

# Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961–2008

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## INTRODUCTION

The labor force participation of mothers has increased dramatically over the last 3 decades, and women have become more likely to work continuously over their life cycle. Almost two-thirds of American women (62 percent) with a birth in the last year were in the labor force in 2008.<sup>1</sup> A child's birth may also require changes in a mother's work schedule to accommodate the demands of raising young children. This report examines trends in maternity leave and the employment patterns of women who gave birth to their first child between January 1961 and December 2008.<sup>2</sup>

The analysis primarily uses retrospective fertility, employment, and maternity leave data from the 2008 Panel of the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), conducted in 2008.<sup>3</sup> Previously published results based

on similarly collected information from the 1984, 1985, 1996, 2001, and 2004 SIPP Panels are also included.<sup>4</sup>

The report first analyzes trends in women's work experience prior to their first birth and the factors associated with employment during pregnancy. Changes are placed in the historical context of the enactment of family-related legislation during the last quarter of the twentieth century. The next section identifies the maternity leave arrangements used by women before and after their first birth and the shifts that have occurred in the mix of leave arrangements that are used. The final section examines how rapidly mothers return to work after their first birth and the factors related to the length of time they are absent from the labor force.

In addition to updating childbearing, employment, and maternity leave trends through the 1990s, the report provides details on changes many new mothers experience in the number of hours worked, pay level, and job-skill level after the first birth. These changes are examined in relation to whether a woman returned to the same employer she had during pregnancy or changed employers

<sup>1</sup> Jane Lawler Dye, *Fertility of American Women: June 2008*, Current Population Reports, P20-563, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2010, Table 3.

<sup>2</sup> The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from the actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> The data in this report were collected from January through April 2009 in the second wave (interview) of the 2008 SIPP; from June through September 2004 in the second wave of the 2004 SIPP; from June through September 2001 in the second wave of the 2001 SIPP; from August through November 1996 in the second wave of the 1996 SIPP; from January through April 1986 in the fourth wave of the 1985 SIPP; and from January through March 1986 in the eighth wave of the 1984 SIPP. The population represented (population universe) is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the previously published reports, see Martin O'Connell, "Maternity Leave Arrangements: 1961–85," *Work and Family Patterns of American Women*, Current Population Reports, P23-165, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1990; Kristin Smith, Barbara Downs, and Martin O'Connell, *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*, Current Population Reports, P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2001; Julia Overturf Johnson and Barbara Downs, *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2000*, Current Population Reports, P70-103, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2005; Tallese D. Johnson, *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961–2003*, P70-113, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2008.

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By  
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after the birth of the child. This report also examines how various social and economic factors are related to the timing of new mothers returning to work.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTHERS AT FIRST BIRTH

Social and economic changes that have occurred among women since 1961 have been noted to be associated with changes in families, child bearing, and work. At the same time, the demographic picture of new mothers has also changed.<sup>5</sup> This section analyzes some of these events and shows how the characteristics of first-time mothers have changed over time.

### Age and Educational Attainment of First-Time Mothers

Young women who give birth in their late teens and early twenties are beginning to start families at ages when other women are completing high school and entering college. Women who have delayed childbearing until their late twenties and thirties are more likely to have completed their schooling and to have accumulated more years of work experience than their younger counterparts.<sup>6</sup> Education and experience can influence income levels and job security, which may in turn influence their decisions about working during pregnancy and how soon to return to work after their first birth.

Age at first birth and the educational attainment of new mothers have changed over time. Data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) show that the mean (average) age at first birth increased 3.6 years from 1970 to

<sup>5</sup> Lynne M. Casper and Suzanne M. Bianchi, *Continuity and Change in the American Family*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Barrow, "An Analysis of Women's Return-to-Work Decisions Following First Birth," *Economic Inquiry*, July 1999, pp. 432–451.

## SIPP FERTILITY, EMPLOYMENT, AND MATERNITY LEAVE DATA

The 2008 panel of the nationally representative SIPP included a fertility topical module in the second wave of interviews conducted in January–April 2009. Information was collected on the birth dates of the first and last children born to all women aged 15 to 64 at the time of the survey. Women whose first child was born between 1991 and the survey date were also asked a series of questions concerning their employment history before and after the birth, as well as their receipt of maternity leave benefits. Data from this survey were used in combination with similar information collected in the 1984, 1985, 1996, and 2001 SIPP panels to provide an extended series of employment and maternity leave data between 1961 and 2008.

The most recent data shown in this report, generally for the time period 2006–2008, are from Wave 2 of the 2008 SIPP. In previous reports, data for prior decades were often generated retrospectively from the most recent survey. For this report, data presented from 1961–2000 were obtained from earlier maternity leave reports produced by the U.S. Census Bureau or were retabulated and the most recent time period was generated by the survey year closest to that period. Data from 1961–1965 to 1981–1985 are from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 (Work and Family Patterns of American Women); data from 1986–1990 to 1991–1995 are from P70-79 (Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995); and data from 1996–2000 are from P70-103 (Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2000). For this reason, some of the data for prior survey years shown in this report may not be identical to those published in previous reports for similar time periods.

2007, from 21.4 to 25.0 years.<sup>7</sup> The percentage of first births that were to women aged 35 and over increased nearly eight times between 1970 and 2006, from 1 percent to 8 percent. At the same time, the percentage of first births that were to women under 20 years of age dropped from 36 percent to 21 percent. Although not available by birth order, educational attainment among all mothers has also increased since 1970. In 2007, 24 percent of mothers had completed a bachelor's degree or more, compared with 9 percent in 1970.

<sup>7</sup> T.J. Matthews and B.E. Hamilton, "Delayed Childbearing: More Women Are Having Their First Child Later in Life," *NCHS Data Brief*, Vol. 21, NCHS, Hyattsville, MD, 2009. J.A. Martin and B.E. Hamilton, et al., "Births: Final Data for 2007," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 58, No. 24, NCHS, Hyattsville, MD, 2010, Tables 2 and 10.

Among mothers aged 30 to 34, the proportion completing 16 or more years of education increased from 15 percent to 43 percent.<sup>8</sup>

During this time, an increasing proportion of women 25 to 34 years old continued their education beyond high school. The proportion who had completed 4 or more years of college approximately doubled from 12 percent in 1970 to 23 percent by 1990. By 2007, the proportion with a bachelor's degree or more education had reached 34

<sup>8</sup> Data for 1970 are from the NCHS, *Vital Statistics of the United States*, Vol. 1, "Natality," U.S. Government Printing Office, Rockville, MD, 1975. Data for 2007 are from J.A. Martin and B.E. Hamilton, et al., "Births: Final Data for 2007," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 58, No. 24, NCHS, Hyattsville, MD, 2010, Table 1.

percent.<sup>9</sup> The age and educational attainment of first-time mothers as related to their work history around the time of their child's birth are examined in ensuing sections of this report.

### Factors Related to Employment and Maternity Leave

During the past 40 years, the way families approach work and child rearing has dramatically changed. In the 1970s, the common expectation that women would leave work upon becoming pregnant began to change.<sup>10</sup> Another change during the 1970s was an increase in the proportion of families with a second income. More mothers, to maintain economic well-being and for other reasons, began to enter and stay in the workforce, resulting in an increase in homes where both spouses worked.<sup>11</sup>

Legislative, judicial, and regulatory changes related to maternal employment were enacted in the 1970s and 1980s that affected employer practices during an employee's pregnancy and after giving birth, and revised policies on child care support. For example, in 1976 the federal tax code was changed to permit working families with a dependent child to take a tax credit for child care costs. The affordability of child care services may be an issue for many women in deciding whether and when

to return to work.<sup>12</sup> In 1978, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act was passed, which prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of pregnancy or childbirth. This act covered hiring and firing policies as well as promotions and pay levels.

Flexible work schedules, employment-based child care benefits, and maternity leave emerged as issues during the 1980s at about the same time that birth rates among women 30 and older began to increase steadily in the United States.<sup>13</sup> A U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1987, *California Federal Savings and Loan Association v. Guerra*, upheld a California law requiring most employers to grant pregnant women 4 months of unpaid disability leave and the right to return to their same job. At the federal level, The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) mandates up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for childbearing or family care over a 12-month period for eligible employees. Studies have found little evidence so far that such laws have increased the amount of leave women take by any considerable amount.<sup>14</sup>

### EMPLOYMENT HISTORY BEFORE THE FIRST BIRTH

The last 3 decades have seen major changes in the work patterns of expecting mothers. This section describes overall trends in women's

employment history from 1961–1965 to 2006–2008 and the characteristics of women who worked during their first pregnancy.

### Overall Trends: 1961–1965 to 2006–2008

In the Fertility History portion of the SIPP, all mothers are asked if they ever worked for pay for at least 6 consecutive months before their first birth and if they worked for pay at a job at any time during the pregnancy leading to their first birth.<sup>15</sup> The categories do not necessarily overlap, as new mothers may have worked for a few months during their pregnancy while never having worked for 6 months in a row.<sup>16</sup> Other mothers may have worked for 6 consecutive months but quit working before they got pregnant. The results presented in this report generally refer to the time period or years when the woman had her first birth.

Table 1 shows that for mothers who had their first child between 2006 and 2008, 72 percent had worked for at least a 6-month period in their lives. This percentage had increased since the early 1960s, when it was 60 percent of new mothers. Most of the increase since 1961–1965 occurred by 1986–1990, when the percentage reached 76 percent. Since then, the percentage of mothers who worked 6 or more months has decreased from a high of 76 percent in 1986–1990 to a low of 72 percent in 2006–2008. Age is related to whether women have worked before having their first child. For women 30 years and older, 8 out of 10 women who had a first birth in 2006–2008 had worked for at least

<sup>12</sup> Daphne Spain and Suzanne Bianchi, *Balancing Act: Motherhood, Marriage, and Employment Among American Women*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Harriet B. Presser, "Can We Make Time for Children? The Economy, Work Schedules, and Child Care," *Demography*, Vol. 26, 1989, pp. 523–543. See Historical Fertility Tables, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2005, Table H3. <[www.census.gov/population/socdemo/fertility/tabH3.xls](http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/fertility/tabH3.xls)>.

