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Comparing Parental Leave Packages Across Countries

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Background Information

Introduction

In today's society, work life balance is an important aspect to most individuals that want to pursue both a career and a family. However, with the current rules and regulations that are in place, especially in the United States, obtaining this balance can be difficult. One of the elements that makes work life balance difficult for families is the decision to have more children. This decision to have a child, whether biologically or through adoption is fraught with a variety of considerations many parents must face. When a family makes this decision, it is often followed by the thoughts of their career and economic means. Analyzing this component is equivalent to analyzing maternity/paternity/parental leave. These decisions can also vary and fluctuate for each family depending on their geographic location. Policies, regulations, development, and the pieces that are involved; however, I am choosing to focus on the attributes maternity/paternity (parental) leave has and how it is reflected in federal policies. From this, I hope to make a recommendation for the United States and propose possible ways to enhance and or incorporate other country's regulation for parental leave into our own.

My research revolves around the premise that family leave packages vary when comparing the United States, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Japan. Conversely, the United States is one of only four nations in the world without a federal entitlement to paid parental leave (Heymann, Earle, & Hayes, 2007). These countries were chosen based off their population size, human development index (HDI), and other factors that prove that these countries were indeed similar enough to use as a comparison when viewing their family leave packages. Through my

research, I aspire to view use Norway, the United Kingdom, and Japan as models in reforming or making recommendations to improve the current policies of parental leave in the United States.

Definitions

According to an international source of legal information, *Educaloi*, maternity leave is defined as beginning for biological mothers only; mothers can take it while they are pregnant and after the baby is born, mothers can take parental leave after maternity leave (1). Based off this definition, maternity leave is something that starts during or prior to the initial moments that a mother delivers her baby. However, the assumption that the duration of maternity leave is not long enough may can be made. This implication can be drawn from the word “beginning”. How long is beginning and who dictates when that time period is over? This definition also focuses primarily on biological mothers when this is not the only audience that would aspire to have both a career and a family.

Educaloi also defines paternity leave as being for biological fathers only. They are allowed to take it after the baby is born; they can take a parental leave after their paternity leave. This definition is very similar to the definition that is provided for maternity leave with a shift in focus. This definition focuses on the fathers and does not allow for them to take time for leave prior to the arrival of the baby the way that the definition of maternity leave allows. The same assumption can also be made; the duration of paternity leave is not long enough. This conclusion can be gathered from the definition itself. Fathers are only allowed to take time off after the child is born. One definition is focused on mothers, while the other is focused on fathers but there is commonality within these definitions, parental leave.

The same source, *Educaloi* defines parental leave as being for both parents, whether they are biological or adoptive; this time is dedicated to setting the new child into the family. Both parents can take a parental leave at the same time or at different times even if they have the same employer. The assumption that was drawn from maternity and paternity leave is refuted through the definition of parental leave. This definition serves as a combination for both maternity and paternity leave and will be utilized as a foundation for my research.

The term family leave package, is a term that will be used frequently throughout my report. This term includes a combination of attributes that are considered in parental leave itself. The term “family leave packages” will also allow for me to formalize and have a common basis to compare among countries. The factors that I am taking into consideration that constitutes as a "package" will be the amount of compensation received, the duration of the leave in weeks, evaluating the funding source for the parental leave, and the duration of employment needed prior to receiving this benefit. Along with these characteristics, I will also incorporate the country's population size and human development index. I will evaluate each country utilizing these attributions while also comparing them to those attributes that currently stand in the United States.

United States Efforts Regarding Parental Leave

The topic of parental leave (maternity and paternity leave) is not a new issue for the United States. The United States recognized that families may experience difficulties during certain times when they have a child. The 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) demonstrates this. This Act requires that employers provide 12 weeks of family leave to qualifying workers with a newborn or a sick child, spouse, or parent; however, that leave is

