

**Maternity Leave—More Gender War:
CIBC/Chamber Weekly CEO/Business Leader Poll
by COMPAS in the *Financial Post*
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Public Opinion and Customer Research**

Introduction

The possibility of the extension of maternity leave to two years, as proposed by government leaders last week, proved to be a hot topic among Canada's CEOs and business leaders. This week's National Post/Chamber/CIBC poll generated the greatest number of passionate responses, and the lowest dropout rate in recent history.

In the eyes of respondents, the two key aspects of maternity leave are the perceived benefits for family life and the perceived harm to business life. On these issues, male and female business leaders express opinions that suggest that they come from different planets. Men focus in an almost laser-like fashion on the harm to business, especially small business, while women see both sides of the issue.

These are the key findings from the current web-survey of CEOs and other business leaders conducted by COMPAS on behalf of the *National Post* under sponsorship of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and CIBC Small Business.

The Impacts of Extended Maternity Leave

Would Harm Business and Female Careers; Would Likely Make Women Happier; Might Improve Family Life and Society

Respondents were asked to reflect on the potential outcome of an extended maternity leave. The vast majority of respondents agree that a two-year absence of an employee would likely lead to a challenging increase for business in disruption and costs. Three quarters of respondents feel the extension of maternity leave will likely lead to a decrease in the hiring of women in their fertile years to the benefit of other women and men as a whole. Meanwhile 70% of respondents believe that the extension of maternity leave will likely lead to a glass ceiling for female employees (Table 1).

Many respondents volunteered supplemental comments on the likely negative outcome of an extended maternity leave:

Extending of the maternity leave will put even further stress on companies struggling to keep their heads above water.

It is far too costly for small business to accommodate maternity leave now, and two years would be more difficult. It is a detriment to young women who may have children because it will prevent them from getting jobs and reinforce the glass ceiling.

I fear that this extension will indeed work against some women and result in discriminatory hiring practices.

I believe this will be a backward step for women.

For SMEs this would inevitably lead to a decrease in hiring young women.



I believe that an extension of maternity leave will set the women's movement back decades. Employers in small - medium companies cannot guarantee jobs for a two-year period and will therefore think carefully before hiring women of childbearing years.

As a whole, respondents do not predict unambiguously positive outcomes as a result of an extension of maternity leave. Business leaders are divided about the expected social and other benefits of extended maternity leave. As shown in Table 1, very large minorities believe that female employees will be happier, that extended leave will be better for society because it will be better for families, and that extended leave will produce better adjusted families and therefore happier employees of either sex.

Comments on the benefits of an extended maternity leave follow:

This is an excellent option; it gives women possibilities and will likely be most beneficial to low-income women.

An extended maternity leave is appropriate. Healthy families are better prepared to bring up healthy and happy children.

Society as a whole will benefit from a parent in the home. The main question is, is this a responsibility of businesses or of society at large? If it is the latter, then perhaps we should subsidize parenthood as opposed to creating a further fixed cost on business. If maternity leave is extended there must be exemptions for small companies with respect to holding jobs open. Even large companies will find this difficult and costly.

Women See Both Sides of Issue—Men Concerned Only About Business and Career Impacts

Men are clearly opposed to the proposal because of its likely negative impact on businesses. For example, 90% of male respondents believe that the loss of an employee for two years will likely lead to a challenging increase in disruption and costs (Table 1). Women, on the other hand, see both the benefits to families and society as well as the potential costs to businesses and women's careers. While 75% of the women surveyed believe the loss of an employee will likely lead to a challenging increase in disruption and costs, 62% say the extension of maternity leave will likely be better for society because it will be better for families (versus 41% male respondents), as shown in Table 1.



Table 1: “As you probably know, there has been much discussion among government leaders about doubling the length of maternity leave from one year to two years. If the proposal is passed, what effect will it have on your workplace? Please rate the likelihood of the following scenarios on a 7-point scale, where 7 means very likely, and 1 the opposite.” [ROTATE]

	Mean	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
The loss of an employee for two years will lead to a challenging increase in disruption and costs									
Total	6.0	56	20	9	6	3	4	3	1
Men	6.2	64	19	7	3	1	3	3	1
Women	5.5	42	21	12	11	5	5	4	0
The extension of maternity leave will likely lead to a decrease in the hiring of women in their fertile years to the benefit of other women and men as a whole									
Total	5.5	32	27	17	11	6	4	3	1
Men	5.7	36	26	21	9	1	3	3	1
Women	5.1	25	28	11	12	16	4	4	2
The extension of maternity leave will likely lead to a glass ceiling for female employees									
Total	5.4	29	24	17	9	5	3	5	9
Men	5.5	32	25	19	6	3	3	4	8
Women	4.9	19	23	12	16	7	4	7	12
The extension of maternity leave will produce happier female employees									
Total	4.5	20	11	15	22	13	8	8	4
Men	4.3	16	11	18	23	9	10	9	4
Women	4.8	28	12	9	21	19	4	4	4



