

Does Leave Work?

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Summary

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Social and Cultural Planning Office
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Social and Cultural Planning Office

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Does Leave Work?*

1 Introduction and research questions

Combining paid work with care responsibilities has received a great deal of attention from policymakers in recent years. In the 1990s childcare facilities were substantially expanded, a statutory right to parental leave was introduced and the possibility of taking leave to deal with other situations was also extended. Most of the existing leave schemes were combined in the Work and Care Act (*Staatsblad* 567, 2001) when it was introduced on 1 December 2001. The right to change the number of hours one works is regulated in the Working Hours (Adjustment) Act, and the Income Tax Act now includes a working time account scheme. Certain sectors have always had schemes designed to help employees combine work and family life. Some collective labour agreements and company agreements contain arrangements that supplement (and in some cases restrict) the statutory schemes.

This study looks for the first time at the need for and use of a number of different schemes to help people combine work and care, specifically:

- leave to deal with unexpected situations (emergencies);
- leave to care for someone with a short-term illness;
- leave to care for someone with a long-term or terminal illness;
- working time accounts;
- career breaks;
- paternity leave;
- parental leave.

It also looks at the options of adjusting (particularly reducing) one's working hours and giving up work altogether. Besides establishing the need for and use of the schemes, it also examines factors that influence them, and factors that explain any discrepancy between need and use.

The study is written from the point of view of employees. Facilities designed to ease the combination of work and care responsibilities have been laid down in legislation. The study was commissioned by the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, who is interested in the extent to which employees use these statutory rights and any problems and obstacles that might still exist.

The following research questions are considered:

- 1 What is the need for various leave schemes and adjustment of working hours

* This publication is a summary of the main results of *Werkt verlof? Het gebruik van regelingen voor verlof en aanpassing van de arbeidsduur* ('Does Leave Work? The use of schemes for leave and adjustment of working hours', 2004) by Heleen van Luijn and Saskia Keuzenkamp. The Hague: Social and Cultural Planning Office. The study was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

(referred to below simply as ‘schemes’) and what differences in need exist between different categories of workers?

- 2 What schemes are being used, and to what extent?
- 3 Why do some employees in a certain situation need to take leave under a scheme while others do not, and what makes some use the schemes and others not?
- 4 Do certain categories of employees clearly make more or less use of the various schemes?
- 5 Is there any correlation between the use of individual schemes and, if so, what?
- 6 What problems do those who need the schemes encounter in trying to use them?
- 7 To what extent do the existing schemes and those proposed by the government meet the need?

Data were obtained in a survey of employees between the ages of 20 and 61 and employees who in the previous two years had stopped working to care for their family or others. In a large number of modules, respondents were asked whether they had faced a certain situation in the past two years, such as an emergency or a sick child. If so, they were asked about their need for and use of leave. If they did not need to take leave, they were asked why. Those who did need leave but had not taken it were also asked why. Users were asked if they had encountered any problems in using the scheme. Besides modules on the various situations in which employees need to take leave, reduce their working hours or give up work, the survey also included questions about background characteristics, the respondent’s and his or her partner’s labour market status, their place of work and the culture in the organisation, and the respondent’s views on work, family and care, state of health and the extent to which they feel time pressure. The response rate was high (78% in the survey to identify entitled employees and 84% in the main survey – see Chapter 2). Ultimately, 3100 respondents collaborated on the main survey.

2 Entitled employees, need and use

The terms ‘entitled employees’, ‘need’ and ‘use’ appear frequently in this report. The first refers to workers with a right to use the schemes in question. People were asked if they had experienced a particular specified event (such as an emergency) or been in a particular situation (such as having a child under the age of 8) in the two years prior to the survey. If that was the case, they qualified as entitled. Entitlement is therefore defined as being in a situation to which a particular scheme applies. This is a fairly broad definition, since the legislation stipulates all kinds of conditions that employees must meet in order to qualify for a particular scheme. The most frequent example is length of service. To qualify for parental leave, for example, an employee must have worked for their current employer for at least a year. However, it was not possible to take such conditions into account in this study.

The ‘entitled’ were further categorised into those with and without a need for the scheme in question. Those with need are entitled persons who used the scheme in

the situation in question and those who did not, despite saying they needed to.

Finally, users are those who actually took leave or reduced their working hours on a more structural basis. The leave taken need not necessarily have been the type of leave provided for in the legislation. For instance, it appears that only a small proportion of users actually took emergency leave in the event of an emergency, and that many others simply took regular leave (holiday). The term ‘use’ refers in this report to uptake of any leave arrangement, irrespective of which, unless otherwise indicated.

Having defined our terms, we now turn to the first two research questions: how great is the need for leave schemes and adjustment of working hours, and how much use has been made of these facilities? Tables 1a and 1b provide a summary of the figures. Table 1a shows percentages of all employees, while Table 1b shows only percentages of entitled employees.

Table 1a Overview of entitled employees, need for and use of various schemes, all employees aged 20-61, 2001 and 2002 (percentages)

	entitled employees, divided into:				use of scheme specifically intended for this situation, as proportion of total use ^b
	entitled employees	no need for leave	need, but no use of scheme	use (in broad sense) ^a	
unexpected situations	38	4	3	31	5
short-term illness	15	2	2	11	9
long-term or terminal illness	7	2	2	3	^c
paternity leave ^d	10	0.5	0.5	9	51
parental leave	27	20	5	2	n.a.
working time account	100	83	11	6	40
career break	100	86	10	4	1
reduced hours	100	67	19	14	n.a.

a This refers to use of some form of leave, irrespective of which type.

b This refers not to the proportion of users among all employees, but to the share of the leave specifically intended for this purpose in the total use of some form of leave for these situations.

