

PARENTAL LEAVE IN NEW ZEALAND

2005/2006 EVALUATION



Department of Labour

TE TARI MAHI



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For more information on parental leave or other workplace related matters visit www.dol.govt.nz

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FOREWORD

For two decades, the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 has enabled New Zealand parents to take leave from employment on the birth or adoption of their child. Its precursor, passed in the early 1980s, provided only for maternity leave.

In 2002 the Labour-led government introduced paid parental leave for the first time. Initially it was for a period of 12 weeks, which we increased to 14 weeks in 2005 and extended eligibility to employees who had six months service or more with the same employer. In July 2006, entitlement to 14 weeks paid parental leave was extended to self-employed parents. Today, more than 20,000 parents access Government-funded paid parental leave every year.

The nature of work and families has undergone fundamental change since 1987. New Zealand's labour market has an ageing population and shrinking working-age population, ongoing skill shortages, an increasing number of women in work, the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men, and high employment growth.

At the same time, family structures and parenting arrangements have grown more diverse, and today, women tend to have fewer children and at a later age. The Choices for Living, Working and Caring Plan of Action sets out our government's goals for addressing these critical issues on behalf of those who balance working and caring responsibilities. Parental leave policies play a vital role in this.

New Zealand, like many developed nations, is seeking to strengthen its statutory leave policies further. Internationally, we're seeing increasing flexibility of leave entitlements, which support family transitions and encourage fathers' access to parental leave.

To test the effectiveness of our parental leave legislation, the Department of Labour conducted an evaluation of the parental leave scheme in 2005/06. The purpose of the evaluation was to find out more about the decision-making and experiences of working parents before, during and after parental leave. The evaluation also examined the experiences of parents ineligible for parental leave, as well as those of fathers and employers. Overall, it found that the scheme enjoys considerable support from mothers, fathers, and employers alike. It also identified areas where parental leave could be improved to better meet the needs of parents and employers.

This report presents the findings of that evaluation and will form the basis of further work on the parental leave scheme. It will also contribute to our growing body of research on how to support parents managing transitions between paid working and caring, and balancing these different responsibilities. A more integrated leave framework and streamlined parental leave scheme will better support the quality of the social and economic life, and health, of New Zealanders in the long-term.



HON. RUTH DYSON *Minister of Labour*
May 2007

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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

OVERALL

There is widespread support amongst mothers, fathers and employers for paid parental leave (PPL). It is almost universally recognised that PPL, with its job protection and payment, is important for parents, primarily mothers, to take time out of paid work around the birth or adoption of a child.

For both biological and social reasons it is almost solely mothers who take PPL and extended parental leave. Recovery from childbirth is seen as being supported by PPL as is breastfeeding for many women.

Fathers rarely take partners/paternity leave under the Act, and most mothers do not transfer any PPL to their spouse/partner. Most commonly fathers use annual leave. After the birth of a child the majority of fathers feel increased pressure as the main income earner and have greater concern about financial security.

There is also diversity of experience of mothers, fathers and employers in relation to the birth or adoption of a child. This reflects the considerable variety of family types, educational backgrounds, employment arrangements and the wide range of employers, as well as the considerable diversity of attitudes towards work and family life and the differing experiences of childbirth and adoption.

MOTHERS

Of those mothers who were eligible for PPL, eight in ten of these women took a period of leave. Overall, this is two-thirds of all women in paid work in the immediate period before giving birth to a baby or adopting a child. Of the remaining third of all mothers in paid work and who did not take PPL, two-thirds take no leave at all. One-third took other types of leave.

PPL is typically taken at the end of all other available paid leave. PPL allows eligible mothers to extend the total amount of leave taken.

Uptake of leave is limited by a number of factors including: awareness of leave policies; a conscious choice to exit the workforce and ethical obligation to employer; perceived flexibility of paid work to fit around family; and type of role in workplace.

Most of those who were ineligible for PPL said that the financial contribution had they been eligible would have been significant. Just under half said a payment would have meant they took more leave.

The biggest barrier to taking the full 12 months of parental leave available is financial pressure. Mothers acknowledge that PPL lessens money worries, but does not provide financial security.

Mothers would like to take longer leave than they actually do – on average, most mothers return to work when their baby is six months old, but would like to return when their baby is 12 months old.

Two-thirds of mothers who took PPL and then returned to work, went back to the same employer. Most returned with the same terms and conditions. Although a little lower, the

majority of women who did not take PPL also returned with the same terms and conditions.

Most mothers change their working arrangements when returning from leave. A change in working hours is particularly common, with two-thirds working part-time compared to one-third before the birth. Of those who decreased their hours, two-thirds planned for it to be a permanent change.

Most mothers prefer the time provided by PPL for themselves, and not for their partners. This is because PPL occurs during the first few months of the baby's life when the baby's health and bonding are critical considerations.

FATHERS

Most fathers take some sort of leave around the birth or adoption of a child. Very few eligible fathers, however, are taking unpaid partners paternity leave and are more likely to save up and use all other types of paid leave around the birth of a baby.

The most common arrangement is for men to take two weeks annual leave around the birth of the baby. Father's ideal leave is four weeks concurrent leave with mother.

One in two fathers had more involvement in domestic responsibilities around the birth. Where the mother had returned to paid work, all fathers maintained or increased their involvement.

Fathers find employers more supportive about changing work patterns around the time of the birth, but not necessarily for longer term changes.

EMPLOYERS

Overall, the majority of employers, and especially small employers, have very little experience of women taking PPL.

Large employers are more likely to have formalised policies and systems in place to manage parental leave, and are more likely to have greater knowledge of their legal obligations. Small employers are more likely to consider parental leave on a case-by-case basis.

Employing someone to cover the position of an employee on parental leave is one of the most difficult aspects to manage for employers. Small and medium enterprises are more likely to find this difficult and prefer to re-allocate work across existing staff rather than try to hire someone to temporarily fill the role.

Two-thirds of employers agree that PPL allows them to plan and manage workloads with greater confidence.

Typically employers accommodate changes in working patterns on the mothers return to work and on an ongoing basis, particularly changing the number of hours worked and working flexible hours.

Small and medium enterprises appear to be more flexible than larger employers. They are more likely to strongly agree that they work around the needs of families where possible and re-evaluate the needs of mothers on a regular basis.

Employers are more supportive of changes to working patterns for fathers around the time of the birth, rather than on a long term basis.



AIM OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of this evaluation is to better understand the dynamics of decision-making and experiences before, during and after a period of parental leave under the *Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 (the Act)* and test whether, and how, the Act is meeting its overall objectives. Parental leave is a particularly complex and often contentious area of public policy.¹ Parental leave policy is relevant not only to parents and children, but also to employers, co-workers and the wider society and economy. While parental leave affects a wide range of individuals and organisations, this evaluation focuses on the experiences of three groups: women who have babies or adopt them; fathers or other partners of these women; and employers.

This report begins with a brief discussion of background economic and social trends that affect thinking about parental leave. This is followed by a summary of New Zealand's parental leave policies, after which there is an outline of policies in other similar countries. The report then outlines the methodologies used in the three phases of the research. The research findings then follow this. Reflecting the distinct phases of the research, the research findings are presented in three main sections. The first covers the environment scan. The second covers qualitative research and the final section focuses on the main quantitative study. Within both the qualitative research and the large-scale third stage quantitative survey, parents (mothers and fathers) and employers were interviewed. Therefore, there are separate sections dealing with the responses of all these groups. Due to the small sample size, only bi-variate analysis is undertaken. As the environment scan and qualitative research were conducted to inform the quantitative survey, this report focuses on the findings and implications of the quantitative stage. The three studies gathered a considerable amount of information and this report inevitably cannot cover all the results in detail. A range of further tables are available on the Department of Labour website.²

1 For example see Galtry and Callister, 2005; Heitlinger, 1993; International Labour Organization, 1997; Kamerma, 2000; Moss and Deven, 1999; OECD, 1995.

2 www.dol.govt.nz



BACKGROUND

Internationally, the development of parental leave policies has a long history (Callister and Galtry, 2006). In New Zealand, maternity leave legislation was first passed in the 1980s. This legislation provided job protection to eligible mothers on the birth or adoption of a child but provided no period of paid leave. Subsequently, the *Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987* extended coverage to women and their spouses/partners to take leave from employment but again with no payment.

In 2002, the Act was extended with the introduction of 12 weeks paid parental leave (PPL). In 2004, the Act was amended again to extend the duration of PPL to 14 weeks and the eligibility criteria were relaxed. In July 2006, PPL was extended to the self-employed.

Since parental leave policies were first introduced in Europe in the late 1800s, and even within the period that job protection for parental leave has been available in New Zealand, there have been significant changes in fertility levels and age of childbearing; education levels, particularly for women; as well as family arrangements for both men and women (Callister et al, 2006; Didham, 2006).

All these factors can affect labour participation, or are themselves affected by changes in the labour market. In New Zealand, labour participation rates for women are at

an historic high (Callister, 2005; Johnston, 2005). Most women are now employed at some stage before having a first child and a high proportion after having children. A number of recent studies, however, indicate much diversity in mother's attitudes to being in paid work when children are young (Gendall and Fawthorpe, 2006; Ministry of Social Development, 2006; Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2005; Families Commission, 2005; McPherson, 2006a). Some mothers would rather be at home fulltime with their children and are employed primarily through financial need, others are in paid work because they actively choose this option. Just as there is now a variety of employment arrangements for women and attitudes to paid work, there has also been an increasing variety of employment patterns for men including, to some degree, fathers of young children (Callister 2005).

In parallel to these changes, there is some indication that there is an increasing diversity in employment arrangements (Butcher 2002; Tucker 2002). While many people work as full time employees in permanent jobs, important other employment arrangements are casual work, short-term contracts, part-time work, multiple job holding and self-employment. In addition, for employees, there is considerable diversity in employer type. While some New Zealanders work in large organisations, a significant number work in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) (Mills and Timmins, 2004).

Given the changes in families and in work, it is not surprising that the primary objectives of the Act have also evolved over time.

The key objectives of the Act and subsequent amendments are:

- *Gender equity within the labour market* with increased female labour force retention and the opportunity to return to paid work without disadvantage to position or pay.
- *Gender equity within families* with fathers sharing leave and caring responsibilities.
- *Improved health outcomes for both mother and child* with a mother being able to recover from childbirth, bond with a new baby and return to work without negative consequences to her health and that of her child.
- *Income stability for families* to provide a period of financial security during the leave period.

The key interventions in the Act designed to achieve the outcomes lie in six main areas.

These include the provision of:

- maternity leave to eligible mothers
- extended leave that can be shared between eligible spouses/partners
- unpaid partners/paternity leave
- job protection during a period of parental leave
- 14 weeks payment during the period of maternity leave to the mother (which may be transferred to an eligible spouse/partner)
- criteria providing access to entitlements under the Act to people with a degree of workplace attachment.



NEW ZEALAND PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

Fourteen weeks of job protected PPL is available to eligible parents. To be eligible for PPL, employees must have worked continuously with the same employer for an average of at least 10 hours a week (including at least one hour in every week or 40 hours in every month) in the six or 12 months immediately before the baby's expected due date or the date the employee has assumed the care of a child they intend to adopt.

Eligibility for PPL is primarily determined through the birth mother. However, if their spouse/partner (including same sex couples) fits the eligibility criteria the mother can transfer part or all of the leave to them. In the case of joint adoption, the spouse/partner can be nominated as the primary caregiver.

EXTENDED LEAVE

Employees who have worked continuously with the same employer for 12 months or more are also entitled to up to 52 weeks of employment protected unpaid parental leave, less any PPL taken. Unpaid leave must be taken continuously and can be shared between parents where they are both eligible. Both parents can take their leave at the same time or consecutively with each other.

The rationale underlying the eligibility criteria for both the paid and unpaid parental leave is that to qualify for the job protection that accompanies leave, an employee should have demonstrated workplace attachment with their employer. This helps to strike a balance between an employee's interest in job-protected leave and an employer's interest in maintaining qualified staff.

PARTNERS/PATERNITY LEAVE

Unpaid leave of one week is available to spouse/partners with six months eligible service and two weeks of unpaid leave is available to spouse/partners with 12 months eligible service.

SPECIAL LEAVE

Up to ten days of unpaid leave is available to a mother before maternity leave for reasons connected with pregnancy, such as antenatal checks.

SELF-EMPLOYED

With the introduction of PPL for the self-employed in July 2006, some self-employed parents also became eligible for PPL part way through the evaluation. Those involved in the evaluation, however, had given birth to or adopted their child before the eligibility criteria changed. For the self-employed to be eligible for parental leave payments, a birth mother/adoptive parent has to establish that they had worked an average of at least 10 hours a week over the six or 12 months immediately before the expected date of delivery or adoption of a child.

Further information on parental leave entitlements and obligations is available from the Department of Labour at www.ers.dol.govt.nz or telephone 0800 20 90 20 during business hours.

Throughout this report paid leave or PPL is used to refer to the paid parental leave described above. Parental leave is used to encompass both the paid leave and extended unpaid leave described above.



INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

While this report examines the use of parental leave in New Zealand, paid maternity, paternity and parental leave policies available in other countries can have an influence on New Zealand policies in at least two important ways. First, when considering the effectiveness of New Zealand's PPL scheme policy makers often compare New Zealand's policies with those of similar countries. Secondly, the parents themselves may have experienced other countries systems of parental leave, and so may make comparisons themselves.

A number of countries provide statutory paid maternity leave. These include Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Kell, 2006). Australia does not directly have a period of paid maternity leave, but has job protection legislation and, from 2004, has provided a universal 'baby bonus' of similar value to the maximum possible payment available to New Zealand parents under PPL on the birth of child.

Where a specific period of maternity leave is provided, the duration is usually between 14 and 24 weeks. Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland stand out internationally in the length of paid maternity leave offered with the length varying from 30 weeks to 64 weeks.

Countries where paid paternity leave is provided include Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Kell, 2006). The period of paid leave usually varies from two days to around two weeks, and is generally paid on the same basis as maternity leave. Longer periods of paid paternity leave are available, however, in Norway and Sweden. For instance, in Sweden a specific 'pappa' month was introduced in 1995 and a second 'pappa' month followed in 2002. Paternity leave is usually not transferable to the mother.

A period of PPL, which either mothers or fathers can take, is available in many countries. The usual pattern is for eligibility for PPL to follow on from paid maternity and/or paternity leave, providing an extension to the period of continuous leave a parent can take after a birth or adoption. In some states of the United States, however, a short period of PPL or other income support is available to allow parents to have a short period out of paid work.



RESEARCH DESIGN

A three-stage iterative research programme was undertaken across a period of 18 months beginning in September 2005. Within this period there was a change in eligibility criteria for PPL. In addition, the research was undertaken at a time when the labour market was robust with high levels of participation, low unemployment, and labour shortages, so some responses may reflect that workers, particularly skilled workers, were in short supply at the time of the survey.

STAGE 1: ENVIRONMENT SCAN

The first stage of the evaluation involved an environment scan. The purpose was to establish fundamental parameters of the scope of the research and inform the development of the second and third stages. It focused on establishing a robust snapshot of women and men's engagement in paid work before and after the birth of a baby.

A random sample of birth records was taken from the Register of Births held by the Department of Internal Affairs. This sample covered a six-month period from 1 December 2004 to 31 May 2005. Births to mothers aged under 18 years of age and recorded still births were removed from the sample. Name and address details of either the mother or father from these selected records were then entered into a database. A tele-matching process was used with assistance from Telecom. The overall matching rate was one in three.

Approximately 1750 records were matched and each person was sent a letter describing the research and providing an opportunity to decline to participate in the research. Twelve respondents (0.7 percent) withdrew from the research.

