

Minutes of the Meeting of the APPG for Fatherhood

3pm Wednesday 25 January 2023

Room O, Portcullis House, Westminster

Attendees: Andrew Gwynne, MP (Chair), Sir Peter Bottomley, MP, Owen Thomas (Future Men), Mary Gibson (Future Men), Charlotte Grievson (Future Men), Dr Ana Jordan (speaker), Dr Agata Weyzk, Griffin Mosson, Tim Soper, Jasmine Kelland, Lee Sobo-Allen, Dr Jasmine Kelland, John Warren, Ben Campbell, Merve Uzunalioglu, Nadav Perez-Vaisvidovski, Sam Morfey, Lal Dalamal, Barrington Reeves.

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting and introduced the speaker, Dr Ana Jordan, and her colleague, Dr Agata Weyzk, from the University of Lincoln.

2. Overview of APPG status

The Chair stated that the APPG for Fatherhood aims to promote the wellbeing of children by encouraging and facilitate equal parenting.

3. Presentation by Dr Ana Jordan, University of Lincoln

Dr Ana Jordan spoke for around 20 minutes on the study 'Caregiving Dads, Breadwinning Mums; Transforming Gender in Work and Childcare', a collaboration between the University of Lincoln and the Nuffield Foundation. She introduced the project (undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic), covered the research findings and set out four recommendations. She emphasised that there was a discrepancy between state and workplace policies and parent's needs and preferences. Please see accompanying PowerPoint presentation for content.

4. Q&A and Discussion

The following questions and comments were taken:

Andrew Gwynne commented that the study is vital. He said that the system is focused on traditional family arrangements and that a real change is needed. He asked what the biggest barrier to family-friendly cultures was. Dr Jordan answered that it was assumptions about childcare that were being made on the basis of gender.

Andrew Gwynne asked whether there were good examples of businesses that are positively changing their understanding of how families work in the modern world. Is government intervention needed or should businesses and other organisations be sharing best practice instead? Dr Jordan said that both were needed, since at present only larger companies are doing well at supporting less traditional family arrangements. She said she doubted that smaller companies would invest in better parental leave without government intervention.

Tim Soper, AON, added that government policy is needed to protect those who are not in the best paid, most powerful roles, or working in large organisations. He also said that dads themselves are part of the solution – they need to speak up and be more visible about their parenting, for example, blocking out their schedule if they are doing the school run. Dr Jordan agreed, and said that dads who had been interviewed for her study had said that there were no men balancing family life and work well to look to as role models.

Dr Jordan said that there were many obstacles to talking about parenting issues such as breastfeeding, and that this leads to women feeling like they should stay at home.

Sir Peter Bottomley asked whether the conversation on this subject used ‘gender’ and a synonym for ‘sex’. Dr Jordan explained that the terminology was chosen because the study focused on women as social beings.

Andrew Gwynne asked whether there were socio-economic differentials that affected couples’ roles, and whether they correlated to levels of satisfaction. Dr Jordan answered that the sample (about 30 couples) was highly educated, though not necessarily high earners. Those whose arrangements had been arrived at by choice reported the highest levels of satisfaction.

Owen Thomas, Future Men, made the point that there are transitions in the way domestic roles are shared between the genders in lower-socio economic groups too, but they tend to be caused by practical necessity rather than choice.

Tim Soper asked what the government needed to be able to produce policies and legislation to support better division of childcare and domestic labour. A brief discussion was held in which it was suggested that a cost-benefit analysis would help.

Barrington Reeves, Sewing Seeds, said that this research reiterates earlier findings, and warned against going round in circles talking about the same social problems.

Sam Morfey from Families Need Fathers asked for examples of countries that have successfully moved from predominantly traditional family models to more shared parenting? In the discussion that followed, it was suggested that the Scandinavian countries and Germany had found the best balances. Merve Uzunalioglu, UCL, mentioned that these countries have ‘father’s reserve days’, i.e. days that men can use specifically for time with their children. Australia’s shared parental leave system was also noted.

Dr Jordan said that she and her colleagues were currently seeking further research funding to look at the impact of the pandemic on this issue.

5. Any other issues for discussion

There was no other business or further discussion.

The Chair closed the meeting at 4pm, thanking Dr Jordan for her presentation and Future Men, secretariat of the APPG, for their support in arranging the event.