

PREGNANT WOMEN WORKING LONGER AND RETURNING SOONER, CENSUS FINDS

Women today are more likely to work while pregnant, are working longer into their pregnancies, and are returning to work sooner after giving birth than they did in the early 1960s, according to the Census Bureau. The report, which is based on interviews from the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), compares employment and leave trends among pregnant women between 2001 and 2003 with data from earlier periods dating back to 1961. In the three years ending in 2003, 67 percent of women who were pregnant for the first time worked during their pregnancies, compared with only 44 percent of women between 1961 and 1965. Fifty-seven percent of women in the most recent survey group worked full time, compared with only 40 percent of early 1960s women.

Among women interviewed in 2004, 74 percent had worked for six continuous months at some point during their lives, compared to 60 percent during 1961-1965. Since 1986-1990, the percentage of first-time pregnant women who had worked at least six continuous months has remained stable. Most new mothers age 30 and older (85 percent) during 2001-2003 worked during their pregnancies, compared with only 30 percent of first-time mothers who were under 18. Seventy-seven percent of non-Hispanic white women, 56 percent of black women, and 58 percent of Asian women worked while pregnant. Among Latinas, 47 percent of women who were pregnant for the first time during 2001-2003 worked while pregnant. By educational level, 30 percent of high school dropouts and 82 percent of college graduates worked during their pregnancies during 2001-2003.

Between the periods of 1961-1965 and 2001-2003, the proportions of women who worked until the third trimester of their pregnancies increased. Among the women surveyed in the early 1960s, only 35 percent who worked during their pregnancies worked until one month or less before the birth of their child, compared to 78 percent during 2001-2003.

The survey also reports on changes in maternity leave arrangements since 1980, when the SIPP began the inquiry. Between the periods of 1981-1985 and 1986-1990, the proportion of women who quit their jobs either during their pregnancies or up to 12 weeks after giving birth decreased from 36 percent to 27 percent, with no statistically significant change in the number of women who quit their jobs occurring after that period. Meanwhile, the number of women taking some form of paid leave (including maternity, sick, vacation, and all other types of paid leave) increased from 37 percent during 1981-1985 to 49 percent during 2000-2003. "Employers may offer paid maternity leave as a job benefit when they weigh the cost of finding and training a new employee against a short leave of absence," the report says. Among women during 2001-2003 who worked during their first pregnancies, 43 percent used paid leave and 34 percent took unpaid leave after giving birth. These percentages were greater than the proportions of women taking paid and unpaid leave during the pregnancy (22 percent and 16 percent, respectively).

The survey also includes data on how soon after a first birth women began working. Women of the early 2000s worked longer into their pregnancies and started working sooner after childbirth than their early 1960s counterparts. Sixty-four percent of all women who gave birth during 2000-2002 had started working 12 months after having a child compared to only 17 percent of women in 1961-1965. Among women who worked during their pregnancies, the numbers were higher: 79 percent of 2000-2002 women had returned to work a year after giving birth, compared to 26 percent of the early 1960s women.

The report, *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961-2003*, is available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p70-113.pdf>.

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