



Highlights of the 2000 U.S. Department of Labor Report
Balancing the Needs of Families and Employers:
Family and Medical Leave Surveys

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Highlights of the 2000 U.S. Department of Labor Report

Balancing the Needs of Families and Employers: Family and Medical Leave Surveys

The following selected findings[†] were compiled and edited by Nicole Casta of the National Partnership for Women & Families from the U.S. Department of Labor report, *Balancing the Needs of Families and Employers: Family and Medical Leave Surveys 2000 Update*.¹ These findings are based on two surveys: one representing all employees and one representing private-sector establishments. A glossary of terms can be found at the end of this document.

I. Usage

How Many People Have Taken Family and Medical Leave?

- ⊗ More than 35 million employees have taken leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) since it was enacted in 1993.²

Why Do People Take Family and Medical Leave?

Reasons—

- ⊗ 52% of leave-takers take time off to care for their own serious illness.
- ⊗ 26% of leave-takers take time off to care for a new child or for maternity disability reasons.
- ⊗ 13% of leave-takers take time off to care for a seriously ill parent.
- ⊗ 12% of leave-takers take time off to care for a seriously ill child.
- ⊗ 6% of leave-takers take time off to care for a seriously ill spouse.³

Reasons by Sex—

⊗ Male Leave-Takers⁴

- ③ 58% take time off to care for their own serious illness.
- ③ 23% take time off to care for a new child.
- ③ 11% take time off to care for a seriously ill parent.
- ③ 10% take time off to care for a seriously ill child.
- ③ 8% take time off to care for a seriously ill spouse.

⊗ Female Leave-Takers⁵

- ③ 49% take time off to care for their own health conditions.
- ③ 29% take time off to care for a new child or for maternity disability reasons.
- ③ 15% take time off to care for a seriously ill parent.
- ③ 12% take time off to care for a seriously ill child.
- ③ 6% take time off to care for a seriously ill spouse.

[†] Unless otherwise noted, findings reported here describe the behavior and opinions of all employees and of private-sector establishments during the 18-20 month survey period.

Who Takes Family and Medical Leave?

By Sex—

- Ⓢ 42% of leave-takers are men.
- Ⓢ 58% are women.

By Income—

- Ⓢ 27% of leave-takers earn less than \$30,000.
- Ⓢ 51% of leave-takers earn between \$30,000 and \$74,999.
- Ⓢ 22% of leave-takers earn \$75,000 or more.

For How Long Do People Take Family and Medical Leave?

- Ⓢ The median length of leave is 10 days.
- Ⓢ 80 percent of leaves are for 40 days or fewer.

II. Coverage and Eligibility

Under the FMLA, an employee is *eligible* if she or he has worked for an employer for at least 12 months; has worked for 1,250 hours over the 12 months before leave is needed; and works at a location with 50 or more employees within 75 miles. A *covered establishment* is a business at a particular location in which there are 50 or more employees within 75 miles.

How Many Private-Sector Establishments Are Covered Under the FMLA?

- Ⓢ 11% of private sector establishments are covered under the FMLA.

How Many Employees Work for Covered Establishments?

- Ⓢ 77% of employees work for covered establishments.⁶

Coverage by Sex—

- Ⓢ 50% of covered employees are male.
- Ⓢ 50% are female.

Coverage by Income—

- Ⓢ 29% of covered employees earn less than \$30,000.
- Ⓢ 48% earn between \$30,000 and \$74,999.
- Ⓢ 23% earn \$75,000 or more.

How Many Employees Are Eligible Under the FMLA?

- Ⓢ 62% of employees work for covered establishments and are eligible.

Coverage and Eligibility By Sex—

- Ⓢ 52% of covered and eligible employees are male.
- Ⓢ 48% are female.

Coverage and Eligibility By Income—

- Ⓢ 24% of covered and eligible employees earn less than \$30,000.
- Ⓢ 51% earn between \$30,000 and \$74,999.
- Ⓢ 25% earn \$75,000 or more.