A total of 1000 interviews were conducted between 1 September 2005 and 2 October 2005. All interviews were conducted by telephone from Research New Zealand's CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) Unit in Wellington. The interviews were split between 720 mothers and 280 fathers, and both groups were asked the same set of questions (except in the case of single mothers). The overall response rate was 68 percent.

STAGE 2: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

The second stage was qualitative research focused on uncovering the drivers of decision-making in relation to parental leave. The intention was to identify issues and insights that could be retested in Stage 3 to understand the size of the issues.

A total of 55 individual in-depth interviews, of approximately one and half hours were conducted in Wellington between 7 February and 10 March 2006. The interviews were conducted by Research New Zealand's Qualitative Unit. The sample consisted of:

- 24 mothers who were eligible for parental leave under the Act
- 11 spouses/partners of eligible mothers
- 8 mothers who were ineligible
- 12 employers.

All of the participants were from the greater Wellington region. The mothers interviewed spanned first-time mothers and mothers who already had children (with a slight skew towards new mothers), tertiary qualified mothers and non-tertiary qualified mothers. All mothers interviewed had a spouse/partner (i.e. no single mothers). As indicated in Stage 1, the profile and paid work patterns of self-employed tended to be similar to those of

eligible mothers who took PPL. Therefore, it was decided to exclude this group.

The employers interviewed spanned small, medium and large organisations and both public and private sector employers.

During Stage 2, the researchers identified that there was some confusion about paid parental leave schemes offered by employers and the government-funded PPL under the Act. This highlighted the need to retest earlier findings from the environment scan relating to the overall uptake of government-funded PPL. This area was retested in Stage 3.

STAGE 3: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

The third and final stage of the research was a quantitative survey to test and quantify the key issues raised in the environment scan and qualitative stage of the research.

For this stage a random sample of 6,000 birth records was taken from the Register of Births covering babies born between March and May 2005 excluding participants in the environment scan, still births, and babies born to mothers aged under 18 years of age. Since Stage 1 showed no significant variations for ethnicity, ethnic quotas were not set. Therefore sample sizes for Maori, Pacific and Asian mothers are small and it is not possible to note any areas of significant difference.

A tele-matching process was used with assistance from Telecom. The overall matching rate was one in three.

Approximately 2,200 records were matched. A total of 1501 mothers and 697 fathers were invited by letter to participate in the survey. These sample sizes were based on the number of interviews required for each

group and the projected response rate.

Each person was sent a letter describing the research and providing an opportunity to decline to participate in the research.

From this group 151 people were ineligible [because of either not being in paid work during the six months prior to having a baby (124) not giving birth during the sample period (7) or declined to participate (30)].

All interviews were conducted by telephone from Research New Zealand's CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) Unit in Wellington. A separate questionnaire was used for each group. A total of 501 interviews were completed with mothers (response rate of 50 percent) and 150 interviews were completed with fathers (response rate of 29 percent).³ While some of the questions asked of mother and fathers were the same, or similar, some were tailored specifically towards mothers or fathers. While a household income variable was collected, the data on mothers and fathers were collected based on individuals not couples. Therefore, unlike some overseas research (e.g. Smeaton, 2006), the attitudes and behaviours of mothers and fathers cannot be directly linked to each other.

All interviews were conducted between 25 July and 6 August 2006. This meant that at the time of the interview parents had babies aged between 14 and 17 months.

With the introduction of PPL for the self-employed in July 2006, some self-employed people appear in the results of Stage 3 as eligible for PPL. While these respondents may not have been eligible for PPL at the time of the birth of their babies (between March and May 2005), when they were interviewed

³ As part of the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the survey fathers were asked 'Did your partner have a baby or did you adopt a baby in the last 12-18 months and are you living with your partner and child in the same household?' Research shows a small but important number of fathers do not live with the mothers of their children around the time of the birth of the child (Callister and Birks 2006).

between 25 July and 6 August 2006 and had returned to work, some had become eligible for PPL due to the passing of amendments to the legislation extending PPL to the self-employed.

A sample of 2000 employers was drawn from a database held by Inland Revenue of organisations who have had at least one employee who has taken PPL during the last two years. Each organisation was sent a letter describing the research and providing an opportunity not to participate in the research.

Of the 22,000 organisations in Inland Revenue's database, 81 percent had only one employee take government-funded PPL, 1 percent had between two and five employees and 3 percent had more than five employees. To ensure that organisations with a large number of employees taking parental leave were included in the research, this group was over-sampled. A total of 150 interviews were completed with employers (response rate of 17 percent).

Quotas were established to provide that an equal number of small (under five employees), medium (five to 19 employees) and large (over 20 employees) organisations were interviewed. The results were subsequently reweighted back into their true proportions in New Zealand (i.e. small 63 percent, medium 27 percent and large 10 percent). One-third of employers were male, and the other two-thirds were female. One-third of employers (35 percent) had female employees only. These were more likely to be organisations of less than five employees. A further 18 percent had between 90-99 percent female employees.



STAGE 1: ENVIRONMENT SCAN RESULTS

KEY FINDINGS

- **At the time of the survey, eight out of ten mothers had work patterns that allowed them to qualify for PPL.**
- **Two-thirds of employed mothers were fully eligible for PPL and the 52 weeks of extended unpaid leave.**
- **Well educated, higher earning women in the core labour market were the group most likely to be fully eligible for PPL. This reflects the eligibility criteria.**
- **Self-employment was a major reason why working women were ineligible for PPL. Eight in ten self-employed would have been eligible for PPL provision at the time of the survey had the scheme included the self-employed.**
- **In terms of employed women who were ineligible for leave, two-thirds were ineligible due to the length of time employed and one-third by the hours criteria.**
- **Casual workers were less likely to be eligible for PPL than permanent workers.**
- **One-quarter of mothers surveyed had no engagement with the labour market in the six months prior the birth of their child.**
- **Non-employed mothers were mainly caring for children.**

The purpose of this stage of the research was to provide an initial measurement of the behaviour and attitudes towards involvement in parenting and paid work amongst those who have recently had babies. The specific research questions included:

- What proportion of mothers are eligible for PPL?
- What is the uptake of PPL amongst those eligible?
- What is happening when PPL is not taken up?
- What are the reasons for ineligibility?
- What is the engagement with paid work in the months preceding the birth of a baby?
- How does the birth of a baby impact on engagement in paid work?
- What is the awareness and knowledge of the PPL scheme?

This was an environment scan and many of the questions asked in this stage were then refined in light of both the responses obtained in this part of the research and in relation to the qualitative

TABLE 1: Distribution of mothers by employment characteristics and eligibility for PPL

Group	Description	Number of mothers	% of all mothers	% of working mothers
Fully eligible (also entitled to extended unpaid leave)	Employed more than 12 months and work more than 10 hours per week	433	43	58
Partially eligible (entitled to 13 weeks paid leave only)	Employed 6-12 months and work more than 10 hours per week	133	13	18
Employed not eligible	Employed <6 months (any hours)	70	7	9
	Employed 6-12 months and work less than 10 hours per week	9	1	1
	Employed more than 12 months and work less than 10 hours per week	29	3	4
Self-employed	Self-employed	63	6	8
Not in paid work	Not in paid work	255	26	-
-	Uncategorisable	8	1	1
	TOTAL	1,000	100	100

interviews undertaken in Stage 2. This led to a wider set of questions asked in Stage 3, which focussed on the experiences of those parents who, through their labour market attachment, were potentially eligible for PPL. This is because the method of self-reported eligibility in Stage 1 did not provide an accurate indication of eligibility for parental leave because it was not certain that respondents in Stage 1 differentiated between the statutory parental leave or that provided by their employers. This was also borne out by findings from Stage 2. Accordingly, this part of the report focuses on the reasons for some mothers being ineligible for PPL. In the Stage 1 sample of parents, no fathers had taken PPL.

Engagement of mothers in paid work

Stage 1 showed that New Zealand mothers giving birth between December 2004 and May 2005 had quite variable levels of engagement in paid work. At the time of the survey, one-quarter had no engagement with the labour market in the six months prior the birth of their child (Table 1). Non-working mothers were mainly caring for children, with 81 percent at home with family, 5 percent were students, 1 percent were unemployed, 8 percent on a benefit and 5 percent were classified as 'other'.⁴

Three-quarters of the sampled mothers (76 percent) were in paid employment before having a child. Two-thirds of these mothers were fully eligible, that is eligible for the period of paid leave and the full 52 weeks of extended unpaid leave.

⁴ It is estimated that the average gap between a first and second child is around two years (Didham, 2006). However, a significant number of births have a gap of between one and two years. This means that potentially some mothers who are taking the 52 weeks of paid parental leave may want to take another period of leave either immediately after or shortly after completing their first period of leave. These mothers would be included in those mothers at home looking after children who were not eligible for leave.

TABLE 2: Some characteristics of mothers relative to their employment and eligibility for PPL

	Fully eligible (n=433)	Partially eligible (n=133)	Employed not eligible (n=108)	Self-employed (n=63)	Not working (n=255)
Median income	\$38,000	\$30,000	\$15,000	\$29,000	-
Partner median income	\$51,400	\$52,800	\$53,400	\$56,000	\$55,600
Union member	24%	20%	17%	2%	-
Nature of work	85% permanent 6% casual	73% permanent 14% casual	22% permanent 48% casual	- -	- -
Number of employers	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.2	-
Managerial/ professionally employed	51%	44%	30%	49%	-
More than one child	45%	50%	69%	-	-
If more than one child, gap of five or more years	34%	17%	20%	-	-
Live in a large city	62%	66%	51%	-	-
Earning under \$20,000	15%	32%	55%	-	-

Some characteristics of mothers

Table 2 sets out some characteristics of fully eligible, partly eligible, employed and not eligible, self-employed and those not in paid work. This table shows that those mothers who were fully eligible had the highest personal income but, while the differences were not great, if they were partnered, they did not have the highest partner income. The ineligible employed were less likely to belong to a union and only 22 percent were involved in permanent work versus 85 percent for those fully eligible and 73 percent of those partly eligible. In addition, just under half (48 percent) of those ineligible workers were in casual work versus 6 percent for those fully eligible and 14 percent of those partly eligible. The ineligible workers were also more likely to be multiple jobholders. Only 30 percent of the ineligible workers were in managerial or professional occupations against half of those who were fully eligible for PPL.

While in some areas there were differences between some groups, in many other areas there was little difference in the characteristics of those eligible and not eligible. For example, while the numbers are small, there seemed to be little ethnic differences. The data indicate that there was considerable diversity within each eligibility group.

Overall, this data indicates that well educated, higher earning women in the core labour market were the group most likely to be fully eligible for PPL. This reflects the eligibility criteria.

Why were working mothers not eligible for paid parental leave?

At the time of the survey self-employment was a major reason why working women were ineligible for PPL. They accounted for 37 percent of the group of working women who were ineligible. The survey found, however, that 78 percent of self-employed

women worked an average of 10 hours per week and employed for six months or more suggesting that the majority of self-employed would become eligible for PPL with the legislation change.⁵

The survey showed that self-employed women were similar in profile to the eligible working women, except they had the highest proportion of return to work since the birth of their child, and matched the working ineligible in low levels of leave taken before the birth. Overall, the data indicate that eight in ten self-employed would have been eligible for PPL provision at the time of the survey had the scheme been expanded to include the self-employed.

In terms of employed women who were ineligible for leave, amongst those in permanent work or on contract most were ineligible due to the length of time employed (62 percent) followed by the hours criteria (34 percent) (Table 3). Of those in casual work, two-fifths of mothers were made ineligible by length of employment and another two-fifths by hours of work. A further one-fifth was made ineligible because they did not meet either the hours or length criteria. As already

TABLE 3: % of mothers in each work status who were ineligible for PPL by length of employment and/or hours of work

Ineligible due to (n=171)	Permanent/contract	Casual
Both hours and length	4	21
Length	62	40
Hours only	34	39
Total	100	100

indicated, being in casual working patterns was more likely to exclude mothers from qualifying for PPL. Not only did these ineligible mothers exhibit low levels of workplace engagement, however, they also tended to have lower qualification levels, lower personal and household incomes, to have more children and be primary care-givers. The low level of workplace engagement reflects the PPL eligibility criteria. But the lower levels of qualification and income reflect that the more disadvantaged workers tend to miss out on PPL.

Many of these issues were investigated in more detail in Stage 3 of the research.

5 The self-employed cannot be eligible for job protection as it is not possible to protect such jobs.



STAGE 2: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS

KEY FINDINGS

- While there are some clear patterns of attitude and behaviour amongst parents, there was also much diversity. Attitudes and outcomes are influenced by a variety of factors including those outside parental control, such as the health of the baby.
- While many of the parents may have strived for equality in both paid and unpaid work before having a child, pregnancy and the birth of a child tends to reinforce traditional gender roles. For most parents, the focus for the first three months is the health of the baby and, for many, breastfeeding is critical.
- Many mothers would like to take 52 weeks leave but when most of the leave period is unpaid this not a financial option for some parents.
- A key tension revolves around a mother's wish for flexibility and an employer's need to manage the impact of the leave over a fixed period of time.

In the process of exploring decision making surrounding parental leave and paid work, the dynamics and influences behind these key insights were uncovered. This stage of the research identified a number of hypotheses to be tested and measured in the final quantitative stage. These are discussed in Stage 3.

An initial finding of Stage 2 was that there was some confusion in terminology between employer paid leave schemes and government-funded PPL. Parents did not use the word "government" when referring to PPL. The qualitative research suggested that some of those who in Stage 1 of the research said they took leave under an employer scheme in fact took PPL. In addition, there was insufficient detail collected in Stage 1 of the research to accurately assess eligibility for some women. This appeared to particularly effect those in contract or casual work whose

eligibility may have been affected by the one hour per week minimum requirement as the survey asked only about *usual* hours worked per week.

Parents

Overall, the qualitative research demonstrates that while there are some clear patterns of attitude and behaviour amongst parents, there was also much diversity. The interviews indicated that for parents, the diversity of attitudes and outcomes are influenced by a variety of factors including those outside their control, such as the health of the baby.

For eligible mothers, PPL sanctions time away from paid work to care for their babies. It is also a prompt for reassessing decisions around gender roles and involvement in paid work. For some, the payment attached to the leave gives the leave value. While many of the mothers and fathers may have strived for

equality in both paid and unpaid work before having a child, pregnancy and the birth of a child often reinforces traditional gender roles. For most families, the focus for the first three months is the health of the baby and, for many, breastfeeding is critical. For both biological and social reasons, most mothers see themselves as the main nurturers. The majority of fathers assume the provider role.

I am always considering where is the income coming from, job security, job stresses, covering mortgage payments and rent.

The biological determinants of gender roles have a significant impact on mothers' perception of the baby's health, the involvement of the father, and if or when to return to paid work:

In our case we made a decision that she would be at home fulltime for the first year or so, for the practicality of breastfeeding. But as the father you can miss out on the milestones, like first steps which is bonding for the father.

In addition, while mothers tend to take the PPL around pregnancy and childbirth, mothers also tend to forfeit PPL if returning to work early rather than transfer payments to higher earning spouses/partners.

While traditional gender roles tend to be reinforced, having a baby prompts other changes for some, such as using the leave period to retrain for a different occupation. And sometimes unexpected events, such as a caesarean birth, meant that plans about who took leave and for how long needed to be changed.

But even without unexpected events, after the birth there can be an intense focus on the baby and for a variety of reasons pre-birth plans relating to paid work are often reassessed. One mother noted:

I did originally think that I would be working full time after I came back from the three months parental leave, but I've ended up doing 30 hours and I think that's turned out for the best.