<sup>14</sup> Wen-Jui Hen and Jane Waldfogel, "Parental Leave: The Impact of Recent Legislation on Parent's Leave Taking," *Demography*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2003, pp. 191–200. Jacob Klerman and Arleen Leibowitz, "Job Continuity Among New Mothers," *Demography*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1999, pp. 145–155.

<sup>15</sup> For the remainder of this report, the term "pregnancy" is used to refer to the pregnancy preceding the first birth.

<sup>16</sup> Working for 6 consecutive months is a standard labor force indicator that measures the likelihood of a serious commitment to the labor force.

<sup>9</sup> *Educational Attainment Historical Tables: Table 1*, Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2007. <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/cps/2007/tables.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/cps/2007/tables.html)>. Prior to 1992, educational attainment was measured by years of schooling completed. Four or more years of college is equivalent to a bachelor's degree or more education.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Cherlin, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Levy, *The New Dollars and Dreams, American Incomes and Economic Change*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1998.

Table 1.

**Employment History of Women Before First Birth: 1961–1965 to 2004–2008**(For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Year of first birth	Number of women with a first birth (thousands)	Women with a first birth who—							
		Ever worked for 6 or more months continuously <sup>1</sup>		Worked during pregnancy		Worked full-time during pregnancy <sup>2</sup>		Worked part-time during pregnancy <sup>2</sup>	
		Percent	Margin of error <sup>3</sup>	Percent	Margin of error <sup>3</sup>	Percent	Margin of error <sup>3</sup>	Percent	Margin of error <sup>3</sup>
1961–1965 . . . . .	6,306	60.0	2.0	44.4	2.0	39.7	2.0	4.7	0.9
1966–1970 . . . . .	6,956	66.4	1.8	49.4	1.9	44.2	1.9	5.2	0.9
1971–1975 . . . . .	6,920	68.9	1.8	53.5	1.9	47.6	2.0	5.9	0.9
1976–1980 . . . . .	7,192	73.1	1.7	61.4	1.9	53.1	1.9	8.3	1.1
1981–1985 . . . . .	8,129	75.2	1.4	64.5	1.5	54.0	1.5	10.5	0.8
1986–1990 . . . . .	8,568	75.5	1.3	67.2	1.4	58.3	1.5	8.9	0.9
1991–1995 . . . . .	8,599	73.8	1.6	66.8	1.8	54.5	1.8	12.2	1.0
1996–2000 . . . . .	8,558	74.0	1.6	67.2	1.7	56.6	1.8	10.6	1.1
2001–2005 . . . . .	8,215	75.0	1.4	69.2	1.5	58.7	1.6	10.6	1.0
2006–2008 . . . . .	5,127	72.3	2.5	65.6	2.7	56.1	2.8	9.5	1.6

<sup>1</sup> At any time before first birth.<sup>2</sup> Full-time/part-time status refers to last job held before first child's birth.<sup>3</sup> The margin of error, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, provides the 90 percent confidence interval around the estimate.

Source: 1961–1965 to 1981–1985: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 (*Work and Family Patterns of American Women*), Tables C and B-2; 1986–1990 to 1991–1995: P70-79 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*), Table A; 1996–2001: P70-103 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2000*), Table 1; P70-113 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 2000–2003*), Table 1; and 2006–2008: Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

6 consecutive months, compared with 43 percent of women under 22 years of age.<sup>17</sup>

The percentage of new mothers who worked at all during their pregnancy in 2006–2008 increased by 22 percentage points since 1961–1965. Forty-four percent of women who had their first birth between 1961 and 1965 worked while pregnant. For women who had their first birth in 2006–2008, 66 percent worked while pregnant, not different from the proportions working while pregnant since 1986–1990.<sup>18</sup>

Fifty-six percent of first-time mothers in 2006–2008 worked at full-time jobs during their pregnancy (35 hours or more per week, Table 1). The proportion of first-time mothers working full-time during pregnancy was 40 percent in 1961–1965, increased to over

<sup>17</sup> Separate analysis, not shown in tables.<sup>18</sup> Overall labor force participation rates for women, regardless of pregnancy status, were as follows: 32 percent in 1960, 43 percent in 1970, 52 percent in 1980, 58 percent in 1990, and 57 percent in 2008. See the Bureau of Labor Statistics Web site at [www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2009.htm](http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2009.htm).

50 percent by the late 1970s, and stayed above 50 percent through 2008. The proportion of first-time mothers working part-time during pregnancy in 1961–1965 was 5 percent. The percentage increased to 11 percent in 1981–1985 and has remained between 9 percent and 12 percent since then. Subsequent sections of this report will show the extent to which weekly hours worked while pregnant and the amount of leave taken from the workforce around the time of a first birth are related to the type of maternity benefits received.

### Women Who Worked During Pregnancy

Table 2 summarizes trends in women's work experience during pregnancy in 2006–2008. Overall, 66 percent of mothers who had their first birth in 2006–2008 worked during pregnancy. First-time mothers under age 22 had lower rates of employment during pregnancy than older first-time mothers (ages 22 and older). Among women at the ends of the age spectrum, 15 percent of new mothers under age 18 worked while

pregnant, compared with 80 percent of mothers 30 and older.

Among the racial groups shown, non-Hispanic White women had the highest percentage (75 percent) that worked during their first pregnancy.<sup>19</sup> Sixty-one percent of Asian women worked during

<sup>19</sup> Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). The body of this report (text, figures, and tables) shows data for women who reported they were the single race White and not Hispanic, women who reported the single race Black, and women who reported the single race Asian. Use of the single-race populations does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The U.S. Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches.

For further information, see the Census 2000 Brief, *Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000* (C2KBR/01-1) <[www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html)>. Hispanics may be any race. Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native population are not shown in this report because of their small sample size in the SIPP. Based on the population of women who had a first birth between 2001–2003 surveyed in the 2004 SIPP, 3.2 percent of the single-race Black population and .54 percent of the single-race Asian population were also Hispanic.

Table 2.

## Work History of Women During Pregnancy Preceding First Birth by Selected Characteristics: 2006–2008

(For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Characteristic	Number of women with a first birth (thousands)	Percentage who worked during pregnancy	Among women who worked while pregnant, percentage who were working—	
			Less than 3 months before child's birth	Less than 1 month before child's birth <sup>1</sup>
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>5,127</b>	<b>65.6</b>	<b>88.1</b>	<b>64.6</b>
<b>Age at First Birth</b>				
Under 18 years .....	314	14.9	63.3	31.9
18 and 19 years .....	619	41.9	85.9	54.1
20 and 21 years .....	702	56.0	84.1	60.8
22 to 24 years .....	959	69.8	84.9	57.0
25 to 29 years .....	1,255	77.7	89.3	69.7
30 years and over .....	1,277	79.8	92.3	70.3
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>				
White alone .....	3,971	68.3	89.2	66.6
Non-Hispanic .....	3,162	74.8	89.6	68.9
Black .....	696	52.0	85.1	53.9
Asian .....	292	61.1	86.2	59.1
Hispanic (any race) .....	914	42.0	85.5	50.4
<b>Timing of First Birth<sup>2</sup></b>				
Before first marriage .....	2,162	51.8	82.7	58.6
Within first marriage .....	2,721	75.3	91.0	67.5
After first marriage .....	244	79.8	89.4	68.1
<b>Educational Attainment</b>				
Less than high school .....	650	28.3	80.4	43.2
High school graduate .....	1,204	50.0	82.2	56.0
Some college .....	1,621	70.7	86.7	63.4
Bachelor's degree or higher .....	1,653	86.6	92.7	71.8

<sup>1</sup> Includes women who responded that they never stopped working during their pregnancy.

<sup>2</sup> Refers to marital status at time of first birth. Before first marriage includes never-married women. After first marriage includes first births outside marriage or within second or subsequent marriages.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

pregnancy, followed by 52 percent of Black women, and 42 percent of Hispanic women.<sup>20</sup>

Women who had their first child before their first marriage rather than within or after their first marriage were less likely to have worked during pregnancy (52 percent, 75 percent, and 80 percent, respectively). This difference by marital status in terms of employment during pregnancy has been consistently noted since 1966–

1970.<sup>21</sup> Women who have their first child prior to marriage are generally younger, more likely to be a minority race or Hispanic, and to have lower levels of education. All of these factors are related to lower levels of employment during pregnancy.<sup>22</sup> Women who have their first birth during or after their first marriage are more likely to be older

and already in the labor force at the time they become pregnant.<sup>23</sup>

A mother's educational level is also associated with the probability that she worked during her first pregnancy. Table 2 shows that for new mothers in 2006–2008, those with a bachelor's degree or higher were more likely to have worked during pregnancy (87 percent) than women with less education (28 percent to 71 percent of women in other educational categories).

Figure 1 shows the percentage of women who worked during pregnancy preceding first birth by age at first birth and educational

<sup>20</sup> The proportion of women who worked during pregnancy is not statistically different between Asian women, Black women, and Hispanic women.

<sup>21</sup> Kristin Smith, Barbara Downs, and Martin O'Connell, *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*, Current Population Reports, P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2001. O'Connell, op. cit., 1990, pp. 14–15.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, Downs, and O'Connell, op. cit., 2001, Tables C and E. These differences by marital status were also found to persist in being related to employment levels in a multivariate analysis controlling for many socioeconomic factors.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, Downs, and O'Connell, op. cit., pp. 6–7.

attainment. Younger mothers with less than a high school degree are less likely to be employed during their pregnancy than women 25 and over with less than a high school degree (26 percent and 62 percent, respectively). While previous reports in this series indicate that older mothers tend to be more educated than younger mothers and to have worked at some point prior to their first birth, Figure 1 suggests few differences in employment during pregnancy by maternal age and education.<sup>24</sup> Only older mothers with a high school degree had higher rates of working during pregnancy than younger first-time mothers with the same educational attainment.