How Many Establishments With 25-49 Employees Voluntarily Provide Family and Medical Leave?

- ☉ 60% of non-covered establishments with 25-49 employees provide leave for all FMLA reasons.

III. Incidence of Paid Leave versus Unpaid Leave

How Many People Receive Compensation During Leave Taken for Family and Medical Reasons?

(Note that the FMLA guarantees employees unpaid leave only.)

The following data refer to each respondent's *longest leave*.

- ☉ 34% of employees receive no pay at all.
- ☉ 66% of leave-takers receive some form of compensation, regardless of length or amount.
- ☉ Of the 66% who receive compensation,
 - ③ 61% receive compensation from paid sick leave.
 - ③ 39% receive compensation from paid vacation leave.
 - ③ 26% receive compensation from paid personal leave.
 - ③ 18% receive compensation from temporary disability insurance.
 - ③ 11% receive compensation from other benefits.
 - ③ 8% receive compensation from paid parental leave.⁷

How Does Compensation Affect a Person's Ability to Take Leave?

- ☉ During the period of the survey, 3.5 million people needed leave for family and medical reasons but were not able to take it.⁸
- ☉ 78% of those who needed leave but did not take it, did not take leave because they could not afford it.
- ☉ 9% of leave-takers receiving less than full pay during their longest leave have to go on public assistance to cover their lost wages.

IV. Support for Family and Medical Leave

How Do Employees Feel About Family and Medical Leave?

- ☉ 81% of employees agree that every worker should be able to have up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave per year for family and medical reasons.⁹

V. FMLA Rights and Responsibilities

How Well Do Employees Understand Their Rights to Family and Medical Leave?

- ☉ 62% of employees at covered establishments do not know if the FMLA applies to them.

How Well Do Employers Understand Their Responsibilities Under the FMLA?

- ☉ 16% of covered establishments do not know whether they are covered under the FMLA or mistakenly report that they are not covered when, in fact, they are.

VI. The Impact of Family and Medical Leave on Employers: Costs and Benefits

Costs—

Does the FMLA Have a Harmful Effect on Business Performance?

- ⊙ In 84% of covered establishments, the FMLA has either no effect or has a positive effect on *productivity*.
- ⊙ In 90% of covered establishments, the FMLA has either no effect or has a positive effect on *profitability*.
- ⊙ In 90% of covered establishments, the FMLA has either no effect or has a positive effect on *growth*.

Is Administering the FMLA Costly to Employers?¹⁰

- ⊙ 89% of covered establishments experience either no increase or only a small increase in *administrative costs* due to the FMLA.
- ⊙ 89% of covered establishments experience either no increase or only a small increase in the *cost of continuing benefits* (e.g., health plans) during leave.
- ⊙ 93% of covered establishments experience either no increase or only a small increase in *hiring and training costs*.

Is Intermittent Leave for Family and Medical Reasons a Problem for Employers?

- ⊙ In 81% of covered establishments, intermittent family and medical leave has no effect on *productivity*.
- ⊙ In 94% of covered establishments, intermittent family and medical leave has no effect on *profitability*.

Benefits—

Do Employees Return to Their Employer After Taking Leave for Family and Medical Reasons?

- ⊙ 98% of covered and eligible employees return to work for the same employer after taking leave for family and medical reasons.

Does the FMLA Save Businesses Money?

- ⊙ 8% of covered establishments experience cost savings due to the FMLA.
- ⊙ 77% of those covered establishments experiencing cost savings cite decreased turnover as the reason for these savings.

What Impact Does the FMLA Have on Employee Morale?

- ⊙ In 89% of covered establishments, the FMLA has a neutral or positive effect on employee morale.

VII. Costs: The Fears of Uncovered Employers Versus the Experience of Covered Employers

How Do the Anticipated Effects on Businesses of Complying with the FMLA Compare to the Actual Effects?

