



Parental Leave and Return to Work: Decisions to take Parental Leave, Breastfeed, and Return to Work Among Working Parents

Kelsie L. Daigle & Gwenith G. Fisher

Colorado State University

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Project Team

Colorado State University:

Dr. Gwenith G. Fisher

Dr. Tori L. Crain

Kelsie L. Daigle

Kymbre A. Grauburger

Dorothy Haruyama

Rebecca L. Clancy

Shalyn C. Stevens

University of Houston:

Dr. Christiane Spitzmueller

Saint Louis University:

Dr. Candice Thomas

California State University – San Bernardino:

Dr. Jing Zhang



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Quick Facts about the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

Applies to...

- 50+ employees within 75 miles
- Worked at employer for at least 12 months, and 1250 hours
- Only 1 in 6 worksites are covered by FMLA



(U.S. Department of Labor & Abt Associated Inc., 2013)

Quick Facts about FMLA



Why people use FMLA...

- 21% take leave for pregnancy, to care for newborn, new adoption
- About 3.5 million people needed leave without being able to take it
- 46% of people who need leave but do not take it due so because of financial constraints

(Department of Labor & Abt Associated Inc., 2013)

Trends Among Working Mothers

- Women are more likely to work while pregnant
- 38% of the U.S. workforce will transition into motherhood
- 82% of pregnant working women continued to work until one month or less of the birth of their baby
- Women are returning to work faster postpartum

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; Bygren & Duvander, 2006)

Trends Among Working Fathers

- 84% of fathers take some time off, averaging less than two weeks
- Almost all fathers return to work at the same job after leave



(Bygren & Duvander, 2006)

Decisions to Be Made

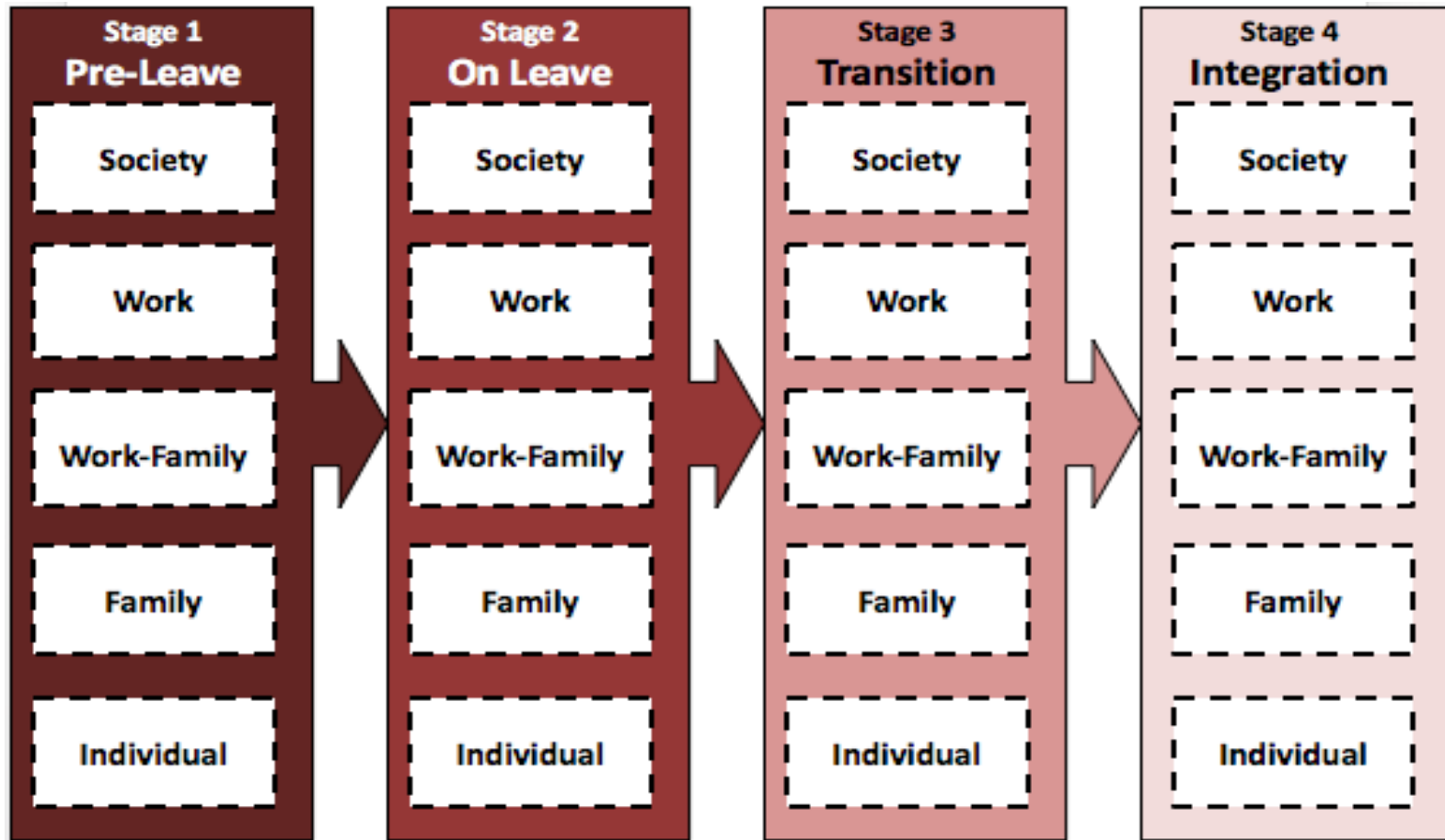
- Should I take parental leave?
- Should I engage in work activities while on leave?
- Should I return to work? If so, when?
- Many workplace and individual factors affect these decisions and experiences of pregnancy and leave



