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**PATERNITY LEAVE POLICY IN GEORGIA:
EXPERIENCES OF FAMILIES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON GENDER DYNAMICS**

MASTER'S THESIS

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Summary: This research analyzes the experiences of Georgian families who benefited from the paternity leave policy adopted in 2020. The study focuses on unfolding family experiences, stories, and challenges in the context of gender dynamics within Georgian society. The research is a qualitative study and implements narrative analysis in order to uncover the background and setting behind collected data and view problems from a higher stance in order to draw conclusions and insights.

CONFIRMATION

I confirm that I am the author of submitted Master's Thesis: *Paternity Leave Policy in Georgia: Experiences of Families and its Implications on Gender Dynamics*, which has been prepared independently and has never been presented for any other course or used in another educational institution, neither in Lithuania, or abroad. I also provide a full bibliographical list which indicates all the sources that were used to prepare this assignment and contains no unused sources.

Anastasia Kublashvili

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INTRODUCTION

Protecting women's rights, establishing and ensuring gender equality is one of the most important challenges in today's world that has been on the agenda of many institutions, civil societies, and countries. Even though there have been various actions taken by civil society regarding protecting women's rights and ensuring their welfare, inequality still remains an issue. Therefore, in order to ensure women's rights protection and prevent gender-based discrimination, policy-making towards women and ensuring their rights through legislative guarantees are rather crucial.

Even though women's involvement in social matters as well as the labor market has increased throughout the past few centuries, gender inequality still remains expressed in gender bias employment processes and the policies of parental leave, more specifically, maternity leave. Since the industrial revolution, women's role within society has transformed and increased due to the need for more human capital in order to sustain a pace of rapidly developing flourishing economies. However, establishing gender equality cannot be guaranteed without appropriate legislative changes in regard to women's rights, thus, one of the ways to make needed changes can be legislative guarantees and policy-making toward women.

Women have an extraordinary capacity for pregnancy and childbirth. Even though the latter is unique, oftentimes it becomes a main reason for gender-based discrimination and abolishing women's rights in the labor market. For the same reasons, some employers even reject women's candidature for employment or terminate the contract upon pregnancy, thus, it is absolutely crucial that women have strong legislative support and protection from the state that will ensure they use the rights attributed to the law.

For the above-mentioned factors, analyzing paternity leave policy and the role of a father in the process is rather significant. Ensuring a child's well-being is an equal responsibility of both parents, and the distribution of parental leave days to fathers not only benefits a child but it can benefit a woman in a labor market and face less gender-based discrimination.

Research Problem: Achieving global gender equality is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030. Achieving gender equality is a challenging process where legislative changes play a rather significant role as without strong legislative support and policy-making toward women gender equality cannot be met.

In contemporary Georgia women and men with general assessment and distribution of gender roles are not equal at all, this is due to the dominance of men's rights over women's rights,

which creates a different role in Georgian society.¹ In Georgia where the society is massively following the traditional culture and where patriarchal norms are dominant, it is widely accepted that women due to their gender roles are supposed to be the ones responsible for household chores, and child raising and are not expected for the active civic, social and political engagement.² Consequently, women are expected to be the submissive and passive ones in the household, while men are expected to be the masters of the entire household.³

Women are underrepresented in decision-making processes at all levels and in all spheres of public life, e.g. only 36.4% are women in lower and middle management positions in civil service.⁴ Even after the introduction of quotas for women in Parliament and local elections in 2020, the share of women in the newly elected Parliament only reached 19.3%.⁵ Consequently, further efforts are needed in the country in order to achieve women's equal economic, social and political participation.

Reflecting on the above-mentioned themes, such as existing stereotypes within Georgian society, distribution of gender roles and norms within the household, the dominance of men and men's decisions, massively traditional culture with patriarchal norms, as well as lack of awareness regarding paternity leave policy or wrong understand of the policy, create problematic that are yet uncovered and itself invite the need of the academic research, that will further unfold mentioned themes in the context of Georgian society, where society is rather conservative in this regard.

Cultural norms are ideological factors that are deeply imprinted in the self-identity of an individual and, on a larger scale, a nation.⁶ It is argued that culture and morality go hand in hand in the definition of stereotypes and they have a reciprocal relationship in which one does not exist without the other and also one is created through the other.⁷ Cultural stereotypes are a useful tool on a certain level that categorize events and people, which helps human beings mentally make a sense of the world around them, but there is a thin line between using stereotypes as a tool for dealing with the confusion of the world and hindering one's ability to have a logical, realistic perception of the surroundings.⁸ Culture creates certain gender stereotypes that affect the way male

¹ Bachana Mikaia, „The Europeanization of Gender Equality beyond the EU: The case of Georgia from 2012 to 2020.” *SciencePo ULB*, 2021, 1.

² Elene Japaridze, „Assessment of the Gender Equality Policy in Georgia by Women's Organizations.” *Center for Social Sciences*, 2012, 3.

³ Japaridze, 3.

⁴ Sarah Forti, „Georgia Gender Analysis.” *Critical Rights & Gender Consult*, 2021, 3.

⁵ Forti, 3.

⁶ Mary Douglas, *Morality and Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983.

⁷ Douglas, 1983.

⁸ The same, 1983.

and female roles get distributed among society as well as in regard to employment fields and household matters.⁹

Generally speaking, the literature suggests that countries can be divided into masculine and feminine cultures. In the first scenario, girls and boys are taught to be competitive on an equal level, girls are also directed into becoming supporters of the achievements of male figures in their lives.¹⁰ In the second scenario, in feminine cultures, both girls and boys are raised in a modest manner, but equality is more prominent and personal excellence is private, rather seen as a large-scale competition.¹¹ These stereotypes and norms are derived from a more general perception of gender differences that are prominent in today's world.¹²

The ways children are raised in both developed and developing worlds are not too different.¹³ From a very young age, gender identity and gender roles in society are differentiated from males to females through the titles that are given to the children and even so simply, the toys that are considered appropriate for girls and boys.¹⁴ Consequently, these kinds of attitudes from society have a significant impact on character development, leading to further complications as adults, considering the fact that generally females are not taught to be competitive in real-world scenarios.¹⁵

As far as discriminatory tendencies are concerned, countries that have had more patriarchal pasts tend to be on a higher level of favoritism towards males in the workplace as well as generally identifying gender roles in the household.¹⁶ Countries that have been more open to gender variety in the social sector have managed to even further develop their arguments toward women's empowerment in different areas of life and household management is in most cases equally distributed.¹⁷

The novelty of the thesis. The research focuses on the rather recent policy in Georgia that is under research - adopting paternity leave in 2020. The research has the potential to update the literature on Georgian paternity leave policy, and its opportunities as well as update the literature regarding the values of Georgian society specifically when it comes to women, gender equality, and the distribution of gender roles in the household. Since the research is a qualitative study, families

⁹ The same, 1983.

¹⁰ Geert Hofstede, *Masculinity and Femininity*. London: Sage Publications, 1998.

¹¹ Hofstede, 1998.

¹² The same, 1998.

¹³ Susan Golombok, *Gender Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

¹⁴ Golombok, 1994.

¹⁵ The same, 1994.

¹⁶ Katrina Katz, *Gender, Work and Wages in the Soviet Union*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

¹⁷ Katz, 2001.

who benefited from the paternity leave policy have been interviewed, which guarantees the authenticity of the experiences and real-life challenges.

Relevance of the thesis. Parental leave policy changes in Georgia are a rather relevant topic of discussion for Georgian society because the government adopted the law in September 2020, and until today not many are aware of the updates. According to the new changes, fathers get a chance to get involved in the process of child care, which can affect women and society in various positive ways. The possibility for fathers to be able to use paternity leave days can contribute to breaking gender role stereotypes in the society, can increase women's employment chances, and overall can positively affect improving gender inequality issue in Georgian society that remains a big social issue until today.

In Georgia, there have been several practices before that allowed men to take paternity leave days, but this was more of the good will of the companies, not the law of the country. Earlier, parental leave meant to leave for pregnancy, childbirth, and child care and logically, for men, the reasons for pregnancy and childbirth were not applicable, thus, fathers were not able to use parental leave days at all.¹⁸ The parental leave days used to be applicable to fathers only in case of the unfortunate death of the mother. Based on the new change, the parental leave policy got divided into two parts, pregnancy and childbirth are separate and child care is separate.¹⁹ Based on the new policy, upon request, the employee can have 126 calendar days of paid leave for pregnancy and childbirth and can get paid leave of the amount of 57 calendar days for child care.²⁰ Thus, if the mother is left with unused maternity leave days, the father is able to use the rest of the days. As for the 57 seven days of child care, parents can decide for themselves who uses those days: the mother or the father.²¹

Another reason that makes this thesis rather relevant and significant is that gender stereotypes and the distribution of gender roles remain an issue within Georgian society. Thus, discussing the “father-friendly” law in society can create an interesting discussion and the thesis can update information regarding values when it comes to gender within society.

Lastly but not least, the thesis is relevant because there is a lack of awareness regarding the policy in society. Thus, the thesis not only researches the new phenomena but also raises awareness regarding the topic among society. Even though the policy itself is very significant, innovative, and exciting, Georgian society as well as the government seems to not talk or discuss the matter. For

¹⁸ Ajara TV, „Fathers will have the opportunity to take advantage of paid paternity leave - what changes have been made in the law.” Batumi: Ajara TV, 2021. <<https://ajaratv.ge/article/71547>>, [2022 10 15].

¹⁹ Ajara TV, 2021.

²⁰ The same, 2021.

²¹ The same, 2021.

instance, there is a lack of information regarding how the government came to the conclusion to adopt the policy, what obstacles they faced and who pushed this change. When it comes to policy implementation, the policy is advertised neither by the government nor by the NGOs. The first Georgian father who benefited from the policy (interviewed in 2021) mentioned that family members and friends were surprised by the decision as they were not aware of the opportunity.²² It has been three years since the policy was adopted and the request from the fathers regarding paternity leave is minimal, Human Rights Institute of Georgia explains the latter by the lack of knowledge as well as by the wrong understanding of the policy due to the stereotypical mindset.²³

For the change to be achieved within the society, only implementation and adjustment of the policy is not enough, distribution of the right information and raising awareness plays a significant role and is an important part of policy-making, which Georgia is lacking for the moment regarding the recently adopted paternity leave policy. Thus, this thesis serves a mission to raise awareness, draw useful insights and bring valuable implications.

Research Goals. The research goal is to investigate the paternity leave policy in Georgia, the experiences of families, the challenges and obstacles they faced, and analyze the implications on gender dynamics within Georgian society. The study is focused on an in-depth analysis of how/if the policy affected the lives of ordinary people, what problems they encountered along the way, and how the policy redefines distribution of the gender roles among Georgian families.

In order to fulfill the research goals, the study tasks are as follows. The thesis discusses gender equality norms in Georgia as well as the paternity leave policy. The study explains feminist theories and constructs a conceptual framework for analyzing the experience of the families and examines how family experiences of paternity leave unfold in the context of Georgian society and gender dynamics.

Research methodology: The research is a qualitative study. The primary method of data collection is a semi-structured individual interview guide.

The following chapter overviews the literature and scholarly findings.

²² Ana Alelishvili, „Fathers in Paternity Leave.” Tbilisi: Euronews, 2021.
<<https://euronewsgeorgia.com/2021/03/24/mamebi-dekretshi/>>, [2022 10 10].

²³ Alelishvili, 2021.

1. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

This section overviews the literature and elaborates on scholarly findings about paternity leave policy, Georgia, and gender equality as well as further explains 2020 paternity leave policy changes in Georgia.

1.1 Paternity leave

Father's participation in child care still remains debatable and is supported to a lesser degree, however, studies show that in Europe the role of the father is becoming significant and fathers are becoming actively involved in child care.²⁴ Even though fathers actively have started to get engaged in parental roles, their engagement considerably varies among countries and, currently, Nordic countries remain the leaders while other European countries are lagging behind.²⁵ The literature identifies factors such as economic loss, cultural norms, and precariousness in the labor market as the factors that prevent fathers from taking paternity leave days.²⁶ Moreover, workplace characteristics play a role too, as in the private and male-dominated sector fathers are less likely to take parental leave.²⁷

Even though maternity, paternity, and parental leave can have a positive impact on women's employment, the literature suggests that long-paid parental leave tends to have a negative impact on women's salaries and generally speaking women's career prospects.²⁸ This becomes a circular issue – women earn less, therefore, choose to take longer leaves instead of men (fathers), which can actually decrease their earnings from the labor market, thus, when there is a choice for a parental leave based on families' preferences, usually women are the ones who end up taking up the leave.²⁹ Many countries have started introducing policies that can break gender roles and stereotypes, for instance, adopting fathers' quota in the parental leave plans; similar policies to fathers' quota or any other mandatory obligations could contribute to creating equal labor market participation opportunities for both women and men.³⁰

Maternity leave has existed for mothers for a long time; Although the inclusion of fathers in paternity leave is a recent achievement, it currently remains far from being universal.³¹ According

²⁴ Jolanta Aidukaite and Donata Telisaukaite-Cekanavice, „The Father's Role in Child Care: Parental Leave Policies in Lithuania and Sweden.” *Cogitatio*, 8(4), 2020, 81.

²⁵ Aidukaite and Telisaukaite-Cekanaviciute, 81.

²⁶ The same, 81.

²⁷ The same, 81.

²⁸ Rita Brazienė and Sonata Vyšniauskienė, „Paid Leave Policies and Parental Leave Choices in Lithuania.” *Lithuanian Social Research Center*, 85 (2), 2021, 43.

²⁹ Brazienė and Vyšniauskienė, 43.

³⁰ The same, 43.

³¹ Miriam Rocha, „Promoting Gender Equality through Regulation: the Case of Parental Leave.” *Taylor & Francis Group*, 12(1), 2021, 38.

to a European Commission Report of 2018, all EU member states offer some sort of paternity or parental leave (or both).³² It is strongly believed that paternity leave (preferably longer) is a step forward for gender equality. Switzerland passed a law mandating taking paternity leave in 2020.³³ Compared to Sweden, which is one of the leaders when it comes to benefits and usage of paternity leave by giving several additional months of leave to families where both parents take leave, Switzerland's ten required paternity leave days still makes a difference and marks progress towards gender equality questions where the country is relatively conservative.³⁴ Although Switzerland's ten days might seem small in comparison to the Swedish plan, it is believed that it will advance work-life balance in the context of gender dynamics.³⁵ Similar to Scandinavians, Portuguese men are very progressive when it comes to the usage of paternity leave, however, the situation is different in Australia, the Czech Republic, and Poland as only about one in 50 paid leave takers is male. Japan and Korea are the countries with the most generous paternity leave offer, however, only a few men choose to benefit from it.³⁶ In Norway, the "daddy quota" (more days of paid paternity leave) led to a more equal distribution of household chores, for example, washing clothes, in addition, those who benefited from this reform reported fewer conflicts regarding the distribution of household chores.³⁷ In Iceland, after a similar reform, they have documented more marital stability as well as a reduced number of divorces during the first years of having a child, which usually is the period when most divorces occur in the country.³⁸

Financial considerations play a crucial role in decision-making. For instance, in OECD countries males earn more than women, thus, from an economic perspective families cannot afford paternity leave.³⁹ However, gender norms and culture still remain the main challenge and obstacle that hinders fathers from taking paternity leave.⁴⁰ For example, a 2013 survey conducted by a Korean trade union showed that the main reason why Korean fathers did not take paternity leave was due to fear of potential negative prejudices.⁴¹ Consequently, employers' attitude towards the policy plays a significant role when it comes to decision-making.

³² Rocha, 38.

³³ Darren Rosenblum, „Mandatory Paternity Leave: The Key To Workplace Equality.” Switzerland: Forbes, 2020. <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/darrenrosenblum/2020/10/01/mandatory-paternal-leave-the-key-to-workplace-equality/?sh=1e63cadf70cd>, 2020> [2022 10 10].

³⁴ Rosenblum, 2020.

³⁵ The same, 2020.

³⁶ Monika Queisser et al., „What Dads Can Do for Gender Equality.” Paris, 2016. <<https://www.oecd.org/gender/what-dads-can-do-for-gender-equality.htm>> [2022 10 10].

³⁷ Lúdia Farré, „Parental Leave Policies and Gender Equality”. *Estudios de Economía Aplicada*, 31(1), 2016, 55.

³⁸ Farré, 55.

³⁹ Queisser et al., 2016.

⁴⁰ The same, 2016.

⁴¹ The same, 2016.