c Since there is no statutory scheme for this situation (a bill to introduce long-term care leave is currently before parliament), people were not asked about the use of long-term care leave.

d Data refer only to male employees aged 20-61

n.a. = not asked

Example: In a period of two years prior to the survey, 38% of employees aged 20-61 encountered one or more unexpected situations which would entitle them to emergency leave. 4% of employees had no need to take emergency leave in such a situation, 3% needed to take leave but had not, and 31% of employees took some form of leave. The final column shows that only 5% of the leave taken was actually emergency leave. The other 95% of the users had taken another form of leave (see also Table 2)

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

Entitled employees

The first column in Table 1a shows how often employees found themselves in a situation for which a leave scheme exists during the two years being studied (2001 and 2002). If we disregard working time accounts, career breaks and reduced working hours (in principle, every employee is entitled to these), we see that unexpected situations occur most frequently, and long-term or terminal illness the least frequently. In the period under study, around four in ten employees had experienced one or more unexpected situations for which they could in principle have taken leave. Seven per cent of employees had had to care for someone with a long-term or terminal illness for more than two consecutive weeks during the period under study.

Table 1b Overview of need for and use of various schemes, as proportion of entitled employees, 2001 and 2002 (percentages)

	no need for leave	need for leave, none taken	need for and use of scheme (use defined broadly)	total	discrepancy between need and use ^a
unexpected situations	10	8	82	100	9
short-term illness	13	13	73	100	15
long-term or terminal illness	29	29	43	100	40
paternity leave ^b	5	5	90	100	6
parental leave	74	19	7	100	72
working time account	83	11	6	100	65
career break	86	10	4	100	72
reduced hours	67	19	14	100	58

a Those who needed leave but did not take it as a proportion of all those who needed leave.

b Data refer only to male employees aged 20-61.

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

No need for leave

Not everyone in a certain situation needs to take leave. Table 1b shows that the proportion of employees in a particular situation who did not need leave is small or very small in four cases. The figures are most skewed when it comes to paternity leave, where only 5% of those entitled did not need to take paternity leave. The figure for unexpected situations is 10%. In other situations the ratio is also unbalanced, but in the other direction. For instance, three-quarters of parents with a child under the age of 8 felt no need to take parental leave. The need for working time accounts, career breaks and shorter working hours is also small (a respective 83%, 86% and 67% felt no need to take advantage of these schemes).

It comes as no surprise, of course, that the need for leave is greatest in the case of urgent incidents that require an immediate solution. The reasons why employees did not need to use certain schemes is examined in more depth in Section 3.2.

Need for leave, none taken

Tables 1a and 1b also give an insight into how many employees feel a need to take leave under some scheme or other but do not do so. Table 1b shows that the proportion varies from 5% (paternity leave) to 29% (in the event of long-term or terminal illness). The reasons why employees do not take leave when they need it is examined in Section 3.3.

Need for and use of scheme

The question of to what extent the various schemes are used is addressed in two stages. It was decided in this study to look initially at the use of leave, irrespective of the type of leave. Attention is then focused on what type of leave was taken and the scale of the use of the scheme specifically intended for that situation.

The column 'use (in broad sense)' in Table 1a shows the results. We can see that some form of leave is taken most frequently in the event of unexpected situations. Three in ten employees had taken leave to deal with an unexpected situation that prevented them from working on at least one occasion in 2001 and 2002. Furthermore, Table 1b shows that eight in ten people who faced an unexpected situation (the 'entitled', in other words) took some form of leave. The situation often involved the death of someone (mentioned by 46% of the relevant group), but unforeseen circumstances at home (such as a burglary, broken sewer or water pipe) or a child suddenly being taken ill were also mentioned quite frequently (both by 25% of respondents).

A relatively large amount of leave is taken to care for a person with a short-term illness, usually a sick child or partner. In the two years prior to the study, one in ten employees had taken leave for a person with a short-term illness. Nine per cent of male employees aged 20-61 had taken paternity leave in 2001-2002.

Compared with short-term leave of this kind, the use of longer-term leave is limited. Three per cent of employees aged 20-61 had taken leave to care for someone with a long-term illness, and 2% had taken parental leave.

Fairly little use is made of the 'generic' schemes, which are not solely intended for people in certain specified circumstances. Table 1a shows, for example, that in 2001 and 2002 6% of employees had used a working time account scheme and 4% had taken a career break. More use is made of the possibility of reducing working hours: in the period studied, 14% of employees had done so.

We have so far been concerned with use in the broad sense. The final column of Table 1a shows the share of the scheme specifically intended for the situation in question in the total use of leave. We can see that only 5% of employees who had taken leave to deal with an emergency had actually taken emergency leave. Only 9% of those who had taken leave to care for a sick person on a short-term basis had actually taken short-term care leave. 'Real' paternity leave is used most frequently: half of the men whose partner had given birth actually took paternity leave.

'Working time account' refers to those using a special tax facility for the purpose: 40% of those who were saving to take leave at a later stage had done so. The statu-

tory scheme for funding career breaks was used by virtually no one who had taken a break in their career.

Table 2 shows the type of leave taken in three situations (emergency, care for someone with a short-term illness and care for someone with a long-term or terminal illness). In many cases, it is regular leave (holiday) or leave built up in lieu of pay (known as ADV). In 52% of unexpected situations, the employee had taken holiday (while, as we have said, only 5% had taken emergency leave) and in no less than 67% of cases of short-term illness, holiday or ADV was taken. People who had taken leave to care for someone with a long-term or terminal illness were not asked if they had taken long-term care leave, as this does not exist (at least not in the statute books). We can see from the table that many people take holiday to care for someone with a long-term or terminal illness (35% of cases). However, many had also had exceptional leave (over one in five) or had themselves reported sick (one in seven).