From the father's perspective, taking leave around the birth is primarily to support the mother and establish feeding patterns. Fathers, however, also want time to bond with the baby. In the early months breastfeeding takes priority for most families, so any leave taken by the father to satisfy these three sets of needs must be taken at the same time as the mother. Fathers are also influential in the choices made by mothers around how best to meet the needs of the baby, their family, their career and their employer obligations. The few fathers who did become primary caregivers sometimes found that they were challenging convention.⁶

There is ongoing reassessment of plans in relation to paid work and initial intentions are not always matched with reality. For some parents, the amount of leave mothers want to take around the birth of the baby only becomes clear with the experience of the impact of their new baby on their lives. Thus for these parents the anticipated return to work date is an estimate. For many parents return to paid work is primarily prompted by financial considerations. Leave is generally structured to maintain pre-birth income for as long as possible and PPL is taken at the end of all other paid leave.

6 It was unclear at what stage these fathers became primary caregivers.

The interviews indicated that many mothers would like to take 52 weeks leave but when most of the leave period is unpaid this not a financial option for some parents.

For some mothers, however, there is anxiety around keeping careers on track during the time of their parental leave and feelings of obligation to their employers, particularly in small and medium businesses.

In a 12 month time period a workplace can undergo considerable change and re-organisation. For mothers returning to work after 12 months it can be similar to beginning a new job. For others, however, a desire for mental stimulation influences when mothers return to work.

Many parents reported that at six months, routines of the whole family but particularly the baby are more established and the baby is less reliant on the mother.

Yet, illustrating the diversity of attitudes, for others return to work at three months is too soon. For these parents, there are negative consequences for bonding and the baby's wellbeing. And for some mothers, the advantages of not returning to paid work are greater than all that work offers.

I don't think anyone else, even if they are family, would take care of your kids as well as you would.

The interviews suggested that the biggest anxiety around return to paid work is the quality of childcare. Therefore at a practical level, availability and affordability of quality childcare affects decision making. Respondents suggested there are few places for babies under six months and this strongly impacts on the ideal time for mothers to return to paid work.

Career compromises are often made on return to work to juggle changing priority placed on paid work and family responsibilities:

If I was working a full-time job as well, neither of us could be at senior management level, because you are required to do more than an eight hour day.

Workplace commitment is also demonstrated by women in casual/contract work and mothers in less skilled paid work.

Some employers suggested that return to work by these mothers is valuable to the employers. Their intermittent interaction with paid work and, for some, a willingness to fulfil lesser skilled tasks is important. Some of these women often have strong workplace loyalty demonstrated by the length of service with any one employer. This group feels deserving of parental leave entitlement and are the most likely to benefit from the financial assistance provided by PPL. They tend to come from households where incomes are lower than those of eligible mothers.

The mothers who were not entitled to PPL felt they were more disadvantaged. They often work up to the birth and return to work early and they struggle financially. Both Stage 1 of the research and the qualitative interviews suggested mothers who are eligible but unaware also tend to fit this pattern.

The financial provision of PPL for these mothers would have been significant. Some mothers feel very let down that they do not qualify for PPL, especially when they had a long history of paid work:

It's not fair that I did not get PPL when I've worked for the same employer for five years – why can't they add up my hours?

Mothers who would gain most from PPL financially, often lack the confidence and education to find out about it. It was also stated that PPL is better suited for first children, especially when parents choose to have children close together.

The qualitative research suggests that the actual dollar amount for mothers who benefit from PPL is a token covering day to day costs associated with having a baby, for example nappies. Yet, for mothers excluded from PPL by their patterns of work, the amount of money provided by PPL would have had a significant financial impact, allowing them to have time to bond with the baby and delay their early return to paid work.

Employers

Knowledge of the details surrounding PPL appears to be low and there is some confusion around eligibility criteria amongst all mothers and some employers (small and medium enterprises). Despite their obligations under the Act, many employers (especially small and medium enterprises) reinforce the attitude that it is up to mothers to find out about it and complete the application. Friends and family are the most trusted source of information about PPL but the internet and 0800 numbers provide the detail. Mothers working for employers with a human resource capability are more likely to be given information and feel more supported.

When employing women of childbearing age, employers acknowledge that if these women chose to have babies it will impact on their engagement with paid work. Out of necessity, women need to take some leave from paid work to have a baby. Although a fact of life, the qualitative research indicated that this could be a difficult process to manage for

mothers and their employers. Mothers' plans change and some employers are better equipped to deal with the consequences of parental leave and its unpredictability than others.

The size of the organisation and the flexibility and approach of the immediate manager was noted by some parents in terms of their ability to balance family and paid work.⁷

For example, a decision to resign before the birth can be triggered by the belief that the company will not be able to accommodate the flexibility required by the mother following the birth. Mothers working for small and medium enterprises are more likely to face pressure to return to work early.

There was some feeling amongst parents that the relatively short duration of PPL advantages employers more than mothers. There were also some comments that larger organisations can cope better with periods of leave or part-time working arrangements following a period of parental leave.

For small and medium enterprise, covering any type of leave can be challenging (for example, annual leave has a significant impact on them). Workloads are typically reallocated across existing staff, rather than taken on by a temporary replacement. The qualitative research suggested it can be easier for some to replace someone who resigns than find a temporary replacement.

Yet it appears many small and medium enterprises are flexible in approach and systems and are characterised by high personal investment in relationships. Strong relationships can exist within the company between all employees and between employer and employees. In these situations, employees have a stronger commitment to

⁷ Both New Zealand and international literature emphasise the importance of the attitudes of immediate managers (eg McPherson 2006b).

match this flexibility in the way in which they work. At times, however, this can lead to difficulties managing paid work and families.

For most employers, if mothers extend their leave beyond six months, while the employers are legally required to hold the position open, making suitable arrangements to cover the role without finding a permanent replacement can be difficult. Exceptions to this are government agencies and larger businesses where systems and processes are in place making it easier to fulfil their legal obligation and for the larger volume of women in this situation.

PPL seems to be institutionalised in larger firms and government agencies.

It is recognised as one of the many benefits available for mothers and is just one of many processes handled by the employer. In these types of workplaces additional informal support for mothers comes from others with first hand experience of PPL. It can also be easier for mothers to take extended leave by initiatives like short contract work at home to help supplement income before returning to work in a more formal capacity.

The culture of the organisation determines the extent to which family and paid work can be balanced. For small and medium enterprises, it can be more problematic and employers can be less flexible as the immediate manager makes it happen. Flexibility can be a key.

The organisation's perception of the value of the employee to them is defined in a number of ways. It can be having particular skills or seniority that are difficult to replicate (particularly in a tight labour market), having responsibility for managing relationships of importance to the business, or where aspects of the role make it difficult to fill because of the more menial nature of the work and/or a willingness to work irregular and anti-social hours.

There is recognition that employers who accommodate different working patterns can secure loyal staff.

When considering the perspectives of employers and parents, a key tension revolves around a mother's wish for flexibility and an employer's need to manage the impact of the leave over a fixed period of time.



STAGE 3: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS

KEY FINDINGS – OVERALL

- There is widespread support amongst mothers, fathers and employers for PPL. It is almost universally recognised that PPL, with its job protection and payment, is important for parents, primarily mothers, to take time out of paid work around the birth or adoption of a child.
- For both biological and social reasons it is almost solely mothers who take PPL and extended parental leave. Recovery from childbirth is seen as being supported by PPL as is breastfeeding for many women.
- Fathers rarely take partners/paternity leave under the Act, and most mothers do not transfer any PPL to their spouse/partner. Most commonly fathers use annual leave. After the birth of a child the majority of fathers feel increased pressure as the main income earner and have greater concern about financial security.
- There is also diversity of experience of mothers, fathers and employers in relation to the birth or adoption of a child. This reflects the considerable variety of family types, educational backgrounds, employment arrangements and the wide range of employers, as well as the considerable diversity of attitudes towards work and family life and the differing experiences of childbirth and adoption.

The Stage 3 research was guided by both the initial quantitative research in Stage 1 and the qualitative research in Stage 2. This section of the report begins with some of the key research questions. This is followed by some overall information about the sample including its demographic characteristics. Next, the detailed results of the survey are presented. This is divided into three main sections:

- Experiences of mothers
- Experiences of fathers
- Experiences of employers.

While the results are initially presented within three separate sections, some

common themes that emerge across the three groups are explored.

As discussed in the research design section, there were some important changes between the Stage 1 Environment Scan and the final survey. The initial sample comprised all women who had given birth between 1 December 2004 and 31 May 2005. In the final quantitative stage, women outside of paid work six months prior to the birth of their last baby were excluded. In the Environment Scan, PPL eligibility was calculated based on the average number of hours worked per week (as well as length of tenure) before the birth. From the qualitative research it was

found that casual workers tend not to work regular hours per week which could have contributed to a proportion of mothers being wrongly identified as eligible for PPL. In Stage 3 of the research, mothers were asked to self-select eligibility for PPL based on length of tenure and number of hours worked prior to the birth. This final stage of the research also focussed on mothers return to work patterns, rather than their work status prior to giving birth.

An aim of this stage of research was to test and quantify a number of questions or hypotheses raised in the first two stages. These included:

- To what extent are women in paid work planning time between the birth of their children to fit in with paid work?
In what ways do the eligibility criteria for PPL impact on this?
Is a six-month break from paid work the realistic ideal for balancing the needs of the baby, mother, family, career and income?
- To what extent does the need for income stability drive decisions regarding leave?
- How do different sizes of organisations manage and provide for parental leave?
- In what ways have the terms and conditions of employment for mothers who return to paid work changed e.g. in terms of role, level of responsibility, hours worked?
What has helped or hindered these changes, were they changes by choice?
- What factors impact on eligible mothers forfeiting PPL?

- Is PPL's definition of workplace attachment based on hours and length of service excluding women with loyalty to employers?
Would the actual dollar amount provided by PPL make a significant financial contribution deterring their early return to paid work?
- Is there a lack of flexibility in the workplace making it difficult for fathers to take the lead carer role or to share childcare?
- To what extent are fathers in the lead care role and how many aspire to greater involvement?
Would concurrent use of PPL for mothers and fathers increase uptake amongst men?
- What are the key information needs and sources on PPL for mothers and employers?

Reflecting the increasing diversity of New Zealand society, the basic demographic data shows much heterogeneity among the new parents who had worked in the six months before having a child. Some of the main characteristics were:⁸

- While most mothers had either one or two children (48 percent and 34 percent respectively), a significant group had three children (12 percent) and 5 percent had four or more.
- There was a wide variety of highest level of educational qualifications. Over half the mothers had a degree or other tertiary qualification (this was higher than for men in the sample)⁹, 14 percent a technical or trade qualification or professional training

⁸ Female demographic information is primarily considered in this list. However, where male characteristics are significantly different this is noted

⁹ This reflects changes in educational attainment amongst men and women in recent decades (Callister, et al 2006).

(lower than fathers), 26 percent school level qualification, and 6 percent some secondary schooling

- Reflecting the overall demographics of New Zealand, 68 percent of mothers lived in a large town or city. However, 20 percent lived in a small town or in a rural area (under 10,000 people).
- There was also a wide variation of household income (before tax, on an annual basis). For example, 19 percent of mothers and 24 percent of fathers stated that their household income was \$100,000 or more. Yet, 17 percent of mothers and 10 percent of fathers had household incomes under \$40,000.
- While most of the mothers were between the ages of 30 and 39 (70 percent), 22 percent were 18-29 years and 7 percent were 40 or older. New Zealand European mothers tended to be slightly older.
- Before they had their babies, one-third of mothers worked part-time.
- 78 percent of the mothers were New Zealand European, whereas 89 percent of the fathers were in this group.¹⁰
- Amongst those who had returned to work, a quarter of mothers (24 percent) work for a small and medium enterprises (under 20 employees), 24 percent for an organisation of between 20-99, and 36 percent with 100 or more employees. A further 13 percent of mothers were self-employed. More fathers worked for small and medium enterprises (35 percent), but also more for the large employers

(39 percent). Only 3 percent of fathers were self-employed, probably representing an undercount of self-employed fathers.

- Amongst those who had returned to work, 18 percent of mothers stated they were the main income earner, with a further 10 percent saying they jointly were the main income earners. Yet, 90 percent of fathers in the sample stated they were the main income earner, with only 4 percent choosing the joint earner option.
- Amongst those who had returned to work, two-thirds of mothers were employed permanently, 9 percent each employed on a fixed term or casual work and 3 percent said they were not working at the time of the survey but had worked since the baby was born (they could be casual workers).

Stages 1 and 2 already indicate some diversity of experience and attitude.

The demographic and economic diversity of the parents needs to be kept in mind when considering the results of the survey.

The following section considers the experiences of mothers.

¹⁰ Some of the differences in responses by women and men, such as whether they were the primary income earner, may reflect differences in perceptions between the two groups. However, it may reflect the much lower response rate of fathers. It is possible the fathers sample is more biased than the sample of mothers.

MOTHERS

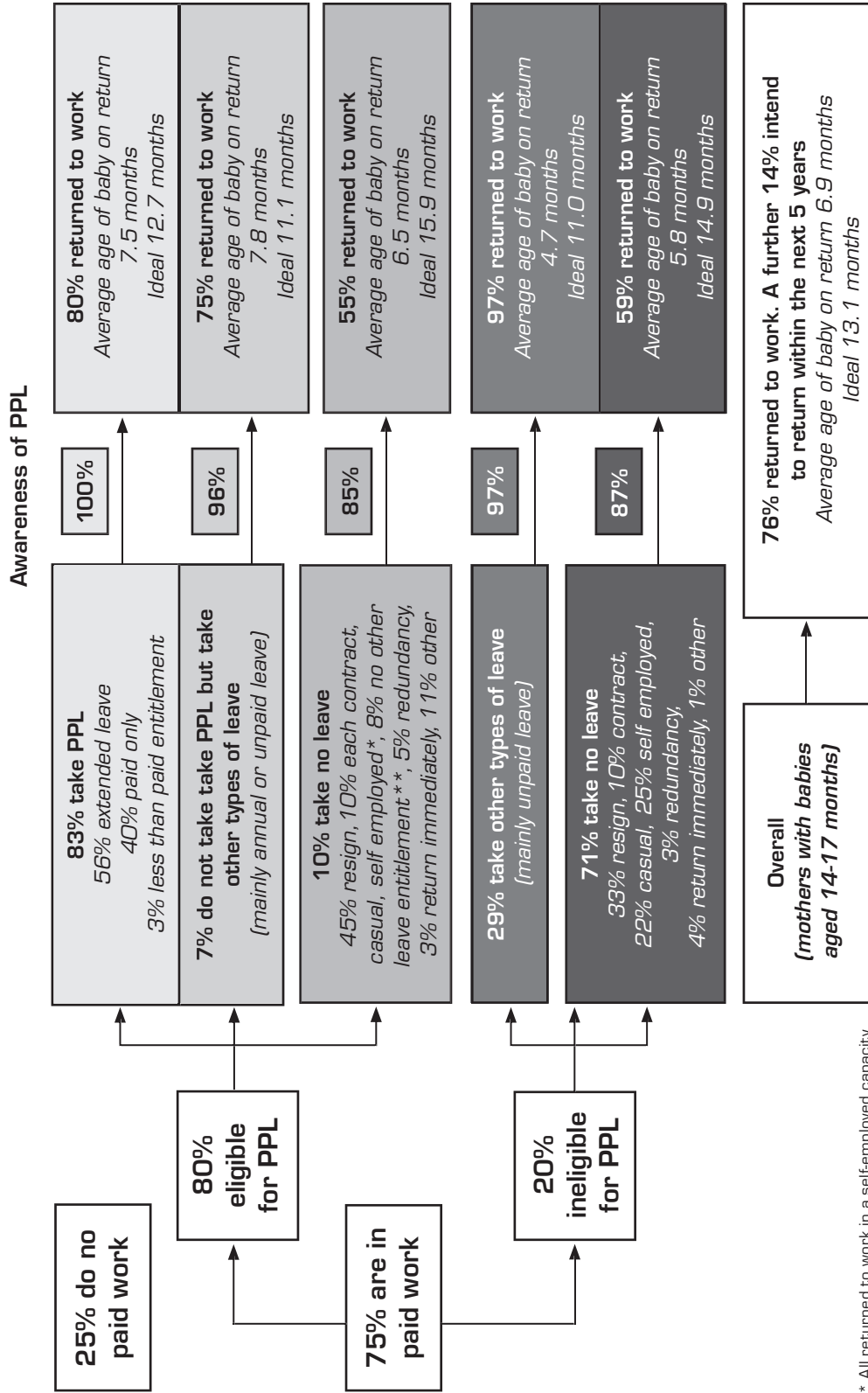
KEY FINDINGS

- Of those mothers who were eligible for PPL, eight in ten of these women took a period of leave. Overall, this is two-thirds of all women in paid work in the immediate period before giving birth to a baby or adopting a child. Of the remaining third of all mothers in paid work and who did not take PPL, two-thirds take no leave at all. One-third took other types of leave.
- PPL is typically taken at the end of all other available paid leave. PPL allows eligible mothers to extend the total amount of leave taken.
- Uptake of leave is limited by a number of factors including: awareness of leave policies; a conscious choice to exit the workforce and ethical obligation to employer; perceived flexibility of paid work to fit around family; and type of role in workplace.
- Most of those who were ineligible for PPL said that the financial contribution had they been eligible would have been significant. Just under half said a payment would have meant they took more leave.
- The biggest barrier to taking the full 12 months of parental leave available is financial pressure. Mothers acknowledge that PPL lessens money worries, but does not provide financial security.

