts, the government argues that this will create a good balance between freedom of choice and governmental management regarding how the weeks are split between the parents. Further, the government argues that this arrangement will send the message that both parents are equal caregivers, as well as making room for the father to obtain his natural place in the home while the children are little, as well as giving the families some flexibility (Regjeringen, 2018). In the Norwegian Public Inquiry report from 2017, the committee suggested that the period of paid parental leave should be divided in two equal parts between the parents, giving the father 20 weeks (25 weeks if one chose 80% coverage) and 20 weeks for the mother (25 weeks if one chose 80% coverage) plus nine weeks related to giving birth (three weeks before giving birth and six weeks after). The arguments favouring this arrangement, were that employers would evaluate men and women equally if they had approximately the same period of parental leave including being able to expect both genders to be away from work the same amount of time related to birth. A gender imbalanced withdrawal of parental leave weeks puts a strain on female dominated workplaces which in turn will be reinforced in the gendered labour market. The government however, thinks this suggestion is too rigid due to different types of families having different kinds of family situations and chooses to ignore the suggestion (Regjeringen, 2018).

The Children and Gender Equality Department argues in the note regarding the hearing related to the implementation of the new parental leave policy, that 'it is time to change the term 'quota', to a more modern term'. They argue further, that 'paternity quota' is much more known and used since it was established in 1993, than the term 'maternity quota', which was established 2013. The recommendation they present is to replace the term *quota* with 'mother's part' and 'father's part'. It is time for a change, they argue, since 'father's now get a historical large part of the paid parental leave period, and the parents become gender equal in a way that they were not before' (Regjeringen, 2018).

When a government department comes up with a new proposition for law changes, there is a hearing first where the general public's, the business world's and organizations' opinions regarding the proposals can be heard. Hearings are also used for the purpose of overseeing and controlling the governments work. It is the democratic right to be heard and be a part of policy making regarding changes made to laws and regulations that may affect the public (Regjeringen, 2015).

On April 10th 2018, the government promoted a new law proposition for the parliament regarding splitting the paid parental leave period in three equal parts, 15 weeks for the mother, 15 weeks for the father, and 16 weeks to share however one likes. The proposition also includes dividing the quota of paid parental leave in 19 weeks to each parent if one chooses 80% coverage (Regjeringen, 2018). After a letter dated May 23rd 2018 was sent out to interested agencies asking for their opinion regarding the paid parental leave policy, 34 agencies and private persons have written back to the government about their opinion regarding the changes made to the paid parental leave policy. 12 agencies have replied that they have delivered their reply without any notice. This is a small number of answers from all of the 166 agencies asked by the government for their opinion regarding the change in policy. The deadline for replies to the new policy, were set to July 4th 2018 (Regjeringen, 2018).

4.2 Welfare arrangements and distribution

How the Nordic countries, including Norway arrange welfare distribution and what the underlying idea of the welfare system is, will be presented in this paragraph. Further, the general ideological thoughts behind choosing this form of welfare arrangements will be introduced.

Universalism is both used in the welfare state policies and in the welfare state research, and the term is in both cases, theoretically and politically, disputed. The Nordic welfare states are usually referred to as universalistic. However, according to Sipilä and Anttonen (2012), the term is dependent upon the context it is used and the meaning varies from different benefits and through time and space. They argue that the Nordic welfare state researchers have perhaps been too liberal in applying the term. As long as the system

includes all, it will be called universal, even though benefits are dependent upon income. The general opinion is that for a benefit to be labelled as universal, it needs to be given to everybody, which means that the benefit needs to be in accordance with the law and managed by the state. The definition of the term universalism creates a separation between a private and a public safety net. The ideological goal of universalism is integration and equality; however, flat rate benefits can be troublesome, since it may lead to parallel systems that will weaken the universalism goals (NOU 2017:6, p. 38). Borchorst et al. (2015) have elaborated on four criteria for the principle of universalism. The first criteria are that all are included in the same rules with defined rights. This is usually written in law, however, in Norway, who gets what and how much is set as indicative rates, meaning that the county can decide for their respective area. This creates variations in service level and the rights become more unclear throughout the country. The second criteria, are that all are entitled to receiving the benefit in question. The standards for who gets the benefit in Norway is that a person has a resident permit, even if that means citizenship or not. Even though all have the right to get the benefit, not all will receive it. The allocation is based on need, and as long as the allocation is based on professional and non-economic criteria, it does not go against the principle of universalism. However, benefits which is allocated based on means-tested economic criteria goes against the universalism principle. The third criteria, are that all receives the same benefit. Given that the person belongs in the relevant target group based on objective criteria, all get the same services or same amount of money. The standardization of cash benefits can be difficult in Norway, due to indicative rates allocated by the county or municipality authorities, meaning the amount of money can vary. The fourth criteria, are that the benefit is enough, which can be hard to define. If one looks at cash benefits, it can be useful to look at Marshalls citizenship criterion, that the benefit should make it possible to participate in the normal life of society. The benefit should therefore be aimed to be enough for wide groups in society, including the middle class. Another way to look at it, is that the benefit should be enough, so that people feel there is no need for private insurances or to buy better, or supplement the benefits. The universal welfare state model can be put in contrast with models based on selectness. This is models where policy make changes only when institutions such as family and market fail, or where policy is only aimed at special groups. Selective arrangements in the classical form, is mostly about reserving benefits for the weakest groups in society. Another anomaly from

universalism, is to give additional benefits to people who have lesser means. For instance, reduced payment, or a free spot in kindergarten. This benefit covers all, but people who have less, are favoured with additional benefits (NOU 2017:6, p. 39). If benefits are supplied outside the system, through private markets and these out conquer instead of complement the existing welfare system, it is a sign that the level of universalism has decreased in the public programs, even though the benefits are available to all (NOU 2017:6, p. 40).

The Norwegian welfare state model is dependent upon even income distribution and a high percentage of work participation in order to maintain the generous and universal welfare arrangements. Further, the funding of the welfare state is based on the insurance that one pays what one can, and gets what one needs. The system is at risk if people stop contributing to the insurance arrangement, or if it is taken out more welfare benefits than what is paid in through income taxes. The Norwegian welfare state is in need of a large middle class who sees the system as favourable to contribute to, in case they may be in need of welfare services sometimes during their lives. Even though economic resources are mostly distributed evenly in Norway, compared to other countries, it is still a general high support for the government to keep an active distribution policy in order to reduce the economic differences in the public (NOU 2017:6, p. 36). The perspective on distribution in the Nordic countries, Norway included, is liberal egalitarianism, found in the middle of the extreme perspectives of liberal distribution and egalitarian distribution. The liberal egalitarian perspective includes a separation of individual's efforts and abilities when it comes to what differences that should be evened out, and what one should have property rights to. This perspective has challenges, including that it is not a given which difference that should be evened out. It can also be almost impossible to determine what situations are self-inflicted or not. The Nordic welfare states have a general perception that it is legitimized to even out differences that are not a result of one's own choices. However, there are exceptions to this perspective. In health care, one is given medical treatment, even though a disease or injury is caused by one's own choices. Likewise, with kindergarten. All families have a right to a spot in kindergarten for their child, so that the parents can work, and one does not lose this right even if one is out of a job or homemakers (NOU 2017:6, p. 37).

When it comes to distribution of resources in Norway, the work force is the primary function in order to prevent poverty. It is of great importance through policymaking to keep

making it attractive to be a part of the work force. In practice, benefits and other welfare state services can create a change of behaviour in the population, causing more people to leave the work force, if the benefits are of greater attractiveness than paid labour. Still, in distributing welfare state services and benefits, the compensations have to be big enough to make it possible to maintain a decent way of living. It can be troublesome to keep the balance between handing out a decent amount of benefits, and still make it low enough to keep people going to work. To keep track of each benefit and the effect on society, as well as how the effect is measured in addition to other benefits, is of the utmost importance. One benefit can either make a positive or negative impact on work participation. For instance, benefits that create work incentives, can have a negative impact on the distribution, and vice versa. Classical economic theory (Stieglitz 1986) dictates that there will be a scale tipping between distribution and efficiency. However, at what level economic incentives will have on the usage of different benefits, and how economic incentives included in different welfare benefits have on every person's choice to work, is very unsure. In cases where the choice is between working and not working, it will be beneficial to make the salary for alternative work a great deal higher than what one would gain by not working, and receiving social security benefits (NOU 2017:6, p. 44-45).

4.2.1 The effect of family politics on women's fertility and work activity

How one organizes one's family is influenced by economic structures in society, cultural norms and family policy, and is to be seen in context with historic processes. Policy has the ability to impact interests and identity as well as creating incentives and reallocating resources. Further, family policy can make it more difficult or easier in regards to action alternatives. As such, the welfare research has found it interesting to look at how family policy may have an effect on women's fertility and work activity. As an example, the level of work activity amongst women in the western countries has increased over the years, however, not all countries have had equal arrangements in regards to family policy. Therefore, one can not only conclude with the rise in women's work activity as only seen in correlation with family policy. A number of factors can play in, and the importance of understanding how societal conditions are put together, becomes apparent. How the family

institution changes, can be contributed to cause and effect that may be many and varying, and therefore, hard to tell apart (NOU 2017:6, p. 52-53).

According to discussions regarding methods, can be found in Galloway et al. (2013) and Johnsen & Løken (2013), it can be difficult to look at the impact of family policy on family life empirically. In later years, statistical correlations and cause and effect methods have been used, which perhaps is the best way to ascertain short-time effects of reforms. If a reform comes into conflict with the existing conditions in development, it will have a negative effect in practice according to Neyer & Andersson (2008). The reform seeks to close the gap between family practice and family policy. However, the same type of family policy can have a different impact in different countries, seen as the societal context the policy is supposed to function in may be very different, or because the motivation and background for the implemented reform may vary. Therefore, implementing a reform in one country which have a positive effect in that context, may have severe limitation when implemented in another country. Further, the timing of implementing a new reform may have significance. One may also find that one reform may come into conflict with another reform, making it hard to trace the effects of the family policy reforms. In regards to how one chooses to organize one's family life, one will be affected by a large variation of factors. Choices are dependent upon possibilities in the job market, access to, experiences and costs related to alternatives of child care, as well as ideals for child care. What are acceptable norms, according to society and family regarding gender practices as well as parenting practices, are also factored in. Societal and individual structures set limits in regards to the individual's choice. With this in mind, gradual and continuous adapting processes are shaping and altering the individual's preferences. One will achieve so-called feedback effects when new institutions are situated and have an effect on the society where they were created. However, it is complicated to identify under which conditions one get feedback effects, but adjustments can lead to a change in attitudes. Normative feedback can bring about a change in what the ideal is, as well as what the citizens perceptions of their material interests (NOU 2017:6, p. 52-53).

