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PRAMS Brief

Oklahoma Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System

OKLAHOMA FAST FACTS

67.3%

Mothers who worked during their most recent pregnancy

55.7%

Mothers who had returned to work at the time of the survey

OF THESE WORKING MOTHERS:

60.9%

Mothers who used unpaid leave after their baby was born

My job did not have paid leave

Most cited reason (35.5%) that affected the decision to take leave

54.3%

Mothers who used unpaid leave and breastfed for at least 8 weeks

Mothers of all ages, races, ethnicities, marital statuses, and educational levels were more likely to use unpaid leave than other leave types after their baby was born



UNPAID MATERNITY LEAVE AMONG OKLAHOMA MOTHERS: 2012-2015

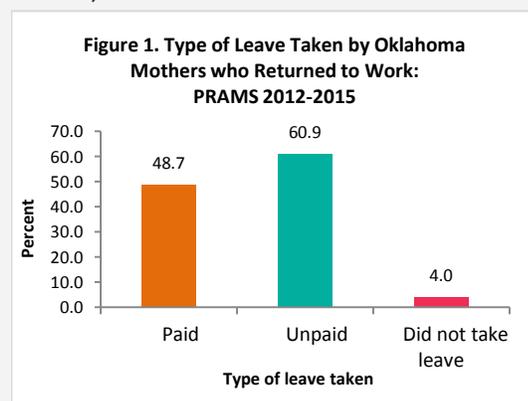
At some point, an employee may need time away from work for personal obligations. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) enacted in 1993 provides employees who meet specific eligibility requirements with up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave per year for certain family and medical reasons.¹ However, FMLA only guarantees unpaid leave.

Research has found that paid family leave improves children's health and strengthens families.² Yet, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, only 15% of workers have access to paid family leave through their employers.³

Currently, only four states (Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and California) provide paid family leave. Washington State and Washington DC have policies which will go into effect in 2020.⁴ Oklahoma has no mandatory benefits law.

EMPLOYMENT & LEAVE

During their most recent pregnancy, 67.3% of Oklahoma mothers worked for pay. At the time of the survey, 55.7% of these mothers had returned to their job (data not shown).



These mothers reported using unpaid leave (60.9%), paid leave (48.7%), or using no leave at all (4%) after their child was born (Figure 1).

The things that affected mothers' decisions to take leave from work are listed in Table 1.

| Table 1. Things affecting mothers' decisions to take leave from work | | |
|--|---|---------|
| Rank | Reason | Percent |
| #1 | Job did not have paid leave | 35.5% |
| #2 | Could not financially afford to take leave | 30.8% |
| #3 | Had not built up enough leave time to take any or more time off | 24.6% |
| #4 | Job did not offer a flexible work schedule | 18.0% |
| #5 | Afraid they would lose their job | 14.9% |
| #6 | Had too much work to do | 14.4% |

