

Parental Leave Policies

How Policy Environments Shape Perceptions of
Workers Who Take Leave

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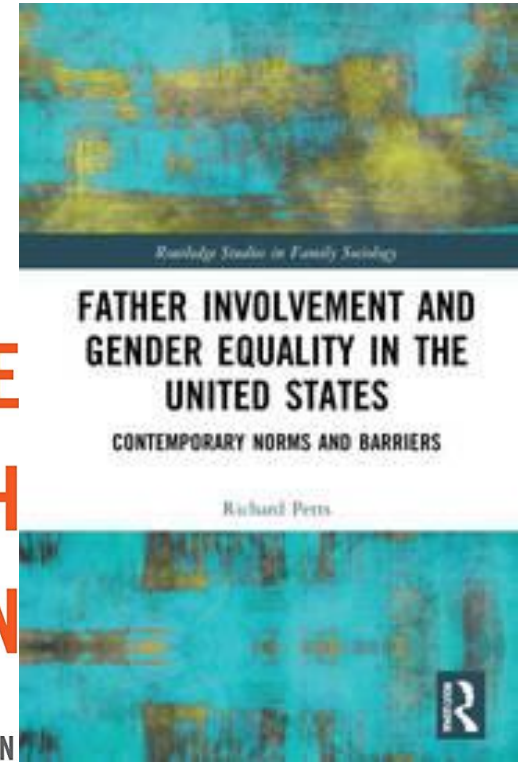
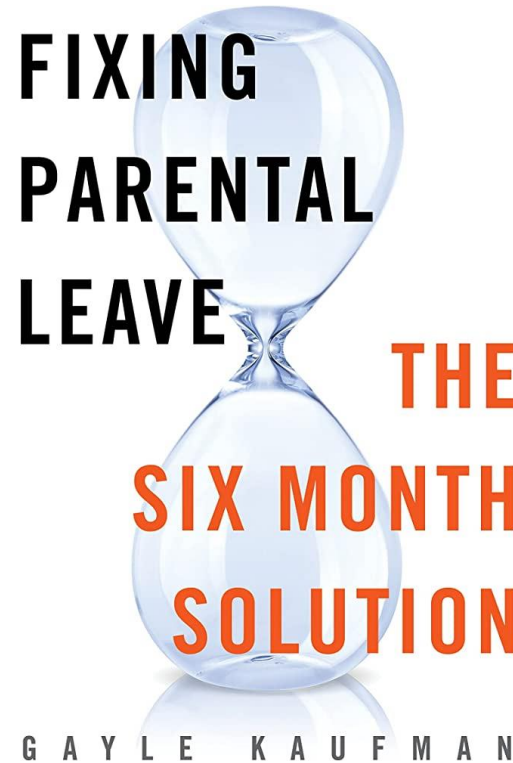
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Parental Leave

1. What is the impact of taking parental leave on perceptions of workers and their careers?
2. Can parental leave policy improve outcomes for working parents?



Barriers to taking parental leave in the U.S.

1.No federal paid leave policy

a. Only 12 states and DC have adopted paid family leave policies

b. Company policies vary widely

2.Unpaid leave through FMLA



A preference-action paradox

1. Workers want more paid leave—but don't utilize leave when available
 - a. Especially true for men

2. Why? Assumed negative workplace implications
 - a. Fear of the **commitment penalty**
 - i. Taking parental leave associated with workplace penalties—conflicts with ideal worker norms

Acker 1990; Williams 2000; 2013; Blair-Loy 2003; Correll et al. 2007; Benard and Correll 2010; Rudman and Mescher 2013; Horowitz et al., 2017; Petts, Knoester, & Li, 2020

Organizational policies and commitment penalties

1. Policy design—and signals it sends—vital
2. Workers do take more parental leave when the policies and workplace culture signal support
 - a. Is the commitment penalty attenuated in these situations?

