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# The Facts Behind Why Americans Need Nationwide Paid Family Leave

MAY 11, 2016

The United States is the only advanced country in the world that provides no cash benefits to women during maternity leave. But 2016 has been a notable year of progress toward adequate family leave—including both parents and close family members with serious illnesses—in the United States, with New York State passing the nation’s strongest paid family leave program to date, California expanding their decade-old law to increase the wage replacement rates, and the city of San Francisco passing a paid parental leave ordinance. These laws build on existing paid family leave legislation in Rhode Island, New Jersey, and California, as well as the 1993 federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which grants certain employees unpaid leave with job protection. However, the vast majority of Americans are still left with no choice but dependency on their employer’s discretion of what family leave policies are.

There is a plethora of proven benefits that are afforded to individuals with paid family leave, and these assets would only increase from making such policies available to all Americans.

## 1. Health Benefits

There are significant health concerns during birth and early life for both the mother and the baby. In addition, parent-child bonding is important for health and development. Paid support during this critical time for childhood development would ensure parents don’t have to choose between their children and their financial security.

### *Mothers’ Health*

- Almost a quarter of women who give birth in the United States return to work just two weeks later. Fourteen days is proven to be too short of a time for women to recover from childbirth—both emotionally and physically (even more so in cases of c-sections, which are major surgeries and should be treated as such). Furthermore, there are a number of health factors prior to giving birth that may require mothers to use their leave time so as to heed by doctors’ bedrest orders.
- Job-induced stress—whether it be a lack of job security or returning to work prior to fully recovering—can also cause and exacerbate postpartum depression for new mothers.

