

A Comparison of American and European Maternity Leave Usage and Outcomes

Submitted by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the disparities across maternity leave usage and access in the United States, the associated employment outcomes, and how these outcomes differ from European countries, where national paid maternity leave policies exist. The aim is to gain new knowledge on the consequences of a lack of paid leave national policy in the United States. A better understanding of national maternity leave policy in the United States is beneficial to mothers and families, the organizations that employ these family members, and those entrusted with enacting new policies. A literature review and analysis of archival data was conducted to discover the impacts of paid maternity leave policy and lack thereof. The literature review covered how policy and women's employment interact. The data analysis showed that contextual factors also interacted with the two. The data analysis demonstrated how employment outcomes do not follow much of a pattern to the length of maternity leave, suggesting that there is another component influencing employment outcomes. The data analysis also demonstrated that the United States stands out from European countries analyzed in their ratio of absence on leave and their net equivalized income one month after birth.

The United States remains the only developed country and the only Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member country that does not entitle mothers to paid maternity leave. Current U.S policy under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) defines that mothers of newborns or newly adopted children in the U.S. may take 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave. The FMLA only applies to organizations with 50 or more employees and mothers must work 1,250 hours for the past 12 consecutive months to be eligible. The remaining OECD member countries are able to fund their paid maternity leave programs through employer, worker, and government contributions (Paid Family Leave Across OECD Countries, 2022). Because of these policy differences, research on maternity leave has focused largely on the outcomes associated with a lack of paid policy. The purpose of this paper has three aims: to investigate whether the absence of a national paid maternity leave policy is associated with disparities in the U.S., to determine the work-related outcomes associated with maternity leave usage, and to compare employment outcomes between the United States and European OECD member countries.

Theoretical Framework

Mandated-Benefit Model

Mandated maternity leave policies, whether paid or unpaid, support the continued labor force participation of women. The mandated-benefit model relates policies that mandate employers to provide benefits to economics. The standard model shows that when an employer is free to discriminate between men and women in their wages, women's wages and employment decrease. This model therefore implies mandates are a way of eliminating the incentive to discriminate, since the value of maternity leave is greater for the mother rather than the employer (Givati & Troiano, 2012). Givati and Troiano (2012) modify this model by factoring in gender-

based discrimination attitudes to explain why some countries mandate longer maternity leave than others. When gender-based discrimination attitudes are factored in the model, it is shown that the less tolerant a society is of gender-based discrimination, the longer the maternity leave it will mandate. This model has been used to provide one of a number of explanations for varying policies, including between European countries and the United States. For example, European countries are social welfare states, while the U.S. is individualistic and market oriented. There are also lower fertility rates in Europe than in the United States. In terms of the feminist movements, the United States strives for equality while Europe strives for equity. There are also different legal structures: in the U.S. the FMLA is under anti-discrimination law, while in Europe, maternity leave is covered by special law (Givati & Troiano, 2012). These explanations make up some of the contextual factors that will be discussed in both Study 1 and Study 2 of this paper. Study 1 will discuss policy change in the literature about maternity leave, while Study 2 will discuss varying employment outcomes across the U.S. and European countries. Some of the other contextual factors are explanations for varying policy and outcomes such as earning inequality and cultural values. Cultural values can include attitudes about mothers and women in the workplace. This model gives a perspective of how varying contextual factors and policies affect mothers and families.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory proposes that all social relationships take place within an exchange framework. Human interactions therefore maximize rewards while minimizing costs (Tsen et al., 2022). In the context of company policies and organizational commitment, if an employee receives benefits, such as paid maternity leave, from their employer they feel compelled to repay favors to maintain the rewarding exchange tie. This relates to the further discussions in this paper by drawing

the connection of employer provided maternity leave to not only organizational commitment, but also to maternal employment outcomes that stem from this exchange. This theory has a connection to the mandated-benefit model as well. In the standard model, employers discriminate against women if there are no mandated benefits, which in turn causes women's wages and employment to decrease. In social exchange theory, employers would try to maintain a rewarding exchange tie by providing paid maternity leave, in hopes that the mother remains a valuable part of the organization. The connection of these two theories points out the way government policy, organization policy, culture, and maternity leave influence one another.

Job Characteristics Model

The job characteristics model from Hackman and Oldham (1975) is used to connect job design characteristics to subsequent critical psychological states and outcomes. The five core job design characteristics are skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. These characteristics can lead to critical psychological states known as experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibilities, and knowledge of results. The four outcomes that come from these states are: high internal work motivation, high quality work performance, high satisfaction with work, and low absenteeism and turnover (Pierce et al., 2009). Job characteristics are relevant to maternity leave since differences in job design yields different work outcomes. There are specific occupations, for example, that are found to utilize less maternity leave. Maternity leave usage is also associated with work outcomes, specifically high work satisfaction. Job design and work outcomes are each associated with maternity leave usage, and this model helps explain why this may be.

Study 1 - Literature Review

Literature on the usage and outcomes of maternity leave has been widely studied. Bringing together this literature and drawing connections is therefore beneficial to this area of research. There are two aims of this literature review: to investigate the disparities present in the United States due to a lack of national paid maternity leave, and to determine the work-related outcomes associated with maternity leave usage.

Aim 1: To investigate whether the absence of a national maternity leave policy is associated with disparities in the U.S.

Objective 1: Investigating whether a lack of national maternity leave policy is associated with disparities in the U.S. will allow for a better understanding of how groups are differentially affected by current national policy.

Aim 2: To determine work related outcomes associated with maternity leave usage.