- **Mothers would like to take longer leave than they actually do – on average, most mothers return to work when their baby is six months old, but would like to return when their baby is about 12 months old.**
- **Two-thirds of mothers who took PPL and then returned to work, went back to the same employer. Most returned with the same terms and conditions. Although a little lower, the majority of women who did not take PPL also returned with the same terms and conditions.**
- **Most mothers change their working arrangements when returning from leave. A change in working hours is particularly common, with two-thirds working part-time compared to one-third before the birth. Of those who decreased their hours, two-thirds planned for it to be a permanent change.**
- **Most mothers prefer the time provided by PPL for themselves, and not for their partners. This is because PPL occurs during the first few months of the baby's life when the baby's health and bonding are critical considerations.**

The results from Stage 1 have already illustrated a complex pattern of employment and eligibility for PPL. Drawing on data from both stages, Figure 1 (see page 28) confirms this. First, it shows that of the mothers who had a baby aged 14-17 months old at the time the survey was carried out, a quarter were not in paid work in the period before having the child. As Stage 1 showed, most of these women were at home looking after children.

FIGURE 1: The landscape of mothers with babies aged 14-17 months.



* All returned to work in a self-employed capacity.

** No other leave entitlements e.g. annual leave and sick leave (not PPL).

The data indicates that at the time of the survey, eight in ten women in paid work six months before giving birth to or adopting a baby were eligible for PPL. The data then suggests that 83 percent of eligible mothers actually took up PPL, that is about two-thirds of all women in paid work took up PPL. There were some differences in eligibility for PPL by whether this was a first child with 86 percent of mothers with a first child having been eligible versus 75 percent for women with more than one child. This is likely to reflect some differences in working patterns of these two groups of women before they have their baby. In contrast, eligible mothers with other children demonstrate similar leave and return to work patterns as eligible first-time mothers.

Another difference was between mothers with a spouse/partner and those without. In the first group, 81 percent were eligible for PPL and there was an 83 percent uptake, while for single mothers the relative figures were much lower at 73 percent being eligible with a 74 percent uptake.

Of the remaining third of all women in paid work and who did not take PPL, two-thirds took no leave at all (equally divided between those who qualify and do not qualify for PPL). One-third took other types of leave.

Figure 1 shows there were three main subgroups within those who were eligible for PPL. These were the 83 percent who took leave, 7 percent who did not take PPL but took other types of leave, and 10 percent who took no leave. Within these three groups themselves, there was a further range in behaviour. For example, amongst those who were eligible but took no leave 45 percent resigned; 10 percent were contract workers; 10 percent casual workers; 10 percent self-employed; 8 percent had no leave entitlement; 5 percent were redundant; 3 percent returned immediately; and 11 percent other.

There were two main subgroups within the 20 percent of mothers who were ineligible for PPL. The largest subgroup, 71 percent took no leave. But again within this overall group, there was a diversity of behaviours. The largest single subgroup, one-third, had resigned. A very small group of mothers (4 percent) returned to work immediately after having a child.

Figure 1 also shows awareness of PPL by main group. Not surprisingly, all of those eligible for PPL and who took it were aware of the scheme. The two groups who were least aware of the PPL scheme were those who were eligible but did not take leave (85 percent) and those who were ineligible and also took no leave (87 percent).

Figure 1 also shows return to work (at the time of the survey) for mothers by main group. It should be noted that rates of return to work by those mothers who had not worked in the six months before having a baby were not recorded in the survey. It is likely some of these mothers would have re-entered the workforce. Overall, 76 percent of mothers who were working before having a child were back in paid work by the time the child was aged 14-17 months. The lowest returns to work were by those who were eligible for PPL but did not take leave (55 percent) and those ineligible who also did not take leave (57 percent). These lower returns to work are perhaps to be expected given that a significant proportion of both groups resigned from paid work when they had their baby. Also of note amongst these two groups was the mismatch between average age of baby for those who returned to work and their stated ideal leave period. Those who were eligible for PPL but did not take leave and those ineligible who also did not take leave had the longest ideal leave periods.

TABLE 4: Profile of mothers who had worked in the six months before birth of their child

	Total sample (n=501)	Eligible Mothers			Ineligible Mothers	
		Took PPL (n=333)	Took other leave (n=28)	Took no leave (n=40)	Took other leave (n=29)	Took no leave (n=71)
Tertiary qualified	52%	55%	61%	40%	52%	44%
Household income over \$80,000	35%	37%	46%	25%	28%	28%
Main income earner*	18%	19%	29%	14%	21%	2%
Work for a SME*	37%	29%	34%	50%	68%	65%
Work for a large organisation*	36%	42%	48%	23%	21%	5%
Married/living with partner	93%	94%	100%	83%	86%	92%
Have more than 1 child	52%	48%	50%	50%	62%	68%

* Amongst those who have returned to work only.

The highest return to work was not in fact for those eligible for PPL. It was amongst those mothers who were ineligible but who took another type of leave. In this group 97 percent had returned to work. Again, there was a mismatch between average age of baby and ideal period of leave (as there was in all groups). Finally, the figure shows that 80 percent of mothers who took PPL were back at work at the time of the survey.

Understanding the characteristics of all the various subgroups shown in Figure 1 is not possible because of sample size. Some overall characteristics of the main groups, however, can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 indicates that on many variables there is not a significant difference between some of the groups. For example, there is virtually no difference between the proportion of eligible mothers who took PPL and those ineligible mothers who took other sort of leave when the proportion that are tertiary qualified is considered. But when household income is compared for these two groups, the former group has a much higher proportion with household incomes over \$80,000 per annum.

The most qualified mothers are those eligible for PPL but who took other sorts of leave. These mothers have the highest household income and also are more likely to be the main income earner. A group that stands out is mothers who were ineligible for PPL and did not take leave, with only 2 percent being the main income earner. In addition, only 5 percent worked for a large employer, much lower than for the other groups.

Table 4 shows that ineligible mothers were more likely to work for a small and medium enterprise and were more likely to have more than one child.

Reasons for not taking leave

As both Figure 1 and Table 4 show, non-leave takers span both those eligible for PPL and those not. When non-leave takers are considered as a group, the largest single group, 37 percent, resigned from their job. At the time of the survey, given that self-employed mothers were not eligible, self-employment was the second main reason for not taking leave at 19 percent. This supports the findings of Stage 1. The next four reasons were: casual work so there was no need to

take leave (17 percent), a contract expired (13 percent), the mother returned to work immediately (4 percent), and the mother was made redundant (4 percent). Overall, first-time mothers were more likely to resign, in part possibly because a higher proportion of first time mothers were in paid work in the first place and so even those more likely to be long term 'stay at home' mothers were still in employment.

Of those mothers who resigned, the largest single response was that the mother had made a conscious choice to spend more time with the family (35 percent). This response was much higher, however, for the ineligible mothers (41 percent versus 28 percent for eligible mothers). The next four reasons were health/medical reasons (18 percent), paid work not flexible enough to fit around family (13 percent), not eligible for leave (10 percent) and low work-place attachment (10 percent). For those mothers who stated paid work was not flexible enough to fit around family, the response was much higher amongst those who were eligible for PPL (22 percent versus just 5 percent of those who were ineligible). This may reflect that to be eligible a person is more likely to be in the core labour force, a part of the labour market that may not offer the high degree of flexibility some mothers want if returning to work.

What sort of leave, when leave is taken and for how long

Table 5 shows for those who took leave what sort of leave was taken and, on average, for how long. The most common type of leave taken is PPL, with the next single largest type of leave was extended unpaid parental leave.

TABLE 5: What sort of leave and for how long?

	% Taking leave type* (n=390)	Avg. length of leave (n=390)
Paid parental leave**	85%	3 months ¹¹
Extended unpaid parental leave	57%	6 months
Annual leave	27%	3 weeks
Employer paid leave	11%	2.5 months ¹²
Special leave	10%	-
Sick leave	7%	2 weeks
Unpaid leave negotiated with employer	7%	7 months

* Mothers can take more than one leave type so the column adds to more than 100 percent.

** 13 percent of mothers indicated they took more than three months of PPL indicating that there was some confusion as to what was counted as PPL.

Some mothers are eligible for an employer provided period of PPL. Overall, Table 5 shows that 11 percent of mothers who took a period of leave used employer provided paid leave. But when eligible versus non-eligible mothers are considered, those who were eligible (whether or not they actually took PPL) were more likely to take employer paid leave (11 percent) than those not (4 percent). Those not eligible were slightly more likely to take sick leave (11 percent) than those who took PPL (7 percent).

Only 22 percent of mothers took PPL by itself. The remaining 78 percent took PPL in combination with one or more other type of leave. Where PPL was taken in combination with other types of leave, it was most commonly taken with extended unpaid parental leave. Over half, 57 percent, of mothers who took PPL also took some period

¹¹ According to Inland Revenue (IR) data, the proportion of applicants who received less than 14 weeks of PPL for the period 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2006 was just 4 percent of the total applicants during this period. No question was asked in the Stage 3 survey about the actual payment received while on PPL, but IR data suggests that approximately 90 percent of applicants receive the full rate of payment and that this has been stable over time.

¹² While the average is 2.5 months, 38 percent took between one week and one month. The average is strongly influenced by the 12 percent who took between six and 12 months.

TABLE 6: How important were each of the following in your decisions regarding the type and length of leave? (All mothers who took leave)

Reason	Important or very important %	Not at all important or not very important %
Bonding with your baby (n=389)	99	1
The health of your baby (n=386)	98	1
Establishing baby's feeding/sleeping patterns (n=388)	94	5
Taking time out for the family (n=385)	93	4
Caring for other children in the family (n=239)*	92	6
Your own health (n=389)	87	10
Establishing breastfeeding (n=378)	84	14
The availability of childcare on your return to work (n=358)	78	17
Your partner's work commitments/hours (n=367)	74	16
The need to maintain your current income level as much as possible (n=383)	69	23
Your ability to do your job after having time away from work (n=374)	63	26
The leave available to your partner (n=344)	54	34
Your career (n=380)	52	38
Your employer's expectations (n=376)	47	42

* Only those with older children responded to this question.

of extended leave. Regardless of leave type taken, PPL was most commonly taken at the end of other paid leave (76 percent fitting this pattern). It appears that most mothers do this in order to maintain income for as long as possible.

Across all leave types, only 6 percent of mothers took leave only before birth, 21 percent only after, but most, 73 percent, took leave both before and after the birth.

Factors influencing decisions to take leave

Mothers were asked to comment on how important a number of factors were in influencing their decisions about leave. Table 6 shows responses for those mothers who took leave.

For mothers, bonding with the baby, as well as the health of the baby, were almost universal responses. As a comparison, most fathers ranked health of the spouse/partner

as important or very important (93 percent) while health of the baby ranked lower at 90 percent (Table 21).

While many mothers did rate establishing breastfeeding as important or very important in decisions regarding leave (84 percent), given its significant health role for both mothers and babies, and that six months exclusive breastfeeding is actively promoted by the Ministry of Health, it is notable that 14 percent of the mothers rated this factor as either not at all important or not very important.

The diversity of attitudes of mothers towards employment and their employer shows up in Table 6. For example, while many mothers see their own career and their employer's expectations as important, a significant proportion of mothers view these factors as unimportant. When non-leave takers were also considered, in two of the employment

Reason	Important or very important %	
	Took PPL (n=325-328)	Did not take and ineligible (n=23-26)*
The need to maintain your current income level as much as possible	67	80
Your employer's expectations	47	61

* The small numbers mean caution is needed with these results.

Reason	Agree or strongly agree %	Disagree or strongly disagree %
Recognises the importance for me to take leave from work to care for my baby (n=331)	95	4
Lets me focus on bonding with my baby (n=332)	88	9
Lessens money worries (n=332)	85	12
Makes the transition from two incomes to one income easier (n=326)	83	14
Gives me enough time to establish breastfeeding (n=318)	77	19
Contributes to financial security (n=332)	82	14
Allows me to return to the same role and salary/wage level if I choose to (n=323)	79	15
Makes my return to the same employer easier (n=319)	71	18
Is more valuable time for mothers than fathers ¹³ (n=332)	66	27
Gives me enough time to recover from having a baby (n=331)	64	32
Gives me enough time to establish baby's routine (n=331)	61	34
Gives me enough time to organise childcare (n=309)	59	36
Is long enough for me (n=332)	26	71

related responses there were some significant differences between those taking PPL and those who were ineligible and did not take leave (Table 7). This table shows that the need to maintain current income levels and employer expectations were much more important for those mothers who did not take leave and were ineligible for it.

Mothers attitudes towards parental leave

Mothers were asked to rate a number of statements with regard to their overall attitudes towards parental leave.

Table 8 shows the responses of those mothers who took PPL.

Almost all mothers who took PPL agreed that this leave recognises the importance for mothers to take leave from work to care for their baby. Some of the responses, however, are difficult to interpret. For example, the breastfeeding response may reflect that a significant number of mothers do not think breastfeeding is important or that it is important but they were unable to.

¹³ Some of those disagreeing with this statement are likely to see it of equal value to mothers and fathers, not necessarily of greater value to fathers.

TABLE 9: Did you return to work about when you had planned, or did you go back earlier or later than you intended?

	Took PPL % (n=268)	Didn't take, eligible % (n=43)	Didn't take, not eligible % (n=67)
Returned when planned	47	49	48
Returned earlier than planned	38	35	36
Returned later than planned	12	12	10
Did not have a plan on when to return	3	2	4
Other	0	2	1

**TABLE 10: Main reason for not returning to work when planned
(Those who had returned to work- top seven reasons)**

	Took PPL % (n=134)	Didn't take, eligible % (n=20)*	Didn't take, not eligible % (n=31)
Needed the money	38	40	39
My employer asked me to come back earlier	12	5	3
To spend more time with baby/ not comfortable returning	8	5	6
New job/advancement/flexibility at work	7	5	10
Didn't want to get too out of touch with my job	4	0	0
I wasn't able to organise childcare	4	5	0
Childcare became available	4	0	0

* The small number means caution is needed with these results.

While the majority of mothers who took leave agreed that leave was more valuable for mothers than fathers (66 percent), over a quarter (27 percent) disagreed with this view.

The most negative response was around the length of leave. Only a quarter agreed that the period of PPL was long enough, with 71 percent disagreeing with the statement.

Mothers were also asked as to how supportive their employer was about leave decisions. Most (90 percent) of all mothers taking leave said their employers were either supportive or very supportive. Small and medium enterprises were seen as being more supportive.

Mothers return to work and actual versus ideal length of leave

Mothers were asked about return to work and, connected with this, whether their actual period of leave was an ideal length. Table 9 shows responses for three groups who had returned to work: those who took PPL; those who were eligible for PPL but did not take this type of leave; and those who were not eligible and did not take leave. The data show an almost identical set of responses with the single largest group being those who returned when planned (just under half). The next largest group was those who returned earlier than planned.

Those who had not returned to work when planned were asked for the main reason for this

TABLE 11: Taking the needs of your family, your employer and yourself into account, when do you think is the realistic ideal point to return to work? How old would your baby be?

	Took PPL %		Didn't take, eligible %		Didn't take, not eligible %	
	Actual (n=268)	Ideal (n=333)	Actual (n=43)	Ideal (n=68)	Actual (n=67)	Ideal (n=95)
Up to 3 months	15	3	21	1	49	9
4-6 months	36	14	28	7	20	11
7-11 months	34	8	39	7	11	4
12+ months	17	70	12	75	16	73
Never*	-	2	-	4	-	2
Unspecified	0	3	0	4	1	1

* Only for ideal. Actual is only for the mothers who had returned to work at time of survey.

TABLE 12: What was the main reason for not taking 12 months leave?

	Took PPL % (n=212)	Didn't take, eligible % (n=37)	Didn't take, not eligible % (n=54)
Financial pressure	61	38	35
Felt ready to return/wanted the adult company	7	8	2
Difficult to find someone to fill my role while I was on leave	4	3	11
Unspecified	4	11	4
Self-employed	2	5	17
Not eligible for PPL	0	3	13

decision (to either go back earlier or later than planned). Table 10 shows the main reasons. Clearly reflecting that income maintenance is important, the largest single response for all groups was that they needed the money. This was followed by a variety of other reasons some employment related and some family related.

When employers were asked about changes to the date of return, the majority (77 percent) said the request was made by the mother, that is, the employer requested 23 percent of the changes. This is higher than the 12 percent of mothers who said that employers asked them to come back earlier.

Table 11 shows responses by mothers in these same three groups as to when they did return to work (for those mothers who had

returned) versus the ideal length of leave (for all mothers regardless of whether they had returned). While not shown in Table 11, overall, 8 percent of mothers who had returned to work took less than one months leave, but this figure was only 1 percent for those who took PPL versus 33 percent for those who were not eligible and did not take leave.

Amongst all three groups there was a significant mismatch between actual leave taken and ideal leave. For mothers in each group, the ideal clusters around 12 months or more leave (between 70 and 75 percent). The second largest cluster is around four to six months (7-14 percent). In addition, when the mothers who had taken leave but had not yet returned were considered, the 'actual' figures

TABLE 13: How much do you agree or disagree that the ending of the paid parental leave payments had a significant impact for you on reassessing when to return to paid work?

Those who took PPL % (n=333)	
Strongly disagree	10
Disagree	19
Neutral	14
Agree	23
Strongly agree	32
Don't know	2
Total	100

(increasing the 12+ months group), there is still a mismatch (36 percent took 12 months or more versus 72 percent who see this time as ideal). As Table 11 indicates, mothers not taking PPL were significantly more likely to return to work with child up to three months.

It is worth noting that 38 percent of mothers who took PPL returned to work when their child was under six months old.

These three main groups of mothers were also asked the main reason for not taking 12 months leave. Table 12 shows the responses. Again, for all groups the single main response was financial pressure. This response was particularly strong amongst those who took PPL (61 percent).

Following on from this line of questioning, mothers who took PPL were asked how much the ending of the payments influenced their timing of return to work. Table 13 shows that while over half agreed with the statement that the cessation of payments did influence their return, 29 percent said it did not.

Considering a sub-sample of mothers who took parental leave, but had not gone back to work, 34 percent said they wanted to stay home longer with the baby, a further 24 percent could not find childcare or it was not available, and 11 percent said that they

TABLE 14: Would PPL make a difference for those ineligible?

(n=100)	Before Birth	After Birth
Would have taken more leave	27	38
Would have taken less leave	7	5
Would have taken the same amount of leave (could be no leave)	54	45
Don't know	12	12
Total	100	100

had no flexibility around job or hours or that terms of employment had changed.

Those mothers who were not eligible for PPL were asked if it would have changed their leave taking if they had been eligible (Table 14). The largest single group (54 percent) would have taken the same amount of leave before the birth. However, 27 percent would have taken more leave. In terms of leave after birth, slightly less than half (45 percent) would have taken the same amount of leave. A total of 38 percent would have taken more leave after the birth if they had been eligible.

Ineligible mothers were asked had they been eligible for PPL, whether it would have made a significant difference in terms of covering costs. The majority, 89 percent, responded that it would have. In total, 35 percent agreed with both the statements about taking longer leave and difference in covering costs.

Reasons for return to work

Table 15 shows responses to a number of statements about reasons for return to work. This is for those who took PPL and includes those who returned when planned and those who did not. The reason most commonly agreed with was because the mother's employer was willing to be flexible to accommodate the way they wanted to work (80 percent). Given the data shown

TABLE 15: Thinking about the timing of your return to work, how much do you agree or disagree that you returned to work when you did? (Only those who took PPL)

Reason	Agree or strongly agree %	Disagree or strongly disagree %
Because my employer was willing to be flexible to accommodate the way I wanted to work (n=340)	80	17
Out of financial necessity (n=371)	78	15
When it fitted in with childcare availability (n=340)	62	32
Out of loyalty to my employer (n=332)	51	39
Because my career is important to me (n=367)	51	36
To help manage the volume of work (n=350)	41	53
To accommodate my partner (n=345)	27	59
So I didn't forget how to do my job (n=349)	27	66
Because it was difficult to find anyone to cover my role while I was away (n=341)	26	68
Because of unexpected changes within my organisation – e.g. staff resigning or restructuring (n=305)	26	70

TABLE 16: Did you have the choice to return to work under the same terms and conditions of employment?

	Took PPL % (n=268)	Didn't take, eligible % (n=43)	Didn't take, not eligible % (n=67)
Yes	89	60	76
No	10	21	13
Don't know	1	19	10
Total	100	100	100

in some previous tables, not surprisingly close behind was financial necessity at 78 percent. Childcare availability was important for 62 percent. Work related reasons, such as because it was difficult to find anyone to cover their role while they were away, were important for around a quarter of mothers who took PPL.

Terms and conditions when returning to work

Again the tables 16 and 17 show responses for three groups who had returned to work: those who took PPL; those who were eligible for PPL but didn't take this type of leave; and those who were not eligible and did not take leave.

Table 16 asked whether mothers returned under the same terms and conditions of employment, a legal requirement under legislation for those eligible to take PPL. Most of those who took PPL (89 percent) did have the same terms and conditions. The figures were lower for the other two groups but still relatively high overall. Some mothers, however, will have chosen to make their own changes to terms and conditions rather than these being imposed on them by employers.

Returning mothers were asked about changes they had made in the way they worked once they had returned (Table 17). In doing so they could pick more than one option.

Only 7 percent of those who took PPL said they made no changes. The two largest single responses were working fewer hours and working more flexible hours. The former was particularly common amongst those taking PPL with 69 percent reporting this work pattern. A small group, however, increased their hours.

TABLE 17: Which of the following changes, if any, have you made to the way you work as a result of the birth or adoption of your baby?

	Took PPL % (n=268)	Didn't take, eligible % (n=43)	Didn't take, not eligible % (n=67)
Working fewer hours	69	58	66
Working more hours	4	7	12
Working more flexible hours (e.g. different start/finish times)	57	51	55
Working from home some/all of the time	31	19	45
Increased your responsibilities	18	26	19
Decreased your responsibilities	27	26	15
Changed your role within your company	28	16	9
Changed your employer / started a new job	18	37	19
Become self-employed (if you were previously an employee)	4	5	6
Become an employee (if you were previously self-employed)	1	0	3
Working on contract (if previously permanent employee)	8	9	6
Left the workforce	3	2	1
Have been made redundant	2	0	3
Other	0	0	1
No changes made	7	5	6
Unsure	0	0	0

A significant number of mothers worked from home for some or all of the time, particularly those who were ineligible and did not take leave (45 percent). This latter group include the self-employed.

There were a wide variety of other responses, however, showing a diversity of workplace arrangements. Some of these arrangements were potentially chosen by the employee (such as becoming self-employed) and some will have been employer prompted (such as becoming redundant). Table 17 also gives an indication that not all mothers are returning to the same employer. In fact of those who took PPL, 18 percent said they changed employer, 4 percent noted they were self-employed, 8 percent were working on contract, 3 percent had left the workforce and 2 percent had been made redundant.

This suggests that around a third of mothers who took PPL did not return to the same employer.

When employers were asked about what assistance they had made for returning mothers over 80 percent said they offered flexible working hours or ability to change hours of work. In addition, around 40 percent said they offered the ability to work at home (Table 37). For a variety of reasons, including that some mothers do not want to change particular aspects of their working patterns, the take-up by mothers appears to be lower than the availability of such assistance.

Of those mother's who had returned to work and had decreased their hours, about a third planned to increase them again sometime in the future.

When just first-time mothers who had a child and who had returned to work were considered, a significant number changed their working hours. For example, 72 percent worked 40 hours or more before the birth, but this dropped to 19 percent when they returned. Before birth, only 1 percent worked less than 10 hours per week, but after birth this rose to 19 percent.

Of the mothers who had returned to paid work, 80 percent said their employers had been supportive or very supportive of changes to work patterns. More of those working in the public sector stated their employer was supportive than those with private sector employers (86 percent versus 76 percent).

Mothers were also asked if they were entitled to a selection of benefits from their employer as a result of having a baby. Of all those who had returned to work, 61 percent said they had no employer benefits. If they did have benefits, the most important were: space for breastfeeding (17 percent); access to on-site childcare/crèche (8 percent) and access to a car park (10 percent). Only 1 percent said they were able to work more flexible hours. At first this seems surprising, given that 57 percent of mothers who returned to employment (Table 17) said they worked flexible hours. The mismatch may be due to the wording of the question as it asks if these benefits were made available as the result of having a baby. Some of the benefits may be available to all employees.

Finally, mothers were asked how easy it was to combine paid work and family life. Overall, just over half (51 percent) either found it

not very easy or not at all easy to combine the two spheres. Again reflecting diversity of experience, however, 29 percent found it either easy or very easy. There was little difference by categories of leave takers.

Transferring leave to spouses/partners

Eligible mothers can potentially transfer some or all of their leave to their spouse/partner. The study showed a very small number of mothers did not use the full period of PPL. These mothers were asked if they forfeited the remainder of the 13 weeks they were entitled to, or did they transfer it to their spouse/partner, the majority, 75 percent, said they forfeited it.

All mothers taking PPL were told as part of the interview that they could transfer part or all of their PPL to their spouse/partner, provided the spouse/partner met the eligibility criteria for PPL. They were then asked if this were something they would consider doing. Of this group 72 percent said they would not consider such a transfer. The main reasons given for this were: that it is more important for the mother to be bonding (67 percent); more important for the mother to be breastfeeding (60 percent); more important for the mother to have a period of recovery from birth (51 percent); and just under half (44 percent) stated that the money available to their spouse/partner would not be enough.

FATHERS

KEY FINDINGS

- **Most fathers take some sort of leave around the birth or adoption of a child. Very few eligible fathers, however, are taking unpaid partners paternity leave and are more likely to save up and use all other types of paid leave around the birth of a baby.**
- **The most common arrangement is for men to take two weeks annual leave around the birth of the baby. Father's ideal leave is four weeks concurrent leave with mother.**
- **One in two fathers had more involvement in domestic responsibilities around the birth. Where the mother had returned to paid work, all fathers maintained or increased their involvement.**
- **Fathers find employers more supportive about changing work patterns around the time of the birth, but not necessarily for longer term changes.**

Those who were willing to transfer were more likely to be the main income earner, to work full-time, and have been given some kind of benefit from their employer such as space for breastfeeding or childcare facilities.

Overall, of the 150 fathers who responded to the survey, 85 percent stated they were aware of PPL.¹⁴ Older fathers tended to be more aware of PPL. Of all the fathers, 53 percent had a spouse/partner who took PPL. Most fathers (82 percent) took some sort of leave around the birth or adoption of a child. Of these leave takers, 66 percent took one type of leave with 15 percent taking two.

Type of leave taken and length

Fathers typically take paid leave, such as annual leave (58 percent) or other type of employer paid leave (21 percent), rather than unpaid leave (Table 18). This allows them to maintain income while both parents are off work. As indicated in the qualitative research, taking paid leave supports their role as primary income earner. In this survey only 1 percent of fathers reported taking PPL.^{15,16}

Of those who took annual leave, most (88 percent) took up to two weeks. The majority (60 percent) of fathers stated that they saved up their annual leave with the intention of taking at the time of birth or adoption. One result of this is that fathers may then have little leave left for the remainder of the year and this can limit their ability to support mothers in this period as well as reduce their time with their children (Ward, 2007).

When total leave was considered, 46 percent of fathers took up to a week and 38 percent

14 This is a relatively small sample, so it is unlikely to capture some of the more unusual parenting arrangements.

15 It is not known how many fathers would have been eligible for PPL based on their employment record. However, for a father to have taken PPL, the leave must have been transferred from the mothers and, as already shown, few mothers/parents are choosing to transfer leave.

16 The number of people who have accessed PPL since the scheme came into effect on 1 July 2002 is approximately 90,000 people, and about 1 percent of these are men.

TABLE 18: Proportion of fathers who took leave by types of leave taken

	% (n=123)
Took Annual leave	58
Took Sick leave	15
Took Partners/paternity leave	4
Took Paid parental leave	1
Took Extended unpaid parental leave	3
Took Unpaid leave negotiated directly with employer	9
Took Employer paid leave	21
Took Other leave	5
Don't know what type of leave taken	2

up to two weeks. A total of 6 percent took six weeks or more. Overall, this leave taking is considerably shorter than for mothers and reflects that most, but not all, fathers assume the role of primary income earner on the birth or adoption of their child. This pattern has also been shown in a similar survey of fathers carried out in the United Kingdom (Smeaton, 2006).

Of those fathers who took some type of leave, most said they were supported in this decision by their employer, with 29 percent saying their employer was supportive while the majority (58 percent) said their employer was very supportive. Only 3 percent said their employers were not supportive.

Actual versus ideal length of leave

Fathers were asked about their actual versus ideal length of leave. Table 19 shows that, like for mothers, for a significant number of fathers actual leave taken is lower than ideal leave, although on a different scale (weeks rather than months). While the proportion stating that actual and ideal leave were around two weeks were found to be similar, a significant proportion, 29 percent, wanted three to four weeks. A total of 6 percent

TABLE 19: Actual versus ideal length of leave for fathers

	Actual* % (n=123)	Ideal % (n=149)
Up to one week	46	16
Two weeks	38	36
Three weeks	7	12
Four weeks	2	17
Five weeks	-	2
Six weeks	3	4
Two months	1	2
Three months	1	2
More than three months	-	6
More than six months	1	-
No leave at all	-	1
Don't know	1	1
Total	100	100

* Of those who took leave.

wanted more than three months. Again this indicates some diversity of attitudes amongst fathers.

