

# Encyclopedia of Motherhood

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of the difference between  
ams and Joan Segal, in  
argue that mothers still  
eking fathers earn, while  
less women and men has  
d caregiving responsibility  
responsible for the wage  
differences.

ing Gender, Williams  
wall is a result of persis-  
continue to position  
givers of children, rather  
argues that the mater-  
professional practices that  
ate against anyone who  
s on the traditional fem-  
because, however, women  
responsible for caregiv-  
maternal wall affects far more

the maternal wall exists  
continues to be premised

All market work, but  
professional work, is fun-  
damentally workers who work  
able to work overtime,  
o time off for childcare  
ities. In short, standard  
"ideal unencumbered  
obligations. In *Unbending*  
that three related profes-  
sionals maintain the maternal wall:  
the marginalization of  
the expectation that execu-  
tives and their families to  
schedule, which demands  
week at work, drives many  
track because it is impos-  
sible to meet the needs and work the long

continue to work part time,  
work continues to be deval-  
ued and professional lev-  
el advancement and lower pay.  
Williams suggests, in the  
often relocate to advance  
advance women's careers.  
disrupt their careers to relo-

cate with their spouse, which has long-term negative  
and economic professional consequences for them.  
Additionally, many women turn down relocations  
that they might otherwise take because husbands'  
careers continue to be privileged within families.  
Thus, these norms and practices create invisible but  
real barriers to mothers' professional success and,  
ultimately, work to create a maternal wall for moth-  
ers who work in the market.

Challenging the maternal wall requires recognizing  
the distinct discrimination women face as moth-  
ers. Moreover, in *Unbending Gender*, Williams also  
argues for the elimination of the ideal-worker norms  
and the restructuring of market work and family  
entitlements to eliminate practices and norms that  
constitute the maternal wall.

See Also: Academe and Mothering; Care Giving; Matern-  
ity Leave; Motherhood Penalty; Price of Motherhood  
(Citizens); Work and Mothering.

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## Maternity Leave

Maternity leave is a leave of absence from one's  
employer to meet the physical and emotional  
demands experienced by women during the late  
stages of pregnancy and in their new role as moth-  
ers. Maternity leave promotes equality in the work-  
place by providing women job protection when  
they become pregnant and give birth. The absence  
of job protection during pregnancy and childbirth  
places women at a disadvantage in the labor mar-  
ket, historically evident in the United States prior to  
legislative mandates, as women were often forced  
to give up their jobs.

Not surprisingly, studies have since demon-  
strated that maternity leave coverage increases  
employment for women after the birth of a child.  
A study conducted by Jane Waldfogel found that  
55 percent of women who were employed prior to  
the birth of their child took maternity leave and  
returned, and that maternity leave coverage had a  
positive effect on wages.

### Comparisons

Comparisons of maternity and parental leave poli-  
cies are often made by examining scope, compen-  
sation, and duration leave. Government support  
for maternity leave varies across nations and may  
take the form of protected job leave and/or financial  
support. Maternity and parental leave policies have  
been established in over 150 countries. Paid leave  
is often categorized as a social insurance program  
financed through payroll taxes.

In recent years, maternity leave policies have been  
extended to include parental leave, which allows  
for either parent to care for a new child. Austria,  
Germany, Norway, and Sweden offer two years of  
protected leave for a two-parent family. Greece, Ire-  
land, Italy, New Zealand, and Japan offer slightly  
over one year of protected leave, while Australia,  
Canada, and Denmark provide one year of job-pro-  
tected parental leave.

In addition to job protection, many countries  
also provide paid leave. Sweden provides one year  
of parental leave at 80 percent of salary. In most  
of Canada, paid maternity benefits are available to  
the birth mother or surrogate mother for up to 15  
weeks if she has worked 600 hours in the last 52

weeks or since her last claim. The benefit rate is 55 percent of average insured earnings up to a year maximum of \$42,300. Parental benefits are available for up to 35 weeks and may be shared between partners. Since 2006, residents of Quebec are covered under a different plan, which includes benefits up to 75 percent of average weekly income and up to \$62,000 total.

Finland, France, Germany, Greece, New Zealand, Norway, Japan, and Spain offer at least six months of paid parental leave. Finland provides paid leave for the mother during the first 195 days, a minimum of 18 days for the father, and remaining days may be split for a total of 263 days. France provides 29 weeks of paid parental leave; Japan provides 26 weeks of paid maternity leave based on percentage of income; Spain provides 27 weeks of paid maternity leave; and Germany provides 14 weeks of paid maternity leave and extends parental childcare leave until 18 months.

Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal provide between four and six months of paid parental leave. Denmark provides 20 weeks of paid maternity leave, and within the first eight years of the child's life, each parent may take 13–56 weeks of paid leave at a percentage of salary. Austria, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland offer paid leave for four months or less. The Netherlands offers 16 weeks of paid maternity leave and an additional six months of unpaid parental leave for either parent. The United Kingdom provides six weeks of paid maternity leave, an additional 12 weeks of leave at a flat rate, and 13 weeks of unpaid leave available for use until the child turns 5 years of age.

Although Australia and the United States provide maternity leave in the form of job protection, they are the only industrialized countries that do not provide some form of paid maternity leave. Australia provides one year of unpaid leave for women who have provided at least one year of continuous service with their employer.

In the United States, legislation to protect employees from losing their jobs as a result of the birth of a child, caring for a sick parent, or extended leave to care for oneself had been introduced in the 1980s and the early 1990s and was vetoed by Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Eventually,

Congress passed the Family Medical Leave Act in 1993 (FMLA) and it was signed into law by President Bill Clinton. The legislation requires organizations with 50 or more employees to provide 12 weeks of unpaid leave for an employee who must care for themselves or an immediate family member. The legislation is limited to employees who work 1,250 hours per year and does not cover part-time workers with less than 25 hours per week. As a result, many U.S. workers are not eligible for unpaid leave under FMLA.

Those who qualify but who cannot afford time off without pay are also disadvantaged, and many mothers return to work prior to the 12 weeks because they cannot afford to take unpaid leave.

Maternity leave for adoption is also provided in many countries that provide maternity leave, including Scotland, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Some American companies also provide it.

**See Also:** Employment and Motherhood; Moms Track; Mothers Pensions/Allowances; Work and Mothering; Working-Class Mothers.

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