### Duration of Work During Pregnancy

Among all first-time mothers who worked while pregnant, 88 percent worked into their last trimester (less than 3 months before their child's birth (Table 2), while 65 percent worked into their last month of pregnancy. Older mothers were more likely than younger mothers to work closer to the end of their pregnancy. Sixty-seven percent of mothers aged 22 and older worked into the last month of their pregnancy, compared with 56 percent of mothers less than 22 years of age.

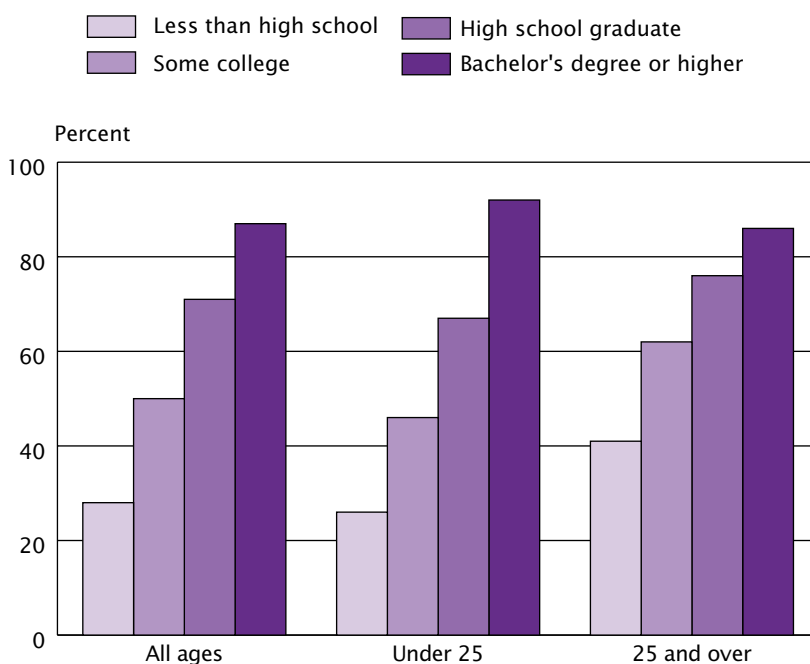
In the early 1960s, high school dropouts worked longer into their pregnancy.<sup>25</sup> During the 1980s, a larger proportion of college-educated women began to work into the last trimester of their pregnancy than women with less than a high school education.<sup>26</sup> By 2006–2008, 93 percent of college graduates who worked during their pregnancy were employed into their last trimester, compared with

<sup>24</sup> O'Connell, op. cit., 1990, pp.16–17.; Johnson, op. cit., 2008, pp. 5.

<sup>25</sup> O'Connell, op. cit., 1990, pp. 16–17.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, Downs, and O'Connell, op. cit., 2001, pp. 7–9.

Figure 1.  
**Percentage of Women Who Worked During Pregnancy Preceding First Birth, by Age at First Birth and Educational Attainment: 2006–2008**



For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

80 percent of women who had not graduated from high school.

White, non-Hispanic women were more likely than Blacks and Hispanics to work late into their pregnancy. Compared with Blacks (54 percent) and Hispanics (50 percent), 69 percent of White, non-Hispanic mothers-to-be worked during their last month of pregnancy.

Table 3 shows how late into pregnancy first-time mothers have worked since 1961. For the 1961–1965 time period, 13 percent of those who worked during pregnancy reported they stopped working during their first trimester (6 or more months before the birth), while 35 percent worked into the last month. By 1986–1990, the percentage of women who left work

in their first trimester had declined to 5 percent, while the proportion working into the last month before their child's birth more than doubled to 76 percent. During the decade of the 1990s, 7 percent of women left work in their first trimester, not different from 6 percent in 2006–2008. However, the proportion working into the last month before their child's birth increased from 73 percent in 1991–1995 to 82 percent in 2006–2008.

The proportion of women who worked full-time during pregnancy, according to when they stopped working, is highlighted in Table 4. In the 1960s, 90 percent of women who worked during pregnancy worked full-time. By 2006–2008, the percentage of working women who worked full time during

Table 3.

### Women Who Worked During Pregnancy Preceding First Birth by When They Stopped Working: 1961–1965 to 2006–2008

(Numbers in thousands. For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Characteristic	1961–1965	1966–1970	1971–1975	1976–1980	1981–1985	1986–1990	1991–1995	1996–2000	2001–2005	2006–2008
Number of women with a first birth . . .	6,306	6,956	6,920	7,192	8,129	8,568	8,599	8,558	8,215	5,127
Number of women who worked during pregnancy . . . . .	2,797	3,435	3,700	4,414	5,239	5,758	5,740	5,749	5,686	3,363
<b>Percentage Distribution of Women by Number of Months Before First Birth They Stopped Working<sup>1</sup></b>										
<b>Total . . . . .</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
1 month or less <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	34.6	39.1	43.1	58.9	64.7	75.7	72.9	76.6	81.1	81.6
2 months . . . . .	17.1	18.3	20.9	14.7	13.0	9.1	9.0	8.1	6.5	6.6
3 to 5 months . . . . .	35.4	28.4	22.9	18.6	13.5	10.0	11.0	7.9	8.3	6.5
6 or more months . . . . .	12.9	13.9	13.1	7.7	8.7	5.2	7.1	7.3	4.0	5.5

<sup>1</sup> Among women who worked during pregnancy.

<sup>2</sup> Includes women who responded that they never stopped working during their pregnancy.

Source: 1961–1965 to 1981–1985: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 (*Work and Family Patterns of American Women*) Tables B and B-6; 1986–1990 to 1991–1995: P70-79 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*), Table D; 1996–2000: P70-103 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2000*), Table 3; 2001–2003: P70-113 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2003*) Table 3; and 2006–2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

Table 4.

### Women Who Worked Full-Time During Pregnancy Preceding First Birth by When They Stopped Working: 1961–1965 to 2006–2008

(Numbers in thousands. For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Characteristic	1961–1965	1966–1970	1971–1975	1976–1980	1981–1985	1986–1990	1991–1995	1996–2000	2001–2005	2006–2008
Number of women with a first birth . . .	6,306	6,956	6,920	7,192	8,129	8,568	8,599	8,558	8,215	5,217
Number of women who worked during pregnancy . . . . .	2,797	3,435	3,700	4,414	5,239	5,758	5,740	5,749	5,686	3,363
Worked full-time (number) <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	2,503	3,074	3,289	3,823	4,387	4,992	4,690	4,846	4,819	2,876
Worked full-time (percent) <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	89.5	89.5	88.9	86.6	83.7	86.7	81.7	84.3	84.8	85.5
<b>Percentage Working Full-time Among Women Who Stopped Working at Each Time Interval:</b>										
1 month or less <sup>3</sup> . . . . .	89.5	91.7	90.5	89.7	87.1	90.0	86.1	86.8	87.1	87.2
2 months . . . . .	86.2	90.0	93.7	84.5	76.7	82.1	71.2	84.4	77.6	67.4
3 to 5 months . . . . .	91.8	88.5	86.9	79.8	76.6	73.4	66.2	74.0	76.3	90.3
6 or more months . . . . .	87.5	85.1	80.0	83.2	80.7	72.0	72.4	68.3	67.5	76.9

<sup>1</sup> Full-time employment status refers to last job held before birth of first child.

<sup>2</sup> Among women who worked during pregnancy.

<sup>3</sup> Includes women who responded that they never stopped working during their pregnancy.

Source: 1961–1965 to 1981–1985: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 (*Work and Family Patterns of American Women*), Tables B and B-6; 1986–1990 to 1991–1995: P70-79 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*), Table D; 1996–2000: P70-103 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2000*), Table 4; 2001–2003: P70-113 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2003*), Table 4; and 2006–2008: Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

pregnancy declined to 86 percent.<sup>27</sup> By 2006–2008, 77 percent of women who worked only in their first trimester had full-time jobs, compared with 87 percent of women who were still working in the last month before their child's birth.

Trends over the last 30 years suggest that first-time mothers are working later into their pregnancy. Expecting mothers may work longer into their pregnancy for reasons other than financial needs. Many may view their jobs as a long-term investment. The data also indicates that working full-time during pregnancy is closely associated with the chance of working into the last month of pregnancy. By 2006–2008, women who worked full-time were the most committed to their jobs by remaining late into their pregnancy, often remaining at their jobs until they became mothers.

## MATERNITY LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

This section first provides an overview of the changes in maternity leave arrangements since 1980, when comparable questions on types of leave arrangements were first asked on SIPP panels. The report highlights types of leave arrangements women use before and after the birth of their first child. It concludes with a look at how the use of various categories of leave differs according to selected characteristics of women.

### Changes in Leave Arrangements Since the 1980s

Types of leave used by first-time mothers include paid leave, unpaid leave, and disability. Other

<sup>27</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that the percentage of employed workers working full-time decreased from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, and then began to rise. See *Women in the Labor Force: A Data Book*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005, Report 985, Table 20, <[www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook-2005.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook-2005.pdf)>.

## MATERNITY LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

In the 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 SIPP panels, two separate questions on leave arrangements were asked of every woman who worked during pregnancy. The first question concerned arrangements used between the time she stopped working and when the child was born, while the second question asked about the arrangements used between the child's birth and up to 12 weeks after the child was born. The 1984 and 1985 SIPP panels asked only one question about arrangements used at any time during pregnancy or up to 6 weeks after the child was born. If a woman said she had never stopped working during pregnancy, no other leave arrangements were tabulated.