Objective 2: Determining work related outcomes associated with maternity leave usage in the U.S. will influence how organizations view maternity leave for their employees, in terms of policy and preparation. Determining the possible outcomes also assists policy implementation and is overall useful to improve the family, maternal, and employee experience.

Method

The literature review began by searching for peer reviewed articles published in the past two years under the search terms “maternity leave usage”, “maternity leave disparities”, and “maternity leave United States” using Oakland University Library OneSearch and Google Scholar. Reading and summarizing these articles allowed for an understanding of the current research environment on this topic. This initial search led to a collection of 10 relevant articles. From these 10 articles, subtopics were created: disparities and outcomes. After establishing these two

subtopics, new search terms were used to find some of the remaining articles, this time without the two-year filter. These search terms included “paid maternity leave access,” “paid maternity leave policy,” and “paid maternity leave employment outcomes.” Articles were also found through references in previously reviewed papers. From these search terms and reviewing referenced articles, a total of 20 peer reviewed articles were used for this literature review.

Results

Policy Change

Research of historical data shows that policy reforms that increase the duration of job protected paid parental leave improve women’s economic outcomes. Providing more generous paid leave entitlements in countries that offer unpaid or short paid leave is found to potentially help families balance the competing demands of earning income and attending to personal and family well-being (Nandi et al. 2018). While international organizations, such as the European Union, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the OECD have made efforts to influence policy change, it has been found to have surprisingly little influence. Instead, it is a source of domestic influence that pushes change, such as the election of leftist governments, under sympathetic party leaders and in the context of human capital concerns (White, 2017). The modified mandated-benefit model explains that the less tolerant a society is of gender-based discrimination, the longer the leave it will mandate, thus suggesting that policy choices stem from social values.

Legislation in 13 U.S. states currently grant paid maternity leave to mothers (State Paid Family Leave Laws Across the U.S., 2023). The San Francisco Paid Parental Leave Ordinance enacted in 2017 was the first in the U.S. to provide parental leave with full pay. Data from a survey of San Francisco mothers suggested very little change in the number of mothers who took

maternity leave after the policy was implemented. The research suggested that this was due to the lack of knowledge and understanding of new maternity leave benefits, specifically among lower-income mothers (Goodman et al., 2020). In 2018, New York implemented a Paid Family Leave (PFL) policy. In the first year, this policy was observed to have an increase in employers' ratings of the ease of handling employee absences. In the second year, this policy led to a rise in the incidence of employee leave-taking, driven by the smallest firms in the study (Bartel et al., 2023). Through further research, it has been found that U.S.-style short-duration paid leave has the potential to increase labor force attachment in the months surrounding a birth, particularly in less-educated women who have little access to paid leave in the absence of a mandate. Short leaves are, however, unlikely to change the behavior of women who would otherwise exit the labor force for prolonged periods after birth (Byker, 2016).

Access to Paid Leave

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), 17% of civilian workers and 16% of private industry workers had access to paid family leave in 2018. For this reason, research on paid maternity leave access in the U.S. focuses on the alarming number of those who do not have access. The lack of national policy affects new mothers in the U.S. differently in their access to paid leave, since they must rely on the unique policy of their employer. The usage of paid maternity leave is lower in younger mothers, in Black and Hispanic mothers, and in mothers with fewer years of education (Hawkins, 2020). A study done on New York City mothers found that disparities in leave composition are masked when considering the total length of leave. It was found that while Black women utilized 3.7 weeks of leave more than white women, holding all else constant, the additional leave was composed of 4.7 more weeks of unpaid leave. There were also findings of women who do not have college degrees taking leave that averaged 3.5 weeks

shorter. This shortened leave is driven by fewer weeks of paid leave. Women who are eligible for the FMLA are found to have a higher relative likelihood to take only paid leave (Slopen, 2020). When analyzing birth weights and the effect of Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) programs for pregnant women in five U.S. states, results showed that this paid maternity leave has particularly large impacts on the children of Black mothers and unmarried mothers. Results suggest that TDI paid maternity leave reduces the share of low-birth-weight births by 4.9% for black women, 2.2% for white women, 6.5% for unmarried women, and 3.5% for married women. Marital status and race are proxies for socioeconomic status, so these results are consistent with the idea that the policy primarily affects low-SES women (Stearns, 2015). In both mothers and fathers, longer lengths of leave are found to be associated with a greater proportion of paid leave (Berrigan et al., 2021; Nandi et al. 2018). Those without access to paid leave may therefore return to work earlier than they would have otherwise and research consistently shows that unpaid leave does not allow the same benefits as paid leave (Nandi et al., 2018).

Job Characteristics and Maternity Leave Access and Usage

Job characteristics are also relevant to the length of maternity leave. Workers in several occupations, including cleaning and grounds maintenance, personal care, food preparation and food service, use maternity leave at rates significantly lower than the average of all workers. Adjustment for education and occupation in one study reduced, but did not remove, the racial and ethnic differences in usage of paid maternity leave (Hawkins, 2020). Non-college-educated workers and mothers with jobs with low pay and status often lack access to paid sick days and paid vacation and are even less likely to have access to employer-provided paid family leave. Freelancers, independent contractors, and other precarious workers typically do not have access to these basic benefits as well, due to the lack of ties to a single employer (Milkman & Appelbaum,

2013). Motherhood has been found to be associated with lower hourly pay and this may be due to women trading higher paying jobs for jobs with more “mother-friendly” job characteristics. These mother-friendly characteristics can include flexible hours, few demands for travel or weekend or evening work, on-site daycare, and availability of a phone to check on children (Budig & England, 2001). Research also finds that mothers who are more satisfied with their jobs take shorter leaves. This may be due to greater job satisfaction being linked to family-friendly workplaces, that new mothers enjoy their work, or they are afraid to lose a good job (Berrigan et al., 2021) In the job characteristics model, high work satisfaction is an outcome that comes from job design characteristics and critical psychological states. This model explains how high work satisfaction may come from job design, and therefore leads to less maternity leave usage. As far as women in occupations that use shorter leave, the model may explain how certain job designs may lead to higher work satisfaction, and therefore less maternity leave usage.

