

Study: Family matters: Parental leave in Canada

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In Canada, several types of leave after the birth or adoption of a child are available to parents. The number of parents taking up maternity, paternity or parental leave might change in the months and years to come, as the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to changes in family formation plans. Although couples are spending more time together as they physically distance from others, they also face increased uncertainty about their future income and earning opportunities in a context of an economic downturn and increased unemployment.

Historically, evidence has shown that, in unfavourable economic contexts, couples tend to shy away from long-term commitments, such as having children. Therefore, the fertility trends and leave practices of parents after the birth or adoption of children will need to be monitored in the years to come. A new article available today provides a snapshot of parental leave taken from 2012 to 2017, which can be used as a benchmark for future comparisons.

Over 2.3 million Canadian parents took a leave of absence from work for the birth or adoption of a child

According to the General Social Survey (GSS) on Family, 2.3 million (80%) Canadians who were paid workers or self-employed took a form of paid leave (such as maternity, paternity leave, parental leave, vacation, employer program) or unpaid leave from their job between 2012 and 2017 after the birth or adoption of a child.

Mothers take maternity or parental leave almost twice as often as fathers

While measures and policies have been introduced to increase the availability of parental leave for both parents, more women than men continue to take a leave of absence from work for a birth or adoption. From 2012 to 2017, 88% of mothers took maternity leave, parental leave or a combination of the two, compared with 46% of fathers. However, over the last decade, more fathers have begun to take paternity or parental leave. For example, from 2001 and 2006, 34% of fathers had taken such a leave.

Instead of paternity or parental leaves, fathers often take vacation or other paid or unpaid personal leave following the birth or adoption of a child. In fact, 42% of fathers drew on their annual vacation leave to take time off work.

Fathers in Quebec who took time off for a birth or an adoption are more likely to take paternity or parental leave than other types of leave

Across Canada, Quebec had the largest share of fathers taking paternity leave, parental leave or a combination of the two (93%), as opposed to other forms of leave (e.g., unpaid leave, vacation leave). This was the case for less than one-quarter of Canadian fathers outside of Quebec (24%), who were more likely to use sick leave, annual vacation leave or benefits from an employer program. Although fathers can split parental leave with mothers for up to 35 weeks in all provinces, Quebec was the only province to offer non-transferable paid paternity leave for up to five weeks at the time of the survey.

Mothers took time off from work for a longer period than fathers

The maximum period of paid maternity leave is 18 weeks in Quebec and 15 weeks in the rest of Canada. Paid paternity leave, which was offered only in Quebec at the time of the survey, has a maximum duration of five weeks. Paid parental leaves can be taken by either parent for up to 35 weeks. Although couples can divide parental leave as they wish, it is primarily women who take most or all of it.

According to the GSS, mothers took maternity or parental leave (or a combination of the two) for a longer period: from 2012 to 2017, over 80% of mothers returned to work within 27 to 52 weeks after the birth or adoption of their child. Over that same period, 48% of fathers took paternity or parental leave (or a combination of the two) for their child for five weeks or less.



While paternity or parental leave uptake by fathers outside of Quebec is lower, when they do take leave, they tend to do so for a longer period after the birth or adoption of a child. Half of fathers in Quebec took five weeks or less of paternity or parental leave to care for a newborn or adopted child from 2012 to 2017, compared with 38% of their counterparts outside of Quebec. However, 36% of fathers outside of Quebec took between 27 and 52 weeks of parental leave for the birth or adoption of their child compared with 17% of fathers in Quebec.

Note to readers

This analysis focused on parents who were paid workers or self-employed before the birth or adoption of a child (from 2012 to 2017) and who took leave (paid or unpaid) from their job. The collection period of the survey was from February 1 to November 30, 2017. Therefore, births and adoptions in December 2017 are not accounted for.

The ability to take time off from employment for reasons of childbirth and adoption is mandated provincially. Maternity leave is for biological mothers only. It is taken during pregnancy and after the baby is born. Paternity leave is for biological fathers only. It is taken after the baby is born and, at the time of survey, was available only in Quebec. Parental leave can be taken after the maternity or paternity leave. It is available to both parents, regardless of whether they are biological or adoptive. Both parents can take parental leave, either at the same time or at different times.

On March 17, 2019, a new five-week parental-sharing benefit (or eight weeks for those who take extended parental benefits) aimed at non-biological parents officially took effect in Canada. This may result in future Statistics Canada data showing a further evolution of how Canadian families use parental leave. More information is available at the [Government of Canada](#) website.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4501](#).

The infographic titled "[Family Matters: Parental leaves in Canada](#)" is now available as part of the series *Statistics Canada—Infographics (11-627-M)*.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).