unpaid (Bartel, etl 2014). California has adopted and put in place a paid leave policy. In fact, they were the first to allow six weeks of PFL (paid family leave) with 55 percent of regular pay replaced. This amount of money could be equivalent to \$1,057 a week depending on the job and profession. Although California was very bold and began to take matters into their own hands in response of the FMLA, this leave is not job-protected and is typically not provided to the public-sector employees (Bartel, etl. 2014). This will leave a segment of working families unaccounted for. According to the peer review article, *California's Paid Family Leave Law: Lessons from the First Decade*, "California's paid family leave statue (CA-PFL) was passed in 2002 and took effect July 1, 2004" (Bartel, etl. 2014). This article then goes on to disclose how this Act was funded. Through "... a payroll tax levied on employees and was added to the pre-existing Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) program that typically provides mothers with six weeks of paid leave during or just after pregnancy" (Bartel, etl. 2014). This statue (CA-PFL) shows that it is possible for a state within the United States to create a version of paid leave. This also demonstrates that the United States has potential to create a federal act to protect and ensure a paid parental leave. The work that California did encouraged others to follow in their footsteps and explore other options for parental leave. New Jersey also decided to begin a "family leave insurance" programs. This program offers six weeks of paid leave which covers about 66 percent compared to California's 55 percent. However, New Jersey has a lower maximum benefit of \$595 per week.

California and New Jersey have served as examples for not only each other but another state as well, Washington. Washington state approved \$250 per week in *PFL* benefits to be provided for five weeks, with the program scheduled to begin in 2009 (Progressive States Network, 2010); however, due to budgetary pressures, implementation has been repeatedly

postponed and is now not scheduled until 2015 (Employment Security Department, 2013).

Through these examples, it is evident that some type of parental compensation can be offered in the United States in some manner. It is also very evident that families, more specifically women, are displeased and frustrated with the lack of federal regulation that is currently provided by the United States. This level of dissatisfaction makes it difficult for families to achieve a balance between their career and establishing a family with a component of financial support.

Testimonials

There are so many cases and experiences that women have openly shared and documented regarding maternity leave in the United States. However, not all experiences are documented or recorded for public display; my mother is a primary example. At the age of 16, my mother discovered that she was pregnant with me and in need of a job. She went on several interviews and hid the fact that she was pregnant. She hid her pregnancy in fear of asking a future employer for a start date and vacation time. My mother's case may not be documented, but *The Guardian*, a British daily newspaper authored by Harriet Minter, does have documented cases. *The Guardian* allows for women to anonymously share their frustration and the discrimination they face in the workplace. This can be due to a pregnancy, or the varied time allowed that their employer gives them for maternity leave. In *The Guardian*, an article entitled, "Maternity Leave Discrimination: Five Women Tell Their Stories", it highlighted 5 women and their stories, as the title suggests. Rachael, Jessica, Aisha, and Claire were names given to women to hide their identities. All had similar experiences that were recorded on this media platform.

Rachel expressed that she worked for a large company for many years. As a mother of two, her maternity leave experiences were completely different. After her first maternity leave, she changed her status from full time to part time as a personal request and a management suggestion. For her second leave, she was told my management that her position was no longer needed and was "redundant". The company also told her that they created a new job position that had KSA (knowledge, skills, and abilities) that were similar to her current position; however, she was offered the option to apply but not encouraged to do so. Rachel's story is one of many that sheds light on the current maternity leave situation. Based on this situation, the assumption that employers have autonomy to decide what happens to the female employees' job in terms of security, once they file for maternity leave. Because it is not a federal law requiring a paid leave, the employer has the option to do whatever they please in the meantime; in this case, it resulted in Rachel losing her leadership position to assume a non-leadership position with fewer pay.

Rachel was not the only one; Jessica also had a similar story. Jessica states, "My employers discriminated against me from the moment I told them I was pregnant" (Minter, 2015). This is a strong claim to make on Jessica's behalf; however, based on her story and the information she was willing to share on this anonymous site, it then became obvious. Very similar to that of Rachel, Jessica's scheduled hours as an hourly employee began to slowly decrease once she revealed to her employer that she was pregnant. Her employer also suggested that she go on maternity leave at 26 weeks leaving her 14 weeks without work, assuming she carries her child full term, or 40 weeks. Aside from the struggles of her hours, she was able to go on maternity leave at 36 weeks when she was also informed that the forms that approved her maternity leave were misplaced; this meant that she would no longer be compensated for the time that she was out of work. As anyone could imagine, this added a lot of stress on Jessica as

she worried if she could financially support her child. The end result of this was her going into premature labor. This testimonial demonstrates the physical stress that the maternity leave policies can have on a family. This also shows how lackadaisical the tracking process for maternity leave can be to employers if this type of paperwork can be misplaced. In this specific case, the conclusion that maternity leave is not an important aspect for this particular company can be made. Quite honestly, this conclusion can be made for several employers and people based on these anonymous stories.