In the 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 panels, questions about leave arrangements used for both periods before and after the child was born were asked of all women, including those who reported that they had never stopped working before the child's birth. This change from the earlier SIPP panels complicates any comparisons with leave arrangements used by women prior to 1980. Maternity leave arrangement data for the 1980s were obtained from the 1996 panel that asked these questions of women who had a first birth since 1980. Beginning in the 1996 panel, "disability leave" was included as a separate response. Women may have conceptually included it in either the paid or the unpaid leave categories in the prior SIPP panels.

circumstances that lead to time away from a job include quitting a job, being let go from a job, and having an employer go out of business. They are included as types of leave arrangements in this report. Some women use only one type of leave while others may combine several types.

Table 5 shows selected leave arrangements used by women in the past 20 years. A drop in the proportion quitting their jobs was noted between the 1981–1985 time period and the subsequent 1986–1990 time period, from 36 percent to 27 percent. The next drop in the proportion quitting their jobs occurred between 1996 and 2000 and the subsequent time periods of 2001–2005 and 2006–2008. Conversely, the percentage of mothers who took paid leave (including paid maternity, sick, vacation, and all

other paid leave) increased from 37 percent in 1981–1985 to 43 percent in 1986–1990. By 2006–2008, 51 percent received paid leave. Employers may offer paid maternity leave as a job benefit when they weigh the costs of finding and training a new employee against a short leave of absence.<sup>28</sup>

For all of the first-birth time periods, about 5 percent of women or less reported being let go from their job while pregnant or within 12 weeks after giving birth. Disability leave usage over the past 2 decades appears to have reached a high point in 1991–1995 at 11 percent. Unpaid maternity leave usage increased from 34 percent to 41 percent during the 1980s, and further increased to 45 percent

<sup>28</sup> *A Workable Balance: Report to Congress on Family and Medical Leave Policies*, U.S. Department of Labor, Commission on Family and Medical Leave, Washington, DC, 1996.



Table 5.

### Selected Leave Arrangements Used by Women Who Worked During Pregnancy Preceding First Birth: 1981–1985 to 2006–2008

(For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Year of first birth	Number of women who worked during pregnancy (thousands)	Percentage of women using type of specified leave arrangement <sup>1</sup>				
		Quit job	Paid leave <sup>2</sup>	Unpaid leave <sup>3</sup>	Disability leave	Let go from job
1981–1985 . . . . .	5,147	35.7	37.3	33.7	6.3	3.5
1986–1990 . . . . .	5,758	26.5	43.3	41.0	7.5	2.3
1991–1995 . . . . .	5,740	26.9	42.7	40.3	11.2	4.2
1996–2000 . . . . .	5,749	25.6	42.0	45.0	6.9	2.2
2001–2005 . . . . .	5,686	21.5	49.4	38.3	7.8	4.0
2006–2008 . . . . .	3,363	21.9	50.8	42.4	9.5	4.7

<sup>1</sup> The total in individual leave arrangements exceeds 100 percent because of multiple answers. Leave arrangements may have been used before, or up to, 12 weeks after the birth.

<sup>2</sup> Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other paid leave.

<sup>3</sup> Unpaid leave includes all unpaid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other unpaid leave.

Source: 1981–1985 to 1991–1995: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports P70-79 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*), Table F; 1996–2000: P70-103 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2000*), Table 5; 2001–2003: P70-113 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2003*), Table 5; and 2006–2008: Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

Table 6.

### Detailed Leave Arrangements Used by Women Who Worked During Pregnancy Preceding First Birth: 2006–2008

(For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Type of leave	Before or after birth <sup>1</sup>	Before birth	After birth
<b>Number of women who worked during pregnancy (thousands) . . . . .</b>	<b>3,363</b>	<b>3,363</b>	<b>3,363</b>
<b>Percentage Using Leave Arrangement<sup>2</sup></b>			
Quit job . . . . .	21.9	15.9	6.0
Paid leave <sup>3</sup> . . . . .	50.8	21.4	45.3
Maternity leave . . . . .	40.7	16.9	35.1
Sick leave . . . . .	9.8	2.9	8.1
Vacation leave . . . . .	10.8	3.1	9.2
Other paid leave . . . . .	1.8	0.9	1.0
Unpaid leave <sup>4</sup> . . . . .	42.4	19.1	36.5
Maternity leave . . . . .	35.5	16.0	30.6
Sick leave . . . . .	3.4	0.9	2.6
Vacation leave . . . . .	3.2	1.3	2.4
Other unpaid leave . . . . .	3.1	1.1	2.3
Disability leave . . . . .	9.5	3.2	8.1
Other leave . . . . .	8.4	3.4	6.2
Self employed . . . . .	0.9	0.4	0.7
Employer went out of business . . . . .	0.1	0.1	–
Other . . . . .	7.4	3.0	5.5
Let go from job . . . . .	4.7	3.2	3.1

– Represents zero or rounds to zero.

<sup>1</sup> Leave arrangements are only counted once if used before and after birth.

<sup>2</sup> Total in individual leave arrangements exceed the percentage who took leave because of multiple answers.

<sup>3</sup> Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other paid leave.

<sup>4</sup> Unpaid leave includes all unpaid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other unpaid leave.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

by 1996–2000. An apparent 7 percentage-point decline in unpaid maternity leave usage occurred by 2001–2005, coincidental with the increase in the percentage of women receiving some type of paid maternity leave. The decline in unpaid leave remained unchanged in 2006–2008, reaching 42 percent, while paid leave usage has remained unchanged for the last two time periods at about 50 percent.

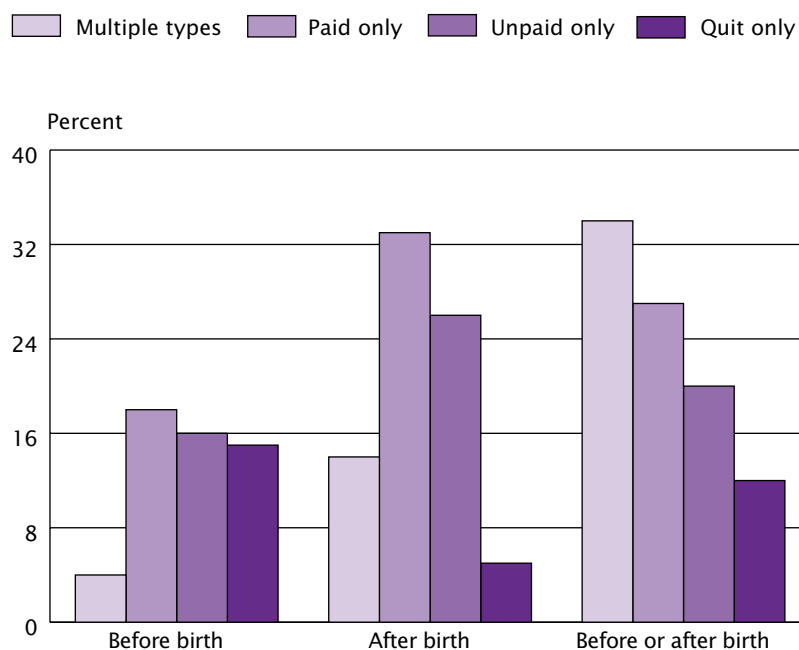
### Leave Arrangements Before and After the First Birth

Table 6 provides a detailed picture of leave arrangements—both before and after their child’s birth—used by employed women who had their first birth between 2006 and 2008. Women were allowed to identify more than one type of leave arrangement. Less than a quarter of women quit their job around the time of the birth of their child (22 percent). Sixteen percent of women quit their job before the birth of their child, compared with 6 percent who quit after the birth of their child.

Both paid and unpaid leave (all types combined) were more likely to be used after the child’s birth (45 percent and 37 percent, respectively) than during pregnancy (21 percent and 19 percent, respectively). These findings suggest that for women who plan to return to work after having their child, many may work as long as possible into their pregnancy in order to have more leave, both paid and unpaid, available to use once their child is born.

Overall, 41 percent of women received paid maternity leave and 36 percent of women received unpaid maternity leave. Both of these types of leave were more likely to be used after birth than before. Whether it was used during pregnancy or after giving birth, sick

Figure 2.  
**Percentage of Women Using Selected Leave Arrangements and Multiple Arrangements Before or After Their First Birth: 2006–2008**  
(Among women who worked during pregnancy)



Note: Multiple types of leave used “Before or after birth” include using more than one type before birth only, after birth only, and using a different type before birth than after birth. Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other paid leave. Unpaid leave includes all unpaid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other unpaid leave.

For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel Wave 2.

leave and vacation leave were more likely to be paid than unpaid.

Another leave-taking strategy that women use is to combine different types of leave. Figure 2 shows the percentage of women who worked during pregnancy and used only paid leave, used only unpaid leave, quit their job only, or used multiple types of leave. These data are shown separately for during pregnancy, up to 12 weeks after giving birth, and the combined periods. Before birth, 4 percent used more than one leave arrangement. Fourteen percent used more than one type of arrangement after birth and

34 percent of women used multiple leave arrangements in the combined periods of pregnancy and up to 12 weeks after giving birth (different arrangements before and after their child’s birth).

Using only paid leave was more common for women after giving birth than before (33 percent and 18 percent, respectively). Use of unpaid leave was also more common after the birth compared with those who used only unpaid leave before birth (26 percent and 16 percent, respectively). Among women who identified quitting their job as their only leave arrangement, 15 percent quit

Table 7.

