



* Paid Parental Leave Experience for Women in Corporate America *



Table of contents

Introduction	03
Methodology and key takeaways	05
Preparations, concerns and challenges <u>before</u> parental leave	07
Return to work, reintegration and retention <u>after</u> parental leave	11
<u>Manager impact</u> and effectiveness in managing the parental leave process	16
<u>Organizational impact</u> and effectiveness in managing the parental leave process	20
Conclusions and <u>opportunities for employers</u>	25
Note on the paid parental leave experience for men and further research	27

Introduction



In the past few years, there has been a significant uptick of new and improved paid parental leave policies in the United States. [72% of Fortune 500 companies](#) now have some form of paid parental leave, a significant increase from a decade ago. [85% of companies](#) are expanding their paid leave policy now, or have done so in the past two years.

There are many reasons why companies introduce or improve their paid leave policies, and there's increasing momentum around paid leave as a critical human right in the U.S. Research shows that these policies are good for [parents, children, and society at large](#). They also contribute to [higher productivity and increased employee loyalty](#). And, paid parental leave policies [help attract and retain talent](#), especially women. Furthermore, [surveys show](#) that paid parental leave policies are one of the top benefits that employees care about, rising to the #1 most important benefit for Gen Z.

Despite all of these benefits of longer paid leave policies - there are still many open questions about **how to implement these policies in a way that truly supports business continuity and the careers of working parents, especially mothers.**

It can be very difficult for employees to return to work successfully after taking extended time away from work for parental leave. Parental leave is the most vulnerable career moment for many women, and the turning point [when the gender wage gap widens the most](#). As more men are offered longer paid parental leave, [they are not utilizing it](#) for fear of the career repercussions of taking time away from work.

In fact, recent research suggests that parental leave may actually be exacerbating the gender wage gap by punishing the women who take longer parental leaves and negatively impacting their earnings over time.

Parental leave also has an organizational impact, beyond the individuals taking leave. Their teams often struggle to absorb the work, especially in the absence of sufficient coverage planning.

* **To be clear - researchers agree that the benefits of longer paid leave far outweigh the challenges.** And, most of the challenges associated with longer paid leaves are fully addressable through intentional organizational and management practices. These challenges would likely also be addressed more effectively if the U.S. had a national paid leave mandate that enforced and funded paid leave in a way that both supports employees and employers.

And so, as more companies provide longer paid parental leaves and government support for this movement continues to grow, we decided to investigate the downstream impacts of those leaves, on the individuals taking leave, their teams, and their organizations. Specifically, we studied the experiences, challenges, opportunities, and impact of paid parental leave policies on the long-term careers and business results of those who take this leave.

Most important - we want to identify actionable takeaways and recommendations for companies and HR leaders.

To do this, we surveyed 2,752 women who returned from partially or fully paid parental leave in the past three years in the United States, and we asked them 42 questions about their parental leave experience.

 **In this study, we found that:**

- **Access to paid parental leave is universally and overwhelmingly appreciated and valued** - and is oftentimes a key reason why women specifically choose to work at their company
- **The impact of parental leave on career progression is a top concern** - especially for those who have access to fully paid leave, have access to longer leave, earn higher incomes, and/or work at larger companies
- **Half of parental leaves result in team burnout** - highlighting how parental leave can impact more than just the individual going on leave, especially without thoughtful planning
- **Manager action (or inaction) is the most important factor in determining career and business outcomes of parental leave** - effective managers are associated with a myriad of other positive outcomes including (a) strong coverage planning in advance of leave, (b) successful re-onboarding after the return to work, and (c) increased productivity, engagement, promotion rates and retention of new parents

This study sheds qualitative and quantitative light on the problems and solutions that new mothers in a corporate setting face when they return to work from various lengths of leave. And it provides tangible suggestions for how employers can retain these women and advance them through the workplace without falling into cycles of employee turnover, team burnout, or discrimination.

Methodology

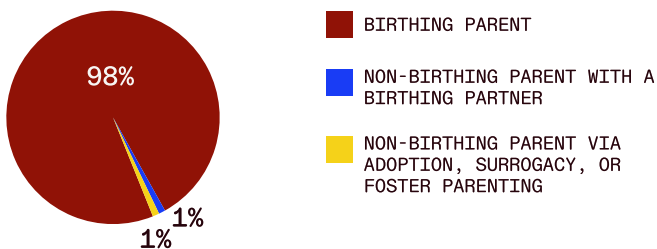
Survey Methodology

This survey was designed by Parentaly and promoted via LinkedIn. The results were cleaned and analyzed by an independent research firm, [Edge Research](#), which regularly conducts research projects for non-profit organizations, for-profit institutions, and government agencies. **We filtered the data to focus on the critical mass of respondents: 2,753 women in the U.S. who had access to and took at least some paid parental leave within the last three years, at companies with greater than 100 employees.** All differences noted between different segments of respondents in this paper are statistically significant.

Who Participated

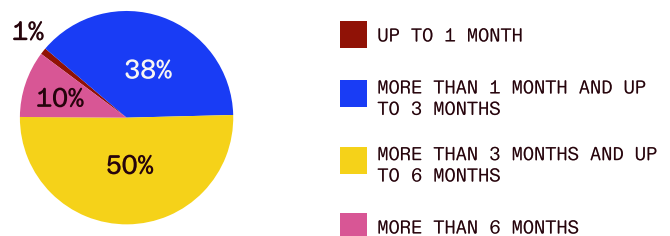
PARENT TYPE

Most respondents were birthing parents



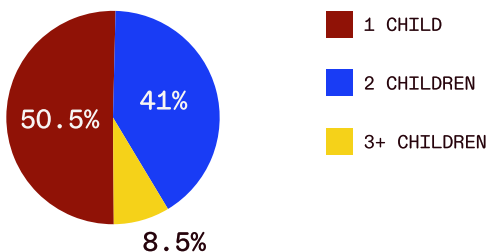
LENGTH OF LEAVE

Most respondents took between 1-6 months of parental leave



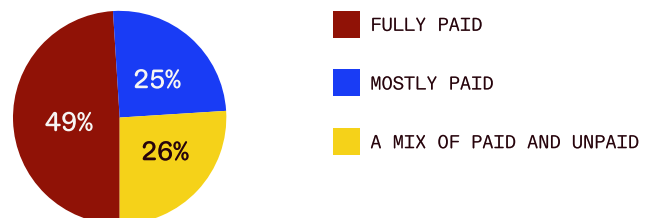
NUMBER OF CHILDREN

Half the respondents had 1 child and the other had had multiple



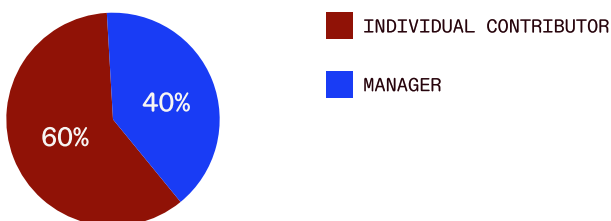
ACCESS TO PAID LEAVE

Half the respondents had fully paid leave, and half had mostly paid or a mix of paid and unpaid leave



ROLE LEVEL

Respondents were split between individual contributors and managers



SIZE OF COMPANY

Respondents worked at a mix of different company sizes



Respondents work in a broad cross-section of industries including: technology, law, consulting, finance, media & entertainment, healthcare, education, retail, manufacturing, and public sector.

Key takeaways

The biggest takeaways for human resources, policymakers and researchers



TALENT ACQUISITION

Strong parental leave policies are a must-have for any organization seeking to attract female talent.

94% of mothers would consider their company's parental leave policy when evaluating a job offer today, stressing the importance of a strong parental leave policy to companies' broader talent acquisition strategy.



CAREER CONCERNS

For women with access to fully paid leave, continued career progression is the top concern, above childcare and health concerns.

This concern increases for those who take longer leave, have a higher income, and/or work at larger companies.



RETENTION RISK

Women may leave their companies for other work opportunities if they don't get appropriate support before and after parental leave.

Given that new parenthood is an extremely vulnerable career moment, new parents pose a massive retention risk for companies. 73% of new parents consider leaving their company at least "occasionally" and one-third leave within 18 months of their return to work. Of those who leave, only 4% leave the workforce.



TEAM IMPACT

Over half of all parental leaves result in team burnout, creating a ripple effect across the organization.

60% of new mothers say their organization is less than "effective" in supporting parental leave transitions and 89% want their organization to invest in the experience further.



MANAGER INFLUENCE

Managers have an outsized influence on the overall parental leave experience and can significantly improve career and business outcomes.

Although career progression is a top concern for expecting parents, only 20% receive support from their manager in this area – and 69% of returning parents don't find it easy to have conversations with their manager about what they need to be successful as a working parent. Those with an effective manager are over 2.5x more likely to have a positive parental leave experience in the workplace than those without.

