

Leave Usage Following a First Birth Among Men in the United States: Evidence from New Nationally Representative Data

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Abstract

Evolving norms regarding men's role in childrearing and policy debates surrounding the adoption of a national paid parental leave policy underscore the importance of understanding how patterns of leave-taking among American men have changed, as well as the characteristics of men who do take leave. This paper uses data from the 2019 and 2020 Survey of Income and Program Participation to describe patterns of leave usage among men over time and model factors associated with the likelihood of men with first births after 2010 taking leave, differentiating between leave types. It finds that first-time fathers' use of leave (particularly paid parental leave) has increased over time, and that there is sociodemographic variation in the use of leave by recent first-time fathers. Men with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to take leave and, more specifically, to take paid leave than those with lower levels of educational attainment.

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² This paper is released to inform interested parties of research and evaluation and to encourage discussion. The views expressed on statistical, measurement, or methodological issues are those of the author and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau. The author would like to thank Ashley Westra from the Census Bureau's Demographic Statistical Methods Division for assistance in developing the weighting adjustment strategy used in this paper. All estimates in this paper are produced using public-use data.

Introduction/Prior Research

While dozens of countries worldwide have implemented paid parental leave for fathers (O'Brien, 2009), the United States lacks a national paid parental leave policy for men and is one of the only high-income countries that does not mandate paid maternity leave (Heymann, 2013). Some men are eligible for paid parental leave through their employer, and others are able to take unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). However, many men are not eligible for paternity leave. Gendered historical parenting expectations in heterosexual couples have treated men as breadwinners, while nurturing has been seen as women's role (Coleman & Franiuk, 2011). While these norms are evolving, their influence persists.

Research has suggested that paternity leave use is associated with benefits such as increased involvement among fathers in their children's lives (Marsiglio & Roy, 2012). However, a paucity of available data has limited researchers' capacity to identify benefits associated with paternity leave. Rather than assessing the possible benefits or implications of leave usage, most existing research regarding paternity leave has focused on the question of who takes leave. A variety of factors have been proposed and explored as being linked to leave usage, ranging from men's perceptions of father identity and fathering roles to relationship commitment between parents (Pragg & Knoester, 2017). Perhaps the greatest amount of attention has been dedicated to exploring demographic and socioeconomic variation in men's parental leave usage. Past research has found that White fathers use leave at higher rates than fathers from other race and origin groups (Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Pragg & Knoester, 2017). Older fathers have been identified as more likely to take paternity leave than younger fathers, perhaps owing to greater career stability (Petts et al., 2020). Men with higher incomes and higher educational

attainment have also been found to be more likely to take paternity leave (Brandth & Kvande, 2002; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007), likely as a result of greater availability of leave from an employer for workers with higher socioeconomic status (Klerman et al., 2012). Variation in the use of leave across these characteristics also depends on the type of leave taken -- for example, when comparing use of paid leave to use of unpaid leave (Petts et al., 2020).

Gaps in the Literature

The above studies have relied on the few existing sources of data available in the United States about paternity leave usage. Surveys that have included questions regarding this topic include the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW), the National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997 (NLSY97), and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) (Petts et al., 2020). However, these data sources are either not nationally representative (in the case of FFCW) or rely on births from a relatively narrow period. As a result, little is known about how patterns of parental leave usage among men have evolved over time or about the characteristics of men taking leave in the most recent birth cohorts.

New Data: Parental Leave in the Survey of Income and Program Participation

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is a nationally representative panel survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau that collects information on a variety of topics related to economic wellbeing, family dynamics, education, and wealth, among others.³ The 2019 SIPP included a series of questions about parental leave for the first time since the 2008 panel. While prior panels had only asked women about parental leave usage, the 2019

³ Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. For further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates, including standard errors and confidence intervals, see <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html>.

panel asked both men and women parental leave questions. Respondents were asked whether they worked during the pregnancy leading up to the birth of their first child. Those who worked during the pregnancy were asked whether they continued working right up to the birth. Additional information collected included the type(s) of leave (if any) used prior to the birth, how long prior to the birth the respondent stopped working, the type(s) of leave (if any) used after the child was born, whether the respondent worked at any time after the birth, and how long after the birth the respondent started working. Regarding type of leave taken, the available response options were: paid maternity/paternity leave, unpaid maternity/paternity leave, paid sick leave, unpaid sick leave, disability leave, paid vacation leave, and some other type of leave.⁴ If respondents used multiple types of leave, they could select multiple response options. The SIPP is unique among surveys that collect information regarding parental leave usage among men in that information is released for all men under age 65 at the time of interview, facilitating comparisons across cohorts.

