

# Employer-paid Maternity Leave in Australia: A Comparison of Uptake and Duration in 2005 and 2010

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## Abstract

*While the implementation of Australia's Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme in January 2011 is expected to extend access to paid parental leave significantly, the program commenced in the context of regularly reported increases in the prevalence of employer-paid parental leave. The aims of this paper are to identify and explain changes in mothers' use of employer-paid maternity leave over the five years prior to PPL. Our data come from broadly similar surveys conducted in 2005 and 2010. They show increasing uptake and duration of employer-paid maternity leave over this period, but marked and persistent inequalities in patterns of usage. We argue that inequalities are unsurprising in association with employer-provided entitlements, and that they will not necessarily be ameliorated with ongoing expansion of employer-paid provisions. Given its importance in the Australian context, employer-paid parental leave will need to be taken into account in assessing the impact of any government-initiated paid parental leave scheme.*

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## 1. Introduction

This paper examines mothers' use of employer-paid maternity leave in Australia in 2005 and 2010, analysing changes over the five-year period prior to the introduction of the Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme which commenced operation in January 2011. In the absence of a national paid parental leave scheme until 2011, employer-paid schemes have been an important aspect of the Australian parental leave environment, becoming increasingly prevalent during the 2000s alongside the rising profile of work/family issues in the public domain. The period from 2005 to 2010 was one of relative stasis in relation to parental leave policy, with no major developments in legislated provisions. Changes in the prevalence of employer-paid leave over this period are thus most likely to reflect broader social and labour market trends, particularly the increased labour force engagement of mothers and associated pressures on employers to accommodate more effectively the needs of working parents. Documenting the background picture of leave usage in this context is an essential task if the impact of subsequent policy changes is to be assessed accurately.

Our research aims are to ascertain the extent of change in usage (uptake and duration) of employer-paid maternity leave over the five years prior to PPL, identify the main factors that influence usage and determine whether these too changed over the time period. On the basis of this analysis we seek to establish whether the uptake and duration of employer-paid maternity leave became more (or less) evenly distributed across the labour market.

The research makes several contributions to existing knowledge. First, we present more comprehensive data than have been available to date on employer-paid maternity leave in Australia in the period leading up to the introduction of PPL. As we elaborate in section 3, while increasing prevalence has been reported from a number of sources, limitations have included lack of representative data from employers and an inability to assess genuine access to provisions. Our survey data enable us to avoid these kinds of problems by focusing on leave usage. In addition, our surveys provide the first opportunity to assess the extent to which a range of employment-related factors and social and demographic characteristics explain the use of employer-paid maternity leave and whether key influences have changed over time.

We focus specifically on mothers, primarily because our survey data indicate that it is largely women who take up employer-paid parental leave provisions. Employers are more likely to provide paid maternity (rather than shared parental or paid paternity) leave; moreover employer-paid paternity leave tends to be of comparatively short duration. The scope for analysis of fathers' leave usage is therefore limited.

Before turning to our analysis, we provide an overview of recent research on employers' provision of work/family measures, followed by a summary of the pre-existing data on the prevalence of employer-paid parental leave in Australia. Our data and methods are then outlined, with the subsequent sections reporting the results of our interrogation of the survey data and the conclusions we draw from our investigation.

## 2. Employer-provided 'work/family' measures: previous research

In addition to numerous studies of public policies providing leave and other supports for working parents (see, e.g., cross-national comparisons in Gornick and Meyers, 2005; OECD, 2007; Moss, 2012; Thévenon, 2011), considerable research has been undertaken over recent decades on the extent and type of 'family friendly' provisions made available at the organisational level. This literature highlights the increasing prevalence of employer-provided work/family measures, both in within-country trends (for the UK, see Kersley *et al.*, 2006: pp.263-4; Whitehouse *et al.*, 2007) and in cross-national comparisons (e.g., Evans, 2001; OECD, 2007).

Analysis of provisions at the organisational level has focused in particular on implementation and access concerns (e.g., Brough *et al.*, 2008; Budd and Mumford, 2005; Forsyth and Polzer-Debruyne, 2007; Kossek, Lewis and Hammer, 2010; Lewis, 1997), but attention has also been directed to the question of what determines employers' propensity to adopt such provisions. A theoretical distinction between what can broadly be termed 'business case' and 'institutional' rationales has frequently been invoked in efforts to explain employer behaviour, with business case drivers including economic imperatives such as the need to attract and retain employees, while institutional pressures may emerge from norms, regulations and expectations in society more broadly or within the organisation (see, e.g., Davis and Kalleberg, 2006; Glass and Estes, 1997; Wood, de Menezes and Lasaosa, 2003). In practice, however, as several of these writers observe, these theoretical perspectives tend to overlap and the motives of employers may be mixed.

Nevertheless each perspective makes plausible arguments about the drivers underpinning employer-provided work/family measures. For example, the business case model's emphasis on attraction and retention of highly educated and skilled employees suggests that policies may be more prevalent in firms predominantly employing staff with professional training; or that, within firms, it will be those highly skilled staff for whom such provisions are available (see, Gray and Tudball, 2002). Also under the umbrella of business case arguments is a predicted association between 'high commitment' workplaces and the provision of work/family entitlements (e.g., Osterman, 1995; Wood, de Menezes and Lasaosa, 2003). A corollary of these predicted associations, less often examined in the literature, is the impact of an alternative business model based on numerical flexibility or employee 'churn' rather than the provision of entitlements designed to retain high skilled and highly committed workers. In such organisations, or for those on insecure contracts within organisations, access to work/family provisions may be restricted. The presence of contrasting business models could thus produce a polarisation in access to work/family policies, both between and within organisations (Davis and Kalleberg, 2006; Whitehouse and Zetlin, 1999).