1.2 Georgia and gender equality

It may sound paradoxical to the reader, but it's a historical fact that even in a patriarchal country such as Georgia, even earlier than the pre-Soviet era, there was one of the most prominent precedents in the twelfth century that could be pertinent to the gender equality phenomenon.⁴² In the Georgian medieval epic poem “The Knight in the Panther's Skin” which is considered a masterpiece of Georgian literature, poet Shota Rustaveli writes about King Tamar, who was a female king as King George III had no son to take over the country after him, “*though indeed she be a woman, still as sovereign she is begotten of God. She knows how to rule. We say not this to flatter you; we ourselves, in your absence, often say so. Her deeds, like her radiance, are revealed bright as sunshine. The lion's whelps are equal, be they male or female*”.⁴³ As Rustaveli underlines gender equality in the twelfth century, in contemporary Georgia women and men with general assessment and distribution of the gender roles are not equal at all, which is due to the dominance of men's rights over women's rights, which creates a different role in Georgian society.⁴⁴

In Georgia where the society is massively following the traditional culture and where patriarchal norms are dominant, it is widely accepted that women due to their gender roles are supposed to be the ones responsible for household chores, and child raising and are not expected for the active civic, social and political engagement.⁴⁵ Consequently, women are expected to be the submissive and passive ones in the household, while men are expected to be the masters of the entire household.⁴⁶ After the post-Soviet period, Georgian society actively started discussions regarding gender and gender equality. In 1994 Georgia ratified CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) and its optional protocol in 2002.⁴⁷ Georgia currently is in the process of implementing a wide range of international commitments the core of which is the CEDAW, Sustainable Development Goals, and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.⁴⁸ Even though over the past two decades, significant progress has been made in the field of gender equality, according to the Global Gender Gap Index for 2020, Georgia ranks 74th out of 153 countries.⁴⁹ Based on the data of the Global Gender Gap Index, compared to 2006, the situation in Georgia worsened in regards to women's political empowerment and economic participation, while the situation of women's health and survival has improved.⁵⁰

⁴² Mikaia, 1.

⁴³ The same, 1.

⁴⁴ The same, 1.

⁴⁵ Japaridze, 3.

⁴⁶ The same, 3.

⁴⁷ Forti, 2.

⁴⁸ The same, 2-3.

⁴⁹ The same 3.

⁵⁰ The same, 3.

Women are underrepresented in decision-making processes at all levels and in all spheres of public life, e.g. only 36.4% are women in lower and middle management positions in civil service.⁵¹ Even after the introduction of quotas for women in Parliament and local elections in 2020, the share of women in the newly elected Parliament only reached 19.3%.⁵² Consequently, further efforts are needed in the country in order to achieve women's equal economic, social and political participation.

The research conducted in 2019 commissioned by UNDP and UNFPA within the scope of the Sweden-funded UN Joint Program for Gender Equality provides the following results: 86% of Georgian women believe that women have to overcome more obstacles in their careers than men, 48% of Georgians believe that women's main duty is to take care of the family rather than to seek a professional career, 63% of women and 54% of men think that Georgia has yet to achieve gender equality.⁵³ To conclude, some of the gender inequitable behaviors and attitudes tend to remain in society, however, alongside the growing receptivity of the idea for an equitable future and willingness for the changes.⁵⁴ The data comparison of the UNDP and UNFPA research conducted in 2013 and 2019 brings up some promising trends, and generally speaking, traditional views of gender roles are becoming less common, however, more resources, special focus on certain matters, and continued attention are needed in order to accelerate achieving gender equality in the country.⁵⁵

1.3. Paternity leave policy changes in Georgia

Based on the adopted changes in paternity leave policy in Georgia, nothing has changed in the rules of remuneration. The only change was made in the use of maternity leave. Earlier, maternity leave meant leave for pregnancy, childbirth and childcare.⁵⁶ Thus, the employee had to face all three preconditions to be eligible for the leave and in the case of men, pregnancy and childbirth obviously could not have happened, thus, automatically fathers were not included in the law and it was impossible for fathers to benefit from it.⁵⁷ The maternity leave record claimed that the father could use this model in case of the unfortunate death of the mother.⁵⁸

The new regulation of maternity leave is divided into two parts. Pregnancy and childbirth are separate and child care is separate.⁵⁹ Upon request, the employee is paid 126 calendar days of

⁵¹ The same, 3.

⁵² The same, 3.

⁵³ Deboleena Rakshit and Ruti Levto, „Men, Women, and Gender Relations in Georgia: Public Perceptions and Attitudes.” *UNDP and UNFPA*, 2020, 53.

⁵⁴ Rakshit and Levto, 53.

⁵⁵ The same, 53.

⁵⁶ Ajara TV, 2021.

⁵⁷ The same, 2021.

⁵⁸ The same, 2021.

⁵⁹ The same, 2021.

paid leave for pregnancy and childbirth, and 57 calendar days of paid leave for child care.⁶⁰ If the mother has certain unused days, the father can benefit from the remaining days. When it comes to 57 child care days, here the parents decide themselves who takes those days - mother or father.⁶¹ Consequently, the biggest plus of the policy is that the policy is divided into two parts, and fathers are involved in the process, and this way the policy of paternity leave has been established.⁶²

A very first Georgian male, who benefited from the policy change and used paternity leave days, interviewed in March 2021 claims that family members and friends were not aware of the policy and the opportunity and were surprised by his decision.⁶³ Even though the law was passed three years ago, the number of males requesting for the leave is minimal, Human Rights Institute of Georgia explains this is due to the lack of knowledge, awareness and stereotypical mindset.⁶⁴

It is important to have a look and understand the context of the decision-making - what kind of discussions led to the implementation of this law, or who pushed the law, however, the literature lacks information regarding the details of this particular law-making in Georgia in 2020, which once again highlights the importance of the thesis and relevance of the topic.

To conclude, the above-analyzed literature, cultural and gender phenomena help this research to create a contextual and factual framework and analyze whether the proposed themes and phenomena apply to Georgian society when it comes to gender equality by using paternity leave policy as a tool.

First of all, the literature suggests that awareness of the paternity leave policy in the country is very minimal, which is supported by the argument of lack of awareness and wrong interpretation of the policy due to an existing stereotypical mindset.⁶⁵ Research serves a mission to spread awareness regarding the policy as well as identify what is the level of awareness regarding the policy among acquaintances and surroundings of the research participants, as well as to explore what is the understanding of the policy for those families who chose to benefit or for others who have reflected on participant families' choice.

Second of all, the literature suggests that in contemporary Georgia by the distribution of gender roles men and women are not equal at all, which is due to the dominance of patriarchal norms and conservative culture.⁶⁶ Thus, this information challenges the thesis to test whether the proposed literature is still applicable to the society (through the experiences of participant families)

⁶⁰ The same, 2021.

⁶¹ The same, 2021.

⁶² USAID, „Parental Leave.” Tbilisi: Usaid, 2021.

⁶³ Alelishvili, 2021.

⁶⁴ The same, 2021.

⁶⁵ The same, 2021.

⁶⁶ Mikaia, 1.

and gives research opportunities to update the literature on the gender equality phenomenon of Georgian society. Even though after the post-Soviet period, Georgia has actively started discussing gender equality issues, and has adopted various gender equality related policies or laws, it takes a different effort to actually see the change in real life.⁶⁷ Adoption of paternity leave policy truly is a significant way to gender equality as it redefines gender roles in the household as well as does not discriminate women from the labor market. The latter helps this study to observe how the policy has affected the lives of ordinary people and what changes it has brought in their households and family and helps to examine what further efforts might be needed for better implementation of this very innovative policy for the country.

In addition, the literature suggests that workplace characteristics and attitudes play a significant role in decision-making along with other reasons such as the financial standing of the family as well as existing cultural norms in the society.⁶⁸ Analyzed literature offers various different experiences and outcomes of the policy in different countries. Thus, taking into consideration Georgia's cultural and historical past, as well as various gender equality reforms that have been implemented or have been attempted to be implemented in the country after the post-Soviet era, makes this research rather crucial for Georgian society.

Lastly, as the literature suggests cultural norms and established stereotypes affect morality and consequently, decision-making.⁶⁹ The fact that Georgia strongly follows cultural norms and traditions makes research interesting to explore how the culture affects the decision-making of participant families who benefited from paternity leave, the challenges they have experienced along the way, and what led them towards very uncommon and unorthodox decision-making. Georgia, with a patriarchal past and male-dominated culture that has a high level of favoritism towards males when it comes to workplaces and households, make analysis of the paternity leave decision among research participants rather interesting and challenges study to update the literature when it comes to values and norms in the context of gender dynamics. The paternity leaves policy in Georgia and the country's cultural norms itself invite the need for research. The next chapter discusses the theoretical paradigm of the study.

⁶⁷ Forti, 2.

⁶⁸ Aidukaite and Telisaukaite-Cekanaviciute, 81.

⁶⁹ Douglas, 1983.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section is designated to construct a theoretical framework for the research. The gender performativity theory, traditional feminist theory, and dominance theory create a strong and important foundation for the study as they bring and offer concepts as well as terminology for the research. Furthermore, theories along with analyzed literature help to form an interview guide, for the purposes of data collection, questions coming from arisen problems and themes of the theories. The above-mentioned theories that are considered for this research are further elaborated in this section.

2.1 Gender performativity theory

Gender is constructed through performances, based on which certain activities make one feel a certain way - either feminine or masculine - as per the theory of gender performativity suggested by Judith Butler.⁷⁰ The term *gender performativity* first was used by feminist philosopher Butler in 1990, based on which being born male or female does not determine behavior, as people later on in life try to learn how to behave in order to fit in a certain norm of behavior.⁷¹ In addition, Butler questions the distinction between “sex” and “gender”, for example, traditional feminists consider “sex” as a biological category, and “gender” as a historical category.⁷² Butler argues that there is no biological “sex” existing outside of its social meanings.⁷³ Butler in her theory explains the latter by arguing that people are born into a world where there is already an existing understanding of gender, and automatically, the world sets the meaning of their autonomy.⁷⁴ In addition, the theory argues that people can’t really know themselves outside of social meanings.⁷⁵ Consequently, gender reality is performative, in other words, it is real only to the extent that it is performed.⁷⁶

For Butler, gender is what one does, not what one is, gender is a sequence of “doings” and not “being”.⁷⁷ Gender performativity is not a singular act but a particular type of process that repeats, this repetition creates gender stability and gives gender its illusion where repeated actions or performances are in synchrony with social norms of how should one behave and what should one do, all this leads to fixed norms that become common practices within the societies that are

⁷⁰ Butler Judith, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993, 46.

⁷¹ Butler, 47.

⁷² Butler, 48.

⁷³ Anna Szorenyi, „Judith Butler: Their Philosophy of Gender Explained.” Australia, 2022.

<<https://theconversation.com/judith-butler-their-philosophy-of-gender-explained-192166>> [2022 11 15].

⁷⁴ Szorenyi, 2022.

⁷⁵ Szorenyi, 2022.

⁷⁶ Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, 21.

⁷⁷ Sara Salih, *On Judith Butler and Performativity*. London: Routledge, 2006, 55.

imprinted in their minds and actions.⁷⁸ For example, dressing up a certain way, using particular body language, doing certain exercises, etc.⁷⁹

The theory of gender performativity argues that gender labels and categories begin from the same moment when people name a newborn as “girl” or “boy”, as certain expectations are already imprinted on the way they are supposed to be raised, and later on by speaking of people as “man” or “woman” people keep on creating the gender categories and expected performances.⁸⁰ Butler in her theory argues that current ways of performing masculinity and femininity are considered the correct ways to do gender.⁸¹ The theory believes that existing norms of doing the gender right create confusion between “what is” and “what should be”, and prevents the possibility of perceiving other ways of performing certain gender as acceptable and legitimate, in fact, sometimes it is even hard to imagine other ways of doing gender.⁸²

As gender performativity theory suggests, if gender is constructed through the repetitive behavior of one⁸³, this could explain why gender-related changes are always difficult to be achieved and established in societies, just like a paternity leave policy in Georgia. Although the policy is rather innovative and promotes gender equality in many different ways, it is not only something new for Georgian society but rather unorthodox to imagine men on paternity leave, taking care of a baby and getting involved in various household chores. The theory of gender performativity strengthens the analyzed literature regarding the gender equality stance in Georgia where men and women are expected to behave in a certain way and perform certain duties, for example, women are expected to be submissive members of the household and take care of household chores, while men are expected to be masters of the household and the main decision-makers who actively perform civic duties as well.⁸⁴ The theory of gender performativity directs a research agenda to explore the linkage between expected gender roles and the adoption of new, innovative policy that can benefit society and the country in a very unorthodox way.

2.2 Traditional feminist theory

Inequality and inequality of opportunities is the most significant form of inequality.⁸⁵ However, gender norms are socially constructed, it is not something that is connected to our DNA

⁷⁸ Salih, 56.

⁷⁹ The same, 56.

⁸⁰ The same, 58.

⁸¹ The same, 58.

⁸² The same, 58.

⁸³ The same, 56.

⁸⁴ Japaridze, 3.

⁸⁵ Karl Thompson, „Feminist Theory: A Summary for A-Level Sociology.” 2017.

<<https://revisesociology.com/2017/02/03/feminist-theory-summary-sociology/>> [2022 06 01].

and is biologically determined, thus it can change.⁸⁶ The traditional feminist theory believes that patriarchy is the cause of gender inequality - women are subordinate because men have power.⁸⁷ Consequently, traditional feminist theory blames patriarchy for gender-based violence and oppression as it encourages men to exercise their power and dominance over the submissive group - women.⁸⁸ The more patriarchal society is, the more cases of violence and oppression happen there.⁸⁹

There is a common stereotype that we often hear on a daily basis about women: “Women are less rational and more emotional.”⁹⁰ If you arise a question regarding this statement - less rational than what? Or more rational than what? The straightforward and commonly accepted answer is men.⁹¹ Consequently, these statements create certain assumptions and stereotypes that men are superior, men are rational and overall, men are the standard against which women are measured - these assumptions of “masculine superiority” and “feminine inferiority” reinforce the stereotypes and create an irrational hierarchy between men and women.⁹²

To sum up the above-discussed, similarly to gender performativity theory, traditional feminist theory offers that there are existing assumptions of “masculinity” and “femininity”, in addition, the traditional feminist theory emphasizes the abuse of the assumption and discrimination against women. The traditional feminist theory blames discrimination against women due to their gender on the patriarchy and patriarchal system that links within the analyzed literature regarding Georgian society and aligns with the theoretical paradigm of the thesis.

2.3 Dominance theory

A dominance feminist is very familiar with this pattern of behavior when it includes a male-to-female gender dynamic, thus, to a dominance feminist, female subordination is defined by a man’s physical, sexual, and social control over a woman.⁹³ Dominance theory focuses on the unequal distribution of power among men and women and works towards setting women free from men.⁹⁴ This theory which is also known as radical feminism blames the legal system for contributing to the oppression of women as there are no corresponding punishments for the violence and oppression against women.⁹⁵ Most lawmakers are men who are logically interested in keeping

⁸⁶ Thompson, 2017.

⁸⁷ The same, 2017.

⁸⁸ Sarah Jane Brubaker, „Embracing and Expanding Feminist Theory: (Re) conceptualizing Gender and Power.” *SAGE*, 27(5), 2021, 719.

⁸⁹ Brubaker, 719.

⁹⁰ Chelsea Haramia, „Feminism Part 3: The Dominance Approach.” *1000-Word Philosophy*, 2020, 1.

⁹¹ Haramia, 1.

⁹² The same, 1.

⁹³ Andrea Mazingo, „The Intersection of Dominance Feminism and Stalking Laws.” *Northwestern Journal of Law & Social Policy*, 9(2), 2014, 336.

⁹⁴ Nancy Levit and Robert Verchik, *Feminist Legal Theory*. 2nd edition. New York: NYU Press, 2016, 37.

⁹⁵ Levit and Verchik, 37.

the patriarchal structure of the society where men are dominants.⁹⁶ The main belief of patriarchy is that men should be superior in all spheres of life thus, it is this superiority that is a root of all-gender based violence and oppression, including domestic violence where men as the “head of the households” exercise their dominant power over women.⁹⁷

The dominance approach toward feminism claims that injustice consists in unjust social relations of domination and subordination as unjust power relations have been the foundation of how everything operates in the world - discourse, relations, and institutions.⁹⁸ Consequently, the latter has allowed the creation of a dominant group - men and has allowed men as leaders of dominant groups to structure society and enforce their dominance and power over subordinated groups - in this case - women.⁹⁹ To sum up, the dominance approach targets unequal power relations as the source of gender injustice.¹⁰⁰

The dominance approach targets the structures and systems that maintain the subordination of women and others.¹⁰¹ The dominance theorist believes that women should not be trying to prove to men that they are valuable, because the latter automatically reinforces a system and idea that assumes that dominant men should be the ones deciding who is valuable in the first place, and gives them the power to make a determination.¹⁰² The dominance approach challenges and criticizes the legal system, its structures and conditions, claiming that they are created with the purpose to be maintained by men - the dominant category of the legal system and society¹⁰³ (as stereotypically assumed). The dominance theorists do not question how valuable stereotypical feminine characteristics are, they question how power and domination have been already built into our minds and assumptions regarding sex and gender differences.¹⁰⁴ The kind of dominance, dominance theorists argue and fight for, exist in the system and in the institutions that influence and structure our lives every day, consequently, the shift in perspective is equally required for the society as well as for the institutions.¹⁰⁵

Dominance theory directs the thesis towards exploring the benefits of paternity leave policy in a very much male-dominated and patriarchal society. Although the social, political and economic sector is male dominated in Georgia, yet they have adopted a “father-friendly” policy, which can create equality not only in the household, but in the Georgian labor market as well, where women

⁹⁶ The same, 37.

⁹⁷ The same, 37.

⁹⁸ Haramia, 1.

⁹⁹ The same, 1.

¹⁰⁰ The same, 1.

¹⁰¹ The same, 2.

¹⁰² The same, 1.

¹⁰³ The same, 1.

¹⁰⁴ The same, 1.