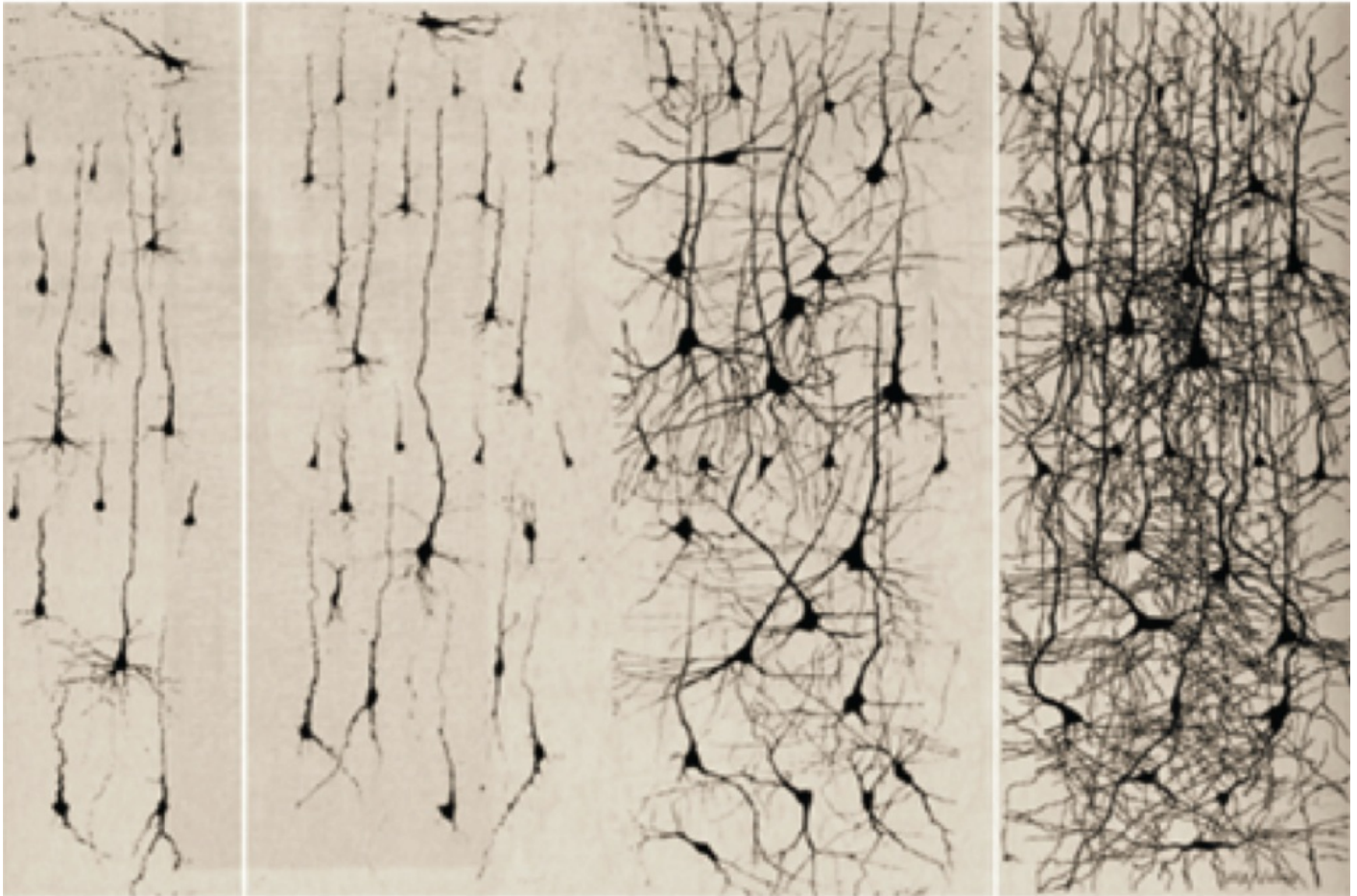
### *Babies’ Health*

- Maternity leave has been linked to improved child health outcomes (ranging from increased birth weight to decreased premature births), as well as the increased duration of breastfeeding, which has positive effects on babies (as well as their mothers).

- In terms of increased medical attention, newborns whose mothers take longer leaves are more likely to be taken to the pediatrician for regular check-ups.
- An additional ten weeks of paid leave for new parents has been shown to reduce post-neonatal mortality by up to 4.5 percent.

## 2. Improved Childhood Development

The critical relationship between a child and his or her parents begins early. It takes three months for an infant to begin recognizing a caregiver's voice, face, and smell—which applies to adoptive parents as well as birth parents. Approximately 90 percent of a child's brain development takes place before his or her fifth birthday, making parental involvement during these years crucial. We know that education begins on day one, and activities such as parents reading to their young children, for instance, vastly improves their vocabularies and gives them an educational head start. Paid family leave policies grant parents the opportunity to positively influence their child's early development.



DRAMATIC GROWTH OF NEURONAL ARCHITECTURE FROM NEWBORN, ONE MONTH, SIX MONTHS AND TWO YEARS (LEFT TO RIGHT). SOURCE: "THE PEDIATRICIANS ROLE IN ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD POVERTY", DAVID KELLER.

### 3. Gender Equity and the Case for Maternal and Paternal Leave

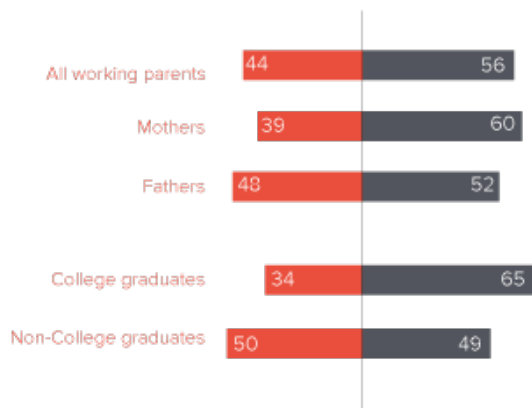
As stated by Century Foundation Fellow Julie Kashen, "Gender-neutral paid leave policies support women's workforce participation, men's caretaking participation, and greater gender equity."

## SIX-IN-TEN WORKING MOMS SAY BALANCING JOB AND FAMILY IS DIFFICULT

% saying it is \_\_\_\_\_ for them to balance the responsibilities of their job with the responsibilities of their family

■ Not too/Not at all difficult

■ Very/Somewhat difficult



Source: Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center survey of parents with children under 18, September 15-October 13, 2015.



### *Workplace Equity*

- A recent Pew Survey stated that the majority of American working parents (56 percent) says it is difficult to balance careers with family responsibilities; 60 percent of women answered yes to difficulty, as did 52 percent of fathers.
- When faced with the question of who will ease familial growing pains by taking care of children, it is still primarily women who are leaving the workforce (many of them without paid leave). Paid family leave has long term gains for both individuals and companies as it ultimately leads to greater workforce attachment and earning capacity for women. Furthermore, paid leave takers are more likely to be working than non-leavers nine to twelve months after childbirth, and 54 percent are more likely to earn higher wages in the next year (critical in the face of the United States's gender wage gap).
- Economists Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn have calculated that if the United States were to adopt similar paid parental leave, part-time work, and child care policies that Europe has, the American women's labor force participation rate would have been seven points higher than it was in 2010.