4.2.2 Children, families and poverty

Globally, Norway ranks as one of the wealthiest countries in the world, with good living conditions. Generally, up to the millennium, it has been assumed that the Norwegian welfare state would prevent families with children from experiencing poverty, because of the free school and health service, family friendly policies and social security, both in the research field and in the political discourse. Then came several research studies, concluding that there were children in Norway who lived in what one can categorize as poverty. Poverty was now recognized as a social problem, both in research literature and in political context. Still, there is no official definition of poverty in Norway. Poverty is a complex problem that can be hard to measure and understand. The practise in Norway to determine poverty, is to look at income, or the lack thereof, so-called low income (NOU 2017:6, p. 42). A common way to determine continuous low-income in Norway, is to look at a period of three years, compare it to the average income in that period, and then define people with an income below 50-60% of the average median in the same period, as low-income families (Epland, 2018).

In the public discussions regarding poverty in Norway, there is an understanding of poverty as a relative phenomenon. This definition entails an understanding that one is living in relative poverty if one does not have the same opportunities in life as fellow citizens, or in the area one lives. Relative poverty is basically the same as distribution policy being off, entailing factors that does not allow people to participate in society in the same way as fellow citizens, such as knowledge and income. This definition of poverty as relative, has been brought about by Townsend (1979). His definition concluded that a person is poor, if one could not keep the same living conditions as others, but also if one was lacking the resources to participate in society. This definition has gained some critique, including how one can define what is normal activities in society, what is the common living conditions and also, if everybody in a society are starving, one cannot say that anyone in that society are relatively poor. In Norway there is a general agreement on using the definition relative poverty, even though how to measure it is not totally agreed upon (NOU 2017:6, p. 43).

Even though there are a broad agreement that the social differences regarding living conditions should not be unreasonable and that one should try to prevent poverty, there is

no agreement regarding the level of how much social inequality the society should accept. If one succeeds in facilitating a high level of social mobility, more people have a chance to assert their abilities and efforts in creating good living conditions for themselves, no matter what one's social background is. Research on social mobility in Norway regarding the period from 1960's to 1990's according to Ringdal (2010), has shown that the relative social mobility has increased. People with different family backgrounds has now a greater chance in life, however, research also shows that family background still plays a large role for children's social position in adulthood (NOU 2017:6, p. 40). Compared to other countries, Norway has a relative high level of economic and social mobility, but still it is not insignificant what type of family one grows up in. There is a link between the outcome of children's living conditions and income when they are grown and the parents' economic position, and this is true especially for the poorest families. Emphasizing that all should have the same chances in life, society needs to facilitate the factors that are of significance in order to make freedom of choice available, despite the parents' position (NOU 2017:6, p. 41).

4.3 Freedom of choice

In the 1970's, the Nordic countries endeavoured to achieve gender equality through bringing about more freedom to the families, by leaving it up to the parents how to split the parental leave period amongst themselves. This in order to give women the opportunity to choose both to have children and to work. The general idea was that gender equality would not be achieved in the work market unless one achieved gender equality in the domestic arena. In continuance of the idea of gender equality in the home, paternity leave was introduced in the 1990's, 1993 in Norway, giving fathers an opportunity to stay at home with the child when it was little, making fathers and mothers equal caregivers. However, the paternity quota has been disputed since the start, since it is argued that giving fathers a parental leave quota will reduce the family's freedom of choice. Giddens (1991; 1992; 1994; 1998), argues that being able to choose one's autonomy and lifestyle is becoming more and more important than upholding the traditions related to sexuality, gender and family. Therefore, welfare policy should account for freedom of choice and the identity project of the individual. However, empirical studies are questioning how much importance is to be

attributed to individualization processes (Syltevik & Wærness 2004), and it is argued that the level of dependency and autonomy varies throughout life, and the autonomy of the individual is based in a variety of social relations. As such, becoming parents involves a lifetime commitment. In arguing for freedom of choice, one needs to keep in mind that not all choices are realistic. Further, it is possible that gender neutral choices may have an impact that is gendered and therefore, freedom of choice may carry on structures that are contingent on gender, especially when it comes to policy regarding childrearing that opens up for more freedom of choice (NOU 2017:6, p. 46-47).

The flexibility in the parental leave policy, makes it possible for families from different social backgrounds and family situations to arrange the parental leave period in greater extent to their individual needs (Hamre, 2017).

4.3.1 One-time pay-out

If the mother does not qualify for paid parental leave, she can receive a one-time pay-out from the state. When the one-time pay-out was first introduced in 1976, there was a debate regarding gender equality for mothers who were working and for mothers who stayed at home. It was seen as a goal to strengthen the family institution and by paying mothers who stayed at home, one would achieve national insurance purposes, as well as taxable equality between work in and outside the home. Without giving a reason, the amount of the one-time pay-out was set to 20% of the basic amount (G). In later years, the reason for this benefit have been explained in different ways, such as 'a benefit to help with expenses', or that 'it is a load for women to be pregnant and give birth and the money would therefore serve as some kind of compensation', or that 'the amount is now high enough that it can be linked to the expenses it is to have an infant' (NOU 2017:6, p. 155). However, in a government proposition from 1999-2000, there have been made some arguments regarding the one-time pay-out and the fathers independent right to earn paid parental leave:

In regards to the introduction of the independent right to earn paid parental leave for fathers, one can question whether families where women are entitled to the one-time pay-out should 'having your cake and eating it too.' If one is to avoid double pay-out, one must either not give the mother the one-time pay-out in cases where the father is planning to take

out continuous paid parental leave, or one must make proportionate deduction in the fathers paid parental leave (NOU 2017:6, p. 155) (My translation).

Based on this argument the department determined that the three weeks prior to birth and the six weeks after birth was earmarked the mother. Also, the weeks earmarked the father (which was four at the time), was to be taken away. They argue that: "The one-time pay-out based on this reasoning, can be seen as a compensation for the family's loss of 13 weeks of paid parental leave weeks" (NOU 2017:6, p. 155) (My translation).

The group of women who receives the one-time pay-out is a heterogenic group consisting of students (who has not work enough alongside studying), immigrant women who are participating in Norwegian training or in the introduction program, women who have never had paid work, or women who has not worked long enough or earned enough prior to giving birth. The percentage of women receiving the one-time pay-out, have been reduced from 27-28% in the 1990's to 16% in 2014. This decrease is seen in connection with more women participating in the work force and therefore, are eligible for paid parental leave. 32% of the recipients of the one-time pay-out is in the age group 25-29 years. Another group that is included in the numbers that receives the one-time pay-out, is young mothers. But this group amounts to only 6% of the total group of recipients. This group may not qualify for paid parental leave because they have not started working. In the other end of the scale, one finds women over 40 years who receives the one-time pay-out, and the numbers of recipients in this group is higher than in the 35-39 years group, but the total percentage are only 3% out of the total number of recipients. About two thirds of the total number of recipients of the one-time pay-out in 2014, were immigrant women (NOU 2017:6, p. 155-157).

Women who receives the one-time pay-out have a weak connection to the work market prior to giving birth. Numbers from 2014, shows that 63% of the recipients have had no pensionable work, and 19% have had pensionable work for three years or more. There has been an increase in the percentage of women having no pensionable work before giving birth. In 2008 the number was 52% compared to 63% in 2014. The increase of 11% can be explained by the number of women with migrant background in that period, who have a lower connection to the work market. However, the increase has happened continuous with the number of births amongst younger women going down, which should have resulted in

an increase in participation on the work force prior to giving birth, but this has not been seen as expected (NOU 2017:6, p. 157).

Looking at income for women who receives the one-time pay-out and the women who have qualified for paid parental leave, shows a gap. In families where the mother is a recipient of the one-time pay-out, the father usually has a low income, or no income at all. Half of the recipients in 2014, had low or no income in the year prior to giving birth, which may indicate part-time work. 71% of families where the mother received the one-time pay-out had an income below six times the basic amount, compared to 88% of families where the mother received paid parental leave, had an income over six times the basic amount. In at least seven of ten cases where the mother receives the one-time pay-out, the family lives around or below the Norwegian poverty line. It is likely that children with a mother who received the one-time pay-out will grow up in a low-income family. Of the mothers who received the one-time pay-out in 2014 and had previously given birth, over 50% had received the one-time pay-out in regards to birthing children prior to 2014. The conclusion that women who receives the one-time pay-out are living in low-income situation over time is amplified when one looks at the likelihood of receiving other social benefits over a longer period of time as well. Three years after giving birth, a little more than a fourth of the total number of recipients in 2011 were also receiving other economic benefits from NAV (NOU 2017:6, p. 157-158).

4.3.2 Breastfeeding

The relevance of breastfeeding is clear in relations to the paid parental leave policy. Women give birth and breastfeed. Men do not. Breastfeeding is relevant to look further into, in relations to the discursive and social practises surrounding the paid parental leave policy. Further, breastfeeding and the outtake of parental leave, have an impact on one another. The main sustenance is breastmilk until the child is six months old, and recommended until the child is one year old, which will be thoroughly presented below.

The Norwegian directory of health (*Helsedirektoratet*) have recommendations, guidelines and advice regarding breastfeeding. It is noted that every family and infant are different and that every advice regarding breastmilk and other foods, needs to be adapted

to every mother and child. The national professional guidelines say that from birth, the mother should be given encouragement and practical support in order to get the breastfeeding established as soon as possible, since breastmilk has a lot of favourable health benefits for both mother and child. If the mother chooses to make an informed decision to stop breastfeeding, including an offer of guidance, her decision should be met with understanding and respect. Further, the mother should be guided in the correct use of formula. If the mother manages to breastfeed, she should be encouraged to maintain the breastfeeding fulltime, without the use of formula or water, only vitamin supplement is necessary (HD, 2017).