¹⁰⁵ The same, 1.

are given chance to experience less gender-based discrimination due to unique opportunity of paternity leave, where door for men has been open to benefit.

To conclude the above-analyzed theories, the theory of gender performativity suggests that gender is constructed through one's repetitive behavior that establishes certain norms.¹⁰⁶ The traditional feminist theory that blames patriarchy for gender-based violence and oppression as it encourages men to exercise their power and dominance over the submissive group – women.¹⁰⁷ Dominance theory focuses on the unequal distribution of power among men and women and works towards setting women free from men.¹⁰⁸ This theory which is also known as radical feminism blames the legal system for contributing to the oppression of women as there are no corresponding punishments for the violence and oppression against women.¹⁰⁹ Most lawmakers are men who are logically interested in keeping the patriarchal structure of the society where men are dominants.¹¹⁰ Considering the three theories, a theoretical framework for the research has been established.

Above-analyzed theories have been taken into consideration throughout this study, especially during creating an interview guide and formulating interview questions. Through analyzing theories as well as terminology and concepts they offer, interview questions were formulated that have further encouraged research participants to touch gender, feminism, gender equality, household, gender norms related topics for further examination and analysis.

Next section describes the methodological approach of this study.

¹⁰⁶ Salih, 56.

¹⁰⁷ Brubaker, 719.

¹⁰⁸ Levit and Verchik, 37.

¹⁰⁹ The same, 37.

¹¹⁰ The same, 37.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This chapter overviews the research methodology. For the purposes of this study, a qualitative method has been chosen. In this Master's thesis, the qualitative method is understood as a tool that helps the researcher uncover the deeper, in-depth meaning behind the collected data and allows the researcher to view a problem from a higher stance for further analysis and interpretation of the data. In addition, a qualitative research strategy has been chosen to understand the meaning of the phenomenon, identify new themes, clarify new concepts and formulate theoretical propositions for future potentially larger-scale study.

The data has been collected through online semi-structured interviews. The chapter further discusses the choice of a semi-structured interview guide as the primary method of data collection and the ways respondents were selected for the study.

Interviews have been analyzed through narrative analysis methods which emphasizes the interpretive character of the research. For the purposes of data analysis, narrative analysis has been chosen as narrative analysis encourages the researcher to dive into the background, settings as well as the social and cultural context of the research subjects and consequently, giving the researcher a better understanding of subjects in their narration. In this particular study, narrative analysis is understood as a tool for interpreting the interviews and personal stories of the research participants.

3.1 Data collection methodology

For the purposes of this research qualitative data has been collected through conducting individual semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview style has been chosen for the study because it allows the researcher to have a set of already prepared questions as well as ask interviewees additional questions if needed. Individual interviews have been conducted through social media platforms.

The reason why qualitative research is chosen over quantitative research is that interviews are the best way to get a personal perspective when a researcher aims to find out the way people think or address certain issues and when research is based on the emphasis on values, opinions, behavior - which is the case of this research.¹¹¹ In comparison to surveys that could have been limiting the research participants, interviews allow respondents flexibility with their responses and provide enough room for giving a variety of responses.

Since semi-structured interviews require the researcher to engage in direct interaction with research participants, social desirability bias is prone. The potential bias occurrence in the research has been mitigated by providing a safe environment during the interview, ensuring confidentiality

¹¹¹ John McCormick, *Comparative Government and Politics*. New York: Red Globe Press, 2019.

by providing the informed consent form (Appendix A), and formulating as neutral interview questions as possible.

3.2 Sampling method

The target of this research is Georgian families who benefited from the parental leave policy where fathers also get child care days (paternity leave). The policy implications are analyzed through the experiences of these families. The research is exploratory, therefore, participants have been chosen by using a mix of nonprobability sampling techniques due to the lack of access to all the Georgian families who used or were affected by the policy. The sampling frame for the interviews has been those Georgian populations that are acquaintances of the researcher. Through purposive/judgmental and snowball sampling techniques, the initial interviewees led to other potential interviewees. The usage of purposive/judgmental and snowball sampling can be justifiable as the population participating in the research can be considered to be homogenous (particular characteristics of a population).

The respondents have been researched through social media platforms. Each potential respondent received a message in which the researcher introduced herself, and the purpose of the research, and kindly asked if the potential respondents would be willing to take part in the study by participating in the interview. After the potential participants agreed to participate, the researcher sent an informed consent document and then scheduled an appointment to conduct an online interview.

The intended sample for the research is 6 families, and couples - husband and wife are interviewed and represented together. Initially, the intended sample for the research was 10 families, and couples, however, finding the right target and then convincing them to participate in the study was a rather challenging process. Initially, I started announcing regarding my research and need for potential target respondents via various social media platforms, such as “Facebook”, “Instagram”, and “LinkedIn”. Additionally, through the help of acquaintances, I was spreading the word in various social groups on the internet platforms, such as “Men Care”, “Safe Business is Your Choice”, “Fathers’ Circle”. Still, most of the respondents were found through snowball sampling techniques and by my acquaintances or their acquaintances spreading the word within their circle. I ended up having 6 families as a sample, as unfortunately, I was either ignored or rejected by respondents. 2 of the families, who initially agreed on participation, later on stopped replying to my messages, assuming they changed their mind. 2 of potential respondents - colleagues of one of my respondents - who were well fitting into the research target, directly rejected participation. After some time, on the social media platform “LinkedIn”, I saw an article from the coffee company “Meama” in Georgia, proudly announcing the usage of a paternity leave policy

among their staff. I tried to contact the company manager, and get connected with the target staff members of the “Meama” company to conduct the interview. After this journey, I ended up interviewing 6 families - husband and wife together.

It is important to mention that there is no official open data regarding the statistical number of men or families who benefited from the paternity leave policy, thus, I was not able to measure how successful my search of the targeted families was.

3.3 Data collection instrument

The major data collection instrument of this research is an individual semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide that is provided for the respondents includes major themes and sub-questions. Interview questions are designed to help respondents think about their opinion, attitude, experience, and the influence of the paternity leave policy on their lives and gender dynamics within Georgian society.

The interview guide allows the researcher to explore in-depth factors of the effect of paternity leave policy on the experiences of Georgian families. Interview respondents have been chosen through the snowball sampling technique. The results of data collection are presented in the following chapter. The interview guide (Appendix B) presents the questions that are given to the interviewees.

Interview Guide

Decision-making:

1. How/where did you learn/hear about the paternity leave law/opportunity?
2. How did you come up with this idea and why did you decide so?
3. How did you divide the days? Did you (father) take all the days of child care days or were the days somehow divided among you and your spouse?

Reaction:

1. How did you feel sharing this news?
2. Were people around you, friends and family members, aware of the law? How did they react?
3. Was your company/HR/responsible member and co-workers aware of the law? Were they surprised? How did they react?
4. Was this in any way an encouraged decision from the company?
5. How was the process overall, speaking of documentation and bureaucracy?

6. Did people around you try to support you?
7. What were the biggest challenges while making the decision?

Personal Impact:

1. What emotions being a father on paternity leave brought up for you (considering the environment around)?
2. How did this decision affect your social life?

Future:

1. What do you think about your decision now?
2. If you had a chance would you make the same choice again? Or are you considering taking a paternity leave again?
3. Do you talk about and encourage other males (friends, relatives) to use paternity leave?
4. Do you think overall society in Georgia will follow your path and why so?
5. How do you think paternity leave policy defines gender roles in the household?
6. How do you think paternity law affects distribution of gender roles and overall gender dynamics within Georgian society?
7. How did it affect/change gender dynamics within your family or circle (if it did)?

Sociodemographics:

1. What is your age?
2. Where are you from? (Big city, small town or village)
3. What is your level of education? (Secondary education or higher education)
4. What is your occupation?

3.4 Narrative analysis

The collected data is analyzed by using the narrative analysis method. Narrative analysis helps the researcher uncover the key concepts and explore the background and settings of the research subject in narration. The narrative analysis genre allows the researcher to interpret stories within the context of this research that was told during conducting in-depth interviews.

Through narrative analysis, similarities and differences within the experiences of research participants have been explored and further discussed in the context of specific themes that have been identified from the collected data. Not only major themes have been identified but commonly raised tendencies during conducted interviews have been addressed as well. Additionally, during narrative analysis, connections with analyzed literature and suggested theories have been addressed along with inductively addressed themes.

3.5 Problems and limitations

Qualitative, opinion-based exploratory research cannot go without limitations, which I have been aware of and the latter has been considered during gathering data and conducting interviews. While carrying out empirical research following potential limitations occur. The first limitation of the research is the exploratory nature of this thesis. The main disadvantage of exploratory research is that it provides qualitative data. Interpretation of such information can be judgmental and biased. Moreover, exploratory research involves a smaller sample; hence the results cannot be accurately interpreted for a generalized population. The second possible limitation is a potentially biased sample, which is inevitable while interacting with people for various reasons. Firstly, there is no guarantee of the honesty of the respondents, and secondly, the respondents have been interviewed online, through social media channels, thus, the authenticity of their responses might be lost. Lastly, the lack of credibility of a young researcher perceived by respondents can be another limitation of the research process.

On a concluding note, the collected data has fulfilled the requirement of qualitative study, as a prepared interview guide led and encouraged research participants to speak about the thematic of feminism, gender equality, gender roles in the household, bureaucracy, institutions, attitudes, consequently, data for successful analysis and drawing for insightful conclusions have been gathered.

The next chapter presents the analysis of the collected data.

4. FAMILY EXPERIENCES: ANALYSIS

For the purposes of this study, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 6 couples. The respondents of this research are Georgian families who benefited from the paternity leave policy. For the purposes of this study a family - husband and wife - are represented together, “F” stands for “family”, “RM” stands for “respondent male” and “RF” stands for “respondent female”.

Out of 6 participant families, 5 families are from Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, and 1 family is from Kutaisi, the second biggest city in Georgia. All participants have a higher education - a degree from the university. The age category of the male participants varied from 25 to 47, and from 23 to 44 for females.

4.1 Personal stories

Participant Family 1

In F1 the husband stepped in to use paternity leave since the wife was not able to take maternity leave as she was employed under a service contract and in case of maternity leave, she would not be receiving a salary at all, which was not beneficial for the family. Although the decision-making process was very easy for the couple and did not require further hesitation, the decision was rather shocking and surprising for their families, friends, relatives, and co-workers as they were not aware of this policy and possibility. The ironic and sarcastic attitude from others made RM1 feel tense to share the news, however, this feeling faded away with time and eventually did not hurt his feelings at all.

Along with a not very supportive attitude from surroundings, F1 had a rather unpleasant bureaucratic experience. Even though RM1's company management admitted that they did not have a similar experience, they easily granted proceeding with the paternity leave. Although management approved the decision, HR was rather surprised and the family experienced a biased attitude and unprofessionalism from HR as according to RF1 “*HR was demanding unreasonable documentation*”. F1 identifies bureaucracy and the attitude of HR as the biggest challenge during the decision-making process. Due to the attitude and the difficulties they were facing, at some point, they even considered giving up.

Another biggest challenge was the ironic attitude from acquaintances that psychologically affected F1 and during the process that was already complicated enough, the sarcastic jokes of others did not help at all. The latter even made F1 rethink the relevance of their decision. Regardless, paternity leave brought positive emotions and benefits to the family. RM1 encourages other males to benefit from the policy, however, he only keeps talking about this matter only if he

sees a positive attitude from the person, if he notices a negative attitude, he blocks the topic as he does not want to cause any *“additional irritation”* and *“to avoid negative dialogue”*. This can be explained by the lack of support and attitude he received earlier. Although F1 experienced difficulties with bureaucracy and an unpleasant attitude from others, they are considering repeating their decision in case of having another child. F1 blames their unpleasant experience on a lack of awareness among society as well as in the private sector, management, and HR. They consider the law as very ambiguous.

F1 claims that there is a lack of awareness regarding the policy in society. F1 claims that if there is no gender equality in the family, only paternity leave policy cannot simply fix the gender equality in the family or distribution of household roles, *“if, from the very beginning, there is no gender equality in the family a child and paternity leave cannot change anything at all”*, RM1. F1 similarly thinks about paternity law affecting the distribution of gender roles and gender dynamics within Georgian society, *“it is all about humans and its nature”*, RM1. Even before paternity leave, in their family, there were no frames of what is man’s duty and what is woman’s duty. The household chores that the husband took over during paternity leave, are the same chores he used to do even before paternity leave. He has never experienced any discomfort with any house chores. F1 considers that those who have frames of gender duties won’t even use paternity leave, and even during paternity leave won’t change their views regarding gender roles as they think that all this primarily depends on the character of a person. They strengthen their argument by saying that because of their decision nothing has changed in their family or circle regarding gender dynamics. They claim that in their family everything remained the same, and in their acquaintances' circle everything remained exactly the same as it used to be before their paternity leave.

Participant Family 2

In F2 idea of paternity leave was born with the encouragement of the RM2’s workplace, which they gladly accepted as RM2 had a strong desire to be part of the child-raising process, *“in my opinion family and especially children are the equal responsibility and happiness of both parents and from the very first days I wanted to be part of the process of raising a child”*, RM2. RM2 felt very proud sharing this news with others, as he was one of the first ones benefiting from the law, he was invited to various TV and Radio programs to talk about the policy and his experience. Although RM2 did not want to talk about this as he did not consider this as a huge deal, he realized that spreading the word about the policy would be a great opportunity for society, thus, he not only accepted invitations from TV and Radio but always tried to talk about gender equality related issues and ideas among his friends' circle, including the paternity leave policy.

Although the paternity leave policy was a workplace-encouraged initiative, thus, bureaucracy was rather simple, requiring filling out a single form, and there was support from the company, F2's friends and family were not aware of this opportunity, and F2's decision at first caused laughter to them, however, later the laughter has changed and made others think about the policy and its implications, *"many of my friends even laughed when they heard about this, but later, when they saw that nothing was missing or has been taken away from my manhood then they started thinking that someday they could use it when they have kids"*, RM2. Laughter from others did not affect RM2 at all because he so much believes in equality, and if needed he would argumentatively explain why their decision was important for him and his family, for him this was a very normal form and decision. F2 does not identify any challenges regarding the decision-making process as this decision was strongly part of their beliefs and values. The couple claims that even though it is a norm in Georgia that during the first period, grandma or nannies help in child raising, they have strictly decided that they wanted to raise the child themselves together, thus, they are proud of their decision and consider it one of the best decisions that they have ever made, if they had a chance they would repeat the same.

According to RM2, Georgian society will follow his path in the long run, but in the short-run, it is hard to say as he thinks that it is not only a topic of social norms but the economy, and whether the economy of Georgia can afford and is ready for 5,000 men taking paternity leave. He raises an argument that popularizing and raising awareness regarding the policy is one thing and the economical readiness of the country another. F2 considers paternity leave policy as the most important stage in normalizing gender roles in the household, as taking paternity leave can automatically mean realizing to do certain chores at home, *"consequently, if the gender roles are not normalized, then it is a very important step from parents"* F2. Not only for households but for establishing healthy gender dynamics within Georgian society F2 considers paternity leave opportunities as rather crucial. As more people show this example, more will realize that some norms and ideas about gender equality must be reconsidered. RM2 even suggests that popularizing paternity leave policy could be labeled as a "paternity leave holiday", as psychologically it will encourage more to benefit from it.

The paternity leave policy created changes in gender dynamics in the circle of F2, however, they do not think it happened only because of them, they think that overall the world is changing gender dynamics and norms, where people realize that a patriarchal society is not healthy or profitable. There are more fathers in the park walking kids, and more fathers wanting to spend time with families, thus, their decision might have made some micro-contribution within their circle. RM2 claims that he has been focusing on gender related conversations in his circle for 5-10 years and he can clearly see more conscious, open-minded, and argumentative discussions. All this is

because every parent wants a better future for their children. Previous experiences show that changes that are being made in Central Europe take 5-10 years to be adopted in Georgia, thus F2 is hopeful for Georgia to implement paternity leave actively and establish gender equality in the country.

Participant Family 3

In F3 the wife worked in the private sector and was not able to take time off from work, thus the family decided that husband would benefit from paternity leave. RM3 is a civil lawyer himself, thus he was well aware of the paternity leave policy, family rights and the insights of the policy as himself has been involved with various gender-related policies. Even though F3 got laughed at on their decision by other family members as no one had any information regarding the policy, RM3 still felt very comfortable while sharing the news because he knew he was benefiting from the existing law, his priority was creating a comfort for his family, thus, he did not care what third parties had to say or comment. If there was a chance to return back in time, F3 would make the same decision.

RM3 most times played the role of educator whether it was educating his family, friends, or co-workers even as he explained the meaning of the policy in depth to them. It is important to emphasize that although RM3 is a civil lawyer working in the public sector, his co-workers did not have any information about the law, which proves once again that the paternity leave policy is rather ambiguous in the country. His co-workers, similar to his family members, were surprised by his decision which is explained by a lack of information and knowledge of the policy. Although people were surprised, RM3 did not receive much of a sarcastic or ironic attitude which he explains by him holding a high position at work and many not being able to dare to be skeptical towards him and his decision, instead they chose to carry on with a surprising attitude. When it comes to challenges during decision-making, F3 does not identify any major challenges at all, even bureaucracy went very smoothly although it was the first case for HR, F3 used existing laws as references including an official announcement of the ministry of health.

