

Were you eligible for paid or unpaid parental leave? If eligible, did you take it all – and if not, why not?

My wife used up her recreation leave and then used unpaid leave as that was all that was available to her by her employer

Did (or would) it affect the time you took off work, your capacity for breastfeeding, the baby's and your health, stress, relationships, your interaction with your baby, and your family life generally? How and why?

Time off was based upon both monetary factors and the development of the child in the 6 months after it was born

What were the distinctive benefits of prenatal as opposed to postnatal leave?

My wife found it better to use postnatal leave as a baby 'outside the womb' requires more time and attention than while baby is 'inside the womb' – but is basically using prenatal leave was not necessary because of the good health of my wife during the 9 months

Did your partner get paid parental leave, and did you both use it to care for the baby?

My wife employer did not provide such...I had 5 days off on paid parental leave after the birth

Did you use other types of leave to care for your baby? If so, what types and for how long?

No – my wife was a full time carer until the baby went into day care for 2 days a week at 6 months

What were the good and bad aspects of the leave arrangements?

That was the arrangements that had the minimum possible financial impact and was best also because baby was breast fed

How did your leave arrangements affect your employer? Was your employer positive or negative about you taking leave. Why?

My wife's employer was not overly happy as it affected how the section where she worked operated for 6 months and then she went back for only 2 days a week (previously she was full time) – so the current arrangements it is still not optimum for her employer

Did you return to work? On a full time, part time or casual basis? To the same employer? To the same or a similar job?

My wife returned on a part-time basis (2 days a week) to the same employer. Some of the job activities have changed because of the fact that she is no longer full time

Did your leave arrangements affect how quickly you went back to work? In what way?

Yes – her paid recreation leave was used up and the money from baby bonus only went towards paying off the mortgage for the next 6 months

Is the amount of paid or unpaid parental leave now available from your work sufficient?

No – babies need lots of time and attention for at least the 1st 12 months and maybe up to 18 months. The existing fixed costs of running a household still need to be attended to with a reduced income along with the extra cost of a new baby

What ought to be the objectives of a paid parental leave scheme? What are the implications of these objectives for the design of the scheme?

Financial – the household not be significantly worse off, social – minimize the stress impact upon the relationships of the family unit, emotionally – strength of personal relationships be maintained under new stressors, economic – the economy (employer) not lose a valued/skilled employee over the longer term

In assessing different schemes that have different effectiveness in achieving such multiple objectives, what weight should be given to each of the various objectives? How should the various objectives be traded-off against one another if they conflict?

All such a scheme can do is to ease the financial burden on the family unit and allow a fairly reasonable amount of initial time for mother/child bonding – it is up to the family unit to deal with all other intra-family factors

What assessment criteria should be used to assess the merits of different models of paid parental leave? Are there existing studies that provide lessons on how to undertake rigorous assessment of options in this area?

The model must allow maximum flexibility where the mother pre/postnatal suffers ill health as a result of the pregnancy outcome, or if the child suffers ongoing ill health, or if the child is disabled in some way

For each objective, can you foresee any possible unintended consequences from the introduction of a paid parental leave scheme?

Too long a benefit will prolong a person's absence, too low a benefit will delay/defer people on the economic margin from being childbearing at a younger age and reduce the number of off-spring that they have.

What could be done to avoid or reduce the impact of any unintended consequences?

Make the outcome/resultant scheme be based upon sound research and not be a positive political PR outcome/winner for the Government of the day

What type of eligibility tests should be established? Who should be eligible?

All households where the gross taxable income of the couple is less than \$200,000 (automatic CPI indexed)

Should the eligibility test be designed to encourage ongoing workforce attachment? How could this be done?

Yes – all outcomes must focus on a return-to-work within the 6-12 month period (except where the child suffers long term ill health a significant disability). Where the child is healthy have a set amount (base line amount is equal to the Federal minimum wage) for the 1st 3 months (you will also need to pay this amount in the one month prior to the baby's birth), this then reduced to 75% between the 4th and 6th months, this then reduces to 50% between the 7th and 9th month, then to 25% from the 10th to 12th month, then to zero at the 13th month. All people are paid this same amount irrespective if they had a working status of working full/part time or a casual at the time they left their employer to have a baby. Where the baby is disabled or ill then the payment period is over 24 months with each decrement occurring at 6 monthly periods.

Should other prime carers, such as grandparents, foster and adoptive parents, also be covered?

Yes – the mother's immediate 'significant other' person irrespective of the uniqueness of the particularly family unit – definitely include grandparents, foster and adoptive parents, and the family/friend 'significant other' (who ever that may be) as defined by the mother/couple

Should any support of a similar nature be extended to non-working parents?