When the baby is four months, the mother is encouraged to keep breastfeeding fulltime until the baby turns six months old, if the mother is comfortable with it, and the baby is growing and thriving on breastmilk alone. According to the Norwegian health directory, breastfeeding fulltime until six months is both safe and good, and can prevent the baby from stomach and bowel infections. However, if the baby has only been given breastmilk and vitamin supplement but is showing signs of needing more sustenance, and the mother's situation or wishes allows it, she should get advice on how to gently start introducing solid foods to her baby, in addition to the breastmilk. If the baby has been given formula since birth, mothers should be advised to start giving the baby solid food in order to help get them used to different consistencies and flavours. If the child has had both breastmilk and formula since birth, solid foods should be gently introduced, and advice should be given to the mother that breastmilk should always be offered first, before formula, since breastmilk still has valuable benefits (HD, 2017).

Breastmilk is the most natural, and the best food for the child. Partial breastfeeding is beneficial to both mother and child. Breastmilk contains protection against infections, nutrients that the baby needs, enzymes and hormones that effects physiological maturing and components that are favourable to the development of the immune system. Furthermore, the national guidelines for breastfeeding express that exclusive breastfeeding of six months is recommended by several official organisations, such as AAP (American Academy of Paediatrics), EFSA (European Food Safety Authority), ESPGHAN (The European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition), SACN (Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition) and WHO (World Health Organization). If breastmilk is not an

option, formula is the only alternative. After four months, solid foods can be introduced. Solid foods should be introduced at six months at the latest, since the child then needs more sustenance and energy than breastmilk or formula alone can provide. It is recommended to breastfeed or give formula the whole first year after birth, and one should continue to breastfeed after one year if possible. WHO recommends breastfeeding until the child turns two years of age, and even longer (HD, 2017).

In the National Public Inquiry report from 2017, breastfeeding is included as a part of women's care work in the home, and is also an important argument that goes into the discussion around paid parental leave policy. In the western world according to the Norwegian Directory of Health, Norwegian women have the highest breastfeeding frequencies. 76% of mother continues to breastfeed their child after six months and only 2% of Norwegian babies has never had breastmilk. The recommendations for breastfeeding changed in 2001 following WHO advisement, where it was recommended to give only breastmilk for the first six months, instead of four, which was the previous recommendation. The total length of breastfeeding is recommended for 12 months or longer. However, the length of the breastfeeding period, especially the recommendations regarding breastmilk as the only nutrition, has been disputed. On one hand, the positive benefits of breastfeeding for mother and child have been stressed, on the other hand, the importance of accepting the different, individual needs of mother and child are gaining more footing in the debate. There has been professional disagreement regarding breastmilk as the only sustenance should be recommended for four or six months (NOU 2017:6, p. 104).

The governments recommendation regarding the total length of the breastfeeding period and the period where the child receives breastmilk as the only sustenance, is only followed by a minority of women. In 2013, only 35% were still breastfeeding at 12 months, and only 3% were giving breastmilk as the only nutrition at six months. There have been done comparisons regarding breastfeeding in 1998 (before the change in recommendations for breastfeeding in 2001) and in 2006-2007. The findings show that the breastfeeding frequencies have remained stable. If one adds the findings from 2013, one can perhaps detect a trend where there is a slight decrease in breastfeeding frequencies, especially in children past six months. According to the Ellingsæter commission, the length of the paid parental leave period has increased over the years during the comparative studies regarding

breastfeeding. Therefore, the commission concludes that the period of paid parental leave is not a factor when it comes to the development in breastfeeding, since mothers still has maternity leave when the child is six months, and that there probably are different causes as to why there is a slight decrease in breastfeeding frequencies (NOU 2017:6, p. 104).

After the mother goes back to work after giving birth, she has the right to take breaks during the workday to breastfeed her child. Either one can choose to take a break twice a day to breastfeed for thirty minutes, or one can choose to reduce the number of hours at work with one hour per day. A woman breastfeeding her child under the age of one, has a right to get paid for the hour she spends breastfeeding during the workday, if she works seven hours or more each day. However, the law makes no requirements of the employer to pay a mother nursing her child after the age of one (NOU 2017:6, p. 164).

In regards to the new parental leave policy, many chronicles and articles are being published in the Norwegian media relating to hardships regarding shorter maternity leave and breastfeeding hassles. The most recent posts, is about a mother who because of the new policy had to stop breastfeeding her child. She has had seven months of parental leave, and reports that neither she nor her baby is ready for her to start work again. Mothers have the right to take an hour or two off from work in order to breastfeed their child, however, in this case, the mother cannot use the right since her job is user-controlled personal assistant, working odd hours at all times during the day/night (Edwardsen, 2020). An article from 2013 (when the paternity quota was 12 weeks), reports that many mothers have trouble weaning the child off breastfeeding, getting the baby to eat anything else than breastmilk, in regards to mothers going back to work after their end of the parental leave period. It was reported that several quit breastfeeding earlier than before, due to an extended paternity quota. According to health workers, few manages to continue breastfeeding after returning to work (Nilsen & Arntzen, 2013).

Another discourse in the media related to the parental leave policy, goes toward breastfeeding versus formula. A chronicle published by the Secretary General in Save the Children Norway in 2018, claims that 800 000 children die annually because they are not being breastfed. She contributes one of the causes to aggressive marketing of formula, which the Norwegian Oil Fund profits off through investments in five of the six largest formula companies. Even though the risks connected to using formula instead of breastmilk

is greater in the poorer parts of the world than in Norway, Wang states that the reasons why parents choose to give their baby formula is partly due to “more women at work”, urbanizing, weak health authorities and increased income. She further states that the Norwegian government, though providing economic contribution to global health for mothers and children, at the same time they fund the industry which actively works against the most effective measure to ensure children’s lives; breastfeeding (Wang, 2018).

4.3.3 The best interest of the child

According to UNICEF (2016), the quality of childhood does not only affect childhood itself, but also children’s future prospects and opportunities. Weak economic and social resources in the early years of life have an increased risk of lower competence, bad health, and lower income in adult life. During the 20th century, childhood has been moved from the private sphere to the public, the state has taken more responsibility, and the expertise and knowledge linked to children, have gained greater importance (NOU 2017:6, p. 33).

Children has had different value in society, from labour to be given emotional value from their parents. Further, a decrease in child mortality has led to a greater focus on the child as an individual. This has closely been connected to the mother’s vocation as a ‘housewife’, and children represents a blessing for the parents as well as an economic cost. The view on childhood has been drastically changed in Norway after the 1970’s. Welfare benefits for the families has expanded exponentially and material affluence has increased. But at the same time, one can track an increased worry for children’s upbringing. The fear of the future and the present time, demands that the children should be shielded (NOU 2017:6, p. 33).

Different ideal models of children’s needs are reflected in family policy. The traditional model has been based on a stable family institution as the child’s most important arena for socializing and care. Over the last couple of decades, this model has been replaced with a different model, giving way for other arenas for children, as well as professional childcare. In western countries, the consequences of mother’s increased work activity for children, especially the youngest ones, have been discussed and disputed at all times. One of the main questions have been if children’s interests and needs are in conflict with mother’s

individual needs and interests. An American study, Bianchi (2000), concludes that mother's redistribution of time for family to time for market, has to a small degree had any negative consequences for children's welfare. The hallmark of the modern childhood is an increasing institutionalization of children's lives. The view on the family's role, the goal of care and education institutions and early childhood has been created by different cultural and national political contexts, according to OECD (2006). These perceptions have shaped the parent's practices and the policies (NOU 2017:6, p. 33-34).

In reference to NOU 2009:10 '*Fordelingsutvalget*', there has been made some deliberations as to whom makes decisions for the child. It has been discussed that children are dependent upon others and that the most important decisions regarding their lives are being made by someone other than the child, usually the parents. Further, even though there is a broad understanding that children have rights of their own, even the state will make decisions for children's lives and there are different opinions in how far the state should intervene in decision making for children (NOU 2017:6, p. 34). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989, was ratified by Norway in 1991, and implemented into the Norwegian legal framing in 2003. It views children from the age of zero to eighteen as different from adults, but children still have basic rights, containing protection, provision and participation. In all cases regarding children, the child's best interest should always be considered. However, to interpret what is in the best interest of the child, can be difficult. What is best, may be disputed and lots of complex variables may be involved in making a judgement, also, how one is to perceive what is in the best interest of the child will be colored by culture and history, and are therefore changeable and variable. One needs to put on the 'child perspective' in cases where children are involved or affected, and take under advisement which consequences a decision will affect the child. According to Heimer and Palme (2015), welfare policy needs to include children as participants. Per now, the research on welfare keeps children's welfare separate from the general welfare research, consequences being that children's participation in society and living conditions are being neglected in research theories regarding welfare. Children are looked upon as future earning potential, 'becoming's', instead of their 'being's' as children here and now. There is little empirical research based on this type of perspectives (NOU 2017:6, p. 35).

4.3.4 Paternity leave

The law clearly states that employees have the right to a leave of absence related to adoption, pregnancy and birth. As a general rule, one has no right to paid leave, unless one has a collective, or an individual agreement with one's employer. Pregnant women have the right to twelve weeks of paid leave; however, the weeks will be taken out of the maternity quota after birth, leaving out the six weeks the mother is obligated to take right after giving birth. In the context of birth, the father has the right to take two weeks of leave. Again, a collective or individual agreement with one's employer is necessary if one is to receive economic compensation for the weeks one is away from work, but the two weeks are in addition to the weeks of paid parental leave. In addition to the paid parental leave period, each parent has the right to one-year unpaid leave of absence from work, which in total adds up to three years of leave to stay home to care for a child (NOU 2017:6, p. 164).

Since the introduction of paternity leave in 1993, the number of weeks earmarked the father has increased, partly by adding extra weeks to the total parental leave quota and partly by taking weeks from the shared parental leave quota and mark it as paternity leave (Ellingsæter et al. 2012, p. 107). The paternity and maternity leave quota contained 14 weeks in 2013, before it was reduced to ten weeks by the government under prime minister Erna Solberg. The same government reversed their decision in 2018, and the quota was extended to 15 weeks each of the total parental leave quota, without expanding the total number of parental leave weeks. The added weeks to each quota was taken from the shared quota, leaving less weeks for the parents to divide for themselves based on their own choosing (Schou, 2019, p. 8). In proposition 74 L, it is stated that 'based on experience, all father's do not take out the full or parts of the paternity quota. The weeks the father does not take out, cannot be transferred to the mother, unless the requirements are met' (BoL, 2017-2018). On January 1st 2019, it was included in the new paid parental leave policy that 19 weeks quota to each of the parents were given if one chooses 80% coverage (NAV, 2019a).