## Type of Leave Arrangements Used Before or After Birth by Women Who Worked During Pregnancy Preceding Their First Birth by Selected Characteristics: 2006–2008

(For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Characteristic	Number of women who worked during pregnancy (thousands)	Percentage of women using specified leave arrangement				
		Quit job	Paid leave <sup>1</sup>	Unpaid leave <sup>2</sup>	Disability leave	Let go from job
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>3,363</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>42.4</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>4.7</b>
<b>Employment Status at Last Job</b>						
Full-time .....	2,876	19.3	56.0	41.8	10.7	4.7
Part-time .....	487	37.2	20.5	46.2	2.3	4.7
<b>Month Stopped Working Before Birth</b>						
1 month or less <sup>3</sup> .....	2,742	15.5	54.9	43.2	10.2	4.3
2 months .....	221	43.0	44.8	44.3	5.4	4.5
3 to 5 months .....	218	55.5	15.6	41.7	6.0	8.7
6 or more months .....	182	54.4	40.1	29.1	7.1	6.6
<b>Age at First Birth</b>						
Less than 18 years .....	(B)	(B)	(B)	(B)	(B)	(B)
18 and 19 years .....	259	44.4	13.5	53.3	4.6	6.9
20 and 21 years .....	393	32.8	32.6	47.8	3.6	5.6
22 to 24 years .....	669	18.8	48.1	43.5	8.7	7.6
25 to 29 years .....	976	17.9	60.6	38.8	12.6	3.8
30 years and over .....	1,019	12.3	61.4	40.7	11.1	2.8
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>						
White alone .....	2,711	21.5	51.6	41.8	8.9	4.6
Non-Hispanic .....	2,365	21.1	52.3	46.7	9.0	4.1
Black .....	362	25.7	50.3	46.4	6.1	6.4
Asian and Pacific Islander .....	178	15.2	47.2	47.8	23.0	2.8
Hispanic (any race) .....	384	24.2	46.6	35.7	10.2	8.1
<b>Timing of First Birth<sup>4</sup></b>						
Before first marriage .....	1,121	29.9	39.4	47.1	6.0	7.0
Within first marriage .....	2,048	18.7	56.5	60.2	10.7	3.6
After first marriage .....	384	5.2	28.6	29.4	8.6	1.8
<b>Educational Attainment</b>						
Less than high school .....	184	50.0	18.5	48.4	3.3	10.9
High school graduate .....	602	33.1	31.6	48.5	6.0	6.5
Some college, no degree .....	1,146	22.9	46.8	41.1	8.6	5.2
Bachelor's degree or more .....	1,432	12.9	66.3	40.1	12.4	2.7

(B) Base less than 75,000 or numerator too small for comparison.

<sup>1</sup> Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other paid leave.

<sup>2</sup> Unpaid leave includes all unpaid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other unpaid leave.

<sup>3</sup> Includes women who responded that they never stopped working during their pregnancy.

<sup>4</sup> Refers to marital status at time of first birth. Before first marriage includes never married women. After first marriage includes first births outside or within second or subsequent marriages.

Note: The total in individual leave arrangements exceed 100 percent because of multiple answers. Leave arrangements may have been used before or up to 12 weeks after the birth.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

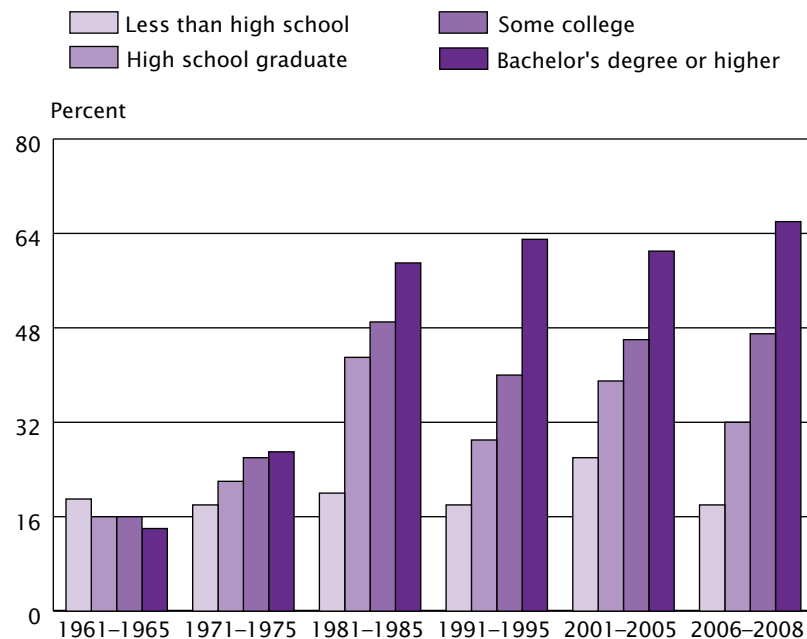
their job while they were pregnant, while 5 percent quit their job after giving birth.

### Use of Different Leave Arrangements

This section examines the types of leave arrangements used by women—either before or after their child's birth—by various social and demographic characteristics.

Among first-time mothers in 2006–2008, younger women were more likely than women who had their first child at a later age to quit their job (Table 7). About twice as many women who had their first birth before age 25 quit their job

Figure 3.  
**Percentage of Women Who Received Paid Leave Before or After Their First Birth, by Educational Attainment: Selected Years, 1961–1965 to 2006–2008**



Note: Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other paid leave used before the birth and up to 12 weeks after the birth.

For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf).

Source: 1961–1965 to 1981–1985: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 (*Work and Family Patterns of American Women*), Table B-9; 1991–1995: P70-79 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*), Figure 4; and 2001–2003: Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

(32 percent) as women who had their first child at age 25 or older (15 percent).

The proportion of women using paid leave for their first birth generally increased with age, from 24 percent of women under age 22 at their first birth to 61 percent of those 25 and older. Older women, who have more years of labor force experience than younger women, may benefit from this experience by receiving more paid benefits.

Employment characteristics of the last job held during pregnancy are also associated with the type of leave arrangements women use for the birth of their first child. Full-time workers were more likely to use

paid-leave benefits than part-time workers (56 percent and 21 percent, respectively), while part-time workers were more likely to quit their jobs than were full-time workers (37 percent and 19 percent, respectively). Women who worked into the last month of pregnancy were more likely to use paid leave benefits (55 percent) than those who left work 6 months or more prior to their first birth (40 percent). Four percent of women who worked until their last month of pregnancy were let go from their job.

Educational attainment at the time of interview serves as a useful proxy for the type of job one holds, the wages one earns, and in turn,

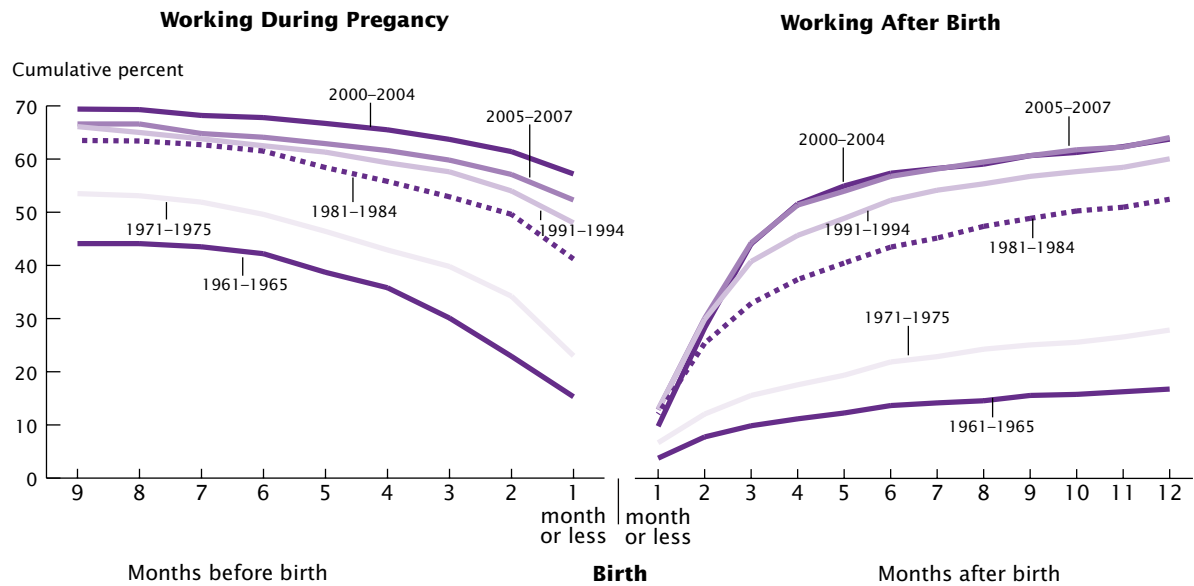
the type of maternity leave benefits offered. Increasing levels of education go hand-in-hand with increases in the use of paid leave benefits. Sixty-six percent of women with a bachelor's degree or more used paid leave, compared with 19 percent of women who had less than a high school education. The use of unpaid maternity leave did not differ statistically between women who had less than a high school education and those with a bachelor's degree or more. Women with less than a high school education were more likely to quit their job than women who had a bachelor's degree or more (50 percent and 13 percent, respectively).

In the early 1960s, the use of paid maternity leave for a first birth did not differ statistically by educational level. The relationship between educational attainment and use of paid leave began to appear in the early 1970s and became pronounced by the early 1980s (Figure 3). The percentage of women with a bachelor's degree or more who received paid leave increased from 27 percent in 1971–1975 to 59 percent for those with a first birth between 1981 and 1985, and grew to 66 percent of new mothers between 2006 and 2008. The use of paid leave by mothers with less than a high school degree was 18 percent in 2006–2008, about what it was for previous time periods (Figure 3).

In summary, many changes have occurred in mothers' employment during and after pregnancy since the 1960s. Recent decades have seen a profound transformation of the organization of family households, maternal employment, and legislation regarding maternity leave. Women are now working longer into their pregnancy and approximately half use paid maternity leave. Paid benefits are more

Figure 4.

**Percentage of Women Working During Pregnancy and Percentage Working After Their First Birth, by Month Before or After Birth: Selected Years, 1961–1965 to 2005–2007**



For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see <[www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf)>.

Source: 1961–1965 to 1981–1984: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 (*Work and Family Patterns of American Women*), Table B-5; 1991–1994: P70-79 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*), Figure 7; and 2000–2004 and 2005–2007: Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

likely to be used by more educated women, those who work at full-time jobs, and those who work very close to their child's birth.

