

# Catching up with the rest of the world: Meeting the needs of working families

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# Project on Global Working Families

## Research Program Components

- Mapping Global Trends: over 170 countries.
- Systematic Review of Legal and Policy Framework: examination of policies in 177 nations.
- Statistical Analysis of National Household Surveys: 55,000 households from the United States, Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia.
- Studies of companies in North America, Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia and Australia.
- In-depth Ethnographic Studies: more than 1,000 in-depth interviews in the United States, Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

# Working Families: How Does the U.S. Measure Up Globally? and Why Does It Matter?



# Research Background

- The Work, Family, and Equity Index is the first venture to systematically define and measure successful public policies for working families in 177 countries. The evidence-based study uses extensive data from independent research, government sources, academic institutions, professional organizations, and a wide range of international bodies including the UN, OECD, the World Bank, and the ILO.
- The Work, Family, and Equity Index is part of the Project on Global Working Families, the first program devoted to understanding and improving the relationship between working conditions around the world and family health and well-being.

# Paid leave for Childbearing and Childrearing

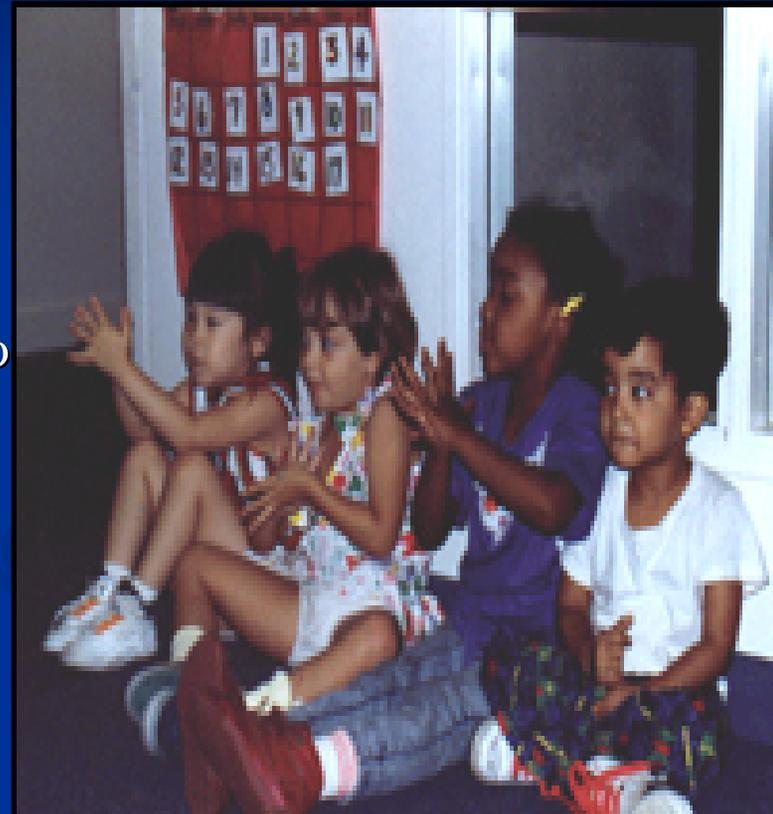
## Why Does it Matter?

- Improves children's health outcomes by making more time available to parents to provide essential care for children, contributing to lower infant mortality and morbidity rates.
- Improves economic conditions of families by increasing the long-term employment and earning prospects of working parents, thereby increasing job security and ensuring consistent income.
- Benefits employers by reducing staff turnover, which can lower recruitment and training costs and improve workers' productivity.
- Is enshrined in two widely accepted human rights protocols: the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (155 countries), and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (ratified by 185 countries).

# Leave around childbearing

## Where does the U.S. Stand?

- Out of 173 countries studied, 168 countries offer guaranteed leave with income to women in connection with childbirth; 98 of these countries offer 14 or more weeks paid leave. The U.S. provides no paid leave for mothers.
- The only other countries studied that provide no leave with income to mothers are: Lesotho, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, and Swaziland.
- 65 countries ensure that fathers either receive paid paternity leave or have a right to paid parental leave; 31 of these countries offer 14 or more weeks of paid leave. The U.S. guarantees fathers neither paid paternity nor paid parental leave.



# Support for Breastfeeding

## Why Does it Matter?

- Breast-feeding results in lower infant and child mortality, with studies finding a 1.5 to 5-fold lower relative risk of mortality among breast-fed children.
- A higher illness and fatality rate has been documented among bottle-fed children in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as well as in developing countries.
- Breast-fed children have lower rates of gastrointestinal infections, respiratory tract infections, otitis media, meningitis, and other infections, as well as better average cognitive development.