Since the implementation of the paternity quota in 1993, fathers have taken out increasingly more weeks of paid parental leave over the years. However, the number of weeks fathers take mostly correlates with the number of weeks earmarked the father in the

paid parental leave period. 60% of fathers took out the paternity quota or more in 2008, and this percentage have increased to 70% in 2015. These numbers are interpreted to mean that more fathers take out more paternity leave. In 2015, the paternity leave quota was ten weeks. 37% of fathers took out more parental leave weeks than the weeks earmarked them, 24% had not taken out any parental leave at all, 6% had taken out less than the earmarked quota, and 33% took out the exact number of earmarked paternity leave. Bringedal & Lappegård (2010), found that 34% of fathers took out more than the earmarked paternity leave in 2010, which at the time was five weeks, however, when the paternity quota was raised to ten weeks, the number of fathers who took out parental leave weeks was markedly reduced. They speculate that fathers perhaps want to take out more of the total parental leave period when the paternity quota is established. Further, one in four fathers does not take out any parental leave at all. It can be hard to find the reasons for this, since they are not registered in the NAV database. However, one can explain some of it by including fathers who does not have the right to take out paternity leave because they themselves have not earned the right to it, or because the mothers have not had an attachment to the work force in the last six of ten months previous to giving birth. According to Brandt & Kvande (2013), it is more usual for fathers to make use of flexible outtake of parental leave. They might make the use of postponing the leave, or combine it with work and vacation. Despite fewer births over the years, the number of fathers who took out paternity leave have increased. In 1996, 25 000 fathers took paternity leave, compared to 35 000 in 2005, nearly a decade later. This is interpreted to be indicative of a greater support towards the paternity leave policy amongst fathers (Hamre, 2017). In the period from 2008 until 2018 the percentage of fathers who take out the paternity quota, has increased from 60 to 71% (Gram, 2019).

The amount of pay-out related to paid parental leave, is contingent upon one's salary. In 2017, about 50% of the fathers who answered a survey regarding paid parental leave said that they earned more than 6G a year, which is the maximum pay-out of parental leave. Of the fathers that earned more than 6G, 65% answered that their employer would pay out the economic gap between what the state pays out and their salaries while working. Of those who took out more than the paternity quota, 75% answered that they had an employer who would cover the rest, so that they would not loose economically for staying home with their child (NAV, 2019c).

When referring to administration and economic consequences, the Children and Gender Equality department states that fathers have a somewhat higher earning potential than mother's, and by increasing the number of weeks earmarked the father, they expect a higher pay-out of paid parental leave by implementing the parental leave policy. Further, they state that based on previous experience, father's takes out only parts of their earmarked weeks and some father's take out no leave at all, which they argue will reduce the costs of pay-out for the state. They foresee that the weeks in the shared quota will be taken out in the same manner as before, therefore, the two mentioned effects of the change in parental leave policy will balance each other out. The conclusion is that the budget will not be affected over time (Regjeringen, 2018).

In regards to the implementation of the new parental leave policy, where the paternity quota is 15 weeks, several business companies have been concerned in regards to fathers being forced to take out more paternity weeks, or the weeks will be lost. In a news article, it is reported that employers ask for advise on how to keep fathers in the workplace instead of taking 15 weeks of paternity leave. Some companies are willing to pay mothers to stay at home with the child (unpaid leave which the father's employer will compensate), in order for the father to keep working (even though he has the right to paid paternity leave). The communications advisor in NAV, does not have an oversight of how many who have been 'bought out' of the paternity quota when asked about this topic (Udland, 2018).

4.3.5 Un-paid parental leave

As mentioned previously in the subchapter 'new rules and nuances', in order to have the right to paid parental leave, one must have income-based work for six of the last ten months. Consequences in relations to this will arise when one is about to have another child, and the mother has been home due to unpaid leave. The consequences will be the same if the mother has stayed at home with unpaid leave for a longer period of time and comes back to work. During the period of unpaid leave, one loose the right to paid sick leave. One may also loose the earning right to pension. The law says one needs to have had income for the last four weeks in order to qualify for paid sick leave (Khan, 2020). According to NAV, the percentage of mothers who stay home with unpaid parental leave has increased. In 2008 (six

weeks paternity leave quota), 18% took unpaid leave and in 2017 (ten weeks paternity leave quota), 30% of mothers stayed home with unpaid parental leave. The average number of weeks the mother stayed home with the child in 2017, was 53 weeks, whereof 13 weeks were unpaid. Fathers from the same group stayed at home on the average of ten weeks, where one week were unpaid. Often, parents will find it more economically beneficial to take out 100% coverage for 49 weeks and ten weeks unpaid leave, rather than 80% coverage for 59 weeks. The numbers of mothers who use unpaid parental leave may be indicative of parents wanting to spend more time at home with their child (NAV, 2019c).

4.3.6 Childcare availabilities in Norway

Previous to 1970, kindergarten was a private arrangement through organisations or private persons. In 1975, the first law regarding kindergarten was established, pushed forward by women and implemented through cross political cooperation. During the 1990's, several kindergartens were built, and the percentage of children attending have gone up from 2,8% in 1970, to 98% (amongst the oldest children) in 2015, and there has been a significantly increase of attendance for one-year olds and two-year olds. In 2009, all children had the right to a spot in kindergarten. The law was shaped by educators, though the law regarding kindergarten do not fall inn under the law regarding schools, but is seen as an own institution (Jonassen, 2015).

The cash support was introduced in 1998, then only for one-year-olds, and in 1999, it was expanded to include two-year-olds. In 2012, the cash support was no longer for two-year-olds and the amount was set to a classified rate, where the amount was largest for the children between 13-18 months, and lower for the children between 19-23 months. One can receive cash support to take care of one's own children instead of sending them to kindergarten when the paid parental leave period is up. The cash support can be received for 11 months, until the child is 23 months old. One can also get a reduced cash support of 50%, if the child is attending kindergarten for less than 20 hours per week.

This economic benefit has been justified by giving more time to the families to care for their own children in their own way, as well as a more equal transfer of economic benefits from the state to the individual family. The amount is set in the budget by the

parliament every year. However, this benefit does not give the right to earn paid parental leave, pay while sick or other welfare benefits. The number of receivers of the cash support has gradually declined from 2000 till 2013. In 2015, 76% of the recipients were women, and immigrant families are using this benefit more often, though the number of recipients in this group is also declining. Bakken & Myklebø (2010) found that one in four were making use of the cash support due to not getting a spot in kindergarten. Amongst the families who did not want to use kindergarten, nine out of ten answered that it was because they wanted to spend more time with their child. Of the parents who had their child in kindergarten, 95% said they wanted the child to start before it turned 18 months old. 86% said they received a spot in kindergarten when they applied for it. In the same survey, 41% of parents who received the cash support would apply for a spot in kindergarten if the cash support was liquidated, and 34% would not. These findings are indicative of most parents wanting their child to attend kindergarten; however, they prefer a later start.

In 2001, an evaluation of the cash support was made by Baklien et al. and the final report concluded that the arrangement has had both wanted and unintentional effects, for example that parents seemed to adjust to work and care the same way then, as before the cash support was introduced. Further examples from the report shows that parents have a strong preference for sending their child to kindergarten, the reform did not seem to have any effect on gender equality either in the domestic arena or on the work force, and the reform had little or no effect on women's participation in the job market. However, Rønsen (2009) found a long-term effect of the reform, a generic reduction about 20% from mother's potential labour supply. According to Dahl (2014), the change in the reform in 2012 when the benefit did no longer apply to two-year-olds, has seemed to get more parents to participate in the labour market. In 2016, Østbakken when reviewing the findings in research regarding cash support, concluded that the cash support reform had a solely negative effect on mother's participation on the work force, especially mother's with immigrant backgrounds. She also notes that the reform has had no impact on father's attachment in the labour market. In all, the authors of the National Public Inquiry report note that if cash support is chosen due to lack of other options for child care, it puts severe limitations on the family's freedom of choice (NOU 2017:6, p. 158-163).

5 Analysis and conclusion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will analysis of categories of findings based on Carol Lee Bacchi's critical discourse analysis model, "what's the problem represented to be?". I will work my way through the six questions in the analysis model;

1. What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced? (Bacchi, 2009, p. xii)

However, as mention in the theory chapter, the questions will perhaps not be in a chronological order, nor may all questions be given equal focus for each category of findings, and some questions may not be as relevant to answer, given the topic of each specific subchapter. I have made categories in order to structure the findings that are being analysed, however, all categories in the analyses is connected.

The questions in Bacchi's analysis model, will shed light on the discursive and social practises in Norwegian society, on a political level (discursive), as well as on a family level (social). Further, the questions will be used to discuss the paid parental leave policy in both a historically perspective, as well as the perspective of today's situation regarding the paid parental leave policy. In addition, the analysis model will highlight how the discursive and social practises in regards to the paid parental leave policy affects gender equality.

5.2 What's the problem represented to be?

In the presentation of findings related to the research question of this thesis; '*A historical and discursive view on parental leave policy in Norway. How are discursive and social practises related to parental leave policy affecting gender equality?*', several representations of problems have come up. However, the first question in Bacchi's analysis model focuses on one specific policy and what the problem is represented to be in that specific policy. In this case, the policy in question is the changes made to the parental leave policy. It states that the paid parental leave period should be split in three equal parts, 15 weeks for the mother, 15 weeks for the father and 16 weeks to share however one likes. Earmarking 15 weeks for the father, is a historically high quota.

Previously, the highest number of weeks earmarked the father have been 14 weeks, in 2013. It should be pointed out that the father's quota has only been increased with one week, historically speaking. However, back to back, it may seem like a big change to go from 10 to 15 weeks earmarked the father, especially when the total paid parental leave period is not extended in the process. Therefore, the increase in the earmarked quotas from 10 to 15 weeks, may seem excessive and cause a feeling of unfairness if one regards the freedom of choice to be less than before. How the changes to the parental leave policy have been received will be further addressed later.