Preparations, concerns and challenges before parental leave

68%

of respondents who received fully paid parental leave reported concern about the impact of parental leave on their career progression.

The process of expanding a family involves a wide range of personal and professional considerations. In recognition of this phase of life and the associated challenges, many companies have introduced benefits to reduce the stress of family-building and personal challenges associated with new parenthood. This includes support like providing premium healthcare options, concierge medical services, fertility assistance, adoption support, financial wellness, support for filing for leave, and backup childcare.

Monitoring maternal and infant health will always be critical for women during pregnancy, childbirth, and post-partum. But interestingly, our survey found that the top concern for expecting mothers with access to fully paid leave isn't childcare or healthcare. It's that their paid parental leave will dampen their career progression.

Career progression

The opportunity to advance one's career through promotion, pay raise, expanded scope, acquiring new skills, receiving more mentorship/guidance, or achieving other desired professional goals

For all employees - no matter how we cut the data to analyze different segments by industry, function, company size, or income of employee - healthcare was consistently ranked as their lowest concern. Perhaps this is due to the fact that many survey respondents likely have access to company-subsidized health insurance, which may minimize their concerns about healthcare.

Finding affordable childcare was a major concern for everyone, but especially for employees who did not receive fully paid parental leave, as compared to those who received fully paid leave.

RESULTS BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF LEAVE

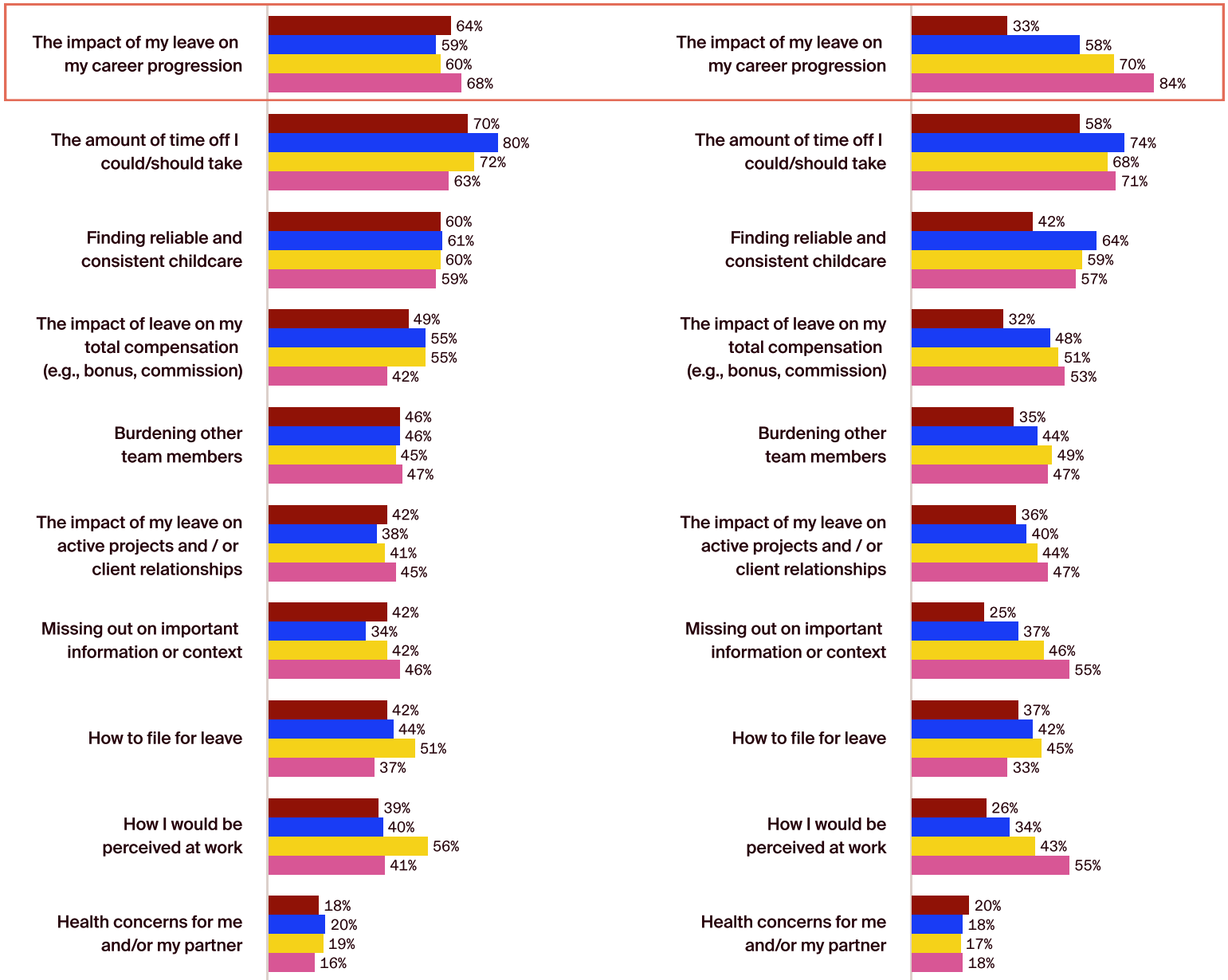
Which of the following concerns did you have about going on parental leave?

■ TOTAL ■ MIX OF PAID AND UNPAID ■ MOSTLY PAID ■ FULLY PAID

RESULTS BROKEN DOWN BY ANNUAL SALARY

Which of the following concerns did you have about going on parental leave?

■ <\$50K / YEAR ■ \$50K - \$100K ■ \$100K - \$250K ■ \$250K+



I've had 3 parental leaves now from my 3 children and all 3 have set me back directly and indirectly in career progression, potential income earnings, promotions, etc. —Anonymous

49%

of respondents reported concern about the impact of leave on their total compensation (e.g. bonus, commission).

When we analyzed the data further, we found that concerns about career increase, and rise to #1, for those who have access to fully paid leave, take longer leave, make over \$100,000 per year, work at larger companies, and/or work in managerial positions.

- For **companies of all sizes**, the top two concerns for mothers taking leave were (a) future career progression and (b) questions about the amount of time off they could or should take
- Women with the **longest paid leaves** were more concerned about the impact of parental leave on their career progression compared to women who had shorter (< six months) leave
- **Women in managerial roles** were more concerned about the impact of parental leave on their career progression compared to individual contributors

It's important to note that the concerns that women report can vary significantly depending on their income level. While career progression is a concern across all income levels, its relative weight increases for women who make \$100,000 per year or more. For example - only 33% of women who make under \$50,000 per year report concerns with career progression as compared to 70% of women who make \$100,000 to \$250,000, and 84% of women who make over \$250,000 per year.

The research showed clear and actionable data that can counter the concerns that women frequently face prior to leave. Specifically, a strong coverage plan can alleviate many of the career and workplace challenges associated with taking leave. Coverage plans can improve confidence on how the work will be carried out and subsequently resumed upon return.



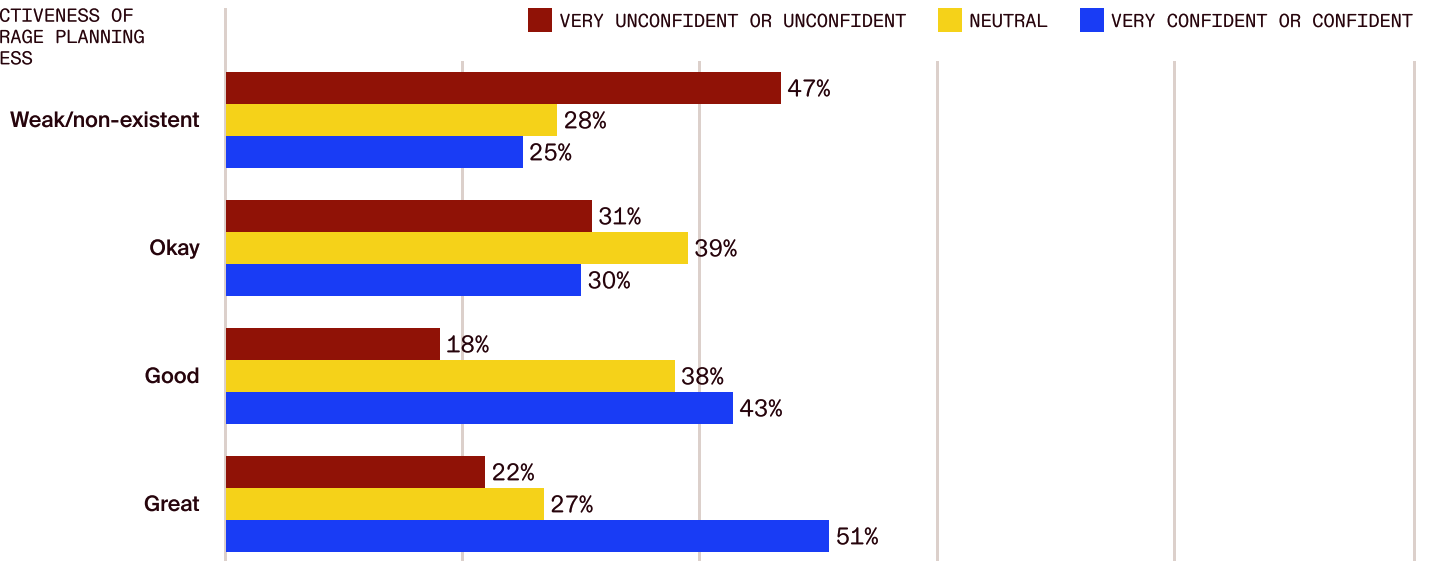
TAKE ACTION

Those who had a “great” coverage planning process are over 2x more likely to feel confident about their future career trajectory than those who had a weak or non-existent planning process.