**WORKING AFTER THE FIRST BIRTH**

It has been widely noted that new mothers in the United States tend to return to work much more quickly. New mothers are often driven to return to work promptly by a combination of factors, including preferences, economic opportunities, or social norms.<sup>29</sup> This section looks at how rapidly women begin working after the birth of their first child. Overall trends since the 1960s will be examined. Also, recent data from the 2008 SIPP

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Cheesman Day and Barbara Downs, *Opting-Out: An Exploration of Labor Force Participation of New Mothers*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, <[www.census.gov/hhes/www/loindex/Opting-Out-paper.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/loindex/Opting-Out-paper.pdf)>.

Panel are analyzed to determine the characteristics of women who start working most rapidly and whether changing employers after birth is related to changes in job characteristics.

**Trends Since the 1960s**

Figure 4 shows the monthly employment paths of women during their first pregnancy and for the first 12 months after their child's birth. Women with a first birth between 2005 and 2007 worked longer into their pregnancy and started working after childbirth sooner than their counterparts in the early 1960s. As shown in Figure 4, most of the increases in the percentage of women working later into their pregnancy and working after their first birth came about by the early 1980s. Compared

with the 2000–2004 time period, women in the 2005–2007 time period worked fewer months, from 1 month or less to 7 months before the birth. In contrast, the percentage of new mothers who returned to work for the 2005–2007 birth period was not statistically different, except for 1 month or less, from women who had their first birth between 2000 and 2004.

This trend is also evident in Table 8, which shows the monthly cumulative percentage of women working after the birth of their first child. In the early 1960s, 14 percent of all mothers with newborns were working by the sixth month, increasing to 17 percent by the twelfth month.

These percentages more than doubled by 1976–1980, with further increases in these 2 reference

Table 8.

### Women Working at Monthly Intervals After First Birth by Year of First Birth: 1961–1965 to 2005–2007

(For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Characteristic	1961–1965	1966–1970	1971–1975	1976–1980	1981–1984	1986–1990	1991–1994	1996–1999	2000–2004	2005–2007
<b>Women With a First Birth</b>										
Number of women (thousands) . . . . .	6,306	6,956	6,920	7,192	6,671	8,568	6,995	6,918	8,389	5,126
Percent . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Cumulative percentage working after:										
3 months . . . . .	9.9	12.7	15.6	22.4	32.9	41.6	40.8	44.7	45.0	44.2
6 months . . . . .	13.7	18.3	21.9	32.2	43.5	52.9	52.3	57.2	57.3	57.4
12 months . . . . .	16.8	23.9	27.9	38.8	52.5	60.8	60.1	64.6	63.5	63.8
<b>Women Who Worked During Pregnancy</b>										
Number of women (thousands) . . . . .	2,797	3,435	3,700	4,414	4,237	5,758	4,621	4,592	5,812	3,415
Percent . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Cumulative percentage working after:										
3 months . . . . .	16.5	19.6	24.1	32.6	46.0	57.3	57.3	59.7	58.0	58.6
6 months . . . . .	21.4	26.7	32.1	45.4	59.3	70.6	70.4	74.8	72.4	72.9
12 months . . . . .	25.8	32.7	38.8	52.6	69.7	78.6	77.7	81.5	79.1	79.2
<b>Women Who Did Not Work During Pregnancy</b>										
Number of women (thousands) . . . . .	3,509	3,522	3,221	2,778	2,434	2,810	2,374	2,327	2,563	1,711
Percent . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Cumulative percentage working after:										
3 months . . . . .	4.6	6.0	5.9	6.3	9.9	9.4	8.7	15.1	13.1	15.3
6 months . . . . .	7.5	10.2	10.1	11.1	16.2	16.6	17.3	22.5	21.5	26.6
12 months . . . . .	9.6	15.3	15.3	16.8	22.5	24.3	25.8	31.2	30.2	33.0

Note: 2005–2007 estimates are used for the most recent birth cohort to allow for at least one year of postbirth employment data.

Source: 1961–1965 to 1981–1984: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P-23-165 (*Work and Family Patterns of American Women*), Table B-5; 1986–1990 to 1991–1994: P70-79 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*), Table I; 1996–1999: P70-103 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2000*), Table 8; 2001–2003: P70-113 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2003*), Table 8; and 2005–2007: Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

months occurring by 1986–1990. From 2000–2007, the percentages have remained statistically unchanged at 57 percent for the sixth month and 64 percent for the twelfth month.<sup>30</sup>

Table 8 shows the relationship between work experience during pregnancy and the rate at which women work in the first year after giving birth for the periods 1961–1965 to 2005–2007. Among women who worked during their

pregnancy, 17 percent of women in the 1961–1965 time period returned to work 3 months after their child's birth. Twenty years later, this percentage increased to 46 percent for the 1981–1984 time period, and to 59 percent for the 2005–2007 time period. Women who did not work during their first pregnancy have considerably lower percentages working at this 3-month interval compared with women who worked during pregnancy: 5 percent (1961–1965), 10 percent (1981–1984), and 15 percent (2005–2007). This suggests that prebirth employment is likely to be an important determinant in employment after a woman's first birth.

### Characteristics of Mothers

To examine the characteristics of women by when they returned to work, data are shown in Table 9 in two ways: for all mothers and for mothers who worked during pregnancy. This latter group, women who worked during pregnancy, is used to control for the negative effect of job-search costs on the likelihood of securing work for those not employed during pregnancy. Characteristics are shown by time intervals of when mothers started working after the child's birth: less than 3 months, 3 to 5 months, or 6 to 11 months after the child's birth. To complete the distribution, proportions are also

<sup>30</sup> The time period of analysis for working after a first birth is restricted to those who gave birth by 2007 because some who gave birth in 2008 did not have 1 full year of employment data by the time of the interview in 2009.

Table 9.

## Women Working at Stated Time Intervals After First Birth by Selected Characteristics: 2005–2007

(For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Characteristic	All women with a first birth					Women with a first birth who worked during pregnancy				
	Total (thousands)	Started working after first birth				Total (thousands)	Started working after first birth			
		Less than 3 months <sup>1</sup>	3 to 5 months	6 to 11 months	Did not work during first year <sup>2</sup>		Less than 3 months <sup>1</sup>	3 to 5 months	6 to 11 months	Did not work during first year <sup>2</sup>
<b>Number</b> . . . . .	<b>5,126</b>	<b>1,449</b>	<b>1,370</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>1,928</b>	<b>3,415</b>	<b>1,343</b>	<b>1,068</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>752</b>
<b>PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION</b>										
<b>Total</b> . . . . .	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28.3</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>39.3</b>	<b>31.3</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>22.0</b>
<b>Employment Status During Pregnancy</b>										
Not employed . . . . .	1,711	6.2	17.7	7.4	68.7	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
Full-time . . . . .	2,893	40.4	32.8	6.8	20.1	2,893	40.4	32.8	6.8	20.1
Part-time . . . . .	522	33.5	23.1	10.7	32.7	522	33.5	23.1	10.7	32.7
<b>Age at First Birth</b>										
Less than 18 years . . . . .	308	13.0	17.8	9.0	60.2	59	47.1	14.4	18.4	20.1
18 and 19 years . . . . .	576	21.0	20.9	8.1	49.9	249	39.8	19.1	6.0	35.1
20 and 21 years . . . . .	675	32.6	19.4	7.5	40.5	394	49.8	21.4	5.8	23.1
22 to 24 years . . . . .	941	30.3	21.0	6.8	41.9	657	42.4	25.0	7.8	24.8
25 to 29 years . . . . .	1,315	28.6	32.3	7.8	31.3	1,016	35.6	37.0	7.7	19.7
30 years and over . . . . .	1,311	31.0	33.7	6.7	28.6	1,041	36.5	37.3	7.1	19.1
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>										
White alone . . . . .	4,007	29.8	25.7	6.3	38.3	2,759	40.8	30.5	5.9	22.8
Non-Hispanic . . . . .	3,142	33.1	27.3	6.0	33.6	2,404	40.9	31.3	5.7	22.1
Black . . . . .	694	25.8	29.4	13.7	31.1	403	39.1	27.8	16.4	16.7
Asian and Pacific Islander . . . . .	282	10.6	38.7	8.8	41.9	157	13.9	55.4	11.6	19.0
Hispanic (any race) . . . . .	984	17.2	21.2	7.9	53.7	412	37.5	27.6	7.8	27.1
<b>Timing of First Birth<sup>3</sup></b>										
Before first marriage . . . . .	2,106	25.7	22.4	8.9	42.9	1,152	42.8	24.1	9.7	23.4
Within first marriage . . . . .	2,741	29.4	29.7	6.6	34.4	2,041	37.0	34.5	6.5	22.1
After first marriage . . . . .	279	36.3	30.7	3.8	29.3	222	43.4	38.6	3.5	14.5
<b>Educational Attainment</b>										
Less than high school . . . . .	620	9.9	15.6	8.2	66.3	179	28.8	18.9	13.0	39.3
High school graduate . . . . .	1,224	27.6	21.7	7.8	42.9	610	47.3	24.6	6.7	21.5
Some college . . . . .	1,652	34.0	25.3	5.9	34.9	1,242	42.8	27.1	5.9	24.2
Bachelor's degree or higher . . . . .	1,629	30.0	36.2	8.3	25.5	1,384	34.1	39.6	8.3	18.0
<b>Month Stopped Working Before Birth</b>										
1 month or less <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	2,683	43.3	33.9	6.0	16.8
2 months . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	242	37.7	16.9	5.2	40.1
3 to 5 months . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	297	19.0	24.9	17.3	38.9
6 or more months . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	193	16.9	22.5	14.6	46.0
<b>Type of Leave Arrangement Used<sup>4</sup></b>										
Quit job . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	794	20.6	18.2	9.4	51.8
Paid leave . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	1,691	41.6	37.4	8.4	12.6
Unpaid leave . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	1,381	45.4	32.1	7.7	14.8
Disability leave . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	330	35.1	47.8	4.0	13.1
Let go from job . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	114	32.4	18.0	5.2	44.3
Other leave . . . . .	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	284	38.2	28.7	5.2	27.9

(X) Only applicable for women who worked during pregnancy.

