Benefits of Paid Leave on Child Well-Being

- Scholar Jody Heymann’s review of the literature found paid leave may support improvements across a range of sustainable development goals relevant to maternal and child health. Outcomes relate to poverty, health, gender equality, decent work, and inequality.

- Four-fifths of respondents who took paid leaves reported they were better able to care for a new baby. New mothers who take paid leave are more likely to take the minimum doctor-recommended six to eight weeks to recover from birth. Newborns whose mothers take 12 weeks of leave are more likely to be breastfed and receive regular check-ups.

- Paid parental leave can reduce infant mortality by as much as 10%, according to a 2011 study of 141 countries with paid leave policies.

- Paid parental leave can reduce the share of low birth weight births by over 10% and decreases the likelihood of early term birth by nearly 7%, with a particularly large impact on children the well-being of children born to children of unmarried and black mothers.

- Paid parental leave can also increase the rate and duration of breast-feeding. A 2011 study in California found that women who had paid leave breast-fed twice as long as women who did not take leave. Babies who are breast-fed, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are less likely to get a variety of infections and are also at lower risk for asthma, obesity and sudden infant death syndrome.

- One study found that children were 25.3% and 22.2% more likely to get their measles and polio vaccines, respectively, when their mother had access to paid maternity leave. Without paid leave, there was no increase in immunizations.

- The early bonds parents develop with their babies are foundational to future learning and relationships. Responsive parents let infants and toddlers know they are loved, safe, and cared for, which gives them the confidence to explore their environments, acquire new skills and abilities, and develop independence. Paid leave helps parents have the time they need at home to become a responsive caregiver to a young child, establishing a pattern that will promote the child’s long-term cognitive, social, and emotional development.

- When parents take time to care for their sick children, the kids have a speedier recovery, and the length of hospital stays is decreased by nearly a third.¹

- Access to paid family leave has also shown a decrease in child abuse related head traumas.

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Paid leave helps children by helping their parents.

- Paid leave increases time for treatment for post-partum depression. One in seven (15%) of women experience post-partum depression. Most receive no treatment. Women who took longer than 12 weeks maternity leave reported fewer depressive symptoms, a reduction in severe depression and improvement in their overall mental health.

- Mothers who are able to breast-feed are less likely to get breast cancer, ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes and heart disease, according to the CDC.

- Women who take paid leave after a child’s birth are more likely to be employed the following year and report increased wages than women who do not take leave. First-time mothers who utilized paid leave were 26.3% less likely to quit their jobs and 18.2% more likely to work for the same employer after the birth of their first child.

- Parents who took leave report lower levels of public assistance in the year following their child’s birth, when compared to those without paid leave.

- In 2010, a Swedish study found a mother’s future earnings increased 7% for every month of parental leave that her partner took.

- Studies show that seven percent of people who filed for bankruptcy cited the birth of a child as the cause. A significant number of bankruptcies also happen after a worker misses two of more weeks of work due to illness.

- Forty-eight percent of family caregivers who have to take time off to care for a family member lost income during that time.

- Those who received no pay during leave were more likely to be female, poorer, less educated or younger than those who got at least some pay.

- Family and medical leave insurance increases men’s role in caregiving by making it possible for them to be involved without the family taking a big financial hit. In Rhode Island, during the first year of its program, nearly one-third of all leave takers were men.

- Fathers in the U.S. who take longer paternity leave are more involved with their child’s care nine months later.

- In Iceland, where men and women each get 3 months paid leave and can share another 3 months, 90 percent of fathers of newborns take leave – and 3 years later, 70% of those couples share child care responsibilities.