Correll et al 2007; Gerson 2010; Horowitz et al. 2017; Petts et al. 2020; Pedulla & Thebaud 2022

Data: Survey experiment

1. Online survey experiment

a. $N = 1,715$

2. Described an expecting parent thinking of taking leave

a. HR rep. details company's policies

b. Worker makes decision about leave



Mize and Manago 2022; Weinberg et al. 2014; Mullinix et al. 2015; Peer et al. 2017; Coppock et al. 2018a; 2018b

Experimental manipulations: factorial design

1. Manipulations

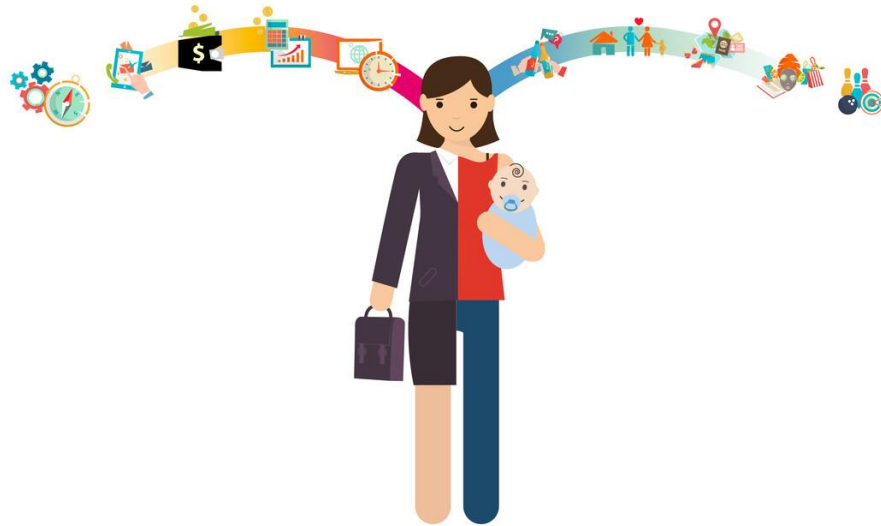
- a. Gender of employee
- b. Weeks of paid parental leave offered (0 – 12 weeks)
- c. Level of wage replacement (55% – 100%)
- d. Workplace support / parental leave is normative
- e. “Parental” leave policy vs maternity and paternity