Current Paper and Analytic Approach

This paper uses data from the 2019 and 2020 SIPP to develop a profile of leave usage among men in the United States, filling the gaps in the existing literature identified above. It aims to use these new data to answer two questions. First, how have patterns of leave usage among men evolved over time? Second, which demographic and socioeconomic factors are related to men's likelihood to 1) take any type of leave, and, among those men taking leave, 2) to take a given type of leave?

⁴ Respondents could also indicate that they quit or were let go from their job, but those responses are excluded from these analyses.

The paper proceeds in two sections. The first section explores trends in parental leave usage following a father's first birth over time, relying on statistical testing of group differences.⁵ The comparisons show five-year age cohorts of men based on the timing of their first birth, dating back to 1980. The distributions presented explore how the frequency of men using any type of leave has evolved across cohorts, and how the relative frequency of men using paid vacation leave, paid parental leave, and unpaid parental leave has evolved across cohorts.⁶ While not implying causation, these analyses shed light on the degree to which changing gender norms and employer-based, state, and local parental leave policies have affected men's leave usage.

The second, main section of the paper focuses on model-based analyses of the most recent available cohort of men – those with births after 2010. Logistic regression models explore 1) the likelihood of these men to take any type of leave following their first birth; and 2) the likelihood of men who did take leave following their first birth to take a) paid leave of any kind (parental, sick, or vacation); b) paid parental leave; c) unpaid leave of any kind (parental or sick); and d) unpaid parental leave.⁷ Relying on the findings and modeling approaches from prior research (Laughlin, 2011; Petts et al., 2020), these multivariate regression models control for: age at first birth, race and Hispanic origin, timing of first birth relative to first marriage, and educational attainment. Since the SIPP only collects information regarding income, employment status, etc. during the year preceding the interview, rather than at the time of a respondent's first birth, these factors cannot be included in regression modeling.

⁵ All comparative statements in this report have undergone statistical testing, and, unless otherwise noted, all comparisons are statistically significant at the 10 percent significance level.

⁶ Since respondents could indicate that they took multiple types of leave, these categories are not mutually exclusive.

⁷ As above, since respondents could indicate that they used multiple types of leave, the same respondents may be in the 'yes' group for multiple models.

The analyses in these paper pool data from the 2019 and 2020 SIPP in order to maximize the available sample of fathers. This combined cohort is created by leveraging data from the last available panel for a given respondent as of the 2020 SIPP. This approach means that data from the 2020 SIPP are used for 2018 Wave 3 and 2020 Wave 1 respondents, while data from the 2019 SIPP are used for 2019 Wave 1 respondents⁸ and 2018 Wave 2 respondents for instances in which a Wave 3 interview was not conducted.

The nature of this pooled approach means that the SIPP person weights cannot be used in analyses without appropriate adjustments. For the purposes of these analyses, the period of interest is treated as 2020, meaning that the goal of adjusting the weights is to generate totals that align with those that would be generated using the 2020 weights alone. Two adjustments are required to achieve this aim.