Yes – only if the mother has indulged in at least 20 hours/week for three or more months within the past 6 months - across any range of employment (paid or voluntary) whether self-employed people, casual workers, employees in small businesses, contractors and shift workers (so that no one is financially disadvantaged by the extra costs cost of bring a baby into the world)

Should all employees be covered and if not, why not?

Yes all types of employees should be covered

What implications do different levels of coverage have for the effective administration of the scheme, the behaviour of employers and employees, and its impacts generally?

Nil – monetary benefit should be equitable and the ‘rules’ totally consistent/simple across all types of employees/employers – keep the administration ‘overhead’ to a bare minimum

Should there be a qualifying period — a minimum time spent in the workforce — before an employee becomes eligible for paid leave? If so, how long should that period be? Why? Should there be an eligibility period based on time with the employee’s current employer?

Qualifying period – the person must have worked at least 20 hours/week for three or more months within the past 12 months or have studied full time for at least a semester within the past 12 months at a TAFE/University

Should the rate of payment be linked to the employee’s wage (either current or an average wage over a recent period)? If not, what basis should be used for the parental leave payment?

No – the employer can voluntarily do a ‘top-up’ if they want their employee to feel valued and do the ‘right thing by their employee’ for that person to return to work. The amount of money provided to the person should be net amount of the weekly ***minimum award wage*** amount eg. after tax (as determined at the federal level) and be paid by centrelink

How long should a parent receive paid parental leave for? Why? What benefits would arise from longer or shorter periods of paid leave?

Pay the person 100% of the net amount of the weekly ***minimum award wage*** amount eg. after tax for the first 6 months, this then reduces to 60% between the 7th and 9th month, then to 40% from the 10th to 12th month,

and then to zero after that. A person should not become dependent upon the benefit – it is only short term assistance so that the family unit as a whole can re-adjust to significant change in family circumstances.

At what time in the prenatal period should people be entitled to parental leave?

From one month prior to the child's expected birth date

Should each parent have a separate entitlement for leave, or should there be an amount of leave to be shared between the parents? If the leave were to be shared, should there be an amount that is reserved for exclusive use by either parent?

Yes...let them choose what option that they can afford and what they want to share/overlap

Is there a case for a different period of leave for parents of children in different circumstances (such as children born with a disability)?

Yes – parents of sick and/or disabled children should get significantly more time off.

Should government contribute to the funding of the paid parental leave scheme? Should employers and/or employees contribute?

Yes – both Government and business (from a certain size) must co-contribute

If the cost were to be shared among employees, employers and the government, what basis should be used to calculate each groups contribution?

We should replace the current State based Payroll Tax – remove this tax from the States and re-badge it as a Federal Tax (Maternity Leave Tax). Basically any business where their gross payroll exceeds \$1 million should pay a fix 2-2.5% (of their gross payroll) amount into this scheme. The benefit of this concept is that no existing business is any worse off. Also their own money actually goes directly/indirectly back to the business (when their workers utilise such leave). The Federal Government should top up any shortfall in revenue. Thus small business of less than 10-15 employees should not be financially impacted...or if

you really want to get them involved then maybe only get them to pay .5-1.0% as a maximum. It has to be seen as a win-win for all stakeholders (eg. Government, business, the individual, and mostly the economy). The self employed should not have to make any such payment – they will just struggle just to have their business survive during this period of time.

NOTE: any new maternity payment should not affect/be detrimental to the existing Baby Bonus Scheme, nor should it affect existing Child Care benefits. I do believe that there certainly needs to be a major overall to Family Tax A & B schemes to make it much more streamlined such and remove the low means test caps and the on going administrative ‘nightmare’ of arrears adjustment issues.

If a scheme were to rely at least partly on direct employer funding, what mechanisms could protect worker entitlements in the event of insolvency?

Monies connected from Businesses should be EFT’ed to Centrelink/ATO on a weekly/fortnightly/monthly basis month (depending upon the current frequency of a business’s payroll processing).

How would any national scheme interact with existing privately funded schemes?

Separate issue – private schemes can continue to exist if the business is prepared to value their employee’s so highly (good luck to them). Such private practices should in no way affect what the employee receives from the Federal Government – no additional means test should be imposed.

What are the likely costs of different schemes, how are these appropriately measured, who would ultimately bear them and does this influence the form of financing adopted?