Jessica is not the only one that has experience physical trauma from the stress of uncertainty regarding maternity leave while attempting to start a family. Aisha is also an example. Aisha told her employers that she will be going through a vitro fertilization (IVF) treatment. The time needed for the treatments would come from her annual leave which was included in her preexisting benefit package. Once she made this announcement, her employer began to observe her very closely. Aisha stated that she felt as though this observation was only in response to her announcing her decision to have an IVF treatment. After observation and prior to the start of her IVF treatments, her employers determined that her performance had declined and the leave time that she was granted will no longer be allowed. This also meant that they withdrew the \$10,000 bonus that she was given. Proceeding with what Aisha desired to do, she worked harder and went through with the treatments. The stress of the job and financial obligations caused Aisha to miscarry at 3 months into her pregnancy. From these three stories alone, there seems to be a trend; employers have too much power and maternity leave is seen as a variable factor. Three women shared similar experiences and however were granted different times of leave, different financial support, and faced different challenges leading up to and during their leave.

The experience that Claire had is no different. Her case is unique in the aspect that she was given verbal orders. Claire states,

The biggest mistake I made was to tell my boss that I was two months pregnant, [from then on] I was pressurised to have an abortion. When I refused he promised to put me on the poverty line ... I was then subjected to a series of trumped up disciplinary charges and put under immense stress to quit. [I was] interrogated about the alleged misconduct at length in a hot room without water with the full knowledge of HR. [They] stated that if I fainted it would be considered a disciplinary matter ... (Minter, 2015).

Although this story is very vivid and went unreported (officially), it is still very asinine and extreme. No employee should feel as though getting pregnant and or telling their employer that they are pregnant is a mistake or wrong choice of judgment. This story, speaks for itself and the analysis of it would not describe the hardship that Claire had to go through. HR even went as far as making her sign a compromise agreement which enabled her from reporting this legally.

These testimonials serve as a guideline and firsthand insight as to how maternity (parental) leave is affecting families in the United States and what people are suffering through. Understanding that these four women do not speak for the entire population and segment of women who do not have access to maternity leave, these testimonials are influential. And for these reasons, I have decided to base an entire year of research to understanding the policies on both a national and global scale. The United States is similar in term of population, HDI index, etc., to other countries that have established governmental regulations for parental leave.

Analysis

When analyzing the current policies that certain states have in place within the United States, it then became evident that this is not just a regional issue. This issue exceeds the borders of the United States and can be considered global. Through my research, I have decided to compare and contrast the parental leave packages that have been established for other countries that are similar to the United States in terms of population (giving special consideration to the number of women and the age distribution), human development index (HDI), compensation, the length of the leave, the funding source (whether the financial responsibility is on the government or the employer), and the job duration (how long do you have to be an employee prior to being allowed these benefits). These attributes were selected because according to “International Perspective on Work-Family Policies: Lessons from the World’s Most Competitive Economies,” these are the most common attributes seen in the policies across several countries. This academic journal lists over 15 countries that contains these attributes and takes these components into account when creating parental leave policies (Barksdale Getty Image).

Analyzing population as a characteristic of parental leave packages, allows for a clearer correlation and standard to be identified among the countries. The number of individuals in a geographic location is the same no matter who those individuals are. Viewing the number of people in a particular country also allows for impact to become a part of the analysis. Based on the population, many individuals can be impacted by this policy. Adding another variable of women ages 15-24, and 25-54 allows for the impact to be narrowed down to the number of women in that country that this would impact directly. This can be attributed to the fact that

around these ages, women are able to begin a family based on biology and are active in the workforce. These aspects allow them to be considered and labeled as the ones that would be impacted at the greatest scale.

