Men are facing a challenge to share the responsibilities of family life and child care more and more as women have become an important part of the labour market. In the Nordic countries, possibilities for fathers to take a leave from work and care for their children have been guaranteed by the welfare state with various forms of economically compensated parental leave.

In the beginning of 2003, following the example of other Nordic countries, a new "father's month" of parental leave was introduced in Finland. If the father takes the last two weeks of the parental leave period, he gets two extra paternity leave weeks as a bonus. Being a leave for both mothers and fathers, the seven-month parental leave has mainly been taken by mothers. The bonus weeks are now used as an incentive for more fathers to take parental leave.

In order to understand the cultural and structural gendered dynamics of the take-up and sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers in Finland, we collected a survey data in 2001/2002, consisting of 1413 fathers and 3300 mothers of children born in 1999.

In the paper, I look at factors related to the decision making of who will take leave such as having information of the existing possibilities; discussion or lack of it between spouses; calculations on the economic consequences of taking leave as well as possibilities and needs for a break from work and the degree of support at the workplace. I discuss the sharing of leave from a gender order perspective: how power relations between men and women in society as well as in the family are related to the take-up of parental leave.