There is enough data out there to get fairly accurate costing models as to revenue inflows and expected cost outflows. Just keep the input/output simple and minimise the administrative overhead. All inputs occur electronically and likewise outflows...Just need to take about 6-12 months in getting a computer solution built (I would start to design/build such a solution now... so that you can roll it out ASAP and not have an inefficient/ineffective interim hybrid paper/electronic solution in place for a number of years)

If employees and/or employers contribute to the scheme, is a pooled funding arrangement desirable?

The employee should not have to make a direct contribute to such a scheme – only the employer and the Federal Government should make such a direct financial contribution.

Should all employees who would be eligible under a national paid parental leave scheme also be accorded the right to return to their previous job? What are the costs and benefits of mandating this requirement?

Basically yes – or to work duties where their existing/recognised skill continues to be utilised as previous. Still have to have some flexibility so that no party (person taking the time off, or the person doing their job in their absence), or the business is disadvantaged in any way

Should this requirement be the same in all circumstances? Should there be exceptions for particular types of jobs or particular types of employers (such as very small employers?)

Yes..I would expect exceptions would occur within any size business because people have specialized and unique work developed skill sets

Should the rights accorded to the employee be different according to whether the period of paid leave is funded by the employer or the taxpayer?

No - it must remain equitable and above who pays what.

Should the qualifying period for parental leave be the same as any qualifying period for the right to return to work, or should a longer period apply in the latter case?

The same qualifying period should apply to both parental leave and the right to return to work.

To what extent (and why) would an increase in the availability and duration of paid parental leave significantly alter the quality of infant care and outcomes for the child? What is the appropriate duration of leave to maximise such benefits, and should any minimum period be mandated?

It probably will more remove stressors on the family thus making the home environment of the baby much more safe and positive. I would allow parents to take any further period beyond the initial 12 months paid period eg. up to 2-3 years without pay if they wished and their personal circumstances warranted/allowed such

How do the impacts on child and parental welfare vary across different types of parents and children (for example, by family income, education and Indigenous status, gender of the carer, and for children with disabilities)?

If you can alleviate some of the time and cost pressures for new parents and guarantee parents they have a choice (and a job) at the end of a paid absence period then a majority of people across all social strata and demographics will be financially/emotionally better off. To solve other issue then some level of compulsory parenting/child development course is required (eg. 2 hours a week over the first 12 months, then 2 hours a month between 13 months and 48 months) for both parents and all associated primary carers. We all should be required to do such no matter our backgrounds – at a minimum it should be in a group self-support setting so that community linkages can develop outside of this somewhat formal setting.

To what extent would the introduction of a paid parental leave scheme assist mothers in establishing and maintaining breastfeeding routines, and with what benefits?

It gives them somewhat more choice and time to decide upon such, and also the duration of doing such.

What are the key impacts of parental, as opposed to non-parental, care on the health and development outcomes for children?

You see the baby as an extension of the family unit, and have a closer caring relationship. You get to know the child yourself and not just live with a growing human being. You utilise your learnt skill set to raise the child as good as you can without repeating past mistakes of prior generations. You learn to appreciate the innocence and value of childhood. They earlier learn more about kinship and caring so as to gently and incrementally cope with the ever increasing exposure to the competitive world of the community

What complementary measures would reinforce the infant and parental welfare effects of paid parental care?

Community parent groups, community health centres, community play centres, community meeting places, etc. Give parents daily community opportunities to interact with experiences and people in similar situations/professions skilled in child development knowledge outside of their homes

What factors deter fathers from taking more parental leave?

Loss of significant income, their fear that they are somewhat inadequate in raising a child, their lack of understanding of the value of being a 'hands on' parent

To what extent do income considerations, as opposed to the right to return to the same employer, play a part in the parental leave decisions of Australian families?

It is lack of income that is the major consideration in wanting to return to work, but it is the right to return to work to the same employer (and their understanding and flexibility to your situation) that determines the duration of the absence.

What are the non-income benefits of continued work, and do they play a significant role in the parental leave decisions of Australian parents?

Continues work gives more options to your child in the future (eg. better school that they can attend, a better standard of living, a better lifestyle, a good work ethic, etc)

To what extent will any new arrangements change the period of absence from work?

We may take 9 months off in the future if we have another child rather than 6 months for our first child...as more time will be needed to manage the household and to cope with each extra child

To what degree would parental leave affect job mobility (between employers and different jobs), increase productivity, labour participation and alter choices about a return to full-time or part-time work ?

It may reduce job mobility because you generally have built a trusting relationship with the existing employer and they will better understand your changing circumstance over the years to come. Productivity should improve because of this pre-existing trust and the fact of there being mutual benefits to both parties – both want increased flexibility within each environment – the home and the work site

Will the labour market impacts vary by sex, age, individuals versus households, ethnicity, disability, skill-level, lone-parent status or other employee characteristics – why and by how much?