In the proposition document regarding implementing the change to the parental leave policy, it is stated that the thought behind the parental leave policy is to ensure children a safe and good start in their lives, as well as for the parents to be able to combine work life with family life (BoL, 2017-2018). The problem representation entails a difficulty for parents to both stay at home with their child during the first year, go to work and earn a living at the same time, unless there is a paid parental leave policy in place to take care of the problem. The proposition document, states that based on experience, fathers do not take out all of their earmarked weeks of paid parental leave. Further, it is written that the weeks the father do not take out should not be transferred to the mother, unless there are special circumstances. Meaning that the weeks the father do not take out, will be lost from the paid parental leave period (BoL, 2017-2018). One can interpret this as an explicit problem representation, that fathers less often use their full quota, or any of it, and implicitly that mothers do not return to work fast enough after giving birth. Which in turn is

an implicit problem representation regarding gender equality and parents not being equal in child care and work life. The parental leave policy will therefore help solve this problem, by forcing fathers to take out the full 15 weeks, or the weeks will be lost. This will be further addressed when presenting argumentation regarding paternity leave and freedom of choice for the families.

Further, the proposition includes a change of the term 'quota' to be changed to 'the mother's part' and 'the father's part', based on the argumentation that it is a more modern phrase (Regjeringen, 2018). Though there is no mentioning of what the term 'modern' entails. It is explicitly expressed that this is in line with achieving gender equality, by giving the father a historically large part of the paid parental leave period. In addition, by adding 'mother' and 'father' to the term representing each period of earmarked parental leave weeks, one might implicitly locate an effort to make the term more equal in terms of gender and the implications it has for gender roles. By dividing the term into gender categories such as 'mother's part' and 'father's part', one also divides the genders and the roles associated with gender. Which is possibly hard to avoid, given biological differences between the genders in terms of giving birth. According to Connell (2011), diminishing the divide between men and women in policy documents, may result in creating an even bigger divide and forgetting the rationale of gender, causing more gender segregation, not less. A different solution can be to avoid gender altogether when implementing new terms in regards to parental leave policy, if the rationale is to ensure gender equality.

By referring to the previously named quotas now as 'the mother's part' and 'the father's part' as more modern phrases, one also implicitly states that quotas are an 'old and traditional' term, no longer to be associated with the paid parental leave policy. The more modern term would be more 'fitting', and will implicitly, and in time more explicitly, be linked to a strive for gender equality in terms of parental leave policy. This is perhaps an effort of the government to aim for value integration. According to Barth (1966, 1994), values, like gender equality, can be changed and integrated into the population through social interaction. One will gradually adjust oneself based on one's own and other people's trying's and failings, until one reaches a new value consistency (Martinussen, 2008: p. 153). In this case, the value of both parents as equal caretakers is the wanted value consistency. However, the process of value integration takes time, and in this instance, the value of

gender equality may seem to be competing with simple biology; that mother's give birth and breastfeed children during their first year of life.

In the National Public Inquiry report, the problem is represented as having to achieve gender equality (the solution) in order to avoid social differences (problem). As mentioned, according to the authors, women's lives are becoming more and more structured to customize the state and work market. Men's lives and role have not been structured towards state and market in the same way as women (NOU 2017:6, p. 32). Perhaps due to the problem representation as women needing to participate more on the work force are trumping the problem representation regarding the need for men to partake more in the domestic arena. There can be located several problem representations through reading this report. However, the main problem representation seems to be that Norway has to achieve gender equality in order to avoid social differences in society. The same problem representation can be found in NAV reports. The political goal is to keep women working after they have children and for men to become more involved in the domestic arena, which in turn will help bring about gender equality in the Norwegian society (and reduce social differences) (Schou, 2019: p. 22).

Next, implementing a parental leave policy with a historically large quota for the father, as we shall see, also affects freedom of choice for the families with children.

5.2.1 Paternity leave and freedom of choice

The problem representation; 'to achieve gender equality in order to avoid social differences', is somewhat based on data and research conducted on the pattern related to father's outtake of paternity leave. Father's only take out the exact number of weeks which have been earmarked them, rarely more or less. Therefore, the government have concluded that they need to earmark more parental leave weeks for the father, in order to get fathers to stay home longer with their child (Regjeringen, 2018). The problem is represented as a need for the parental leave policy to guide (or force) fathers to take out more leave to adjust to the societal ideal structure, to achieve gender equality through reform. According to Foucault (1982), the state tries to adjust people's actions, knowledge and moral through implicitly facilitate how they wishes that the parental leave policy should be used. By

dividing the parental leave period into three equal sections, the assumption is made, that this will send a clear message to the parents that they are both equal caregivers for their child. In addition, it is assumed that the arrangement with the parental leave period being split in three equal parts, will make room for the father to obtain his 'natural' place in the home while the child is young (Regjeringen, 2018). In the dictionary, the term 'natural' means something that comes from nature, rather than something being man-made (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). It is probably safe to say that parental leave policy is not a natural occurrence, however, mothers giving birth to babies are natural, breastfeeding is natural, and fathers are needed in order to make the baby, is a natural thing. Though, it would be hard to ascertain that fathers staying at home caring for the baby in the first year of life (considering giving birth and breastfeeding), is considered something natural. It may seem as the argumentation from the government in regards to fathers staying at home with their child longer as a natural thing, may be something of an exaggeration, rhetorically speaking. Parental leave policy is a man-made thing. The goal of having fathers stay at home with their children when they are young, are a man-made thing. Most of the structures and policies that shape our lives, are man-made. "We are governed through problematisations" (Bacchi, 2009: p. xiii).

The number of parental leave weeks that father's take out of the parental leave period, almost consistently correlates with the number of weeks earmarked them by the state (Gram, 2019; Hamre, 2017). One might interpret these findings in several directions. Perhaps father's want to stay at home longer than the appointed weeks, however, they might feel that the mother (especially if she is breastfeeding) should have more time at home with the child, or perhaps they simply want to avoid a conflict regarding parental leave outtake with their partner. Or that father's need to have their parental quota established by the state, or father's will not take out parental leave weeks. By referring to the number of parental leave weeks disposed for each of the parents as 'quotas', or in the new policy, as 'the mother's part' and 'the father's part', may seem like a more modern phrase (Regjeringen, 2018), one will still establish a separation of the parents and give them each an 'appropriate' time to stay at home with their child. This will in turn make an impact on every family's right to choose how to arrange the parental leave period for themselves and their given situation.

By extending the paternity quota to 15 weeks for each of the parents, is based on several assumptions. Firstly, the government argues that it sends the message to families that both parents are equal caregivers. This may be true in several regards, however, simple biology must be factored in. Women give birth, some women may experience complications from childbirth, and women have the main responsibility for supplying the newborn with breastmilk. The government have accounted for this in the parental leave policy, giving the mother three weeks of paid leave prior to giving birth, and six weeks after birth (this will be further discussed in the subchapter regarding breastfeeding and the best interest of the child). By earmarking 15 weeks for the father, one makes the assumption that fathers have earned the right to take out paternity leave. This is only the case if the mother has been working for six of the last ten months prior to giving birth or they themselves have met the requirements for receiving paid parental leave (NAV, 2019a). One in four fathers does not have the right to take out paid paternity leave (Hamre, 2017). By not giving the father's individual earning potential to paid parental leave, one forfeits the gender equality idea regarding parents as equal caregivers, and in addition, implicitly puts the problem representation of mother's returning to work sooner after giving birth, over father's 'obtaining their natural place in the home'. No explanation is offered in the law proposal on paid parental leave regarding father's own individual right to qualify for paid parental leave. The father's right in this regard, are being silenced.

Another assumption goes towards the idea that all profits economically from taking paternity leave. However, the state only covers the amount up to 6G (six times the basic amount), which means that if fathers earn more, fathers will lose economically by staying home with their child, which in turn will impact the economic situation of the family (NAV, 2019c). Some fathers who decides to take paternity leave even though their salary is above 6G, have a place of employment who pays out the rest of what the state does not cover. However, this was presented to apply for only 75% of fathers in the survey conducted in 2017 (NAV, 2019a). In total, this means that 25% of fathers does not have the right to paid paternity leave, and of those who have earned the right and earn more than 6G, 25% will lose economically by staying home with their child. There are of course mothers who earn more than 6G as well, however, this is not regarded in the same way as men's salaries in

relations to paid parental leave uptake in various reports. Nor does it seem like women earning more than 6G qualifies as a problem representation within the parental leave policy.

As shown in the background chapter, regarding the evolvement of the Norwegian welfare state and the members rights to different types of social and economic benefits, rights have been reserved for both genders (Benum, 2016). However, previous to the 1960's and 1970's, it was not standard for married women to go to work. Men were the breadwinner of the family, and the women tended to child rearing and domestic chores. During these years, the parental leave policy was formed and based on the argument of achieving gender equality. By implementing 12 weeks of paid maternity leave, and the rest of the weeks to be divided freely amongst the parents, in order to give the father an opportunity to stay at home with his child, was perhaps not the most effective way to ensure gender equality in the family arena. Even though fathers were able to take parental leave, few did. That is perhaps why the government developed the parental leave policy further in 1993, earmarking weeks for the father to stay at home with his child (Ellingsæter et al. 2012, p. 106-107). By extending the quotas earmarked the father, there have sometimes been added additional weeks to the total parental leave period, and other times, the weeks have come out of the period of parental leave weeks that the parents themselves can chose how to share. As the data collected surrounding fathers' uptake of parental leave, the shared quota is most often used by the mother, and usually back to back with the maternity quota. The reactions are often more outspoken (through media) when the weeks for the paternity quota is taken out of the shared quota, instead of added to the total parental leave period. There are additional reactions due to the fact that the weeks earmarked the father can rarely be transferred to the mother, and therefore, the weeks are lost.

The freedom to choose for oneself and one's own family in regard to parental leave uptake may seem to be less, given the strict rules. Every week one earmark for each of the parents, is one week less of 'freedom to choose'. Due to different family situations, where the father cannot use or will not use his earmarked weeks of paternity leave, families will risk losing 15 weeks from their parental leave period to stay home with their child. When this is the case, the child will be about 7,5 months old, when the parents no longer have the

right to paid leave to take care of it. This will be further addressed when analysing findings related to child care post the parental leave arrangement.