Along with population, HDI is also another important characteristic when comparing parental leave packages across countries. According to the United Nations Development Programme, HDI is defined as, "... a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living" (UNDP, 2017). Based on the definition, HDI explores the qualities that enhance the type of people that are within that specific country. For example, life expectancy, education, etc., are used in HDI. The higher the number, the higher standard of living which can also be correlated to the parental leave packages countries have. If the life expectancy is high, the possibility of a working family expanding is also high. If the country sees this correlation, the assumption or conclusion that a federal regulated parental leave package should be put in place can be made. Education is also considered with calculating HDI. If a population has a high HDI number, it is also possible that their population also values education. Valuing education plays directly into parental leave because the higher the education level is, the more likely it will become that the individual will be in the workforce which is where this issue will most likely be seen.

Compensation is another key factor. When analyzing the standard for parental leave packages, compensation is a motivating and very important piece that a lot of families and employers take into consideration. According to Annie Finnigan, the author of the article, "Everyone but U.S.:The State of Maternity Leave", pay is one of the most important factors of maternity leave due to the amount of money it takes to have a child (Finnigan, 2011).

Compensation is not only a characteristic that is universal, it is also an aspect that is almost expected from families that want to go on leave. The entire premise of compensation stems from the idea of generating a sense of financial stability for your family which happens through a job. When you are on leave, this stability has the potential of being placed on pause which leave families in a situation that is unideal. For this reason, compensation is an important aspect that is very essential to developing a parental leave package.

Population, HDI, and compensation are important characteristics that constitute a parental leave package, but these are not the only characteristics. Duration of a leave is a very important aspect as it will have a long-lasting effect on the family. The length of the leave allows for a relationship to be established between mother/father and child. After delivery there is a strain on the mother physically and an adjustment period for the family. Even if the child is not their biological child and is adopted, there is still a time for adjustment. The length of the leave, also ties into the HDI which is another component. Parental interaction with a child at a very young age increases the development and can also be incorporated into education which will increase the overall HDI.

Establishing a funding source is also a characteristic that should be analyzed when constructing a parental leave package. Understanding that parental leave is very expensive, there needs to be a set source so that there can be a standard for this leave. The funding source could be seen as an investment in both the employer and the social infrastructure being that these are the two areas that the funds would be generated from. In the government's case, it would be applied as taxes as seen in some states in the United States. There are concerns that there are enough taxes in place; however, this can be seen as a return on investment. In all, parental leave could give the child the mental stability needed later to become a productive member of society

and participate in the workforce. In terms of the employer, if they are funding parental leave, there isn't a standardization that occurs for all women and families. For example, if a woman works for company A and another work for company B, there is nothing that states these women will receive the same percentage of pay and or time for leave. This variation is also evident in the various testimonials given from women in the United States. Comparing the funding source, will also influence the recommendation that will be suggested for the United States.

The last characteristic that will be analyzed to compare parental leave packages across countries is job duration. Parental leave can be seen as a benefit in the eyes of both government and employers. Understanding that this is expensive and time consuming on both end, establishing a time period and or expectation that a worker must exceed to receive this benefit would also assist in standardizing the process. Using the time that the employee has been employed is key when developing a parental leave package because it enforces a loyal relationship between employer and employee. If an employee has been at a company for over 90 days, as an example, it can be assumed that the chances of them resigning after delivering are slim due to the time and money investment by the both employee and employer. Analyzing this from an employer standpoint, having a required time employed shows that they take special interest in the well-being of their employees in and outside of the workplace, once they have proven themselves to be valuable.

Based on these characteristics alone, Norway, Japan, and the United Kingdom are very similar to the United States. Understanding and acknowledging that these are 4 different countries with 4 different cultures, ideas, values and norms, I have decided to use these characteristics as a form of standardization. Table 1 below outlines the metrics and findings that were constructed based on these characteristics.

