

Every year about 130 million babies are born in the world. That's 130 million more mouths to feed, bodies to clothe, diapers to change; it's 130 million people who need to be cared for. But some companies' policies force parents to make a tough decision between taking care of their child or going to work to make money to provide for them.

“We don't think of childbirth as 'sick'. But it is very physically demanding, and a newborn is physically demanding too.”
-Donna Patrick

This decision comes from the action of maternity and paternity leave which both can be defined as parental leave. According to The Oxford Dictionary, parental leave is a “period of absence from work, paid or unpaid and usually as required by law, granted by an employer to an employee who is the parent of a baby or young child.” Legally this means that parents may have time off to care for their child after a birth or adoption, but this was not a law until the '90s.

“Parental leave should be paying you your salary and saving you your job when you get back,” Donna Patrick said.

The first act that attempted to offer some aid to mothers in the workforce was the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which was a non-discriminatory act. It was not directly for women, but it called for companies to acknowledge any disabilities that could come before, during, or after pregnancies. After this initial act, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 which prevented discrimination based on the possibilities of pregnancies. Finally, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) provides parents with twelve weeks of leave but pay is not required.

With this act in place, most companies offer it as the bare minimum and some even require

employees to use saved paid vacation time or sick days towards their weeks off if they wish to get paid. While many parents wish they could take the time off to spend with their newborn, many have to return to work immediately after the twelve weeks or even before in order to make the money needed to provide for the family. With so many discrepancies between companies' policies the effect of families in the United States is evident.

In studies done by other countries, with higher rates of parental leave, it is proven to be very beneficial for the child and for the parent. Research shows how the first few months of a child's life are the most important developmentally. The bonds between the parent and child are formed during this time, as the child's physical needs are taken care of too. This also allows the mother to physically and mentally recover from a previous long nine months.

“Taking maternity leave allowed me time to bond with my baby and heal,” Mother Erica Cannon said.

A report from Psychology Today explains how “a break from work following childbirth is associated with a reduction in infant mortality rates [...] Women who must work immediately after birth also report worse health outcomes, including weakened immune systems and respiratory symptoms.”

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As the opportunities for paid maternity leave increased in other countries so did the rates of paternity leave. Although it is more common for women to take maternity leave in the United there is a rise in the amount fathers that take paternity leave because it is as important for the children to connect with father as it is with the mother. While many men that are taking advantage of leave policies is a negative stigma surrounds it because of the potential of not being paid and missing work.

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9 out of 10 dads take some form of paternity leave



7 out of 10 dads took ten days or less off