### *Coverage for Fathers, Adoptive Parents, and LGBT Parents*

- A recent Boston College study found that nearly 90 percent of respondents said it is critical for paid paternity leave to be made available in addition to maternity leave.
- Beyond women's workplace equity, parental leave for all parents is important given that fathers who take two or more weeks off following the birth of a child are significantly more active in that child's care nine months after their birth than fathers who are afforded no leave.
- Ensuring fathers receive paid time off is also of critical importance for same-sex male couples to care for their children. The same holds true for adoptive parents or lesbian mothers who did not give birth.
- Adoptive parents furthermore require paid time off for logistical and legal reasons—in the United States, they must remain in the state where they are adopting a child for seven to ten days after birth, and if adopting abroad, they must abide by the country at hand's own rules, not to mention necessary travel time.

## 4. Addressing Income Inequality

The current lack of federal paid family leave plays into the vast problems the United States has with income inequality.

### *Who Gets Paid Leave?*

- Well-paid people who have managerial (or higher)-level positions are the ones who are the most likely to receive paid family leave, even though it is the low-income families—who cannot pay for nannies and daycare—who need it most.
  - According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), only 5 percent of the lowest quartile of wage earners have access to paid family leave (as opposed to 21 percent of the highest quartile). Twenty-two percent of this lowest quartile cannot even take unpaid leave with job security.
  - For the lowest tenth of wage earners, these numbers dip to just 4 percent with access to paid leave and 25 percent without access to even unpaid leave. By stark contrast, for the highest paid tenth of workers, 22 percent have access to paid leave, and just 6 percent are without access to unpaid leave.

### *Further Disadvantages Linked to Income*

- Without paid leave, many people use their paid sick or vacation time to cover maternity or paternity leave. However, almost half of all people paid less than \$550 a week receive no paid personal leave, sick leave, family leave, or vacation at all.

- Focusing in on access to paid sick leave, which crucially ties into this debate (particularly given the aforementioned health effects of birth, or, as covered by family leave policies like the proposed FAMILY Act, recovery from intensive surgery or caring for an ill/injured family member), the BLS says only a quarter of the lowest-paid tenth of workers have access to paid sick leave, whereas 90 percent of the highest-paid tenth of workers do. Similar disparities are seen with vacation and personal days.
- As former Century Foundation Policy Associate Clio Chang has researched, the economic risks associated with a lack of family leave can have rapid and permanent effects on children. Factors such as economic insecurity from having to forgo income can introduce what is known as “toxic stress” into a family—something that can severely hinder a child’s neurological development and cause developmental delays such as failure to begin talking at a normal age.

## 5. Economic Stability

Paid family leave policies can have great positive influence over the economic stability of both individual American families and the United States as a whole.

### *Economic Stability of Individual Families*

- The Department of Labor (DOL) reports that 60 percent of people without fully paid family leave have trouble making ends meet and eventually end up cutting leave short. Furthermore, 15 percent of those who received partial or no pay during leave reported relying on public assistance to get by.
- It can be harder for people who leave their jobs to care for children to later return to the workforce, and when they do, they are often met with pay cuts and trouble getting eventual raises and promotions (which, as we know, affects gender inequity and family stability, as well).

### *Economic Stability of the United States*

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- A recent Center for Economic and Policy Research study on California (which has an existent paid family leave

policy) found that over nine-tenths of employers reported that those employees who took paid family leave performed at a higher or equal level upon their return. Additionally, many employees saved costs in the long run as those who took paid family leave were much more likely to stay with their employers. In a day in age in which people are increasingly moving from company to company, the significance of retention should not be understated.

- Indeed, as noted by YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki: “But paid maternity leave isn’t just good for mothers and babies; it’s good for business, too. After California instituted paid leave, a survey showed that 91 percent of all employers said the policy either boosted profits or had no effect. Employers also noted improved productivity, higher morale and reduced turnover.”

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