Business with a high percentage of 20-40 year old females on a working class salary will be moderately affected – otherwise the effect should be no different to current trends.

Are there likely to be any perverse impacts on labour markets (such as unemployment risks, labour market discrimination, or erosion of parent's work skills)? Why and to what extent? What impacts might this have on longer term job prospects for individuals and the availability of skilled labour for business?

No the maternity payment will not be significant enough for people within the household to permanently adjust their work participation as a result of any such short term payment

What would be the behaviour of those employers that already offer paid parental leave? How would this affect wages, the leave they offer, and their employment practices generally?

Some Employers would withdraw their pre-existing benefits in this area...but others who really valued their staff would probably retain such extra benefits. A monetary contribution is only part of the issue...the amount of time off the person is allowed to have off is somewhat another matter

In what ways are the labour market and equity impacts of paid parental leave likely to be particularly sensitive to the design of the scheme (for example, whether it has universal coverage, its financing methods and so on)?

The scheme must be the same for all participants irrespective of a person's pre-existing income levels or work arrangements – one scheme/one way for all

What affects current decisions by businesses about whether to offer paid parental leave to their employees and the eligibility conditions that they set (mothers only, exclusion of casuals etc).

The profitability of the business, the size of the business to absorb such a skill loss, and their ability to 'cover' such absences with other/new staff

What would be the direct impacts on business of meeting the direct and indirect costs of paid parental leave? How would these effects vary across firms and sectors, and over time? In particular what are the impacts on small businesses?

Only size should matter – thus you need a 2 tiered system – big business pay a higher % or make a larger contribution than small businesses and the self employed. You cannot discriminate across industry sectors

What would be the positive impacts – would paid parental leave improve staff retention and productivity? If so, how big is this effect, and which industries are likely to benefit most?

Yes ... more staff would be willing to return to the workforce...a woman who is a mother is a much more productive/organised/committed person.

The effect would be bigger if the business made extra incentive payments directly to the individual during their absence period

What kinds of scheme would have the largest or smallest impact on business and why?

Largest impact to a business would be any scheme that added their pre-existing overall payroll/taxation expenses.

Least impact to a business would be any scheme that that 're-badged' a pre-existing overall payroll/taxation expenses to this express purpose.

Are there any distinctive business impacts of new parental support arrangements in regional and rural Australia?

Some level of flexibility for the family member taking the baby to work or having a more earlier/gradual 'return to work' negotiated arrangement

Are there ways of implementing any changes to alleviate any adverse impacts?

No. money and time are mutually critical factors to both a new family and a business. It can only be a 'part-win'-'part-win' to both parties directly affected

How might employers who already offer some paid parental leave respond to a new arrangement (and why)? Were an arrangement to be government-funded, how could its design reduce the 'crowding out' of voluntary schemes?

Some will cease providing such an incentive, while other who value their employees will continue providing such an incentive. To stop any 'crowding out' the Government would need to offer a additional taxation incentive

How, and to what extent, will paid parental leave arrangements interact with social security and other government payments, and which areas will be most affected?

Such an impact upon social security should be negligible...or maybe somewhat positive as the payment is only payable to those with a recent employment history. Family Tax A/B schemes should be totally revamped – the Government need to decide if these schemes are just there to allow the poor working family who cannot afford have children and/or are just providing un-necessary middle class welfare. The Family Tax A/B Schemes are certainly not providing much of an incentive to any family household structure or to any social strata

What implications does this have for the design of a paid parental leave scheme and for the relevant social security schemes?

Such a scheme has to promote people's participation in the workforce (paid or voluntary) – we cannot have people staying at home and being unproductive to the Australian economy over a medium to long term when the level of home based work in raising a child diminishes as the child grows through the years. A working mother means a working economy and a productive household, and a growing community. Society should reward and promote a healthy balance between relationships/family/work/community participation and involvement

Extra Comment

NOTE: The ***baby bonus payment*** is for significant one off initial ('start up') costs directly relating to the child living within the existing family household - minor house/room renovations together with baby related purchases (eg. cot, change table, pram, car child constraint, clothes, initial bulk nappy supplies, and a significant number of initial incidental items.

NOTE: The ***maternity payment*** is to alleviate significant short term ('adjustment') costs directly relating to the child's initial care and the immediate forgone income by one of the significant family household parties – allows such monies to make a moderate contribution to pre-existing fixed household costs (rates, utilities, day-to-day household living expenses, mortgage debt, etc) and a minor contribution to extra ongoing fixed household costs of the extra family member.

The two payment serve two distinct purposes...