Even though RM3 talks about the paternity leave policy with his male friends and encourages them to follow his path, he also justifies that since Georgians are raised in old stereotypes it is hard to adopt “*good European aspects*”, “*so realistically, it is very difficult to destroy our strong mentality*”, RM3. Thus, he is hopeful that society will follow his way as for him equality of women and men in the family is an axiom. In his family, men have never been higher than women, everyone had his/her own word. He argues that first should come family and then society and this thinking should be established within the society, which he argues is a matter of time. He believes that 99% of Georgia follows older rules and values and all this (gender norms) is

different thinking for them but he believes that this is normal thinking, exactly how it is supposed to be. F3 thinks that paternity leave policy can define gender roles in the household in a sense that gender stereotypes should not exist and in their family, it has never existed, thus in their case paternity leave policy did not change anything, *“we properly follow gender dynamics, I was not even paying attention to all this, if my wife needed help, of course, I was by her side. I have never felt strange or awkward about this”* RM3.

RM3 raises a rather interesting concept, from the aspect of gender equality, when it comes to paternity leave, he claims that he feels a little offended and discriminated against as under the law men and women are not equal at all. He claims that if the law is for one family, serving one matter, how come there are differences in days, salaries, remuneration, etc. He claims that aspects of the distribution of days, and salaries, in regard to gender equality should be fixed. In addition, he believes that the main problem of Georgian society is breaking the Soviet mentality among people who have been raised with the communist mentality. It is one thing to make additions to the law, and another is to actually take an action when people are not even aware of the law. RM3 argues that gender does not mean only women, and yet they only focus on women, when gender contains both women and men related issues. He believes that first of all these relationships must be fixed through an educational angle and more conscious actions.

Participant Family 4

In F4, RM4 used paternity leave to participate in child care and raise procedures. He is a journalist by profession who closely works with the development and adoption of legislative initiatives, and thus was aware of the paternity leave opportunity. Even though RF4 was unemployed, RM4 still decided to go on paternity leave because there was a need for it for the family and wife. They both realized that there was a need as well as desire from both sides. RF4 believes that the process is very pleasant yet difficult thus having a spouse by her side is very crucial.

F4 friends and family members were not aware of the law. Especially skeptical were co-workers, those who heard about the law did not think that it would be possible to implement it in reality and were skeptical that HR would approve of this, however, even though co-workers' awareness of the policy was low, HR was aware and took care of all the necessary paperwork within an hour. In fact, HR encouraged RM4 to proceed with the decision. Parents of F4 took their decision more or less well, as they realized that they would be helping one another in this process. RM4 claims that being on paternity leave was very interesting and brought very pleasant emotions. If during the first child, he did not participate in child care at all, this time he was fully involved and experienced every detail. He claims that he got so attached it was hard for him to go back to work.

If he has another chance, he is sure he will use paternity leave again. He not only encourages other males to take paternity leave he believes that this is rather essential and everyone should experience it as it brings them closer to their children.

F4 believes that there should not be a distinction between maternity and paternity leave, there should only be paternity leave where the family decides who benefits from it based on the family conditions and needs. The crucial part is that a child will spend time with a parent, whether it is a mother or father. When raising a child is connected to big finance, the family should align their plan - whether the mother takes leave or the father - based on income and convenience of the family, not based on gender roles, *“mother leaving a high income job might cause bigger problems for a child and family than father taking care of him/her in this case”* RM4. More people should be aware of the law, otherwise, just having the law on paper does not have any point. People need to realize and reconsider their thoughts regarding this topic. Unfortunately, in Georgia there are still certain stereotypes regarding motherhood and fatherhood, mothers should raise a child while fathers should bring in money in the household, *“some think that you are not a cool guy if you take a part in childcare and you do not have a right position in the household”*, RM4. F4 believes that their decision caused some changes regarding gender dynamics in their circle, for example, after RM4, his 3-4 co-workers went on paternity leave, they do not laugh about changing diapers or taking care of baby laundry, now they accept it as a very normal action, people are not so skeptical anymore. One of their friends who used to claim that he would never change a baby's diaper after the baby was born, took time off from work and got involved in the childcare process. Today, his wife runs her own business, while he is independently taking care of the baby. F4 does not think that the latter was caused only due to their experience of paternity leave, they believe that everything makes an influence, including their decision, some realize it better, and some start thinking about it and the opportunity.

Even though F4's paternity leave experience has been pleasant overall and their desire and attitude have been strong and vocal, at first they were skeptical as well. They even consulted the Professional Union and familiarized themselves with their rights, before announcing the decision to the company's HR. After consulting the lawyer, the couple got more belief that it would be actually possible. RM4 is hopeful and claims that if today his company easily accommodates paternity leave, this can be an example for other institutions. When people can see that a number of companies implement the law, they can even demand it and it will change the social situation in Georgia for good. In Georgia, people lack confidence in believing in innovative steps and give up after the first failure, thus, examples of individual cases are rather important within the society. F4 believes that in order to make a significant change more awareness, examples, and more push toward employers is needed.

Participant Family 5

F5 has been aware of the paternity leave policy, however, it seemed very unrealistic as there was no one around who knew who benefited from the policy. The primary reason for F5 to benefit from paternity leave was curiosity, to test the policy, whether it was actually possible in reality or not and to see if/how it would work out. In Georgia, where maternity leave is very normal practice, paternity leave is a rather surprising reality. The couple wanted to become one of the firsts who would implement the policy in real life. Additionally, in their family career growth of both women and men is equally important, thus, they thought this would be the right choice for them and they had realized very well why they were doing all this.

Reaction from family regarding their decision was surprising as they did not know the policy and it was unimaginable for them, thus, a couple, in the beginning, did not feel support at all as for some their decision was unacceptable, which they explain due to the contemporary reality of their society where only mother is expected to be with a baby, and mother should be raising a child. Some even tried to convince them to change their mind, however, they had strongly made up their mind regarding the decision. Despite the difficult attitude they experienced from their surroundings, they did not feel uncomfortable sharing their news as they both had realized that child raising was equal responsibility for both of them. The biggest challenge for the couple was not decision-making but the realization that mother would not be home and father would be responsible for everything during the day part, they had similar thoughts, however, *“when there is big desire, you can solve everything”*, RF5. Although at first, RM5 was confused, right now he is proud that he knows everything related to a baby, and some day he gets to tell his son that he was one of the first fathers on paternity leave. RM5 encourages others to use paternity leave policy in the future and not only, if F5 had a chance again, they would make the same decision to first of all, benefit their child and family, and secondly, raise awareness within the society which they believe is so much needed.

When it comes to bureaucracy, for F5 the process could have been much easier, but overall was not too difficult. F5 believes that a parent who wants to take paternity leave and needs time to be with family and newborn should not need various documents and letters. F5 claims that even though at their workplaces responsible members had awareness of the paternity leave and took care of bureaucracy easily, they still acted surprised and it seemed like it is not convenient for them, and they did not really want it to happen, *“might not be convenient for them that you are using your right”*, *“I am sure everyone has this information that both father and mothers’ leave exist but still father’s asking for it remains surprising for them”*, RF5.

F5 believes that if more males use paternity leave, more will realize the benefits of the policy, as people see and learn from examples. The paternity leave policy defines gender roles in the household because a child from an early age can learn that there are no gender roles, in addition,

people around can realize that men and women, especially when establishing a family, have the same equal responsibility, especially when it comes to childcare. This way, stereotypes will break that women have the function of just being housewives and society can realize that women have the right to have a career just like men and that a balance of gender roles is needed in relationships. Even though F5 claims that in their society gender equality is not maintained, the paternity leave policy did not make many changes in the family as from the very beginning they had gender equality established within the family. However, they see positive changes in their circle after their decision. Consequently, the paternity leave policy can help the gender equality movement attempts to be successful in Georgia. Distribution of gender roles only for men and only for women should not exist and paternity leave policy helps this very well as men can realize and think, “why only mom?”.

Participant Family 6

F6 got interested in the usage of the paternity leave policy after RM6 was informed about the policy at work by HR (private sector) and was encouraged to benefit from the policy. Based on the common decision of the family RM6 with the primary goal to spend more time with a newborn and his family decided to proceed so. Even though friends and family members were not aware of the policy and they were rather surprised, RM6 felt very rewarded while sharing his decision with others. According to F6 experience, paternity policy still is *“a very new and strange concept for society.”* Thus, they consider this as a very big step forward for Georgian society. Although the decision was rather surprising for others, the couple still felt very supported by family members, and eventually, they were all happy that they would be home together with a newborn. The couple does not identify any challenges when it comes to decision-making, bureaucracy was relatively simple for them as well as to finalize their decision. The experience brought positive emotions in the household and they would repeat it again.

Even though, RM6 has mentioned that he wanted to spend more time with family, during the interview he also mentioned and emphasized the importance of not going to work, *“not to go to work - no one could change my mind”*, *“not to go to work, not to be tired, and having more time to spend with a baby and my wife”*, RM6. Although it is difficult to make assumptions, time off from work and perceiving paternity leave as “holiday” could have been an incentive for this individual to take the leave. Although the main essence of the policy is not the latter, there is nothing harmful to get into this policy this way, because eventually, it still balances gender roles in the household as men are exposed to household chores that in Georgian society are assumed to be “women’s chores”, and the policy still benefits the family, relationship and the community with an example.

When it comes to the adoption of the policy within Georgian society, F6 believes that it's important that society realizes the meaning of the policy, as for now, this can be unacceptable for various reasons. They are hopeful and sure that with time this will be achieved in Georgia. F6 believes that paternity law positively affects the distribution of gender roles and overall gender dynamics as both parents equally participate in the process and divide the roles. Although they claim that nothing has changed in their family after this decision, they confirm that a couple of their friends who had newborns after their decision, their attitude towards gender roles have changed a little. RM6 strongly believes that all companies should implement and encourage paternity leave laws and allow men to have time off at least for a short period of time.

4.2 Experiences

When analyzing the experience of the Georgian families who have benefited from the paternity leave policy, one thing became vivid - they all are proud of their decision, and if they had a chance they would make the exact same decision and take paternity leave again. Even though Georgia is considered as conservative country with strong traditional culture, values, and beliefs with rather patriarchal norms, the pride of paternity leave policy challenges the literature.

As the above-analyzed literature suggested, in contemporary Georgia in regard to the distribution of gender roles men and women are not equal.¹¹² In the massively traditional culture, women are granted the responsibility of household chores, including independently raising a child, whereas men are responsible for the material well-being of a family.¹¹³ Even though, generally speaking, women are expected to be the submissive and passive group of the household, and men to be the head of the household¹¹⁴ - the latter was not experienced by the interview respondents.

Indeed, every family had different reasons and motives that led to the decision father taking the paternity leave, none of the families agrees on above mentioned gender roles within Georgian society and regardless of the main motives of what led husbands to take paternity leave - they all believe that in the distribution of the gender roles, including a raising a child - men and women, husband and wife within the family are absolutely equal.

When participants were asked to reflect on their decision looking from today and today's perspective, it is important to mention that all participants have a positive attitude about their decision, and they all very confidently would repeat the same again; *"one of the best decisions that we have made"*, claims F2, *"if there was a chance to return back in time, I would make the same decision"*, claims RM3, *"I hope that I will have another chance, and for sure, I am sure and 100% I*

¹¹² Mikaia, 1.

¹¹³ Japaridze, 3.

¹¹⁴ The same, 3.

will use it. Why should I not want to be with my kids and family especially when I have an opportunity for it”? claims RM4.

Another concept that is common to all male participants is their feelings while sharing the news that they took paternity leave. Although for Georgian society paternity leave is very unorthodox, because many are not even aware of this law and maternity leave is the only concept within the society, none of the male participants felt uncomfortable or embarrassed to share the news that they are fathers who are on paternity leave. More specifically, RM2 and RM5 felt very “*proud*”, RM3 felt “*very comfortable*”, RM6 felt “*rewarded*”, and only RM1 mentioned feeling “*tense*”, however, only at the very beginning and this was caused by the ironic reactions, and comments from surroundings, “*in the beginning, to be honest, it made me tense. Because, everyone was surprised, “oh my god, are you on paternity leave?” “Did you give birth or what?” “Are you a mother?” “Why are you on leave?” and similar questions like this. After some time, for myself not to worry and not to pay attention, I started to look at it with humor, “so what, what is the problem”, so I would not bring close to my heart those negative comments and reactions, eventually, I stopped paying attention. Probably, all this was during the first kid's last period of paternity, for the second kid I did not have any reaction at all*”, RM1.

Considering the environment around within the society where paternity leave is rather unorthodox and even an unknown concept and policy for the majority of the society, not only all male participants are proud of their eventual decision, but rather enjoy the process itself. Regardless of how desired a certain decision is, it is always challenging to experience it to the fullest and enjoy every moment of it when one is surrounded by judgmental opinions and constraints. “*These six months created many positive and nice atmospheres in my life, it is hard to express with words*”, comments RM1, “*since the process was very challenging it was interesting to handle it*” RM2”, “*I was thinking of creating comfort for my family, that was my main goal, I did not care what third parties would think or say about this*”, RM3, “*I got very attached and it was difficult to go back to work, it was amazing, I think everyone should have a chance to experience those procedures and not just leave those feelings for nannies to experience*” RM4. Consequently, according to the experiences of participants of this research, being a father on paternity leave can be associated with a pleasant process rather than an unusual and mysterious decision.

Research participants not only enjoyed the process themselves but very actively encouraged other males, their friends, and relatives the usage of paternity leave. None of the research participants considered this as a taboo topic for discussion, instead, they are promoting the law, explaining the policy in detail, how other families can benefit and why they should use it. “*Yes, of course. In my friends' circle, sometimes I have to talk about equality and I try to share my ideas and thoughts with them. If there is someone at this stage who is expecting a baby or is planning on*

having one, of course, we also always touch on this topic. Not because to be exemplary, and get invited to TV and Radio, but for his child, his family, and himself” RM2.

Only one respondent mentioned that once he starts encouraging his male friends, and acquaintances and he senses their negative or skeptical attitude toward the topic, he immediately stops the topic not to cause any inconvenience, *“Of course I am talking about it. Everyone who is telling me that they are expecting to have a baby I always tell them about it. I explain to them how mother and father can use it, and how they even can divide the days. But when you start talking with people, from the very first sentence you can sense their attitude about this idea of paternity leave, and then I either block the topic or continue explaining, not to cause any additional irritation in people and to avoid negative dialogue”* claims RM1.

Respondents shared their experiences with their workplace, HR, co-workers, and responsible members. Respondents are employed both in the public and private sectors, thus, their experience demonstrates an attitude of the public and private sectors in Georgia in regard to paternity leave awareness, implementation, and support. In this study, four family experiences are from working in the private sector, whereas two are in the public sector.

When it comes to the awareness of the paternity leave policy in the private sector in Georgian companies, out of four participants who are employed in the private sector, three employers were aware of the law, whereas, one employer was not, *“my boss was surprised, and loudly admitted that he has not done anything similar in his life”* RM1, whereas one respondent mentioned that although workplace representatives were aware of the law yet they were surprised by the request. In the private sector, in the case of participant family experiences, in two cases it was an encouraged decision from the company, *“company offered after I announced that I was expecting a baby”* RM2. When it comes to the bureaucratic process of paternity leave in the private sector, for three participants the process for relatively simple and were required to take care of very minor documentation, whereas, one family experienced major problems with the HR of a spouse’s company giving the family hard time and demanding unreasonable documentation as claimed by the participant, *“in our case, when we let our companies know that we would use paternity leave, even though we had a positive answer from the management that was sure to go ahead, HR got shocked. HR had an argument that she/he had never done this. Why did it matter to her/him as the procedure is the same for both women and men. Personally, HR created a problem for me, the HR of my husband’s company. For example, HR demanded unreasonable documentation from me, and this is where the attitude of HR was exposed, and it was biased. I could see unprofessionalism, and many other problems until we officially filed the paperwork”* RF1.

The remaining two family participants of the research had experience with the public sector. One participant mentioned that in his workplace there was a lack of information and knowledge of

the law that led to the surprised reaction of his coworkers, whereas in another case participant mentioned that HR was fully aware of the law and co-workers were not aware, those co-workers who had some information about the fact, they were very skeptical of how it could have been implemented in reality. Thus, in the first case, it was the very first experience for the HR of the institution, while in another case it was encouragement from the workplace to take paternity leave, *“from the workplace, it was even encouraged that it would be great if I would use it”* RM4.

When it comes to the bureaucratic side in the public sector in regard to paternity leave for male employees, in both cases it was relatively easy. It is interesting to emphasize that, even though in one case, HR did not have much awareness of this opportunity and this was his/her first case, from the bureaucratic side the process went very smoothly and easily, although the respondent himself provided references and other announcements, *“very easily. I used all the existing laws as a reference. Because, it was the first case for our HR, and I even provided an official announcement from our ministry of health regarding it. But eventually, in this regard, I did not experience any issues”*, RM3.

When it comes to the general awareness of paternity leave among study participants, they identify the following as their primary source of information regarding this topic: a workplace (private sector), HR (private sector), university lecture, work sphere - being a lawyer by profession and being involved in legislation filed by profession.