The fears of those establishments not covered by the FMLA are shown to be largely unfounded when compared with the experiences of those establishments already complying with the FMLA.

Effects of Complying With the FMLA on Business Productivity—

- ⊙ 51% of non-covered establishments anticipate a negative effect.
- ⊙ While only 16% of covered establishments experience a negative effect.

Effects of Complying With the FMLA on Business Profitability—

- ⊙ 51% of non-covered establishments anticipate a negative effect.
- ⊙ While only 10% of covered establishments experience a negative effect.

Effects of Complying With the FMLA on Employee Productivity—

- ⊙ 40% of non-covered establishments anticipate a negative effect.
- ⊙ While only 17% of covered establishments experience a negative effect.

Effects of Complying With the FMLA on Employee Morale—

- ⊙ 24% of non-covered establishments anticipate a negative effect.
- ⊙ While only 11% of covered establishments experience a negative effect.

Effects of Complying With the FMLA on Administrative Costs—

- ⊙ 71% of non-covered establishments expect their administrative costs to increase.
- ⊙ While 89% of covered establishments experience either no or only a small change in administrative costs.

Endnotes

¹ *Balancing the Needs of Families and Employers: Family and Medical Leave Surveys 2000 Update*, conducted by Westat for the U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, DC, 2000, <<http://www.dol.gov/dol/asp/public/fmla/main.htm>>. This report is based on two surveys, one of employees and one of establishments. These surveys were conducted from July to mid-October of 2000 (Ch. 1, p.3).

The 2000 Survey of Employees was conducted with a sample of individuals aged 18 or older in U.S. households who had been employed since January 1, 1999 (a period of between 18 and 20 months, depending on when the interview occurred). The sample was drawn from the universe of all known U.S. households with telephones. The sample frame represented all employees that had a telephone. It included individuals employed in both the public and private sectors (Ch. 1, p. 4).

The 2000 Survey of Establishments surveyed private business establishments. It excluded government and quasi-governmental organizations (e.g., schools and post offices). For purposes of the sample, an “establishment” was defined as the business located at a particular address or location. Data were collected with respect to this location, even if the employer had other locations. The human resources director or the person responsible for the company’s benefits plan was selected to be the respondent for each establishment (Ch. 1, p.4).

² This constitutes 27% of all civilian employees in the U.S., according to calculations by the National Partnership for Women & Families. (The percentage was derived based on the average number of civilian employees in the years 1993-2000. Data on number of civilian employees from the “Employment Level Civilian Labor Force,” Series ID: LFU11000000, from the *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, DC, Accessed on April 10, 2001, <www.bls.gov>. The 1993 date was used as the beginning date because the FMLA was enacted in that year.

³ These total more than 100% because some people took more than one leave during the survey period.

⁴ These total more than 100% because some people took more than one leave during the survey period.

⁵ These total more than 100% because some people took more than one leave during the survey period.

⁶ This number is from Table A2-3.1 and is based on employee responses. Table 3.1 provides a different number for the percent of employees at FMLA-covered establishments. The numbers in Table 3.1 are based on the responses of establishments rather than employee responses.

⁷ These total more than 100% because some respondents receive compensation from more than one source.

⁸ The interviews for the *Survey of Employees* began in July and ended in mid-October of 2000. Respondents were asked about the period of time from January 1, 1999 through the time of their interview—a period of 18 to 20 months depending on when the interview occurred (C-20 and Section A of the Employee Survey).