Maternity Leave and Organizational Commitment

In a recent study done by Sterling and Allan (2022), the Quality of Maternity Leave (QML) framework was used to analyze mothers’ subjective experience of maternity leave. There are six QML dimensions: time-off, flexibility, coworker support, discrimination, microaggression, and benefits. There are work-related outcomes that come from securing QML dimensions, such as organizational commitment and career advancement outcomes. Maternity leave policies, along with other family-friendly policies, are positively related to mothers’ organizational commitment. Work–family benefit availability and supportive work–family culture are positively related to affective commitment and negatively related to work–family conflict and intentions to leave the organization (Sterling & Allan, 2022). The positive relationship between workplace support and organizational commitment in women may be in turn related to a mother’s postnatal intentions to

return to work (Thompson et al., 1999). Evidence suggests that the implementation of paid family leave policy improves employers' ratings of employee commitment and cooperation, concentrated in the first policy year (Bartel et al., 2023). Social exchange theory explains why employers would be inclined to make organizational policies that benefit mothers. There is a rewarding exchange tie each party is trying to maintain. Employees feel inclined to reciprocate to their organization due to the paid maternity leave benefits they receive.

Maternity Leave and Employment Outcomes

Reducing brief labor force interruptions may have long-term employment benefits for affected mothers (Byker, 2016). Maternity leave usage in the United States can have many effects on the employment outcomes of a mother including labor force participation, wage penalties, and lack of opportunities for career advancement (Sterling & Allan, 2022). Motherhood is found to be associated with lower hourly pay when compared with women without children. The causes of this are not well understood, but it may be that having children causes women to lose job experience, be less productive at work, trade off higher wages for mother-friendly jobs, or be discriminated against by employers (Budig & England, 2001). It has also been found that mothers experience a wage penalty per child, and that these penalties are also larger for married women than for unmarried women (Budig & England, 2001). By taking maternity leave, mothers face a lack of wage increases postnatally that may be influenced by reduced work experience (Sterling & Allan, 2022). The ways women manage conflict before and during their maternity leaves may also influence their employment. It was found that women's ways of handling conflict seem related to their bosses' assessments of their competencies and their potential for promotion (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007). Taking leave may also ultimately harm a mother's perceived agency. One study shows that hypothetical job applicants who take longer legislated leave are perceived as less agentic and

are expected to be less committed to their job than applicants who take a shorter leave (Hideg et al., 2018). Providing information about the woman's agency is beneficial for evaluations of those women who take longer legislated leave and a corporate program that gives women the opportunity to stay connected with work while on maternity leave can be another successful agency intervention (Hideg et al., 2018). In the United States cultural values and norms surrounding caregiving, pregnancy, mothering, gender, and work affect maternity leave policies. The usage of maternity leave then affects the employee and employer perception and treatment of mothers in the workplace (Sterling & Allan, 2022). Gender stereotypes about mothers contribute to the penalties of motherhood in the workforce, which in turn affect a mother's promotional opportunities (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007).

Study 2 - Archival Data Analysis

A study done comparing the U.S and European countries tested the argument that earnings inequality is a key contextual factor for understanding both heterogeneity in effects of family policies among mothers and variation in policy effects across contexts. The study looked at data from 23 OECD member countries including Austria, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain. The study stated that although researchers generally agree that national family policies play a role in shaping mothers' employment, there is still considerable debate about whether, how, and why policy effects vary across country contexts and within countries by mothers' educational attainment. The findings supported the joint importance of earnings inequality and mothers' educational attainment for conditioning the associations between family policies and mothers' employment (Hook & Paek, 2020). As mentioned in the mandated-benefit section of the theoretical framework, there are many reasons offered for policy differences between the United States and countries in Europe, such as cultural tolerance of gender-based

discrimination. However, there is still much to be discovered about what conditions in each country affect policy and the varying effects it has on mothers.

Discovering whether and how employment outcomes in the United States differ from those in Europe will contribute to knowledge of the benefits of a current working paid maternity leave system. Data from the U.S. and eight European countries will be analyzed to compare maternal employment outcomes in each country to see if there are any possible connections between paid maternity leave and employment outcomes. Some questions that will be considered are whether the length of leave in the European countries will show connections in the next graphs and whether the United States will be similar to the European countries in outcomes or show dramatic differences.

Aim 3: To discover whether and how employment outcomes associated with maternity leave usage in the United States differ from those in Europe.

Objective 3: Discovering whether and how employment outcomes in the United States differ from those in Europe will contribute to the knowledge of the benefits of a current working paid maternity leave system. These discoveries could also help predict the effects of a national paid policy in the U.S.

Method

In order to accomplish this aim, archival data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Family Database was analyzed. OECD is available for download as Excel spreadsheets from their website. Four datasets were relevant to this topic: Maternal Employment, Gender Differences in Employment Outcomes, Parental Leave Systems, and Parental Leave Replacement Rates. The OECD collects data for 38 member countries. The countries of interest were the United States and European countries that followed International

Labour Organisation (ILO) guidelines of employment status and offered 100% paid leave. ILO guidelines state that maternity leave is first given to the mother (but may include a transfer of the entitlements to the father) and that people on maternity leave should always be considered in employment. Other European countries may have followed ILO guidelines and offered paid leave, but the average payment rate was below 100%. Not receiving a full payment rate may have different effects on the usage in those countries, so they were not used in this analysis. This information is found on the OECD website from the Labour Force Statistics Notes and under the dataset PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems (2022b). The parental leave systems dataset also includes information about weeks of paid parental and home care leave available, which is later used to explain some of the findings in the following figures. This left eight countries to be analyzed against the United States: Austria, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain.