2. Worker decision

- a. Weeks of paid leave taken (0 – 17 weeks)
 - i. Can include PTO

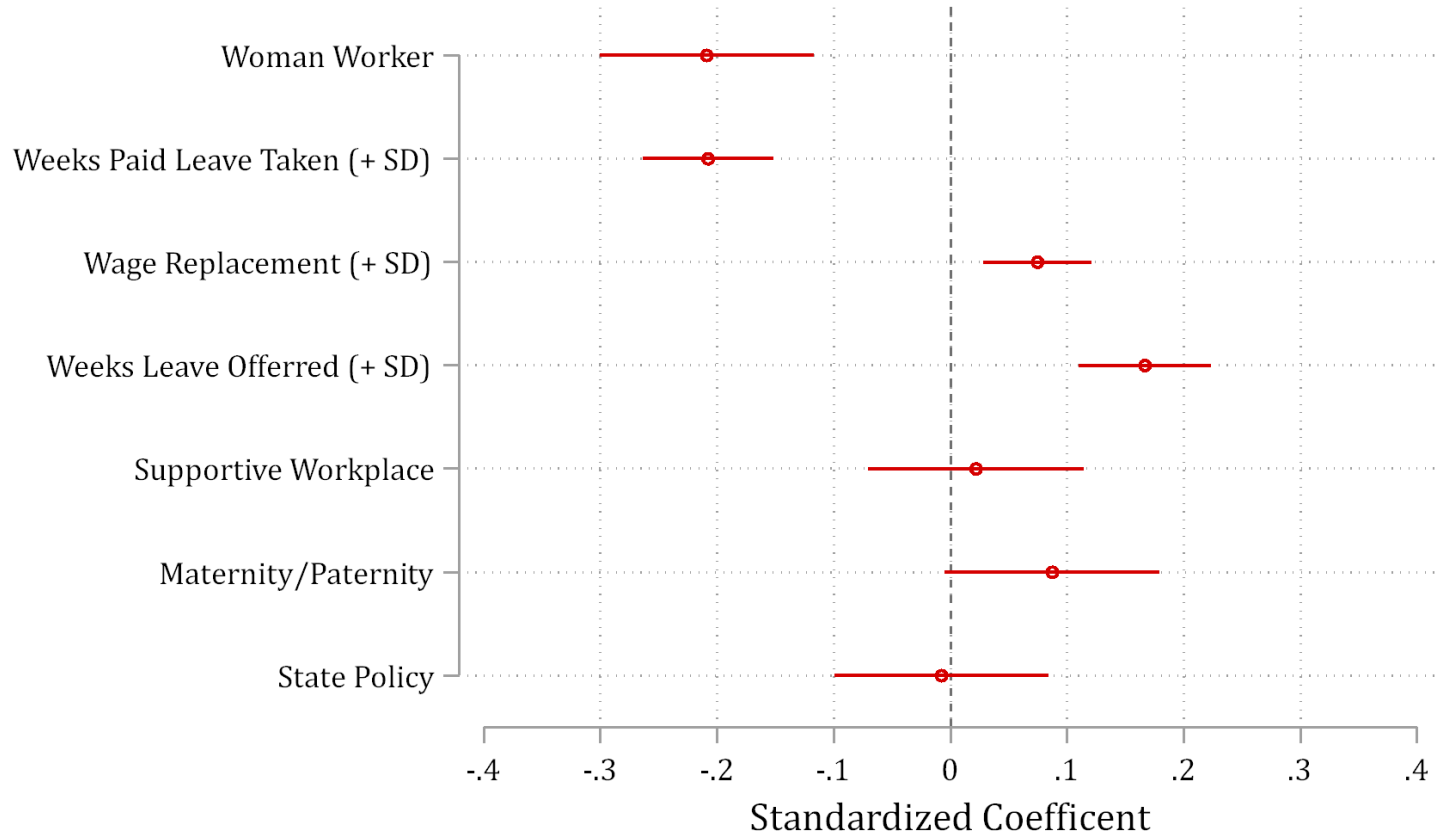
Dependent variables

1. Perceived commitment (DV) – 12 items ($\alpha = 0.85$)
 - a. Whether participant thinks worker