The extension of maternity leave will be better for society because it will be better for families									
Total	4.2	15	13	18	20	11	12	10	1
Men	3.9	9	12	20	21	12	14	12	1
Women	5.0	26	18	18	16	11	5	5	2
The extension of maternity leave will probably produce better adjusted families and therefore happier employees of either sex									
Total	3.9	15	8	15	21	14	17	11	1
Men	3.6	10	5	15	21	15	20	12	1
Women	4.6	25	12	12	21	12	9	7	2

Predicted Take-Up

Small Majority Expected to Take Full Two Years

When asked to predict the number of women who would take the full two-year leave if it were extended, respondents forecast that approximately 61% of women would choose to take the full duration, as shown in Table 2.

One respondent offered the following comment as an explanation for why many women may choose not to take the full-two years if it were offered:

Even if maternity leave is extended, we cannot assume women will opt for it since most younger, dual income families have enormous financial obligations and high debt loads. Cutting back one paycheque, by close to half, may not be sufficient to run a household especially with the increased costs associated with a first child.

Half of respondents indicate that if maternity leave were to be extended, they would encourage staff to take less than the full two-years, as shown in Table 3. The other half is divided between encouraging staff to take the full two-year leave, and not knowing or having no opinion (Table 3).

Men Twice As Likely to Recommend Shorter Leave

Men and women share the same predictions of take-up rates but they differ in the kind of counsel that they would provide pregnant employees. Men are about half as



likely to recommend that women take the full two-year leave and about twice as likely to recommend taking less than the two year opportunity, as shown in Table 3.

Table 2: "In your opinion, if maternity leave is extended, what percentage of women are likely to take the full two-year leave?"

	Total	Men	Women
Women likely to take full two-year leave	61.0	59.2	65.0
DNK or no opinion	1	2	0

Table 3: "If maternity leave is extended, would you encourage staff to take..."

	Total	Men	Women
The full two year leave	23	16	37
Less than the full two year leave	51	59	33
DNK or no opinion	26	25	30

Paternity Rights

No Change Needed

Canadian CEOs and business leaders were asked to consider what changes should be made to paternity leave if maternity leave were to be extended. While 47% of respondents feel that there need not be any change in present paternity rights, 34% of respondents believe that men are entitled to exactly the same leave provisions on grounds of fairness (Table 4). Only a marginal number of respondents feel that men should be given a shorter period of leave (Table 4).

The following are some of the business leaders' comments on paternity leave:

The two-year leave should be granted to the care-giving parent, that doesn't necessarily mean the woman. One parent should be encouraged by society to make a full time commitment to the children. I would like to see tax breaks given to the family where one parent stays at home.

Fathers should be able to have time off if they are performing the care of the infant.

Maternity/paternity should be equal. To mitigate the downside to women being hired in their fertile years and less opportunity for career advancement, "parental" leave should be shared jointly.



There should be a requirement that fathers and mothers share the parental leave. This would alleviate the impact on one employer required to accommodate a two-year absence. Childbearing is a joint responsibility and the infant/child needs the nurturing care of a parent for two years.

Women More Keen on Paternity Rights

In keeping with their greater focus on family and social issues, female business leaders appear to be more supportive of extended leave provisions for fathers than are men themselves, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: (Q4) "What change, if any, should there be to paternity leave if maternity leave is extended to two years? Should men be given..."

	Total	Men	Women
Exactly the same leave provisions on grounds of fairness	34	31	42
A shorter period of leave because men rarely involve themselves with young children as much as women	10	10	7
No change in present paternity rights	47	50	42
DNK or no opinion	9	9	9

Methodology

The *National Post*/COMPAS web-survey of CEOs and leaders of small, medium, and large corporations and among executives of the local and national Chambers of Commerce was conducted August 6-8, 2002.

Because medium and small companies are more numerous in the economy and hence among Chamber membership, actual respondents are drawn more from these strata than from the stratum of the largest companies. Because of the small population of CEOs and business leaders from which the sample was drawn, the study can be considered more accurate than comparably sized general public studies. In studies of the general public, surveys of n=179 are deemed accurate to within approximately 7 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The principal and co-investigators on this study are Conrad Winn, Ph.D. and Jennifer McLeod.