First, as discussed above, some 2018 Wave 2 cases from the 2019 SIPP were not interviewed in the 2020 SIPP, meaning that they lack 2020 weights. Assuming that those 2018 panel cases that were interviewed in both 2019 and 2020 (referred to as ‘Group 1’) and those 2018 panel cases that were interviewed only in 2019 (referred to as ‘Group 2’) are similar because both were interviewed in the 2019 SIPP, this issue can be addressed by applying a ‘reverse non-interview adjustment,’ in which the 2020 weights for Group 1 are redistributed across Groups 1 and 2, proportional to their 2019 weights. The adjustment factor is defined as $\alpha = Y/X$, where $X = \sum weights_{2019}$ for *all* 2018 Wave 2 cases, and $Y = \sum weights_{2020}$ for the subset of 2018 Wave 2 cases that were interviewed in both 2019 and 2020. The weights for all individuals in Groups 1 and 2 are transformed by multiplying the 2019 weights by α . For the

⁸ Wave 1 cases from the 2019 SIPP were not interviewed in 2020. For more information, refer to <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/user-notes/2019-usernotes/2019-discont-2019-pnl.html>.

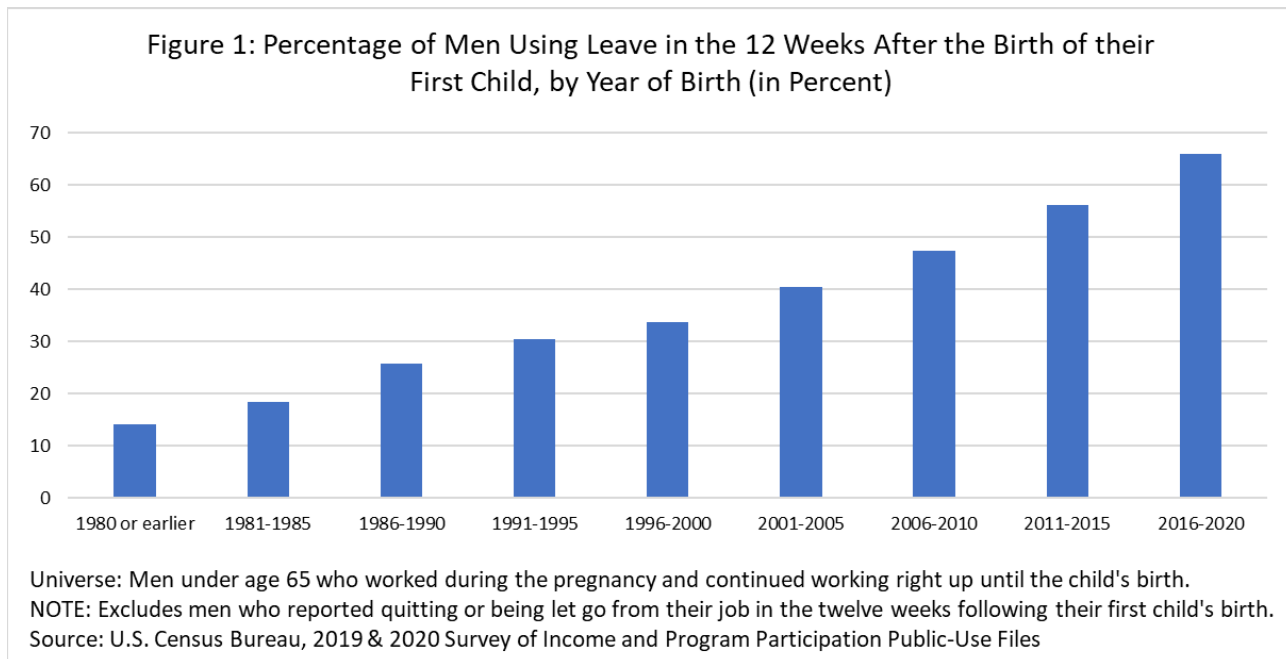
final person weights, α is equal to 0.6943. This process generates adjusted 2020 weights for these groups, correcting for the frequency with which 2018 Wave 2 cases from 2019 were not interviewed in 2020.

Second, since the 2019 and 2020 survey years are being combined, all of the person weights must be adjusted to align the population totals with the weighted 2020 totals. This is achieved through the transformation $weight_{adj} = weight_{unadj} * \beta$, where $\beta = 1 - (\Sigma weights_{2019}) / (\Sigma weights_{2018} + \Sigma weights_{2019} + \Sigma weights_{2020})$. For the final person weights, β is equal to 0.73249.

