



HLTH 3100  
Fall 2022

Sarah Freiburger, Departments of Language & Public Health  
Naomi Horner, Departments of Language & Public Health

The United States is one of the only countries in the world without a national paid leave which leaves about 80% of the workforce without paid time off for the birth or adoption of a child according to the National Partnership for Women & Families. The Family and Medical Leave Act in which eligible employees are entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons according to US Department of Labor.. Consequently, there are negative impacts on the health and mental health of both the mother and the child due to a lack of paid parental leave.

## Benefits of Paid Leave on Mother

A National Partnership study found that every additional week of paid leave for a new mother reduces the likelihood of poor mental health by 2%. Paid leave is also associated with lower rates of partner violence. Breastfeeding also has benefits for mothers, including reducing the risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Finally, paid leave decreases a mother's chance of rehospitalization by 51%.

## How Paid Leave Affects Minority Groups

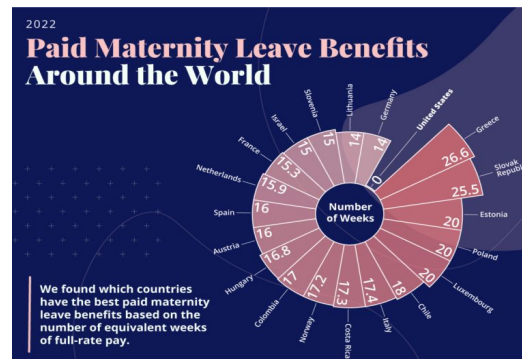
Only 7% of low wage workers have access to paid maternity leave, and nearly 25% take 10 or fewer days of maternity leave, according to Gupta et al. People of color are also much less likely to have access to maternity leave. A study found that only 43% of African Americans and 25% of Hispanic workers had any access to paid leave. Within the LGBT community, EIGE found that only 45% of individuals reported their employer offered LGBT inclusive leave. Many leave policies do not include the term “domestic partner,” so unmarried couples find issues with requesting leave.

## Benefits of Paid Maternity Leave on Baby

Maternity leave is connected with better physical health outcomes in infants. According to Carlson et al., a recent study divided 48,916 infants into 3 cohorts: those whose mothers received 6 weeks, 12 weeks, and 18 weeks of maternity leave. Infants in the 12 week group had decreased odds of malnutrition and respiratory conditions, as well as decreased rates of acute care and hospital readmissions when compared to the 6 week group.

According to Hayes, another study found that longer maternity leave leads to a 5 percentage point increase in Hepatitis B vaccinations, and increases in DTP immunizations. In addition, it was found that longer maternity leave leads to higher rates of well-baby checkups. These checkups are a helpful way of seeing if an infant is growing and developing as they should be. These checkups also allow for immunizations to be given.

The same study found that longer maternity leave also leads to higher rates of breastfeeding. While formula feeding is a method of keeping a baby healthy and fed, multiple studies have found that breastfeeding provides benefits that formula cannot. Breastfeeding strengthens an infant's immune system, stimulates positive brain development, and decreases risks of infections. The study found that with 12 weeks of family leave as compared to 6, breastfeeding rates doubled. Overall, increased maternity leave decreases infant hospitalizations by 47%.



The figure above compares the length of maternity leave in several countries. The figure comes from Buisness.org and provides information surrounding the importance of maternity leave.

## Strategies for Improvement

A major improvement would be to lengthen leave policies and codify paid leave. As discussed previously, there are numerous health benefits for both the mother and baby that come with a longer maternity leave. Another strategy for improvement would be to widen family leave definitions in order to include low-income and part time workers, who are currently excluded from most policies.

## Conclusions

Overall, there are many health benefits for both the mother and the infant if there is more time allotted for maternity leave. Moving forward, it is important to raise awareness and provide support through policies and change.

## References

- Carlson, A. M., Ebert, J., & Hise-Gorman, E. (2022, February 23) Length of maternity leave impact on child health outcomes. American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved November 9, 2022, from <https://www.aap.org/newsroom/press-releases/2022/02/23/aap-advocates-for-longer-maternity-leave>
- <https://www.aap.org/newsroom/press-releases/2022/02/23/aap-advocates-for-longer-maternity-leave>
- Family and medical leave (FMLA). United States Department of Labor. (n.d.). Retrieved November 30, 2022, from <https://www.dhs.gov/fmla>
- Francois, E., Cheng, H., & Baum, Reger, M. (2021, November 11). How does the U.S. compare to other countries on Paid Parental Leave? Americans get 7 weeks. Estimating gap more than 80%. The Washington Post. Retrieved November 30, 2022, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/policy-fix/wp/2021/11/11/global-survey-paid-parental-leave/>
- Hayes, T. O. N. (2020, June 9). How children benefit from paid family leave policies. AAF. Retrieved November 30, 2022, from <http://www.aaf.org/resources/articles/how-children-benefit-from-family-leave-policies>
- National Partnership for Women & Families. (n.d.). Paid leave is essential for Healthy Moms and babies. Paid Leave Is Essential for Healthy Moms and Babies. <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/work-health/moms-and-babies/paid-leave-is-essential-for-familial-care/Paid%20maternity%20leave%20summaryoftheReport.pdf#sthash=20intimateqz20intimateqz20intimateqz20intimateqz20intolese>
- Paid family and medical leave is critical for low-wage workers and... (n.d.). Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://www.fairworkplacesolutions.com/2022/06/29/paid-family-and-medical-leave-is-critical-for-low-wage-workers-and/>
- Paid leave is essential for Healthy Moms and babies. Paid Leave Is Essential for Healthy Moms and Babies. (n.d.). Retrieved November 30, 2022, from <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/work-health/moms-and-babies/paid-leave-is-essential-for-familial-care/Paid%20maternity%20leave%20summaryoftheReport.pdf#sthash=20intimateqz20intimateqz20intimateqz20intimateqz20intolese>
- Paid parental leave. United States Department of Labor. (n.d.). Retrieved November 30, 2022, from <https://www.dhs.gov/fmla>
- Parental-leave policies. European Institute for Gender Equality. (2020, May 16). Retrieved November 30, 2022, from <https://www.eige.europa.eu/gender/equality-toolkit/parental-leave-policies>
- Business.com. (2022) Paid Maternity Leave Across the World is 2022. Photograph. Retrieved November 19, 2022, from <https://www.business.com.au/workforce-management/paid-maternity-leave-across-the-world/>