The policy was in place, but no one wanted to take time out of their day to transition me off / on... so it could've been great but it was disheartening. —Anonymous

Looking back, how confident did you feel about your future career trajectory as you went into parental leave?

EFFECTIVENESS OF
COVERAGE PLANNING
PROCESS



ADVICE & RECOMMENDATIONS

Preparation ahead of parental leave can address many of the most common concerns that women have before they go on parental leave. A strong coverage planning process sets the expecting parent, their colleagues, their clients, and their manager up for success in their absence. It can minimize disruption when the employee goes on leave, and create a realistic understanding between employer and employee of what can be achieved before the leave and on what timeline.

There are many matters that a parent who is about to take parental leave – and their employer – might have to think through, including:

- Announcing a pregnancy to managers, colleagues, vendors and clients
- Determining who will cover for the individual going on leave and how to allocate the work
- Finishing and handing off work and projects before the parental leave start date
- Navigating performance reviews, career conversations and promotion cycles
- Communicating information about doctors visits and other important appointments
- Managing anxiety about being away from work
- Filing the appropriate paperwork and understanding state and regional legislation regarding parental leave
- Developing contingency plans for scenarios where the child arrives early

Return to work, reintegration and retention after parental leave

24%

of return-to-work transitions are not fully announced to the relevant team members.



Returning to work after parental leave is a critical transition period that can significantly impact a new parent's experience, engagement, and future career trajectory. While much attention is given to the length of parental leave, what happens after employees return often remains overlooked. The challenges faced during this phase are diverse and deeply felt, ranging from inadequate re-onboarding support to poor workplace dynamics. In addition, parents returning to work often struggle with managing and integrating their responsibilities and demands as a parent with those at work.

To address these challenges, more progressive companies have begun to institute “return to work after parental leave” policies or programs. These

programs can include phased returns, flexible schedules, and reintegration support.

Still, the prevalence of formal return-to-work programs is relatively low. Additionally, most companies lack clear guidelines for managers on how to effectively re-onboard a returning parent and support systems for employees returning from parental leave. This gap often results in inconsistent experiences for employees, and as we found in our survey, transfers the onus of the experience onto the manager of the employee returning from leave.

66

It's important for companies to understand that support in the transition back to work is just as important as paid leave. I've had three leaves and I was never supported coming back. It was a surprise to the team that I returned and no one proactively helped to get me back up to speed. —Anonymous

99

71%

of returning parents have difficulty balancing work and life priorities, far above concerns about childcare, healthcare, and finances.

A positive return-to-work experience after parental leave begins with the first day back at work. Unfortunately, one out of four new parents report that their return date was a surprise to their colleagues. This results in poor morale and has real negative business consequences. If coworkers are not prepared to re-onboard the new parent, confusion ensues.

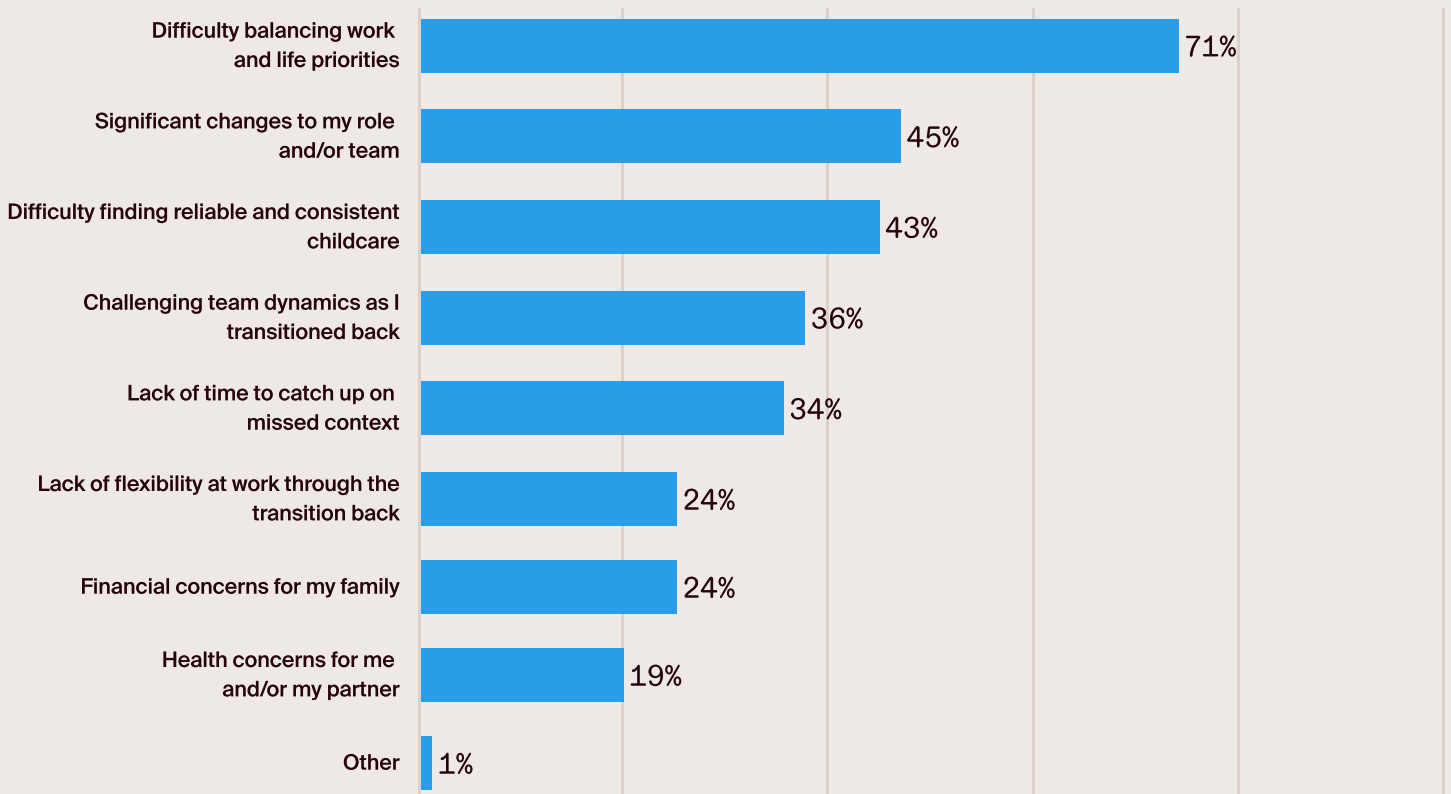
Nearly half of new parents find the transition back to work to be more difficult than anticipated, with issues such as difficulty balancing work and life priorities, role changes, and challenging team dynamics topping their concerns.

66

The transition from being at home with a child to going back to work has been the hardest thing I've experienced in my life. No one knows what I'm going through. No one understands I'm up all night with a screaming baby and at work trying to function on 2-4 hours of non consecutive sleep. When I returned to work, the pumping room situation was not figured out—the room was covered with dry crusted milk, and there was only one room for two women to share (and I work for a Fortune 500 company). And one of my coworkers, who doesn't have a child, suggested I pump in the bathroom. People compare my child to them having to raise a dog or puppy. It's demoralizing, humiliating, and downright frustrating. —Anonymous

99

Which of the following challenges did you experience in the first 6 months after you returned from parental leave?



Unsurprisingly, the length of an employee's leave had a significant impact on satisfaction with their parental leave experience and return to work. Those with **very short leaves** tend to struggle more with **finding reliable and consistent childcare** and **lack of flexibility at work through the transition back**. Those with longer leaves tend to struggle more with **significant changes to their role and/or team**.

Parents who take longer leaves tend to be more satisfied with their overall leave experience but are more likely to experience a negative impact on their careers.