will work overtime, come to work early, be loyal, be good worker, choose family over work, etc.



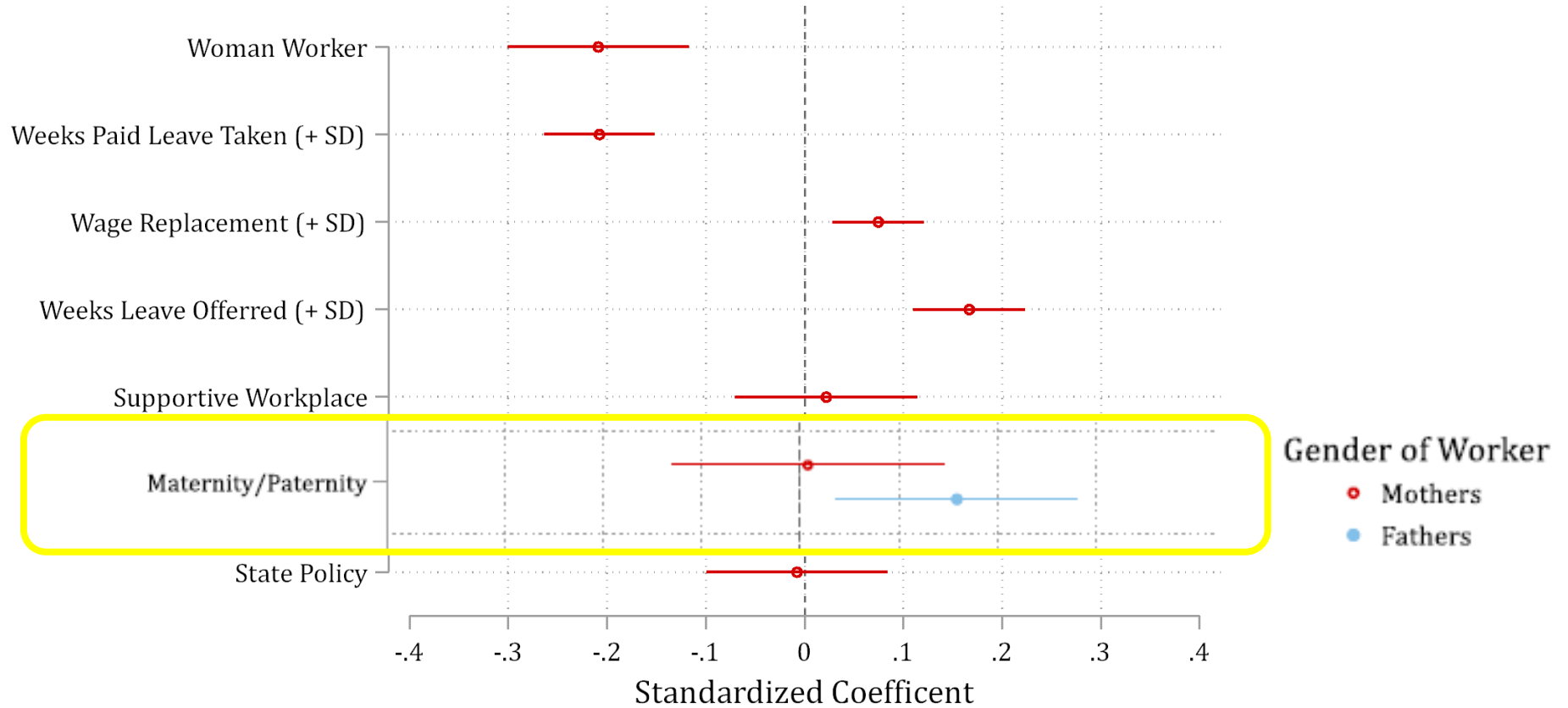
Blair-Loy 2003; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Benard and Correll 2010; Rudman et al. 2012