4.3 Insights

The paternity leave policy defines gender dynamics within Georgian society. Analyzed literature regarding Georgia and gender equality emphasize the highly patriarchal attitude towards gender as society sticks to cultural norms where males are dominant in society and in the household. Women are considered as a submissive group who are expected to be in charge of chores including raising a child, while men are considered as masters of the household who are supposed to take care of the material welfare of the family.¹¹⁵ However, the experiences of the families who benefited from the paternity leave policy bring completely different values than what the literature has to suggest.

To begin with, even though by the general assessment of gender roles men are not expected to raise children, the primary goal of male research participants to benefit from paternity law was to spend more time with family and get involved in the childcare process. In addition, men on paternity leave were exposed to household chores that in society are considered to be women's roles only, however, for male participants, the chores were very normal, that everyone should be doing at home. Even if earlier men were not exposed to certain household chores, naturally, taking care of a

¹¹⁵ Japaridze, 3.

newborn and being at home requires accomplishing certain household tasks, which means that this way or another the men were exposed to certain chores, which becomes a rather normal part of their lives, thus, this experience breaks the stereotypes of distinguishing between women and men's roles and people come to the realization that there are a certain chores that have to be done at home for the sake of the family.

Although the literature suggests that Georgia has a male-dominated society, based on analyzed data, conclusions can be drawn that in the 6 participant families, the paternity leave policy breaks the patriarchal concept, as the policy normalizes fathers being at home full time, while women are back to work right after birth giving. In some cases, families chose this way as wives were earning more and this was the more convenient way for the family. Thus, it changes gender roles in a way that the family proceeds based on the needs, interests, and benefits of the family and does not really worry about the gender roles or the dominance of either member of the household.

Georgia's cultural norms truly challenge the paternity leave policy, which is proved by the negative and skeptical attitude research participants received from their friends, family, and co-workers. This attitude did not hinder participants from finalizing their decision, in fact, they took time to in-depth explain the policy and its actual meaning. Consequently, as people realized the meaning of the policy, gender dynamics changed, for example, some tried to take paternity leave, some started thinking that there is nothing wrong with a father taking care of a baby, and some realized that there is nothing wrong performing certain house chores when it is a need for a family. Some of the acquaintances of the research participants realized that there is nothing wrong with the paternity leave policy and families should proceed based on their needs, and desires and not with the expected gender performances.

Gender performativity is created by the consistent performance of one. If only women keep taking care of household chores, such as cleaning, cooking, and raising a child, society will forever assume that these are the tasks only for women, however, the paternity leave policy breaks the idea of gender performativity as the policy allows men to proceed with the tasks that are simply life skills and not only women's duties. Consequently, this breaks gender roles, does not expect only certain gender to perform certain specific actions, and creates more inclusivity, diversity, and equality.

Based on analyzed literature, theories and the collected data following theoretical propositions can be derived that can be tested in large-scale research:

TP1: Existing gender stereotypes in Georgian society do not hinder individuals from benefiting from paternity leave.

The experience of 6 participant families clearly demonstrated that existing gender roles and stereotypes within the society did not affect the decision of the families to benefit from the paternity leave policy. Even though a father staying at home and full-time taking care of a child is rather unorthodox in Georgia, the desire among participant families was high, and the decision was well realized that it was for the benefit of the family, participant families did not let opinions of others influence their decision. Thus, it is rather crucial to conduct large-scale research and explore whether the latter is the case among the larger population of Georgian society as this is a significant step forward toward gender equality.

TP2: Georgian society believes that raising a child is an equal responsibility for both parents and not only women's responsibility.

One of the initial reasons why male participants decided to use the paternity leave policy was the desire to participate in the child-raising process and be with a baby and wife from day one. Unfortunately, this is not the common thinking in Georgian society, after childbirth, mothers are expected to be raising children, while fathers are expected to take care of the material welfare of the family. However, participant families have realized that raising a child is an equal responsibility of husband and wife. Thus, conducting a study and testing the proposed theoretical proposition among a larger population can update the literature about Georgian values in regard to child raising responsibilities and stereotypes.

TP3: Paternity leave policy does not affect the face of men in society.

Paternity leave is rather unusual in Georgian society. Even though there was a sarcastic and skeptical attitude toward male participants from acquaintances regarding the decision, eventually, people started accepting this decision, viewing the father taking care of a baby as normal and in some cases even changing their minds and attitudes regarding this topic. Thus, it is interesting to further analyze paternity leave in the context of men's role within society.

TP4: Paternity leave policy breaks gender role-related stereotypes in Georgian society and redefines the distribution of gender roles in the household.

The paternity leave policy makes people wonder, think and reconsider. This has been proven by the stories of 6 participant families. The paternity leave policy breaks the idea that only mothers can take care of a newborn and emphasizes the important role of the father in the process. Thus, the policy has the potential to break gender-related stereotypes in the society and redefine the gender roles in the household which is worth researching on a larger population of Georgian society.

TP5: Paternity leave policy even in a patriarchal society can be successful if the meaning of the policy is explained to the society.

Paternity leave has been rather successful in the case of 6 participant families, as families had a clear understanding of the policy as well as its implications. Although for some it might have

been unusual or unacceptable, the overall journey of the research participants, starting from making the decision ending up with fathers independently full-time taking care of babies, has been successful. It has been mentioned earlier in the paper that awareness of the policy among the population is very low. Participant families for various different reasons had knowledge regarding this policy, and the right understanding, the latter emphasizes the importance of knowledge, because with the correct information, even in a patriarchal country paternity leave can be successful and beneficial for the families.

CONCLUSIONS

The Master's thesis, *paternity leave policy in Georgia: experiences of families and its implications on gender dynamics*, focused on analyzing the paternity leave policy in Georgia that has been recently adopted in 2020 and its implications on gender dynamics. The research focused on the stories of 6 participant families where families benefited from the paternity leave policy. The research incorporated literature regarding paternity leave policy experiences in other countries, literature regarding cultural stereotypes as well as gender equality assessment in Georgian society. As for theoretical framework, research guided the theory of Gender Performativity, Traditional Feminist Theory, and Dominance Theory. Based on analyzed material as well as collected data, research was able to derive insights regarding the effect of the paternity leave policy on gender dynamics within Georgian society.

The chapter concludes the study and describes the most important conclusions of the research, implications, and potential contribution of the study as well as provides recommendations for future investigations.

It is important to keep in mind that conclusions are derived based on the experiences of 6 participant families that are difficult to generalize for the entire population. The study concludes that even in a patriarchal country like Georgia, paternity leave policy defines gender dynamics within the society for the better. Existing gender stereotypes in Georgian society do not hinder individuals from benefiting from the paternity leave policy when the policy is correctly understood. Georgian society believes that raising a child is an equal responsibility of both parents and it is not just a gender role associated only with women, thus paternity leave policy does not negatively affect the face of men in the society. The paternity leave policy breaks gender roles and redefines the distribution of gender roles in the household as fathers on paternity leave are exposed to various household chores that Georgian society believes is only women's duty. Paternity leave policy even in a patriarchal society can be successful if the meaning of the policy is correctly distributed among the population.

As for recommendations for future research, applying a quantitative method by conducting a survey among a broader population could be beneficial for a more accurate interpretation of the findings for a generalized population. Additionally, for a similar qualitative study probing would be beneficial if a language barrier or distance during interviewing is not a shortcoming. Lastly, a shorter and more detail-oriented interview guide can be more efficient for collecting more accurate data.

The research potentially contributes to a literature gap on the topic of paternity leave policy in Georgia. Additionally, this study investigates the mindset of changes in regard to the gender roles in the household among Georgian families and updates the literature regarding the values of

Georgian families specifically when it comes to women, gender equality, and the distribution of gender roles in the household. This study serves a mission to raise awareness regarding the paternity leave policy within Georgian society. Personal experiences and stories of research participant families can influence other families' decision-making and understanding of gender roles. In addition, research can influence organizations of both public and private sectors to analyze the outcomes of the policy, and encourage and incorporate paternity leave policy within the company culture. Most importantly, research offers insights for future, large-scale research.

The study and the probing questions related to the paternity leave policy and gender dynamics might encourage refreshing ideas to any reader interested in exploring the link between the paternity leave policy and its effects on gender dynamics and distribution of the gender roles in the household.

Gender equality is a unique value and socio-political goal for every democratic society. However, if we want paternity leave to succeed in Georgia and positively affect gender dynamics within the country, change cannot come only from the piece of paper but awareness and the right actions taken by the government, institutions and society. This is not only about promoting gender equality but improving the quality of life - for women, men, and children.

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SUMMARY

This study focused on the paternity leave policy in Georgia and its implications on gender dynamics. For Georgian society, paternity leave policy is a rather relevant topic of discussion as the law has been adopted and clarified in 2020 based on which men can freely benefit from the adopted policy.

Achieving global gender equality is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030. Ensuring gender equality is a challenging process where legislative changes play a rather significant role as without strong legislative support and policy-making towards women gender equality cannot be met. In contemporary Georgia women and men with general assessment and distribution of gender roles are not equal at all, this is due to the dominance of men's rights over women's rights, which create different roles in Georgian society. In Georgia where the society is massively following the traditional culture and where patriarchal norms are dominant, it is widely accepted that women due to their gender roles are supposed to be the ones responsible for household chores, child raising and are not expected for the active civic, social and political engagement. Consequently, women are expected to be the submissive and passive ones in the household, while men are expected to be the masters of the entire household. First Georgian father who benefited from the policy mentioned that family members and friends were surprised by the decision as they were not aware of the opportunity. It has been three years since the policy was adopted and the request from the fathers regarding paternity leave is minimal, Human Rights Institute of Georgia explains the latter by the lack of knowledge as well as by the wrong understanding of the policy due to the stereotypical mindset.

The research goal is to investigate the paternity leave policy in Georgia, experiences of families, challenges and obstacles they faced and analyze the implications on gender dynamics within Georgian society. The study is focused on in-depth analyzing how/if the policy affected the lives of ordinary people, what problems they encountered along the way, and how the policy redefines distribution of the gender roles among Georgian families. In order to fulfill the research goals, the study tasks are as follows. The thesis discusses gender equality norms in Georgia as well as paternity leave policy. The study explains feminist theories and constructs a conceptual framework for analyzing the experience of the families and examines how family experiences of paternity leave unfold in the context of Georgian society and gender dynamics.

The research is a qualitative study. 6 Georgian couples have been interviewed who have benefited from paternity leave policy to share their experience. Husband and wife are represented together. Based on the gathered data, individual family stories have been analyzed regarding gender roles, gender dynamics, gender roles in the household, gender stereotypes.

It is important to keep in mind that conclusions are derived based on the experiences of 6 participant families that are difficult to generalize for the entire population. The study concludes that even in a patriarchal country like Georgia, paternity leave policy defines gender dynamics within the society for the better. Existing gender stereotypes in Georgian society do not hinder individuals from benefiting from the paternity leave policy when the policy is correctly understood. Georgian society believes that raising a child is an equal responsibility of both parents and it is not just a gender role associated only with women, thus paternity leave policy does not negatively affect the face of men in the society. The paternity leave policy breaks gender roles and redefines the distribution of gender roles in the household as fathers on paternity leave are exposed to various household chores that Georgian society believes is only women's duty. Paternity leave policy even in a patriarchal society can be successful if the meaning of the policy is correctly distributed among the population.

As for recommendations for future research, applying a quantitative method by conducting a survey among a broader number of populations could be beneficial for a more accurate interpretation of the findings for a generalized population. Additionally, for the similar qualitative study probing would be beneficial if language barrier or distance during interviewing is not a shortcoming. Lastly, shorter and more detail-oriented interview guide can be more efficient for collecting more accurate data.

ANNEX

Annex A Informed Consent Document

Dear Participant,

Please consider participating in a study about the paternity leave policy in Georgia and its implications on gender dynamics. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate in the study. If you do decide to participate you may stop at any time. There will be no consequences for deciding not to participate or for deciding to stop participation in the study.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer questions in the format of a semi-structured interview, which will take from thirty minutes to one hour to complete.

The information you provide during your participation in this study will remain confidential. The results of the study will only be reported in aggregate form and no identifying information will be released. Transcripts of interviews will be coded to maintain participant confidentiality. To further safeguard your confidentiality, please do not write your name or any identifying information on the study instruments. The information you provide during the course of this study will not be used for any purpose outside the scope of this research project, which includes preparation of a master's thesis and potential future publication. All raw data will be destroyed by February 2023, while the coded transcripts will be archived as a part of the submitted thesis.

Participation in this study involves minimal risk. The questions asked may be considered personal or sensitive. However, you can choose to not answer them and withhold any information.

There is no cost to participate in this research project.

This research project is being conducted by Anastasia Kublashvili as part of the second-year thesis process of Eastern European and Russian studies program at the Vilnius University, Institute of International Relations and Political Science. The thesis advisor is Augustė Dementavičienė. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research project, please contact Anastasia Kublashvili, +37062916938, anastasia.kublashvili@tspmi.stud.vu.lt, or Professor Augustė Dementavičienė, auguste.dementaviciene@tspmi.vu.lt

Thank you for your time.

Anastasia Kublashvili, _____

Signature of participant/date

Informed Consent Document (Georgian)

ძვირფასო მონაწილე,

გთხოვთ, მიიღოთ მონაწილეობა საქართველოში მამების შვებულების პოლიტიკის კვლევაში. ამ კვლევაში მონაწილეობა სრულიად ნებაყოფლობითია. თქვენ არ ხართ ვალდებული, მონაწილეობა მიიღოთ კვლევაში. მონაწილეობის შემთხვევაში კი შეგიძლიათ ნებისმიერ დროს შეწყვიტოთ. თუ გადაწყვეტთ, რომ არ მიიღოთ მონაწილეობა ან შეწყვიტოთ კვლევა, ეს არ აისახება შედეგებზე.

მონაწილეობის შემთხვევაში თქვენ უნდა უპასუხოთ შეკითხვებს ინტერვიუს ფორმატში, რომლის დასრულებასაც დააათი წუთიდან ერთ საათამდე დასჭირდება.

ამ კვლევაში მონაწილეობისას თქვენ მიერ მოწოდებული ინფორმაცია კონფიდენციალური დარჩება. კვლევის შედეგები წარმოდგენილი იქნება მხოლოდ მთლიანი ფორმით და არ გამოქვეყნდება საიდენტიფიკაციო ინფორმაცია. ინტერვიუების ჩანაწერები დაშიფრული იქნება მონაწილეთა კონფიდენციალურობის შესანარჩუნებლად. თქვენი კონფიდენციალურობის დასაცავად, გთხოვთ, არ დაწეროთ/დაასახელოთ თქვენი სახელი ან რაიმე საიდენტიფიკაციო ინფორმაცია კვლევის ინსტრუმენტებზე. თქვენ მიერ მოწოდებული ინფორმაცია ამ კვლევის მსვლელობისას არ იქნება გამოყენებული რაიმე მიზნით ამ კვლევითი პროექტის ფარგლებს გარეთ, რომელიც მოიცავს სამაგისტრო ნაშრომის მომზადებას და პოტენციურ მომავალ პუბლიკაციას. ყველა ნედლი მონაცემი განადგურდება 2023 წლის თებერვლამდე, ხოლო კოდირებული ტრანსკრიპტები არქივდება, როგორც წარმოდგენილი ნაშრომის ნაწილი.

კვლევაში მონაწილეობა მინიმალურ რისკს შეიცავს. დასმული კითხვები შეიძლება ჩაითვალოს პირადულად. თუმცა, თქვენ შეგიძლიათ არ უპასუხოთ მათ და არ დაფაროთ რაიმე ინფორმაცია.

აღნიშნულ კვლევით პროექტში მონაწილეობა არ არის ხარჯებთან დაკავშირებული.

კვლევით პროექტს ახორციელებს ანასტასია კუბლაშვილი, ვილნიუსის უნივერსიტეტის საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობებისა და პოლიტიკური მეცნიერებების ინსტიტუტის, აღმოსავლეთ ევროპისა და რუსეთის მეცნიერებათა პროგრამის სადისერტაციო პროცესის ფარგლებში. დისერტაციის მრჩეველი არის ავგუსტე დემენტავიჩიენე. თუ თქვენ გაქვთ რაიმე შეკითხვა ან კომენტარი ამ კვლევით პროექტთან დაკავშირებით, გთხოვთ, დაუკავშირდეთ ანასტასია კუბლაშვილს, +37062916938, anastasia.kublashvili@tspmi.stud.vu.lt, ან პროფესორ ავგუსტე დემენტავიჩიენეს, auguste.dementaviciene@tspmi.vu.lt.

გმადლობთ, რომ დრო დაგვითმეთ.

ანასტასია კუბლაშვილი, _____

მონაწილის ხელმოწერა/თარიღი

Annex B

Interview Guide

Hello, my name is Anastasia Kublashvili. Thank you for participating in my interview for the study of parental leave law in Georgia. I am a second year Master's student of Eastern European and Russian studies programme at Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science.

The interview will take from thirty minutes to one hour and will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. The interview is confidential, and only my supervisor and I will have access to it. I am interested in as much information as you are willing to provide, however, you are free to withhold any information, or stop any time. In addition to answering the direct questions, if there is anything you think is important to add or comment on through the interview, please do not hesitate to. For us it is very important to hear your experience, worldview. There are no answers that are considered not proper if they are the ones that you believe in.