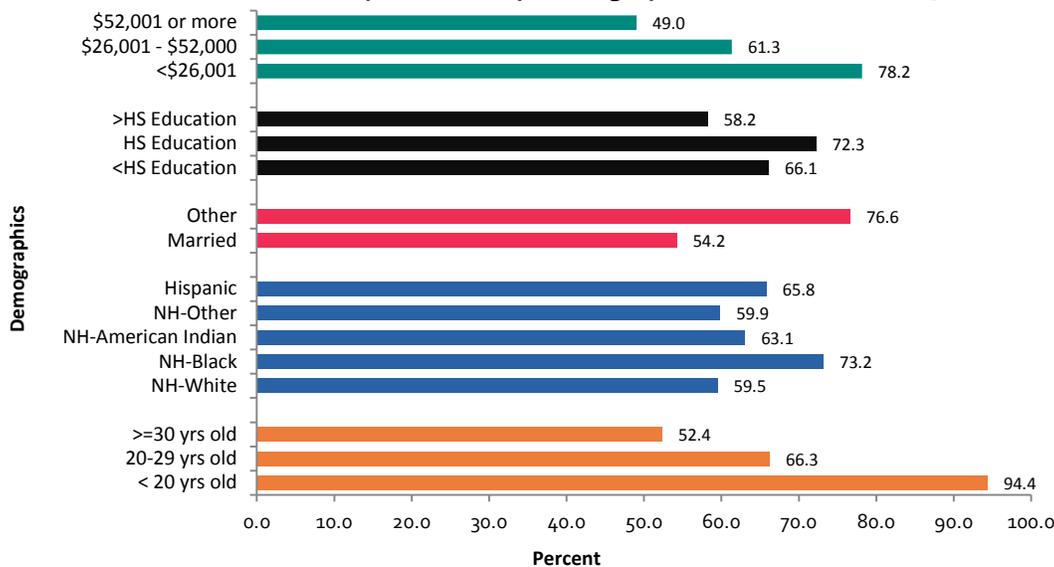
There were slight variations across educational attainment groups. Nearly 46% of mothers with less than a high school (HS) education and 53.3% of mothers with a HS education cited the top reason affecting their decision about taking leave was their job did not have paid leave. Only 30% of mothers with greater than a HS education identified this as the leading reason (data not shown; statistically significant difference).

DEMOGRAPHICS

Figure 2 shows that among those who worked during pregnancy, Oklahoma mothers of all ages, races, ethnicities, marital statuses, and educational levels were more likely to use unpaid leave than other leave types (such as paid leave or taking no leave at all) after their baby was born.

Income level was the only demographic that did not follow this same pattern, with mothers whose household income was \$52,001 or more using another leave type slightly more than unpaid leave.

Figure 2. Percent of Oklahoma Mothers Who Worked During Pregnancy and Used Unpaid Leave by Demographics: PRAMS 2012-2015



CONSIDERATIONS

As indicated by data from states with paid leave laws, benefits of paid leave include:⁵

- Time to attend well-child care visits and ensure children receive immunizations
- Higher rates and longer periods of breastfeeding
- Decline in depressive symptoms in new moms
- Higher satisfaction with parents' ability to care for their children
- More involvement from fathers in the child's direct care after birth when they take at least two weeks off from work

Employers and public health can also benefit from paid leave policies. Benefits include:⁵

- Improvement in work productivity when parents return to work since they can search for quality child care
- Reduction in occurrence and length of childhood illnesses when parents can take off for a child's medical needs. This decreases private and public health expenditures and helps reduce the infant mortality rate
- Positive impacts on employee satisfaction and retention⁶

Oklahoma employers are not required to provide paid or unpaid leave to employees. If an employer chooses to offer these benefits, each employer can create their own policies for eligibility and use of the benefits.⁷

CONCLUSION

Mandatory leave laws and programs could provide significant benefits for Oklahoma families, employers and public health. Although there are many financial and legal barriers to overcome when enacting new leave policies, Oklahoma residents, employers, and health care providers need to advocate for changes that could significantly impact the health and quality of life for all Oklahoma families.

LIMITATIONS

The data are self-reported and may be subject to bias. Mothers' responses to leave were not mutually exclusive; around 9% reported using both paid and unpaid leave (they could select any combination of paid, unpaid, or no leave). Additionally, definitions of leave types were not provided and left to the mothers' interpretation.

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"I would like to see the state of Oklahoma push employers to offer paid leave for new mothers. I have to take unpaid leave to care for my child that was just released from the NICU. My family can't afford this."
-PRAMS mom

PRAMS is a population-based surveillance system about maternal behaviors and experiences before, during, and after pregnancy. Approximately 250 mothers are selected to participate in Oklahoma each month. Mothers are sent as many as three mail questionnaires in English or Spanish seeking their participation with follow-up phone interviews for non-respondents.

Information included in the birth registry is used to develop analysis weights that adjust for probability of selection and non-response. Prevalence rates were calculated using SAS callable SUDAAN. PRAMS 2012-2015 had a response rate of 64%.

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