By dividing the parental leave period into three equal parts, one reduces the number of weeks in the shared quota. These weeks are most often used by the mother. In the next subchapter, I will go into the topic of mothers breastfeeding and the changes made to the parental leave policy, and how it may have an impact on breastfeeding and cause mothers to take unpaid parental leave.

5.2.2 Breastfeeding and unpaid parental leave

It is recommended to provide breastmilk for the child from birth and until 6 months as the only sustenance, as long as the baby is growing and thriving. Further, breastmilk or alternatively formula, should be provided for the child until 12 months of age (HD, 2017). There are several reasons why a mother may choose to not breastfeed her child, either voluntary or involuntary. The studies regarding breastmilk versus formula have various conclusion, and in the Norwegian context, there is no reason to believe that formula is not a good replacement for breastmilk, given clean drinking water and hygiene. Still, breastmilk is preferred rather than formula if the situation where both the mother and child allow it. Partly because of health benefits for both mother and child, but perhaps also due to simple biology; women are born with breast and the potential to breastfeed.

The government documents regarding the changes made to the parental leave policy do not mention breastfeeding as a factor at all, not explicitly nor implicitly. By recommending breastfeeding over formula and at the same time reducing the number of weeks for mother's outtake of paid parental leave (maternity quota plus shared quota), seems to be somewhat of a contradiction. If one further looks at the recommendation of the authors of the National Public Inquiry report, to further divide the paid parental leave period into two equal parts for each of the parents, the authors barely mentions breastfeeding. However, the report notes that there has been a detection of a decline in mothers who breastfeed their babies and the duration of breastfeeding as mentioned in the findings chapter, but do not connect this to the changes that are made over the years regarding the implementation of the paternity quota, and the reduction of the number of weeks

earmarked the mothers. Still, there are two competing problem representations in regards to parental leave policy and breastfeeding. Mothers should preferably give their babies breastmilk as the only sustenance for the first 6 months, while continuing to provide breastmilk for the whole first year. This should be achieved at the same time that the mother would return to her job approximately 7,5 months after birth (given that she takes the shared quota in addition to the maternity quota). Or as the authors of the Norwegian Public Inquiry report 2017 recommends, mothers should continue to breastfeed the child after returning to work when the child is 6,5 months old. An assumption is also made regarding biology. One can agree that women birth babies and breastfeed, and men do not. However, biology seems to be given less focus in the discourse regarding parental leave policy, especially from the governments point of view.

The parents who are affected by the new parental leave policy, may find biology of the utmost importance when it comes to parental leave and breastfeeding, as shown by Nylander's argumentation in the findings chapter. Both the arrangement of dividing the paid parental leave period into three equal parts, or the recommendation in the National Public Inquiry report, seems both to presuppose that breastfeeding until the baby is 12 months old is important to maintain. Though, the Norwegian standards for breastfeeding varies from the global recommendations of WHO, to supply the child with breastmilk until two years of age, or even longer. The reason for this, is not deliberated on in the report. Surely, it is not expected of the father to breastfeed his child, though the preference for only providing breastmilk as sustenance for the child in the first 6 months, and combined with solid foods up to 12 months, seems to be traded in for the expectation of achieving gender equality through replacing breastmilk with formula. The strive to achieve gender equality in the domestic arena trumps breastmilk, according to the government's proposition to the new parental leave policy.

Further assumptions can be construed as the law on paid leave to breastfeed during the child's first year (past six months of age) is working as it is meant to, and that all mothers who return to their place of work, manages to combine work and breastfeeding. Though, the authors do not mention any findings related to outtake of paid breastfeeding leave. There is no mentioning of challenges related to mothers who have a longer commute to work, or mothers who work shifts or have night work. The new parental leave policy is silent in

regards to obtaining the goal for mothers to breastfeed their child until 12 months old in regards to national health recommendations. Further, the report regarding numbers of breastfeeding frequencies after the new parental leave policy was implemented, is not ready, and the effect the parental leave policy has had on the number of mothers who breastfeed their child and for how long, have not yet been established.

A new problem representation can arise if mother and child are not ready to be separated after the appointed time given them by the parental leave policy, then, unpaid leave is the option. As shown in the findings chapter, the numbers of mothers who take out unpaid leave have gone up in relations to the paternity quota being expanded with weeks from the shared quota. The number of fathers who take out unpaid leave are less. The NAV report concludes these findings to be indicative of parents wanting to spend more time with their child (Nav, 2019c). However, unpaid leave, as shown in the findings chapter, has limitations and narrows the parent's rights. While taking unpaid parental leave, one loses the right to paid sick leave and pension savings. In this case, mainly the mother's rights. When weeks are taken out of the shared parental leave quota and earmarked the father, more mothers decide to take out unpaid leave to stay home longer with their child. Vice versa, fathers do rarely take out unpaid parental leave, and therefore, does not lose their rights to paid sick leave and pension savings. In this regard, gender equality is hardly the result of mother's being put in a position where they have to take unpaid leave, due to the shared quota being diminished. By taking weeks from the shared quota and mark it as paternity leave, more mother's take out unpaid leave, which in turn give women less rights than men in work life.

A focus on the child is necessary for this argument and will be presented below, in addition to child care availabilities that become relevant when the paid parental leave period has ended.

5.2.3 The child's best interest and child care availabilities

The quality of childhood does not only have an impact on the childhood itself, but will also affect life as a grown-up, both socially and economically. Children are an expense for parents; however, welfare arrangements and economic benefits help ease the economic

burden it is to raise children (NOU 2017:6, p. 33). A change has been made as to how children should be cared for over the years, and the ideal has moved more towards professional child care in the form of kindergarten. However, the discussion surrounding mothers working at the same time as raising children, and whether it harms the child, are still active. There is no similar discussion regarding fathers attending work at the same time as raising children. The assumption is that children does not get harmed by attending kindergarten in the early years of childhood, and this idea forms family policy and social practises of the parents regarding child rearing. As mentioned in the findings chapter, Heimer & Palme (2015) argues that children need to be seen as participants in regards to welfare policy, and so far, this has not been an objective in welfare research, rather children are included as future earning potential (NOU 2017:6, p. 35). When addressing the new parental leave policy, the government only mentions children as entitled to have a safe and good childhood. Further, emphasis is put on the child's best interest, without accounting for what this is based on. 'A safe and good childhood' is a generic phrasing, without adding content to the phrase. Children are neither included regarding the one-time pay-out benefit, and nor is there a focus on children in regards to the end of the paid parental leave policy and kindergarten. Further, findings regarding consequences of early start in kindergarten have been difficult to locate. Research regarding children attending kindergarten before the age of one, seems to be conflicted (Nøra, 2018; GoBaN project at Oslo Met 2014-2019). Though it is too early to conclude, one might due to the new parental leave policy expect children to start kindergarten younger than before, considering one in four fathers do not have the right to paternity leave, and therefore, these families will lose 15 weeks of their total parental leave period. Not all families can afford to take out unpaid parental leave.

By addressing child care, there are several problem representations that surfaces, though not all are explicit. Firstly, the necessity of child care in order for women to participate in the workforce, secondly, child care as welfare, and thirdly, early education in the form of child care. In solution to fixing the problem of women's inequality, child care availabilities are presented as the answer. However, an assumption towards this problem representation is that by making child care available so that mothers can return to work, it will also cause women to raise their material living conditions as well as their social status. Which keeps in line with the overall problem representation; to achieve gender equality in

order to reduce social differences. Researching gender inequality and underlying causes in the EU, Simon Duncan (1996: p. 415) found that child care is not the variable that determines women's status and level of employment (Bacchi, 1999: p. 130-132).

(W)hile expanded childcare services will improve many women's lives and make their paid labour more possible, it leaves gender relations within nuclear families unchanged, does not challenge the social definition of woman as mother, and does nothing to reorganize the seemingly unbridgeable chasm of 'public' and 'private' realms and responsibilities (Susan Prentice 1988: p. 61 in Bacchi, 1999: p. 132).

Therefore, child care availabilities as a way to ensure women's participation in the workforce may be necessary, however, these findings show that child care availabilities do not necessarily have anything to do with ensuring gender equality. Women have been participating in the work force for quite some time, though it has not led to their 'liberation' in terms of gender equality (Bacchi, 1999: p. 131). Further, the government intervenes in family decisions regarding child care whether they decide to fund and facilitate public child care or not (Bacchi, 1999, p.134), and also in relations to funding private child care, such as through the cash support benefit. By not funding public child care, the government would certainly legislate families lives as well, and especially women's lives, since they are assumed to be 'natural' caregivers.

The Norwegian arrangement with access to kindergarten for all children, regardless of the mothers (or fathers) participation in the work force, makes for a universal welfare benefit. Accessible to one specific group and the benefit is not based on taxable income. If one chooses not to send the child to kindergarten by the time the child is 13 months old, one may qualify for receiving cash support from the state. Though this economic benefit has been challenged and disputed over the years, it has prevailed with minor adjustments. According to findings, the benefit has become less popular over the years. Perhaps due to the amount that is paid out, and perhaps also due to the fact that most decide to send their children to kindergarten. Though, it has been suggested to raise the amount of cash support this coming fall (2020) (Sørdal, 2019). Those who do make use of this arrangement, are parents who often argue that they would rather spend more time with their child than send them to kindergarten (Bakken & Myklebø 2010). Which correlates with the findings regarding taking unpaid parental leave, parents wish to spend more time with their child.

One might suggest, since the popularity of the benefit is decreasing, that the money spent on cash support, could be reallocated to extending the parental leave period. That way, one would increase freedom of choice and reduce the need for unpaid parental leave. The cash support benefit is a contradiction to the social practise of parents wishing for their children to attend kindergarten. Further they found that about 25% of the recipients of cash support, did not get a spot in kindergarten for their child (NOU 2017:6, p.158-163). One could argue that the cash support may function as a bridge between the policy on paid parental leave and admission to kindergarten. As the study from 2010 shows, 86% of parents who applied for a spot in kindergarten when they applied, got it. This is interpreted to mean that 14% did not get a spot when they applied, or perhaps they did not apply at all (NOU 2017:6, p.158-163).