To quantify the career impact of longer vs. shorter parental leaves, we asked new parents about any positive career outcomes they experienced in the first 18 months they were back at work after their leave and found that those who took longer leaves were less likely to get a raise or promotion within 18 months of their return.

2x

Parents who take longer leaves are up to 2x more likely to be satisfied with their overall parental leave experience.

45%

After their return, 45% of all new parents say their leave negatively impacted their career progression.

66

Knowing I was going to receive six months of my full salary helped tremendously during the postpartum period. One less stressor.

—Anonymous, New York Metro Area, works in tech

33%

Employees who take more than six months of leave are 33% more likely to believe that their parental leave negatively impacted their career progression vs. parents who take less than six months of leave.

38%

Those who take more than six months of parental leave are 38% less likely to get a raise and half as likely to get promoted within 18 months of their return as those who take less than six months.

99



73%

of new parents consider leaving their company at least "occasionally."

1/3

of new parents do leave their jobs within 18 months of their return to work.

4%

of those who leave, only 4% leave the workforce.

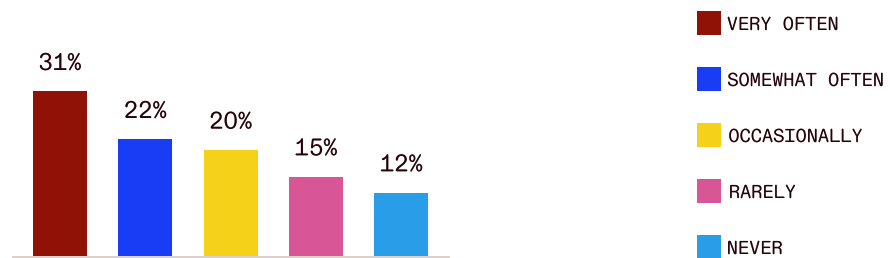
The survey also revealed how big of a retention risk returning parents can be for companies, and why it's important for companies to invest in making the experience successful. While 94% of new parents initially return to work after parental leave, the challenging return-to-work environment compels most of them to at least consider quitting.

One-third of women with access to paid leave do end up leaving within 18 months of their return, but contrary to popular belief, they're most often leaving for another job. Only 4% leave the workforce altogether.

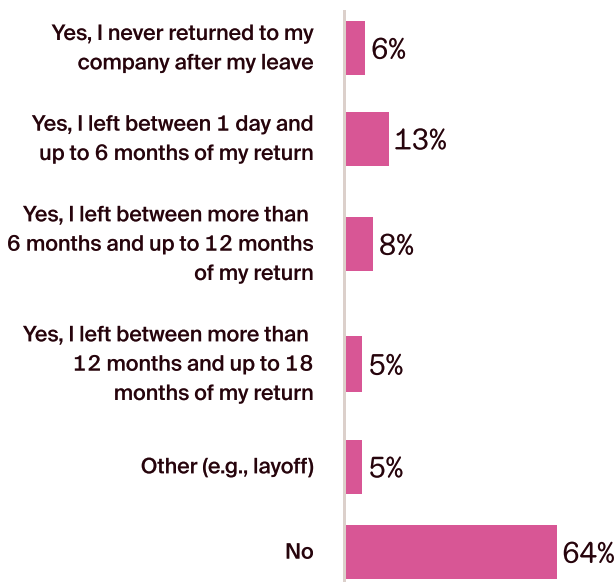
The silver lining is that there are clear and tangible actions that can make the return-to-work transition easier and improve retention outcomes. For example, the effort to develop a strong re-onboarding process for the new parent reintegrating at work at least doubles and often triples their ease of transition.

Furthermore, those who are more confident about their future trajectory are more likely to stay at their company longer, indicating the potential for more career support for new parents.

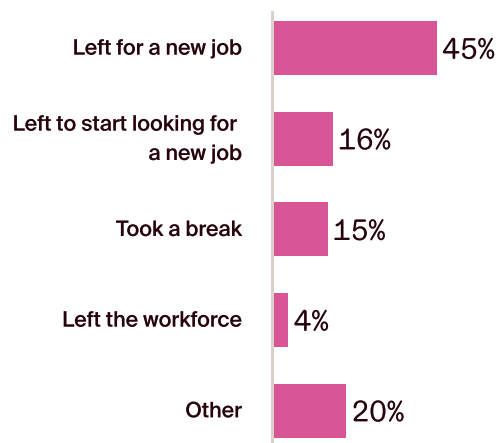
How often did you consider leaving your company within 18 months of your return?



Did you leave your company within 18 months of your return to work?



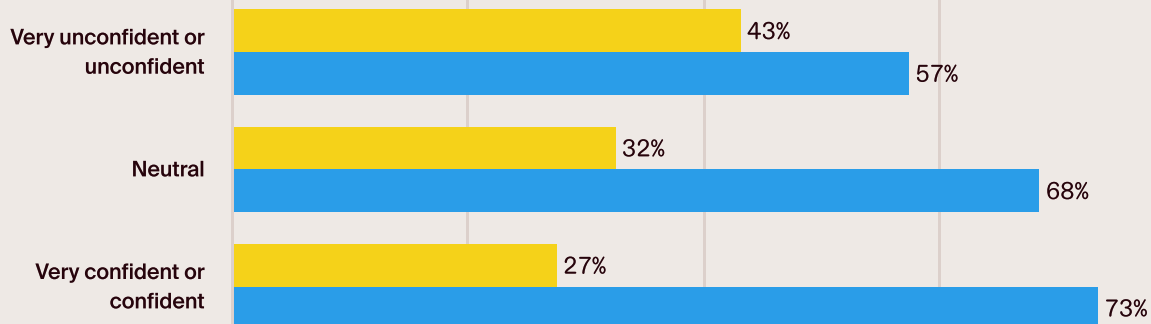
What did you do after you left your company?



Did you leave your company within 18 months of your return to work?

CONFIDENCE ABOUT FUTURE CAREER TRAJECTORY

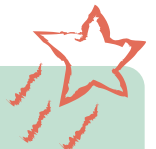
LEFT WITHIN 18 MONTHS STAYED AT THE COMPANY



Confidence about future career trajectory is associated with longer retention at the company after returning to work.

* * TAKE ACTION

Those who have a strong re-onboarding plan are 3x more likely to find their return-to-work easier than expected, compared to those who don't have a re-onboarding plan.



ADVICE & RECOMMENDATIONS

Returning to work after time away to adjust and bond with a new family member can be jarring for new mothers and their employers – but it doesn't have to be. Employees and managers should consider several factors to ensure a smooth transition back, including:

- Reminding team members that the parent is returning to work
- Establishing a plan for remote vs. office work
- Discussing proper resources and scheduling around pumping, if applicable
- Getting up to speed on business developments or project advances
- Meeting with colleagues or clients who can shed light on changes in the organization
- Revisiting career goals and developing a plan to pursue them
- Discussing boundaries and flexibility for the new parent

Manager impact and effectiveness in managing the parental leave process

66

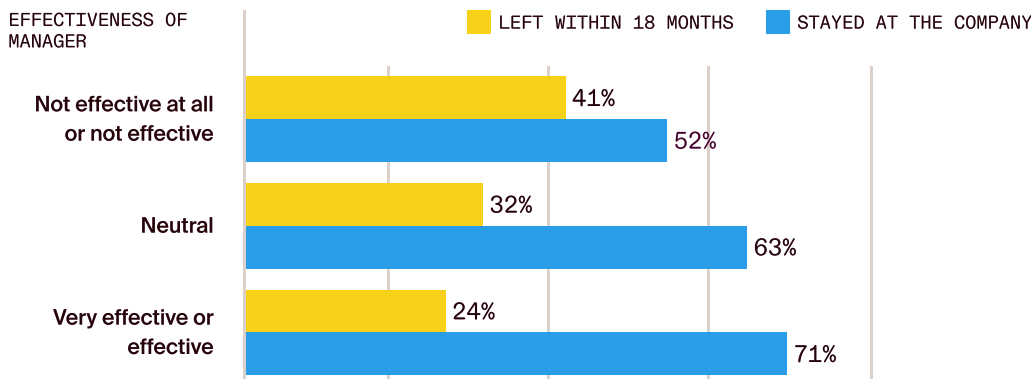
I've felt very conflicted in honoring my new role as a parent, and working mom, as well as having career ambitions. My manager has been very supportive but at times he's over-emphasized my being a mom: 'She's a mom first, I love that. Her greatest accomplishment this year was becoming a mom!' It's sweet, but it also makes me feel pigeon-holed. He hasn't said the same about my colleague who became a dad a few months after me. I want to be noticed for my contributions, not that I'm a mother. —Anonymous, 31, Portland, Oregon, works in tech

99

One of the most consequential findings from our survey is how critical managers are to the overall parental leave experience and retention of new parents. The research indicates that managers likely play the most significant role in either making the experience positive and productive or difficult and unplanned.

