

The development benefits of maternity leave ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full article PDF ^[2]

ABSTRACT

Within developing countries, studies addressing the effects of maternity benefits on fertility, infant/child health, and women's labor force participation are limited and provide contradictory findings. Yet, knowledge regarding the implementation of maternity provisions is essential, as such policies could significantly improve women and children's well-being. We add to this literature using fixed effects panel regression from 1999 to 2012 across 121 developing countries to explore whether different types of maternity leave policies affect infant/child mortality rates, fertility, and women's labor force participation, and whether those effects are shaped by disparities in GDP per Capita and Secondary School Enrollment. Our findings demonstrate: (1) both infant and child mortality rates are expected to decline in countries that institute any leave policy, policies that last 12 weeks or longer, and policies that increase in duration and payment (as a percentage of total annual salary), (2) fertility is expected to decline in countries that have higher weekly paid compensation, (3) maternity leave provisions decrease fertility and infant/child mortality rates most in countries with lower GDP per capita and countries with middle-range secondary enrollment rates, and (4) labor force participation does not increase. Our results suggest that policy makers must consider the duration, compensation, and goals (addressing fertility versus mortality rates) of a policy alongside a country's economic development and secondary school enrollment when determining which maternity leave provisions to apply within developing-country contexts.

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