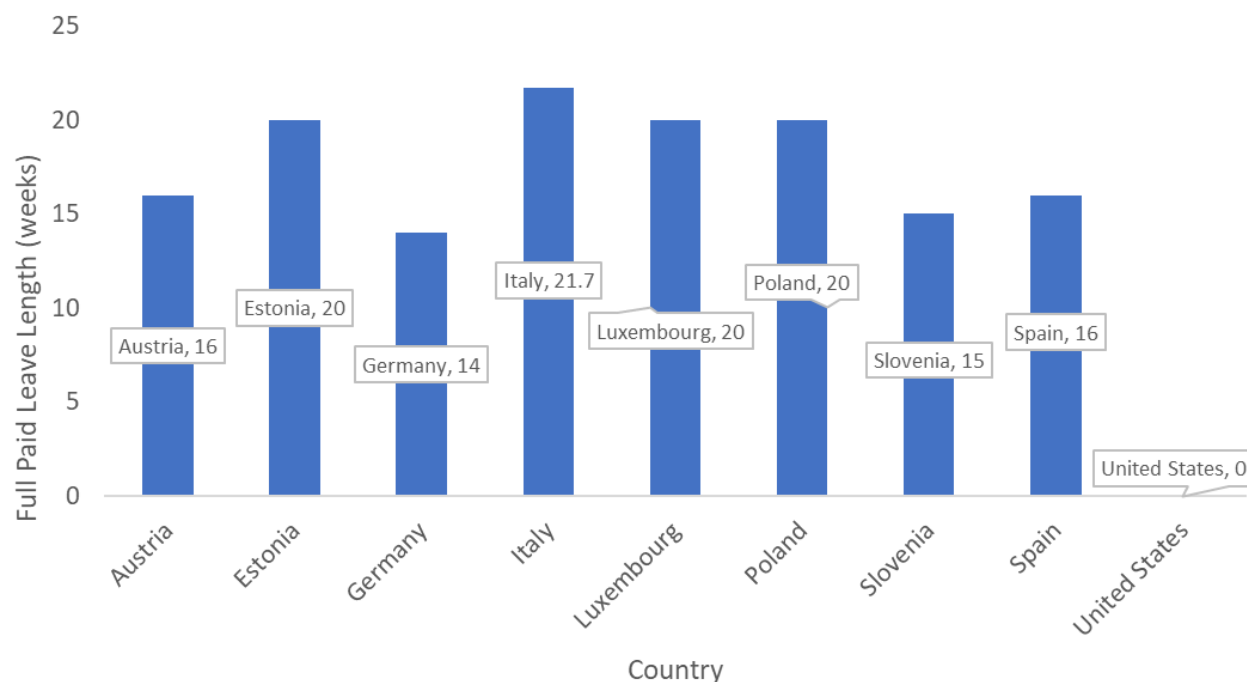
The second dataset, LMF_1_2_Maternal_Employment, was analyzed to compare Maternal Employment rates. The data was either from 2019 or the latest available year (OECD, 2020). Provided in this data were the employment rates for women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14, by part-time/full-time status. Data about employment rates for women with children aged 0-2, by maternity/parental leave status was also provided in this set. The third dataset was LMF_1_6_Gender_differences_in_employment_outcomes (OECD, 2022a). The data was from 2021 and included information on gender gaps in employment and women's share of managerial employment for OECD member countries. The fourth dataset, PF2_4_Parental_leave_replacement_rates, contained data on net equivalized income over the period of parental and home care for the year 2014 (OECD, 2017). Each of the datasets were

filtered to only include the nine chosen countries and were then used to create figures that made it possible to interpret descriptive statistics.

Results

Figure 1

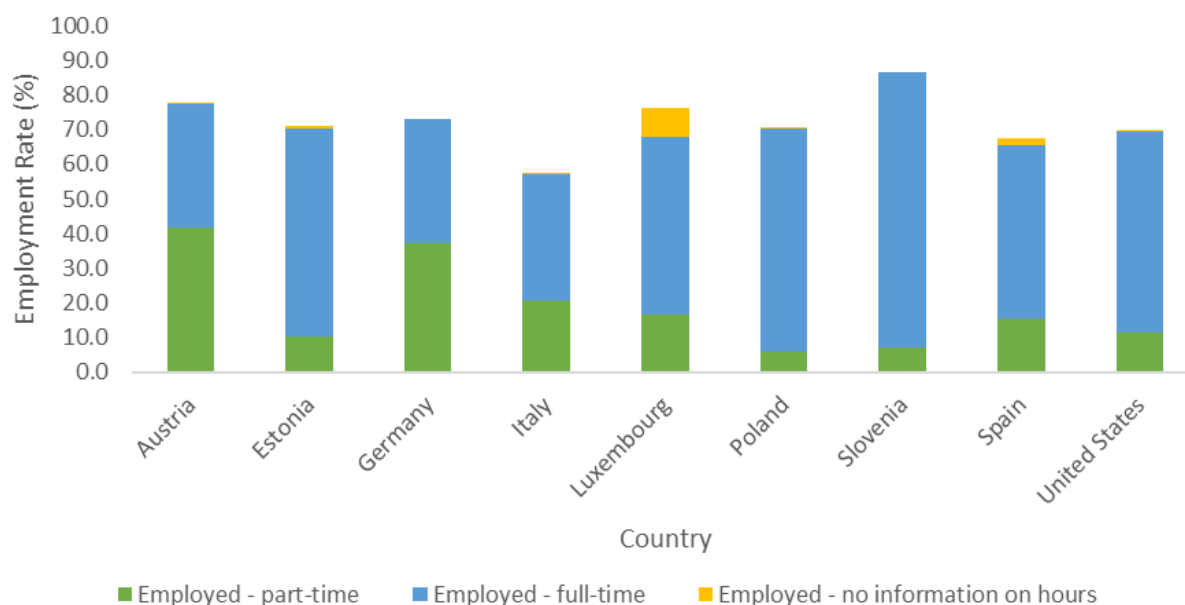
Full Paid (100% Payment Rate) Maternity Leave Length in Weeks