Performing these two transformations yields a nationally representative dataset of first-time fathers from the last wave at which they were interviewed, thereby leveraging the full available sample from the 2019 and 2020 SIPP. The logistic models rely on an overall sample of 2,472 men with first births after 2010 in order to focus on the most recent cohort of first-time fathers.

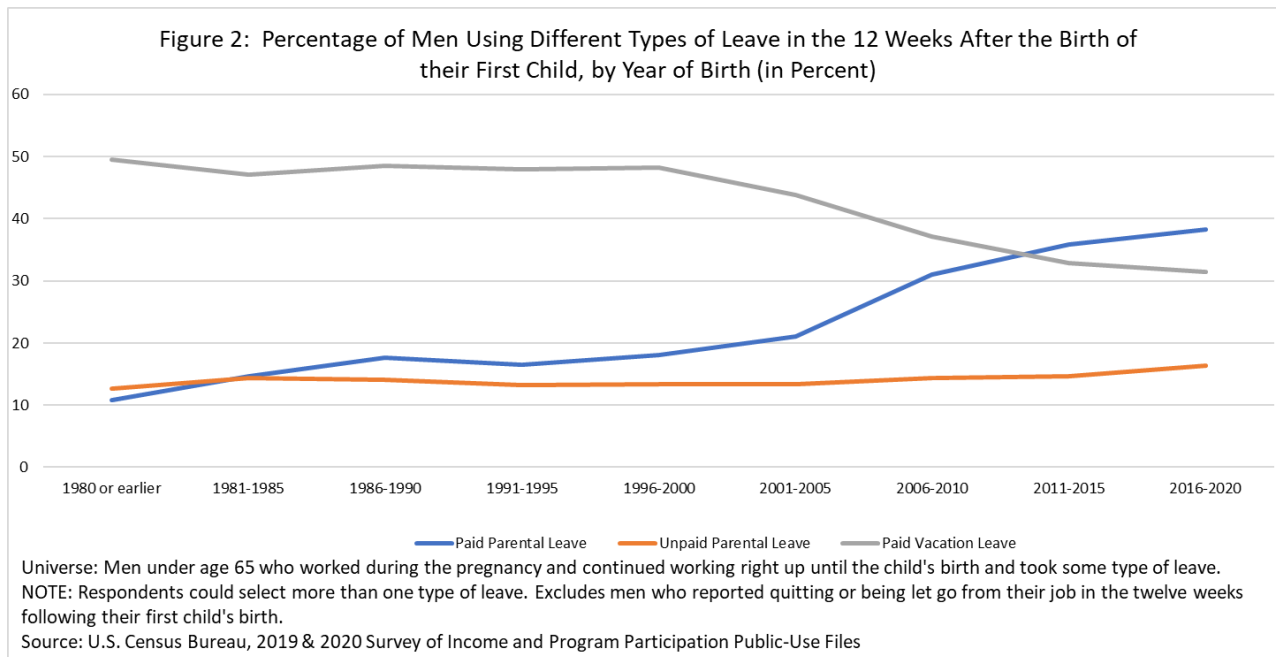
Results

Figure 1 presents how the percentage of men taking leave has changed over time among those who worked during the pregnancy preceding their first birth. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the share of men taking leave has increased over time, from 14.0 percent among those men with first births in 1980 or earlier to 65.9 percent among men with first births from 2016 to 2020.



Meanwhile, Figure 2 presents how the usage of different leave types has evolved over time among those men who took some type of leave. Notably, the percentage of men taking paid parental leave has increased over time, from 10.8 percent among those men who took leave after births in 1980 or earlier to 38.3 percent among men who took leave after first births from 2016 to 2020. Over this same period, men's use of paid vacation leave has declined, from 49.5 percent among men who took leave after births in 1980 or earlier to 31.4 percent among men who took leave after first births from 2016 to 2020.⁹

⁹ The percentage of men with first births from 2016 to 2020 taking paid paternity leave and the percentage taking paid vacation leave did not differ significantly.



Establishing the way in which men's leave use patterns have evolved over time and what they look like for more recent birth cohorts sets the stage for identifying factors associated with leave use among men with births after 2010. Table 1 presents the results of the logistic regression model described above predicting the likelihood of first-time fathers since 2011 taking any type of leave.