Please take a look at the provided informed consent form and confirm your agreement to participate and for the conversation to be recorded.

Decision-making:

1. How/where did you learn/hear about the paternity leave law/opportunity?
2. How did you come up with this idea and why did you decide so?
3. Was it a joint decision?
4. How did you divide the days? Did you (father) take all the days of child care days or were the days somehow divided among you and your spouse?

Reaction:

1. How did you feel sharing this news?
2. Were people around you, friends and family members, aware of the law? How did they react?
3. Was your company/HR/responsible member and co-workers aware of the law? Were they surprised? How did they react?
4. Was this in any way an encouraged decision from the company?
5. How was the process overall, speaking of documentation and bureaucracy?
6. Did people around you try to support you?
7. What were the biggest challenges while making the decision?

Personal Impact:

1. What emotions being a father on paternity leave brought up for you (considering the environment around)?
2. How did this decision affect your social life?

Future:

3. What do you think about your decision now?
4. If you had a chance would you make the same choice again? Or are you considering taking a paternity leave again?
5. Do you talk about and encourage other males (friends, relatives) to use paternity leave?

6. Do you think overall society in Georgia will follow your path and why so?
7. How do you think paternity leave policy defines gender roles in the household?
8. How do you think paternity law affects distribution of gender roles and overall gender dynamics within Georgian society?
9. How did it affect/change gender dynamics within your family or circle (if it did)?

Sociodemographics:

1. What is your age?
2. Where are you from? (Big city, small town or village)
3. What is your level of education? (Secondary education or higher education)
4. What is your occupation? (Level of position)

Interview Guide (Georgian)

გამარჯობა, მე ვარ ანასტასია კუბლაშვილი. გმადლობთ საქართველოში მამების შვებულების კანონის პოლიტიკის შესწავლისთვის, ინტერვიუში მონაწილეობისათვის. მე ვარ ვილნიუსის უნივერსიტეტის საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობებისა და პოლიტიკური მეცნიერების ინსტიტუტის, აღმოსავლეთ ევროპისა და რუსეთ მცოდნეობის პროგრამის მაგისტრატის მეორე კურსის სტუდენტი.

ინტერვიუ ოცდაათი წუთიდან ერთ საათამდე გაგრძელდება და აუდიო ჩაიწერება ტრანსკრიფციის მიზნით. გასაუბრება კონფიდენციალურია და მასზე წვდომა მხოლოდ მე და ჩემს ხელმძღვანელს გვექნება. მე მაინტერესებს იმდენი ინფორმაცია, რამდენის მიწოდების სურვილიც თქვენ გაქვთ, თუმცა თქვენ თავისუფლად შეგიძლიათ შეაჩეროთ ნებისმიერი ინფორმაციის მოწოდება, ან ინტერვიუ შეწყვიტოთ ნებისმიერ დროს. შემოთავაზებულ კითხვებზე პასუხის გარდა, თუ რაიმე, თქვენი აზრით, მნიშვნელოვანია, შეგიძლიათ დაამატოთ ან კომენტარი გააკეთოთ. გთხოვთ, ინტერვიუს მსვლელობის დროს არ დაყოვნდეთ. ჩვენთვის ძალიან მნიშვნელოვანია თქვენი გამოცდილების, მსოფლმხედველობის მოსმენა. პასუხები არ ჩაითვლება არასწორად, თუ არის თქვენთვის სასურველი და მისაღები.

გთხოვთ, გადახედოთ მოწოდებული თანხმობის ფორმას და დაადასტუროთ თქვენი თანხმობა მონაწილეობაზე, საუბრის ჩაწერაზე.

გადაწყვეტილების მიღება:

1. როგორ/სად გაიგეთ/გაიგეთ მამობის შვებულების კანონის/შესაძლებლობის შესახებ?
2. როგორ გაჩნდა ეს იდეა და რატომ გადაწყვიტეთ ასე?
3. ერთობლივი გადაწყვეტილება იყო?
4. როგორ დაყავით იდეები? თქვენ (მამამ) ბავშვზე ზრუნვის ყველა დღე გამოიყენეთ როგორ იყო დღეები თქვენ და თქვენ მეუღლეს შორის განაწილებული?

რეაქცია:

1. როგორ გრძნობდით ამ ამბების გაზიარებისას თავს?
2. იცოდნენ, თუ არა თქვენმა გარშემომყოფებმა, მეგობრებმა და ოჯახის წევრებმა კანონის შესახებ? როგორი რეაქცია ჰქონდათ?
3. იცოდნენ, თუ არა თქვენი კომპანიის/HR/პასუხისმგებელმა წევრებმა და თანამშრომლებმა კანონის შესახებ? გაუკვირდათ? როგორი რეაქცია ჰქონდათ?
4. იყო, თუ არა ეს კომპანიის წახალისებული გადაწყვეტილება?

5. როგორ იყო პროცესი მთლიანობაში დოკუმენტაციასა და ბიუროკრატიის თვალსაზრისით?
6. გარშემომყოფები ცდილობდნენ თქვენს მხარდაჭერას?
7. რა იყო ყველაზე დიდი გამოწვევა გადაწყვეტილების მიღებისას?

პირადი გავლენა:

1. რა ემოციები მოგიტანათ დეკრეტულ შვებულებაში მყოფმა მამის სტატუსმა? (ირგვლივ არსებული გარემოს გათვალისწინებით)?
2. როგორ იმოქმედა ამ გადაწყვეტილებამ თქვენს სოციალურ ცხოვრებაზე?

მომავალი:

1. რას ფიქრობთ თქვენს გადაწყვეტილებაზე დღეის გადმოსახედიდან?
2. შანსი რომ გქონდეთ ,ისევ იმავე არჩევანს გააკეთებდით? ან განიხილავთ ისევ მამის შვებულებას?
3. საუბრობთ ამ თემაზე და ამხნევებთ , თუ არა სხვა მამაკაცებს?(მეგობრებს, ნათესავებს), ურჩევთ , თუ არა გამოიყენონ მამის შვებულება?
4. როგორ ფიქრობთ, აირჩევს თუ არა საქართველოში საზოგადოება დეკრეტის ამ ფორმას? რატომ?
5. რას ფიქრობთ, როგორ განსაზღვრავს მამობის შვებულების პოლიტიკა ოჯახში გენდერულ როლებს?
6. რას ფიქრობთ, როგორ მოქმედებს მამობის კანონი გენდერული როლების განაწილებაზე და ზოგადად გენდერულ დინამიკაზე ქართულ საზოგადოებაში?
7. როგორ იმოქმედა/შეიცვალა გენდერული დინამიკა თქვენს ოჯახში ან წრეში (თუ ეს განხორციელდა)?

სოციოდემოგრაფიკა:

1. თქვენი ასაკი?
2. საცხოვრებელი ადგილი (დიდი ქალაქი, პატარა ქალაქი ან სოფელი)?
3. განათლება (საშუალო ან უმაღლესი განათლება)
4. რას საქმიანობთ? (პოზიცია)

Annex C
Interview Transcripts

Interview 1:

Decision-making:

1. How/where did you learn/hear about the paternity leave law/opportunity?
RM1: To be honest, I understood about it from my wife, that I could take paternity leave for child care days and I decided why not. My wife physically could not manage to take off from work and I decided, why not take the leave, and under the law, I did it very normally but everyone was very surprised.
2. How did you come up with this idea and why did you decide so?
RF1: The idea was created due to the fact that at that moment I was working under two contracts, but both contracts were service contracts, so automatically under the service contract it would not be convenient for me to take maternity leave. Thus, because I was not able to take maternity leave, of course I had a right to use, but considering work it would be better not to take the maternity leave, and not to leave child alone, we preferred one of us to take the leave, and because I had service contract from both work, meaning that in case of maternity leave I would not receive salary, that part was not convenient for us. Thus, we decided that my husband would benefit from the child care days.
3. Was this more of a voluntary decision or you derived from the family's financial situation? Did your and your spouse's income play a role in the decision?
RF1: Because I had a service contract from both work, meaning that in case of maternity leave I would not receive salary, that part was not convenient for us. Thus, we decided that my husband would benefit from the child care days.
4. Was it a joint decision? How did you come up with the final decision?
RM1: We came to the final conclusion very easily, we did not overthink, hesitate for too long. Considering everything, we always do things fast, we do not overthink for too long, thus, my paternity leave decision was made very easily. We did not have any problems.
5. How did you divide the days? Did you (father) take all the days of child care days or were the days somehow divided among you and your spouse?
RM1: No, I fully used all days for both of our kids. I used 6 months on one child fully, and used 6 months on another child fully as well.

Reaction:

1. How did you feel sharing this news?
RM1: In the beginning, to be honest, it made me tense. Because, everyone was surprised, "oh my god, are you on paternity leave? Did you give birth or what? Are you a mother? Why are you on leave?" and similar questions like this. After some time, for myself not to worry and not pay attention, I started to look at it with humor, "so what, what is the problem", so I would not bring close to my heart those negative comments and reactions, eventually, I stopped paying attention. Probably, all this was during the first kid's last period of paternity, for the second kid I did not have any reaction at all.

2. Were people around you, friends and family members, aware of the law? How did they react?

RM1: Many were surprised, but some tried not to make it obvious that they did not know about it, and they commented “wow, good job”. But many were surprised, and did not know about the law that this was a possibility. This category mostly was at my workplace, because after me, there were situations when co-workers had children and there was an opportunity for them to use paternity leave but they had an attitude of “why should I take the leave, why would I”? Even though they knew about all this after my case.

3. Was your company/HR/responsible member and co-workers aware of the law? Were they surprised? How did they react?
4. Was this in any way an encouraged decision from the company?
5. How was the process overall, speaking of documentation and bureaucracy?

RM1: My boss was surprised, and loudly admitted that he has not done anything similar in his life and that he was doing it for the first time and he had to see what his superiors would say, and after this, after we have received answer from superior management, he confirmed that it was confirmed and that I could normally go ahead and proceed with it.

RF1: Generally, as I understood, awareness about men being able to use the child care days is very low, majority is not aware of this. Not only men, but HRs do not know about this. Because, at some point the law used to apply only to workers in the public sector, thus in private sector awareness is low, plus, the attitude is very ironic, “how come it is possible for a man, is he a mother or what, did he give a birth or what?” and other classical comments in this direction. In our case, when we let our companies know that we would use paternity leave, even though we had a positive answer from the management that was sure to go ahead, HR got shocked. HR had an argument that she/he had never done this. Why did it matter to her/him as the procedure is the same for both women and me. Personally, HR created a problem for me, HR of my husband’s company. For example, HR demanded unreasonable documentation from me, and this is where the attitude of HR was exposed, and it was biased. I could see unprofessionalism, and many other problems until we officially filed the paperwork.

Law is very ambiguous, for me personally as a citizen, and it was difficult to understand why HR was demanding from me a salary letter to prove that I was working, when I had a letter already provided from my workplaces that I would not use childcare days. And I did not have any other obligation of providing any other document. HR demanded all kinds of documentation from me.

6. Did people around you try to support you?

RM1: I do not think I needed any kind of support realistically speaking. Support could be used in another thing, but in this matter I don't understand how others could support me. Well, some of my friends were really by my side, and were telling me, “why not, sure, you had to use paternity leave, and you are a father” and etc. Maybe for these people this topic more or less was more understandable, I am not sure, I did not ask everyone individually why they were surprised with all this.

7. What were the biggest challenges while making the decision?

RM1: I am not sure, can you maybe add on something?

RF1: In my opinion, the number one challenge was bureaucracy, and it was surprising that a private company created such a difficult time for us. During this process, there was a time where we thought if we should give up, even though based on law there was no way they could deny it. This was the biggest challenge toward me. And towards my father, a big challenge is the irony of co-workers and other people around him regarding this topic, which psychologically affected him and myself as well. It was a joke to them, “men and childcare leave” and other nonsense comments, and when you are in the process which is already hard enough for some unclear reasons, and you do not get why do they make all this so difficult, addition of this nonsense comments psychologically affects your decision and even makes you rethink the relevance of your decision.

Personal Impact:

1. What emotions being a father on paternity leave brought up for you (considering the environment around)?

RM1: Very big emotions, more time spent with my child, interaction with my child. These 6 months created many positive and nice atmospheres in my life, it is hard to express with words. It is great that you do not worry that you will come very tired and stressed from work and you come home, I felt very relaxed while being at home and that period brought very positive energy in my life.

2. How did this decision affect your social life?

RM1: Not much. No radical changes. It went in the same rhythm as usual. Of course, some things changed, of course having a child changes some aspects in private life, not everything can be as it used to be, but overall, nothing big has changed.

RF1: We had both of our children during covid period, that’s why we experienced changes in social life, not because of children.

Future:

3. What do you think about your decision now?

RM1: I have a great attitude about my decision to take childcare days. First of all, my wife was not able to use it, and I faced the fact, but I am not a problematic person, and I had a “why not” attitude from the very beginning, “if I am eligible to use it, why should not I?” When needed I also wash dishes, I do not have any discomfort with any house chores. I do not understand people who do not do these kinds of things and try to avoid them.

4. If you had a chance would you make the same choice again? Or are you considering taking a paternity leave again?

RM1: Of course. If there was the same situation, that my wife cannot take the leave and the law would not be an obstacle, why not, with pleasure. We are thinking of having a third child, and I might take paternity leave again.

5. Do you talk about and encourage other males (friends, relatives) to use paternity leave?

RM1: Of course I am talking about it! Everyone who is telling me that they are expecting to have a baby I always tell them about it. I explain to them how mother and father can use it, and how they even can divide the days. But when you start talking

with people, from the very first sentence you can sense their attitude about this idea of paternity leave, and then I either block this topic or continue explaining, not to cause any additional irritation in people and to avoid negative dialogue.

6. Do you think overall society in Georgia will follow your path and why so?

RM1: In my opinion, if we were to conduct research today, around 30% would use paternity leave, I doubt about the remaining 70%.

7. How do you think paternity leave policy defines gender roles in the household?

RM1: This is a very debatable topic of discussion. If there is no gender equality in the family, automatically, whether having a child or not, whether to be on paternity leave or not, there will be no equality. If from the very beginning there is no gender equality in the family a child and paternity leave cannot change anything at all.

8. How do you think paternity law affects distribution of gender roles and overall gender dynamics within Georgian society?

RM1: In my opinion, it's all about humans and its nature. Personally, even before paternity leave, I never had some frames of what is my duty and what is not. What I used to do, exactly what I did during paternity leave and after. And those, who have the frames of gender duties, that person won't even use the paternity leave and even in paternity leave won't change its views on gender roles and duties, and will remain the same. It really depends on the character of a person.

9. How did it affect/change gender dynamics within your family or circle (if it did)?

RM1: No, nothing, only on the level of humor. Everything else remains standard, in family, friend circle - everything remains exactly the same as it used to be before my paternity leave.

Sociodemographics:

1. What is your age?

RM1: 32

RF1: 37

2. Where are you from? (Big city, small town or village)

Tbilisi

3. What is your level of education? (Secondary education or higher education)

RM1: Degree from Georgian Technical University

RF1: Master's Degree in Eastern European Studies and History

4. What is your occupation? (Level of position)

RM1: Technical service employee

RF1: Supervisory board support manager

Interview 2:

Decision-making:

1. How/where did you learn/hear about the paternity leave law/opportunity?

RM2: I took the leave even earlier before the law was adopted. I took it in 2014, when we had our first child. I personally work on issues like this and at that time I used to work on UN Community Service Fond, which is a highly diplomatic organization with its own internal regulations and even if the change was not in Georgian law, based on

UN internal policy I had a right and I was eligible for paternity leave. And I benefited from it without any further complications.

2. How did you come up with this idea and why did you decide so?

RM2: In my opinion family and especially children are the equal responsibility and happiness of both parents and from the very first dates I wanted to be part of the process of raising a child.

3. Was it a joint decision?

RF2: I had no idea about this possibility. When my husband informed me that he would be able to take 1 month of paternity leave I was glad about this fact of course.

4. How did you divide the days? Did you (father) take all the days of child care days or were the days somehow divided among you and your spouse?

RM2: Our case is very unique because of 2 factors. Firstly, we benefited not from Georgian law but UN law, I could take that 1 month off anytime.

RF2: Secondly, I used to work in the private sector, where unfortunately, they did not grant me maternity leave at all. They told me that they would dismiss me for a while from work and later if I wished I could go back. I did not have any other choice, I left work, later I returned back of course since I needed a job and four months I was at home.

RM2: I would like to add on, the company justified itself that at that moment my wife's contract was about to end, and they used this situation, but of course it was immoral and we could use them even if we did want. So it turned out in a strange way, I used it and she was left out without the leave.

Reaction:

1. How did you feel sharing this news?

RM2: To be honest, very proud, because at that time we were just 2-3 men who benefited from this opportunity and we were given pioneer status. Because of this they invited me on almost all TV and Radio programs to talk about this. After 2-3 visits, I was sick of talking about this, as in my opinion I did not perceive this as such a huge deal. But I could realize that since I was one of the first ones, it was a big event and forced myself to speak about it, spread the word and tell more people about this opportunity.

2. Were people around you, friends and family members, aware of the law? How did they react?

RM2: No, no, I am sure even today many are not aware of this even though we through campaigns we are trying to raise this topic.

RF2: They do not even use it, it is still like this unfortunately.