The eight chosen European countries all offer paid maternity leave at 100% payment rate (see Figure 1). The amount of full paid maternity leave in these countries range from 14 weeks, in Germany, to 21.7 weeks, in Italy. The average amount of paid leave among the eight European countries is 17.8 weeks. The United States has a stark contrast to these numbers, at zero weeks of national paid maternity leave.

Figure 2

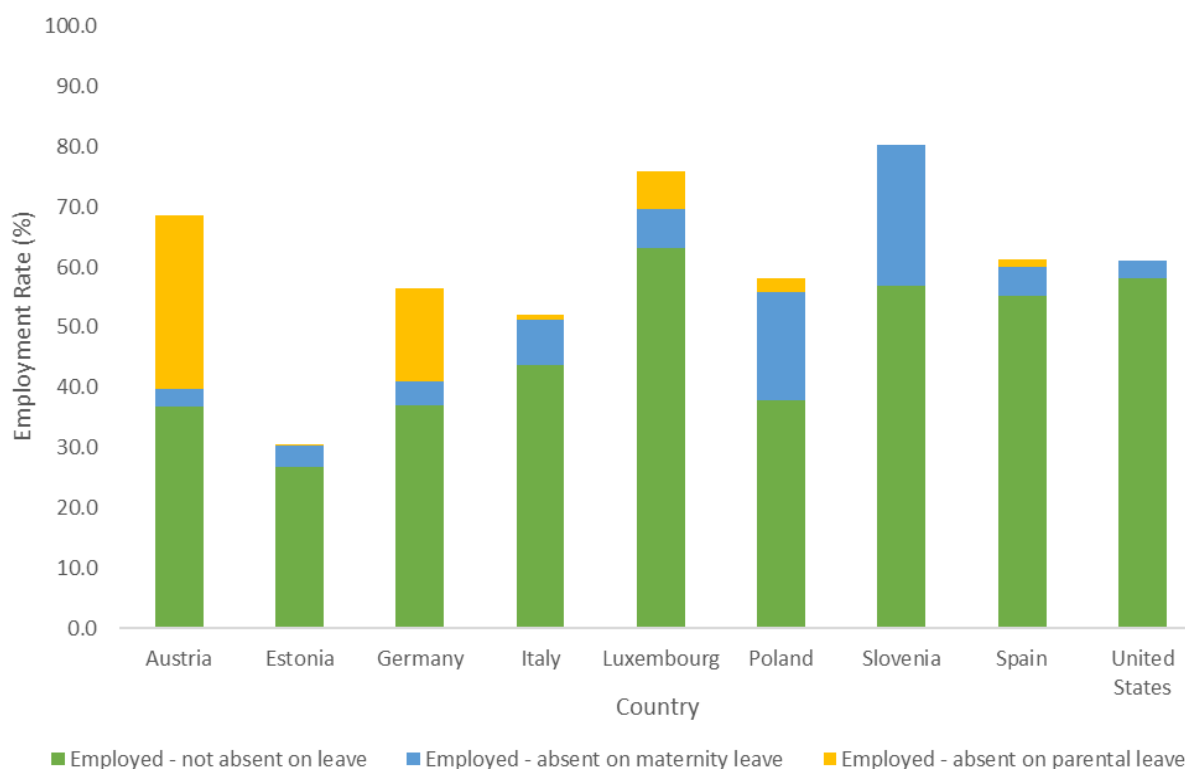
Employment Rates for Women (15-64 year-olds) with at Least One Child Aged 0-14, by Part-time/Full-time Status in 2019



The employment rates for women with at least one child aged 0-14 were compared by part-time and full-time status (see Figure 2). Italy has the lowest total employment rate among the nine countries at 57.5%. Italy is also the country with the longest paid leave among them. Slovenia has the highest total employment rate for women at 86.6%, and the highest full-time employment rate at 79.7%. Slovenia also has one of the lowest part-time employment rates along with Poland. Austria and Germany have the highest percentage of part time employment rate compared to the other countries. Slovenia, Austria, and Germany are all at the lower range of the length of paid weeks at 15, 16, and 14 weeks, respectively. The United States seems to be most similar to Estonia in this figure, as they have similar total employment rates and similar part time and full-time employment rates for women. Estonia is at the higher range of paid leave length at 20 weeks.

Figure 3

Employment Rates for Women with Children Ages 0-2, by Maternity/Parental Leave Status in 2019



Note. No data was provided for the United States for Employed - absent on parental leave, as there was no distinction between parental and maternity leave in the available survey.

The employment rates for women with children aged 0-2 were compared by maternity leave/parental leave status (see Figure 3). The United States has the smallest rate of employed and absent on leave among the nine countries at 2.9%. The United States also has the largest ratio of employed and not absent on leave to employed and absent at 20.15. The next largest ratios are from Spain and Estonia at 9.04 and 7.55, respectively. Luxembourg has the highest employment rate for not absent on leave at 63.2%. This is followed by the United States at 58.1%. Austria and Slovenia have the highest employment rates for absent on leave at 31.9% and 23.5%, respectively.