Employees who reported their manager as “effective” or “very effective” in supporting them through parental leave reported better career and business outcomes, less bias, higher retention, stronger planning and re-onboarding processes and higher overall satisfaction.

Did you leave your company within 18 months of your return to work?



6x

Employees with an “effective” or “very effective” manager are nearly 6x more likely to have a strong re-onboarding plan, compared to employees of ineffective managers.

1.7x

Employees with “effective” or “very effective” managers are 1.7x more likely to stay at the company after returning to work, compared to employees of ineffective managers.

I knew from the day I told my manager I was pregnant and she responded with 'oh, okay,' that parental leave was going to be a struggle. Upon return, I was left out of important conversations so as not to 'overwhelm me' when I was more than ready to jump in. My manager assumed my capacity rather than ask me about it. I was on a promotion trajectory and was severely diminished. Bad manager mixed with bad policies, and my career stalled. —Anonymous, 36, New York City

Over half of expecting parents don't get support from their manager in building a coverage plan.

71%

of returning parents don't have a sufficient re-onboarding plan from their manager when they return-to-work.

69%

of returning parents don't find it easy to have conversations with their manager about what they need to be successful as a working parent.

37%

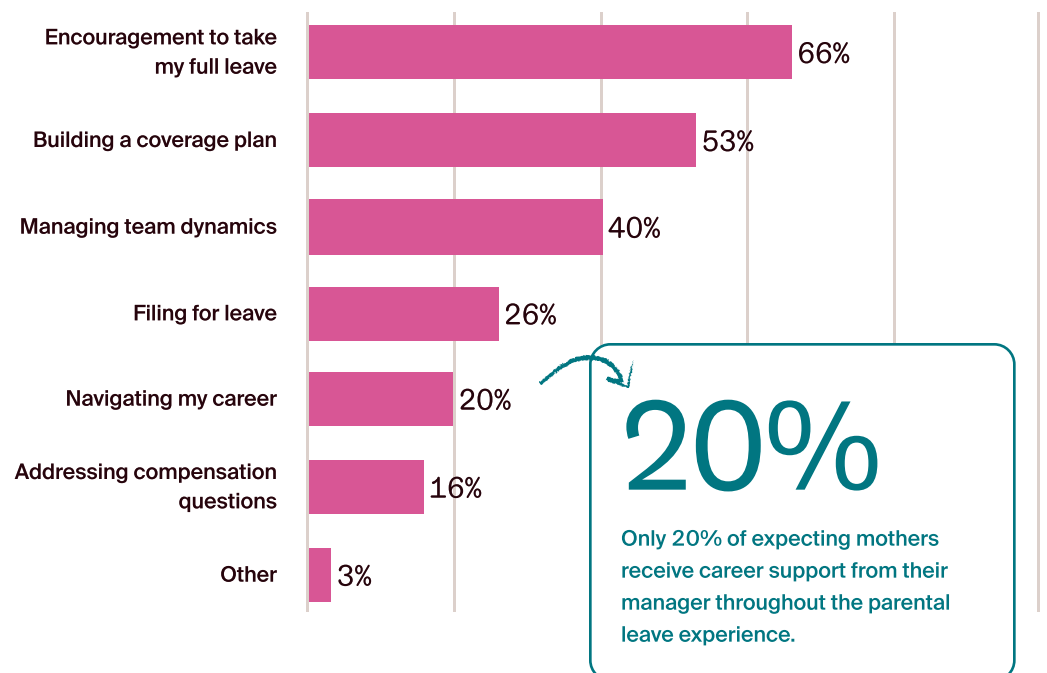
of parents say they faced bias or discrimination at some point during their parental leave transition. Those who faced bias or discrimination are nearly 2x more likely to leave the company within 18 months of their return.

One of the biggest opportunities for managers is to improve their communication through the parental leave experience, for example by being cognizant and mindful of potential biases, creating a comfortable environment for working parents to articulate their needs, and advocating for new parents' continued career success.

There is also a meaningful gap between where expecting and new parents need the most professional support in the leave journey and the manager support they receive.

For example, the survey demonstrated that **although continued career progression is a top concern for expecting mothers, it's an area where managers are providing the least support.** Similarly, many expecting parents don't get support building a coverage plan prior to leave and most don't have a sufficient re-onboarding plan after their return.

In which of the following areas did you get support from your manager (prior to leave)?



66

When I returned there was a complete lack of information about resources available for pumping mothers. In addition, my manager was supportive, but she is not a parent, so she struggled with knowing exactly what I needed support on. It would have been helpful for her to receive some resources about how to welcome a new parent back to work. —Kory, 35, Chicago, Illinois, works for a Fortune 100 company

99



Some managers will think in advance about their employees' needs before and after parental leave. Those who don't might have more trouble motivating and engaging their employees taking leave.

When we compare people who reported "positive" vs. "negative" parental leave experiences, we observed important differences in how they rated the effectiveness of their manager, underscoring the importance of the manager's role in shaping the parental leave experience.

66

My boss was under a ton of pressure and placed unrealistic expectations on how I could catch up on significant business changes that happened while I was out. —Anonymous, 35, Midwest region

99

*
* TAKE ACTION

Those who have a “positive” parental leave experience are 3x more likely to have an effective manager, compared to those who don’t have a positive experience.



ADVICE & RECOMMENDATIONS

The manager relationship is especially critical through the parental leave journey. Managers can set the tone for how the leave is handled before, during, and after parental leave – and this has far-ranging organizational implications that can positively or negatively ripple out across an organization. There are several areas that human resources teams can consider training managers on to significantly reduce friction, including how to:

- Spot unintentional biases about returning mothers, i.e. assumptions that they want to stay home with the kids instead of attending a work happy hour or travel for business
- Delegate work and communicate with enough time to prepare everyone for the parent’s return from leave
- Handle the relationships between the returning parent and team members who took on more work in their absence
- Proactively manage questions and concerns from the parent about bonus, commission, salary milestones, workload, scheduling and future ambitions within the company
- Have open and honest conversations with the returning parent about what they need to be successful, including conversations about work-life boundaries

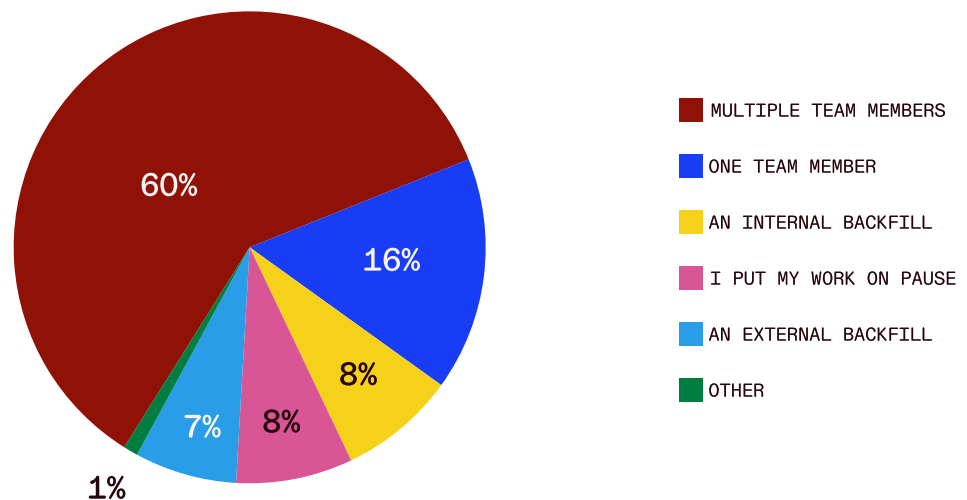
Organizational impact and effectiveness in managing the parental leave process

Although most research and discussion on the impact of paid parental leaves focuses on the individual taking leave (and rightly so!), there has been minimal focus on the impact of parental leaves on teams and organizations.

As longer parental leaves become the norm, the potential for business disruption and team burnout is higher. Especially because in most cases, the work of the individual taking leave is covered by their internal peers. In a minority of extreme situations, other team members will even quit their role, largely due to their experience through their team member's leave.

Most leaves are covered by multiple team members or other internal resources within the organization. This is true even for leaves greater than six months.

Who covered most of your work during your leave?



52%

of all parental leaves result in team burnout.