(Fisher, Valley, Toppinen-Tanner, & Mattingly, 2016)

Parental Leave and Return to Work Model

(Fisher, Mattingly, Daigle, Valley, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2017)



Stage 1: Pre-Leave

- Physical changes, anticipating time away from work and parenthood
- Planning with family, employer, and for childcare
- Amount of time planning positively related to whether a mother returns to work following leave
- Workplace social norms impact breastfeeding intentions

(Spitzmueller et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Harrison & Ungerer, 2002)

Stage 2: On Leave

- How long leave is taken depends highly on formal leave policies
 - Pay or no pay?
- Parental bonding, physical recovery,
- Reassess pre-leave intentions
- Engage in work activities while on leave?

(Han et al., 2009)

Stage 3: Transition

- Return to work predicts breastfeeding secession
- Maternity leave <12 weeks associated with higher postpartum depression
- How women return to work, reconcile work and family, is heavily influenced by family leave policies
- Sleep deprivation associated with reduced productivity, performance, safety

(Spitzmueller et al., 2015; Feldman et al., 2004; Fien et al., 2008)

Stage 4: Integration

- Technical and psychological "back in the groove"
- Mothers will stay at job when they have better physical and mental health
- Family supportive behaviors from the workplace

(Carlson et al., 2011)

Working Parents Longitudinal Study

Goals:

1. *How* and *why* work experiences and personal factors shape process
2. Identify which work experiences and resources influence the *timing* of employees' decision to take parental leave, their behaviors and experiences on leave, and the decision of the timing to return to work

Working Parent Longitudinal Study

3. What work experiences and resources are most relevant for breastfeeding intentions and continuation
4. Spouse/partner experiences



Working Parents Longitudinal Study

Participant Eligibility:

- Pregnant working women and their spouse/partner in the U.S.
- At least 18 years old or older
- Working at least 30 hours per week
- Singleton pregnancy

Working Parents Longitudinal Study

Procedure:

- 5 wave longitudinal study
 - First survey in 2nd or 3rd trimester
 - 4 following surveys postpartum
- Breastfeeding – daily diary study
- Sleep – actigraphy and daily diary
- English and Spanish

Impact

- Inform development and possible changes to family leave policies like FMLA
- Provide recommendations for small businesses
- Provide foundation for training of supervisors and employees to promote successful navigation of parental leave and return to work



Small Business Implications

- Women may have fewer role parenthood relevant models
- Previous research shows that workers' preparedness for transitions can be strengthened
- Offering family leave could make businesses more competitive, positively impact organization

(Vuori et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Labor, 2012)

Small Business Implications

- Organizations should:
 - develop and clearly communicate policies to workers
 - foster an organizational culture that permits employees to use the policies available to them without penalty or perceived penalty.
- Often there are no policies for ongoing dialogue between the workplaces and the mothers during the family leave.
- Offer training for supervisors and other employees

(Fisher et al., 2016)

Questions & Discussion



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Thank You!

Kelsie L. Daigle
kdaigle@rams.colostate.edu



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