Further, the recipients of cash support are mainly women (76%), and there is a greater number of immigrant families who make use of this benefit, though these numbers are also declining. In addition, findings (Rønsen 2009) show that the cash support reform leads to a long-term effect, a generic reduction for mothers' participation on the work force by 20%. While Dahl (2014), found that the changes made to the cash support reform in 2012, to no longer apply for two-year-olds, have caused more parents to participate in the job market. And Østbakken (2016) found that the reform has only had negative consequences in regards to mothers work participation, especially immigrant mothers, and the reform had no impact on father's contribution to the job market (NOU 2017:6, p. 158-163). These findings may build up under the notion that women are the main care takers in regards to child rearing, and fathers go to work.

The cash support reform is in somewhat conflict with the paid parental leave policy, though the benefits cannot be used at the same time. The goal of the paid parental leave policy is to get more fathers to contribute with child care and domestic chores, while the goal for mothers is to get them back to work after giving birth. In this way, the two policies are contradictory, since most recipients of cash support are women. If the problem is that the paid parental leave policy should equalize the genders in the domestic arena, then the cash support reform comes into direct conflict with this goal.

5.2.4 One-time pay-out, attachment to the work force and social differences

I will present the analysis of the one-time pay-out policy and consequences, since it is directly connected to the paid parental leave policy in the way that it is the only option for those who do not qualify for paid parental leave.

Mothers who have not earned the right to paid parental leave, qualifies for a one-time pay-out. It is a gendered benefit, and the rate of this amount is set to 83.140 NOK, which is paid out in full to the mother, after the 26th week of pregnancy (NAV, 2019b). As shown in the findings chapter, the thought behind the one-time pay-out is to reduce the social differences between those who have earned the right to paid parental leave and those who does not meet the criteria. Though the authors of the National Public Inquiry report have concluded that the one-time pay-out should cease to exist and be replaced by a minimum amount of parental leave (G), the government have decided to keep the benefit and up the total sum of the one-time pay-out. There is no facts or data that concludes that the one-time pay-out do in fact reduce the social differences between those who qualify for paid parental leave and those who do not. Still the benefit is maintained.

The assumption is made, that the amount of roughly 83.000 NOK covers the necessities for the upkeep of a baby in the first year of life. Though, no calculations have been offered on this by the government. According to an article, the upkeep of a baby during the first year of life amounts to approximately 54.540 NOK and 89.760 NOK during the first two years of life. This is based on a moderate budget and the numbers will vary if it is one's first or second child, due to what baby equipment one already owns (Skjennald, 2018). If one accounts for living conditions as well, the amount will be more. The one-time pay-out is given to those who have not been working for the last six of ten months prior to giving birth, or those who have earned less than 50.000 NOK. There will be a big difference in income between families who qualifies for paid parental leave and for those families who only qualifies for the one-time pay-out.

Further, the findings of the Public National Inquiry report, states that the women who have received the benefit in regards to previous births, have a high chance of receiving it again in regards to a new birth. In addition, the recipients of the one-time pay-out have weak ties to the work force, have part-time jobs and low income. In comparison, of the

women who qualified for paid parental leave in 2014, 88% of the families had income over 6G, six times the basic amount of income. Of the women who received the one-time pay-out, 71% of the families had an income below 6G, below six times the basic income. Often, in families where the mother receives the one-time pay-out, the father has low or no income (NOU 2017:6, p. 157-158). By upping the amount of the one-time pay-out, with roughly 20.000 NOK rather than discarding the one-time pay-out arrangement and replace it with a minimum of paid parental leave, one is merely upholding a pattern of low income in the families who receives the one-time pay-out.

As mentioned in the introduction, there are many considerations to be made when deciding to have a child. And even though one needs to take some responsibility for one's own situation and economy when deciding to have children, the one-time pay-out may seem to be punishing children who are born into families who does not qualify for paid parental leave. The mothers who are recipients of the one-time pay-out are often also reliant upon other economic benefits from the state and municipality. A little more than a fourth of all the recipients of the one-time pay-out in 2011, were also receiving other economic benefits from NAV, three years after giving birth (NOU 2017:6, p.157-158). This may be indicative of several things. Most of the women who receives the one-time pay-out have weak ties to the work force and their families have low income. The amount of the one-time pay-out does not seem to be helping these families to better their economic circumstances in the longer run, nor does it seem to reduce the social differences between families who qualifies for paid parental leave and those who receive the one-time pay-out.

Further, the one-time pay-out does not help in order to strengthen the mother's ties to the work force, making the economic benefit questionable. Kaul (1996) found that there are several reasons why women have a weaker connection to the work force than men. This includes interpretations of the employee's rights on a societal level, market conditions, the strength of unions, the managing strategy the businesses use, and the working conditions of the different business companies and firms (Martinussen, 2008: p.216). All of these factors to why women have weaker work ties than men, does perhaps explain why women are in need of a one-time pay-out in connection with giving birth. However, the one-time pay-out policy as mentioned, does not strengthen mothers' ties to the job market.

What is not addressed in terms of the one-time pay-out and how the economic benefit functions, is the effect it has on the children who are born into families who does not qualify for paid parental leave. Even though poverty is deemed as a relative term in Norway, practise is to look at low-income, rather than no income in order to ascertain poverty. Poverty is to not be able to have the same opportunities and uphold the same living conditions as one's fellow residents, and that one lacks the resources to participate in society (Townsend 1979) (NOU 2017:6, p. 42-43). Children born into families with low income and weak work ties are subject to the mother receiving the one-time pay-out, and possibly being subject to the family receiving other economic benefits from the state or municipality for years after birth. This may call for a change in how one perceives the one-time pay-out benefit to be reducing economic and social differences between families who qualifies for paid parental leave and for mothers who receives the one-time pay-out. As mentioned, the government disregarded the conclusion made in the Public National Inquiry report regarding replacing the one-time pay-out with a basic amount of paid parental leave. The reasons for why this conclusion have not been met is not expressed, even though the government have chosen to raise the amount of the one-time pay-out by approximately 20.000 NOK. The amount of G (the basic amount of income) in 2019, was 99.858 NOK (NAV, 2019d). Meaning the difference from upping the amount of the one-time pay-out is only 19.585 NOK short of discarding the one-time pay-out benefit, and replacing it with a minimum of paid parental leave.

By upholding the policy regarding the one-time pay-out for mothers who do not qualify for paid parental leave, going against the recommendations from the authors of the Public National Inquiry report, one may look further into possible reasons for why this is. A larger economical expense for the state may be one reason, however, if the mothers who fall in under this group of recipients often have to rely on other economic benefits from the state, then it will no longer be a 'cheaper solution'. Bernstein (1974), focusing on the evolving code and the limiting code, may be used to explain why families with mothers who receive the one-time pay-out have lower income and weaker work ties than families who have qualified for paid parental leave. While the new proposition for changes made to the new parental leave policy where on hearing, the adjustment to the amount of the one-time pay-out was not. The amount of the one-time pay-out have only been adjusted through the

annual state budget proposal, without a public discussion and a unanimous voting in parliament (Stortinget, 2018). In this case, Bernstein's evolving code coincides with question four in Bacchi's model; what is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently? The access to the discourse surrounding the one-time pay-out policy is limited to a closed voting in parliament for elected politicians, who have disregarded the recommendation by the authors of the Norwegian Public Inquiry 2017; to discard this arrangement altogether.

By allowing a hearing on a topic who is relevant for people of average or high income with strong ties to the work force, and not a hearing for a policy that functions for people with weak work ties and low income, needs to be addressed. Bernstein's evolving code entails varied circumstantial language and complex reasoning, which can be said to include the governmental discourse in forming and implementing policy. Bernstein goes further in saying that this language and code are reserved for certain people, people who belong in the middle class, meaning that people from lower social classes will not have access to the discourse (Martinussen, 2008, p.200-201). One can argue that the adjustment to the amount of the one-time pay-out is not a change in the policy itself, rather a detail, however, by disregarding the authors of the Public National Inquiry report regarding discarding the one-time pay-out and replacing it with a minimum of paid parental leave, it seems like the recipients of the one-time pay-out are being silenced in the political discourse.

The one-time pay-out policy causes a greater divide for low-income families in terms of gender as well, since the policy is only targeting mothers who do not qualify for paid parental leave. In addition to increasing social differences, furthering the arrangement of the one-time pay-out policy, it excludes the low-income families as a part of the strive for gender equality.

5.2.5 Gender equality and a way forward

The assumptions and presuppositions regarding this problem representation 'to achieve gender equality in order to avoid social differences', are several. Firstly, that men have to increase their role in the family arena and women have to increase their participation in the work force in order to achieve gender equality. Second, that gender equality will reduce the

social differences in society. Harshly put, the gender equality project has not been completed according to the authors of the National Public Inquiry 2017, therefore, it will be hard to quantify if gender equality actually reduces social difference. Thirdly, by focusing on, and through policy facilitating getting women to participate in the labor market after bearing children, will increase gender equality in society.

Gender equality is a term which is used in policy documents without ascribing the term any meaning. This is troublesome, since the content of gender equality can be interpreted in a number of ways. Gender equality is in general portrayed as a Norwegian value, however, it is rarely explicitly explained what it means in policy documents, for example in the policy on parental leave documents. The solution in order to obtain gender equality is explicitly explained by implementing a parental leave policy which is divided in three equal parts. Causing women to return to work earlier after giving birth, and men to stay at home longer with the child. But not necessarily causing gender equality.

According to Ellingsæter, there are two concepts regarding equality which is related to how one organizes policy. Policy is based on 'equality of opportunity' and 'equality of outcome'. Policies which is based on equality of opportunity, facilitates particular choices and opportunities for all. Policies based on equality of outcome however, accounts for equal opportunities not being enough in order to achieve gender equality. The paid parental leave policy is an example of policy based on equality of outcomes. Instead of focusing on choice, the focus is on results, meaning one has to compensate for structural differences, such as by implementing a larger paternity quota. Ellingsæter argues that this leads to a more 'symmetrical parenthood' where gender is no longer a factor in how one determines responsibilities of tasks related to home and child rearing (Ellingsæter, 2009, p. 9 in Øverland, 2010, p. 74-75). Previously, when the quotas for each of the parents were smaller and therefore, the shared quota larger, the policy was based on equality of opportunity, meaning the shared quota contained more weeks which could be distributed more freely amongst the parents, leaving an opportunity to choose between the gender equality idea or other arrangements that would fit the individual family and situation. The new parental leave policy is based on equality of outcome, where the quotas for each of the parents are larger and the shared quota is smaller, meaning the individual quotas cannot be transferred to the other parent, and the period of shared leave contains less weeks to distribute freely.