Burnout

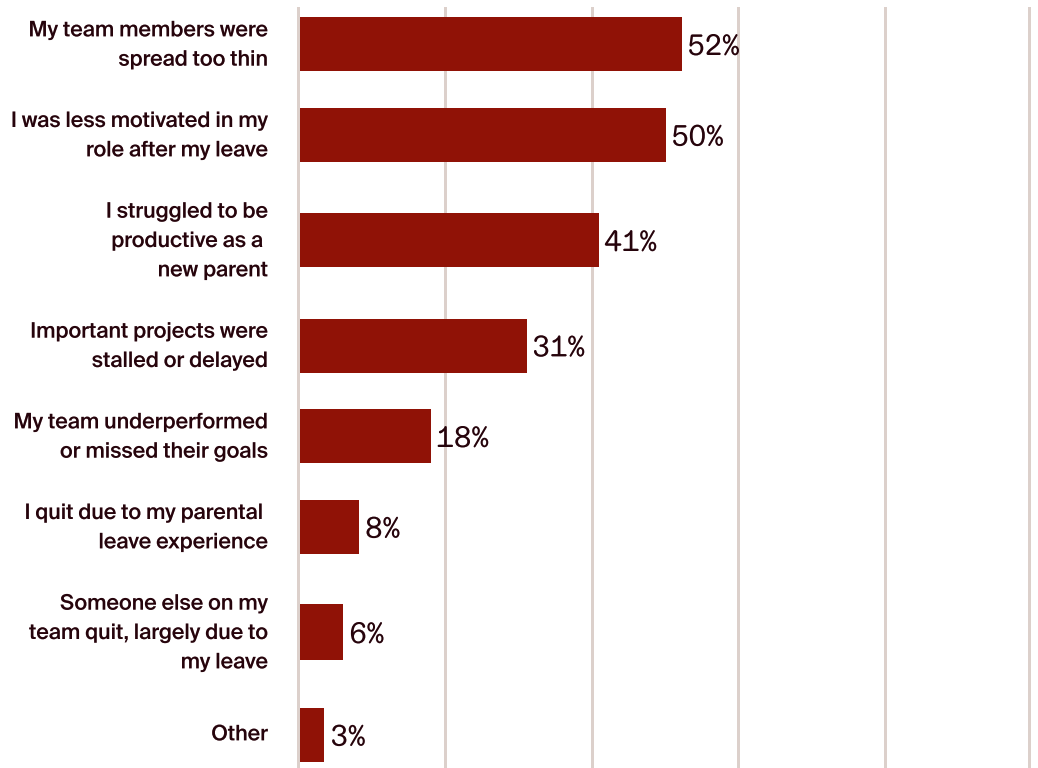
physical or mental exhaustion from taking on additional responsibilities, decreased work performance as a result of being spread very thin

66

During my leave, the reporting structure changed and I had a new direct manager that I was returning to who never outreached me to connect during my leave. Upon my return to work, my new manager was more concerned for the rest of the team who was burnt out covering my leave that she piled on twice the normal workload of my role within 3 days of returning. —Employee in education, New Hampshire

99

Was there any negative impact to the business as a result of your leave?



66

My company's parental leave was extremely generous and for that I am grateful because this was during the height of the pandemic. The support I received from my team, however, was not great and that informed my decision to leave later. —Anonymous

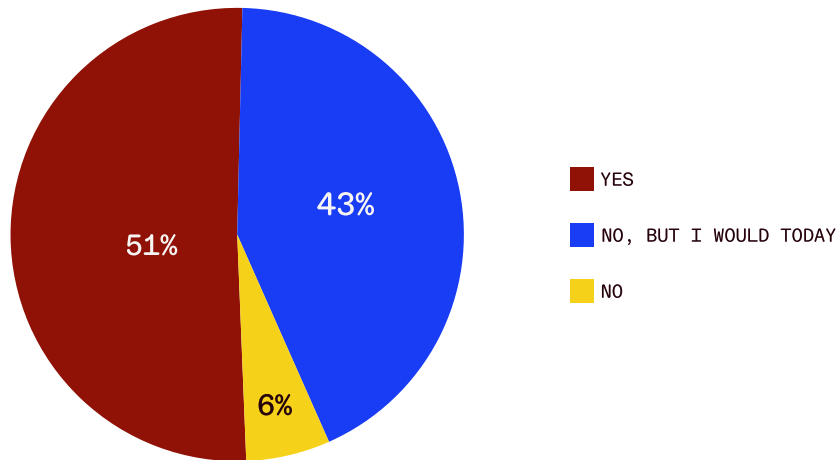
99

Expansive access to paid parental leave is critical for attracting and retaining employees, and many companies have made an incredible leap forward by investing in their parental leave policies.

94%

of parents would consider their company's parental leave policy when evaluating a job offer today.

Did you consider your company's parental leave policy when evaluating your job offer?



66

My experience with taking parental leave was unique - I started at my company just 8 weeks before taking my leave (31 weeks at date of hire). I was upfront and firm in that I couldn't even consider this role if I would not be eligible for their full paid leave policy, and they rose to the occasion.

—Amanda, works in professional services

99

66

I left the company I worked for because of the ridiculous and outdated parental leave policy (or lack thereof). My current company has great parental leave culture/benefits, etc. and even though I don't plan to have another child, this is very important to me.

—Gina, Omaha, Nebraska

99

89%

of parents believe it's important for their organization to invest more in their parental leave experience.

However, the majority of parents say their organization is less than effective in supporting the transition and 89% believe it's important for their organization to invest more. This includes 87% of those parents who had a positive experience themselves.

66

I am very lucky to have had two fully paid parental leaves. My first was 12 weeks in sports tech, and before I left and when I returned I felt penalized for being a mom—even though I was the top performer on my team. It was a huge piece of where my disengagement started. My second leave, also 12 weeks paid at a non-profit, was the entirely opposite experience. I was celebrated and encouraged to announce my pregnancy. I received a promotion and pay increase shortly after returning. It only increased my already high engagement.

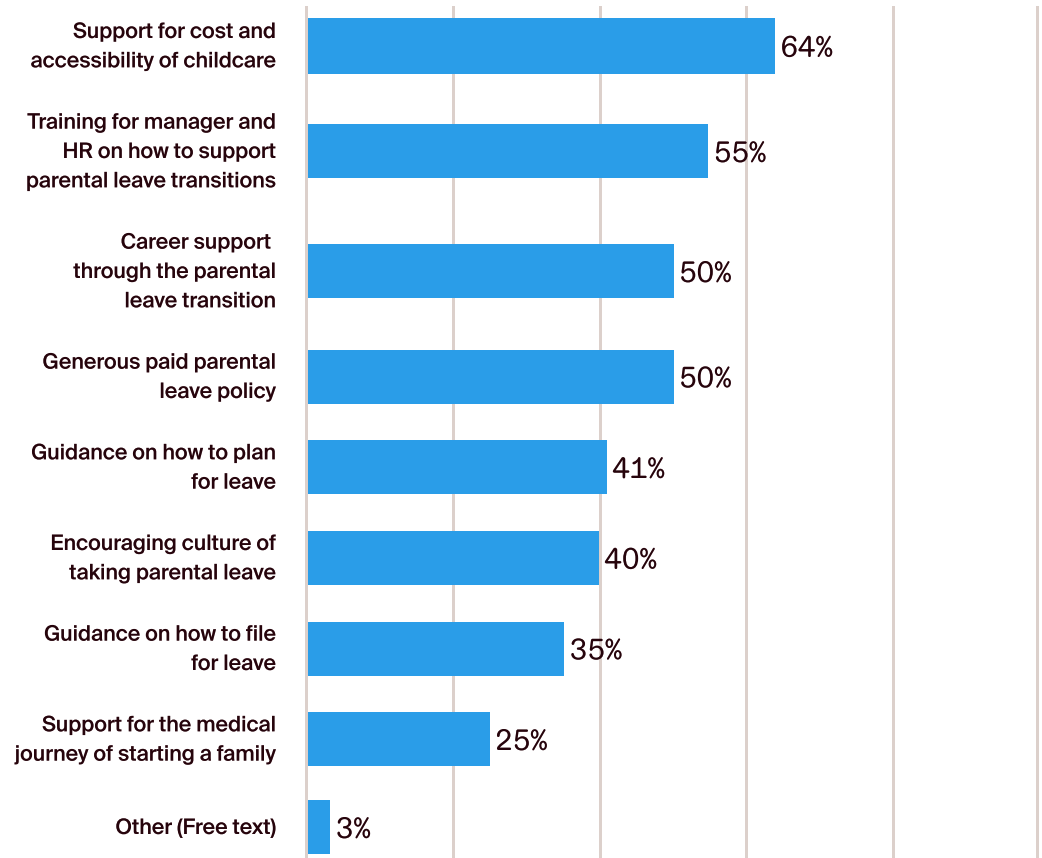
—Anonymous

99

60%

of new parents say their organization is less than "effective" in supporting parental leave transitions.

What would have made the parental leave experience at your organization better?