There are no apparent patterns with the length of leave and employment rate for mothers with children aged 0-2.

Figure 4

Gender Gaps in Employment Rates in 2021



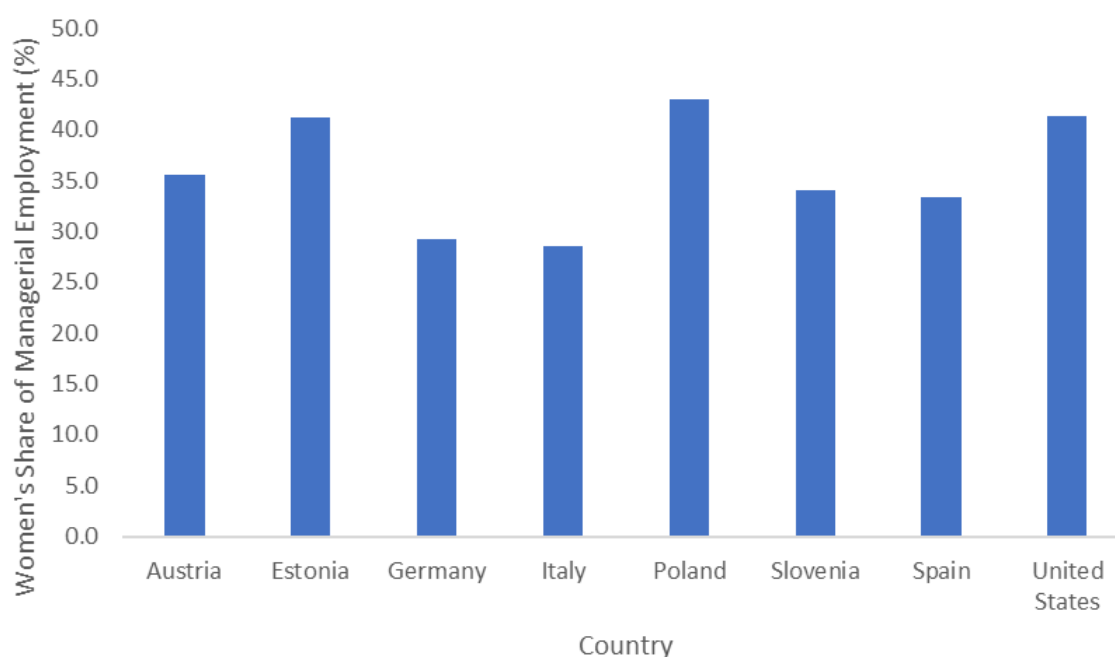
Note. The full-time equivalent employment rate is calculated as the employment rate for 15-64 years old multiplied by the average usual hours worked per week per person in employment (both dependent and self-employment), divided by 40. For the United States, the full-time equivalent is calculated based on usual working hours for dependent employees only.

The gender employment gaps for each of the nine countries were compared, along with their full-time equivalent rate (see Figure 3). The full-time equivalent rate is interpreted as the proportion of the population that would be employed if all those in employment worked a 40-hour working week. Countries with much larger space between the standard and the full-time equivalent gaps have highly unequal working hours that contribute heavily to the overall gender differences. Among the nine countries, Austria and Germany have the largest space between the two gaps at 14% and 13.8%, respectively. This aligns with Figure 2, where these two countries had the highest

ratio of part-time to full-time maternal (children aged 0-14) employment rates. The standard gender gap in the United States falls in the middle at 9.6% and has the most similar rate gap to Spain, Estonia, and Poland. The United States is most similar to Spain in the standard employment gender gap and most similar to Luxembourg in the full-time equivalent rate. There are no apparent patterns with the length of paid leave and the gender employment gaps for these nine countries.

Figure 5

Women's Share of Managerial Employment in 2021



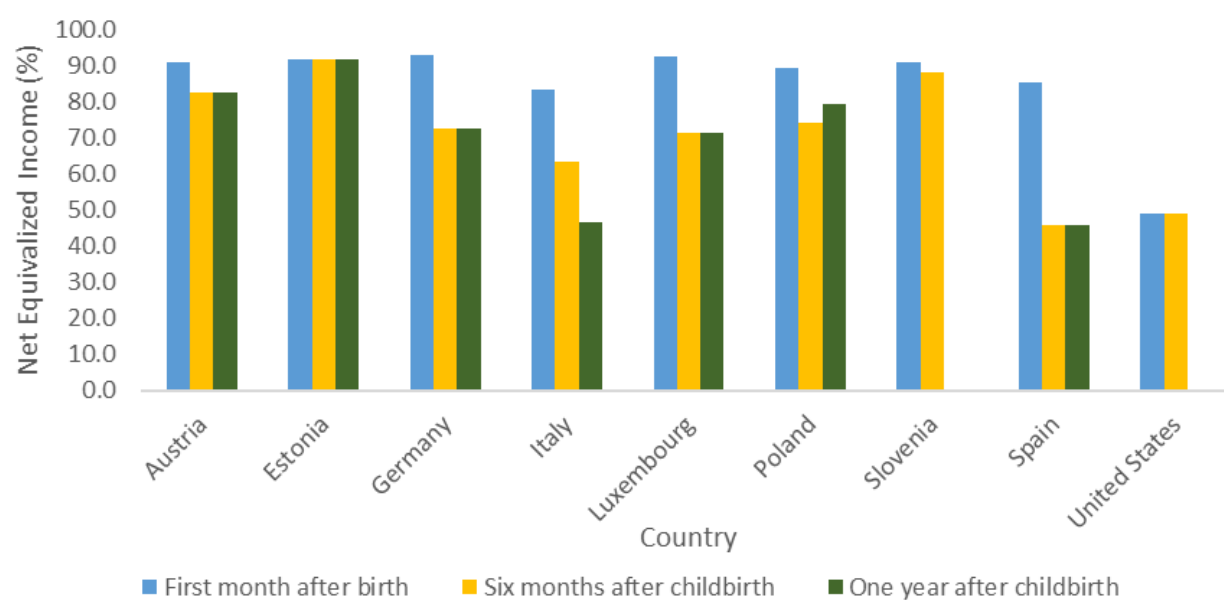
Note. Data for Luxembourg was not available in this set.