RM2: There are many factors, such as social, etc. Many of my friends even laughed when they heard about this, but later, when they saw that nothing was missing or has been taken away from my manhood then they started thinking that someday they could use it when they have kids.

3. Was your company/HR/responsible member and co-workers aware of the law? Were they surprised? How did they react?

UN initiative.

4. Was this in any way an encouraged decision from the company?

RM2: Yes, of course. When I announced at work that we were expecting a baby, my

direct manager told me that they would let me take a leave. I also did not know about this and I got very glad when I heard about it.

5. How was the process overall, speaking of documentation and bureaucracy?

RM2: In my case it was very easy. This was one of the types of leaves my company was offering, so I filled out the form and presented it to the management, and that was it.

6. Did people around you try to support you?

RM2: I so much believe in equality, not only gender equality but equality between people too, it is hard for another person to argue with me and be against me about this topic. In the beginning, if people would act strange, I would argumentatively explain to them why it is important for me and my family, even if support was not needed from them. Noone would tell me anything otherwise, why am I doing this. I did not need any moral support from anyone, for me this is a very normal form and decision.

7. What were the biggest challenges while making the decision?

RM2: Decision-making was not challenging but later the process was. One of the reasons why I decided to take the leave was that we decided that we wanted to raise a child ourselves. In our country it is a norm that during the first period grandma's help or nannies or other people, but we wanted to try ourselves. Of course we were shocked, because we did not know what it looks like to raise a child but this was a challenge.

The other day my friend was telling me that if we want to bring our campaign about paternity leave on another level so we can get a more positive attitude from more men about this, he suggested we promote a "paternity leave holiday", because many people would want to be on holiday. What they will do at home, this is another topic but everyone would want a holiday.

Personal Impact:

1. What emotions being a father on paternity leave brought up for you (considering the environment around)?

RM2: Only positive and since the process was very challenging it was interesting to handle it. I can't really say that during the process someone told me something that made me feel bad or sad. Especially when I personally work on these projects, I strongly protect this idea.

2. How did this decision affect your social life?

RM2: Well of course being a parent affects it.

RF2: and affects until today.

RM2: In my close circle, I had a temporary nickname of "sorry, kid", because every time I had an invitation my response was "sorry, kid, sorry, kid". And later they told me that they would not message me anymore, only after I would end this stage. Later, they also had kids and then I started calling them the same nickname.

Future:

3. What do you think about your decision now?

RF2: This was one of the best decisions that we have made, because it was very necessary. Because it was our first child, I was emotional. I even had post-pregnancy depression, but at first I could not recognize it. I had days when I could not get up

from bed, I could only feed the child and that was it. I also had sleepless nights, so I would not be able to make it.

RM2: I also think that the first stages are the hardest and critical.

RF2: Especially when it's a first child and you do not know anything at all.

4. If you had a chance would you make the same choice again? Or are you considering taking a paternity leave again?

RM2: Indeed. Right now, if I had to take a leave and my employer would reject it, I would directly take the case to the court.

5. Do you talk about and encourage other males (friends, relatives) to use paternity leave?

RM2: Yes, of course. In my friends circle, sometimes I have to talk about equality and I try to share my ideas and thoughts with them, as just a human, not as an NGO worker. Thus, if there is someone at this stage who is expecting a baby or is planning on having one, of course we also always touch this topic. Not because to be exemplary, and get invited to TV and Radios, but for his child, his family and himself.

6. Do you think overall society in Georgia will follow your path and why so?

RM2: Depends when. In the short-run - hard to say, in the long-run - sure, I think that number will rise, I doubt it will be similar to the level of Scandinavia, but this has its explanation. It is not only a topic of social norms but the economy, and whether the economy of Georgia can afford so many people. Let's say tomorrow 5,000 men want to take paternity leave, is the economy ready for it? Imagine, so many people not working all of a sudden, this is not a pension, this is a salary that people receive and if people won't work, will the company be able to pay? Thus, this is a very broad topic with many aspects. To popularize, involve everyone and the entire country, whether the country is ready for this or not - I do not know, economically speaking.

7. How do you think paternity leave policy defines gender roles in the household?

RM2: I think this is one of the most important stages to normalize gender roles. Except for the cases where some people will take this leave just to hang out with his friends and drink beer every day, it might happen, who knows. But I think, a father who makes a decision to take the leave, realizes that this means different chores at home, even more, than he used to do. Consequently, if the gender roles are not normalized, then it is a very important step from parents.

8. How do you think paternity law affects distribution of gender roles and overall gender dynamics within Georgian society?

RM2: Here as well, I would say that this is one of the biggest steps, because, our society and not only in the world, until they see something with their eyes they have a hard time to perceive or believe that it is possible. Thus, I think that if some people saw me, heard about me, neighbors, friend circle or the country, of course it is a visible example of the possibility for them. More people show this example, more people will realize that some norms and ideas about gender equality must be reconsidered.

9. How did it affect/change gender dynamics within your family or circle (if it did)?

RM2: In my opinion, yes. But it won't be right if I say that this change is only because of me. Generally, in the world the dynamic of the perceptions of these norms is changing. With previous experience we know that Georgia adopts some changes little later and takes more time for the changes than Central Europe for example, which is a simple given situation. For example, if change was made in Central Europe, it takes 5-10 years for Georgia to adopt it. But personally when I walk in the streets, I see more

and more fathers with their kids alone and no one has an unhappy or forced face. I can say that in a way this could be a contribution of our campaign because we are the only organization which works with men regarding topics like this, but it would be wrong if I would say that it is only because of us. I think in general the world is going through the stage where men realize that patriarchal society is not healthy and profitable and the norms must be changed. Consequently, my step, minimum, in my micro circle made changes.

I have been focusing on all this for the past 5-10 years, and when I gather with my friends I can see that the discussion about the topics like this are more conscious. Not only about paternity leave but about femicide, equality, etc. There are more argumentative discussions. If earlier they would not want to talk about all this and would say leave us alone, now I can see that now that they are parents themselves, especially parents of girls, they want a better future for their children.

Sociodemographics:

1. What is your age?
RM2: 33
RF2: 36
2. Where are you from? (Big city, small town or village)
RM2&RF2:Tbilisi
3. What is your level of education? (Secondary education or higher education)
RM2: BA in Business Administration and Communications, MA in Public Policy.
RF2: Degree in Architecture.
4. What is your occupation? (Level of position)
RM2: Communications specialist.
RF2: Kids' photo studio owner.

Interview 3:

Decision-making:

1. How/where did you learn/hear about the paternity leave law/opportunity?
2. How did you come up with this idea and why did you decide so?
RM3: By profession I am a lawyer. Approximately 20 years I have been in the field of law in the public sector. I used to be in the private sector as well but in the last 18 years I have been in the public sector. I am a specialist of civil law, thus, I am working very closely with laws and regulations, and I knew fully about the law and I was considering this topic. Additionally, based on my family situation, the law was applicable for me. For example, in order to benefit from the law, no family member should not have benefited from law in the past. Even though, from a gender equality perspective it was not really a correct law. But still it was applicable to me. My wife worked in the private sector, did not have any time off from work in this regard and I decided to use this law, for the benefit of myself and my family.
3. Was it a joint decision?
RM3: Well my family at first laughed, they did not know the main idea of the law, after I explained to them in very depth later they realized, but still it was a strange

topic for others as well, for my colleagues as well. Many did not know about it, including my colleagues and I had to educate them.

4. How did you divide the days? Did you (father) take all the days of child care days or were the days somehow divided among you and your spouse?

RM3: At that time, my wife, due to her work, needed more time, and it was more flexible and I had more freedom to run errands for example. And I tried to use the days as much as possible, and satisfy the needs of the families as much as possible. Even now, we are both involved in this on a daily basis, and this topic has never been a topic of discussion. We have 2 children, and for example, my wife was preparing an older one for tomorrow and I was preparing the younger one. So, this is a very standard topic in our relationship.

Reaction:

1. How did you feel sharing this news?

RM3: I was very comfortable. I used what I could use by the law.

2. Were people around you, friends and family members, aware of the law? How did they react?

RM3: Yes, no one knew about it but at the same time they are aware of my “strange” decisions. There were times when we would laugh about it but later with more people, the direction of the conversation would change.

3. Was your company/HR/responsible member and co-workers aware of the law? Were they surprised? How did they react?

RM3: My colleagues were a little shocked. They don't really realize the situation. However, this was mostly caused because of lack of information and knowledge about the law. At that time, I had a high position, thus, they expressed their shock by being surprised.

4. How was the process overall, speaking of documentation and bureaucracy?

RM3: Very easily. I used all the existing laws as a reference. Because, it was a first case for our HR, and I even provided an official announcement of our ministry of health regarding it. But eventually, in this regard, I did not experience any issues.

5. Did people around you try to support you?

RM3: Because of my high position at work, not many could dare to be very skeptical towards me, and that helped, they had more of a surprising attitude.

6. What were the biggest challenges while making the decision?

RM3: Nothing much at all. Of course, work life was not easy to give up on and sometimes there were cases where I had to leave, but we were always able to find a way so the children would not be left alone. We tried our best to pay more than enough attention to our kids and I think we did very well in that aspect.

Personal Impact:

1. What emotions being a father on paternity leave brought up for you (considering the environment around)?

RM3: I had to attend some meetings at that time, at the same time I used to be a member of the gender council, and I was very involved in gender related topics. And, even locals here did not think that someone could make this step, and they thought it was a very brave step. But I did not think of it that way at all, I was thinking of

creating comfort for my family. That was my main goal, I did not care what 3rd parties would think or say about this. I truly accepted this as a very normal step, nothing more or special.

2. How did this decision affect your social life?

RM3: Of course it affected me, but I never felt isolated from anything. There were times that at night I would need to work on some tasks, in regards to laws.

Future:

1. What do you think about your decision now?

RM3: If there was a chance to return back in time, I would make the same decision.

2. If you had a chance would you make the same choice again? Or are you considering taking a paternity leave again?

RM3: Indeed. Plus, law gives me a possibility to do so. Realistically speaking, from the aspect of gender equality I even feel a little offended as in regards to the law we are not really equal, in this particular paternity leave law. Because, gender equality is a different topic, 550 days, 90 days, salaries, etc. Women get a higher salary than men, etc. and why so? If this is a one family, serving a one matter, why should not we discuss equal relations in regards to law? In my opinion, in this aspect the law should be fixed.

3. Do you talk about and encourage other males (friends, relatives) to use paternity leave?

RM3: Yes, I had this talk a couple of times with my friends. But you are also well aware of the Georgian mentality, we have been raised on old stereotypes and it is hard to adopt good European aspects. We are always soaking up bad things from Europe. There is always good and bad, but there is a choice and a person should identify and choose what is bad and what is good. We are equally soaking up both good and bad, and eventually it is bad. So realistically, it is very difficult to destroy our strong mentality, in addition to that 80% of people do not work in this system. They have fixed the law of labor but still it does not answer those stereotypes that European law has determined, but hoping that slowly more things will shift for better and eventually to have a high level of European values in the private sector too, public sector follow this more or less and tries to keep up in regards of labor relations.

4. Do you think overall society in Georgia will follow your path and why so?

RM3: In my opinion, they should. This is an axiom in my opinion, in the family woman and man are equal. In my family, men have never been higher than women, in our family everyone has their own word and opinion. First there is a family, and then society, and I hope this thinking will be established within the societies. But it is a matter of time, and future generations who acquire education in Europe. Because 99% in Georgia still follow the older rules and values. It is an exception even in my friends' circle to have a different thinking mindset. But we think that this is "different thinking" but in my opinion this is normal thinking, exactly how it is supposed to be.

5. How do you think paternity leave policy defines gender roles in the household?

RM3: A family is a difficult construct philosophically, psychologically speaking. But gender stereotypes should not exist, there should be a golden gap in this aspect, and neither "man" nor "woman" should enter into any or anyone's relationship in a way that these relationships are transmitted to the kids. That's why this is difficult. Of course, there is no family without any conflict or argument, but it depends on the

conflict, but all this in regards to children should be well thought, as kids are our mirrors, it should be balanced. When you look at the kids, you are stepping back from some things, and put them as a priority.

6. How do you think paternity law affects distribution of gender roles and overall gender dynamics within Georgian society?

RM3: We had an association agreement with Europe, thus from the late 90s-2000s, we reflected gender equality in laws, but literally we just reflected it. Actions tomorrow and the day after still should be taken. Breaking stereotypes, establishing gender equality.. I have attended thousands of lectures, but you are sitting on a lecture today and tomorrow you encounter something worse in reality on TV, on the streets, etc.. Still we have not analyzed all this yet, like Europeans did. Europeans analyzed all this in past centuries. We are trying to find something in between but we struggle to break down the soviet mentality, those who have been raised on communist mentality. It is one thing to write something in law, and another thing to take action. Most people do not even know all this. Gender does not mean only women. I faced these issues in the past years. They pay attention only to a woman, when gender contains both woman and man, and these relationships must be fixed first from an educational angle, writing a law won't help at all. If we want our future generation to have clear and analyzed education, information we must take appropriate actions - more conscious actions and education.

7. How did it affect/change gender dynamics within your family or circle (if it did)?

RM3: No, it did not change. We properly follow gender dynamics, especially in regards to our children. And I was not even paying attention to all this, if my wife needed help, of course, I was by her side. I have never felt strange or awkward about this. She is my family member, I also live here and I also want the environment to be a certain way, thus If I could do something, I always did. If she could do something, she would do, and so on. So, nothing has changed.

Sociodemographics:

1. What is your age?
2. **RM3: 47**
RF3: 44
3. Where are you from? (Big city, small town or village)
Kutaisi
4. What is your level of education? (Secondary education or higher education)
RM3: Higher education
RF3: Higher education
5. What is your occupation? (Level of position)
RM3: Public lawyer
RF3: Cosmetologist

Interview 4:

Decision-making:

1. How/where did you learn/hear about the paternity leave law/opportunity?
RM4: Considering that my profession is directly connected to getting to know the procedures from the development of legislative initiatives to their adoption, when this initiative was created, I was aware about it, especially, I am streaming economic related topics, it was in my work sphere, thus very soon I found out about all this, and then it took time to be adopted. But from the beginning I knew it from the initiators who provided a press-release. And it is in general always easy to know things, as new changes in law always go through journalists and we are always aware of the changes. I knew about this many years ago, but I did not need it. When I needed it, I remembered it existed, researched it more, had an individual consultation, what I needed, what I had to fill in, what criterias I should fit in, etc., discussed with HR and after that I used it.
2. How did you come up with this idea and why did you decide so?
RM4: In this particular case, we did not have a nanny. This is our second child. There was a big need to help my wife to raise kids, or be there if she would feel weak or anything else would be needed for the second child, it was important to have someone who would always be at home and to participate in case of need. At first, I was thinking of just taking annual leave, before thinking about paternity leave, but since there was an opportunity, I used paternity leave to together participate in child care and raise procedures.
3. Was it a joint decision?
RM4: Naturally, it was a joint decision. We both realized that there was a need for it, plus there was a desire from both sides.
RF4: In general, this process is very difficult. Along with big happiness it is related to big difficulties. When you live alone and you independently run a family, and have no one around who can stand by you and help you (parents for example), it is very pleasant and very crucial even that fathers participate in this process, help mothers and also get pleasant emotions from this process.
4. How did you divide the days? Did you (father) take all the days of child care days or were the days somehow divided among you and your spouse?
RF4: I am unemployed.
RM4: Thus, I took the leave only, it was approximately up to 3 months.

Reaction:

1. How did you feel sharing this news?
RM4: At first when I announced that I was going on paternity leave everyone laughed at me at work, everyone thought that it was a joke, and they did not take it seriously until they saw that I was really going to go for it. Secondly, they did not think our workplace would let me do that, they (co-workers) were not even aware that this was existing. I found a person at work who had already used the leave, and he also confirmed that they also took his decision as a joke at first. Of course HR knew and had everything ready, the list of all the required documentation, number of days and absolutely everything. HR did all the bureaucratic tasks within 1 hour. And my wife had a very happy and cool reaction that I would be off work for long. Others took it more or less well, especially our parents, because they realized that we would be helping one another.

2. Were people around you, friends and family members, aware of the law? How did they react?
RM4: No, around me, no one knew about it. Those who knew thought that the law was active only on paper and reality it would never be implemented. Some were very skeptical that workplaces actually would approve this.
3. Was your company/HR/responsible member and co-workers aware of the law? Were they surprised? How did they react?
HR - Yes, co-workers - no, if yes, rather skeptical.
4. Was this in any way an encouraged decision from the company?
RM4: From the workplace, it was even encouraged that it would be great if I would use it.
5. How was the process overall, speaking of documentation and bureaucracy?
RM4: My wife had to write a letter that she was not employed. Because based on the law, if both parents are employees in the public sector only 1 can take the leave. In Total, I was required to have 3 documents: bank account number (since the government gives out money on newborn), my wife's letter, and confirmation letter from the hospital regarding the child born.
6. Did people around you try to support you?
RM4: Support not, but more of figuring out how I managed this. After me 3-4 people took paternity leave at work after they saw that it was possible.
7. What were the biggest challenges while making the decision?
RM4: To be honest, all the procedures were so simple, everything got cleared out within 2 days. Perhaps, for the private sector all this is more complicated timewise and all. In my case nothing was a problem at all. I managed to fix all the documentation 1.5 months before the baby was born. So bureaucracy was so simple, and our decision as well, who does not want to be with family.

