

POLICY BRIEF (ISSUE 4)

Paternity Leave-Taking and Early Childhood Development in Singapore

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Background

Paternity leave has gained increasing attention as a policy tool to promote gender equality, strengthen father-child bonds, and improve family well-being (e.g., Huerta et al., 2014; Petts & Knoester, 2019). However, its influence on early childhood development has been understudied. This study investigates the relationship between **paternity leave-taking** and **multiple developmental outcomes in children aged 3–8** in Singapore and explores the mediating roles of **fathers' involvement, father-child closeness, and family dynamics**. Findings from this study provide new insights into how paternity leave, particularly for two or more weeks, benefits children development and family relationship.

Data and Method

The study draws on two waves of data from the **Singapore Longitudinal EARly Development Study (SG-LEADS)** (Yeung & Chen, 2024). Our analytic sample included 3,895 children living with both biological/adoptive parents, whose mothers are primary caregivers, and born on or after 1 May 2013¹.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is employed to examine the relationship between paternity leave-taking (i.e., *did not take leave, 1-week leave, 2 weeks or more leave*) and children's academic and behavioral outcomes across both Waves. Propensity score matching (PSM) is used to minimize selection bias by comparing respondents with similar backgrounds, differing only in the length of paternity leave taken (Petts & Knoester, 2019; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983).

¹ The official implementation date of paternity leave policy in Singapore.

Key Findings

1. Enhanced Paternal Involvement and Family Dynamics

- Paternity leave of two or more weeks significantly improved fathers' involvement strengthened father-child closeness, and enhanced family dynamics during early childhood (ages 3–6).

2. Mid-to-long-term Positive Academic Impact

- Fathers taking two or more weeks of leave were directly linked to children's improved letter-word identification and applied problem-solving skills in children aged 3–8. Additionally, stronger father-child bonds indirectly improved children's numerical skills at ages 3–6.

3. Mid-to-long-term Behavioral Improvements

- Paternity leave indirectly contributed to reduced behavioral problems in children by improving family dynamics, including fewer family conflicts, higher marital satisfaction, and reduced maternal parenting stress.

4. Cumulative Impact of Paternity Leave

- Even a relatively short paternity leave (two weeks) demonstrated cumulative benefits for children's development in early to middle childhood by fostering cohesive family relationships.

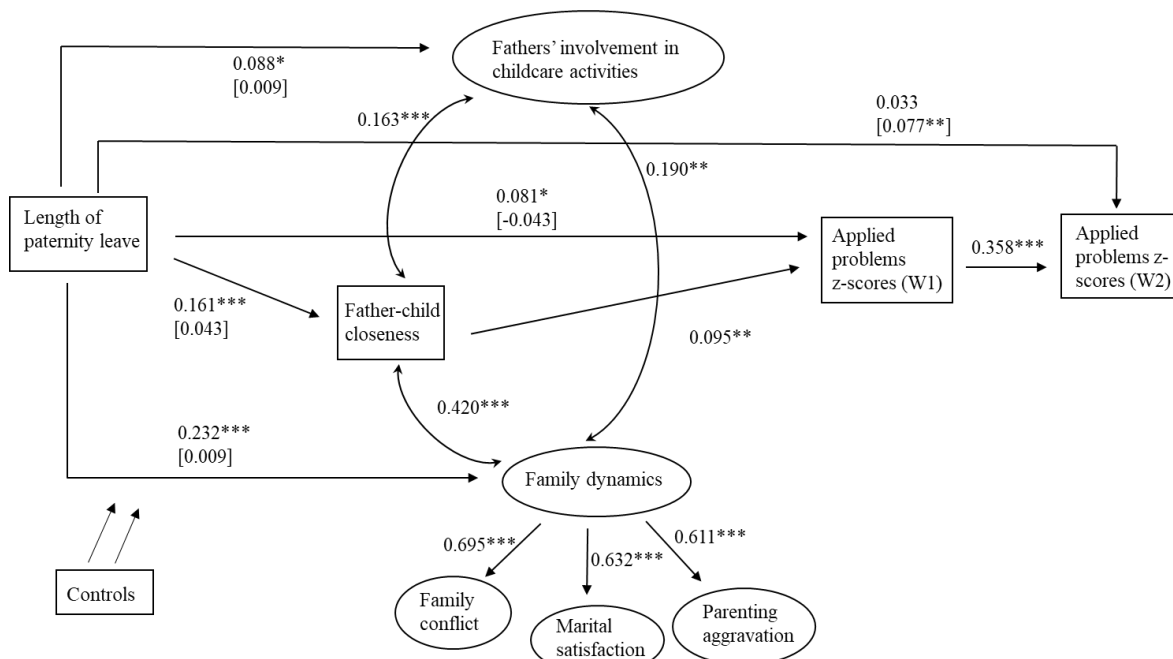


Figure 1. Standardized solutions for the structural model of length of paternity leave on children's applied problems z-scores Note: The goodness-of-fit indices are: CFI (.958), TLI (.946), RMSEA (.022), SRMR (.028). Significant paths are presented in solid lines. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Policy Recommendations

1. Extend Paternity Leave Duration

- Expand the statutory paternity leave policy to encourage fathers to take at least two weeks or more to maximize developmental benefits for children.
- Launch public campaigns to highlight the positive impact of paternity leave on family well-being and child development.
- Educate employers on the long-term benefits of encouraging fathers to take paternity leave.

2. Strengthen Workplace Support

- Encourage employers to provide flexible work arrangements and create a supportive workplace culture where fathers feel comfortable taking paternity leave.

3. Integrate Developmental Monitoring

- Establish mechanisms to track children's cognitive and behavioral development in relation to paternity leave uptake, ensuring evidence-based policy adjustments.

4. Targeted Interventions for Vulnerable Families

- Develop tailored programs to support low-income families or communities with cultural barriers to paternity leave uptake, ensuring inclusive policy impact.

See details about related studies on this topic:

Li, N., & Yeung, W.-J. J. (2025). Paternity leave-taking and early childhood development: A longitudinal analysis in Singapore. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.13100>

Yeung, W. J., & Li, N. (2023). Paternity Leave, Family Dynamics, and Children's Behavior in Singapore. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 85(2), 580–602. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12896>

For information about SG-LEADS, see study website <https://sg-leads.org/>.

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References

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