



Paid Leave: A Crucial Health Support for Women and Families

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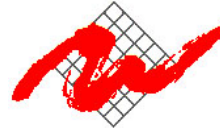
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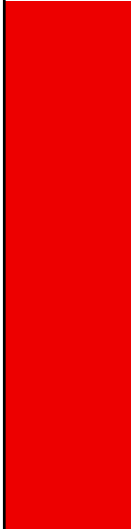
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Institute for Women's Policy Research
www.iwpr.org



IWPR's Mission



The Institute for Women's Policy Research conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies.

IWPR was founded in 1987 to fill the gap in policy-oriented empirical studies on key issues related to women's well-being.

The Institute approaches social policy with an understanding that gender, along with race and class, is of fundamental importance in defining individuals' life experiences and opportunities.

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Workplace flexibility is essential for today's families – and especially for today's women

- Fewer than one-third of children have a parent at home full-time.
- One of every eight children has a chronic health care need.
- More than 21 million full-time workers provide care for elderly relatives.
- 80 percent of mothers assume full responsibility for meeting their families' health-care needs.

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Workplace flexibility improves employment outcomes

- Women who have parental leave are nearly twice as likely to return to employment following childbirth as women without leave.
- Women with paid leave are more likely to return to their original employer than women with unpaid leave.
- Women with paid maternity leave have higher post-maternity earnings than those with other paid leave – 7 percent higher.
- Many experts see rigid workplaces as a key factor in women's lower pay.

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Workplace flexibility improves health outcomes

- Longer maternity leaves are associated with better health outcomes for mothers.
- Staying home longer after childbirth may support long-term breastfeeding – faster returns to employment are associated with ending breastfeeding.
- Children recover their health faster when their parents are involved in their care.
- Workers who must go to work when they're sick are prone to on-the-job injuries.
- Workers with contagious diseases need time – with pay – to stay home and avoid public contact.

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Few women have paid maternity leave, and paid sick days policies are inadequate

- Only 8 percent of workers have paid family leave.
- Half of the Working Mother “best companies” offer six or fewer weeks of paid maternity leave.
- 40 percent of working mothers lack both sick and vacation leave.
- Half of working mothers who stay home with sick children do not get paid for the work-time they miss.
- Only one in five low-wage workers has paid sick days.

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The unpaid Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 - our only federal leave policy – is inadequate

- Eligible workers may take up to 12 weeks off per year for their own health needs (including pregnancy and maternity), to bond with infants, for adoptive and foster care placement, and to care for immediate family members.
- Eligibility criteria exclude nearly half of all workers from FMLA coverage.
- This leave is unaffordable for many families and creates a financial burden for others.

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Worker advocates are fighting restrictions to the FMLA and working for paid leave

- The Bush Administration has initiated a process to restrict workers' access to FMLA leave.
- A broad-based coalition seeks to implement paid family leave insurance.
- Another active policy proposal would give federal workers four weeks of paid parental leave.
- IWPR research shows that paid sick days policies actually save employers money, by reducing turnover and increasing productivity.

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Advocates also seek paid sick days assurances

- San Francisco adopted the country's first paid sick days labor standard, in November 2006.
- The District of Columbia followed suit earlier this year with the Accrued Sick and Safe Leave Act.
- Policy makers in a dozen states considered paid sick days legislation in 2008. Two campaigns remain viable this year (in Milwaukee, WI, and Pennsylvania).
- A federal proposal has been introduced in every Congress since 2005.

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The 2008 presidential campaign has highlighted paid leave

Senators Clinton and Obama have both supported paid family leave and paid sick days.

Senator Obama has pledged to pursue these policies if he is elected.

Senator McCain has not endorsed any paid leave proposals.

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More research is needed to inform policy development

- Evidence of health impacts can be persuasive to legislators and voters.
- Public health implications are particularly compelling.
- Data are needed on savings from better treatment of chronic health conditions.
- Research can help make connections between paid sick days, preventive care, and health-care expenditures.

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More research ideas

- Impacts of paid paternity leave and family care leave are poorly understood.
- Circumstances and impacts in diverse communities need to be explored.
- Additional investigation of short- and long-term impacts of parents' job inflexibility on children could help spur policy development.

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Other roles for public health experts

- Medical specialists have a lot of credibility with policy makers.
- Reports of patients' problems can expand policy makers' understanding of life circumstances that differ from their own.
- Impacts on children resonate with "family values" perspectives.

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Paid leave is the new minimum wage

- A basic employment standard
- Feasible
- An articulation of a shared social value



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