Only 27 out of the 150 fathers who were interviewed took no formal leave.¹⁷ Of these a total of five did not take leave because the birth was outside of normal working hours, for example, the birth was in the school holidays for teachers and four were self-employed. Of the remainder, the two main reasons were 'couldn't afford to' (seven fathers) and 'workload wouldn't allow it' (six fathers). In addition, fathers taking no leave were more likely to be aged over 45, have family incomes under \$80,000 and be having their first baby (so are not needed to look after older children).

When asked if they took the amount of leave planned, 76 percent said they took the amount planned (taking an average of 2.1 weeks), 6 percent took more leave (1.3 weeks), but 16 percent took less leave

17 Given the small numbers, these results are only broadly indicative.

TABLE 20: What was the main reason you didn't return to work when you originally planned?

	% (n=27)*
Needed the money	15
My employer asked me to come back earlier	15
Limited (paid) leave available	15
My partner did not recover from the birth as quickly as expected	11
Didn't want to get too out of touch with my job	7
Complications with pregnancy/birth	7
Workload/Commitments	7
To help out/spend time with baby	7
Unspecified	7
Don't know	7
Baby and mother both well	4
I wasn't able to organise childcare	0
My partners situation changed (e.g. made redundant etc)	0
The baby was not well	0

Total may exceed 100 because of multiple responses.

* Low base number of respondents - results are indicative only.

(2.1 weeks). Those who did not take the amount of leave they planned (either more or less leave) were asked the main reason for not returning to work when they originally planned (Table 20). The need for money or limited paid leave being available made up just under a third of responses. Some unexpected events, including complications around the birth, were also important. The effect of unexpected events also showed up in the qualitative interviews.

Fathers were asked if they would prefer to take leave at the same time as their spouse/partner. The majority (88 percent) said they would like it at the same time and, on average, this group wanted four weeks leave. Just 7 percent wanted leave after their spouse/partner. This group were more likely to have lower household incomes than other fathers.

Attitudes towards parental leave

Fathers were asked that when they considered what type of leave to take

and how long they would take, to rank the importance of a number of factors (Table 21). The health of their spouses/partners was the most common choice (93 percent). The health of the baby, however, was not far behind (90 percent). Taking an active role in helping around the house was also important to most fathers (92 percent), as was bonding with their baby (91 percent), and caring for the baby (89 percent). While both the qualitative research and some earlier questions suggest that providing income is very important for many fathers, 17 percent said that this was not important or not very important.

In some of responses shown in Table 21 there were divergent opinions. In terms of the father's career, their workload and their employer's expectation, around 40 percent of fathers agreed that these factors were important or very important. About an equal proportion of fathers, however, felt these factors were not important.

Fathers were then asked to consider some general statements that were presented to them about parental leave (Table 22).

TABLE 21: In deciding what type of leave and how much leave to take, how important were each of the following?

Reason	Important or very important %	Not important or not very important %
Health of partner (n=122)	93	5
Active role helping round house (n=122)	92	4
Bonding with your baby (n=122)	91	3
Health of baby (n=119)	90	6
Active role caring for baby (n=122)	89	5
Caring for other children in your family (n=89)*	81	14
Providing income for family (n=120)	75	17
The leave available to your partner (n=92)	47	36
Your career (n=119)	46	40
Workload (n=123)	42	42
Your employer's expectations (n=117)	41	40
The availability of childcare on your return to work (n=101)	36	54
Timing of baby's birth (n=116)	35	46
Your partner's work commitments (n=92)	30	59

* Only for those with older children.

Almost all fathers (98 percent) agreed with the statement that parental leave recognises the importance of parents to take leave to care for their baby. Only a few percentage points fewer (94 percent) agreed that parental leave allows their spouse/partner to focus on bonding with the baby. This and the previous table show that fathers are generally concerned about parental leave in relation of how it assists mothers and babies.

Like mothers, the majority of fathers (65 percent) disagreed with the statement that parental leave is long enough (71 percent of mothers disagreed with this statement).

Transferring leave from mothers

Only 42 percent of fathers were aware that it is possible for mothers to transfer some or all of their PPL entitlement to their spouse/partner. The fathers were asked how interested they would be in having leave transferred to them (Table 23). A total of

51 percent said they would be interested.¹⁸

This contrasts with only 28 percent of those mothers who took PPL saying they would consider a transfer. The low rate of transfer could be related to the current length of PPL, which is short in comparison with countries such as Sweden and Norway where sharing of leave is actively promoted. The data also shows that PPL, at its current length, is seen by both mothers and fathers as important for the mothers for biological and recovery reasons.

Fathers who were more interested in having a period of leave transferred to them were more likely to have taken a longer leave around the birth, more likely to be primary caregiver, have more than one child, and to work in technical or professional positions. Those not interested were more likely to have taken a shorter leave and work in managerial roles.

Fathers were asked to comment on a set of reasons as to what would prevent them

18 No information was supplied to indicate whether they would have been eligible to take PPL.

TABLE 22: How much do you agree or disagree with these statements about parental leave?

Reason	Agree or strongly agree %	Disagree or strongly disagree %
Recognises the importance to take leave to care for baby? (n=77)	98	1
Lets your partner focus on bonding with baby? (n=80)	94	4
Gives time to establish breastfeeding? (n=76)	88	11
Lessens money worries? (n=79)	88	6
Makes transition from two incomes to one easier? (n=78)	86	9
Allows return to same role and salary? (n=75)	80	16
Gave partner time to recover from having baby? (n=78)	78	21
Contributes to financial security? (n=80)	77	17
Makes return to same employer easier? (n=66)	76	14
Is more valuable time for mothers than fathers? (n=80)	76	14
Gave partner time to establish routine? (n=79)	69	29
Gives partner time to organise childcare? (n=62)	66	24
Is long enough? (n=80)	30	65

TABLE 23: How interested would fathers be in having PPL transferred to them?

	% (n=150)
Not at all interested	18
Not very interested	16
Neutral	12
Interested	29
Very interested	24
Don't know	1
Total	100

taking up PPL (Table 24). The two strongest reasons were related to biological factors, breastfeeding (79 percent stated that this would influence them to a large extent) and mother's recovery from birth (75 percent). The need to maintain their income was also important for many, but not all, fathers. Over half (56 percent), however, stated that they had no concerns about job security should they take PPL.¹⁹

Fathers were asked if there was a period of PPL that existed just for them how likely it

would be that they would take it up (Table 25). Half said it would be likely or very likely they would. Again illustrating a diversity of opinions, however, just over one-fifth say that it was not likely they would take up the leave.

Changes in work patterns and being the primary income earner or caregiver

Fathers were asked about changes in both paid and unpaid work following the birth or adoption of their child. When asked if their spouse/partner had returned to paid work at the time of the survey, 58 percent of fathers said they had. Of those whose spouse/partner had returned to paid work, 40 percent of fathers said they found it more difficult to balance their paid work with family life. This is somewhat lower than the 51 percent of mothers who either found it not easy to combine work and family life. The group of fathers finding it more difficult to combine the two spheres was employed as professionals working in the private sector, and with household incomes of over \$100,000.

19 If the fathers were eligible for PPL their jobs are protected under the Act.

TABLE 24: To what extent would each of the following prevent you from taking up Paid Parental Leave? (Sorted by column 'to a large extent')

(n=71)	To no extent %	To a small extent %	To a moderate extent %	To a large extent %	Don't know %
More important for mother to be there for breastfeeding?	10	1	8	79	1
More important for mother so she can recover from the birth?	3	1	20	75	1
More important for mother to spend time with baby in early months?	7	4	18	70	0
Income is needed	10	4	17	65	4
Partner wants to take the full entitlement?	34	3	13	38	13
Difficult to find cover for my role while away?	32	13	23	31	1
Need to keep up with my career?	39	13	23	24	1
Concerns about job security if leave is taken?	56	13	11	17	3

TABLE 25: If PPL existed specifically for fathers, how likely would you be to take this up?

	% (n=150)
Not at all likely	23
Not very likely	17
Neutral	9
Likely	17
Very likely	33
Total	100

Fathers were also asked if they placed equal importance on their spouse's/partner's paid work and 63 percent said they did.

All fathers were also asked whether after their baby was born or adopted, they had more, less or the same amount of involvement in housework and domestic responsibilities. A total of 54 percent of fathers stated they had more involvement, while only 5 percent said they had less involvement. Those fathers whose spouse/partners had returned to work were asked if this involvement changed when their spouse/partner returned to paid work and 54 percent said their involvement stayed the same, for 40 percent it increased and for just 6 percent it decreased.

Fathers were questioned if they had they made any changes to the way they undertook their paid work around the birth or adoption of their child (Table 26). Only 28 percent said they made no changes. The most common response was to be working flexible hours (45 percent), with 28 percent saying they were working fewer hours. Again indicating a diversity of responses, however, 8 percent said they were working longer hours. Two-thirds of those who took no leave made changes to their work around the time of the birth.

Fathers were then asked in the longer term, (i.e. defined in the survey as from when their baby was about six months old) whether they had made any changes to the way they undertook their paid work (Table 26). Again, only 29 percent said they had made no changes. The most common change was working more flexible hours (38 percent). However, 24 percent said they had increased responsibilities. This fits with the findings from Stage 2, where many fathers felt they had more pressure on them post the birth of the child as they had assumed the role of primary or, for many at least in the short-term, sole income earners.

TABLE 26: Changes in patterns of paid work by fathers around the time of the birth and in the longer term

	Around the time of birth % (n=149)	Changes in the longer term % (n=149)
Working more flexible hours	45	38
No changes made	28	29
Working fewer hours	28	21
Working from home some/all of the time	26	21
Increased your responsibilities	13	24
Decreased your responsibilities	11	7
Working more hours	8	15
Changed your employer / started a new job	7	11
Changed your position within your company	3	9
Become self-employed (if previously an employee)	1	3
Left the workforce	1	1
Been made redundant	1	0
Other	1	0
Become an employee (if previously self-employed)	0	2
Don't know	0	0

TABLE 27: How much do you agree with the following statements following the birth or adoption of your child?

	Agree or strongly agree %	Disagree or strongly disagree %
I am more concerned about financial security now (n=148)	86	11
I now feel more financial pressure as the main income contributor (n=146)	77	15
I now feel more pressure to maintain my career? (n=148)	72	19

The fathers who had made longer-term changes were then asked how supportive employers had been of these changes. Only 4 percent said their employers were not supportive, with 25 percent stating they were supportive and 38 percent very supportive, a total of 63 percent stating they were supported in their changes.²⁰ This level of support, however, is lower than the proportion getting support from employers for decisions about leave around the time of birth (87 percent).

Given that information gathered in the qualitative phase pointed to many fathers becoming the main income earner on the adoption or birth of a child, fathers were asked about the financial and career pressures on them (Table 27).

Most (86 percent) agreed that they had become more concerned about financial security. A significant proportion also felt pressure to be the main income earner and to maintain their career. But continuing the theme of diversity, nearly a fifth disagreed with the idea that they felt more pressure to maintain their career.²¹

²⁰ These proportions include 17 percent for which the question was not applicable as they were self-employed.

²¹ Some of these fathers may already have strong pressures to maintain a career so this event may not add much to these pressures. For example, some fathers will already have children and be the main income earner.

EMPLOYERS

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, the majority of employers, and especially small employers, have very little experience of women taking PPL.
- Large employers are more likely to have formalised policies and systems in place to manage parental leave, and are more likely to have greater knowledge of their legal obligations. Small employers are more likely to consider parental leave on a case-by-case basis.
- Employing someone to cover the position of an employee on parental leave is one of the most difficult aspects to manage for employers. Small and medium enterprises are more likely to find this difficult and prefer to re-allocate work across existing staff rather than try to hire someone to temporarily fill the role.
- Two-thirds of employers agree that PPL allows them to plan and manage workloads with greater confidence.
- Typically employers accommodate changes in working patterns on the mothers return to work and on an ongoing basis, particularly changing the number of hours worked and working flexible hours.
- Small and medium enterprises appear to be more flexible than larger employers. They are more likely to strongly agree that they work around the needs of families where possible and re-evaluate the needs of mothers on a regular basis.
- Employers are more supportive of changes to working patterns for fathers around the time of the birth, rather than on a long term basis.

Of the employers who responded to the survey, 63 percent had less than five employees, 27 percent 5-19, 2 percent 20-49 and 8 percent had fifty or more. Overall, 64 percent of employees were female. Across the sample, 25 percent of small employers had been in operation less than 3 years compared with just 4 percent of large employers. Over a third of large employers (36 percent) had operated 50 or more years as against 10 percent of smaller employers and 12 percent of medium sized employers.

Employers spanned a range of industries, but the largest proportion was in retail trade (20 percent), health and community services (13 percent) and education (12 percent). Some of the differences in size were related to sector. For example, those in retail trade tended to be small employers, while those in the education sector tended to be large employers.

Given that the size of employer seemed to be associated with some differences in attitude

TABLE 28: How familiar do you feel you are with your legal obligations as an employer surrounding paid and unpaid parental leave?

	Total sample % (n=153)	Less than 5 employees % (n=51)	5-19 employees % (n=51)	20 employees or more % (n=51)
Not at all familiar	4	4	4	0
Not very familiar	19	27	6	4
Neutral	6	6	6	10
Somewhat familiar	51	49	59	39
Very familiar	20	14	25	47
Total	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

to or experience with parental leave, much of the following analysis is based around three groups: small employers (less than five employees), medium sized (5-19), and large employers (20 or more).²²

Experience in dealing with leave and sources of information

Not surprisingly, due to both their size and the length of time they have been established, small employers had less experience of dealing with parental leave. For example, 92 percent of small employers had only one female employee who had taken leave of any type in relation to having/adopting a baby in the last 12 months, against just 14 percent of large employers having only one female employee take leave. Amongst large employers, 24 percent had ten or more female employees take leave in the previous year. Similarly, small employers had far less experience than large employers in dealing with both PPL and extended unpaid leave.

Potentially reflecting this lesser experience with leave, but also since SMEs generally do not have specialist HR sections, small employers were much less likely to feel familiar with their legal obligations concerning paid and unpaid parental leave (Table 28).

Employers were asked about sources of information they used when considering PPL (Table 29). While some of the sources were important across all employer sizes, large employers appeared to seek advice from a wider range of sources including payroll companies, a lawyer, and their own HR department. Small employers were more likely to have used an accountant. But overall the two single most important sources were the two government agencies responsible for PPL, the Department of Labour and Inland Revenue.

Return to work by mothers

Employers were asked about the proportion of mothers in their organisation who only took the 14 weeks paid component of their parental leave entitlement, and then returned to work on the date agreed before they went on parental leave (Table 30). Less than half in small organisations (43 percent) said all employees did return when initially agreed, but the rate was even lower in large organisations (21 percent). In 41 percent of large organisations, none of the employees came back on the agreed date. If they did not return on the agreed date the most common reason was that they did not return at all (58 percent). The next most common response was returning later than planned (25 percent).

²² While those employing 20 or more are large employers in a New Zealand context, in most countries many of these would be considered to be small and medium sized employers.

TABLE 29: Information sources about parental leave including PPL

	Total sample % (n=153)	Less than 5 employees % (n=51)	5-19 employees % (n=51)	20 employees or more % (n=51)
Contacted Inland Revenue	44	43	44	47
Contacted Department of Labour	42	37	48	55
Contacted accountant	22	24	20	14
Contacted payroll company	9	4	16	20
Contacted lawyer	7	4	12	10
Contacted industry body/association	8	6	12	8
Contacted own HR department	2	0	4	6
Contacted 'Other'	2	2	2	2
None of the above	17	18	16	14

Total may exceed 100 percent because of multiple responses.

TABLE 30: Did the mothers return on the agreed date? (Mothers who took the 14 weeks PPL)*

	Less than 5 employees % (n=42)	5-19 employees % (n=44)	20 employees or more % (n=39)
None	29	30	41
Some	0	5	23
Most	0	2	3
All	43	27	21
Still on leave so unable to say	26	18	5
Don't know	2	18	8
Total	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

*Sub-sample based on those organisations which had employees taking PPL only.