Table 1: Comparing Countries Regarding Family Leave Packages

Country	Population	HDI Index	Compensation		Length (In weeks)		Employer or govt?	Employment Duration
			Father	Mother	Father	Mother		
Norway	5,258,317 Women ages 15-24 327,969 Ages 25-54 1,045,791	.949	Yes	Yes	87-97	100	government	6 of the 10 months prior to the start of parental benefit period
United Kingdom	65,102,385 Women 33,270,400 (statistia)	.909	Yes	Yes	2	39	government	At least 26 weeks
Japan	127,110,047 Women 15-24 5,813,222 Ages 25-54 24,145,406	.903	Yes	Yes	44	58	government & employer	They have to be enrolled in shakai hoken (social insurance) for 2 years
United States	325,145,963 Women 157 million	.920	No	No	0	0	employer	12 months fulltime 1,250 hours if part time

Norway

As outlined in the table, Norway has a population of 5,258,317. More specifically, they have 327,969 women varying from the ages of 15-24 and 1,045,791 women varying from the ages of 25-54. When comparing these numbers to that of 157 million women in the United States, Norway has 155,626,240 less women than the United States. Keeping all other variable constant, such as the age to work and the number of women who actually have the desire to perform "double duty" work and raise a family, the number suggest that there are 155,626,240

more women in the United States that could qualify for maternity leave. Population in this case is significant because it reveals the number that are impacted by maternity/parental leave process in Norway, and the number of women that could have a similar opportunity in the United States.

The HDI index that is represented for Norway is .949. Not only is this number the highest between all of the other countries that are being compared, it is also .029 higher than that of the United States. Although this number does not seem significant, it represents that Norway has .029 better development in life expectancy, education, and standard of living than the United States. Having a high HDI index indicates that overall the country is a better place to live in order to develop those three dimensions. Although there is not clear correlation between HDI index and the necessity of parental leave, an argument can still be made for it. The whole premise of HDI index serves as a measurement of development for an entire country. Developing a standard parental leave will impact this number due to the efficiency and productive of the employee. The time off work to tend to newborn children and newly adoptive children, will allow for stress levels to decrease for the employee, and allow for the child to establish a foundation. Although parental leave is not the answer to eliminating stress for all employees, it eliminates an outside distraction for the employees. Overall, Norway has the highest HDI index and it can be for many reasons including their use and accessibility of parental leave.

Norway also offers financial compensation during the time of leave. Additionally, it is offered to both mother and father. Considering that there is a financial constraint added when expanding your family, compensation is very important. Money is a driver for most employees. In Norway's case, the assumption that they understand this is made due to the fact that both mother and father are able to receive pay while they are out for parental leave. Comparing that to the United States, the United States does not offer paid leave for either mother or father. This

comparison separates these two countries even more. Because Norway offers pay to both mother and father, the value of family can be assigned to this country. There seems to be a different work life balance that Norway promotes in contrast to the United States. It also helps draw a direct correlation, keeping all other variable constant such as norms and regulations. Norway has a smaller population, higher HDI index, and offers both mother and father pay during their leave. The question then becomes why?

Along with pay, Norway also is very generous with the amount of time they are offering for parental leave. As shown in Table 1, fathers are allowed 87-97 weeks off for paternity leave, and mothers are offered 100 weeks in maternity leave. Collectively, the parental leave is about 197 weeks which is approximately 45 months and almost 4 years. When analyzing the United States in this manner, it is difficult to assess and compare when this aspect, duration of leave, is variable. Based on the amount of leave that is granted, it further enhances the label and identity that Norway has of being family friendly. This country seems to find value in providing this type of leave to individuals.

The source of funding in Norway's case is from the government; whereas in the United States, this financial support is offered by employers. According to the World Atlas, Norway's form of government is a monarchy, meaning that this position of power is inherited (2017). However, the head of government is the country's prime minister. This means that this system allows for the parliament to make decisions, such as parental leave, which are very beneficial. In a newsletter called *The Australian*, there is an article entitled, "Norway is Proof that You Can Have It All" written by Paul Cleary, it focuses on the many successes that Norway has, including paid leave. This article makes the claim that recently, Norway has achieved what might be considered the Holy Grail when it comes to a healthy economy and society. This is evident and

achieved by very high wages and productivity, flexible working arrangements and the world's highest rate of workforce participation, especially among women. It then furthers this idea by stating that the key element to this success is a combination between the 12 months' paid parental leave (at minimum) with universal access to childcare at highly subsidized rates (2013). For these reasons, Norway's government (prime minister) is able to provide and regulate this.

