

Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961-1995

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INTRODUCTION

Over half of American women with a child less than 1 year of age are currently in the labor force.¹ For many women, a child's birth signals numerous changes in the daily schedule at work and at home that both the family and employer must confront and resolve. This report examines trends in maternity leave and employment patterns of women who gave birth to their first child between January 1961 and December 1995.

The report primarily uses retrospective fertility, employment, and maternity leave data from the 1996 panel of the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), conducted in 1996. However, previously published results based on similarly collected information from the 1984 and 1985 SIPP panels are also included.²

The report first discusses changes in characteristics of first-time mothers since the 1960s that are related to the likelihood of employment during pregnancy. These changes are placed in the historical context of the enactment of family-related legislation over the last quarter-century to better understand major work transformations that have occurred in women's pre- and post-birth employment experiences.

¹Amara Bachu and Martin O'Connell. *Fertility of American Women: June 2000*. Current Population Reports, P20-543. U.S. Census Bureau: Washington, DC, 2001.

²Data shown for 1981 to 1994 were collected in the SIPP 1996 Panel, Wave 2. Data shown for 1961 to 1980 was collected in the SIPP 1984 and 1985 panels. For more information on the previously published report, see Martin O'Connell. "Maternity Leave Arrangements: 1961-85," in *Work and Family Patterns of American Women*. Current Population Reports, Series P23, No.165. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1990.

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Second, the report examines the trends in women's work experience prior to their first birth and the factors associated with employment during pregnancy. Third, it considers the maternity leave arrangements women use both before and after their first birth and identifies the shifts that have occurred in the mix of leave arrangements used by first-time mothers. The report concludes with an examination of how rapidly mothers with newborns return to work and the factors related to the length of time absent from the labor force in the post-birth period.

In addition to updating childbearing, employment, and maternity leave trends through the mid-1990s, this report covers new substantive ground. Specifically, it details changes the mother experienced in the number of hours worked, pay level, and job skill level after the birth of the first child relative to the last job held before the child was born. These changes are examined in relation to whether a woman returned to the same employer she had during pregnancy or changed employers after the birth of the child.

FIRST-TIME MOTHERS AND FAMILY LEGISLATION SINCE THE 1960s

Over the time period studied in this report, many social, economic, and legislative changes have occurred in American society. This section begins with a summary of the characteristics of mothers around the time of their first birth and ends with a discussion of these societal changes.

Characteristics of mothers at first birth

Two important factors are likely to shape women's employment histories prior to first birth: their age at the time of the birth and their educational attainment level. Younger women are still developing job skills and often have yet to complete their educational careers as teenagers or even by their mid-twenties, the age by which marriage and motherhood frequently have begun. Women who have delayed childbearing until their thirties are more likely to have completed their schooling and accumulated more years of work experience prior to their first birth. This experience, in turn, may affect their income level and job security and influence their decisions about working during

pregnancy and how soon after their child's birth to return to work.

How have these two characteristics changed over time? Data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) show that first-time motherhood at age 30 and over tripled between 1960 and 1995, from 7 percent to 22 percent.³ The educational attainment level of first-time mothers has also increased since 1970, partly because older women, who make up an increasing proportion of first-time mothers, have higher education levels than younger first-time mothers. In 1970, 10 percent of first-time mothers had 16 or more years of education, compared with 23 percent in 1995.

During this time, increasing proportions of women in these older childbearing age groups—women 25 to 34 years old—continued their education beyond high school.⁴ The proportion of women 25 to 34 years old who had completed 4 or more years of college increased from 8 percent in 1960 to 12 percent in 1970 and further increased to 21 percent by 1980. These years closely correspond to the development of the women's movement and issues related to the family and the working environment. By 1995, this proportion again increased, but only slightly to 25 percent. As the age and educational composition of first-time mothers may be related to changes in their workforce behavior, these two indicators will often be examined in the ensuing sections of this report.

SIPP FERTILITY, EMPLOYMENT, AND MATERNITY LEAVE DATA

The 1996 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which was a nationally representative survey of approximately 37,000 households, included a fertility module in the second wave of interviews conducted in August-November, 1996. Information was collected on the birth dates of the first and last children born to all women 15 to 64 years old at the time of the survey. Women whose first birth occurred between 1980 and the survey date were also asked a series of questions concerning their employment history before and after their pregnancy, as well as their receipt of maternity leave benefits. Data from this survey were used in combination with similar information collected in the 1984 and 1985 SIPP panels to provide an extended series of employment and maternity leave data between 1961 and 1995.

³National Center for Health Statistics. *Vital Statistics of the United States*, Vol. 1-Natality. U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, annual issues. Data on educational attainment of the mother were not published until 1969 and only then from a sample of states.

⁴Jennifer Day and Andrea Curry. *Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1995*. Current Population Reports, P20-489. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1996, Table 17.

Legislation related to employment and childbearing

In addition to the changes noted in the age and educational structure of mothers, changes in the work environment related to maternity and employment issues need to be considered. In the 1960s, a common expectation for women was that they would leave work upon becoming pregnant.⁵ 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. Also at this time, changes to the federal tax code in 1976 permitted working families with a dependent child to take a tax credit on child care costs. Both these actions clearly marked the beginning of federal involvement in work-related issues and concerns of mothers. These laws affected both employment practices during pregnancy and net child care costs after the child was born, the latter item strongly related to the affordability of child care services which would enable a mother to return to work.

Job security and flexibility in the work schedule are important concerns a mother with a newborn child faces when deciding when to return to work. Flexible work schedules and employment-based child care benefits became popular employee issues during the 1980s, just about the time when fertility rates in the United States began to increase steadily, especially among women 30 years and older.⁶ In addition, a landmark 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.

The most comprehensive federal act to date relative to maternity leave and employment policies is the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) which mandates up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for childbearing or family care over a 12-month period for eligible employees. Eligible employees are defined as those who worked for at least 1 year for their current employer, and who worked for at least 1,250 hours during the previous 12 months, and who worked for a business employing 50 or more employees. For women who are employed part time or work in small businesses for which the FMLA does not apply, both the families and employers are faced with a dilemma: how to reconcile the medical and emotional needs of the mother and infant with the requirements of the employer and the financial needs of the family.

Another noteworthy change over this time period is the increased importance of a second income to the household's overall economic well-being. Stagnant men's wages coupled with rapidly rising housing prices and the prices of other goods beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the 1980s translated into both spouses working outside the home.⁷ To remain in the middle class, mothers were increasingly called upon to remain in the work force.

It is important to interpret the noted changes in the age and educational structure of mothers with infants in conjunction with the historical back-

ground of the women's movement, and the legislative and economic changes of the 1970s and 1980s. While the demographic factors may have changed the normative balance between work and family life for mothers, the legal, economic, and cultural changes in this period were also important and may have fostered a working environment for this Baby Boom generation of women that was quite different from that of their mothers.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY BEFORE THE FIRST BIRTH

This section starts with a description of overall trends in women's employment histories from 1961-65 to 1991-95 and then describes the characteristics of women who work during their first pregnancy.

Overall trends: 1961-65 to 1991-95

Over the years, the disparity between the percentage of women who ever worked before becoming mothers and the percentage working while pregnant with their first child (hereafter referred to as "pregnant" or "pregnancy") has diminished.⁸ Figure 1 shows that the percentage of women who have ever worked for 6 or more consecutive months⁹ increased from 60 percent in 1961-65 to 74 percent in 1991-95.¹⁰ Only 44 percent of women worked during their pregnancy in 1961-65 but by 1991-95 the threshold had

⁵Andrew Cherlin. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*. Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, 1992.

⁶David E. Bloom and Jane T. Trahan. *Flexible Benefits and Employee Choice*. Pergamon Press: New York, 1986; Martin O'Connell and David E. Bloom. *Juggling Jobs and Babies: America's Child Care Challenge*. Population Trends and Public Policy, No. 12. Population Reference Bureau: Washington, DC, 1987.

⁷Frank Levy. *Dollars and Dreams: The Changing American Income Distribution*. Russel Sage Foundation: New York, 1987.

⁸For the remainder of this report, the term "pregnancy" is used to refer to the pregnancy preceding the first birth to facilitate reader comprehension, although a woman's first pregnancy may not result in her first birth.

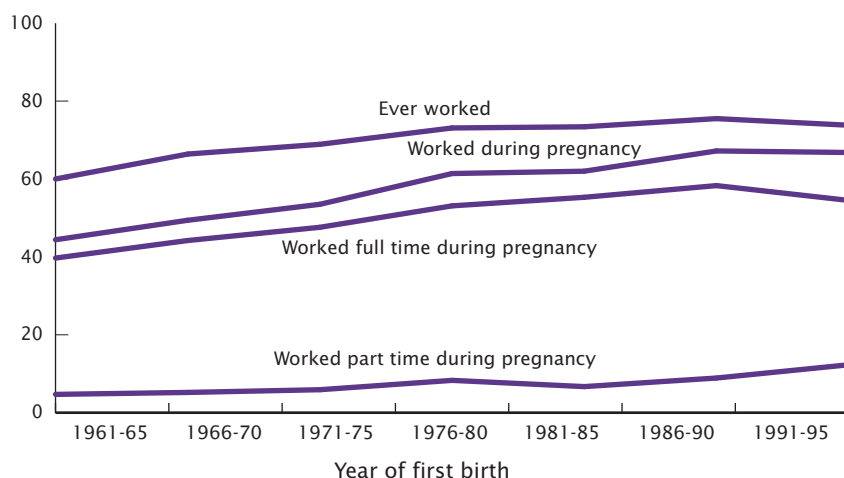
⁹Working for 6 consecutive months is a standard labor force indicator which measures the likelihood of a serious commitment to the labor force.

¹⁰The estimates in this report are based on responses from a sample of the population. As with all surveys, estimates may vary from the actual (population) because of sampling variation, or other factors. All statements made in this report have undergone statistical testing and meet Census Bureau standards for statistical accuracy.

Figure 1.

Women Who Ever Worked for Pay Continuously for 6 or More Months Before Their First Birth, and Who Worked During Pregnancy: 1961-65 to 1991-95

(Percent)



Source: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P23-165, Tables C and B-2, and this report, P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

risen considerably, as 67 percent worked while pregnant.

Most of the gains in these indicators were made by the 1976-80 period, about the time that the Pregnancy Discrimination Act was passed. Although we cannot disentangle the effects of social change and legislation, it is important to note that these social and legislative changes occurred at roughly the same point in time. Between 1976-80 and 1991-95, the proportion of women who had ever worked for 6 or more consecutive months ranged between 74 percent and 75 percent, while the proportion who worked during pregnancy increased by 5 percentage points. In comparison, both these measures increased — by 13 percentage points and 17 percentage points, respectively — between the 1961-65 and 1976-80 periods (see Table A).¹¹

¹¹In contrast, overall labor force participation rates for women, regardless of pregnancy status, progressed more smoothly for these periods: 32 percent in 1960, 43 percent in 1970, 52 percent in 1980, and 58 percent in 1990 (see the Bureau of Labor Statistics Web site at www.bls.gov/pdf/cpsaat2.pdf).

As previously mentioned, age and educational level strongly influence the likelihood of entering the labor force. Table B presents, for the most

recent period, the percentage of women employed for at least 6 consecutive months at any time before the birth of their first child, by age. The likelihood of working rises rapidly with age. By ages 25 to 29, approximately 9 out of 10 women who had a first birth in 1991-95 had worked for at least 6 consecutive months.

Table B also shows this proportion by educational attainment level for women 25 years and over, an age when most women are old enough to have graduated from high school or have attended or graduated from college. Clearly, educational background and attendant job skills are significantly related to the likelihood of working before the first birth. Significant differences in employment experience occur between those mothers who did not graduate from high school and those with more education. No significant differences were found in employment rates

Table A.
Employment History Before First Birth: 1961-65 to 1991-95

(In thousands)

Year of first birth	Number of women with first births	Ever worked 6 or more months continuously ¹	Worked during pregnancy ²		
			Total	Full time	Part time
1991-95	8,599	73.8 (72.5-75.1)	66.8 (65.4-68.2)	54.5 (53.0-56.0)	12.2 (11.2-13.2)
1986-90	8,568	75.5 (74.2-76.8)	67.2 (65.8-68.6)	58.3 (56.8-59.8)	8.9 (8.0-9.8)
1981-85	8,306	73.4 (72.0-74.8)	62.0 (60.5-63.5)	55.3 (53.8-56.8)	6.7 (5.9-7.5)
1976-80	7,192	73.1 (71.4-74.8)	61.4 (59.5-63.3)	53.1 (51.2-55.0)	8.3 (7.2-9.4)
1971-75	6,920	68.9 (67.1-70.7)	53.5 (51.6-55.4)	47.6 (45.6-49.6)	5.9 (5.0-6.8)
1966-70	6,956	66.4 (64.6-68.2)	49.4 (47.5-51.3)	44.2 (42.3-46.1)	5.2 (4.3-6.1)
1961-65	6,306	60.0 (58.0-62.0)	44.4 (42.4-46.4)	39.7 (37.7-41.7)	4.7 (3.8-5.6)

¹At any time before first birth.

²Full-time/part-time status refers to last job held before first child's birth.

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent the 90-percent confidence interval for the estimated percent.

Source: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P23-165, Tables C and B-2, and this report, P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

Table B.

Women Who Ever Worked for Pay Continuously for 6 or More Months Before Their First Birth: 1991-95¹

Characteristic	Number of women with first births	Number of women who worked 6 or more months	Percent of women who worked 6 or more months
Total	8,599	6,345	73.8
Age at first birth			
Less than 18 years.....	814	218	26.8
18 and 19 years.....	1,223	638	52.2
20 and 21 years.....	1,148	752	65.5
22 to 24 years.....	1,543	1,236	80.1
25 to 29 years.....	2,024	1,798	88.9
30 years or older.....	1,847	1,703	92.2
Educational attainment²			
Less than high school.....	184	103	56.1
High school graduate.....	781	675	86.4
Some college, no degree.....	1,184	1,093	92.3
Bachelor's degree or more.....	1,721	1,630	94.7

¹Includes work at any time before the first birth, regardless of whether a woman worked during the pregnancy.

²Limited to women age 25 and over at the time of first birth.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

among college-educated mothers by whether they had completed college.

In 1991-95, the majority of women who worked during pregnancy worked at full-time jobs (35 hours or more per week; see Table A). The proportion of women working full time during pregnancy increased from the 1960s to the 1980s, and declined slightly in the early 1990s. However, there was an increase in part-time work in the 1990s. Whether this relative shift from full to part-time work is a function of the type of work available or women's desires to minimize work hours outside the home cannot be discerned from the data. However, subsequent sections of this report will show the importance of the number of hours worked while pregnant and the amount of leave taken from the workforce around the time of the first birth in determining the type of maternity benefits received.

Women who work during first pregnancy

Table C summarizes the trends in women's work experience during pregnancy since the early 1960s. With one exception (1966-70), mothers under age 18 and age 18 and 19 had consistently lower rates of employment compared with women 25 to 29 years old and 30 years old and over. Of course, many younger mothers had not finished school and would not be expected to favorably compete in the job market, even if they were not pregnant.

Differences in employment rates between age groups also increased. Since 1961-65, employment rates increased from 29 percent to 46 percent for mothers 18 and 19 years old, and from 54 percent to about 84 percent for mothers 25 to 29 years old. Again, it should be noted that the greatest increases in employment for women 25 years and over occurred in the first 20-year segment shown in the table (1961-65 to 1976-

80) rather than in the second 15-year segment since the 1980s.

Since 1961-65, White women have been most likely to have worked during their first pregnancy.¹² Asian and Pacific Islander women have increased their employment rates during their pregnancy since 1981-85, the first year with data for analysis. Hispanics and Blacks have remained at fairly constant levels since 1981-85, although Black women have experienced significant increases in employment rates since 1961-65.

Figure 2 shows for the most recent birth period, 1991-95, employment rates by age and race and ethnicity of the mother. Among women who had their first child between 1991 and 1995, White non-Hispanic women, regardless of age, were more likely to work while pregnant than either Black women or Hispanic women. Among mothers under age 18, Black women and Hispanic women were equally likely to have worked during pregnancy (about 17 percent). After age 22, Black women were more likely to have worked during their pregnancy than Hispanic women. It is interesting to note that the large differences that existed between White non-Hispanic women and Black women between the ages 18 and 19 (about 18 percentage points) were considerably less for older age groups (about 8 percent for ages 22 to 24 and 25 and over). It may be that women who delay childbearing do so because they are employed, and are therefore more likely to be in the labor force at the time of their pregnancy.

¹²Categories are not exclusive. Blacks may be Hispanic. Hispanics are of 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 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) in the 1996 Panel. Based on the 1996 SIPP Panel, Wave 2 maternity leave data, 6 percent of the Black population and 6 percent of the Asian and Pacific Islander population are also of Hispanic origin.

Table C.
**Women Who Worked During Pregnancy by Selected Characteristics:
 1961-65 to 1991-95**

(Percent working in specific category)

Characteristic	Year of first birth						
	1991-95	1986-90	1981-85	1976-80	1971-75	1966-70	1961-65
Total	66.8	67.2	62.0	61.4	53.5	49.4	44.4
Age at first birth							
Less than 18 years	20.5	29.3	18.5	23.5	25.1	19.1	25.0
18 and 19 years	45.7	44.7	42.6	40.8	38.3	40.1	29.2
20 and 21 years	57.7	60.6	57.8	57.4	57.4	50.8	49.4
22 to 24 years	70.5	72.7	69.9	73.1	66.6	61.4	56.8
25 to 29 years	83.6	78.3	77.7	81.1	73.1	66.2	54.4
30 years and over	85.1	83.0	74.1	74.0	60.7	44.3	51.9
Race and ethnicity							
White	70.3	70.3	65.2	65.5	57.0	51.6	46.7
Non-Hispanic	75.6	76.3	68.4	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Black	50.4	53.2	49.2	40.5	39.8	37.9	32.2
Asian and Pacific Islander	58.4	62.0	43.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Hispanic (of any race)	44.0	39.0	42.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Timing of first birth¹							
Before first marriage	50.7	53.2	46.6	41.7	42.0	42.9	36.7
Within first marriage	74.5	73.0	66.6	67.5	56.9	50.6	46.5
After first marriage	81.5	73.7	75.4	69.4	67.9	58.3	40.7
Educational attainment							
Less than high school	28.6	35.4	30.6	28.2	25.6	26.0	21.8
High school graduate	60.2	61.6	57.3	61.0	53.7	50.2	48.8
Some college, no degree	75.5	74.2	69.6	72.5	62.6	57.8	51.5
Bachelor's degree or more	87.1	85.2	79.0	81.8	77.0	67.0	62.9

NA Data not available for these years.

¹Refers 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.

Source: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 Table C and this report, P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

A mother's educational level is also associated with the probability that she will work during her first pregnancy. Table C shows that in 1991-95, women with college degrees were much more likely to work during pregnancy (87 percent) than were women with less than a high school diploma (29 percent) or women who had just graduated high school (60 percent). Women with more education may have jobs more conducive to accommodating pregnancy. For example, they may be more likely to sit during the day, not engage in manual labor or be exposed to hazardous materials or conditions, and may have rest facilities available. Their schedules may also be more flexible, allowing for ease of schedul-

ing medical appointments, or late arrivals/early departures.

Since 1966-70, women who had their first child before their first marriage were least likely to have worked while pregnant, while those who had their first child after their first marriage ended were more likely to have worked while pregnant.¹³ Women who have their first child prior to marriage are generally younger and more likely to be of a minority race or ethnic group, and thus to have lower levels of education and labor market experience or

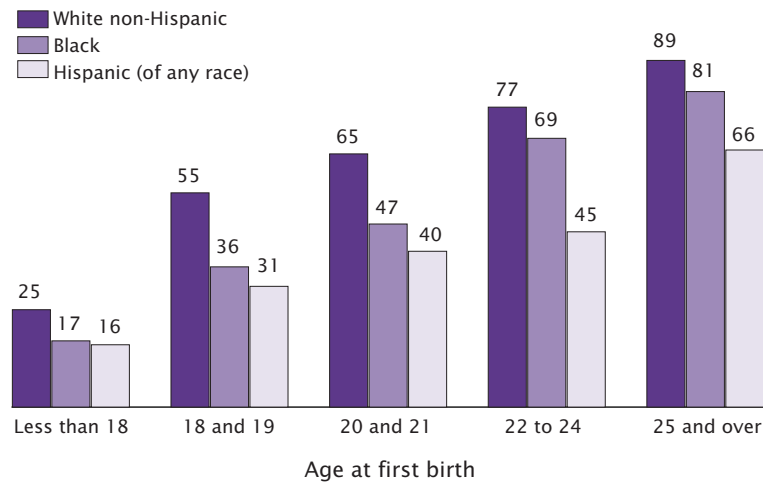
skills. Women who have their first birth within or after their first marriage are more likely to be older and already in the labor force at the time they become pregnant. As will be shown, after statistically controlling for the effect of these variables—age, education, and race—the marital status of the mother at the time of her first birth has very little relationship to the likelihood of her working during pregnancy.

In general, the changing age and educational composition of mothers since the 1960s has shifted to those groups who are also more likely to have either a prior work history before first birth or are more likely to work while pregnant—namely, older and more educated women.

¹³Discussion of estimates for 1966-70 to 1976-80 is on page 14 of "Maternity Leave Arrangements: 1961-85," by Martin O'Connell, in *Work and Family Patterns of American Women*. Current Population Reports, Series P23, No. 165. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1990.

Figure 2.
Women Who Worked During Pregnancy by Age at First Birth and Race and Ethnicity: 1991-95

(Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

Duration of work during pregnancy

In 1961-65, 13 percent of women who worked during pregnancy reported they stopped working during their first trimester (6 or more months before the birth), and only 23 percent worked until less than 1 month before the birth of their first child (see Table D). A key transition occurred between 1971-75 and 1981-85 when the percentage of women who left work in their first trimester declined from 13 percent to 5 percent while the proportion working within 1 month of their child's birth jumped from 27 percent to 53 percent. Since 1981-85, those percentages have varied only by 2 percentage points for either indicator.¹⁴

Since 1981-85, the percentage of pregnant women who worked full

¹⁴It is interesting to note that of the 53 percent of women who worked within 1 month of their child's birth in 1991-95, about one-half of these women (27 percent) reported that they had never stopped working during their pregnancy.

time has declined slightly from 89 percent to 82 percent.¹⁵ Perhaps the composition of available work has changed, making part-time work increasingly available. On the other hand, women with more labor force experience or education may now have the skills or seniority to demand part-time work while pregnant, more than they did in the past. This change may be tied to the shift in age structure of women at first birth, to older ages since 1961.

The bottom panel of Table D shows that in the early 1960s there was little variation in the proportion of women who were full-time workers by the month they stopped working in their pregnancy. Among women who had their first birth in 1961-65, about 9 out of 10 women worked at full-time jobs, regardless of when they stopped working. With the exception of 1976-80, for all subsequent periods, women who left their jobs in their first trimester of their

¹⁵Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that the percentage of employed workers working part time increased over the 1970s and 1980s, and then began to decrease in the late 1990s.

pregnancy were less likely to be full-time workers than women who worked within a month of the birth of their child. In 1961-65, 88 percent of women who stopped working in their first trimester were full time, not different from the percentage for women who worked until 1 month before their child's birth. In 1991-95, 89 percent of women who worked within one month of their child's birth worked full time compared with 72 percent of women who stopped working in their first trimester. In general, Table D suggests that women who expressed the most commitment to their jobs, the full-time workers, remained at work until they became mothers.

Working during pregnancy: Who works the longest?

As shown previously, women with more years of schooling are more likely to be employed during their pregnancy, reflecting both their job skills and educational training gearing them towards employment after school. The previous report in this series noted that in the early 1960s, women who worked longer into their pregnancy were those in need of more financial assistance, especially high school dropouts who may have had low paying jobs.¹⁶ However, during the 1980s and 1990s, college-educated women began to work into the last trimester of their pregnancy more often than women with less than a high school education (see Figure 3). The earlier report suggested that women in the 1980s may have begun to work longer into their pregnancy for reasons other than immediate financial needs, perhaps viewing their jobs from a long-term perspective such as subsequent job opportunities with their employer after the birth of their child. This current report corroborates this finding.

¹⁶ *Op cit.*, O'Connell, 1990, pp. 16-17.

Table D.
Women Who Worked During Pregnancy: 1961-65 to 1991-95

(In thousands)

Characteristic	Year of first birth						
	1991-95	1986-90	1981-85	1976-80	1971-75	1966-70	1961-65
Number of women with first births	8,599	8,568	8,306	7,192	6,920	6,956	6,306
Number of women working during first pregnancy	5,740	5,758	5,147	4,414	3,700	3,435	2,797
Percent distribution of women by number of months before first birth they stopped working¹							
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Less than 1 month	52.6	54.8	52.7	40.9	27.1	26.2	22.7
1 month	20.3	20.9	21.0	18.0	16.0	13.2	11.9
2 months	9.0	9.1	10.7	14.7	20.9	18.3	17.1
3 to 5 months	11.0	10.0	10.2	18.6	22.9	28.4	35.4
6 or more months	7.1	5.2	5.4	7.7	13.1	13.9	12.9
Percent working full time² before first birth							
Total	81.7	86.7	89.2	86.6	88.9	89.5	89.5
By number of months before first birth they stopped working: ¹							
Less than 1 month	89.0	91.0	92.1	89.1	89.9	91.8	88.2
1 month	78.7	87.5	90.6	90.8	91.5	91.6	91.9
2 months	71.2	82.1	88.4	84.5	93.7	90.0	86.2
3 to 5 months	66.2	73.4	75.7	79.8	86.9	88.5	91.8
6 or more months	72.4	72.0	83.1	83.2	80.0	85.1	87.5

¹Among women who worked while pregnant.

²Full time employment status refers to last job held before birth of first child.

Source: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P23-165, Tables B and B-6, and this report, P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

Figure 3 shows that this pattern has continued since the 1980s. By 1991-95, 90 percent of college graduates who had worked during their pregnancy were employed at least until their last trimester (less than 3 months before their child's birth) compared with 62 percent of women who had not graduated from high school. In fact, Table E shows for the most recent 5-year period of births (1991-95), a much higher proportion of college graduates had worked during the last month of pregnancy (64 percent) as did women with less than a high school education (35 percent). The changing relationship of educational attainment and work during pregnancy is perhaps related to the changing composition of the U.S. workforce. As more women enter the workforce, highly educated employees may be more valued and rewarded by their employer and

encouraged to stay as long at work as possible.

For the most recent study period, 1991-95, Table E presents data for different socioeconomic groups on their likelihood of working during different stages of pregnancy. Because the characteristics shown in Table E are closely related to each other—for example, younger women also tend to be less educated—a multivariate analysis was used to ascertain the independent effects of each of the listed variables on the likelihood of working during pregnancy, statistically controlling for each of the other factors. For each of the time intervals shown in Table E, two columns are shown: the “Percent” columns show the simple percentage of women working, while the “Odds ratio” columns show the likelihood of a woman with that characteristic working in that time interval relative

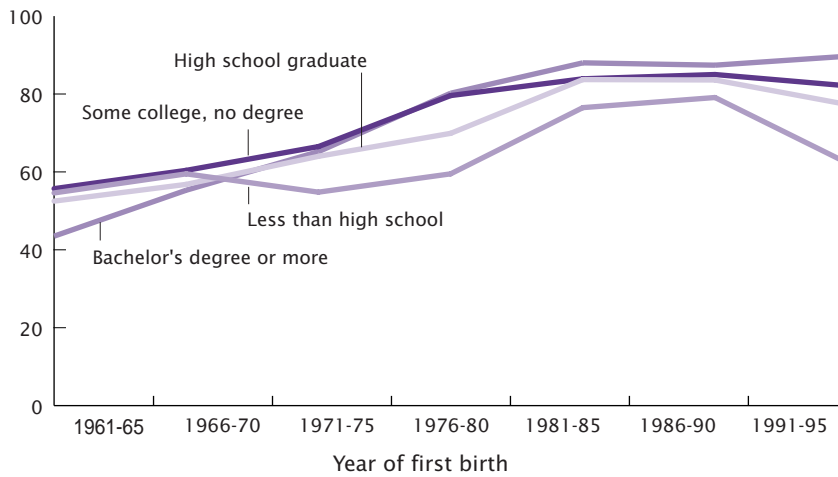
to a woman in the reference category. It is this latter column that indicates the relationship between the characteristic and the likelihood of working, after taking into account the other variables in the analysis.¹⁷

In general, women most likely to work late into their pregnancy are full-time workers, older women, and women with more years of schooling. Table E shows percentages and odds ratios predicting the likelihood of working during different stages of pregnancy. Working at a full-time job during pregnancy is strongly associated with the likelihood of working in both the last trimester and the last month of pregnancy. After statistically controlling for the effects of other

¹⁷An odds ratio of 1.0 indicates that a woman with this characteristic is as likely to be working as a woman with the specified reference or comparison characteristic. Ratios under 1.0 or over 1.0 indicate that a woman is less likely or more likely to work, respectively.

Figure 3.
**Women Who Worked in the Last Trimester of
 Pregnancy by Education Level: 1961-65 to 1991-95**

(Among women who worked during pregnancy)
 (Percent)



Source: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P23-165, Table B-7, and this report, P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

factors, women who worked full time at their last job during pregnancy were about two times as likely to work until the last trimester and two and a half times as likely to work until the end of their pregnancies than part-time workers.

Likewise, women who were older at the time of their first birth were more likely to work during pregnancy and also later in pregnancy than their younger counterparts. Older women may have more permanent jobs that enable or require them to maintain involvement in their work until close to the time their child is born. The odds that pregnant women age 25 or older at their first birth were working in the last trimester of pregnancy, was about twice that of teenagers. However, there were no statistically significant differences by age in the likelihood of working in the last month of pregnancy, after controlling for other factors in the statistical model.

Race and ethnicity are significantly associated with whether a woman

works at all during her first pregnancy, with White non-Hispanic women being more likely to work than other groups. However, there were no differences by race in the proportions of women working until late in their pregnancies.

Similarly, although women who had a child before their first marriage appear to be the least likely group of women to work either during pregnancy or late into their pregnancy, these differences are minimized by controlling for the other factors.

For all of the intervals shown in Table E, educational attainment clearly maintains a significant relationship with working during pregnancy. More highly educated women may be in career positions that require a greater show of commitment than the jobs of women with fewer years of school completed. Only 35 percent of women who had failed to complete high school worked in their last month of pregnancy compared with 64 percent of pregnant workers with at least a bachelor's degree.

Other factors in the statistical model did not diminish this pattern.

The data suggest that working during pregnancy is closely associated with job commitment and skill level of the worker. Women who are employed at full-time jobs and who, by the nature of their level of educational attainment, are employed at more highly skilled jobs, maintain their ties to the labor force for the majority of the months of their pregnancy. As will be shown, employment history is closely related to the types of maternity benefits received and the rapidity of returning to work after childbirth.

MATERNITY LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

This section first provides an overview of the changes in maternity leave arrangements since the 1960s. Next, it discusses leave arrangements women use before and after the birth of their first child, and ends with a comparison of women who take maternity leave and return to work with women who quit working when they have their first child.

Changes in leave arrangements since the 1960s

Periods of maternity leave are important for families as infants require considerable care and mothers need time to recover from pregnancy and childbirth. Businesses also benefit from offering maternity leave (both paid and unpaid) if it leads to greater job retention, because they can avoid the time and financial costs of finding and training new employees.¹⁸ Because there is no consistent formal structure for maternity leave in the United States, women must often individually patch together a plan of both paid and unpaid leave, the sum total of which may or may not be

¹⁸Commission on Family and Medical Leave. *A Workable Balance: Report to Congress on Family and Medical Leave Policies*. U.S. Department of Labor: Washington, DC, 1996.

Table E.
Work History During Pregnancy by Selected Characteristics: 1991-95

Characteristic	Among women who worked at all during pregnancy		Among women who worked last trimester of pregnancy ¹		Among women who worked last month of pregnancy ¹	
	Percent	Odds ratio	Percent	Odds ratio	Percent	Odds ratio
Total	66.8	(NA)	81.9	(NA)	52.6	(NA)
Number	5,740	(NA)	4,699	(NA)	3,019	(NA)
Employment status at last job						
Full time.....	54.5	(NI)	84.7	*1.97	57.3	*2.48
Part time.....	12.2	(NI)	69.1	1.00	31.5	1.00
Age at first birth						
Less than 18 years.....	20.5	1.00	63.8	1.00	37.3	1.00
18 and 19 years.....	45.7	*2.58	69.3	0.96	34.8	0.69
20 and 21 years.....	57.7	*3.55	67.9	0.77	41.7	0.77
22 to 24 years.....	70.5	*5.70	82.0	1.53	49.3	0.92
25 to 29 years.....	83.6	*10.76	86.9	*2.03	59.2	1.21
30 years and over.....	85.1	*10.68	88.7	*2.27	60.3	1.17
Race and ethnicity²						
White.....	70.3	(X)	81.9	(X)	52.5	(X)
Non-Hispanic.....	75.6	(X)	82.3	(X)	52.9	(X)
Black.....	50.4	(X)	79.5	(X)	53.5	(X)
Asian and Pacific Islander.....	58.4	(X)	87.0	(X)	51.8	(X)
Hispanic (of any race).....	44.0	(X)	78.2	(X)	49.3	(X)
White, non-Hispanic.....	(X)	1.00	(X)	1.00	(X)	1.00
Black, non-Hispanic.....	(X)	*0.53	(X)	0.95	(X)	1.19
Other, non-Hispanic.....	(X)	*0.32	(X)	1.35	(X)	0.89
Hispanic.....	(X)	*0.39	(X)	1.00	(X)	1.05
Timing of first birth³						
Before first marriage.....	50.7	1.00	76.3	1.00	44.8	1.00
Within first marriage.....	74.5	0.94	84.0	0.86	55.6	1.04
After first marriage.....	81.5	0.85	82.7	*0.59	52.9	0.80
Educational attainment						
Less than high school.....	28.6	1.00	62.3	1.00	35.2	1.00
High school graduate.....	60.2	*2.25	77.3	*1.88	45.9	1.49
Some college, no degree.....	75.5	*3.86	82.1	*2.27	50.6	*1.65
Bachelor's degree or more.....	87.1	*4.47	89.7	*3.04	64.4	*2.41
Unweighted N.....	(NA)	2935	(NA)	1910	(NA)	1910
chi-square.....	(NA)	766.97	(NA)	137.91	(NA)	139.99
degrees of freedom.....	(NA)	13	(NA)	14	(NA)	14

* Significant at the 90-percent confidence level.

NA Not applicable.

NI Not included because employment status at job held during pregnancy was omitted from the logistic regression predicting employment during pregnancy.

X Race/ethnicity categories allow overlap between groups, therefore mutually exclusive categories were used in the logistic regressions.

¹Among women who worked while pregnant.

²Mutually exclusive race categories shown for logistic regression only.

³Refers 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.

Source: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P23-165, Table B-7, and this report, P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

satisfactory to them. Thus, maternity leave in the United States is a common occurrence, yet hardly a uniform experience.

Table F shows the overall changes since the 1960s in the type of leave arrangements used by women who

worked during their pregnancy. In the early 1960s, 63 percent of pregnant working women quit their job around the time of first child's birth. This percentage decreased to 27 percent by the late 1980s, where it seems to have recently stabilized.

Simultaneously, an equally important increase has occurred in the use of paid and unpaid maternity leave. In the early 1960s, the use of paid leave arrangements was reported by 16 percent of women who worked during pregnancy. However, by the late 1980s and the early 1990s, larger

Table F.
Leave Arrangements Used by Women Who Worked During Pregnancy: 1961-1965 to 1991-95

Type of leave	Year of first birth						
	1991-95	1986-90	1981-85	1976-80	1971-75	1966-70	1961-65
Number of women (in thousands)	5,740	5,758	5,147	4,414	3,700	3,435	2,797
Leave arrangements used (in percent)¹							
Quit job	26.9	26.5	35.7	41.3	51.1	58.9	62.8
Paid leave ²	42.7	43.3	37.3	34.0	23.4	18.3	16.0
Unpaid leave ³	40.3	41.0	33.7	20.2	20.8	17.6	14.1
Disability leave	11.2	7.5	6.3	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Let go from job	4.2	2.3	3.5	4.9	4.6	4.2	5.0

NA Data not available for these years.

¹Individual leave arrangements exceed 100.0 because of multiple answers. Leave arrangements may have been used before or up to 12 weeks after the birth for periods 1981-85 to 1991-95 and before or up to 6 weeks after the birth for periods 1961-65 to 1976-80.

²Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, vacation, and other paid leave.

³Unpaid leave includes all unpaid maternity, sick, vacation, and other unpaid leave.

Source: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 Table D and this report P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

proportions of pregnant working women used paid maternity leave (43 percent). The use of unpaid leave increased in a similar manner. Of the 5.7 million women who worked during pregnancy, only a small percentage (14 percent) used both paid and unpaid leave in 1991-95.

No more than 5 percent of pregnant women were let go from their job over the entire study period. The use of disability leave increased from 6 percent in the early 1980s to 11 percent in the early 1990s (disability leave data were not specifically collected in earlier periods but may have been reported in the other

types of paid or unpaid leave arrangements).

These trends are likely related to other changes in the lives of American women over this same time period. Women are having births at later ages and are more likely to be college graduates, trends which translate into greater work experience before first birth and stronger commitment to the labor force. Employers, more than ever, may perceive women as integral to their work force and may be more likely to offer maternity leave as a job benefit when they weigh the costs of finding and training a new employee against a short leave of absence.

MATERNITY LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

In the 1996 SIPP panel, two separate questions on maternity leave 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.

In both surveys, women who reported that they had never stopped working before the child's birth were not asked about arrangements used prior to the child's birth but were asked about any arrangements used after the child was born. Respondents in the surveys were allowed to report as many arrangements as they used (in the 1996 panel, 6 percent and 11 percent of women provided multiple answers to the questions on maternity leave before and after birth, respectively). The most important addition to the list of leave arrangements in the 1996 panel was the inclusion of "disability leave," which may have been conceptually included as responses in either the paid or unpaid leave categories in the prior SIPP panels.

Leave arrangements before and after the first birth

Table G provides a detailed picture of maternity leave arrangements used by employed women—both before and after their child's birth—who had their first birth in 1991-95.

In general, women are more likely to quit their job before the birth of their child (23 percent) than wait until after their child is born (4 percent). On the other hand, both paid and

Table G.
Detailed Leave Arrangements Used by Women Who Worked During Pregnancy: 1991-95

(In percent)

Type of leave	Total	Leave taken	
		Before birth	After birth
Number of women (in thousands)	5,740	5,740	5,740
Leave arrangements used (in percent)¹			
Quit job	26.9	22.8	4.1
Paid leave ²	42.7	24.3	35.9
Maternity leave	30.7	18.4	24.7
Sick leave	10.6	4.2	8.8
Vacation leave	11.3	3.5	9.7
Other paid leave	1.5	0.8	1.0
Unpaid leave ³	40.3	19.7	36.7
Maternity leave	34.8	16.9	31.0
Sick leave	2.7	1.2	2.0
Vacation leave	2.1	1.0	1.5
Other unpaid leave	3.4	0.8	3.0
Disability leave	11.2	4.9	9.4
Other leave	6.4	2.8	4.7
Self employed	1.0	0.3	0.9
Employer went out of business	0.6	0.4	0.1
Other	4.8	2.0	3.7
Let go from job	4.2	3.6	3.2

¹Individual leave arrangements exceed 100.0 because of multiple answers. Leave arrangements in the total column may have been used before or after the birth, and are only counted once if used at both times.

²Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, vacation, and other paid leave.

³Unpaid leave includes all unpaid maternity, sick, vacation, and other unpaid leave.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

unpaid leave respectively are more likely to be used after the child's birth than during pregnancy. The same pattern holds true for use of disability leave: 5 percent of pregnant women use this type of benefit when pregnant, while 9 percent of mothers use it after the child is born. This suggests that women may use a "save it up" strategy by working as long as possible into their pregnancy and then taking their leave after their child's birth. Another leave taking strategy that women use is to combine different types of leave. Separate analysis shows that in 1991-95, 6 percent of women combined one or more types of leave arrangements (i.e., quit, paid, unpaid, or disability leave) before their child's birth while 11 percent combined leave arrangements after their child's birth.

A sizable proportion of women take "maternity leave" either before or after their child is born, with more mentioning that this leave was unpaid (35 percent) than paid (31 percent). Sick or vacation leave, however, is more likely to be paid than unpaid. Furthermore, this paid sick or vacation leave is used more frequently after the birth than before the birth of their first child.

Over the time period 1981-85 to 1991-95, there was an increase in the use of both paid and unpaid leave arrangements after the child's birth (data not shown for the 1980s). Use of paid leave after the child's birth increased from 32 percent in 1981-85 to 36 percent in 1991-95, while use of unpaid leave increased from 30 percent to 37 percent over the same time period. This may reflect an increased effort on the part of employers to accommodate

women's childbearing by offering paid or unpaid maternity leave and holding their job for them. It may also reflect increased compliance with the various legislative and judicial rulings established during that period or the family's increased reliance on mother's wages for financial well-being.

Who receives maternity leave and who leaves their job?

Younger women in 1991-95 were more likely to quit their jobs than were women who had their first child at older ages (see Table H). More than twice as many women (44 percent) who had their birth before age 22 quit their jobs in 1991-1995, compared with women who had their first child at age 25 or older (19 percent).¹⁹ Part-time workers were also more likely to quit their jobs (53 percent) than full-time workers (21 percent).

Older women were more likely to receive paid maternity benefits. The proportion of women using paid leave for their first birth increases steadily with age, from only 7 percent of women whose age at first birth was less than 18 years old, to 59 percent among those who had their birth at age 30 or older. It is likely that the greater labor force experience and job security enjoyed by older women translates into better benefits when interrupting their job to have a baby.

Employment characteristics are important factors associated with the type of leave arrangements women use for the birth of their first child. Full-time workers were more likely to obtain paid leave benefits than part-time workers. Women who worked

¹⁹This statement and other statements in this section based on Table H were also statistically significant when a multivariate analysis was performed controlling for other characteristics shown in the table. The results of this analysis are available in the detailed tables accompanying this report on the Internet.

into the last month of pregnancy were more likely to obtain paid leave benefits than those who left work earlier in their pregnancy. Very few women who worked until their last month of pregnancy were let go from their job (only 1 percent). However, 13 percent of women who left in their first trimester were let go from their job and did not return to work

at all for the remainder of their pregnancy.

While no other job-related characteristics of the mother while pregnant were collected from this survey, educational attainment at the time of the interview may be a good proxy for the type of job one holds, the wage one earns, and in turn, the type of maternity leave benefits offered.

Increasing levels of education appear to go hand-in-hand with increases in the use and perhaps the availability of paid maternity benefits. Sixty-three percent of women with a bachelor's degree or more used paid benefits, compared with 18 percent of women who had less than a high school education. In addition, these highly educated women were less likely to use unpaid leave surround-

Table H.
Type of Leave Arrangements Used by Women Who Worked During Their Pregnancy: 1991-95

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Number of women	Percent of women using specified leave arrangement				
		Quit job	Paid leave ¹	Unpaid leave ²	Disability leave	Let go from job
Total	5,740	26.9	42.7	40.3	11.2	4.2
Employment status at last job						
Full time.....	4,688	21.0	48.6	41.3	12.2	4.6
Part time.....	1,052	53.4	16.3	35.8	6.7	2.5
Month stopped working before birth						
Less than 1 month.....	3,019	13.8	54.7	43.5	10.3	1.2
1 month.....	1,167	23.6	44.7	45.9	13.3	4.4
2 months.....	514	45.8	28.7	33.8	16.4	6.4
3 to 5 months.....	631	59.7	12.2	30.0	11.5	10.7
6 or more months.....	409	58.4	12.7	24.9	4.6	13.3
Age at first birth						
Less than 18 years.....	166	49.1	7.2	35.9	6.4	6.6
18 and 19 years.....	559	43.0	15.9	43.7	8.9	7.7
20 and 21 years.....	662	43.6	19.2	41.0	5.9	6.8
22 to 24 years.....	1,087	29.6	36.6	39.4	8.6	4.8
25 to 29 years.....	1,692	21.2	52.6	40.2	13.6	2.5
30 years and over.....	1,573	16.1	59.4	40.0	13.8	3.0
Race and ethnicity						
White.....	4,871	27.5	43.2	40.1	11.1	3.8
Non-Hispanic.....	4,332	26.5	44.6	40.2	10.7	4.0
Black.....	631	22.4	35.7	43.3	10.8	8.2
Asian and Pacific Islander.....	199	21.5	49.2	38.2	15.7	1.4
Hispanic (of any race).....	568	34.1	32.4	39.7	14.3	4.0
Timing of first birth³						
Before first marriage.....	1,489	33.9	23.8	44.2	9.0	7.4
Within first marriage.....	3,826	25.1	48.3	39.2	11.6	3.0
After first marriage.....	424	18.7	58.4	37.2	14.8	4.0
Educational attainment						
Less than high school.....	363	46.3	18.2	47.1	9.3	6.2
High school graduate.....	1,535	32.2	29.1	41.6	10.1	5.7
Some college, no degree.....	2,088	26.1	40.1	43.0	10.2	4.7
Bachelor's degree or more.....	1,754	19.2	62.7	34.6	13.7	1.9

¹Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, vacation, and other paid leave.

²Unpaid leave includes all unpaid maternity, sick, vacation, and other unpaid leave.

³Refers 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: Individual leave arrangements exceed 100.0 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 (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

ing the birth of their first child (35 percent) compared with women with less than a high school education (47 percent).

The striking relation between educational level and use of paid maternity leave is a relatively new trend that began in the early 1970s and that had intensified by the 1990s. Figure 4 shows that in the early 1960s, the use of paid maternity leave did not differ depending on educational level. Over time, the percentage receiving paid leave among women who were not high school graduates has remained steady at roughly 18 percent. However, there has been a distinct rise in the use of paid maternity leave among women with higher levels of education since the 1960s.

Over this same period, women have increasingly acquired more years of schooling and entered the labor force at unprecedented levels. Their age at first birth has risen, and they work longer into their pregnancy and have done so in a period when family-friendly legislation has provided more job security during pregnancy. All of these factors contribute to a greater commitment to the labor force. The combination of these changes in American society helps explain the simultaneous declines in job quitting during pregnancy and the increases noted in the receipt of both paid and unpaid maternity leave.

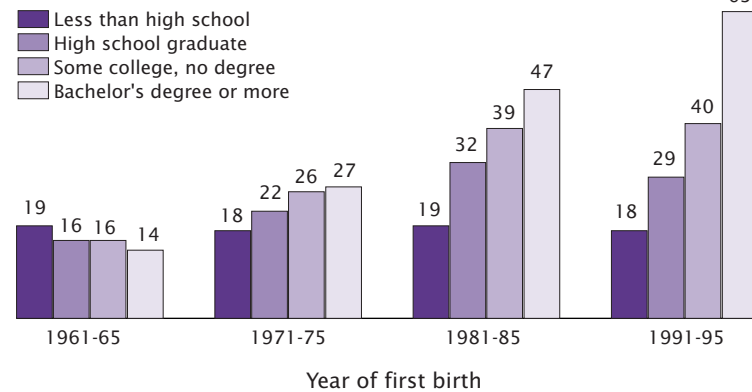
RETURNING TO WORK

Juggling work and family activities often becomes difficult after the birth of a child. This section looks at how rapidly women begin working after the birth of their first child. Overall trends since the 1960s will be examined first. The next subsection will look at the characteristics of women who return most rapidly to work. Finally, new data from the 1996 SIPP panel will be examined to determine

Figure 4.

Women Who Received Paid Leave for Their First Birth by Educational Attainment, Selected Years: 1961-65 to 1991-95

(Percent)



Note: Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, vacation, and other paid leave used before or after the birth.

Source: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 Table B-9 and this report, P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

which women are most likely to return to their same employer after their child's birth and the types of changes that have occurred in their jobs.

Trends since the 1960s

Table I shows the cumulative monthly percent of women working after the birth of their first child. In the early 1960s, relatively few women worked within one year of childbirth – only 14 percent of all mothers with newborns had returned to work by the 6th month, increasing to only 17 percent by the 12th month. These percentages more than doubled by 1976-80 with another large increase occurring by 1981-85 after the passage of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act. By 1991-94, 52 percent of mothers had returned to work by the 6th month after their child's birth, and 60 percent by the 12th month.

If a woman decides to return to work during the first year of her child's life, she will probably return earlier rather than later in the child's infancy.

Among those who returned to work by the 12th month after childbirth, most had returned by the 3rd month. In 1991-94, over half had returned by 3 months after the first birth and over three-fourths were working by the 6th month.

Figure 5 clearly illustrates the relationship between work experience during pregnancy and the rate at which women returned to work. Women who worked during their pregnancy in 1991-94 were back to work much sooner than were women who did not work during their pregnancy. For example, 57 percent of women who worked during their pregnancy were back to work by the 3rd month, compared with only 9 percent among women who had not worked during their pregnancy. By the 6th month after childbirth, 70 percent of women who worked during their pregnancy and 17 percent of women who did not were employed. These differences by prior employment history are noted for each time period (see second and third panels of data in Table I). This

Table I.
Women Working at a Job by Monthly Interval After First Birth: 1961-65 to 1991-94

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Year of first birth						
	1991-94	1986-90	1981-85	1976-80	1971-75	1966-70	1961-65
Number of women with first births	6,995	8,568	8,306	7,192	6,920	6,956	6,306
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Worked after birth							
Cumulative percent:							
Less than 1 month ¹	3.3	3.4	3.6	2.5	1.8	1.3	1.9
1 month	13.0	13.5	13.2	7.2	6.7	4.6	3.8
2 months	29.9	31.8	27.8	16.8	12.1	9.0	7.8
3 months	40.8	41.6	35.9	22.4	15.6	12.7	9.9
4 months	45.7	46.9	40.8	27.1	17.6	15.2	11.2
5 months	48.9	49.9	43.7	29.5	19.4	16.5	12.3
6 months	52.3	52.9	48.3	32.2	21.9	18.3	13.7
12 months	60.1	60.8	56.3	38.8	27.9	23.9	16.8
24 months	(I)	66.6	63.0	48.0	37.0	29.8	22.5
60 months	(I)	72.7	69.9	64.3	50.0	41.1	33.5
Worked during pregnancy							
Number of women	4,621	5,758	5,147	4,414	3,700	3,435	2,797
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Cumulative percent:							
Less than 1 month ¹	4.5	4.5	5.4	3.7	2.6	2.4	4.1
3 months	57.3	57.3	52.9	32.6	24.1	19.6	16.5
6 months	70.4	70.6	66.9	45.4	32.1	26.7	21.4
12 months	77.7	78.6	74.4	52.6	38.8	32.7	25.8
Did not work during pregnancy							
Number of women	2,374	2,810	3,160	2,778	3,221	3,522	3,509
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Cumulative percent:							
Less than 1 month	1.1	1.1	0.6	0.5	1.0	0.2	0.2
3 months	8.7	9.4	8.3	6.3	5.9	6.0	4.6
6 months	17.3	16.6	18.0	11.1	10.1	10.2	7.5
12 months	25.8	24.3	26.9	16.8	15.3	15.3	9.6

I Incomplete interval.

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

Note: 1991-94 estimates are used for comparing worker rates before and after birth for the most recent first birth cohort.

Source: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 Table B-5 and this report P70-79, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

finding suggests that the entry rate for those women not employed during their pregnancy is slower due to the time and energy involved in the search for a new job. It may also be that they reflect a more selective group of women who have decided to remain out of the labor force both before and after pregnancy to devote more time solely to family-raising activities.

Likelihood of a Rapid Return to Work

As shown previously, women who did not work during their pregnancy in 1991-94 (which made up about

one-third of all mothers), had comparatively lower post-birth employment rates than mothers who worked during pregnancy. To examine the relationship between specific job characteristics of women who worked during pregnancy—for example, hours worked and leave benefits—and when they returned to work, data are shown in Table J in two ways: first, for all mothers and then only for mothers who worked during pregnancy. Employment rates are also shown for three different time intervals after the child's birth—working less than 3 months after

birth, 3 to 5 months after birth, or 6 to 11 months after the child's birth.

For the first group, all mothers, the characteristics of those women who return to work quickly after their child's birth are similar to those who worked during their pregnancy. Women who are older are more likely to return to work both within 3 months and 3 to 5 months after childbirth than younger women (see Table J). Those who have attained high levels of education are more likely to return to work both within 3 months and 3 to 5 months after childbirth than women with lower

levels of education. White non-Hispanic women are also more likely to work after the birth of their first child than are Black women or Hispanic women.

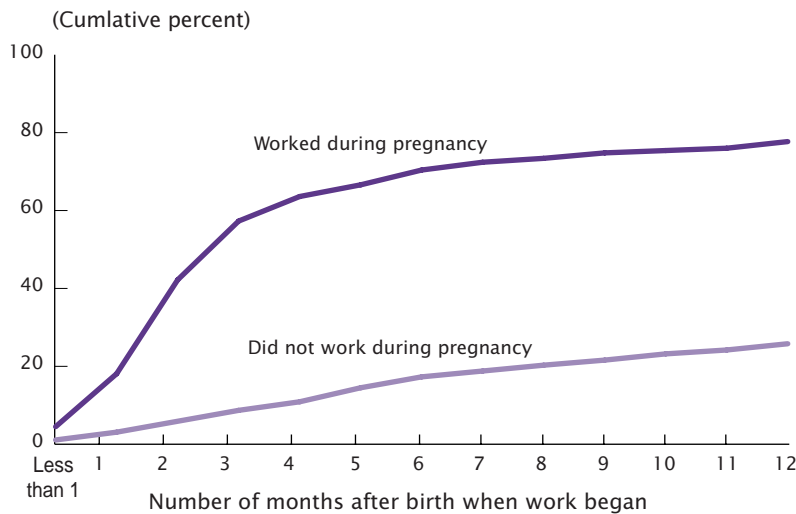
A different picture emerges when one looks only at employment rates for women who worked during their pregnancy. The large differences in returning to work within three months just noted for all women by these demographic characteristics are reduced or become insignificant for women who have worked during their pregnancy. For all mothers, teenagers returned within 3 months less often than women 30 years and over, but among women who had some work experience during pregnancy, only a few percentage points separated these age groups. Higher return rates, however, were still found for older women in the 3 to 5 month interval.

Employment differences between high school dropouts and women with college degrees disappeared, although higher return rates for the 3 to 5 month interval were similarly noted for college graduates. As for differences by ethnicity, no differences were noted for any of the intervals between Hispanics and White non-Hispanics for any of the intervals in Table J.

For women who worked during their pregnancy, job characteristics seemed to play the most important role in determining when they returned to work.²⁰ Women who worked into their last month of pregnancy returned to work more rapidly than those who left work before their last trimester of the pregnancy. For example, 50 percent of women who stopped working less than one month prior to their child's birth were back at work less than 3 months

²⁰The ensuing results were also verified and upheld by performing a multivariate statistical analysis which controlled for the other variables shown in this table.

Figure 5.
Women Who Returned to Work by Work Status During Pregnancy and Interval After First Birth: 1991-94



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

after their child's birth compared with 22 percent of women who left 6 or more months before their child's birth.

Likewise, the type of maternity leave women use is also related to how soon they return to work. Women who use maternity leave—either paid or unpaid—or disability leave, are roughly twice as likely to experience a rapid return to work (within less than 3 months) compared with women who either quit or are let go from their job. Women who are let go or who quit obviously have greater difficulty in securing employment after their child's birth as time for a job search may be scarce considering the newly acquired responsibilities of motherhood.

These findings imply that there is a strong association between work-related variables and rapid returns to work. It is unclear whether these women are more motivated to maintain ties to the labor force because of career goals or whether the jobs these women hold offer benefits that facilitate these ties to the labor force, such as promising a job after child-

birth without experiencing any negative job sanctions. Clearly, the costs to employers associated with finding and training new employees are high as well as are the costs to employees searching for a new job. In contrast, previous research showed that in the 1960s and 1970s, the women most economically in need and dependent on their own earnings (teenagers, Black women, and women with premarital first births) experienced the most rapid returns to work.²¹ Women's commitment to the labor force now appears to be stronger, and maternity leave benefits may play a more important role in continued employment after the child's birth.

²¹Martin O'Connell. "Maternity Leave Arrangements: 1961-85," in *Work and Family Patterns of American Women*. Current Population Reports, Series P23, No.165. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1990. For other research also showing economic need as an important factor in rapid returns to work, see Frank Mott and Lois Shaw. "The Employment Consequences of Different Fertility Behaviors," in Lois Shaw, ed., *Midlife Women at Work*. Lexington Books: Lexington, MA, 1986; and Steven McLaughlin. "Differential Patterns of Female Labor-Force Participation Surrounding the First Birth," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 44(2): 407-420, 1982.

Table J.
Returning to Work in Stated Intervals After First Birth by Selected Characteristics: 1991-94

Characteristic	Percent returning to work							
	All women				Women who worked during pregnancy			
	Less than 3 months	3 to 5 months	6 to 11 months	Did not return within 1st year	Less than 3 months	3 to 5 months	6 to 11 months	Did not return within 1st year
Total	29.9	19.0	9.5	41.5	42.2	24.4	9.4	24.0
Employment status while pregnant								
Not employed.....	5.9	8.6	9.7	75.8	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Full time.....	43.1	25.9	9.4	21.6	43.1	25.9	9.4	21.6
Part time.....	38.3	17.4	9.5	34.8	38.3	17.4	9.5	34.8
Age at first birth								
Less than 18 years.....	11.8	10.2	11.2	66.8	37.7	12.5	4.0	45.8
18 and 19 years.....	21.9	14.9	10.3	52.8	36.3	19.5	11.4	32.8
20 and 21 years.....	25.8	12.3	12.0	49.9	43.4	16.2	14.4	35.9
22 to 24 years.....	33.3	17.1	10.1	39.5	45.5	20.8	10.8	23.0
25 to 29 years.....	37.1	23.7	7.9	31.4	43.4	27.3	8.0	21.4
30 years and over.....	35.4	26.8	7.8	29.9	40.8	30.6	7.7	20.9
Race and ethnicity								
White.....	30.8	19.6	9.7	39.9	41.3	25.2	9.3	24.2
Non-Hispanic.....	32.9	20.7	10.2	36.2	41.3	25.2	9.5	24.1
Black.....	25.3	15.2	10.0	49.5	46.7	17.0	11.0	25.3
Asian and Pacific Islander.....	32.6	21.3	2.5	43.6	50.9	29.0	4.2	15.8
Hispanic (of any race).....	19.6	14.5	6.9	59.0	41.3	25.7	8.5	24.5
Timing of first birth¹								
Before first marriage.....	24.9	13.2	9.5	52.4	42.8	17.5	8.5	31.2
Within first marriage.....	31.8	22.1	9.8	36.3	41.5	27.3	10.0	21.1
After first marriage.....	39.8	20.6	6.7	32.9	46.7	22.1	6.5	24.7
Educational attainment								
Less than high school.....	14.8	8.5	7.8	69.0	39.5	15.7	9.7	35.1
High school graduate.....	29.4	14.6	10.3	45.6	43.6	18.1	11.1	27.3
Some college, no degree.....	33.2	21.6	9.9	35.4	43.2	25.4	9.0	22.4
Bachelor's degree or more.....	35.3	27.8	9.0	27.9	40.3	30.9	8.3	20.5
Month stopped working before birth								
Less than 1 month.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	50.4	28.4	7.0	14.3
1 month.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	42.0	23.3	9.0	25.7
2 months.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	29.6	22.6	13.3	34.4
3 to 5 months.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	27.2	16.2	14.2	42.4
6 or more months.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	22.0	13.6	15.8	48.5
Type of maternity leave arrangement²								
Quit job.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	21.3	13.3	15.5	49.9
Paid leave.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	49.1	31.9	7.0	12.0
Unpaid leave.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	44.4	28.5	8.9	18.3
Disability leave.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	45.1	35.3	2.2	17.4
Let go from job.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	19.2	8.1	20.6	52.1
Other leave.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	29.7	18.9	10.6	40.7

NA Not applicable for women who did not work during pregnancy.

¹Refers 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.

²Leave arrangement may have been used before or after the birth. Individual leave arrangements exceed 100.0 because of multiple answers.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

Returning to the same or a different employer

Since the early 1980s, approximately 75 percent of women who worked during their pregnancy returned to work by 12 months after their child's

birth (see Table I). Among these mothers, most of them secured their first job after childbirth (about 76 percent) with their pre-birth

employer (see Table K). The majority who returned to their pre-birth employer also experienced no change in the numbers of hours they worked per week after having a child compared with their work schedule before their child was born.

However, this proportion declined from 84 percent in 1981-85 to 77 percent in 1991-94. There was a commensurate increase in the percentage of women working fewer hours after having their first child (14 percent in 1981-85 to 20 percent in 1991-94).

Table K indicates also that for the three periods shown in the table, at least 95 percent of women returning to their pre-birth employer earned the same or higher pay as before the birth. In addition, 97 percent or more were at the same or greater job skill level. When combining all three of these characteristics together, 69 percent of women who had a first birth in 1991-94 experienced no change for any of these three indicators, down slightly from 77 percent in 1981-85.

Compared with mothers who returned to their pre-birth employers, women who changed employers for their first job after childbirth experienced considerable variability in the number of hours they worked each week, their pay level, and the skill level of their job. In 1991-94, 42 percent worked the same number of hours after the child's birth, 23 percent worked more hours, and 36 percent worked fewer hours.

Switching employers meant decreasing their hourly work schedule for about a third of mothers for all three periods shown in Table K.

Changing jobs also meant more variability in pay. While 88 percent of women in 1991-94 who returned to their same employer returned at the same pay level, only 35 percent of women who switched employers had

Table K.
Women Who Worked During Pregnancy and Returned to Work Less Than 12 Months After Birth of Their First Child: 1981-85 to 1991-94

(In percent)

Characteristic	Year of first birth		
	1991-94	1986-90	1981-85
Number of women returning to work (in thousands) ¹	3,539	4,474	3,761
Returned to pre-birth employer	2,750	3,416	2,891
Returned to different employer	790	1,059	870
Women returning to work (in percent).....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Returned to pre-birth employer	77.7	76.3	76.9
Returned to different employer	22.3	23.7	23.1
Returned to pre-birth employer			
Number of hours worked after first birth.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
More than before first birth	2.8	3.0	1.7
Same as before first birth.....	77.2	81.0	84.1
Fewer than before first birth	20.0	16.0	14.2
Pay level after first birth.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Higher than before first birth	7.5	5.9	5.8
Same as before first birth.....	88.3	90.8	92.6
Lower than before first birth.....	4.1	3.3	1.6
Skill level after first birth.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Greater than before first birth	5.6	3.1	4.2
Same as before first birth.....	92.6	94.1	93.9
Lesser than before first birth.....	1.8	2.8	1.9
Hours, pay, and skill level all the same after first birth	69.1	74.1	76.5
Returned to different employer			
Number of hours worked after first birth.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
More than before first birth	22.7	18.5	18.2
Same as before first birth.....	41.6	48.1	47.5
Fewer than before first birth	35.8	33.4	34.3
Pay level after first birth.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Higher than before first birth	38.0	33.7	31.1
Same as before first birth.....	34.7	37.8	39.9
Lower than before first birth.....	27.3	28.5	29.0
Skill level after first birth.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Greater than before first birth	24.8	30.4	28.8
Same as before first birth.....	53.9	46.8	48.9
Lesser than before first birth.....	21.2	22.8	22.3
Hours, pay, and skill level all the same after first birth	16.0	19.1	17.0

¹Excludes self-employed women and women whose pre-birth employer went out of business.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

their job at the same pay level. A larger percentage of women switched to employers that paid them more than their pre-birth employer (38 percent in 1991-94) than who paid them less (27 percent). This difference is not evident

for mothers in the earlier time periods (1981-85 and 1986-90).