As the table shows, employees also report sick in both other situations, albeit less often (one in twenty respondents who had faced an emergency or had to care for someone with a short-term illness).

These findings suggest that the existing specific leave schemes are often not used in the situations for which they are intended. However, this study is unable to explain the large-scale use of holiday. It might be that people are unaware of the schemes (some were introduced fairly recently). But it is also possible that they have enough holiday and (for whatever reason) are reluctant to go to their manager and arrange to take leave under one of the schemes. It is also possible that it has been agreed (in the collective labour agreement, for example) that staff will first use their holiday or ADV.

Table 2 Overview of the type of leave taken for unexpected situations, or to care for someone with a short-term, long-term or terminal illness, 2001 and 2002 (vertical percentages)

type of leave	unexpected situations (s = 1692) ^a	short-term illness (s = 537)	long-term or terminal illness (s = 125)
emergency leave	5	n.a.	n.a.
short-term care leave	4	9	10
holiday	40	56	26
ADV	12	11	9
extraordinary leave	17	5	22
unpaid leave	n.a.	5	7
reported sick, no leave taken	6	5	14
other	13	7	10
don't know	4	2	2
total	100	100	100

a s = number of situations

n.a. = not asked

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

Discrepancy between need and use

The final column in Table 1b shows the proportion of employees who needed to take leave under one of the schemes in a certain situation but did not do so, calculated as a percentage of those with a need for leave in that particular situation. Use has been interpreted broadly here, without taking account of the type of leave or scheme used.

The discrepancy is smallest for acute situations of short duration, such as a partner giving birth or an emergency. Only 6% and 9% respectively of those with a need for leave did not take any. The discrepancy in the event of short-term illness is also relatively small (15% take no leave despite needing to do so).

The discrepancy is substantially bigger when it comes to leave of longer duration. Forty per cent of those who have to care for someone with a long-term illness take no leave even though they need to, and in the case of parental leave the figure is as high as 72%.

Working time accounts and reduced working hours also have a high discrepancy: 65% and 58% respectively do not use these facilities even though they have a need. To interpret these discrepancies, we need more insight into the reasons behind them. The next section provides some initial pointers, and Section 4 looks at the differences in need and use between different categories of users.

3 *Need for and use of schemes explained*

3.1 *Introduction*

The third research question concerns the determinants of need for and use of schemes. Why do some employees in a certain situation need to take leave under a scheme while others do not? Why do some use such a scheme and others not? How can we explain the discrepancy between need and use? At the outset of the study, an attempt was made to develop a conceptual model with clusters of factors that might help explain the difference between need and use, on the basis of the fairly limited literature on this subject. The role of these factors was investigated in two ways. Firstly, multivariate analyses were performed to establish the extent to which background characteristics (such as gender, age and domestic situation), aspects of the respondent's and his or her partner's labour market status, the culture at the respondent's place of work, his or her views on work, family and care and state of health and feelings of time pressure were significant. This was done in a two-stage process. First, a comparison was made between entitled employees who did and did not need to take leave. Then those who needed to take leave but did not do so were compared with those who did. Table 3 shows the findings.

Alongside these multivariate analyses, we also look at the reasons respondents themselves gave as to why they did or did not need to take leave, and did or did not use a particular work and care scheme. They mentioned some of the factors considered in the first stage of the process (such as whether the partner works and the corporate culture of the respondent's employer), but also others (such as unfamiliarity with the scheme, or absence of such a scheme at the place of work).

Table 3 Overview of determinants of need for and use of leave and part-time work schemes^a

	need	use
leave for unexpected situations	working time (+) culture of 'presenteeism' (+) free time under pressure (+) encountered combination problems in past 2 years (+) <i>progressive collective agreement</i> (+) <i>partner's working time</i> (-)	gender (female -) education (-) number of work/care schemes in company (+) burn-out symptoms (-) <i>progressive collective agreement</i> (-)
leave to care for someone with short-term illness	working time (+) culture of 'presenteeism' (+) combination difficulties (+) <i>partner's length of service</i> (-)	education (-) flexible working hours (+) number of work/care schemes in company (+) professional ambition (-) combination difficulties (-)
leave to care for someone with long-term illness	age (-) education (+) encountered combination problems in past 2 years (+) professional ambition (+)	length of service (+) number of work/care schemes in company (+)
working time account	size of company (-) working time (+) attitude to outsourcing care (+) burnout symptoms (+) combination difficulties (+) experiencing combination problems at time of study (+)	gender (female -) children (yes -) supportive colleagues (+) overtime culture (-) combination difficulties (-)
career break	gender (female +) education (+) age (-) focus on work (-) burnout problems (+) free time under pressure (+) combination difficulties (+) experiencing combination problems at time of study (+) <i>progressive collective agreement</i> (+) <i>nature of partner's contract</i> (flexible +)	age (-) children (yes +) working time (-) free time under pressure (-)
parental leave	age (-) size of company (+) combination difficulties (+) experienced combination problems in past 2 years (+)	education (+) number of work/care schemes in company (+) culture of 'presenteeism' (-) focus on work (+) professional ambition (-) combination difficulties (-) <i>partner's working time</i> (+)

Table 3 (cont.) Overview of determinants of need for and use of leave and part-time work schemes^a

	need	use
reduced hours	gender (female +) education (+) age (-) net household income (+) professional ambition (-) focus on work (-) burnout symptoms (+) combination difficulties (+) combination problems in 2 years prior to study (+) <i>partner's working time (-)</i> <i>(manager +)</i> <i>nature of partner's contract (flexible +)</i>	gender (female +) children (yes +) age (-) partner/no partner (single +) manager (yes -) supportive colleagues (+) free time under pressure (-) combination difficulties (-)

a The variables in italics could only be studied in part of the population. Where variables refer to two categories, one has been mentioned to make the outcome clear (e.g. 'female -' means the likelihood is smaller among women than among men).