Thereby, gender equality will arise as a result due to gender no longer being a factor when determining which of the parents should go to work or stay home with the child. However, the factor of reaffirming gender equality as parents equally partaking in child rearing and paid labour, is based on an assumption that gender equality means equal tasks. Further, by 'forcing' gender equality into the private family sphere, does not necessarily alter the status quo. Mothers are still biological predisposed to birthing children and breastfeed, therefore, the role of 'mother' is hard to change. Nor does it mean that women and men will be more equal in terms of gender inside, or outside the home. There are no findings that argues that men and women become more gender equal in the job market due to the mother returning five weeks earlier to work after giving birth. Quantifying the effect of men staying at home longer in terms of increasing gender equality, is even harder, since the numbers of weeks the fathers take out of paid parental leave varies (even though a paternity quota is in place) more than women who take out maternity leave (and in addition unpaid parental leave).

The intension of the law and the social practice that follows, do not necessarily coincide. Policy is often based on the idea of what the family is, rather than what the family actually are. Even though policy is meant to fix a problem, or more accurately a problem representation, it is often construed to fit the idea more than the reality, meaning the needs of the family are not met (Ellingsæter, 2004 in Øverland, 2010, p. 75).

As presented in the findings chapter related to arguments for change in the parental leave policy, the authors of the Norwegian Public Inquiry report 2017, recommended that the parental leave period should be split into two equal parts for each of the parents. 20 weeks for each of the parents, plus nine weeks for the mother in relations to giving birth with a 100% coverage of wages, and 25 weeks for each of the parents (plus nine weeks for the mother) with 80% coverage. The argumentation for this suggestion was based on employers looking at the parents as more equal in regards to taking out parental leave for the same amount of time. This way, employers could expect both mothers and fathers to be away for the equal amount of time due to taking care of a new baby. Though, this argumentation has not taken into account the number of mothers who take out unpaid parental leave. The government, as mentioned, decided to disregard this suggestion due to it being too ridged and arguments about different family situations and different types of families (Regjeringen, 2018).

However, this does not mean that a paid parental leave period will not be divided in two instead of three in the future, since the government upholds the idea that men and women should be equal both in the home sphere as caregivers and domestic workers, as well as being equal participants in the work force. At this time however, the arguments by the government for implementing the new parental leave policy is somewhat contradictory. It is noted that fathers rarely takes out more than the assigned paternity quota, therefore, more weeks should be added to the fathers quota in order for the father to 'obtain his natural place in the home while the children are little' as well as 'giving the families some flexibility'. By leaving less weeks in the shared quota of parental leave and have 15 weeks for each of the parent's quota, the parents get some flexibility, but at the same time the government concludes that 20 weeks, as recommended by the committee, is too rigid.

In an interview with Melby (V; Liberal Party), Kaski (SV; Socialist Left Party) and Trettebergstuen (AP; Labour Party), Melby points out that the change to the parental leave policy is not that different from before 2013, when the quota was 14 weeks for each of the parents. 'It is basically only one week that differs' (Dorholt, 2019). However, no one has concluded that Norway was nearer to achieving gender equality in 2013, than it is now, in 2020. Further, the weeks were reduced to ten weeks for each of the parents in 2013, and went from ten to 15 weeks in 2018, which is a difference of four weeks. These weeks have been taken from the shared quota, meaning it is a big change from the previous arrangement, causing the discourse to shift. On the one hand, fathers only take out the earmarked weeks, on the other, one does not increase the total length of the parental leave policy, meaning the mother will lose weeks she was previously 'entitled' to.

By not extending the total length of the paid parental leave period, but continuing to increase the father's quota, mothers basically loose more rights, while the fathers gain more. Trettebergstuen (AP), argues that paid parental leave is not an award for being pregnant and giving birth, but it is meant to give the child access to both parents in the first year of life, which is in the best interest of the child (Dorholt, 2019). The rhetoric may seem harsh, and can also be interpreted as women needing to let go of their rights so that men can get more rights, in order to achieve gender equality. For families where the father cannot or will not take the paternity quota, mothers may have to adjust to taking out 15 weeks of unpaid leave in order to compensate for the paid parental leave weeks that are lost. This will not increase

gender equality, rather, leaving the mother with less rights in terms of employment and income.

The paid parental leave policy includes a difference between mother and fathers in terms of the right to earn paid parental leave. The same qualifications apply to both parents, however, if the mother does not qualify for paid parental leave, the father has no right to the paternity quota. Further, if the father takes out parental leave weeks from the shared quota, the mother needs to have a 100% activity level outside the home, approved by NAV. This makes the parental leave policy uneven in terms of gender. The parents do not have individual rights. Some terms only apply to one of the parents, causing even less freedom of choice in relations to the paid parental leave policy, and by extension, it will affect the child. The discursive practises in regards to forming the paid parental leave policy as the solution to the problem representation of having to achieve gender equality in order to reduce social differences in society, have shifted. In addition to wanting mothers to attend work sooner after giving birth and for fathers to stay at home with the child in the first year of life, the discourse have come to include more harsh commentary, such as 'paid parental leave is not an award for being pregnant and give birth', and 'we are lucky to have such a great parental leave policy' (Dorholt, 2019).

The discourse regarding paid parental leave is becoming stricter in relations to proclaiming that one has to earn the right to paid parental leave through taxable income, and at the same time, seems to be less concerned with people who have not earned the right to it. Even though the right is not earned because of oneself and one's own contribution, but rather to the lack of contribution through one's partner. In regards to social practises following the new parental leave policy, it is too soon to tell if gender equality is being achieved and social differences in society are being reduced, as the problem representation suggests. However, if the historical pattern of father's outtake is continuing in the same manner as before, fathers will take out more parental leave weeks than before. Not due to the family's freedom to choose for oneself, but due to the paternity quota being historically large. Still, fathers often split their earmarked weeks, and combine them with work, whilst mothers take their earmarked weeks back to back. Though the idea is that both parents should be equal caregivers, fathers may be seen as only 'helpers' when they do not take out their parental leave weeks in one continuous period. Fathers generally want to stay

at home with their children in their first year of life. However, some fathers and families do not have the right to partake in the problem representation of striving for gender equality in order to reduce social differences, through the 'solution' of parental leave policy.

5.3 Summary and conclusion

The problem is represented as achieving gender equality to avoid social differences through implementing the new parental leave policy. Fathers need to stay home longer and the mothers has to return to work earlier after giving birth in order to achieve gender equality. The new paid parental leave policy expresses the child's right to a safe and good childhood, and points out explicitly, that fathers rarely take out more parental leave than the assigned weeks in the paternity quota. Implicitly, one can deduce that mothers are staying more at home with the child, and not returning to work soon enough. Therefore, the parental leave period should be divided into three equal parts, giving fathers a historically large quota of 15 weeks. The weeks cannot be transferred to the other parent, and the weeks will be lost if the father do not use them.

Through coercion, the social practise of fathers not staying at home with their child and mothers not returning to work sooner, is expected to change. The assumptions and presupposition regarding the paid parental leave policy, are many and varied. Mainly, gender equality is assumed to be achieved by giving fathers larger paternity quotas and getting women to return to work sooner after giving birth. Though, gender equality is seen as an unfinished revolution, and no findings support the paid parental leave policy in achieving this goal. The paternity quota has previously contained 14 weeks, though gender equality has not been measured as a consequence of it.

Fathers have been granted a historically large quota of the parental leave policy, due to the fact that statistics show that father's rarely take out more than the assigned quota. The total length of the parental leave period has not been increased; therefore, one can ascertain that mother's loose weeks they were previously 'entitled' to. Further, historically, when expanding the paternity quota, the number of weeks assigned, have either been added to the total parental leave period, or has been taken from the shared quota (usually taken out by the mother).

In connection with the paid parental leave policy, and additional economic benefits, such as the one-time pay-out, and cash support, there are many silences. Those who are silenced and excluded from the discourse are fathers who do not have the right to paid parental leave, due to not having the individual right to earn it; mothers who do not qualify for paid parental leave and are subjected to the one-time pay-out policy; biology, and the fact that women most often breastfeed their children are absent from the government documents; an increase in unpaid parental leave (especially for women); and lastly, children are not included to the extent that one should expect when arguing for the child's best interest.

Through media discourse, politicians argue that paid parental leave is not an award for being pregnant and giving birth, that it does not harm the child to have the father at home, and implicitly, that mother's rights has to give way for father's rights in order to accomplish gender equality. This problem representation can be seen in two parts, were one or both, does not necessarily bring about more gender equality. By fathers staying home longer with the child and at the same time reducing the mothers paid leave to stay home, causes a rise in women taking out unpaid parental leave. Which further leads to women's rights being reduced in terms of sick pay and pension savings. In addition, no findings corroborate a connection between this problem representation and achieving gender equality, neither in the home or job market. Further, one might expect to see an increase in children starting kindergarten earlier, or a decline in breastfeeding frequencies. The additional policies regarding families, such as cash support and the one-time pay-out policy, are contributing to the opposite of what the problem representation entails. The policies lead to less gender equality and larger social differences amongst those who qualify for paid parental leave, and those who do not. Further, by maintaining the one-time pay-out policy, one causes children to be at risk for growing up in low-income families with weak work ties.

One continues to uphold the idea that parental leave policy will achieve gender equality, both in the domestic arena and in the job market. Even though no reports have been able to confirm that parental leave policy can in fact bring about more gender equality. Findings do show that women's level of employment and status is not determined by child care, neither professional, nor private. Further, the idea of implementing policy based on 'equality of outcome', forcing the families to conform to the gender equality idea, does not change the status quo. Gender equality cannot be authentically achieved through parental leave policy

due to the fact that women are biologically predisposed with the ability to give birth and breastfeed. Alternatively, breastfeeding might have to be discarded in favour of formula in order for the idea of gender equality through parental leave policy to be met. The gender equality project through parental leave policy, is further being hindered by additional policies for those who do not meet the requirements of paid parental leave. The one-time pay-out policy and cash support, are both policies that does not support the gender equality idea. Though which effect the parental leave policy has had on gender equality may be too early to tell, the unfinished gender equality revolution may be completed through temporarily increased inequality, but in time, will result in a new social equilibrium; gender equality and lesser social differences in society (NOU 2017:6, p. 31-32).

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