<sup>1</sup> Includes women who responded that they never stopped working during their pregnancy or after their birth.

<sup>2</sup> Includes women who were working after 1 year and those who never returned to work.

<sup>3</sup> Refers to marital status at time of first birth. Before first marriage includes never married women. After first marriage includes first births outside of first marriage or within second or subsequent marriages.

<sup>4</sup> Leave arrangement may have been used before or after the birth. The total in individual leave arrangements exceed 100 percent because of multiple answers.

Note: 2005–2007 estimates are used for the most recent birth cohort to allow for at least 1 year of postbirth employment data.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

shown for women who were not working within the first year after their child's birth.<sup>31</sup>

Some women may be motivated to maintain ties to the labor force because of personal preferences, career goals, or because their jobs offer attractive leave benefits and do not penalize them for choosing to become mothers. They may also feel they have too much invested in their careers in terms of education, training, and wages to leave the labor force.<sup>32</sup> Previous research has shown that in the 1960s and 1970s, those who were most economically in need of and dependent on their own earnings (teenagers, Black women, and women with premarital first births) returned to work the most rapidly.<sup>33</sup>

Table 9 shows that for 2005–2007, older first-time mothers worked at higher rates in the first few months after giving birth than younger first-time mothers. Thirty-one percent of mothers aged 30 or older were working within 3 months, compared with 13 percent of mothers less than 18 years of age. Most of these women were old enough to have completed high school or college and were potentially old enough to have had some work experience prior to the child's birth. However, these differences are reduced among women after age 20 as the worker rate for women aged 20 to 21 (33 percent) is not

statistically different from the rate for women aged 30 and over (31 percent).

In terms of education, women with a high school degree, some college, or a bachelor's degree or more were more likely to work in the first 3 months after their child's birth (28 percent or more) than women with less than a high school degree (10 percent). Women with less than a high school degree were most likely not to work at all in the year after their first child's birth (66 percent). A larger percentage of non-Hispanic White women than Hispanic women were working within 3 months after childbirth (33 percent compared with 17 percent) and a smaller percentage did not work in the first year (34 percent and 54 percent, respectively).

The variations in the timing of returning to work previously noted diminish or disappear when only women who worked during pregnancy are considered. For example, among all mothers, 10 percent of mothers with less than a high school education were working within 3 months of their child's birth, compared with 30 percent of mothers with a bachelor's degree or more. Among mothers who worked during pregnancy, there was no statistically significant difference in the percentage returning within 3 months between those without a high school education and those with a bachelor's degree or more (29 percent and 34 percent, respectively). Women who were either high school graduates or who had some college had return-to-work rates around 40 percent, higher than women with a bachelor's degree or higher.

About 17 percent of Hispanic mothers, regardless of their work status during pregnancy, were working less than 3 months after

their child's birth, compared with 33 percent of non-Hispanic White mothers. However, among those mothers who worked during their pregnancy, there was no statistically significant difference in returning to work between non-Hispanic White and Hispanic mothers (41 percent and 38 percent, respectively).

For women who worked during pregnancy, when they returned to work after their child's birth was related to when they left work during their pregnancy. Women who worked later into their pregnancy were more likely to return to work sooner than those who left work earlier in their pregnancy. For example, 43 percent of women who stopped working 1 month or less prior to their child's birth were back at work within 3 months of their birth. In comparison, 17 percent of women who left 6 or more months before their child's birth went back to work within 3 months.

The type of leave arrangement women used was also related to when or if they returned to work in the first year after having their child. Women who said they quit a job around the time of their first birth were more likely not to return to work in the first year of their child's birth: 52 percent compared with 13 percent of women who used paid leave arrangements. In contrast, women who used paid leave at any time during their pregnancy or after their child's birth were more likely to return to work less than 3 months after their child's birth (42 percent), than were women who quit their jobs around the time of their first child's birth (21 percent). Women who quit their job during pregnancy or after their child's birth would likely have to expend job-search time to find new employment before they could go back to work. Differences in receipt

<sup>31</sup> The 2008 American Community Survey found that 61.6 percent of women who had their first birth in the 12-month period prior to the interview were in the labor force at the time of the interview. (See Jane L. Dye, *Fertility of American Women: June 2008*, Current Population Reports, P20-563, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2010, Table 3.) The SIPP for the period 2005–2007 shows that 62.6 percent of women who had a birth in this period had ever worked within 12 months of their child's birth (Table 9).

<sup>32</sup> Sonalde Desai and Linda Waite, "Women's Employment During Pregnancy and After the First Birth: Occupational Characteristics and Work Commitment," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 56, 1991, pp. 551–556.

<sup>33</sup> O'Connell, op. cit., 1990, pp. 23–25.



Table 10.

**Odds of the Timing of Work Following a Birth: 2006–2008**(For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Characteristics	All women with a first birth		All women with a first birth	
	Less than 3 months <sup>1</sup>		3 to 5 months	
	Odds ratio	Significance	Odds ratio	Significance
<b>Employment<sup>2</sup></b>				
Employed during pregnancy . . . . .	9.172	(***)	1.598	(*)
Not employed . . . . .	(R)		(R)	
<b>Age</b>				
Age at first birth . . . . .	0.991	(n.s.)	1.014	(n.s.)
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>				
Non-Hispanic White . . . . .	(R)		(R)	
Non-Hispanic Black . . . . .	0.992	(n.s.)	1.362	(n.s.)
Non-Hispanic other race . . . . .	0.545	(+)	1.341	(n.s.)
Hispanic (any race) . . . . .	0.729	(n.s.)	1.077	(n.s.)
<b>Marital Status<sup>3</sup></b>				
Not married at time of first birth . . . . .	1.050	(n.s.)	1.012	(n.s.)
Married during or after first birth . . . . .	(R)		(R)	
<b>Educational Attainment</b>				
Less than high school . . . . .	(R)		(R)	
High school graduate . . . . .	2.403	(*)	1.299	(n.s.)
Some college . . . . .	2.053	(*)	1.307	(n.s.)
Bachelor's degree or higher . . . . .	1.485	(n.s.)	1.936	(*)
<b>Type of Leave Arrangement Used<sup>4</sup></b>				
Paid leave . . . . .	1.207	(n.s.)	1.366	(+)
Unpaid leave . . . . .	(R)		(R)	

(R) Reference group

(+) 0.05 &lt; p &lt; 0.1.

(\*) Significant at 0.01 &lt; p &lt; 0.05.

(\*\*) Significant at 0.001 &lt; p &lt; 0.01.

(\*\*\*) Significant at p &lt; 0.001.

(n.s.) Not statistically significant.

<sup>1</sup> Includes women who responded that they never stopped working during their pregnancy or after their birth.<sup>2</sup> Includes women who were working after 1 year and those who never returned to work.<sup>3</sup> Refers to marital status at time of first birth. Before first marriage includes never-married women. After first marriage includes first births outside of first marriage or within second or subsequent marriages.<sup>4</sup> Leave arrangement may have been used before or after the birth.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

of either paid or unpaid leave in return to work within 3 months of the child's birth were not statistically different (42 percent and 45 percent, respectively). It may be that availability of leave and the assurance of employment continuity may be a more important factor in returning to work than whether or not the leave is paid leave.

**Multivariate Analysis of Timing of Work Following a Birth**

To shed light on the factors related to the timing of mothers' postbirth

work, multivariate regression models are estimated, controlling for employment status during pregnancy, age, race and Hispanic origin, marital status at first birth, education, and type of leave arrangement used. Two time periods for returning to work are examined: mothers who work less than 3 months after their child's birth and mothers who work 3 to 5 months after the birth of their child. Logistic regression techniques were used because the outcome variable, whether a

mother was working by a given time period, is dichotomous (the value of 1 is assigned to mothers who work by the given time period, and a 0 is assigned to mothers who did not). The results, while not predicting causation, will show the relative importance of these indicators with respect to working within a given time period. An odds ratio of 1.0 indicates that a mother with a select characteristic is as likely to work as a mother with the specified reference or comparison characteristic. Ratios under 1.0 or over 1.0

Table 11.

### Job Characteristics of Women Who Worked During Pregnancy Preceding First Birth and Returned to Work Within 12 Months After Birth: 1991–1994 to 2005–2007

(For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf))

Characteristic	1991–1994	1995–1999	2000–2004	2005–2007
<b>Women who returned to work (thousands)<sup>1</sup></b> . . . . .	<b>3,539</b>	<b>4,466</b>	<b>4,388</b>	<b>2,639</b>
<b>Returned to Prebirth Employer</b>				
Number of women (thousands) . . . . .	2,750	3,388	3,638	2,143
Percent (among women returning to work) . . . . .	77.7	75.9	80.8	80.4
<b>Percentage Among Women Returning to Prebirth Employer</b>				
Number of hours worked after first birth . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
More than before first birth . . . . .	2.8	2.7	4.2	3.9
Same as before first birth . . . . .	77.2	77.6	75.5	75.2
Fewer than before first birth . . . . .	20.0	19.7	20.3	20.9
Pay level after first birth . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Higher than before first birth . . . . .	7.5	7.9	5.1	6.3
Same as before first birth . . . . .	88.3	89.0	91.8	91.3
Lower than before first birth . . . . .	4.1	3.1	3.1	2.5
Skill level after first birth . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Higher than before first birth . . . . .	5.6	3.6	3.5	2.0
Same as before first birth . . . . .	92.6	94.1	94.3	96.7
Lower than before first birth . . . . .	1.8	2.3	2.2	1.2
Hours, pay, and skill level all the same as before . . . . .	69.1	70.5	69.9	69.0
<b>Different Employer After First Birth</b>				
Number of women (thousands) . . . . .	790	1,078	750	496
Percent (among women returning to work) . . . . .	22.3	24.1	16.7	18.6
<b>Percentage Among Women Returning to Different Employer</b>				
Number of hours worked after first birth . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
More than before first birth . . . . .	22.7	19.6	13.6	11.0
Same as before first birth . . . . .	41.6	47.7	59.0	45.1
Fewer than before first birth . . . . .	35.8	32.7	27.3	43.9
Pay level after first birth . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Higher than before first birth . . . . .	38.0	34.0	35.1	27.6
Same as before first birth . . . . .	34.7	41.4	34.6	41.8
Lower than before first birth . . . . .	27.3	24.7	30.3	30.6
Skill level after first birth . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Higher than before first birth . . . . .	24.8	28.0	27.7	17.7
Same as before first birth . . . . .	53.9	53.1	53.3	64.6
Lower than before first birth . . . . .	21.2	18.9	19.0	17.7
Hours, pay, and skill level all the same as before . . . . .	16.0	21.3	20.4	25.3

<sup>1</sup> Excludes self-employed women and women whose prebirth employer went out of business.