Example: The need for leave to deal with unexpected situations increases the more hours one works, the more importance placed on presence at work, the more one's free time is under pressure, if one has experienced more combination problems in the past two years, the more progressive the collective agreement and the fewer hours one's partner works.

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

3.2 Need for leave and adjustment of working hours

Background characteristics

It is often stated in the literature that the need for schemes to help combine work and care is influenced by gender, age, education, income, cohabitation/marriage and the presence of children in the home. For instance, women are said to have a greater need for such schemes (because they take on a greater proportion of care responsibilities), as do single people (as they have no partner with whom to share the burden).

As we can see in Table 3, such background characteristics are unimportant in many situations. A few have an impact on leave to care for someone with a long-term illness, career breaks, parental leave and reduced working hours, with analyses most frequently revealing age to be significant. The older one grows, the less one needs leave to care for the long-term sick, career breaks, shorter working hours and parental leave. The more highly educated have more need of leave to care for the long-term sick, and the need for reduced working hours is greater the higher the net household income.

Background characteristics were not found to play a role in more acute, urgent situations (such as emergencies and short-term illness).

Labour market status

A second cluster of factors studied concerns various aspects of the individual's work and work situation, ranging from objective elements like the number of hours worked to cultural factors like company attitudes to attendance and overtime. These factors were found to play a role on occasion, though not all of them in every case, and less frequently than was originally assumed.

As expected, the need for leave generally increases the more hours a person works each week, but this does not apply in all cases. This effect is visible only in unexpected situations, short-term illness and working time accounts. In the event of unexpected situations and short-term illness (only) any 'culture of presenteeism' also plays a role. The size of the company is significant in two types of situation: working time accounts and parental leave. There is more need for these facilities among employees of larger companies.

As well as the labour market status of the respondent, we also examined that of his or her partner. These characteristics are of particular influence on the respondent's need for reduced working hours.

Attitudes to work, family and outsourcing care

The literature leads one to expect that people who are more focused on work, more ambitious and more positive about outsourcing care tasks will have less need for leave schemes and reduced working hours. However, this was barely found to be the case. Only leave to care for the long-term sick, working time accounts and reduced working hours were found to correlate with such views. Employees who are more positive about outsourcing care tasks also have less need of working time accounts. Focus on work was also found to have no impact on the need for leave schemes, although it did impact on the need for reduced hours. Professional ambition impacts on the need both for leave to care for the long-term sick and for a reduction in working hours.

Health and time pressure

We looked at whether the need for leave and part-time working schemes is affected by an individual's state of health and whether they feel their time is under pressure. In the first case, we looked at physical health and burnout symptoms. The former was found to have no significant effect. Burnout symptoms were found to be important in two cases: the need for working time accounts and for career breaks.

The feeling of time pressure was found to play a more frequent role, with the different elements examined (free time under pressure, combination difficulties and actual combination problems) most frequently correlating with the need for leave, as can be seen in Table 3. This strong correlation need come as no surprise, but the fact that the other clusters of factors have little effect is striking.

Table 3 shows that combination difficulties are particularly significant. In only two cases (unexpected situations and long-term illness) is there no correlation

between this factor and the need for leave. In all other cases, the greater the combination difficulties, the greater the need.

Respondents' own reasons for not needing leave

We asked respondents why they did not need to take leave in a number of situations even though they might be expected to. This was not asked in relation to working time accounts and career breaks, however. Table 4 shows the results for leave for unexpected situations, short-term illness and long-term illness, while Table 5 shows the results for parental leave.

The most frequently mentioned and most important reason why respondents did not need leave to deal with unexpected situations or care for someone with a short-term or long-term illness is that they had dealt with it outside working hours. They were apparently willing and able to make time for it and did not want to miss work. In many cases, someone else had dealt with the situation.

Table 4 Reasons^a given by respondents who said they had (had) no need for leave to deal with unexpected situations or care for relatives and friends with long- or short-term illness when they faced such situations, 2001 and 2002 (percentages)^b

	unexpected situations (n = 93)	short-term illness (n = 44)	long-term illness (n = 61)
dealt with outside work	52	49	69
family/friends dealt with situation	35	29	30
partner was home	27	32	20
partner took leave	7	7	5
hired help dealt with situation	3	5	8
other	28	23	21

a The main reason given is shown in bold.

b Several answers possible, so percentages do not total 100.

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

A large number of eligible respondents (42%) gave the availability of sufficient childcare as the main reason for not taking parental leave (Table 5). For one in five respondents, the fact that their partner had never or no longer worked played a role. One in three respondents themselves worked part-time or had started working part-time and therefore had no need of parental leave.

Table 5 Reasons^a respondents gave for not needing to take parental leave (percentages; n = 569)^b

enough childcare	42
partner stopped work / doesn't work	20
already work part-time, no wish to reduce further	18
started working part-time	13
not possible in my job	10
not familiar with scheme	3
worried about effect on career	2
employer unwilling	2

a The main reason given is shown in bold.

b Several answers possible, so percentages do not total 100.

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

3.3 Use of leave and adjustment of working hours

Background characteristics

Background characteristics often have more impact on the use of leave and reduced working hours than on the need for such facilities (Table 3). They have an impact both on the use of schemes for acute, urgent situations and on the use of schemes for less urgent situations.

Level of education is most frequently significant, for three schemes in particular. The more educated a person is, the less likely they are to use leave for unexpected situations and to care for the short-term sick, but the more likely they are to take parental leave. The fact that they take less leave in the former two situations is probably because they often work in jobs where they have more control over when they work.