Personal Impact:

1. What emotions being a father on paternity leave brought up for you (considering the environment around)?
RM4: It was very interesting. For my first child, I could not participate in all the process, but this time I saw and understood such things that I would not be able to experience otherwise, pampers, schedule, water temperature for baby shower, and other details, that was very pleasing. I got very attached and it was difficult to go back to work. It was amazing, I think everyone should have a chance to experience those procedures and just leave those feelings for nannies to experience. And it is also very healthy for a baby to have both parents by side as much as possible.
2. How did this decision affect your social life?
RM4: When we made this decision, before going to my employer, I went to the Professional Union and I went through and got familiarized with my rights, what could I expect and demand, I was so skeptical as well, I even consulted the lawyer. I think their positive answers gave me more belief. All the new laws that we are adapting, I started to believe that if not today or tomorrow, the day after will bring a positive result. If today my workplace started easily accommodating paternity leave, tomorrow other companies will, and if today we are 1, the other day we will be 5, 10, 100, etc. When people realize that if one company has it implemented, their company should

have it as well, they will demand it, and I believe this will change the social situation. In Georgia, our problem is that we do not believe that we can do things, and we look at things on a surface level, and we do not do anything specific to achieve specific results. We think that if we tried once and it failed, that's it. I think my example, and other examples who used this paternity leave gave an example to society around. Maybe your employer is not happy about it but we have a law in the country and they have to obey. They need more pushing.

Future:

1. What do you think about your decision now?

RM4: I hope that I will have another chance, and for sure, I am sure and 100% I will use it.

2. If you had a chance would you make the same choice again? Or are you considering taking a paternity leave again?

RM4: I hope that I will have another chance, and for sure, I am sure and 100% I will use it. Why should I not want to be with my kids and family especially when I have an opportunity for it.

3. Do you talk about and encourage other males (friends, relatives) to use paternity leave?

RM4: Every time I find out someone is expecting a baby, my first question is "are you taking paternity?" I think it is very cool.

RF4: It is not only a pleasing process but very needed as well. We all know that after birth-giving a mother has a hard time both psychologically and physically and it is essential to have someone by your side, and if this person is your spouse, this is the best scenario.

RM4: We recommend it to all our friends.

RF4: It is essential and pleasing as well. All fathers must experience this condition and process, this makes them closer to their kids. When fathers are separated from the child raising process... During the first kid, there has been a couple of months he has not seen a baby normally, and for the second kid he was fully involved and it was even harder for him at work when he was separated from the baby.

4. Do you think overall society in Georgia will follow your path and why so?

RM4: Unfortunately, I do not have a good answer for this. Because we have a very bad attitude regarding motherhood and fatherhood, for some reason, they think that mothers should raise a child and father should bring in money, and it is not like this at all. Regarding finances, whoever has a higher income than one should work, why not, this is my personal opinion, whether it is a mother or father, what is the difference but society does not think this way. In many families, if father say that he is taking paternity leave for child care to help his wife, there is not great attitude about this decision, in my opinion, outside of the capital, in the capital more or less situation is better, in the outside regions there is this problem, they think that you are not a cool guy if you take a part in child raise/care. They think if you change the baby diaper, men do not have a right position in the household.

RF4: But this is not the case among young people.

RM4: I do not mean young people, it might be a problem among parents, neighbors, etc. but once you make this decision I do not think you would wanna put your neighbors first and not your child.

5. How do you think paternity leave policy defines gender roles in the household?

RM4: It is very right. If we talk about gender equality then what does “mother’s leave” and “father’s leave” mean? It is a parental leave that is required to raise a child, and why does it matter whether it will be a father or mother? Parental leave should be just a parental leave, and the family should decide itself who will use it. If we talk about gender equality and claim that there is no difference - it does not matter. What matters is that the child is with a parent - why does it matter if it is a father or mother. Okay, sometimes it matters if we talk about breastfeeding but still, as much as possible it should be the decision of the family. They can raise a child without breastfeeding and the mother can work. Especially, raising a child is connected to a big finances, it is not financially easy. If let’s say, mother has a big financial resources, and father does not for the moment - why not work and father take care of the baby - family resources should be aligned the right way so it is in the interest of the child. Mother leaving a high income job might cause bigger problems for a child and family than father taking care of him/her in this case.

6. How do you think paternity law affects distribution of gender roles and overall gender dynamics within Georgian society?

RM4: In my opinion, there is no difference. So few people are aware of this law, and I think this category already knows about the meaning of gender and gender equality. In theory, of course it changes and it is great, but in order to shift this in reality more people should be aware of this law and experience it themselves to reconsider and realize their thoughts regarding this topic. If this law is not fulfilled, what’s the point of having it on paper then?

7. How did it affect/change gender dynamics within your family or circle (if it did)?

RM4: Well there are some people who feel strange about changing diapers, or sometimes even taking a kid for a walk, but people around me do not think this way. But if earlier they laughed about changing diapers or taking care of baby laundry, now it is a very normal situation, at least around me - if they used to be skeptical, now they got used to all this.

RF4: In our family, we did not even think that my husband would have obstacles regarding childcare, diaper change, baby shower, etc. He is such a person with such qualities, I did not even think that there would be issues regarding taking care of the baby.

RM4: Well, our opinion and attitude is so vocal and strong, even if they had a bad attitude they probably would not say it out loud anyways. Maybe, I do not realize but, everything has its own little influence, more or less, someone understood it better, someone realized it better, someone maybe even started thinking about it and the opportunities.

RF4: We had one friend who would always say out loud that when they have a baby, he would never change baby diaper, when child was born after our situation, he took time off from work and got involved in childcare process, and today, his wife has her own business, she is working and he is the one taking care of a baby fully, while his position was vice versa at first. But when you are with your baby, teach the first words, see their first tooth and fully dive into this role, it is impossible not to change your position. All this cannot be less appealing and interesting than work. So around us, there are

cases like this, I can't blame it all on our decision, but I feel like a little bit of everything influences all this.

Sociodemographics:

1. What is your age?
RM4: 25
RF4: 23
2. Where are you from? (Big city, small town or village)
Tbilisi
3. What is your level of education? (Secondary education or higher education)
RM4: Higher education
RF4: Higher education
4. What is your occupation? (Level of position)
RM4: Journalist-correspondent
RF4: Biologist, currently unemployed

Interview 5:

Decision-making:

1. How/where did you learn/hear about the paternity leave law/opportunity?
RF5: Very first time I heard about it in university during studies, but it seemed so unrealistic, because there was no one around me who had used it, I have never seen this being implemented in real life. So during the lecture, it came up, there was a lecture where we discussed it, and that was the first time I found out about it and I was very surprised.
2. How did you come up with this idea and why did you decide so?
RF5: First of all, we wanted to test it - whether it was actually a possibility in reality or not, and if it would work or not. We all know about maternity leave and it is very popular among our society, but when it comes to fathers, this is still very surprising for our country and for our reality, thus we decide to become, if not the very first one, one of the first ones who would really implement it. Plus, in our family, both of our career development is equally important. When a woman cannot have a pause or cannot continue career growth, she should give some responsibilities to husband and do what she wants to do.
3. Was it a joint decision?
RF5: Very joint. We came up with this together. In our case, both of us had realized why we were doing this.
4. How did you divide the days? Did you (father) take all the days of child care days or were the days somehow divided among you and your spouse?
RF5: We have it divided. Because I work full time and during the day time I cannot be with baby, thus, I try to take over during the evenings, since the baby is still very small and still requires attention from both mom and dad, thus, whether I am tired or not in the evenings, I give the baby whatever he needs. All day long father takes care of everything and in the evening not only me but together. During the weekend I try to do

everything that was not managed to be done during the week and spend time with a baby that I did not spend during the week.

Reaction:

1. How did you feel sharing this news?
RF5: Even though the reaction from others was strange, he did not feel uncomfortable. Vice versa, he did all this proudly. In our case, we had both realized that both of our responsibilities are exactly the same and equal, and it does not matter if mother takes leave or father does, when it is needed - father can do it too. Thus, he truly did not feel uncomfortable when sharing that he took paternity leave because my wife needs it and our family needs this.
2. Were people around you, friends and family members, aware of the law? How did they react?
RF5: No, not really. For many it was the first time finding out, especially the older generation, our parents' generation, because for them father in paternity leave was unimaginable. What does paternity leave mean? What paternity leave? You will go on leave like mothers do? And all the questions of course, yes, there were people who really did not know that father's leave exists too.
3. Was your company/HR/responsible member and co-workers aware of the law? Were they surprised? How did they react?
RF5: Of course, company representatives were aware but in reality, it is not convenient for them, or they do not want to, and might not be convenient for them that you are using your right. I am sure everyone has this information that both father and mother leave exist but still father's asking for it remains surprising for them.
4. Was this in any way an encouraged decision from the company?
RF5: For the company, it was surprising as well because 90% male employees in the company do not use paternity leave.
5. How was the process overall, speaking of documentation and bureaucracy?
RF5: I would not say it was too difficult. Once it was decided that we would do it, and you go with a very strong position to your company and you demand what you are eligible for, there starts bureaucratic problems but if we compare to other processes I would like to say that it was not too difficult. However, it could have been much easier, because a parent who wants to take paternity leave and who needs time to be with his/her baby should not need so many documents and letters.
6. Did people around you try to support you?
RF5: In the beginning, it was unacceptable, I think due to our reality that mom should be with a baby only, and mom should do everything only, and mom has different functions and dad has different functions. There were even talks "may you could wait", "maybe you don't want this", but after our very strong decision, and after explaining that this is absolutely normal and in many countries this is not surprising at all.. Even though sometimes it is difficult to explain something to someone, and eventually achieve what you have in mind, still this is very needed, because this way we can root in our country those natural processes that are supposed to exist.
7. What were the biggest challenges while making the decision?
RF5: Fear, how are we going to handle this, especially when this is a first child when you do not have any experience and in the beginning child is attached to a mother, it is

very difficult for a man to take full responsibility, how to feed, how to put a baby to sleep, what if cries and I can't stop him/her, etc. This was the most difficult moment for us when we realized that mother would not be home and father would be responsible for everything, those thoughts appeared, but when there is big desire you can solve everything.

Personal Impact:

1. What emotions being a father on paternity leave brought up for you (considering the environment around)?

RF5: At first he was confused, sometimes he would not even announce it, but now he is very proud of it. First of all, because this is not a frequent case, and second of all, because he thinks that once our baby grows up, he will tell him that he was one of the first fathers on paternity leave. So, now he is very proud, because he can do anything related to a baby independently, and because he can fully realize what it means to be a father, just like us, mothers, do from the very first second child is born.

2. How did this decision affect your social life?

RF5: Not much has changed. It changed for the better, they spend a lot of time outdoors. He even found very good friends during this process. And it is a leisure in a way for him and he feels very well. Maybe, the father takes a leave and realizes that he cannot do it, but in our case this is not the case, everything is okay, including in his personal life. We do not see much radical changes.

Future:

1. What do you think about your decision now? If you had a chance would you make the same choice again? Or are you considering taking a paternity leave again?

RF5: Of course, now without even hesitating on it we would make the same decision. Because we are both doing very beneficial things first of all for our baby, and secondly, for society as well. Raising awareness is what we really need, especially in this topic.

2. Do you talk about and encourage other males (friends, relatives) to use paternity leave?

RF5: Yes, yes. Recently, my best friend had a baby and they had the discussion in their family that they need nanny, etc. and after talking with my husband, they decided that after mother finishes maternity leave, her husband will take paternity leave. So until some time, when the baby needs a parent, they will be by his/her side, if not mother, then father.

3. Do you think overall society in Georgia will follow your path and why so?

RF5: if we have more males who use paternity leave, I am sure everyone will realize the benefits it brings. After realizing how beneficial this is, they will for sure root this and will happen more frequently. Many examples and talking is needed about this so our society realizes that this is needed.

4. How do you think paternity leave policy defines gender roles in the household?

RF5: Defines. First of all, you are raising a human being, who from childhood has realized that there are no roles for only women and only for men. In addition, you and people around you can see that both man and woman, especially when they establish family, should have the same and equal responsibility, and equally be involved in everything they do, especially when it comes to childcare. We were raised in a reality

where women should raise a child only, which is very difficult and both parents must be involved in it, and it should not be determined as a function of only woman/mother. Also, women should not have the function of just being a house mom, women have a right to have a career just like men and it should be done by keeping balance. In our case, we both think that we are equal and if he wants career growth I need it the same way and doze as well.

5. How do you think paternity law affects distribution of gender roles and overall gender dynamics within Georgian society?

RF5: In our society, gender equality is not maintained, and everyone knows about it. We were raised in this reality and even today we face this reality. However, there are attempts to prove (especially women) that we are equal, and in my opinion, this law will help us in this. If in Georgia mom is viewed as a person who should do everything related to a baby and father has only material responsibilities in child raising, if we change all this and show society that it is not shameful that man raise a child or take for a walk, feed, prepare clothes, etc. because if we want equality we should be equal in everything. And distributed gender roles only for men and only for women should not exist. Paternity leave helps us in this very well, because men will realize that “why not only mom?”.

6. How did it affect/change gender dynamics within your family or circle (if it did)?

RF5: I would not say it changed, because from the very beginning we had gender equality in the family. In our circle, for sure, because men and women started thinking that there are certain things that they can both do equally.

Sociodemogaphics:

1. What is your age?

RF5: 26

RM5: 28

2. Where are you from? (Big city, small town or village)

Tbilisi

3. What is your level of education? (Secondary education or higher education)

RF5: Higher Education

RM5: Higher Education

4. What is your occupation? (Level of position)

RF5: Account Manager

RM5: Actor, currently in paternity leave

Interview 6:

Decision-making:

1. How/where did you learn/hear about the paternity leave law/opportunity?

RM6: At work through HR during a meeting.

2. How did you come up with this idea and why did you decide so?

RM6: Because I wanted to spend more time with a baby and family.

3. Was it a joint decision?

RM6: It was a common decision, we decided it together.

4. How did you divide the days? Did you (father) take all the days of child care days or were the days somehow divided among you and your spouse?

RM6: We used the days together, sometimes I slept, sometimes my wife.

Reaction:

1. How did you feel sharing this news?
RM6: To be honest, I felt very rewarded.
2. Were people around you, friends and family members, aware of the law? How did they react?
RF6: No, no one knew about it, and they were all very surprised.
RM6: Yes, it was surprising for everyone, when they would ask me why I did not work and I would answer, they would be very surprised. Paternity leave is still a very new and strange concept for society.
3. Was your company/HR/responsible member and co-workers aware of the law? Were they surprised? How did they react?
RM6: Co-workers were not aware of it before HR introduced this law in a meeting. My coworker had a baby 6 months before we had, and he did not take the leave as we were not informed at that time and probably it was not implied in internal rules as well.
4. Was this in any way an encouraged decision from the company?
RM6: Yes, it is an encouraging decision of the company in a way as well as a big step forward for Georgian society.
5. How was the process overall, speaking of documentation and bureaucracy?
RM6: It was easy, only the copy of the birth certificate and photo was needed.
6. Did people around you try to support you?
RM6: They were happy.
RF6: They were happy that we would be both home and both take care of a baby.
7. What were the biggest challenges while making the decision?
RM6: Almost nothing, we both came to this decision very easily. Not to go to work - no one could change my mind.

Personal Impact:

1. What emotions being a father on paternity leave brought up for you (considering the environment around)?
RM6: Positive emotions caused by being with family all the time, not to go to work, not to be tired, and having more time to spend with a baby and my wife.
2. How did this decision affect your social life?
RM6: Not negatively, if not positively. It did not affect negatively.

Future:

1. What do you think about your decision now?
RM6: I would do it again.
2. If you had a chance would you make the same choice again? Or are you considering taking a paternity leave again?
RM6: I would do it again.

3. Do you talk about and encourage other males (friends, relatives) to use paternity leave?
RM6: Yes, if they can and the company allows them they will use it.
4. Do you think overall society in Georgia will follow your path and why so?
RM6: It is a complicated matter. For many, for different reasons, this is unacceptable, it is even unacceptable to attend the birth giving. As time passes, hopefully we will move step forward and this will be a very normal thing. It is important how society realizes and uses all this. For sure, we will achieve that.
5. How do you think paternity leave policy defines gender roles in the household?
RM6: Normally. In my family, nothing changes, what and how will change in other families - I have no idea.
6. How do you think paternity law affects distribution of gender roles and overall gender dynamics within Georgian society?
RF6: It positively affects as both parents can equally participate in the process and distribute the roles.
7. How did it affect/change gender dynamics within your family or circle (if it did)?
RM6: Couple of them, yes. Those who had babies soon after our decision - yes, but no one else.
RM6: I would add on that all companies should implement and encourage paternity leave law and it should be considered, if not all 6 months, at least 1-2 months.

Sociodemographics:

1. What is your age?
RM6: 26
RF6: 26
2. Where are you from? (Big city, small town or village)
Tbilisi
3. What is your level of education? (Secondary education or higher education)
RM6: Higher education
RF6: Higher education
4. What is your occupation? (Level of position)
RF6: Warehouse employee
RM6: Currently on maternity leave