# Support for Breastfeeding Where does the U.S. Stand?



- At least 107 countries protect working women's right to breastfeed; in at least 73 of these the breaks are paid.
- One hour or more per day is provided in 100 of the countries guaranteeing the right to breastfeed.
- The U.S. does not guarantee the right to breastfeed, even though breastfeeding is proven to reduce infant mortality.

# Paid Sick Days for Employees and Family Members

## Why Does it Matter?

- Parents play a crucial role in caring for their children's health care needs. Parental involvement helps children recover more rapidly from illnesses and injuries. Parental involvement is equally critical in the case of children's mental health.
- Parents who have paid sick days are more likely to care for their children themselves when they are sick as well as to provide preventive health care.
- Sick adults also fare better when they receive support and care from family members. For example, social supports have been linked to reduced severity and improved survival rates for patients with heart problems.
- Paid sick days are crucial to the ability of employees to meet their own health needs. A sick adult cannot perform to his or her best ability at work, care for children and dependent adults, or participate in the community as well as he or she could when in good health.

# Leave for Illness and Family Care

## Where Does the U.S. Stand?

- At least 145 countries provide paid sick days for short- or long-term illnesses, with 127 providing a week or more annually. More than 79 countries provide sickness benefits for at least 26 weeks or until recovery.
- The U.S. provides only unpaid leave for serious illnesses through the FMLA, which does not cover all workers. The U.S. does not provide any paid sick days.
- 49 countries guarantee leave for major family events such as marriage or funerals; in 40 of these countries, leave for one or more of these family events is paid.



# Work Hours and Availability for Families: Why Does it Matter?

- Parental involvement is critical to children's educational, developmental and health outcomes. When parents are involved in their children's education, children achieve more in elementary school, junior high school and high school.
- One out of two low-income working parents faced barriers to becoming involved in their children's education. Thirty-nine per cent faced barriers to participating in school meetings, school trips, or school events. Eighteen percent of the low-income parents we interviewed had little or no time with their children during the week.
- Parental evening and night work can have negative consequences for children and families. Parents who work non-standard shifts are more likely to have children who score poorly in math, vocabulary, and reading tests; who repeat a year; and who are suspended from school. Families with adults who work the night and evening shifts report lower-quality home environments, and shift-working couples have higher divorce rates.
- Evening, night, weekend, and holiday work are typically not occurring by choice. Over three-fifths of employees working nonstandard schedules do so because they "could not get another job," because it is "mandated by the employer," or because of "the nature of the work."

# Work Hours

## Where Does the U.S. Stand?

- 137 countries in all geographic regions and at all economic levels mandate paid annual leave. The U.S. does not require employers to provide paid annual leave.
- At least 126 countries require employers to provide a mandatory day of rest each week. The U.S. does not guarantee workers this 24-hour break.
- At least 134 countries have laws that fix the maximum length of the work week. The U.S. does not have a maximum length of the work week or a limit on mandatory overtime per week.
- While only 28 countries have restrictions or prohibitions on night work, 50 countries have government-mandated evening and night wage premiums. The U.S. neither restricts nor guarantees wage premiums for night work.



# Ten Policy Priorities

- Paid sick days
- Paid annual leave
- Paid parental leave
- Support of breastfeeding
- Adequate family wage
- Feasible work hours
- Part-time parity
- Universal access to early childhood care and education
- Universal access to out-of-school care
- Meeting rising eldercare needs

# Myths Feeding Inaction

- Myth 1: We Don't Know What Works
- Myth 2: Improvements Can't Reach Workers in the Informal Sector
- Myth 3: No Affordable Solution
- Myth 4: Bad Jobs Are Better than No Jobs, and Action Threatens Bad Jobs
- Myth 5: Parents Can Solve the Problems Alone
- Myth 6: Individual Countries Have No Choice
- Myth 7: There's No Way to Move Forward Globally

# National Competitiveness



Countries can be strongly competitive while providing decent working conditions.

## Examples:

- Those nations who provide overtime pay are as competitive as those who do not
- Those nations who provide evening wage premiums are as competitive as those who do not
- The most competitive countries provide, on average, longer parental leave
- The most competitive countries provide, on average, more leave to care for children

## For more information:

*The Work, Family, and Equity Index: How Does the U.S. Measure Up?*  
by Jody Heymann, Alison Earle, and Jeff Hayes: The Project on Global  
Working Families, 2007. Available at <http://www.mcgill.ca/ihsp/>

Forgotten Families: Ending the Growing Crisis Confronting Children  
and Working Parents in the Global Economy by Jody Heymann, Oxford  
University Press, 2006

The Widening Gap: Why Working Families Are in Jeopardy and What  
Can Be Done About It by Jody Heymann, New York: Basic Books,  
2000

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