⁹ The U.S. Department of Labor’s *2000 Survey of Employees* shows strong support for unpaid leave for all workers. Other surveys have shown strong support not only for leave but for compensation during leave. Eighty-nine percent of parents of young children and eighty-four percent of all adults support expanding disability or unemployment insurance as a vehicle for paid family leave (*What Grown-Ups Understand About Child Development: A National Benchmark Survey*, conducted by DYG, Inc., for Civitas, the Brio Corporation and Zero to Three: The National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, Washington, DC, October 2000, <<http://www.zerotothree.org/fullreport.pdf>>). Seventy-nine percent of working women and men aged 18-34 support expanding FMLA to cover more employees and eighty-two percent support expanding the FMLA to provide paid leave (*High Hopes, Little Trust: A Survey of Young Workers and Their Ups and Downs in the New Economy*, conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the AFL-CIO, Washington, DC, September 1999, <http://www.aflcio.org/articles/high_hopes>).

¹⁰ The Families and Work Institute asked a similar question in their *1998 Business Work-Life Study*. They found that, for eighty-four percent of employers, the benefits of providing leave offset or outweigh the costs. Of that eighty four percent, forty-two percent of employers experience a positive return from providing leave and forty-two percent find providing leave to be cost-neutral. Only seventeen percent experience a negative return (total exceeds 100% due to rounding) (*1998 Business Work-Life Study*, The Families and Work Institute, New York, NY, <<https://swww.igc.apc.org/fwi/pubs/worklife.html>>).

Glossary

This glossary provides definitions used by the authors of *Balancing the Needs of Families and Employers*.

Covered Establishment: An establishment that “employ[s] 50 or more employees [who have worked] for at least 20 workweeks in the current or preceding calendar year at one or more worksites within 75 miles” (Ch. 3, p. 1). [Editor’s Note: The authors survey only private sector establishments.]

Eligible Employee: “An employee is eligible if he or she: works for a covered employer; has worked for that employer for at least 12 months; has worked for at 1,250 hours over the 12 months before leave is needed; and works at a location with 50 or more employees within 75 miles” (Ch. 3, p. 1).

Employer: (See: *Establishment*.) [Editor’s Note: The report’s authors use employer and establishment interchangeably in this report.]

Establishment: An establishment is “a business located at a particular address or location” (Ch. 1, p. 4).

Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA): “An Act that provides covered and eligible workers with up to 12 weeks of job-protected, unpaid leave so they can care for a seriously ill child, spouse or parent; stay home to care for their newborn, newly adopted or newly placed child; or take time off when they [themselves] are seriously ill” (p. viii).

FMLA: (See: *Family and Medical Leave Act*.)

FMLA Leave: Leave taken under the FMLA. “To take such a leave, an employee must not only take leave for a[n] FMLA-qualifying reason, but must also work for a covered employer and meet certain eligibility requirements” (Ch. 3, p. 1).

Intermittent Leave: To take intermittent leave is “to alternate between use of leave and being at work” (Ch. 2, p. 10).

Leave for Family and Medical Reasons: “Leave for a reason that is covered by the FMLA, regardless of [an employee’s] eligibility for the law or whether their employer is covered by the provisions of the Act” (Ch. 2, p. 1).

Leave-Needer: “Employees who reported needing leave for a reason covered under the FMLA yet [who] were unable to take this leave” (Ch. 2, p. 13). [Editor’s Note: It appears that “Leave-Needers” include all employees, not just those who work for a covered establishment and are eligible under the FMLA.]

Leave-Taker: “All employees who took leave for a reason that is covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act, regardless of their eligibility for the law or whether their employer is covered by the provisions of the Act” (Ch. 2, p. 1).

Longest Leave: [Editor’s Note: The report’s authors do not define this term. Editor’s Definition: Some employees took multiple leaves and leaves of varying lengths during the survey period. The Authors use the term “longest leave” when presenting data about the longest leave that an employee took during the survey period.]

Personal Leave: [Editor’s Note: The report’s authors do not define this term. Editor’s Definition: Personal leave is paid leave granted to employees that can be used at the employee’s discretion.]

Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI): [Editor’s Note: The report’s authors do not define this term. Editor’s Definition: Temporary Disability Insurance provides an employee time off with pay for an illness or injury not incurred on the job.]