

Is “Family-Friendly” also Women-Friendly? Corporate Family Leave Policies, the Family & Medical Leave Act, and Women’s Occupational Standing in U.S. Firms

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Cross-national studies have investigated whether maternity or family leaves encourage women’s labor force participation and reduce gender inequality at work. In the United States, there is important variation in the leave policies provided by employers both before and after the Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993. Using data on the personnel policies of over 800 private-sector establishments and the sex and race composition of these workplaces from 1971 to 2002, we investigate whether maternity leave policies increase women’s representation in specific occupations and whether effects differ before and after the FMLA. In fixed effects models with extensive control variables, we find that corporate maternity leave policies increased women’s share of management and professional positions, but only after the FMLA was in place. The effects of maternity leave policies on women’s representation in craft and laborer jobs varied by race.