* TAKE ACTION

New mothers are seeking more employer investment in childcare support, manager training, career support, and generous leave policy.



How can organizations support new mothers better? Parents want more childcare support, generous paid leave, and more comprehensive parental leave programming that includes career support for the individual taking leave and training for their manager and HR teams. And those who left their company within 6-18 months wanted training for managers and HR *even more* than they wanted support for cost and accessibility of childcare.

Ideally, comprehensive parental leave programming results in more informed leadership and tangible plans that make the pre-leave planning and subsequent return more approachable and manageable.

* *
* TAKE ACTION

Those who have an effective manager, a strong coverage plan, and/or a strong re-onboarding plan are significantly *more* likely to find their organization as a whole to be effective in supporting parental leaves.



ADVICE & RECOMMENDATIONS

To avoid team burnout, managers and HR teams together must consider how to delegate work during leave, tapping into different talents and skill sets among individual team members to maximize output and efficiency during leave. Before and after someone goes on parental leave, they should evaluate:

- Who is best suited to take on different projects that the employee on leave is managing
- Whether the employee going on leave needs to train people in taking over various projects
- How to help soon-to-be parents fill out proper paperwork and understand their leave without detracting from their time spent working
- How to assess burnout, stress, or confusion among team members while an employee is on leave
- How to re-onboard the individual returning from leave in a way that is empowering, motivating, and feasible, without creating resentment among team members

To ensure a consistently supportive parental leave experience for the expecting mother that complements their paid leave policy, companies should consider comprehensive programming. Such programming may include childcare support, career support, and parental leave training for managers and HR teams.

Conclusions and opportunities for employers



66

I had the best parental leave experience anyone could have asked for. For my first child, I had 12 weeks and came back to a terrible new manager who was a bully/micromanager. Fast forward a few years, I have the best manager in the world. I had a coverage plan in place 2 months in advance, onboarded this person for seamless coverage and took 6 months total (5 months 100% paid and 1 month vacation).

I came back fully supported to ease in and work remotely. Night and day difference from my first parental leave. My biggest fear in taking parental leave as a senior manager was that my career would suffer. But I got promoted within 3 months and bonus within 7 months of returning to work. I wish everyone had a leader like mine." –Vanessa, Chicago, Illinois

99

There is a significant body of research that shows how adequate healthcare, childcare, and paid leave are essential to women's participation in the workforce and the success of working parents.

Our study shows that while paid parental leave is critical to women's decision of where to work, the experience of taking leave is also important. 89% of employees who had access to paid leave are seeking more employer investment in the parental leave experience.

And it's worth it for organizations to pay attention, especially as longer paid parental leaves become the norm through a combination of state-level mandates and company benefits. New parents are in a vulnerable place when they return, and how their organizations choose to design the experience will influence their productivity, motivation, and retention.

73% of new parents consider leaving their job at least occasionally, and one-third leave within 18 months, most for another job. The leave experience also impacts more than the individual who is taking leave. Over half of parental leaves result in team burnout, and other common implications for the business include stalled or delayed projects and missed goals.

However, the data points to actionable solutions that can significantly improve the leave experience and result in positive career and business outcomes.

These include:

- **Coverage planning support and guidance:** Those who have a great parental leave coverage plan are over 2x more likely to feel confident about their future career trajectory than those who have a weak or non-existent plan.
- **Re-onboarding planning guidance:** Those who have a strong re-onboarding plan are 3x more likely to find their return-to-work easier than expected, compared to those who don't have a re-onboarding plan.
- **Manager empathy and training:** Those with an effective manager are over 2.5x more likely to have a positive parental leave experience in the workplace than those without, and they are more likely to stay at the company longer.

Organizations can develop in-house resources, training, and coaching to support the parental leave experience and/or seek outside support or solutions. And when they do – the results are astounding. **67% of women who had "very positive" experiences returned to work equally or more engaged than before their parental leave (compared to 37% of their peers who had poor experiences).** And women who had "very positive" experiences were up to 1.6x more likely to be "committed" or "strongly committed" to their careers after their return.

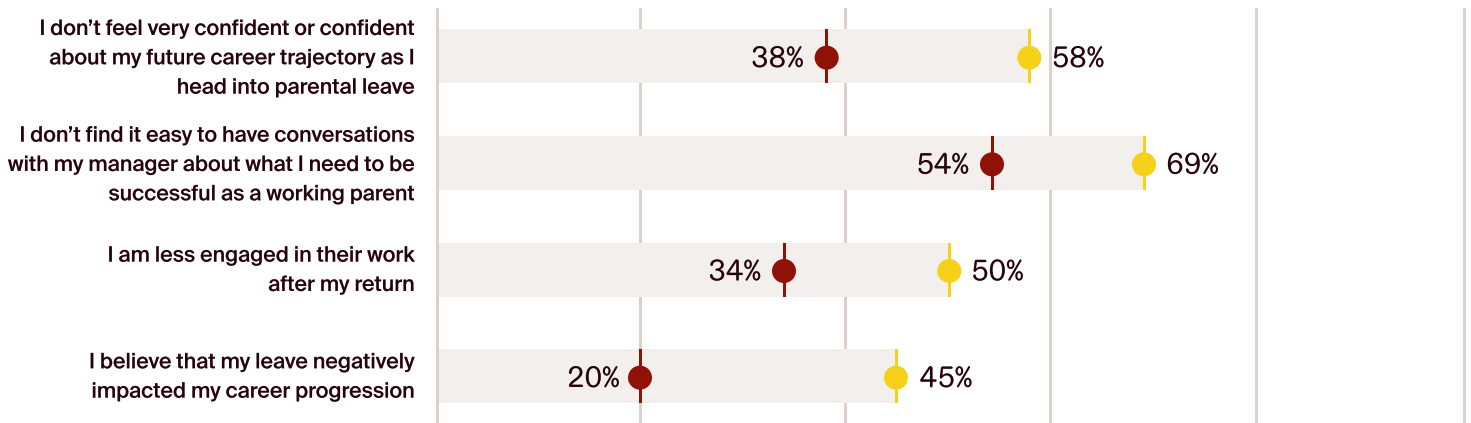


Note on the paid parental leave experience for men and further research

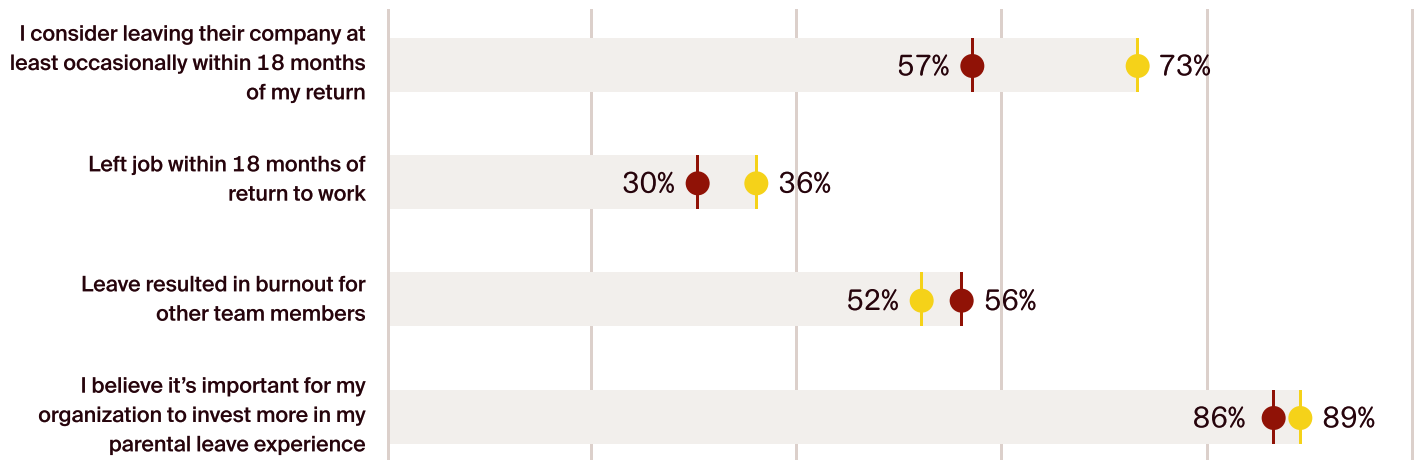
In running this survey, we also collected responses from 291 U.S. men who also had access to and took at least some paid parental leave within the last three years. While the sample size was too small to include in this study, the data shows that while certain challenges and concerns are more specific to women, most challenges and concerns related to the paid parental leave experience are more than a “women’s” problem and instead, felt universally across all parents. It’s worth noting that men in the U.S. tend to take shorter leaves, which influences their overall leave experience (the near majority of men surveyed took 1-3 months of leave and 100% took less than 6 months, whereas the majority of women took 3-6 months of leave and 99% took between 1-12 months).