All of the benefits that Norway has to offer in the form of parental leave packages come with work and diligence. In order to receive this, 6 of the 10 months prior to the start of the parental benefit, you are expected to be an employee. Basically, in order to receive this benefit, you must be an employee for your company 6 months. When referring to Table 1, it states that for the United States, it is required to be employed for 12 months full time or have given the company 1,250 hours part time. This is doubled the time that is required for Norway. From these statistics, it can be said that Norway has a more relaxed system that has the ability to reward and provide special forms of compensation for their citizens and employee. Whereas the United States process is stricter, and they want to ensure that their employees are as loyal to the company as the amount of leave they are requesting. In other words, you put in the time you want off.

United Kingdom

As referred to in Table 1, the United Kingdom has a population of 65,102,385, more specially 33,270,400 women. When comparing these metrics to the United States, the United Kingdom has 123,729,600 less women than the United States. As stated before, the population of women in particular is important as it given context to the impact that the maternity/parental leave has on this country. Comparing this to the United States, also allows for a correlation to be

made. It can be presumed that due to the significantly lower number of women in the United Kingdom, it is easier for them to allocate resources and funds to their women in the form of maternity leave in contrast to the United States.

HDI index is the next characteristic of the parental leave package that should be analyzed. The United Kingdom has an HDI index of .909 which is .19 lower than the United States. This means that in terms of the three dimensions that HDI is measured in, the United States is relatively more developed. The argument based on the correlation between HDI index and maternity leave does not help the United Kingdom viewing these numbers. Instead it suggests that the United States, with its lack of parental leave, is still better developed. However, there is still a correlation between the time a mother and father spend with an infant during their early stages and the overall development of the child. This analyzes will compensate for the varying numbers in HDI due to the amount of leave that the United Kingdom offers. The educational piece, which is the closest link to time spent in the early stages, is only one of the three that is considered.

The next characteristic that should be analyzed in a parental leave package is whether it is compensated or not. In the case of the United Kingdom, both the mother and father are compensated compared to the United States where the parents are not compensated in most cases. Compensation in this aspect is an influencer for parental leave as it provides the means for financial stability. Obviously, the United Kingdom understands this, and this is reflected in the pay that the parents are given.

In correlation with pay is the amount of time that you as parents will be allowed for leave. In the United Kingdom, the father is granted 2 weeks paid of paternity leave, and the

mother is granted 39 weeks paid totaling in 41 weeks of paid parental leave. Approximately, parents are allowed 9 months of paid parental leave in the United Kingdom. Although the United States has established the FMLA which allows 12 weeks of leave, it is unpaid and at the expense of the parents to generate funds during that time. When viewing this correlation, drawing a conclusion is not a simple task. The United Kingdom is declared less developed by the HDI index when compared to the United States, however the United Kingdom is able to allow mothers to have significantly more time of leave compared to fathers. Based on this, the United Kingdom can be said to believe that women need more time of leave compared to the man. This can be for reasons that this country has identified, or gender roles can be seen and regulated differently.

The source of funding for the United Kingdom is also government like Norway. In the United Kingdom, there is an accountable Parliament, a principle known as a "responsible government" according to the World Atlas (2017). There are two levels in the United Kingdom's Parliament that mirror that of the United States structure, House of Lords (Senate) and House of Commons (House of Representatives). Having this type of structure in place, it can be suggested that the House of Commons agrees and demonstrates the value that their parliament has for parental leave. Due to the power that lies in the House of Commons, the idea and premise of parental leave would essentially fall within that section whereas in the United States, parental leave can begin in either House of Representatives or Senate which would prolong the process considering the structure. Having two different powers in the United States, also gives paternal leave a less likely chance of being approved. Considering this, it makes sense that the parental leave packages are able to be funded in the United Kingdom through their governmental system.

The last aspect of parental leave for the United Kingdom is the job duration. In the United Kingdom you are expected to be employed for 26 weeks or 6 and a half months prior to being allowed leave with pay. Comparing this to the 12 full months that the United States requires (on average) the same analysis made for Norway can be made for the United Kingdom. Along with establishing trust and seeking out the motives of employees, it is also said that this job duration is in place to protect overuse of paid leave in the case of the United Kingdom and FMLA in the terms of the United States. This protects the employers and the government (tax payers) from abuse in the unnecessary expenses.