The results indicate that a number of factors influence first-time fathers' likelihood of taking leave. Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic first-time fathers are less likely to take leave than non-Hispanic White first-time fathers (roughly 47 and 69 percent as likely, respectively¹⁰). The timing of men's first birth relative to the start of their first marriage also proves to be influential, with men whose first birth occurred after their first marriage began being roughly 1.8 times more likely to take leave than those whose first birth occurred prior to their first marriage. Finally, the strongest predictor of first-time father's likelihood to take leave is educational

¹⁰ The difference between the odds ratios for non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic first-time fathers was not statistically significant.

attainment. Those with less than a high school degree are roughly 48 percent as likely to take leave as high school graduates, while those with a bachelor's degree or higher are roughly 1.6 times as likely to take leave as high school graduates.

Meanwhile, Table 2 presents the likelihood of those first-time fathers who took any type of leave to take a given type of leave (paid leave of any kind [parental, sick, and/or vacation], paid parental leave, unpaid leave of any kind [parental and/or sick], and unpaid parental leave).

As with the likelihood of taking leave of any kind, the likelihood of taking a given type of leave is also associated with first-time fathers' educational attainment. Those with at least a bachelor's degree or higher are roughly 2.6 times more likely to take paid leave of some kind than high school graduates and roughly 2.2 times more likely to take paid parental leave, among those who do take leave.¹¹ By contrast, those with a bachelor's degree or higher are much less likely to take unpaid leave of any kind (roughly 31 percent as likely) or specifically to take unpaid parental leave (roughly 41 percent as likely) than high school graduates.¹² Meanwhile, age at first birth is positively associated with first-time fathers' likelihood of taking paid leave of any kind, and negatively associated with first-time fathers' likelihood of taking unpaid leave of any kind. Non-Hispanics who did not identify as White or Black are more likely to take paid parental leave than their non-Hispanic White counterparts.

Discussion/Limitations

As discussed above, the U.S. is unique among high-income countries in its lack of a paid parental leave policy for men or women. In the absence of a national policy, changing gender

¹¹ The odds of those with a bachelor's degree or higher to take paid leave of some kind and to take paid parental leave compared to those with a high school degree did not differ significantly.

¹² The odds of those with a bachelor's degree or higher to take unpaid leave of some kind and to take unpaid parental leave compared to those with a high school degree did not differ significantly.

norms surrounding parenting and employer-based, state, and local leave policies in place at the time of a man's first birth likely play a key role in shaping trends in men's leave usage, as well as the factors influencing men's likelihood of taking any type or a given type of leave. Evidence of this can be seen in the patterns of leave usage over time presented in this study, in which men's leave usage generally and use of paid parental leave specifically have increased during a period when men's role in parenting has changed (Coleman & Franiuk, 2011) and the availability of paid parental leave for workers in selected occupations has expanded.

Given that occupation at the time of the birth likely plays an important role in first-time fathers' likelihood to take any type or a specific type of leave, it is a limitation of this study that this information is not captured in the SIPP and therefore cannot be directly captured in the modeled results. However, the modeling does point to the presence of this relationship, albeit indirectly. Educational attainment appears to be the most salient available predictor of leave-taking, and differences in first-time fathers' likelihood of taking paid leave and unpaid leave based on educational attainment may also be indicative of employment-based differences in the availability of different types of leave. Differences in first-time fathers' propensity to take leave based on race/Hispanic origin and educational attainment align with prior research (Brandth & Kvande, 2002; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Pragg & Knoester, 2017). These patterns are perhaps indicative of differences in the types of jobs in which fathers were employed at the time of their first birth and the associated leave policies, given that educational attainment and race/Hispanic origin are associated with income (Shrider et al., 2021), and higher-income occupations are generally more likely to offer more generous leave policies (Clemans-Cope et al., 2008). Likewise, the finding that older first-time fathers are more likely to take paid leave,

which aligns with Petts et al. (2020), may be due to employment-based differences, or differences in the amount of leave accrued at the time of the birth.