For some non-returners, this perhaps reflects an eligibility criterion for PPL. Parents who receive payments need to take leave from their job even if they know in advance that they do not actually plan to return.

Employers were also asked whether the mothers who were eligible to take extended unpaid parental leave of up to 52 weeks after the birth returned on the agreed date. Overall, the largest single response was that none did (28 percent), followed by all returned (22 percent). But 20 percent of employers did not know. Clearly there is much variation in employee experience in relation to actual return dates relative to predicted dates.

Employers were then asked if those employees who had not come back at the agreed date returned earlier, later or not at all from leave. The largest group, about half, did not return at all. The non-returnee rate was higher for small employers (60 percent).

Comparing return data for employers and mothers is not easy because of the differing questions asked of each group. Only an estimate can be made as to what proportion of mothers returned to their original employer as this question was not directly asked. While overall 80 percent of mothers who took PPL returned to paid work within the 14-17 month period, as Table 17 had shown, 18 percent of

TABLE 31: To what extent do you have formalised policies or systems in place to cope with leave?
(Sorted by 'to large extent' responses)

(n=153)	To no extent %	To a small extent %	To a moderate extent %	To a large extent %
To cope with changes mothers make around departure dates and return to work dates?	19	14	22	43
To provide for flexibility of hours on the mother's return to work?	16	14	29	39
To cover workloads while someone is on parental leave?	24	18	25	32
To assist mothers in applying for Paid Parental Leave?***	24	27	19	29
To ensure mothers are informed of all the types of leave they can take?***	23	22	26	28
To plan for leave before as well as after the birth or adoption?***	22	14	35	24
To manage the overall process of parental leave?***	29	24	30	16
To manage parental leave for fathers as well as mothers?***	60	5	12	15

*** For all these responses, large employers were much more likely to have formalized systems in place.

those who had taken PPL changed employer, 8 percent were working on contract, 4 percent became self-employed, 3 percent had left the workforce and 2 percent had been made redundant. This suggests that, based on mothers' responses, only about half of mothers who were employed before having a baby took leave and then returned to the same employer.

The employers were also asked if the changes to mothers return to work date was usually at the mother's request, or by the organisation. Overall, the majority (77 percent) were through the request of the mother, but this was higher amongst large employers (85 percent).

Coping with leave

Employers were asked about policies they had in place to cope with various aspects of leave (Table 31). For most areas related to parental leave, the majority of employers had some level of policy or systems in place to cope. Between a quarter and a fifth, however, had little in the way of policies in most of the areas related to leave. Not surprisingly, in

many areas large employers were more likely to have policies in place. The one area that stands out is whether employers have policies or systems in place for fathers as well as mothers. The majority, 60 percent, did not have policies in place for fathers.

When asked about overall views on parental leave, almost all employers agree that PPL provides some essential income to mothers and the vast majority agree it is very important in giving mothers time to focus on the health of themselves and the baby (Table 32). These are similar to the responses of both mothers and fathers. The importance of income and time off for the health of mothers and babies seems to be a core New Zealand value around PPL.

Table 32 also shows that almost all employers see themselves as being 'family friendly' (98 percent) and, connected with this, almost all suggest that when they value their employees they make sure they work around the needs of their families wherever possible (97 percent). Most also encourage their managers to be flexible in balancing the needs of the business with the needs of the mother.

TABLE 32: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Ranked by areas where most employers agree)		
	Strongly disagree or disagree (%)	Agree or strongly agree (%)
PPL provides some mothers with an essential income source (n=153)	2	98
Our company is family friendly (n=152)	2	97
When we value our employees we make sure we work around the needs of their families wherever possible** (n=150)	2	97
PPL is most important in giving mothers time to focus on the health of themselves and the baby, stopping them returning to work too early (n=153)	7	91
Our organisation encourages managers to be flexible in balancing the needs of the business with the needs of the mother (n=146)	7	89

** Lower for large employers.

TABLE 33: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Ranked by areas where many employers agree)		
	Strongly disagree or disagree (%)	Agree or strongly agree (%)
We re-evaluate the needs of mothers in relation to paid work on a regular basis** (n=136)	15	80
PPL helps mothers return to the same terms and conditions of employment without disadvantage after having a baby (n=153)	12	80
Employing someone to cover the role of an employee who is taking parental leave is difficult** (n=150)	19	76
PPL allows us to better retain experienced staff (n=150)	24	71
Managing the impact of any leave (e.g. annual etc) on workloads in our organisation is difficult** (152)	30	65
PPL allows us to plan and manage workloads with greater confidence (147)	29	64

** Lower for large employers.

Table 33 shows statements that a high proportion of employers agree with. A significant proportion of employers agree with the statement that they re-evaluate the needs of mothers in relation to paid work on a regular basis (80 percent), although this was lower for large employers. A similar proportion also agreed that PPL helps mothers return to the same terms and conditions of employment without disadvantage after having a baby (80 percent), a legal requirement of PPL.

There was more diversity in opinion about some other statements. While three-quarters of employers found it difficult to employ a replacement when an employee was on PPL, nearly one-fifth of employers did not. There were fewer problems for larger employers. Two-thirds also found it difficult to manage the impact of any leave, but a third did not. Again, the problems were lower for large employers.

**TABLE 34: How much do you agree or disagree?
(Areas where there is less agreement amongst employers)**

	Strongly disagree or disagree (%)	Agree or strongly agree (%)
When mothers return to work, considerable time goes into re-establishing work patterns (n=138)	34	59
It is difficult to manage instances where employees return to work from parental leave earlier or later than planned** (n=137)	40	51
In our organisation, we prefer to re-allocate work across existing staff when someone goes on parental leave, rather than employ someone to temporarily fill the role (n=151)	48	45
Since PPL was introduced, the average amount of leave taken around the birth or adoption of a child has increased** (n=144)	22	37
Some employees valuable to our organisation who would financially benefit from PPL are unfairly excluded due to current eligibility criteria** (n=138)	40	31

** Lower for large employers.

While many (71 percent) of employers agree that PPL allows them to better retain experienced staff, a quarter disagreed with this statement.

There was much more divergence of opinion about some other statements (Table 34). Again, in some of the responses there was a difference by employer size. With the following statements, many of the responses were neutral. About half of the employers appeared to face difficulties when employees returned either earlier or later than planned. While not a majority, a still significant 31 percent of employers believed that some employees, valuable to their organisation and who would financially benefit from PPL, are unfairly excluded due to current eligibility criteria. This reinforces the view expressed by ineligible mothers in the qualitative research who felt that the PPL criteria were unfair.

Approaches to managing parental leave

There is a diversity of approaches amongst employers with regards to managing parental leave (Table 35). The single most common response is to have one policy, but with room for flexibility for individual circumstances.

Depending on the size of employer, however, between 25 percent (large employers) and 47 percent (small employers) negotiate each case individually.

Employers were asked about the influence of a range of factors on how they manage and negotiate individual cases of parental leave (Table 36). Only three factors influenced three-quarters of employers to a moderate or large extent. These included the specialist skills of the employee. But all of the areas have a relatively strong influence on employers. The two factors that influence employers the least were the length of leave the employer planned to take and their length of service. For most of the factors, there was a lower positive response to these factors for large employers.

Assistance for returning mothers

Employers were asked if they made any assistance available to mothers returning to work after parental leave (Table 37). The most common types of assistance were flexible working hours (83 percent of employers overall) and ability to increase or decrease total hours worked (85 percent). These types of assistance are not mutually exclusive.

TABLE 35: Which of the following best describes how your organisation manages parental leave with employees?			
	Less than 5 employees % (n=51)	5-19 employees % (n=51)	20 employees or more % (n=51)
Negotiate each case individually	47	37	25
Have a universal policy for all staff	2	4	12
Have one policy, but room for flexibility for individual circumstances	51	57	61
Don't know	0	2	2
Total	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

TABLE 36: To what extent do the following factors impact on the way in which you manage and negotiate individual cases of parental leave? (Sorted by 'to a large extent')				
(n=153)	To no extent %	To a small extent %	To a moderate extent %	To a large extent %
The fact the employee is willing to be flexible in their working hours**	11	12	29	47
The difficulty in finding someone to fill the employee's position**	22	10	20	47
The employee's commitment to the company**	17	6	29	47
The employee's specialised skills ¹	16	6	31	46
The employee's work ethic**	19	9	27	41
The employee's knowledge of the company and how it works**	22	5	32	40
The amount of leave the employee plans to take**	26	9	36	28
The employee's length of service	28	10	33	27

** Lower for large employers.

When contrasted with responses from mothers returning from PPL, there initially appears to some mismatch. For example, only 57 percent of these mothers said they worked flexible hours on return from parental leave. However, a greater number may have been offered such conditions but not taken them up.

Space for breastfeeding was commonly offered amongst small employers (69 percent), but much less so amongst large employers (41 percent). Across the whole sample, 63 percent of employers said they offered breastfeeding facilities. This contrasts

strongly with the 19 percent of mothers who returned from PPL and said their employer offers breastfeeding facilities.

Male employees and parental leave

Employers were asked about their experience in managing male employees taking any type of leave around the birth or adoption of their baby (Table 38). While overall only 13 percent said yes, this was heavily influenced by small employer responses. Over half of large employers (55 percent) had some experience in managing male employees taking leave.

TABLE 37: Do you make any of the following assistance available to mothers returning to work after parental leave? (Sorted by responses by small employees)

	Less than 5 employees % (n=51)	5-19 employees % (n=51)	20 employees or more % (n=51)
Flexible working hours - e.g. varying start/finish times	86	78	76
Ability to increase or decrease total hours worked - e.g. change from full time to part-time hours	84	86	88
Space for breastfeeding	69	57	41
Ability to increase or decrease responsibilities or change role	65	57	63
Ability to work from home some/all of the time	43	31	39
Increased sick leave entitlement	37	22	4
None of the above	10	6	4

TABLE 38: Experience managing male employees taking any type of leave around the birth or adoption of their baby?

	Less than 5 employees % (n=51)	5-19 employees % (n=51)	20 employees or more % (n=51)
Yes	4	18	55
No	96	82	45
Total	100	100	100

TABLE 39: Typically, what type of leave do fathers take?

	Sub-sample % (n=39)
Annual leave	70
Sick leave	14
Partners/paternity leave (that is the 1 or 2 weeks unpaid leave male employees are entitled to under the Parental Leave Act)	29
Unpaid leave negotiated directly with you	24
Paid Parental Leave	17
Other employer funded paid leave (this excludes annual or sick leave)	25
Type of leave taken – Don't know	0

Total may exceed 100 percent because of multiple responses.

* Sub-sample based on those respondents who have had experience with male employees taking parental leave.

That many employers did not note that they had experience is likely to reflect that most fathers taking leave simply take a period of annual leave and so employers may not be aware that they have taken leave for this purpose.

Of the small number of employers who said they had experienced fathers taking some sort of parental leave, the largest single group (70 percent) noted that it was annual leave that fathers took (Table 39).

	Less than 5 employees % (n=51)	5-19 employees % (n=51)	20 employees or more % (n=51)
No flexibility	14	6	4
A small amount of flexibility	10	18	18
A moderate amount of flexibility	25	18	39
A large amount of flexibility	29	43	33
Don't know	22	16	6
Total	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

	Less than 5 employees % (n=51)	5-19 employees % (n=51)	20 employees or more % (n=51)
No flexibility	14	6	2
A small amount of flexibility	20	10	33
A moderate amount of flexibility	25	35	35
A large amount of flexibility	20	31	22
Don't know	22	18	8
Total	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Around a quarter had experienced fathers taking partners leave, unpaid leave negotiated with the employer or other employer funded leave. A total of 17 percent of employers who had experienced leave taking said that fathers had taken PPL. This is much higher than the overall 1 percent of fathers who said they had taken PPL.

Employers were asked about the work related flexibility fathers had around the time the spouse/partner has their baby (Table 40). Only a small proportion stated they had no flexibility but this response was higher for small employers (14 percent) than large employers (4 percent).

Employers were also asked about the degree of flexibility available to men with regard to

their working pattern on an ongoing basis (Table 41). Overall, only 23 percent said that they gave fathers a large amount of flexibility, but a further 29 percent had a moderate amount. Overall, in the longer term fathers have slightly less flexibility around working arrangements than around the time of the birth. This reflects the responses of fathers themselves who tend to work less flexibly in the longer term than around the time of the birth. It also reflects the finding that fathers feel less supported of long-term changes to the working patterns than they do with regards to short-term changes (Table 26 and subsequent discussion).

Employers were asked if various types of assistance were made available to fathers

TABLE 42: Types of assistance made available to fathers after the birth or adoption of a baby

	Less than 5 employees % (n=51)	5-19 employees % (n=51)	20 employees or more % (n=51)
Flexible working hours - e.g. varying start/finish times	57	61	63
Ability to work from home some/all of the time	25	25	31
Ability to increase or decrease total hours worked - e.g. change from full time to part-time hours	47	47	63
Ability to increase or decrease responsibilities or change role	33	41	51
Increased sick leave entitlement	22	18	6
Not applicable (e.g. no male employees)	6	12	2
None of the above	35	20	20

Total may exceed 100 percent because of multiple responses.

after the birth or adoption of a baby (Table 42). Although there were some differences in responses by employer size, the two largest single responses were flexible working hours and ability to increase or decrease total hours worked. Amongst small employers, a third (35 percent) offered no assistance, higher than the 20 percent for medium sized and large employers. Although this set of responses cannot be directly compared with the responses of fathers, some responses closely match (21 percent of fathers say they can work

from home some/all of the time in the long term compared with just over a quarter of employers saying they offer this option).

In general, however, a higher proportion of employers appear to offer flexible working patterns than the take-up by fathers would suggest. For example, between 57 percent and 63 percent of employers say they offer flexible working hours, while 45 percent of fathers say they work more flexible hours around the time of birth and 38 percent long-term.



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this evaluation was to better understand the dynamics of decision-making and experiences before, during and after a period of parental leave under the *Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987* and test whether, and how, the Act is meeting its overall objectives. The evaluation focused on the experiences of three groups: women who have babies or adopt them; fathers; and employers. The study was undertaken at a time of labour shortages and both the quantitative and qualitative research indicated that employers were having some difficulties in attracting and retaining key employees. Therefore some responses may change if there was an economic downturn.

Clear patterns but also much diversity

The research showed some clear patterns. In particular, it is almost solely mothers rather than fathers who take PPL and extended unpaid leave. However, there is also much diversity of experience and attitudes of mothers, fathers and employers. In part, this reflects the considerable variety of family types, educational backgrounds, employment arrangements and the wide range of employers, both in terms of size and area of business, working within the New Zealand economy. It also reflects the wide range of attitudes towards work and family life and, outside the control of parents, the differing experiences of childbirth (or adoption), as well as variations in maternal and child health.

Strong support for parental leave

Overall, the surveys show there is widespread support amongst mothers, fathers and employers for parental leave. It is almost universally recognised that its job protection and payment, is important for parents,

primarily mothers, to take time out of paid work around the birth or adoption of a child. There is much support for the idea that such time out assists in protecting the health of mothers and their babies, that bonding with a new child is important, and that for many mothers, establishing breastfeeding is important.