Note: 2005–2007 estimates are used for the most recent birth cohort to allow for at least 1 year of postbirth employment data.

Source: 1991–1994: P70-79 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–1995*), Table K; 1995–1999: SIPP, 2001 Panel, Wave 2; 2001–2003: P70-113 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961–2003*), Table 10; and 2005–2007: Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

indicate that a mother is less likely or more likely to work/return to work, respectively.

Table 10 shows the odds of working within 3 months or between 3 and 5 months for all mothers. Mothers who were employed during their pregnancy have greater odds of

working within 3 months as mothers who did not work during their pregnancy. The odds of working within 3 months were significantly lower for women who were non-Hispanic other race, compared with White, non-Hispanic mothers. Mothers who were high school graduates

or have some college education have greater odds of working within 3 months than those who did not complete high school.

Prebirth employment, education, and paid leave are all statistically associated with working within 3 to 5 months for first-time mothers.

Mothers who worked during their pregnancy have greater odds of working within 3 to 5 months compared with mothers who did not work before the birth of their first child. Women with a college degree or higher also have greater odds of working within 3 to 5 months compared with women with no high school diploma. Women who received some type of paid leave have greater odds of returning to work within 3 to 5 months following the birth of their first child, compared with mothers who did not receive or use paid leave. This finding suggests that women who have paid leave may only use it for a short period of time before returning to the labor force. Given that FMLA and other leave policies in the United States do not allow for leave for more than 12 weeks, it is not entirely surprising that new mothers return to work relatively soon.

The multivariate results reinforce and add substance to issues previously analyzed in this report and help us understand mothers' postbirth employment activities. Overall, findings suggest there is considerable variation in mothers' postbirth employment across groups stratified by race and Hispanic origin, education, and type of leave. Among these, the strongest factor predicting employment was whether the mother was employed during pregnancy.

### **Job Characteristics Before and After Birth**

For women who had their first birth between 2005 and 2007, 80 percent of the women who worked during their pregnancy and who returned to work within 12 months of their child's birth returned to their prebirth employer (Table 11). Seventy-five percent of those who returned to their prebirth employer experienced no change in the number of hours they worked per

week, statistically unchanged since 1991–1994. One in five women worked fewer hours after having their first child for both time periods. First-time mothers who return to their prebirth employer can expect to return to similar pay at a similar skill level. For the 2005–2007 time period, about 9 of 10 women returning to their prebirth employer earned around the same pay; and 97 percent were at the same or higher job-skill level as before their birth.

Compared with mothers who returned to their prebirth employers, a larger proportion of women who changed employers for their first job after childbirth experienced change in at least one of their job characteristics. For women who had their first birth between 2005 and 2007, 25 percent of women who changed employers maintained consistency in hours, pay, and skill level before and after the birth of their child, compared with 69 percent of women who had the same employer.

For women who had their first child between 2005 and 2007, those who switched employers were more likely to have a change in salary. Forty-two percent of women who changed employers, compared with 91 percent of women who returned to the same employer, had jobs at the same pay level. Some women may have switched employers with better compensation in mind, as 28 percent of those who switched received higher pay, compared with 6 percent of women who stayed with the same employer. However, 31 percent took jobs with different employers at a lower pay level, compared with 3 percent who returned to the same employer.

In the 2005–2007 time period, 97 percent of women returning to their prebirth employer worked at a job requiring the same level of

skill as before the birth of their first child compared, with 65 percent of women who switched employers. Eighteen percent of women who changed employers took jobs at a higher skill level, compared with 2 percent of women who returned to the same employer. However, a larger proportion of those who took jobs with a new employer took a job at a lower skill level than they held during pregnancy (18 percent) than did women who returned to the same employer (1 percent).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Since the 1960s, women have experienced gains in education beyond the high school years and have continued to delay childbearing to older ages. The work experience of women both before and during the pregnancy preceding the birth of their first child has also increased. Women are more likely to work both before and during their pregnancy than they were 30 to 40 years ago and are working later into their pregnancy. Sixty-five percent of women who worked during their pregnancy in 2006–2008 did so into the last month of their pregnancy. In addition, more women are working within a year of giving birth (64 percent in 2005–2007 compared with 39 percent in 1976–1980 and 17 percent in 1961–1965).

One in five women quit their job before or shortly after the birth of their child in 2006–2008. Paid leave benefits were received by 51 percent of pregnant workers in 2006–2008, 42 percent of pregnant workers received unpaid leave, and 10 percent took disability leave. Data in this report also show that 80 percent of mothers who returned to work within 12 months of their child's birth returned to their same employer. Sixty-nine percent of women who returned to

the same employer after the birth of their first child experienced no changes in pay, skill level, or hours. An important factor in working after the birth of a child rests on one's employment status during pregnancy. Women who worked during their pregnancy, especially full-time workers and those working up to the birth of their child, are most likely to return to work within 3 months of having their first birth.

Overall, these findings indicate that women are staying longer at work, returning more rapidly after having their first child, and in general choosing to incorporate work life with childbearing and child rearing more than did women in the 1960s.

## SOURCE OF THE DATA

The population represented (the population universe) in the 1984, 1985, 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 Panels of the SIPP is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States. The SIPP is a longitudinal survey conducted at 4-month intervals. The employment history and maternity leave information were part of the Fertility History topical module collected in the SIPP panels referenced below. The data in this report were collected from January through April 2009 (2008 Panel), June through September 2004 (2004 Panel), June through September 2001 (2001 Panel), August through November 1996 (1996 Panel), January through April 1986 (1985 Panel), and January through March 1986 (1984 Panel). The number of designated housing units in sample in Wave 1 was 65,500 (2008 Panel), 62,700 (2004 Panel), 50,500 (2001 Panel), 49,200 (1996 Panel), 17,800 (1985 Panel), and 26,000 (1984 Panel). The number of eligible units and the number interviewed in Wave

1 were 52,031 and 42,032 for the 2008 Panel; 51,400 and 43,700 for the 2004 Panel; 40,500 and 35,000 for the 2001 Panel; 40,100 and 36,700 for the 1996 Panel; 14,400 and 13,400 for the 1985 Panel; and 20,900 and 19,900 for the 1984 Panel. In Wave 2 of the 2004 Panel, 40,600 interviews were obtained from 44,100 eligible units. In Wave 2 of the 2001 Panel, 28,100 interviews were obtained from 30,500 eligible units. In Wave 2 of the 1996 Panel, 35,000 interviews were obtained from 37,500 eligible units. In Wave 4 of the 1985 Panel, 11,400 interviews were obtained from 13,500 eligible units. In Wave 8 of the 1984 Panel, 11,100 interviews were obtained from 13,500 eligible units.

The institutionalized population, which is excluded from the population universe, is composed primarily of the population in correctional institutions and nursing homes (91 percent of the 4.1 million institutionalized population in Census 2000).

## ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted. This means the 90 percent confidence interval for the difference between the estimates being compared does not include zero. Nonsampling errors in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately the answers are coded and classified. To minimize these errors, the Census Bureau

employs quality control procedures throughout the production process, including the overall design of surveys, the wording of questions, review of the work of interviewers and coders, and statistical review of reports. The SIPP weighting procedure uses ratio estimation, whereby sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but biases may still be present when people who are missed by the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. How this weighting procedure affects other variables in the survey is not precisely known. All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

For further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates, including standard errors and confidence intervals, go to <[www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-12%29.pdf)> or contact Mahdi S. Sundukchi of the Census Bureau's Demographic Statistical Methods Division via e-mail at <[mahdi.s.sundukchi@census.gov](mailto:mahdi.s.sundukchi@census.gov)> or Jamie Choi of the Census Bureau's Demographic Statistical Methods Division via e-mail at <[jamie.choi@census.gov](mailto:jamie.choi@census.gov)>.

Additional information on the SIPP, including questions on the topical modules, can be found at the following Web sites: <[www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/s&a96\\_040501.pdf](http://www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/s&a96_040501.pdf)>, <[www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/](http://www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/)> (main SIPP Web site), <[www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/workpaper/wp230.pdf](http://www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/workpaper/wp230.pdf)> (SIPP Quality Profile), and <[www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/usrguide/sipp2001.pdf](http://www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/usrguide/sipp2001.pdf)> (SIPP User's Guide).

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## MORE INFORMATION

The report is available on the Internet <[www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)> by clicking on the letter “F” in the “Subjects A to Z” section of the Web page and selecting “Fertility of American Women Data.” Scroll down to the maternity leave data section. Other research on maternity leave can be found in the following report: Kristin Smith and Amara Bachu, *Women’s Labor Force Attachment Patterns and Maternity Leave: A Review of the Literature*, Population Division Working Paper Series, No. 32, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1999. This report is on the Internet on the “Population: Working Papers” section under “Subjects A to Z.”

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## USER COMMENTS

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of users of its data and reports. If you have any suggestions or comments, please write to:

Chief, Housing and Household  
Economic Statistics Division  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233

or send an e-mail inquiry to:  
<[hhes@census.gov](mailto:hhes@census.gov)>

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