Gender is significant in three cases: women make less use of leave in unexpected situations and of working time account schemes than men, but are more likely to reduce their hours. The presence of children in the family plays a role in career breaks and reduced working hours (people with children are more likely to take Advantage of these). It also has an impact on working time accounts, with parents being less likely to save for future leave than employees with no children. Age would also appear to have a significant effect in two cases: the older one is, the less likely one is to take a career break or reduce one's working hours. Finally, cohabiting with a partner has an impact in one situation: people who cohabit are less likely to reduce their working hours than those who live alone.

Contrary to expectations, income was found to play no significant role if the different variables are all taken into account in the analysis.

Labour market status

In all schemes, one or two aspects of labour market status help explain use. The number of schemes that an employer offers to help staff combine work and care is most frequently significant. In organisations where there are several such schemes, more employees take leave for unexpected situations and care of the short-term or long-term sick and more take parental leave.

Compared with this, the role of the various job characteristics studied is minor. All the aspects considered were important in only one situation (and a different one in each case). For instance, it had been expected that the number of hours worked would be an important factor explaining the use of schemes, but this was only the case when it came to career breaks. Part-timers are more likely to take career breaks than full-timers. Flexible working times have a significant effect only in the event of short-term illness (staff with flexitime use more leave for this purpose than staff who do not have flexible times). Length of service plays a role only in the case of leave to care for someone with a long-term illness: people who have worked for an organisation for a long time are more likely to take leave for this purpose. Finally, managers are less likely to reduce their hours. This will probably come as no surprise, but what is striking is the fact that being a manager has no significant effect in any other case.

The culture of the workplace has some effect only in the case of working time accounts, parental leave and reduction of working hours.

Attitudes to work, family and outsourcing care

Attitudes to work, family and outsourcing care were found to have virtually no effect. Only in the case of short-term illness and parental leave do some attitudes have a significant effect.

Health and time pressure

If, finally, we look at the 'health and time pressure' cluster, we see that in terms of health, only burnout symptoms play a role, and only in one situation: the more burnout symptoms a person has, the less likely they are to take leave to deal with unexpected situations.

Whether a person feels they are 'time poor' clearly plays a more frequent role, albeit less often than we saw in determining need. In more acute and urgent situations there is usually no correlation with this factor (only for short-term illness). The use of working time account schemes, parental leave, career breaks and reduced hours schemes is, however, lower among staff who experience more difficulties combining work and care or feel their free time is under pressure.

Reasons respondents give for not using schemes

Respondents with a right to use a particular scheme who did not do so were asked why. Table 6 gives an overview of their reasons.

The picture that emerges is fairly mixed at first glance, but on closer examination

we find that work-related factors and loss of income are the most important. In the case of unexpected situations and short-term illness, the idea that work would not permit one to take leave was mentioned most often, and also as the most important reason. This factor also played a role in many respondents' decision not to take leave to care for someone with a long-term or terminal illness or not to take a career break. Many also mentioned their reluctance to burden colleagues or disrupt the continuity of work. Work-related reasons connected with the role of the employer, the corporate culture, career implications and relationships with colleagues were mentioned less frequently. Loss of income was most important when it came to deciding not to take parental leave or a career break, or to reduce one's hours which, given the major impact on income, need hardly strike us as strange.

Partners play a role mainly in the event of emergencies, and long-term and short-term illness. Two or three in ten respondents said they had not taken leave in such a situation because their partner had. The role of unfamiliarity with various schemes is also worth noting; the literature had led us to expect that this would play a major role. As Table 6 shows, unfamiliarity is mentioned most in connection with working time accounts (where the fact that the scheme did not yet exist was given as the main reason). But this factor is mentioned by roughly one in ten respondents in connection with the other schemes too. Finally, a quarter to a third of respondents said they had not taken leave to care for someone with a short-term or long-term illness because they had too little holiday, which in the case of short-term illness might be an indication that they are not familiar with the (recently introduced) scheme for short-term care leave.

Table 6 Reasons^a entitled persons with a need for a particular scheme gave for not using it, 2001 and 2002 (percentages)

	unexp. situations (n = 84)	short-term illness (n = 81)	long-term/terminal illness (n = 53)	parental leave (n = 160)	career break (n = 281)	working time account (n = 305)	reduced hours (n = 525)
work wouldn't permit it	38	40	25	10 ^b	37		34
partner took leave	32	24	22	11 ^c	2 ^c		5 ^c
colleagues would have had to take over	20	19	24		22 ^d		
would disrupt continuity of work	18	15	11	11	19		13
employer didn't approve	8	10	4	6	21	14	16
loss of income	8	13	4	43 + 39^e	61		62
not familiar with scheme	8	9	11	16	8	26	
too little holiday	7	26	34				
corporate culture	5	5	4	11	20	23	14
scheme did not (yet) exist	5	6	6		19	44	6
negative career implications	4	1	0	6	9		6
bad effect on relationship with colleagues	2	6	2		5		4
put off by application procedure	2	1	8		10	8	3
afraid I wouldn't be able to go back to old job					12		
had enough childcare				20			
already taken parental leave for this child				8			
went part-time				8			
already part-time, no desire to reduce further				8			
need to reduce only arose recently							13
have given up work							2
other	27	33	39	18	10	24	12

a The main reason given is shown in bold.

b Actual wording 'I can't in my job'.

c Actual wording 'my partner reduced his/her hours' (and, in case of parental leave: 'or gave up work')

d Actual wording 'there was no one to take over my work'.

e There were two categories of answer here: 'I didn't want to lose any income' and 'it wasn't possible financially'.
empty cell = not asked

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

4 Differences in need and use between categories of workers

The previous section looked at the determinants of the need for and use of leave schemes and the right to adjust one's working hours. It included some implied statements about different categories of workers, the subject of the fourth question. The findings are now re-examined in light of this question.