Figure 1: Effects of Experimental Conditions on Commitment Rating



Note: Positive effects indicate worker viewed as more committed

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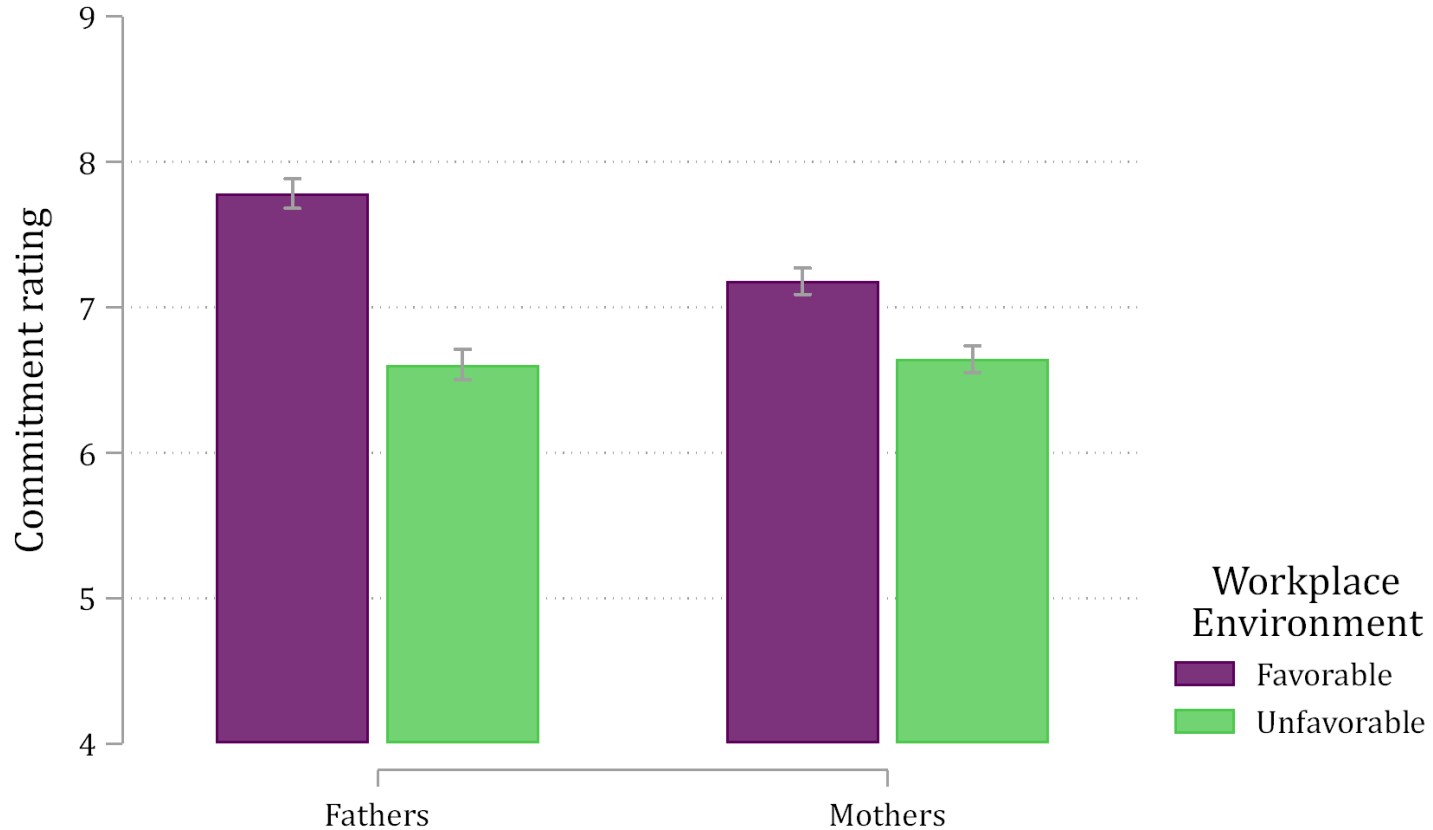
Holistic impact of policy context

