

Were you eligible for paid maternity or paternity leave when your child was born?

Yes, I had nine weeks of paid leave from the NSW Government with my first child (now 4) and 12 weeks on a Commonwealth PhD scholarship with my second (now 2). My partner got 6 weeks paid leave with the first and nine weeks with the second from his work in a non-government organisation. He also took the balance of a year as unpaid paternity leave with the second.

If so, what were the terms available (period and pay arrangements)?

As above.

Did you take all of your paid parental leave entitlement? If not, why not?

Yes.

How much parental leave (paid or unpaid) did you take after the birth of your child? Did the period of paid parental leave available to you influence the amount

of total leave taken? If so, in what way?

I took six months with my first and only 6 weeks with my second. I returned to part-time work and full-time study after both. The money was a certainly a consideration, but we were in a better position than most as we both got paid leave and my work was completely flexible.

How did you arrange your leave to have a baby if you were self-employed or were a contractor to a business?

N/A

Did you leave your job prior to your child being born? If so, did the leave provisions available influence your decision?

I took 6 weeks of paid sick leave before my first (due to a blood condition arising from pregnancy). I took 4 weeks leave before my second was due as that was a legal requirement of my scholarship. As she was then born two weeks late, I only had 6 weeks of my 12 weeks' paid leave after her birth before I resumed my studies.

How did access to paid or unpaid parental leave affect your decision on when to return to work?

With my first, I returned to work because of monetary pressures but with the second it was mainly due to my enjoyment of my studies (and the fact that my partner was on leave with the kids).

The benefits of parental leave on wellbeing

The World Health Organization estimates that a woman's physical recovery from childbirth requires about four months leave. Establishing successful breast feeding, sleeping patterns and other routines takes time. It also takes time for family members to bond with the new baby. Greater durations of parental leave may reduce stresses for parents and enhance family relationships. But taking more time off may also contribute to financial and other pressures.

How important was your time off work with your new baby for you and your baby's

health? What aspects of the baby's and your care were most affected by the time

you were able to spend at home with your new baby?

Very important. Although I had a very speedy recovery from my first baby. I returned to work after 6 weeks with my second, who was a much more difficult baby, and quickly developed PND. Although I then took a further 2 weeks of sick leave for mental health reasons, in retrospect I now realise I didn't take anywhere near enough time off work (as well as moving to a new state/city where we knew no one, away from all friends and family!).

For women, did your partner take parental leave? If so, how long did they take?

Yes, as above. The other thing to note is that my partner was also allowed to work from home 2 days a week for the first two years of our first daughter's life (until we moved away and he went on paternity leave), which was fantastic. They were amazingly child-friendly employers.

How important was this time at home for encouraging them to participate actively

in the care of your new baby?

Crucial! He is an extremely actively involved father. We are currently both working 4 days a week and we share the childcare absolutely 50-50.

If you returned to work, would you have liked to wait longer before returning to

work? What do you think the benefits of a longer time at home would have been?

As above – I was perfectly happy with my choice with #1, where I didn't return to my old job but took up a full time PhD scholarship and a new job one day a week at six months. I continued breastfeeding till 13 months and care was

provided by my mother and mother-in-law. With #2, I returned to full-time study and a part-time teaching load at 6 weeks and that was much too soon for me. I now wish I had waited at least 3-4 months. Full-time care was provided by my partner till she was 1 and I continued breastfeeding till 16 months so it wasn't about me feeling guilty or questioning the quality of the care received but I was utterly exhausted by the competing demands.

The impacts of leave and return to work decisions on career prospects and family income

Paid parental leave can alter the time spent away from work, and can affect whether

the parent (usually the mother) returns to the same employer and, if they return, whether in a full time or part time capacity. While longer leave has benefits for the

parents and their baby, time away from work may erode work skills and reduce income.

Did concerns about the effect of your parental leave on your work prospects (maintaining your skills, promotion eligibility etc.) affect your decision about the

length of leave you took? What were your primary concerns in your decision about

returning to work?

I didn't want to become deskilled through a lengthy period of time away from work, but in hindsight I need not have been so concerned – my career has not stalled at all, since I managed to complete a PhD in minimum time and am in a better paid job (which is also very flexible) than ever before. I do think that if I'd known then what I know now, I would have taken more time at home! That said, I am now satisfied with the balance I have and that may not have been manageable if I'd taken more time off.

Would you have taken longer parental leave if your family could have afforded it?

Possibly but my concern was also about career progression.

How much longer would you have liked?

Another 2 or so months with #2. I was perfectly happy with my decisions for #1.

Did your access to social security payments (like family benefits part B) affect your

decision about taking parental leave or returning to work? If so, in what way?

Not really.

Did you return to the same employer when you resumed work? How did the maternity leave you were offered affect your decision to return to the same employer? What other features of your employer influenced your decision?

No I didn't on the first occasion because the job was not very family friendly in terms of hours. I was not influenced in this decision by mat leave provisions. The second time I continued with my scholarship and was very appreciative of my supervisors' efforts to accommodate my family commitments.

4 INQUIRY INTO PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

What do you think was the effect of your parental leave on your employer? Did they discuss the issues with you? Did this influence your decision on the length of leave taken, or the decision to leave employment?

This was not discussed – because government and universities have long had mat leave provisions, I took for granted that I would be entitled to them without causing any undue negative effect on either institution.

What sort of paid parental scheme would help you most in balancing your work and family goals?

Paid leave for both parents – something like what we had though even longer would have been better. My partner's former agency provided 6 weeks paid leave for all staff after 12 months, 9 weeks after 2-5 years and 12 weeks after 5 years. A similar approach for BOTH genders could be rolled out to promote greater involvement by fathers and I think this would be a vast improvement on eg, a longer period for mothers.

Being kid friendly in the office and having the flexibility to arrive late/leave early for childcare also helps.

The effects on businesses

Both paid and unpaid parental leave can impose costs on businesses, as members of staff are absent for some time and temporary replacements can be difficult to find and expensive. For self-employed people, any leave is self-funded, and women in this group are the least likely to take maternity leave. In addition, were a new paid

parental scheme to involve co-funding by employers, this would have financial implications for such businesses.

N/A for this section.

For employers, do you offer paid parental leave? If so, what are the arrangements?

What share of your workforce has taken parental leave? Do you think your firm's

leave arrangements have influenced this? If so, in what way?

What has been the effect on your firm of staff taking parental leave?

Have you been successful in getting employees to return after parental leave?

How

important is this for your firm's success? Have they typically returned on a full time

or part time basis? Has the availability of part time employment been an issue in

retaining such employees for your firm?

What would be the effects on your business of any co-funding arrangement associated with a new scheme, and why?

Characteristics of paid parental leave arrangements

Paid parental leave schemes can vary greatly. The main features are who is eligible

(for example, by how long they have worked or the nature of their job); the length

of paid leave available; whether conditions vary between mothers and fathers; and

the generosity of the scheme (whether a fixed amount, or related to previous pay

and at what rate). The schemes also vary in how they are financed. Options include

financing by employers, social insurance contributions, targeted employment taxes

and general government revenue.

What are your views on the best arrangements for a paid parental leave scheme?

What are the reasons why you would support such arrangements?

There are pros and cons for all the schemes but I think it is in the national interest that 'working families', to use the hackneyed phrase, be supported in their decision and therefore the provision of paid parental leave should be underpinned by government funding – ie it shouldn't be up to the employer to fund this.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. Please let me know if you would like me to clarify any aspect of my submission.

Lorana Bartels
ACT