First of all, we can conclude on the basis of Section 3 that one cannot in general say that one particular category has more or less *need* for the various schemes. The findings are too diverse. We cannot, for example, say that people with children need leave more than people without children, that single people need it more than people who cohabit, that the more highly educated need it more than the poorly educated, or full-timers more than part-timers. Which workers have the most need of a particular scheme depends on the situation. Furthermore, contrary to expectations, a number of characteristics were found to be of no significance in the situations examined. For instance, level of income was not found to be significant in the analyses, and nor was having a management job.

We can draw the same conclusion about differences between categories in terms of use of the schemes. It is not possible to point to clear categories of workers who are more or less likely to use them. This is however to some extent true of education: although it does not hold for all schemes, the more highly educated make less use of the schemes than those with a lower level of education. There is also sometimes a difference between full-timers and part-timers, but this is usually not the case. Nor can we generally say, for instance, that people who work in a corporate culture where overtime is the norm by definition make more (or less) use of leave than those in organisations where it is not normal to work overtime. The picture that emerges from Table 3 shows too many subtle variations for that.

Since, at the outset, we had expected to repeatedly encounter differences between men and women, we should give this special consideration. The previous section gave the general impression that gender differences play less of a role than expected. Although women have more need of career breaks and reduced hours than men, no differences were found in terms of need for the other five schemes. And gender was found to have a significant effect on use in only half the cases studied, albeit in the opposite direction: men make more use of leave for unexpected situations and working time accounts, while women are more likely to reduce their hours.

However, two things must be borne in mind. The study found that women are more often entitled to leave for unexpected situations, or to nurse someone with a short-term, long-term or terminal illness. They were more likely than men to say they had faced unexpected situations and short-term illness in someone whom they had to or wanted to nurse and that they had given regular support to someone with a long-term or terminal illness for a period longer than two weeks. This is probably because women have a wider social network of people for whom they might want to care, or for whom they are expected to care. Since the need for leave was studied only among those who would be entitled to take it, part of the gender difference 'disappeared', as it were.

This was not the only thing that obscured the gender difference somewhat. Actual use of a leave scheme was studied only among people who said they needed to use such a scheme. Women have more need of career breaks and reduced hours than men. Of those needing a career break, just as many men and women are likely to take one, but in absolute terms, more women take a career break than men (this cannot however be seen in the multivariate analysis on which Table 3 is based). When it comes to reduced working hours, we see a double effect, as it were: women are more likely to need to reduce their hours than men, and among those who said they needed to, more women actually did.

We must therefore conclude after all that the need for schemes regulating leave and the reduction of working hours is greater among female employees (disregarding parental leave and, of course, paternity leave), and that they are also more likely to make use of them. There are clearly more female employees who take leave to deal with unexpected situations and career breaks, and who reduce their hours. A difference between men and women can also be seen in leave to care for the short-term or long-term sick and in parental leave, though it is substantially smaller. Men are slightly more likely to use a working time account scheme.

5 *Correlations in use*

The fifth research question considers whether there are correlations in the use of individual schemes and, if so, what they are. This could not be studied thoroughly, however, as the numbers of respondents were generally small.

The analyses show that correlation with the use of other schemes occurs most frequently in the case of career breaks and reduction of working hours. Half of those who had taken a break in their career were first ill; over a third had been on maternity leave. Reductions in working hours were also often preceded by maternity leave (in half of all cases) or illness (around a third).

6 *Problems*

The sixth question concerns any problems people have experienced in taking leave or reducing their working hours. People who had taken leave under three schemes were asked if they thought it had been enough. Table 7 shows the outcomes.

Table 7 Leave long enough to deal with unexpected situations or nurse the short-term, long-term or terminally ill, 2001 and 2002 (vertical percentages)^a

	unexpected situations (s = 1656)	short-term illness (s = 528)	long-term or terminal illness (s = 125)
yes, more than enough	38	38	20
yes, enough	53	48	46
no, not enough	9	14	34
total	100	100	100

a s = number of situations

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

The data show that the majority of respondents felt they had been able to take enough leave. Nevertheless, depending on the situation in question, between 9% and 34% felt it had not been enough. As the table shows, this applies most often to employees who had nursed someone with a long-term or terminal illness.

Users of all schemes were asked whether they had experienced practical difficulties in organising the leave. Table 8 shows that this is not usually the case. In one or two out of ten situations, the user did not find it easy, however. The biggest proportion of respondents who had had difficulties had taken career breaks or long-term leave to care for someone who was long-term sick or dying; the smallest proportion had taken parental leave.

Table 8 Situations involving various kinds of leave, users' opinion as to whether it had been difficult to organise, 2001 and 2002 (percentages)

	no	yes
unexpected situation	90	10
short-term illness	82	18
long-term or terminal illness	78	22
working time account	85	15
career break	74	26
paternity leave	91	9
parental leave	92	8
reduced hours	76	24

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

Table 9 Problems^a with using schemes experienced by users who found it difficult to arrange leave or reduction of their working hours, 2001 and 2002 (percentages)^b

	unexp. situations (n = 165)	short-term illness (n = 73)	long-term/terminal illness (n = 25) ^c	working time account (n = 27) ^c	career break (n = 33) ^{cd}	reduced hours (n = 525)
work wouldn't permit it	62	71	(32)	n.a.	(30)	32
continuity of work was disrupted	34	37	(32)	n.a.	(18)	16
was afraid my employer would disapprove	19	15	(32)	(22)	(6)	11
my employer initially disapproved	18	22	(12)	(27)	(21)	18
difficult to arrange leave with employer	16	16	(20)	(20)	(12)	14
I was afraid my colleagues would be displeased	15	18	(4)	n.a.	(9)	10
doesn't suit corporate culture (no one does it)	9	8	(8)	(61)	(9)	9
loss of income	8	8	(8)	n.a.	(41)	34
didn't initially know it was possible	7	3	(28)	(21)	(0)	2
the scheme didn't exist where I work	7	3	(8)	(29)	(12)	n.a.
damaged career/promotion prospects	2	4	(4)	n.a.	(34)	12
was put off by application procedure	2	4	(12)	(9)	(0)	4
other	6	0	(12)	(23)	(18)	25

- a The main reason given is shown in bold.
b Several answers possible, so percentages do not total 100.
c Percentages shown in brackets in view of small number.
d Not asked for main reason.