● MEN ● WOMEN

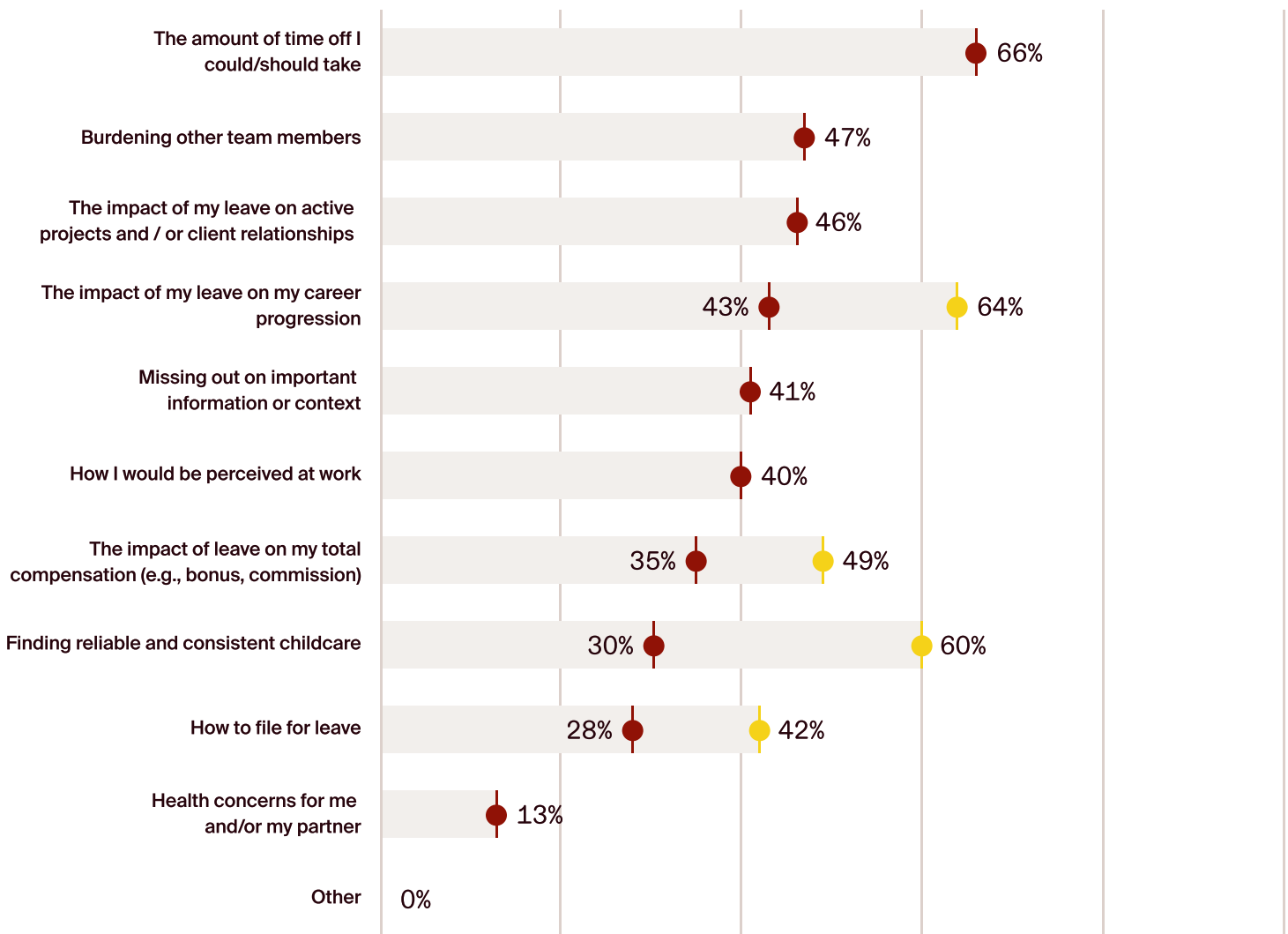
Initial findings: Employee experience



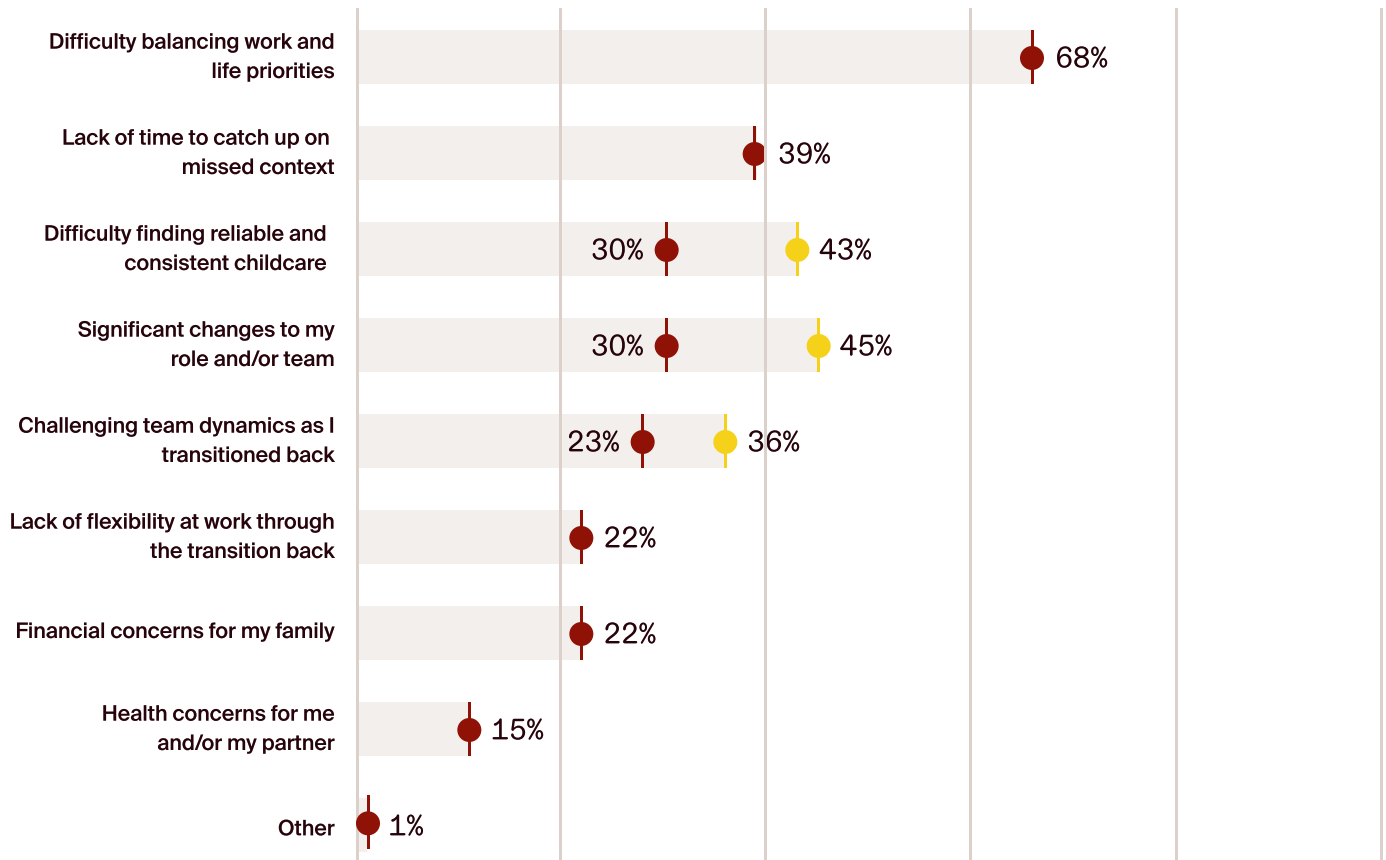
Initial findings: Business impact



Which of the following concerns did you have about going on parental leave?



Which of the following challenges did you experience in the first 6 months after you returned from parental leave?



Further research opportunities: There are many opportunities to further continue this research on the paid parental leave experience. Future topics of exploration may include a deeper dive into paid leave experience for men in the U.S. and for working parents in other countries outside of the U.S.

About Parentaly



Parentaly is a comprehensive program offered as an employee benefit to support expecting and returning parents, as well as their managers, through the parental leave journey. We've empowered tens of thousands of employees in co-designing successful leave experiences. Expecting parents (including birthing and non-birthing parents) have access to a structured career coaching program from pre-leave to return-to-work. Managers receive training and guidance on how to build an empathetic parental leave experience and tactical steps to take through each phase of the leave journey.

To learn more, visit <https://www.parentaly.com/> or contact us at hello@parentaly.com. We'd love to hear from you!

