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Statistical Brief

Time Off for Babies: Maternity Leave Arrangements

As the proportion of women in the labor force has increased, so has interest in maternity leave arrangements. This brief describes the maternity leave arrangements that American working women have used for the birth of their first child and covers women who had their first birth between January 1961 and December 1985.

As more women have joined the work force, working during pregnancy has become the norm.

The proportion of all women who were working increased from 36 percent in 1960 to 50 percent in 1985. With this increase came another: the proportion who worked during their first pregnancy grew from 44 percent in 1961-65 to 65 percent in 1981-85. In addition, the proportion who worked continuously for 6 months before the birth of their first child rose from 60 percent in 1961-65 to 75 percent in 1981-85.



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First-time mothers are relatively older and more educated.

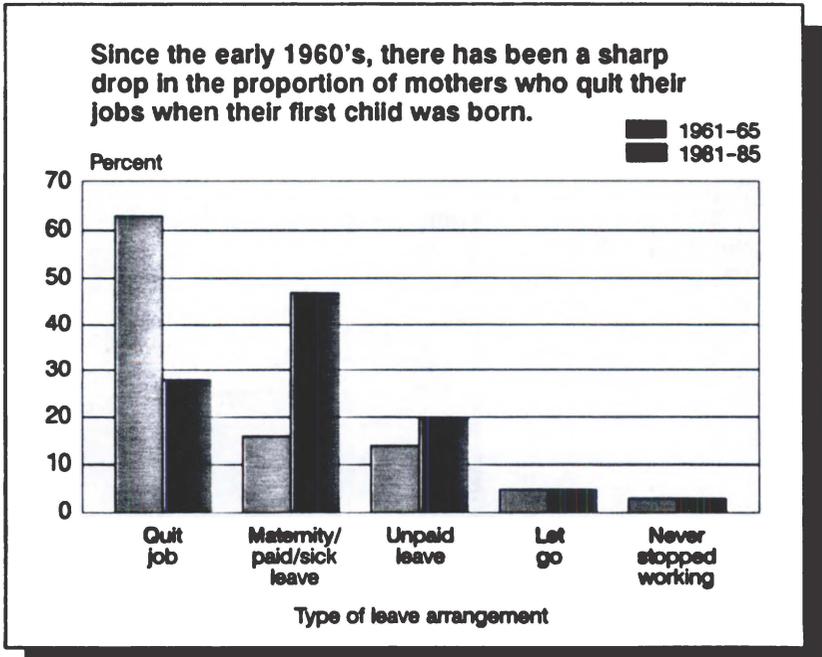
As women have pursued their educations and developed careers, they have delayed child-bearing. By 1985, 4 of 10 first births occurred to women 25 and over, compared with only 2 of 10 in 1960.

Of the women who were first-time mothers at age 25 and over in 1985, 96 percent had completed high school, 64 percent had completed 1 year or more of college, and 38 percent had completed college. If these women were in the work force before

they became pregnant, they were likely to remain there after becoming pregnant

They work longer into their pregnancies . . .

In the early 1960's, women who worked longer into their pregnancy were primarily teenagers, part-time workers, and high school dropouts. In the 1980's, however, older, better-educated, married women were working longer than their younger, less educated, unmarried counterparts. Perhaps women today view their jobs from a long-term perspective and





realize that the amount of time lost from a career affects job retention and future opportunities with their employer.

... and return to work rather than quit after their child's birth.

In the 1960's, 6 of 10 pregnant women voluntarily quit their jobs before their child's birth; by 1981-85, fewer than 3 of 10 did so. Younger mothers are much more likely to quit their jobs before their first child is born; in 1981-85, more than 4 of 10 women 18-21 years old quit their jobs, while only 2 of 10 women 25 and over quit.

Benefits are one big reason for returning.

The proportion of women receiving maternity or paid leave almost tripled, from 1 of 6 in 1961-65 to almost half in 1981-85. Employer financial contributions for maternity benefits also increased since the 1960's: among expectant mothers on maternity leave, four-fifths received cash benefits, up from one-half in 1961-65. First-time mothers 25 years and over are more likely to receive maternity benefits. Recipients of maternity benefits tend to have at least 1 year of college and work full time into their last trimester. Their greater work

experience and career commitment give them the edge in securing benefits and receiving full compensation.

Women are returning to work more rapidly after childbirth.

In the early 1960's, very few new mothers, only one out of six, were working before their child's first birthday. Now, one-half of women with newborns are working within a year of their child's birth. In fact, in 1981-84, one-third were working 3 months after their child's birth; this level of workforce participation was not attained until 5 years after childbirth among women who had their first birth in the early 1960's.

Throughout the 1961-85 period, 75 to 85 percent of women who returned to work less than 3 months after childbirth did so on a full-time basis. But among women who returned 3 to 12 months after childbirth, only 57 percent in 1981-84 returned full-time versus 74 percent in 1961-65.

Maternity benefits and rapid return go hand in hand.

Women who worked during pregnancy in 1981-84 were more likely to return to work less than 6 months after their child's birth (56

percent) than were women who were not employed during pregnancy (13 percent). And among employed women, 7 of 10 women who received maternity benefits returned to work less than 6 months after childbirth, compared with slightly over 4 of 10 women without benefits. This suggests that employment during pregnancy, maternity benefits, and job retention are important contributors to the changing work patterns of American working women.

The data described here come from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and were collected between January and April of 1986.

**For information on this topic:
See**

Work and Family Patterns of American Women, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 165. Stock number 803-005-10018-9. \$3.25 For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. For telephone orders, call (202) 783-3238.

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Women who had maternity benefits were more likely to return to work less than 6 months after giving birth.