Source: SCP (Work and Care Schemes 2002)

Table 9 looks more closely at respondents who had had difficulty arranging leave, and why this was the case. Paternity leave and parental leave are not considered, as the figures were very low. In three other cases the figures were slightly higher, although still fairly low, and here the percentages are shown in brackets. They are the figures for care of the long-term or terminally ill, working time accounts and career breaks.

The argument that work would not permit it is given relatively often as a reason. It is by far the most common reason given in the case of unexpected situations and short-term illness (by 62% and 71% of respondents who found it difficult to arrange leave respectively), and it is also the most important reason. However, this problem occurs relatively frequently with the other schemes, too. One related point that also scores high is disruption to the continuity of work.

A substantial proportion also refer to the role of the employer as a problem in various ways. Roughly speaking, a consistent one in five users who found it difficult to arrange leave had feared that their request would be disapproved of or even rejected by their employer, or found it difficult to arrange it with the employer.

Impossibility (there was no scheme) or unfamiliarity with the schemes caused some respondents problems, although the figures show that on the whole this was not often

the case. These problems occur most in the case of working time accounts or career breaks, although the number of respondents studied are very low.

7 Conclusions

Following this comprehensive summary, it is perhaps useful to list the main conclusions of the study.

- 1 When employees face acute, urgent situations (such as an unexpected situation, short-term or long-term illness or a partner who has just given birth), they generally have a great need for leave. By far the majority of people who encounter such situations need to take leave to deal with them. Compared with this, the need for schemes that in principle apply to everyone, irrespective of their situation (working time accounts, career breaks and reduced hours) is generally substantially smaller, although there is a lot of need for reduced working hours (see Table 1a, third and fourth columns).
- 2 Looking at all employees aged 20-61, we must conclude that, over a two-year period, only a fairly small proportion had taken some form of special leave. Most leave was taken to deal with unexpected situations (a third of employees had taken leave for this purpose in 2001 and 2002), but often it had been holiday or leave accrued in lieu of pay (ADV) (see Tables 1 and 2).
- 3 Very little use is made of the specific leave schemes for the various situations. In only 5% to 9% of the situations where respondents faced an unexpected incident or someone needing short-term care had they taken emergency leave or short-term care leave over the two years in question. Most had simply taken holiday or ADV. Employees also generally take holiday or extraordinary leave if they need to nurse someone with a long-term or terminal illness (Table 2). There is as yet no statutory scheme for long-term care leave, and the reason why respondents did not use the statutory schemes in the other cases was not examined.
- 4 The discrepancy between need and use is greatest when it comes to career breaks, parental leave, working time accounts and reduced hours. This is not so surprising, as these involve fairly far-reaching decisions with major implications. The discrepancy is smallest in acute, urgent situations of short duration, such as a partner giving birth, or an emergency. Leave to care for someone with a short-term or long-term illness falls somewhere in the middle (Tables 1a and 1b).
- 5 Generally speaking, we can conclude that it is not so much employees' background characteristics or views on work, family and care that affect their need for leave schemes and reduced working hours, but rather various objective aspects of their work situation (working time, size of company, culture of 'presenteeism').

This does not apply to all schemes, however. We also found regular links with feelings of time pressure (combination difficulties and combination problems) and, in a number of cases, with subjective health status (burnout symptoms) (Table 3).

- 6 According to the respondents themselves, in many cases they had not needed to use a leave scheme because they had been able to deal with the situation outside working hours or someone else had been able to so (Tables 4 and 5).
- 7 When it comes to factors affecting the use of the schemes, we find more variety. However, many factors affect use of only a few schemes. The number of work-care schemes an employer offers, combination difficulties, the extent to which one's free time is under pressure and professional ambition have an influence most frequently, the first two on the use of four schemes and the last two on the use of two schemes. But personal characteristics (particularly education and gender) are also important in some cases (Table 3).
- 8 Reasons for not using a scheme, according to respondents, are mainly work-related (work wouldn't permit it, colleagues would have to step in, continuity of work would be disrupted etc.). Loss of income is the main factor in parental leave, career breaks and reduced hours (Table 6).
- 9 Generally speaking, we cannot point to any clear categories of employees who are more or less likely to use the various schemes. The gender difference is most frequently a factor: women are more likely to be entitled (in the case of unexpected situations, and caring for the short-term and long-term sick) and also have slightly more need of the schemes (career breaks and reduced hours). They make substantially more use of leave for unexpected situations, career breaks and reduced hours, and slightly more of leave to care for the short-term and long-term sick. Men are slightly more likely to use a working time account scheme (Section 4).
- 10 As far as other possible differences between categories of employees go, the picture is somewhat mixed. In a number of cases, having young children is an important factor (people with small children are more likely to take a career break or reduce their hours, and less likely to use a working time account). Workers with a lower level of education are also more likely to take leave to handle unexpected situations or care for the short-term sick. The more highly educated are more likely to take parental leave. For the rest, we cannot generally say that full-timers are by definition more likely to use the schemes, or that managers or people who work in organisations where overtime is the norm are by definition less likely to do so. The effect of the various background factors affecting the use of schemes is too varied for that (Section 4).

