

Women's Health Goulburn North East

Paid Parental Leave Research - Highlights

Key Research Findings

- The higher the % of pay offered during leave, the higher % of men likely to take it ([found here](#))
- If we're talking about encouraging *men* specifically, then leave reserved specifically for fathers, rather than leave shared to be divided by families as they see fit, is more effective at encouraging men to actually take the leave ([found here](#))
 - However, this has an underlying social script about what it means to be a family - e.g. heterosexual and two-parent
- "We can already see that younger generations place more importance on purpose and flexibility and work environment than just loyalty to the company and income and career progression" ([found here](#)). When these younger generations become parents, we should start to see social attitudes towards leave shift as well - so it's important to get the policy right now, to reflect the kind of future we want.
- In **Sweden** parents receive 480 days of paid parental leave ([found here](#)).
 - Each parent is entitled to 240 days of leave
 - Each parent has 90 days reserved exclusively for themselves and, should they choose not to take it, it can be transferred to the other parent
 - Men take 30% of all paid parental leave in Sweden
 - Income taxes are high in Sweden compared to other OECD countries. Part of this goes toward paid parental leave; the rest is invested in healthcare, childcare, baby-friendly public spaces, fully tax-funded schooling etc.
 - Sweden also has a legal framework to support parental leave policy, including equality law (encouraging men and women to share domestic and care work), employment law (requiring employers to support men to combine flexible work and parenting), and insurance law (father's have non-transferable rights to leave at 90-100% of their salary + additional shared leave) ([found here](#)).
- In **Iceland** parents receive three-months of non-transferrable leave each, with another three to share how they choose ([found here](#))
 - Almost 90% of Icelandic fathers take leave
 - "Both parents are now active with childcare. The law has had a positive effect on gender equality in the labour market," - quote from researcher Ingólfur V. Gíslason, Associate Professor at the University of Iceland.

- A 2012 report on gender equality in the country found that the policy had a direct impact on closer father/child relationships and greater equality between women and men at work
 - Research from the World Health Organisation demonstrates that Icelandic fathers enjoy the strongest position of fathers in the world ([found here](#))
 - The policy allows parents to stay home together, if they wish
 - “The Nordic countries’ provision of extensive paid parental leave is part of the public investment which is made in the early years of all children’s lives and leads to huge social benefits and lesser inequality, as well as long-term dollar savings later” - quote from Professor Andrew Scott from the [Australia Institute Nordic Policy Centre](#)
- A 2017 Boston College Center for Work & Families Study: [The New Dad: The Career-Caregiving Conflict](#), researchers found that ALL working dads want more time with their children. And that is across all generations, from Millennials to Gen X to Baby Boomers.
 - **Japan** provides the longest paid father-specific leave in the OECD at 12 months at, on average, 60% pay!! ([found here](#))
 - The uptake is staggeringly low (6%) and this is due to deeply ingrained social norms and gender roles. This shows how important the underlying work of gender equality really is
 - There are many [public health benefits](#) to better parental leave policies but, given Helen’s background, I’d say you’re already all over this!

The Gender Equality Case (again, but briefly)

- Fathers and partners who actively uptake parental leave help to change underlying gender norms that perpetuate gender inequality by:
 - Helping to close the gender/super pay gap
 - Enabling mothers to return to work
 - Send a clear message about the value of mothers returning to work, helping to mitigate conservative bias that sees women’s primary value in unpaid domestic labour and child-rearing
 - (Hopefully) easing the burden of unpaid domestic labour by sharing the load
- The right to workplace flexibility underpins the success of these policies; jobs should be advertised as flexible from the get-go unless there is a legitimate business case for why this isn’t possible

- This flexibility enables parents to ‘tag-team’ - e.g. with one doing school drop off and starting later and the other finishing earlier for school pick-up
- Men face stigma too. There’s a persistent bias toward men taking extended periods of family leave or seeking flexible work arrangements. We need men modelling this behaviour for other men

The Economic Case

- Businesses are wary of the financial impacts of flexible and shared parental leave policies but a 2011 study of over 250 American employers demonstrated otherwise; 87% reported no cost increase for the business (Applebaum & Milkman, 2011 - [found here](#))
- Good parental leave policies attract and retain engaged employees. A 2016 survey by Deloitte found that 77% of employees with access to benefits reported the amount of paid parental leave offered had some influence on their choice of one employer over another (Deloitte, 2017 - [found here](#))
 - In the same survey, 1 in 3 men felt their position could be compromised if they took extended leave and 54% said men would be judged more harshly than women for taking the same amount of parental leave. However, 63% said that women and men should get the same amount of leave. This links back to the gender equality case - shifting social norms/attitudes towards men accessing leave because they clearly want to.
- Researchers at the University of Edinburgh analysed data from a longitudinal study called Growing up in Scotland. They found that fathers who felt their employers supported them as parents — with flexible work schedules, financial and social support during family leave, and other allowances — were more likely to be engaged with their jobs and to stay in them longer than they may have otherwise. Mirroring [research in the U.S.](#), the fathers we interviewed said that these parenting perks provided a stronger incentive to stay with the company than increased salary did. These positive benefits are lost, though, when fathers don’t take the leave that their employers offer ([found here](#))
- Ernst and Young implemented a new parental leave policy in 2016. In the first year, half of the men made use of the policy; this has more than doubled in the two years since. Additionally turnover rates between men and women within the company have declined from 15% to between 0-2% ([found here](#))
 - This policy includes leave for fertility, birth, adoption, foster care, and legal guardianship.

Applying an Intersectional Feminist Lens

We also need to think deeply about how our history and social scripts inform our policy choices. When we talk about flexible parental leave for families, which families are we actually talking about? Families that look like us? Or *all families*? If it's the latter:

- **Paid parental leave is a cultural issue.** It needs to enable people to make autonomous decisions about what it means to be together as a family. This means allowing people to take parental leave around significant religious or cultural holidays that are central to their familial, communal, and spiritual lives. This is critical if we're interested in being a country that celebrates genuine diversity.
- **Paid parental leave is a racial issue.** If our social scripts hold certain groups higher than others, seeing some as 'hard-working' while others are 'lazy', people will face different barriers to accessing their leave without fear of penalty.
- **Paid parental leave is a class issue.** For working class people, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds - taking time away from work at reduced pay presents a unique financial burden. This pushes people to go back to work sooner and because men still earn more than women (on average) they're often the ones who go back to work.
 - This is supported by Harvard Business Review, who estimate that only 43% of people in the bottom income quartile take any leave after their child is born, stating 'low-income fathers are even less likely to take meaningful time off, fearing how deeply unpaid or reduced-pay time off would impact their family's financial survival' ([found here](#)).

We need to think carefully about the way our policies intersect with other issues. Are we challenging ourselves to create a society that equitable for all of us or are we further embedded structural inequalities that sees certain families benefit over 'other' families.



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