When comparing the share of managerial employment, it was found that the United States had the second highest rate among the nine countries at 41.4% (see Figure 5). Poland had the highest rate at 43%, and Estonia had the third highest at 41.4%. Germany and Italy had the two lowest rates at 29.2% and 28.6%, respectively. Italy and Germany are at opposite ends of the paid leave length range for the nine countries, with Italy as the longest and Germany seven weeks

shorter. Women's share of managerial employment in these two countries are over 10 points lower than the share in the United States.

Figure 6

Net Equivalized Income Over the Period of Parental and Home Care Leave in 2014



Net equivalized income in this context is a situation for a two-child two-earner household with combined average earnings (see Figure 6). In this context it is also assumed that the elder child is at least 2 years older than the child just born and that the parents utilized all of the maternity leave (OECD, 2017). Data on the net equivalized income over the period of parental care and home care leave was taken as a percentage of net equivalized household income one year before the birth day. Data is only shown if at least one parent is on leave at the given point in time. When comparing the net equivalized household income one month after birth, the United States, at 49%, is significantly lower than the European countries, which have a range of 83.5% to 92.9%. The United States also remained lower than most of the European countries for net equivalized household income six months after birth. Spain was the only exception, at 45.7% compared to the

United States at 49%. Spain is the only country out of the eight European countries to not offer any weeks of paid parental and home care leave (OECD, 2022b).¹ The United States also offers zero weeks of paid parental and home care leave. Data for one year after childbirth was not available for the United States and Slovenia, yet most European countries, besides Italy and Spain, kept a relatively close percentage to the first month after birth.

Discussion

The purpose of this project was to demonstrate the disparities in usage and employment outcomes in the United States and how employment outcomes in the U.S. differ from countries with national paid policy by conducting a comparison of the U.S. to European countries. Throughout this paper there has been an underlying connection of contextual factors to maternity leave policy, usage, and subsequent outcomes. This paper has explored policy change and how effective it can be, as well as the disparate impacts that result from a lack of national paid policy. It was then important to not only note the disparities, but what general attitudes around maternity leave then follow into work outcomes in the United States. Decisions of when, how, and to what extent to use maternity leave are constantly influenced by the shifting norms and values in the United States, which also affects employer and employee perception of treatment of mothers in the workplace (Budig et al., 2012).

The archival data analysis on the employment outcomes of the U.S. and eight European countries showed varying results for each outcome analyzed. For example, when analyzing women's share of managerial employment, Germany and Italy had the two lowest rates at 29.2% and 28.6%, respectively. Italy and Germany, however, are at opposite ends of the paid leave length

¹ Paid parental leave and home care leave differ from maternity leave. Paid parental leave refers to employment-protected leave for both or either parent and is often supplemental to specific maternity leave and paternity leave periods. Paid home care leave refers to employment-protected leaves of absence that may follow parental leave, allowing one parent to stay home and care for a child until two to three years of age.

range for the European countries, with Italy as the longest length and Germany the shortest with a 7-week difference. Women's share of managerial employment in these two countries is also over 10 points lower than the United States. This reinforces the influence contextual factors, such as attitudes towards mothers in the workplace, has on employment outcomes, such as managerial employment.

There were two instances where the United States was drastically different compared to the eight European countries in employment outcomes in the data analysis. The first instance was the ratio of employed and not absent on leave to employed and absent on leave. This was 20.15 in the United States, while the other eight countries stayed in the range of 1.15 to 9.04. This means more mothers with children aged 0-2 in the U.S. are employed and not absent on leave than the other European countries. The second instance was the net equivalized income one month after birth. In the United States there was a net equivalized income of 49% one month after birth. This is significantly lower than the European countries, which have a range of 83.5% to 92.9%. This means families in the U.S. earn half as much income one month after birth compared to the previous year, while families in European countries maintain most of their income in the first month after birth. In all of the figures except for full paid leave length and managerial pay, Spain has similar outcomes to the United States. As mentioned above, Spain and the United States were the only countries out of the nine that do not provide paid parental and home care leave.

Theoretical Implications

Social exchange theory is supported by findings in the literature that maternity leave policies are positively related to organizational commitment and is thus extended to include the specific benefit of maternity leave policies. While the mandated-benefit model seeks to explain variations in maternity leave length, the findings of the literature review and the archival data

analysis bring in more potential contextual factors. The mandated-benefit model links a society's tolerance of gender discrimination to leave length, but factors such as attitudes towards mothers and women in the workplace are also relevant to leave length. As mentioned above, social exchange theory and the mandated-benefit model both describe why employers provide their employees leave. The two theories are expanded upon through findings that government policy, organization policy, contextual factors, and maternity leave all influence one another.