Ninety-seven percent or more of women returning to their pre-birth employer worked jobs requiring the same or greater skills, but about 80 percent of women with new employ-

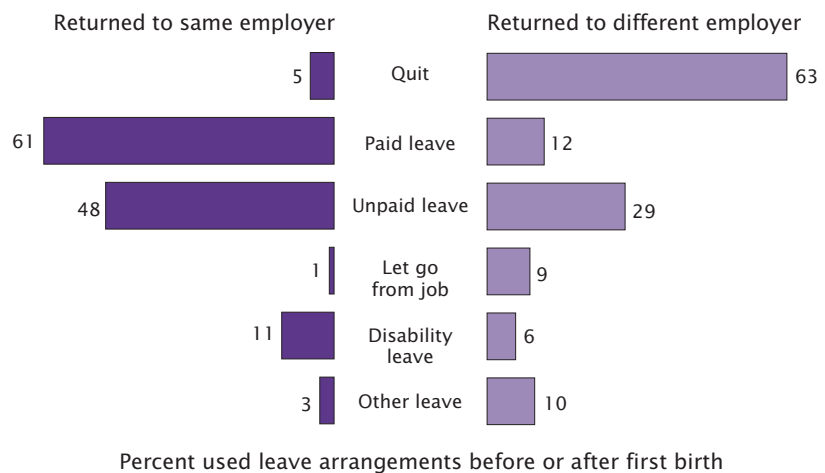
ers were working at jobs with the same or greater level of skills after the birth of their child. However, among those women who experienced a change in their skill level, more generally advanced their skill level rather than taking a job needing less skill. Overall, between 15 percent and 20 percent of women who changed employers maintained consistency on all three of these characteristics before and after the birth of their child. Clearly, women who find a new job after becoming mothers use a variety of paths to support themselves and their new child. Some move up in the work world, while the majority maintain or scale back their commitment to the labor force.

Figure 6 shows the types of leave mothers used by whether they returned to their pre-birth employer by the 12th month after their child's birth.²² Leave arrangements used either before or after the first birth are included because some arrangements, such as quitting, occur almost exclusively before the birth of the child, while others (for example, paid leave) tend to occur most often after the child is born. These leave arrangements can be taken concurrently and are not mutually exclusive—that is, a woman could use both paid and unpaid leave, or any other combination of leave arrangements.

Among women who returned to work by the 12th month after their child's birth, those who returned to their pre-birth employer most fre-

²²This analysis was limited to women returning to work by the 12th month after their child's birth as employer benefits are not likely to extend for more than 1 year after birth. Some countries, like Sweden, do extend maternity leave benefits for more than 1 year after the child's birth. For a cross-national comparison of parental leave, see Sheila Kamerman, "Parental Leave and Infant Care: U.S. and International Trends and Issues, 1978-1988" in Janet Shibley Hyde and Marilyn Essex, eds., *Parental Leave and Child Care: Setting a Research and Policy Agenda*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA, 1991.

Figure 6.
Type of Leave Arrangement Used Before or After First Birth by Return to Post-Birth Employer: 1991-94



Note: Includes women who worked during pregnancy and returned to work within 12 months of their first child's birth.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

quently used paid leave (61 percent) or unpaid leave (48 percent). Very few quit their job (5 percent) or were let go during their pregnancy (1 percent) and subsequently returned. Among women who returned to work by the 12th month but who switched employers, most had quit their job during their pregnancy (63 percent), followed by unpaid leave (29 percent). Nine percent had been let go by their previous employer. About 12 percent of women who switched employers did receive some type of paid maternity leave either before or after their child's birth. These patterns are consistent with the use of paid leave as an incentive for employee retention, whereas those who quit their jobs before or after having a child exhibit minimal amounts of employer loyalty.

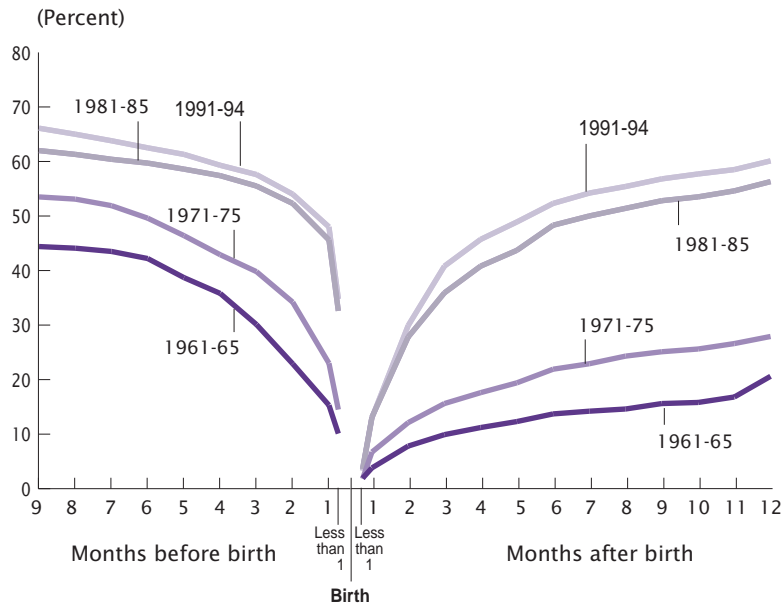
Unpaid leave, however, shows mixed results. About half of women returning to their pre-birth employer used unpaid leave. They may also have used other types of leave, as the categories are not mutually exclusive. Twenty-nine percent of those who

went to a new employer post-birth also used unpaid leave. It appears that the use of unpaid leave does not have as strong a retention effect as does paid leave. It may be that some forms of unpaid leave are a legal mandatory benefit given to employees but are not strong enough to promote job retention.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the 1960s, women have experienced considerable gains in education beyond the high school years and have continued to delay child-bearing to older ages. These factors have contributed to the increase in the work experience of women both before and during their first pregnancy. Not only are women more likely to work during their pregnancy than they did 30 to 40 years ago, but they work longer into their pregnancy. More than half of women work up until one month before the birth of their first child. In addition, women are returning to work after their pregnancy at a faster rate than in previous decades. The cumulative

Figure 7.
Women Who Worked Before and After Their First Birth by Month Before and After Birth: Selected Birth Cohorts, 1961-65 to 1991-94



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

effect is that women's work schedules are less likely to be interrupted by a pregnancy. As shown in Figure 7, the largest changes in trends in women working surrounding their first birth came about in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see Table I for percentages).

These trends have occurred during time periods when family legislation was enacted which increasingly protected a pregnant worker's employment status both before and after birth and made it easier for families to adjust their work and family lives after the birth of their first child. Whereas in the 1960s, around 60 percent of women quit their jobs either before or shortly after the birth of their child, only 27 percent did so by 1991-95 (see Table F). Paid leave benefits were received by 43 percent of pregnant workers in 1991-95 — a similar proportion also received unpaid leave (40 percent), and 11 percent received disability leave.

Data in this report also show that receiving paid leave is related to more rapid returns to work and that the majority of workers return to their same employer after their child's birth. The cumulative effect of these findings indicates that women today are making longer term commitments to the labor force than women in the 1960s and are incorporating work life on a concurrent basis with childbearing and childrearing. Some recent trends, however, suggest that the major increases in employment noted in the 1970s and early 1980s will not be duplicated in the future and that while employment rates are still high, a shift to more part-time work is beginning to occur, both before and after childbirth. Perhaps this is an indicator of a growing flexibility in the workforce or represents the desires of families with newborn children who seek to balance work and family life.

SOURCE OF THE DATA

The estimates in this report come from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) collected in June through September of 1996, and in June through September of 1985, by the U.S. Census Bureau. Data from the 1996 survey were used in combination with similar information collected in the 1984 and 1985 SIPP panels to provide an extended series of employment and maternity leave data between 1961 and 1995. Data in this report are usually shown as 5-year averages (for example, 1961-65). Statistics for the 1961-65 to 1976-80 periods are from the previously cited report ("Maternity Leave Arrangements: 1961-85") while data shown for the periods 1981-85 to 1991-95 are from the 1996 panel of the SIPP.

The data highlighted in this report come primarily from the maternity leave topical modules in respective SIPP panels (1996 Wave 2, and the overlapping panels in 1984 Wave 8 and 1985 Wave 4). The SIPP is a nationally representative longitudinal survey conducted at four-month intervals by the Census Bureau. Although the main focus of the SIPP is information on labor force participation, jobs, income, and participation in federal assistance programs, information on other topics, such as maternity leave arrangements, is also collected in topical modules on a rotating basis.

Since these data are from surveys, they may not accurately reflect past fertility and employment events occurring decades before the interview date due to the respondent's inability to recall events and the subsequent mortality and migration of women after a birth has occurred. These data only reflect the experiences of the women who are living at the time of the survey. To the extent that the experiences of the

deceased or the migrants who left the United States are different from the surveyed population, the estimates are biased.

ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

Statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and meet the U.S. Census Bureau's standards for statistical significance. 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 answers are coded and classified. The Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the production process – including the overall design of surveys, testing the wording of questions, review of the work of interviewers and coders, and statistical review of reports.

The SIPP employs 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 under coverage, but how it affects different variables in the survey is not precisely known. Moreover, biases may also be present when people who are missed in the

survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than the categories used in weighting (age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin). All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

For further information on statistical standards and the computation and use of standard errors, contact Tim Stewart, Demographic Statistical Methods Division, at 301-457-6849 (TTY) or on the Internet at timothy.d.stewart@census.gov.

MORE INFORMATION

The report is available on the Internet (www.census.gov); search for maternity leave data by clicking on the letter “F” in the “Subjects A to Z” section of the web page and selecting “fertility data” and scrolling to the maternity leave data section. A detailed table package presenting more in-depth maternity leave information is also on the Internet.

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. Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC, 1999. This report is on the Internet on the “Population: Working Paper;” section under “Subjects A to Z.”

CONTACTS

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