Conclusion

A lack of available data has inhibited the investigation of leave usage following a first birth among men in the United States. This study uses new nationally representative data to document the increase in men's use of leave and, more specifically, paid parental leave over time, and identifies key sociodemographic factors influencing men's likelihood to take any type or a specific type of leave. Educational attainment, likely acting as a proxy for occupation and therefore access to leave, plays a particularly central role. The profile offered by this study is by no means comprehensive, and the lack of information regarding men's industry and occupation at the time of the birth is a key limitation. Nonetheless, the findings in this study warrant further investigation and discussion in the context of the continuing evolution of historical norms regarding men's and women's roles in childrearing and policy debates surrounding the adoption of a national paid parental leave policy.

Table 1: Odds of Men Taking Leave in the 12 Weeks After the Birth of their First Child: 2011 - present

Characteristics	All men with a first birth ¹		
	Any type of leave		
	Odds ratio	Significance	p-value
Age			
Age at first birth	1.01	N.S.	0.308
Race and Hispanic Origin			
Non-Hispanic White	R	-	
Non-Hispanic Black	0.471	**	0.003
Non-Hispanic Other	0.881	N.S.	0.532
Hispanic (any race)	0.694	*	0.033
Marital Status ²			
First birth occurred after first marriage began	1.783	**	0.010
First birth occurred prior to first marriage began	R	-	
Educational Attainment			
Less than high school	0.479	***	0.001
High school graduate	R	-	
Some college or associate's degree	1.154	N.S.	0.373
Bachelor's degree or higher	1.613	**	0.002

R = Reference group

Note: N.S. = Not Significant; * = p<0.05; ** = p<0.01; *** = p<0.001

¹ Men under age 65 who worked during the pregnancy and continued working right up until the child's birth. Excludes men who reported quitting or being let go from their job in the twelve weeks following their first child's birth.

² Prior to first marriage includes never-married men. After first marriage includes first births outside of first marriage, within second or subsequent marriages, and between marriages.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 & 2020 Survey of Income and Program Participation Public-Use Files

Characteristics		Men who took any type of leave ¹									
		Paid leave (sick, parental, vacation)					Unpaid leave (sick, parental)				
		Odds ratio	Significance	p-value	Odds ratio	Significance	p-value	Odds ratio	Significance	p-value	Odds ratio
Age											
Age at first birth		1.048	**	0.003	1.026	N.S.	0.11	0.968	*	0.038	0.978
											N.S.
Race and Hispanic Origin											
Non-Hispanic White	R		-		R	-		R	-		-
Non-Hispanic Black	0.545	N.S.	0.117	0.743	N.S.	0.449	0.95	N.S.	0.878	0.621	N.S.
Non-Hispanic Other	1.257	N.S.	0.496	2.3	**	0.001	0.878	N.S.	0.727	0.985	N.S.
Hispanic (any race)	1.03	N.S.	0.911	1.421	N.S.	0.327	0.762	N.S.	0.353	1.057	N.S.
Marital Status ²											
First birth occurred after first marriage began	1.494	N.S.	0.286	1.194	N.S.	0.607	0.714	N.S.	0.342	0.827	N.S.
First birth occurred prior to first marriage began	R	-		R	-		R	-		R	-
Educational Attainment											
Less than high school	0.681	N.S.	0.274	0.685	N.S.	0.347	2.081	N.S.	0.054	2.636	*
High school graduate	R	-		R	-		R	-		R	-
Some college or associate's degree	1.247	N.S.	0.344	1.157	N.S.	0.541	0.626	N.S.	0.100	0.88	N.S.
Bachelor's degree or higher	2.609	***	<0.001	2.181	***	<0.001	0.309	***	<0.001	0.405	**

R = Reference group

Note: N.S. = Not Significant; * = p<0.05; ** = p<0.01; *** = p<0.001

¹ Respondents could select more than one type of leave.

² Prior to first marriage includes never-married men. After first marriage includes first births outside of first marriage, within second or subsequent marriages, and between marriages.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 & 2020 Survey of Income and Program Participation Public-Use Files

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