Eligibility for parental leave

Out of all mothers giving birth to or adopting a baby, a quarter was not in paid work in the eligibility period before having the child. Most of these mothers were already at home full-time looking after an older child. The survey did not provide information on how long these mothers stayed out of the labour force but it is likely some will have returned to paid work within the first two years of the child's life. These mothers are not eligible for payment for time out of the workforce and clearly do not have a job that can be protected.²³

23 Some of these mothers may access other forms of family support.

As the eligibility criteria for PPL stood at the time of the survey, that is being employed more than ten hours per week for six or more months, but with the self-employed not at the time of the survey being eligible, this allowed about eight out of ten employed mothers to qualify for PPL. Two-thirds of these mothers were fully eligible, that is eligible for the period of paid leave and the full 52 weeks of extended unpaid leave. Reflecting the eligibility criteria for leave, the data indicates that better educated, higher earning women in the core labour market, and who tend to work in the main urban areas, are those most likely to be fully eligible for parental leave. More disadvantaged mothers in terms of household incomes and number of children to support are over represented amongst those missing out on eligibility for parental leave and its associated payment. In addition, reinforcing this disadvantage, mothers not eligible for government PPL were also less likely to take employer provided paid leave. A similar pattern has been demonstrated in Canada, with research suggesting that eligibility criteria for PPL can reinforce rather than reduce disadvantage in the labour market (Evans, 2006). Since the survey was undertaken, self-employed mothers who meet the working hours and work attachment criteria have also become eligible for PPL. The survey indicates that around 80 percent of self-employed mothers are now likely to be eligible.

Outside of those who were ineligible through self-employment, workers who were likely to be ineligible were casual workers. Contract workers were also more likely to be ineligible. Some of these workers may have had a long attachment to the labour force, but

insufficient attachment within the eligibility period. Some of these contract workers may have in fact filled jobs created by those taking parental leave but who return before six months leave. It is not the weekly hours that are the main impediment to meeting the eligibility criteria but the length of time employed before the birth or adoption.

While the samples were too small to allow a robust analysis of the relationship of ethnicity to attitudes and outcomes, a range of labour market research shows that Maori and Pacific mothers are over-represented in the types of jobs and employment arrangements that tend to exclude mothers from being eligible for parental leave.

The qualitative research indicated that working mothers not eligible are often unhappy about missing out on PPL. Some employers also feel there are mothers who unfairly miss out on being eligible for PPL. Nearly all of those who were ineligible for PPL said that the financial contribution had they been eligible would have made a significant contribution in covering living costs. In addition, nearly 40 percent would have taken more leave (both paid and unpaid) had they been eligible. It is possible that some of those missing out on being eligible for PPL may have had a long-term attachment to the labour force but had not demonstrated recent workplace attachment as required by the eligibility criteria. Equally, some mothers who were eligible for PPL may not have had a long-term attachment. For example, some mothers who are eligible for PPL may have only ever worked for the six months in the period before having a baby.

With the exception of fathers who adopt a child, fathers or other spouses/partners are not directly eligible for paid leave. Mothers can transfer leave to their spouse/partner, however, if this person also meets the work eligibility criteria. While not part of this study, given the employment patterns of men, most new fathers are likely to meet the work test.

Take up of paid parental leave

Of those mothers who were eligible for PPL, eight in ten of these women take up a period of leave. Overall, this is two-thirds of all women in paid work. Of the remaining third of all women in paid work and who did not take PPL, two-thirds took no leave at all (equally divided between those who qualify and do not qualify for PPL). One-third took other types of leave. PPL is typically taken at the end of all other available paid leave. Uptake of leave is limited by a number of factors including: awareness of leave policies; a conscious choice to exit the workforce and ethical obligation to employer; perceived flexibility of paid work to fit around family; type of role in workplace.

Women who take PPL (compared with those who do not):

- Are more likely to agree that they have the choice to return to work under the same conditions of employment.
- Are more likely to return to the same employer.
- Spend more time at home before returning to paid work.
- Are more likely to take leave from paid work before and after the birth.
- Perceive the key benefits of PPL as providing time to aid recovery, establish breastfeeding and to bond with the baby. PPL sanctions time away from paid work to look after the baby.

Does paid parental leave improve income stability for families?

The data indicates that for those parents able to access PPL, the payment does improve income stability for many. Over half of those mothers who took PPL agreed that the ending of the payment had a significant impact on decisions when to return to employment. Over 80 percent of those who took PPL said that it lessened money worries, made the transition from two incomes to one easier, and contributed to financial security. In addition, of those who took PPL, but did not take the full 52 weeks of unpaid leave, the majority said that it was financial pressures that prompted their return to work.

Yet, the qualitative research suggests that the actual dollar amount for mothers who benefit from PPL is a token covering day to day costs associated with having a baby. The qualitative research indicates, however, that for mothers excluded from PPL by their patterns of work, the amount of money provided by PPL would have had a significant financial impact, allowing them to have time to bond with the baby and delay their early return to paid work. For some mothers, the payment attached to the leave simply gives the leave value.

Does parental leave support gender equity in the labour market?

One of the aims of parental leave is gender equity within the labour market. Increased female labour force retention and the opportunity to return to paid work without disadvantage to position or pay is one of the important indicators of this. Ideally, longitudinal data would be needed to determine the effect of PPL and overall job protection on long-term attachment to the labour market for women. Most mothers in the survey, 75 percent, were in paid work before having a child. It is likely that an even higher proportion of mothers having a first child would have had some labour attachment before having that child. No data was available on how many of the mothers who were not in paid work before having their child had actually returned to work when their child was 14-17 months (i.e. beyond the time the survey respondents were interviewed), but it is likely some would have. Overall, 76 percent, of the working mothers had returned to paid work in this time period. While it was higher, at 80 percent, for mothers who had taken PPL, the majority of women return to work, but not necessarily to the same job, regardless of the type of leave taken. This suggests that PPL is not a major factor in determining return. Other factors, such as the need to maintain family income or to maintain careers, are likely to be the stronger drivers for women's long term labour market attachment. But the right to return to the same employer is likely to reduce job search costs and uncertainty about family income. The patterns of return may in part reflect that, in a time of labour shortages, employers at the time the survey was carried out had a very strong incentive to attract back employees.

Comparing return to work data for employers and mothers is not straightforward due to differing questions and perspectives.

A significant number of employers said that mothers did not return at all from either the period of PPL or from the full 52 weeks of unpaid leave. At first this seems at odds with the fact that the majority of women return to paid work within 14-17 months. But the data indicates that about a third of women who return from PPL did not go back to the same job. Therefore, when this is combined with the number of non-returnees, this matches the perception of employers that many mothers do not return to their original workplace.

Potentially PPL, and wider job protection, reduces employee turnover for employers as it allows them to keep an attachment with parents. The requirement to take leave while receiving PPL, however, means that some parents say they will return to work even if they do not plan to in order to receive the payment. There is no financial incentive within the PPL legislation for parents to return to paid work. Instead the main incentives are factors such as need to maintain family income once PPL has finished or to maintain a career. Both the employer and employee data indicates that a small but significant proportion of mothers say they will return to their employer but do not. While some parents may have no intention to return, others clearly change their minds about returning, with the qualitative research indicating a range of reasons for this change. A change of plans is more common for those working for large employers. Parents can also change the time of their return. Around half of mothers who take PPL return to paid work when planned, one-third return earlier, mainly for financial reasons, and one in ten returns later, mainly wanting to spend more time with

baby. For some parents the amount of leave mothers want to take around the birth of the baby only becomes clear with the experience of the impact of their new baby on their lives. Thus for these parents the anticipated return to work date is an estimate.

Most mothers who took PPL and who returned to employment, came back with the same terms and conditions, a requirement of the legislation. Although a little lower, the majority of women who did not take PPL also returned with the same terms and conditions. Yet, most mothers do change their working arrangements. A change in working hours is particularly common, with two-thirds working part-time on return to work compared to one-third before the birth. Of those who decreased their hours, two-thirds planned for it to be a permanent change. If there had been changes in terms and conditions, it seemed that this had generally been at the request of the employee. Mothers noted that in a twelve month time period a workplace can undergo considerable change and re-organisation and for those returning to work after twelve months it can feel similar to beginning a new job.

Does parental leave support gender equity in the home?

Does parental leave promote gender equity within families with fathers sharing leave and caring responsibilities? Based on biology, the design of PPL assumes different roles for women and men with birth mothers being given primary eligibility for payment. While this does reflect the attitudes and behaviours of most, but not all, parents, it potentially constrains parental choice as to who is primary caregiver. In particular, where mothers are not eligible but, through their work patterns, fathers potentially are,

the fathers cannot access any PPL. While mothers can potentially transfer leave most do not decide to. In fact, of the small number of mothers who return early from PPL, most forfeit the remainder of their payment rather than transferring it to a spouse/partner. The survey of fathers, however, indicated that if PPL existed specifically for fathers, half would take it up.

Even if more choice was given to parents as to who took the leave, or there was a specific period of paid leave for fathers, while this would probably be of benefit to some individual families, overall patterns of leave taking would probably not change much. The data from interviews with mothers, father and employers indicates that PPL as it currently stands is generally perceived to be much more important for mothers than fathers. While social norms are likely to be playing their part in determining roles, biological factors are seen by mothers, fathers and employers as critical. While many of the mothers and fathers may have strived for equality in both paid and unpaid work before having a child, pregnancy and the birth of a child often reinforces traditional gender roles. For both biological and social reasons, most mothers see themselves as the main nurturers while the majority of fathers assume the provider role. Both the quantitative and qualitative data show that following on from the birth, the majority of fathers feel increased pressure as the main income earner and have greater concern about financial security. In terms of biology, recovery from childbirth is seen as being supported by PPL as is breastfeeding for many women. Given the length of PPL (14 weeks), these biological factors could be slightly less important if PPL was extended to six months or a year.

While employers are supportive of changes fathers make to work patterns around the birth or adoption of a child, they are less supportive of long-term changes by fathers to their paid work. Once parents return to paid work, just over half of mothers find it difficult to balance home and work commitments. Forty percent of fathers, however, also face difficulties.

Does parental leave support health outcomes for mother and child?

There was some mixed evidence as to whether the parental leave legislation supports optimal health outcomes for the mother and child. Clearly, health is an important consideration for parents when considering leave policies and leave decisions. Nearly all mothers who took some sort of leave noted the importance of the health of their baby when considering the factors influencing the length and type of leave taken. Just under 90 percent note the importance of their own health in the decisions. Nearly all also thought establishing baby's feeding/sleeping patterns was important. In addition, 84 percent of mothers talked about the importance of establishing breastfeeding. Given that the Ministry of Health recommends at least six months exclusive breastfeeding, however, it was notable that 14 percent of mothers rated initiation of breastfeeding as being unimportant.

Almost all fathers also thought mother and child health factors were very important. When asked what would prevent fathers taking up PPL for themselves most fathers thought it was more important for the mother to take the leave to establish breastfeeding and to have time for recovery. In addition, examples can be found of fathers changing their own leave patterns to support their partner when there were unexpected health

problems. When fathers were asked if they would prefer leave at the same time as their partners, most said they would. Again, this suggests that many see themselves in a support role.

Almost all employers also agreed that PPL is important in giving mothers time to focus on the health of themselves and their baby.

When mothers who actually took PPL were asked about their attitudes towards parental leave, nearly a fifth did not think that the leave gives them enough time to establish breastfeeding and a third said it did not give enough time to recover from having a baby. While research establishing the optimal length of time required for recovery after birth suggests that the current 14 weeks of PPL may be suitable for most mothers, research on the period of time out of the workplace needed to support longer periods of breastfeeding suggests the need for at least six-month period of postnatal leave so that mothers can exclusively breastfeed their infants for this period (Galtry and Callister 2005). In terms of health promotion, however, PPL cannot be considered in isolation. The literature also suggests that workplace measures are required to enable those mothers who wish, or are economically compelled, to return to work immediately following childbirth, perhaps with the father caring for the child, to better integrate their work and family commitments. These include measures for 'phasing back' through part-time work as well as provisions for breastfeeding breaks and facilities. In relation to space for breastfeeding, the survey indicated that over 60 percent of employers said they offered such facilities, yet under a fifth of mothers returning from leave reported they were entitled to such space. The reasons for this mismatch are not clear.

Ideal length of paid parental leave

Parents, and many employers, say spending time with babies is important and, as already discussed, optimal breastfeeding practice is supported by having access to a period of at least six months leave for biological mothers. The data indicates that there is a mismatch between the amount of paid leave currently available and what parents actually want. While there is some variation, most mothers would ideally like to take just over one year out of paid work to be with their babies. Yet, the average time at which mothers return to work is when their babies are six months old. Fathers typically take two weeks of annual leave. For most fathers, however, the ideal is four weeks concurrent leave with mothers, to assist with the mother's recovery. The majority of fathers have no plans or interest in becoming the main caregiver. Of those who do, most intend to care for the child from eighteen months of age or older. The qualitative research indicated that fathers who became primary caregivers found they were challenging conventional roles.

If, as the biomedical literature suggests, an initial six-month period of leave following childbirth is warranted primarily on maternal and child health grounds, then leave comes to be seen as unavoidably female-specific. In heterosexual, two-parent families, if greater equality both in the home and the workplace is to be achieved parental leave needs to be shared equally by both parents, thereby avoiding the entrenchment of traditional roles and responsibilities. This then necessitates parents taking leave concurrently, or, alternatively, up to a year of leave, so that they can then take it consecutively. Leave longer than six months would ensure that fathers have the opportunity to both spend time with their child and balance the breastfeeding

mother's potential time input during the early months, if indeed she takes leave for this purpose.

Employer views and experiences

As noted, most employers agree that that PPL is important for parents, primarily mothers, to take time out of paid work around the birth or adoption of a child. In addition, the majority agree PPL helps them retain experienced staff with this especially true for small and medium enterprises.

The majority of employers, however, have very little experience of women taking PPL. This primarily reflects that many employers have a small number of employees and, connected with this, many have not been in business for all that long. While generally employers are supportive of the aims of PPL, managing leave, not just PPL, is an issue for employers, particularly for small employers. Employing someone to cover the position of an employee on parental leave is one of the most difficult aspects to manage for employers. Small and medium enterprises find this more difficult, and they are also more likely to agree that they prefer to re-allocate work across existing staff rather than try to hire someone to temporarily fill the role.

For most employers, if mothers extend their leave beyond six months, while employers are legally required to hold open the position, finding a replacement can be difficult. Exceptions to this are government agencies and larger businesses where systems and processes are in place making it easier to fulfil their legal obligations.

Generally, only large employers have formalised policies and systems in place to manage parental leave, and are more likely to have greater knowledge of their legal

obligations. Small employers are more likely to consider parental leave for mothers on a case-by-case basis.

Managing parental leave does not stop when parents' return to paid work. Employees and employers commonly negotiate on-going flexibility, including flexible working hours. Small and medium enterprises appear to be more flexible. They are more likely to strongly agree that they work around the needs of families where possible and re-evaluate the needs of mothers on a regular basis, when compared with large organisations. Employers generally consider that they are very family friendly, with most saying that they offer flexibility.

Finally, employers are more supportive of changes to working patterns for fathers around the time of the birth, rather than on a long-term basis. This also serves to reinforce gender roles for women and men in terms of work and parenting.

Sources of information about parental leave

Of direct relevance to the Department of Labour, while employers use its information when developing strategies for managing leave and generally find this information useful, the Department is not a key source of information for employees. Instead, friends, families, the media and other employers are key sources of information. Sometimes these sources may

not provide accurate information or reach key audiences. For example, many fathers were not aware of the eligibility criteria for PPL, including that they could have part or all of it transferred to them. Mothers who would gain most from PPL financially, often lack the confidence and education to find out about it.

Knowledge of the details surrounding PPL appears to be low and there is some confusion around eligibility criteria amongst most mothers and some employers. Despite their obligations under the Act, many employers reinforce the attitude that it is up to mothers to find out about it and complete the application. Friends and family are the most trusted source of information about PPL but the internet and 0800 numbers provide the detail. Mothers working for employers with a human resource capability are more likely to be given information and feel more supported.



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