



Paternity leave is paid or unpaid leave available to employed fathers upon the birth of a child. In some countries, paternity leave entitlement extends to same-sex partners, and to adoption of infants. It provides fathers with time away from work to help care for a new child, as well care for other children and help the mother.

Paternity leave is different to parental leave which is usually offered to both mothers and fathers and which tends to be for a longer period to care for the child, beyond the maternity or paternity leave entitlement. Fathers may also have access to parental leave or have the right to share parental leave with the mother.

Paternity leave entitlements vary by country in terms of eligibility, duration, benefit amount and responsibility for funding. Funding may be by employer contribution, employee contribution, government contribution, or a combination of any or all of these. Additional leave for multiple births, according to type of birth (natural/caesarian) and adoption may also be available. Increasingly, countries around the world at all stages of economic development either have or are developing paternity leave policies. The ILO has reported that 78 countries provide a statutory right to paternity leave.

Benefits of paternity and parental leave

All paternity leave is beneficial to fathers, but **paid** paternity leave delivers additional social and economic benefits. Research has shown that men are much more likely to use paternity leave when it is paid at an income replacement rate, is provided for fathers only (often referred to as 'ring-fenced leave', or 'use or lose' leave) and when their right to return to their job is protected.

Fathers benefit from access to paid paternity leave in a number of ways. Research shows they have lower levels of depression, they reduce risky behaviours such as smoking and drinking, and have stronger relationships with their children.

The health and well-being of babies is also improved when fathers are involved in caring from birth. There are improvements in on-time immunization, improvements in child cognitive development, lower infant mortality and prolonged breast feeding. As children grow, they benefit from the enhanced one-on-one time with fathers, through stronger relationships and increased performance at school.

Women benefit significantly from paternity leave in terms of additional time to recuperate from childbirth, time to engage in extended breastfeeding and enjoy increased emotional support.

Paternity leave has also been found to reduce parenting stress, post-partum depression, maternal mortality and intimate partner violence.

In all countries, women spend more time on unpaid work than men. Access to paid paternity leave has been found to produce a more equal distribution of unpaid work and shift social norms around shared caregiving. The sharing of unpaid work allows women more time to spend on paid labour market activities or further learning opportunities. A 2016 World Bank study found a positive relationship between paternity leave and women's employment, including a 6.8% increase in the number of female workers at firms with mandated paternity leave.

In the workplace, changed gender norms about parenting can reduce stigma around taking time off for childcare and promote more equal hiring practices. Providing both parents with access to paid parental leave can also improve household income and economic security. Women's improved access to employment alleviates poverty and allows for increased investment in child health and education. When mothers work, daughters are more likely to stay in school longer, seek out work and earn higher wages. McKinsey Global Institute has calculated that if women's and men's workforce participation were identical, global GDP could increase by \$28 trillion by 2025.

Paternity leave in Myanmar

The Burmese Social Security Law of 2012 entitles employed fathers who are covered under the law to 15 days of paid paternity leave. To be eligible, employed fathers are required to have made at least six months of social security contributions in the 12 months prior to the child's birth. Paternity leave entitlements are paid at 66.67% of the 12-month average wage of the father. An uninsured spouse is also entitled to a maternity bonus. Temporary workers in formal employment in Myanmar are also covered by this Social Security Law. If an employee is not covered by Social Security Law, the employer is responsible for covering paid leave.

Policy challenges

Sydney Southeast Asia Centre | Dr Elizabeth Hill
T +61 2 9114 1481 | E elizabeth.hill@sydney.edu.au
W sydney.edu.au/southeast-asia-centre

Although Burmese fathers are entitled to paid paternity leave, traditional gender roles, statutory prerequisites and the dominance of informal employment pose significant challenges to fathers' eligibility and uptake of the provision.

Traditional gender roles remain strong in Myanmar's patriarchal society, shaped by the Burmese concept of *hpon* which signifies men's superiority over women and his role as breadwinner and head of the household. Men's work is viewed as more valuable than women's, and women, in general, experience low social status. Burmese society views a woman's role as primarily reproductive, with responsibility for the care of family members. With gender boundaries sharply defined, individuals who deviate from traditional roles often experience negative responses from their community. Political awareness of gender issues is lacking due to Myanmar's strong patriarchal culture.

A large informal economy poses a significant challenge to the extension of Myanmar's formal paternity leave provisions. In Myanmar 82.5% of workers are informally employed. Men employed in the informal economy are not covered by Social Security Law and ineligible for paternity leave entitlements, leaving the majority of households unable to benefit from the economic and societal gains that paternity leave provides. Extending paternity leave benefits to these men remains a challenge for the Burmese government.

Professor Marian Baird is Head of the Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies and Director of the Women, Work and Leadership Research Group in the University of Sydney Business School. Associate Professor Elizabeth Hill is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Economy. Her research focuses on gender, work and care in both developed and emerging economies. This research was supported by Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian Government.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY