

Victoria Kuonen

Professor Mangini

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Relief of Mind

The United States is very advanced in technology and has given its people freedom of speech, religion, and voting. Italy and the United States are in the top 15 most productive countries (Moore). Despite being such an advanced country, America is lacking in its maternity leave time for new mothers. “It’s true the whole world does have paid maternity leave, except for two countries too poor to afford it – Papua New Guinea and this place” (Moore). If the whole world has paid maternity leave then shouldn’t America take notice and try to change with the times? In the United States women are often found working later into their pregnancies and rushing back to work. America should provide at least a 14-week paid maternity leave for its citizens.

The United States did not have any law regarding maternity leave until 1993. President Bill Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act, also known as FMLA (Neckermann). FMLA allows employees to take a twelve week leave for family or medical reasons. However, the law does not require the employers to pay during leave (Neckermann). Due to this law many employers do not offer paid leave. Many major companies offer little or no paid maternity leave. Walmart, which is currently has 1.2 million employees, offers no paid time leave (May). Hourly employees are offered six weeks leave with half disability pay (May). Ikea, Levi’s, Nordstrom, Apple, Bank of America, and Chase are companies with both maternity and

paternity pay leave (May). In a U.S. Department of Labor estimates that “only 12% of private sector workers have access to paid family leave through their employers” (Zargorsky).

Giving parents longer time off will help strengthen the mother’s mental and physical state. During child birth the woman’s body is put through a very traumatic experience; it requires time and rest to heal. Many women bleed for 4-6 weeks or possibly longer. The bleeding is so heavy most women use the hospital grade maxi pads (“22 Fascinating Pregnancy, Birth, and Newborn Facts”).

Despite being a highly developed country, the United States infants’ mortality rate is high – twice the rate of Sweden (May). The United Nations’ International Labor Organization called for nothing less than fourteen weeks of paid leave for all working women in 1952 (Zargorsky). Today America still requires only twelve. A 2007 analysis found that 98 countries require a minimum of fourteen weeks of paid leave for the birth of a child (Zargorsky).

Many parents are hurrying back to work after the birth or adoption of a child due to the lack of income (Ingraham). The cost to raise an American child is estimated to cost more than \$223,000 from birth to 18 years old, not including college (Ingraham). Parents are faced with a difficult time of added stress when receiving less income at a time when finances are high. Income drops by ten percent at the start of child and does not rise again until months after the parents are back at work (Ingraham).

Out of 185 countries the United States, Papua New Guinea, and Suriname provide no arrangements to pay women during maternity leave (Neckermann). Our neighbors to the north, Canada, women receive a full year of paid maternity leave (Ingraham). The time span of time off varies from country to country. Italian new mothers get five months of paid leave (Moore). In

the United Kingdom mothers are allowed 39 weeks leave (Ingraham). During this time, they receive almost all their usual pay (Peachey). The British also receive a shared paternal pay for 37 weeks (Peachey). In Norway, 91 weeks are granted to mothers after child birth. A couple countries offer more than a couple years. Finland moms are offered up to three years of paid leave (Ingraham). Mothers in Germany have leave until the child's third birthday (Nerckermann).

Like many topics there are a few cons to paid maternity leave. With employees taking lengthy leaves there is still work that needs to be done. Someone will need to replace the mother during her time of leave. Hiring a temporary employee will take time to train while work is still going untouched. Women could be discriminated against when pursuing new employment. Employers could start to turn down potential employees who are pregnant or could become pregnant. Baker and Milligan, research associates in economics, researched if longer paid maternity leave had any effects on the child's cognitive and behavioral development. The results showed that there are no positive effects on the child's development (Baker).

Offering paid maternity leave will give new mothers and families a peace of mind. Money becomes a big issue during the short months a mother is out of work. Adding money to the list of new stress factors could cause mental health on the mother. Taking care of the country's mothers and infants will only prolong our lives and development as a country. Longer time available for family leave will allow longer bonding periods. This might help lower the rate of women suffering from postpartum depression. For the country to be able to keep moving forward, people need to keep having babies. Laws are constantly being amended, so why hasn't the FMLA? Longer paid maternity leave will improve citizens happiness and fix one of the things we are lacking in as a developed country.

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