1. Policies do not exist in isolation
 - a. Policy environments matter

2. Important to examine clusters of characteristics changing at once
 - a. Favorable workplace parental leave environment
 - b. Unfavorable (typical) workplace parental leave environment

Montez et al. 2010; Long 2016; Mize 2023

Figure 2: Perceived commitment by policy environment favorability
Differential effects for mothers and fathers



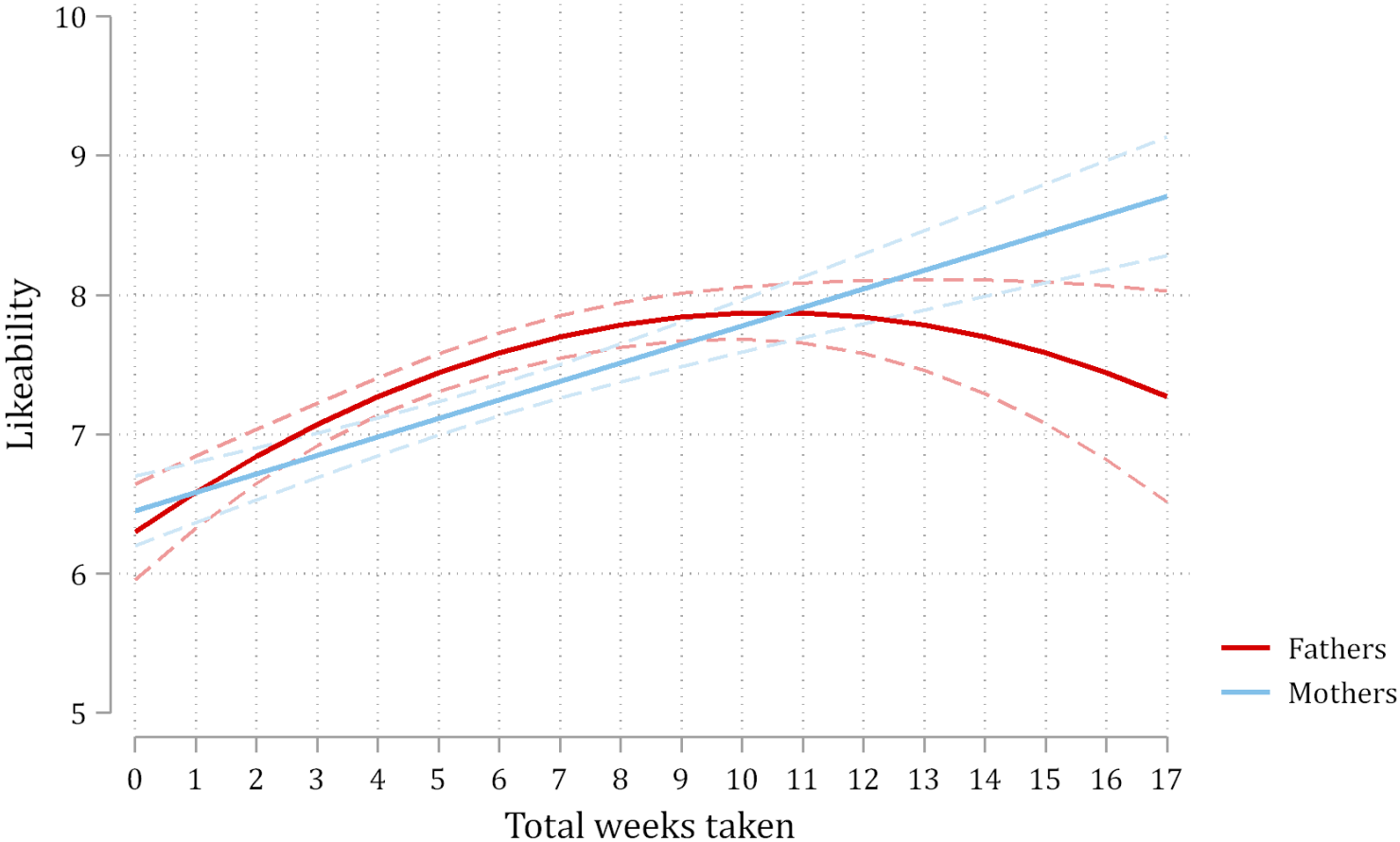
Effects Outside of the Workplace

1. How do decisions about parental leave impact perceptions of good parenting?
 - a. I.e., What should good parents do?

2. How do decisions about parental leave affect how we feel about a person?
 - a. Do we like them? Want to associate with them?

Mize, Kaufman, and Petts 2021; Petts, Kaufman, and Mize 2023; Kaufman, Petts, Mize, and Wield 2023

How likeable the parent is viewed, based on how much parental leave taken



Looking Forward: Diverse Family Forms

1. What about other diverse family forms?
 - a. Single parents; same-gender couples

Tucker Carlson mocks Buttigieg over paternity leave



Tucker Carlson exposed the unfortunate truth about paid leave



Pete Buttigieg defends paternity leave

"Every American ought to be able to get paid parental leave," he said.



RSF grant for follow-up studies

1. Russel Sage Foundation research grant through “Future of Work” initiative

- a. Funds two new studies ($N = 5,000+$) focusing on comparisons of:
- Mother and father couples
 - Two father couples
 - Two mother couples
 - Single mothers
 - Single fathers



Tilcsik 2011; Mize 2016; 2017; Kaufman et al. 2022

Questions?

1. Thank you!

2. Reach me at:

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Appendix

HR Meeting – Official Documentation

Employee Name:	Matthew S [REDACTED]
Employee Position Title:	Marketing Associate
Years with Company:	4
HR Employee:	N [REDACTED], Human Resources Officer
Date of Meeting:	August 12, 2018

PURPOSE OF MEETING:

- The employee (Matthew S [REDACTED]) requested a meeting about the company's parental leave policies
- At our meeting, Matthew said he and his wife were expecting their first child and he is considering taking leave after the baby is born. His wife also works and plans to take some time off after the birth
- Matthew's main questions concerned:
 - The policies about leave and pay during time on leave
 - What is typical in the company for new parents

NOTES:

- I informed Matthew of the company's parental leave policy and gave him a pamphlet with the full details. I emphasized the policy's main details:
 - Up to 7 weeks of paid parental leave after the birth of a child. Employees also have the option to supplement their leave using up to 5 weeks of accrued vacation and sick days (if available) to extend their leave.
 - For weeks of paid parental leave, employees are paid 100% of their regular salary
- He asked about what most new parents at [REDACTED] do and about how taking time off might be viewed by management. I told him:
 - Our company considers work-family balance to be very important and both HR and management always encourage employees to utilize the full benefits provided to them
 - Over 80% of new parents in our company take some time off

RESOLUTION:

I sent a follow-up email to Matthew a week after our meeting. He informed me that he planned to take all 7 weeks of paid parental leave and an additional two weeks for a total of 9 weeks off and return to work on a full-time basis after that

RSF grant for follow-up studies: RQs

1. Which types of workers—based on their gender, sexuality, and family form—are most/least supported as working parents?
2. Can policy environments reduce inequalities across parents?
 - a. I.e., Can good policy equalize support for all working parents?
3. Survey was just fielded