Japan

According to table 1, Japan has an entire population is 127,110,047 with women from ages 15-24 is 5,813,222 and ages 25-54 is 24,145,406. When comparing this to the number of women in the United States, there are about 130 million more women in the United States than it is in Japan. However, there is a clear gender disconnect in Japan alone. There are about 30 million women compared to 97 million men. The impact of maternity leave in this case would be significantly larger in the United States than in Japan for the women. However, the impact of parental leave would be similar given the size of the population collectively when comparing the United States and Japan.

When comparing the HDI index of Japan, Norway, United Kingdom, and the United States, Japan has the lowest HDI index of .903. Comparing it directly to the United States, Japan's HDI index is .11 less developed than the United States. This number calculated and used by the 3 components, life expectancy, education, and GNI per capita. This number can be so low because of the cost of living in Japan. There might not be much income for the citizens because

it is not seen as a criterion or a means of living. From prior knowledge, this could be the one factor that pulls that number down drastically. Knowing this, the correlation between this and the need for parental leave is still valid. Because if in Japan is cheaper than that compared to the United States, it can be said that their birth rates along with life expectancy is higher causing for more people to have children. The increase number in births can then be a linkage to the need of parental leave to protect workers and their compensation.

Along with HDI, Japan also allows for both mother and father to receive pay during the parental leave. As previously stated, this is significantly important but not as significant as it would be in the United States considering the cost of living difference. Compensation for both parents is important in any country due to the financial responsibility that comes along with having a child, however, from these statistics it can be said that it is not a stressed in Japan. When comparing it to the United States, it is still a luxury to have and standardize because on average, mother and father do not receives paid leave in the United States.

Something that stood out during this research is the amount of time citizen of Japan are able to take for level. Referring to Table 1, the mother is awarded 58 weeks in comparison to the father who receives 44 weeks of paid leave. When combining this, 102 weeks or almost 2 years is granted between both the mother and father for parental leave in Japan. In contrast to the United States, the amount of time they offer exceeds that of which is stated by FMLA. I found this surprising due to the knowledge I know about Japan and their work ethic as an International Business major. Japan is considered a high context culture which is defined as a culture that relies on tradition and deep relationships as a form of communications and interactions. Being a high context culture that relies on tradition, taking this amount of leave off is unheard of. Opposing, their HDI index is low because of GNI, but higher than most countries due to their

value of education. Parental leave and spending that time with children early on prepares them to the extreme education process that their children will experience. This is hard to compare to the United States on a culture standpoint because we are considered a low context culture.

The United States and Japan shares similarities in the case that both employers and the government provides regulation for some type of paid leave to happen. Just like Norway and the United Kingdom, Japan has a parliament government. They do not elect the president directly. The Diet, the Japan's national parliament, has members that elects the prime minister amongst themselves (Explore Japan's Government, 2017). Based on this, the structure of their policies assumes that the values aligned with parental leave is evident. Having this type of structure in a high context culture, it defuses the stereotypes and assumptions that are in place for gender and the time that fathers spend with their children. This mirrors the United States government fairly but not enough to draw a direct correlation. The employers then acknowledge the values set by the parliament and also offers their employees with the benefit of leave. Having this in places allows for basic standardization to happen on the governmental level and anything additional is provided by the employers.

Lastly, job duration needs to be taking into consideration when analyzing a parental leave package. Unlike the 12 months that are required in the United States, in Japan you are required to be enrolled in the social insurance that they have called Shakai Hoken. Shakai Hoken is an Employees' Health & Pension Insurance (EHPI). This consists of both a health insurance and pension component. As a citizen of Japan that wishes to take maternity or paternity leave, you are required to be enrolled for 2 years prior to receiving leave (Nagoya International Center, 2017). When comparing this to the United States, I would say that this timeline is very similar despite the additional year that Japan requires. The work ethic plays a huge role and the

perception of time. It can be said that the members of Japan incorporate work into their values and expectation whereas in the United States, it is they're as a means of income and not a mean of satisfaction. This, just like the other countries, is establishing to protect both the government and the employers from workers that are seeking employment for benefits only.