- 11 The study shows that, in some situations, there is a considerable discrepancy between the number of employees needing to use a particular leave or part-time working scheme and the number who actually do so (Table 1). This is particularly so in the case of longer-term arrangements such as career breaks, parental leave, working time accounts and reduced hours. This is not surprising, given the greater implications in terms of income and career.
- 12 Although the percentages are low, the number of employees who take sick leave to care for others is not negligible. Between 1% and 7% of those who needed to take leave or reduce their hours and did not do so simply reported sick. On closer inspection of the particular type of leave, a proportion of users were also found to have taken sick leave. This was the case in 5% to 14% of the three last unexpected situations or episodes of short-term or long-term illness for which leave was taken. The highest proportion of sick leave is found among those caring for a long-term sick or dying relative or friend, a situation for which no statutory scheme yet exists.
- 13 Some believe that people should be able to nominate people for whom they would like to take short- or long-term care leave. To reflect this debate, when it came to care of the short-term and long-term sick, the study looked not only at entitlement under the Work and Care Act and the Long-term Care Leave Bill, but also at other categories of people needing care (such as relatives not in the immediate family, friends or neighbours). The study shows that 3% to 4% of users took leave to care for someone other than their child, partner or parent with a short-term illness in 2001 and 2002. The figures are 1% to 14% in the case of the long-term and terminally ill.
- 14 Unfamiliarity with the schemes would appear at first glance to play only a small role in explaining non-use of the working schemes, except in the case of working time accounts. Some 10% of workers said their unfamiliarity with the scheme was the reason for not using it even though they needed to. One in four said they were not aware of the working time account scheme.
- 15 However, if we look at employees who did take leave, we find that only a few used statutory schemes such as emergency leave, short-term care leave, career breaks and reduced hours. People mainly take holiday and ADV to deal with emergencies, or to care for the short-term, long-term or terminally ill. Why people take holiday instead of using the schemes available we cannot say on the basis of this study. It is possible that the statutory schemes are not very well known. But it might also be that employers and employees have agreed that they will first use up their holiday, or that employees are put off by the hassle they associate with the use of official schemes.

One research question has not yet been addressed: to what extent are the existing and proposed schemes an adequate response to the need? This report is written from the perspective of employees seeking to combine their different tasks and responsibilities. Critics of the schemes might point out that employees' need for leave schemes and other facilities to help them combine work and care are greater than can reasonably be provided for in statutory regulations. They might also argue that putting such schemes in place generates demand, saddling employers with staff who take leave for all kinds of reasons, justifiable or not, thus putting the continuity and productivity of the company's operations at risk.

To what extent do the findings in this report indeed point to a virtually unstoppable demand for leave schemes and the like among those called upon to combine work and care? Are the schemes used to a great, or even excessive, extent? Or are all kinds of problems still associated with the schemes, and does the discrepancy between need and use call for more policy? In other words: are the government's existing and proposed policies an adequate response to the need?

First, we consider the most acute and urgent, usually short-lasting situations. We can conclude that the majority of those who face such situations need to take leave. But such situations do not arise all that often. Over a period of two years, one in eight employees needed leave to care for someone with a short-term illness, and one in twenty for someone with a long-term illness. Employees most frequently need leave to deal with emergencies (one in three). In such pressing situations people generally take a few days' leave. However, when employees have to care for someone with a long-term illness, there is a major discrepancy between need and use. Here there is clearly a major need for a specific scheme.

As we have seen, employees tend to use up their own free time (holiday, ADV) to deal with emergencies and care for the short-term or long-term sick, rarely using the official schemes that exist for such situations (although no statutory scheme yet exists for long-term care). We are therefore justified in concluding that the official schemes for acute situations of short duration are underused. But is that a bad thing? One might, after all, argue that people seem to have enough holiday and that in a certain sense the schemes are therefore unnecessary. However, this study did not examine why employees had taken regular holiday, as this outcome was not foreseen at the outset. Do they really have plenty of holiday and ADV to use for emergencies and caring for others? Or did they just want to sort things out themselves without having to ask their manager for help? We do not know. But we do know that holiday is intended to give people a break from work. If they are unable to take enough rest because they have to spend their free time looking after others (this applies particularly to those caring for someone with a long-term illness), there is a risk that productivity will be affected or (in extreme cases) that illness will result. The respondents' answers indicated their great commitment to their work, and work-

related reasons generally lie behind their failure to take leave even when they need it. We concluded that a majority of employees have no need of schemes less related to specific moments and a specific urgent situation (parental leave, working time account, career breaks and reduced hours). This is not surprising, given their impact on income and career prospects. Thus the large discrepancy between the need for and use of these schemes is also understandable.

So are the existing and proposed schemes an adequate response to the need for leave? The existing provisions would seem to be adequate for acute situations that are generally of short duration, although it would be useful to have more insight into why people use their holiday in such situations. And we also need to consider whether this is such a bad thing (from the point of view of both the employee and the employer). There is a considerable discrepancy between need and use among those caring for the long-term and terminally ill, but there is no statutory scheme for them at the moment. The bill proposing such a scheme is therefore responding to a genuine need among employees. The findings suggest, incidentally, that introducing the right to nominate certain people one would like to care for if necessary would satisfy the needs of some employees.

The provision available under the other schemes would also appear to be adequate. The fact that the implications in terms of income prevent people from taking a break in their career or reducing their hours is not unreasonable and need not prompt a change in policy. This is more debatable in the case of parental leave, since this is a temporary situation, and the government's aim in introducing the scheme was to keep people in the labour market and to recognise the important role of parenthood (and reproduction) in society.

So although we can say that the response is largely adequate, the study has highlighted some remaining problem areas. They vary from situation to situation and from scheme to scheme, and are sometimes connected with the scheme itself, sometimes with circumstances at work, and sometimes with the financial implications, whether real or assumed.