The job characteristics model helps explain how job design, outcomes, and maternity leave usage are related. High work satisfaction has been associated with shorter maternity leave usage, and in the job characteristics model, high satisfaction can be linked back to job design characteristics such as skill variety and task significance. If certain occupations have job designs that match this model and can be connected to the subsequent critical psychological states and outcomes, there can be another explanation for shortened maternity leave usage. In the job characteristics model, job design characteristics lead to positive outcomes, yet these positive outcomes are linked to shortened maternity leave usage. While the outcomes are positive, based on the research reviewed above, shortened leave usage is not necessarily a good thing. If mothers have the job design characteristics and they take shorter leave, this may be detrimental to an outcome like organizational commitment in the long run. The other outcomes, high internal work motivation, high quality performance, and low absenteeism and turnover have the potential to be related to shortened maternity leave usage as well.

Practical Implications

The first implications from this study comes from the broadened understanding of policy in the United States. In Study 1, it was mentioned that there is surprisingly little influence of international organizations on policy change. Policy change is more likely to come from domestic

influence, such as elected leftist governments (White, 2017). While a few U.S. states and cities already have some sort of paid maternity leave policy, the knowledge and understanding of new policies is not widespread, specifically among lower-income mothers (Goodman et al., 2020). Also, when policies are enacted to provide paid leave, such as for Temporary Disability Programs, these policies have particularly large impacts on the children of Black mothers and unmarried mothers (Stearns, 2015). Paid family leave policy can either be enacted on the state or national level and 13 U.S. states currently have enacted these policies. These current state policies are funded through insurance systems that are paid into by employees and employers through payroll contributions (Williamson, 2023). It is imperative that paid parental leave policy is enacted either at the national level or continuing at the state level, in order to reduce disparities. This is done through a consistent domestic push for change through electing supporting officials. Mothers should receive information about new benefits, specifically in an accessible manner, such as easily found websites and using clear language.

There are also implications on an organization level. It is understood from social exchange theory that it is beneficial for employers to create and maintain policies that support motherhood, such as providing paid maternity leave. Work-family benefits are positively related to organizational commitment and negatively related to intentions to leave the organization (Sterling & Allan, 2022). Implementation of paid family leave policy also improves employers' ratings of employee commitment and cooperation (Bartel et al., 2023). This evidence supports the notion that providing paid leave to employees benefits an organization, even when there is not a national mandate for them to do so.

In addition to implications for organizations, there are also implications for managers. In Study 1, it was mentioned that providing information about a mother's agency is beneficial to

evaluations of women who take longer legislated leave. Providing a corporate program that gives women the opportunity to stay connected with work while on maternity leave can be another successful agency intervention for managers (Hideg et al., 2018). This knowledge can be useful for training managers in the benefits they can provide mothers in the workplace and for recruiters in the ways they can prevent bias when evaluating candidates. Procedures that provide consistent support to mothers, such as through idiosyncratic deals, are also important for managers to consider (Liao et al., 2016).

Limitations and Future Directions

While this study has several strengths, it is also important to acknowledge its limitations. This paper focused specifically on the United States but there were inconsistencies in findings when reviewing an Australian study relevant to employment outcomes. This study found that employer-provided, relatively short, paid maternity leave found no effect on long-term employment or wages after a child's first birthday nor have any deleterious effects on employment prospects or wages in the long run. The study also found no evidence to suggest that short employer-provided paid maternity leave improved a mothers' labor market attachment a great deal (Hanel, 2013). This is inconsistent with the findings in the United States, yet Australia was not one of the countries that was focused on in this paper. The cultural differences and other contextual factors describing these inconsistencies are a direction future research can go in. There are also limitations with using archival data. This analysis was limited to the variables provided in the dataset and there are relevant outcomes that were unable to be measured. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to draw connections, but some analyses, such as significance tests, were unable to be performed due to the limitations of the archival data. The OECD does collect longitudinal data, which is a direction future research can go in.

While a number of outcomes were examined, there are others that still need to be examined, such as the link to a minimum level of paid leave that will reduce disparities in maternal outcomes and postnatal organizational commitment, as called for by Hawkins (2020) and Sterling and Allan (2022). Further research may also continue to explore the connection of contextual factors to work-related outcomes, as paid maternity leave length alone did not always have a clear connection to the outcomes in Study 2. From the results of Study 2, it was found through similarities in the U.S. and Spain that some outcomes may be connected to paid parental and home care leave. Further research can also investigate the route to enacting paid maternity leave, whether it is on the state or national level, and how other countries, such as those in Europe can be used as a model to do so.

Conclusion

In this paper disparities in usage and access to maternity leave have been identified, work related outcomes associated with maternity leave and motherhood have been examined, and the differences in outcomes in the United States and European countries with national paid maternity leave policies have been compared. Future research can continue to investigate potential outcomes associated with paid policy in the U.S. as well as the route to enact it. A lack of national paid maternity leave policy has deleterious effects on women and reflecting on these impacts assists in the needed cultural shift in the United States. It is demonstrated above that contextual factors, policies, and maternal employment all interact, but culture may be the driving force for change.

Biographical Note

Lauren Goralczyk is a management information systems major with a business analytics specialization. After completing her bachelor's degree, Lauren plans to attain a master's degree in information technology management. Her professional goal is to work in data analytics to improve decision support in operational, tactical, and strategic business decisions. Data analytics are applied in many business areas, and Lauren is particularly interested in its use in human resource management. For this reason, Lauren has chosen to take on a thesis project researching maternity leave policy. Lauren spent time studying abroad in the Netherlands and wanted to incorporate the differences she noticed in work-life balance, and therefore chose to use her experience in both countries to make comparisons and contrasts in her project. Lauren's research topic combines her interest in business analytics and ethical human resource topics by analyzing the disparities across those who utilize maternity leave.

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