Recommendation

When comparing Norway, the United Kingdom, and Japan to the United States, my research exceeded my original expectations and outcomes. My intention for this research was to analyze those characteristics of the parental leave packages of other countries, compare it to the United States and the current policies, and recommend a strategy or plan for the United States to follow. After completing the research, I have discovered that I am unable to come to a substantive conclusion due to the drastic differences that I did not account for within the countries. The population size, and source of funding, seems to be the two characteristics that serve as main influencers which enabled me from making a recommendation. The conclusions that were gathered from the trends found in HDI index, compensation, length of leave, and the duration of employment were significant; however, do not further my sought out goal because they are attributed to population size, and source of funding.

When viewing population, I initially thought that it would be relatively easy to do because no matter the geographic location, one person is declared one person and included in the count for population. However, through my research, I discovered that the countries that I chose were drastically different in population and the number of women contained within compared to the United States. Although, I could have chosen different countries, these countries provided a great depiction of parental leave packages in different sections of the world. In all cases, the United

States had more women within the county which would mean that it is the place where the impact could potentially be the greatest. With this in mind, the places such as Norway and the United Kingdom are smaller in terms of women, which may make it easier for funds to be allocated to the number of women that are currently there. In the United States this issue is seen as having high impact; however, it can also be expensive considering the number of people that are involved. If I were to redo this research project, I would not change the countries that I choose, instead I would take the time to divide the population in to ages of working women, and consider the birth rates as well as a metric of comparison.

Along with population, the governmental systems also enabled be to make a clear recommendation. The government in all three countries served as a funding source. In all three countries, it was also a parliament structure. Acknowledging that this is very similar to that of congress, it is still different for the obvious reasons that we don't use congress and parliament interchangeably. I would make the argument that parliament has an efficiency level that the democracy in the United States doesn't possess. The other countries also seem to make decisions that are value driven. Political choices, are harder for the United States to do considering our president can serve from 4-8 years. This leave a revolving door for new policies to try to be implemented, but not enough time to suggest, implement, and enforce. Also, when considering the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the power is held within the House of Commons and things that are brought up for voting such as paternal leave, it is only required to passed through one house unlike the two in the United States. Using government and employers as a source of funding, it enabled me to analyze the data different and grasp the concept and influence that government has on a policy as such. Prior to research, I understood the power that existed and was enforced by the government, but I wasn't aware of the scale this influence had. Knowing

this know, if I could go back, I would take the time to analyze the governmental systems deeper. I would then raise the question of exactly how long it took for their country to implement the parental leave and apply the taxes. Analyzing this would also further my claim that through a parliament system, policies are able to be enforced quicker. When analyzing all 4, Norway is the county that has the most attractive package, however their government charges taxes that are consider high from sources. If I would have taken the time to see how those funds were allocated I could have probably made a clearer analysis which could lead to a recommendation.

Understanding now the complexity of the population and funding sources, I would still suggest that the United States should attempt to model the structure that is in place in Japan. Both the government and employers play an intricate role in the development of parental leave. In the United States, there is already the regulation that you have to be an employee for 12 months on average, adding this and then allowing for a certain percentage of your salary or pay to be covered within the FMLA would provide the standardization that I believe the United States is missing. From there, it would be up to the employers to allow for the employees to receive leave after any time they see necessary. This will still allow for the employers to keep some of the power they currently possess, but it will also enable security within families, more specifically women and help with the overall development of a child.

When comparing the United States to that of Norway, the United Kingdom, and Japan, the United States is lacking the components of an efficient parental leave structure. As a country that is heavily involved and influenced by the media, it is surprising that this issue is not observed and realized more analytically. We encourage women to create families and we shed light on the benefits of motherhood; however, that light is then dimmed when the conversation of financial support is brought to the table. We as a country are in need of something more than the

FMLA to ensure that parents will be able to receive some form of compensation through their company once they have a baby. Though my research I personally was unable to create a concrete plan, but that doesn't mean that one doesn't exist.

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