

SHORT ABSTRACT

Maternity and Paternity Leave: Contemporaneous Evidence the June Current Population Survey

Jacob Alex Klerman, RAND

This paper combines contemporaneous data on labor market status from the basic monthly Current Population Survey (CPS) and information on the age of a child in months from the Fertility Supplement to the June Current Population Survey to generate new estimates of maternity and paternity leave behavior and how it has changed over the last two decades. We find sharply contrasting patterns across the two parents. The nearly continuous and dramatic decrease in time away from work around the birth of a child appears to have ended in the early-1990s and perhaps reversed. In contrast, until approximately the mid-1990s, there was no evidence that fathers changed their work patterns around the birth of a child, but that pattern also appears to have changed with emerging evidence of measurable paternity leave--lower levels of work among fathers in the months immediately before and after the birth of a child.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Maternity and Paternity Leave: Contemporaneous Evidence the June Current Population Survey

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Over the last three decades, American women have left the labor force for shorter and shorter periods of time; so that today the time away from work is often measured in months and fathers have begun to take paternity leave. This paper combines contemporaneous data on labor market status from the basic monthly Current Population Survey (CPS) and information on the age of a child in months from the Fertility Supplement to the June Current Population Survey to generate new estimates of maternity and paternity leave behavior and how it has changed over the last two decades.

For maternity leave, these estimates are complementary with several other related attempts (see Smith and Bachu, 1999, for a review of the literature). This paper's basic insight—using June Fertility Supplement information to date births—was first used by Klerman and Leibowitz (1994). This paper extends the sample period forward and matches across CPS interviews to approximately triple the sample size. O'Connell (1990) and Smith, Downs, and O'Connell (2001) construct related tabulations for first births using retrospective responses in Survey of Income and Program Participation topical modules. Those studies are subject to standard concerns about the quality of retrospective data and only consider first births. In particular, we will show that maternity leave behavior is a changing combination of unpaid leave, paid vacation, and part-time work. Retrospective methods are particularly poorly suited to recovering such gradually changing outcomes. Finally, several authors (e.g., Klerman and Leibowitz, 1999) have used the National Longitudinal Survey's (NLS) detailed labor force histories to characterize maternity leave. Those data's longitudinal structure makes them rich for some analyses. However, they are also subject to some recall bias; especially in earlier years, it is not possible to distinguish paid leave from work; they cover only a limited span of years; and even within those years, the NLS is a cohort sample, making it nearly impossible to derive true population estimates.

Preliminary results suggest a striking divergence in patterns across parents. For women, the long and large decrease in the time away from work at the birth of a child

end in the mid-1990s and may have reversed. Today, in the months immediately before and after the birth of a child, about half of all mothers are employed. For the months (one to three) immediately after the birth of the child, many of those new mothers are on leave—paid or unpaid. But for those who are actually working, only about half are working full-time, the balance are working part-time (less than 20 hours a week). For fathers the pattern is quite different, until the early-1990s, there was no evidence of measurable paternity leave---short-term leave (paid or unpaid) or even part-time work. However, from the mid-1990s, there emerges measurable evidence of such paternity leave.

Our paper exploits the characteristics of our matched CPS data—very large samples, contemporaneous questions, and a nationally representative sample—to characterize maternity and paternity leave. How does it vary over calendar time, by the age of the child, and by the family’s other characteristics (race/ethnicity, marital status, parental age and education, parity). Beyond describing the trends, we decompose them into a component due to changes in the characteristics of new mothers and a change in behavior conditional on characteristics. We find that some, but not much of the changes in behavior are due to changes in the characteristics of mothers; with the changes predominantly due to changes in behavior conditional on parental characteristics. Finally, (in work currently underway) we explore the relation between the state of the economy (as proxied by the unemployment rate) and parental labor market behaviors – employment and leave take.

A Note to the Session Organizers about Paper Status

This is work in progress. We have a partial draft of the paper with the descriptive results for mothers and the shift-share decomposition. The results on paternity leave a preliminary based on limited analyses of some individual CPS years. We are currently rebuilding our data set to include more information on fathers and to further expanding our sample size to allow more careful examination of patterns late in pregnancy. The work on the effects of the economy are the project for this winter.

