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Abstract

This article examines national data, we show that women are particularly likely to perceive a need for leave, and use is a consequence of the construction of leave policy—that it provides for only short, unpaid leaves for a narrow slice of workers and those politically constructed as “family”—and the unresponsiveness of workplaces. These limits likely reinforce inequality based on gender, race, and family status.



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- 1.
1. We write “at least a decade” because many versions of some part or another of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) have appeared since World War II when the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor recommended a 6-week prenatal period and 2-month postbirth leave for women.
- 2.
2. It is, at best, an estimate (perhaps based on a study contracted by the U.S. Department of Labor [McGonagle et al., 1995]), but for some reason the estimate vanishes from the written version of the state of the union address.
- 3.
3. Of course, even if we had national data before and after the passage of the FMLA, we would encounter some of the same problems in assessing causal significance as do the studies of state

maternity leaves discussed in the Literature Review section.

4.

4. If workers have any available paid leave (e.g., vacation time), employers may require they use it up as part of FMLA leave (unless the union contract specifies otherwise) (Schwartz, 1996).

5.

5. The variables use the break point of \$30,000 for both conceptual and methodological reasons: This approximates the median household income and the slope changed around this point. In addition, we should note that the survey did not include a measure of personal income; rather, it contained, and we used, a measure of household income. Although it might be interesting to look at both, for the purposes of this analysis we are fortunate that household income, as the data analysis reveals, is a useful and appropriate measure.

6.

6. It is important to note that our coverage variable describes whether the respondents were eligible for covered leave during the time of their leave by asking them to self-report on employer eligibility questions (e.g., how many employees were within 75 miles of where they worked and the number of hours they worked in the prior year). We do not have data on whether employers actually provided coverage. We further note two caveats concerning this variable. First, it does not unequivocally determine that respondents used FMLA covered leave time to take the particular leave they are describing in this survey. Second, the question asks the respondents for a complex rendering of employer characteristics, making it susceptible to error. For this reason, we have not made this variable central to most of our analyses.

7.

7. We also found a significant gender/age interaction. Young men are less likely than are older men to report needing leave, whereas young women are more likely than are older women to report needing a leave (data not shown). This may mean that young males are especially likely to feel they should give priority to building careers, whereas young women are especially prone not only to give birth but take care of family members (including but not limited to children because the effects of gender are net of children), which of course may have negative implications for their careers.

8.

8. Other bivariate analysis (data not shown) shows that poor women are significantly more likely than are wealthier women to perceive a need for leave. This class difference does not show up among men. However, when we examined the interaction of class and gender in multivariate models, these differences did not remain significant.

9.

9. In their review of 17 studies, Gorey, Rice, and Brice (1992) estimated that from 7% to 12% of employees have elder care responsibilities.

10.

10. However, we should note that the models estimated separately by gender showed that whereas there are no differences in length of leave among women of different races, we do find that Latino men (compared to White men) take significantly shorter leaves ($b = -.55$, significant at .05). There are, however, no significant differences among other racial groups of men.

11.

11. This is prior to the implementation of the current welfare laws, which may reduce the number able and willing to obtain public assistance payments while on leave.

12.

12. To explore subgroup differences in the efficacy of coverage, we also estimated the regression model in Table 6 with the following interaction terms: Coverage \times Race (African American, Latino, other race), Coverage \times Marriage, Coverage \times Gender, Coverage \times Income, and Coverage \times Union Membership. Only one interaction term was significant: Latino \times Coverage ($p < .05$), suggesting that coverage may be more important for helping Latinos take leave than non-Latinos. Nonetheless, given the large number of interactions we tested and our caution about our coverage variable as well as the lack of significance we found in most of these subgroup comparisons, we must exercise great caution in interpreting this particular result.

13.

13. It does cover lesbians and gays as parents but not as partners (Lenhoff, 1998).

14.

14. Because the answers were given in error (which is our point), we do not think it meaningful to analyze the social characteristics of those who mentioned these other kin and nonkin. We leave that to future research specifically directed to analyzing the range of kin and nonkin for whom individuals need and take leave. To develop our point that the narrow definition of the family is biased, it would be particularly useful to analyze the social characteristics, such as race, that shape such leaves.

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