Arguments about the prevalence of work/family provisions from an institutional perspective also raise the potential for a polarisation in access. From this perspective, the organisations most likely to have measures in place will be those subject to pressures to conform with employment practice norms, for example because of their visibility and profile or internally due to progressive and influential human relations systems (e.g., Glass and Fujimoto, 1995). Thus public sector workplaces

and large private sector organisations with formalised human resource systems and procedures are predicted to be more likely than smaller private sector organisations to have accessible measures in place. Provisions have also been seen to be more likely in female-dominated workplaces (e.g., Budd and Mumford, 2005), although this might be predicted from either a business case (retention of skilled women) or institutional (response to pressures and expectations) perspective.

A number of these observations underline potential risks associated with reliance on employer-provision of work/family policies such as paid parental leave. Given debates over class and gender effects even with nationally legislated policies (e.g., Evans, 2007), the potential for highly uneven availability of measures provided by employers is a concern, with risks of a widening division between 'paid parental leave rich' and 'paid parental leave poor' sections of the labour market. An alternative view, however, is that increasing prevalence will ensure the spread of provisions to all or most sections of the labour market, with a more egalitarian distribution of work/family provisions (including paid parental leave) emerging over time.

Our survey data provide the rare opportunity to examine a number of these issues in the Australian context. In the following section we provide a brief overview of that context while also highlighting some of the limitations of the available data in providing a comprehensive picture of paid parental leave prevalence and change.

### 3. Employer-paid parental leave: the Australian context

In this section we narrow the focus from work/family provisions in general to employer-paid parental leave (primarily maternity leave) and review the available evidence on prevalence over time in Australia, with particular emphasis on changes during the period 2005-2010. We draw on a number of data sources, each of which examines the issue through a different lens.

Focusing first on the formal paid maternity leave provisions of commonwealth, state and territory governments as employers, a number of recent changes can be identified. Provisions for public servants may be encoded in legislation and/or industrial agreements, and in several cases these have been amended over time with extensions in duration. Between 2005 and 2010 leave duration was extended in four of the nine jurisdictions: from 12 to 14 weeks in Queensland; 12 to 16 weeks in South Australia (and 18 weeks for those with five years or more service); seven to 14 weeks in Western Australia; and 14 to 18 weeks in the Australian Capital Territory.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the public sector, change has also been documented in the increasing proportion of large organisations with paid maternity leave provisions in place. Statistics on such provisions (which may be set out in industrial agreements and/or

<sup>1</sup> Provisions for the nine governments were encoded in the following regulatory instruments: *Australian Capital Territory Public Sector Management Standards 2006*, Republication No.33; *Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Award 2009* (New South Wales); *Maternity Leave (Commonwealth Employees) Act 1973*; Minister for Transport, Trade, Employment and Industrial Relations, July 2008, *Directive No. 5/08, Paid Parental Leave (Queensland)*; *Northern Territory of Australia Public Service Employment and Management By-Laws 2012*; *Public Service and Government Officers General Agreement 2011* (Western Australia); South Australian Government Wages Parity (Salaried) Enterprise Agreement 2010; *Tasmanian State Service Award (Consolidated)*; *Victorian Public Service Agreement 2006*.

company policies) are available from regular surveys conducted by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) (formerly the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency). Among businesses required to report to this agency (non-public sector employers with 100 or more employees) the incidence of paid maternity leave provisions increased from around 46 per cent in 2004-05 to 55 per cent in 2009-10 (WGEA, 2013, p.22). Agency reports have also drawn attention to inequalities in provision within and between organisations: in 2009-10, e.g., there was considerable variation in prevalence across industries and only 21 per cent of organisations providing paid maternity leave extended these entitlements to casual employees (WGEA, 2013, pp.22-23).

A further source of information on change has been Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on employees who report access to paid parental leave in their main job. The proportion of employees responding positively to this question in the ABS *Forms of Employment* survey increased from 47 per cent of women and 39 per cent of men in 2006 (the survey was not run in 2005) to 50 per cent of women and 42 per cent of men in 2010 (ABS, 2007, 2011). While this survey again provides evidence of an increasing prevalence of employer-provided leave entitlements, it is reliant on employees' knowledge of entitlements and has consistently recorded a high proportion of 'don't know' responses (around one-quarter of men and 15 per cent of women responding to the survey in both these years).<sup>2</sup>

Overlapping the sources outlined above are some datasets collecting information on provisions within collective agreements. Analysis of samples of federal registered agreements and a combination of agreements registered at state and federal levels has shown limited incidence of paid maternity leave provisions, with the highest frequency in public sector agreements and those covering more than 500 employees (Baird, Brennan and Cutcher, 2002; Whitehouse, 2001). More recently, Baird, Frino and Williamson (2009) found some increase in the incidence of paid maternity leave clauses and duration of leave, albeit again with higher prevalence in the public sector (59 per cent of public sector compared with 16 per cent of private sector agreements and 55 per cent in the non-profit sector), as well as some increase in the duration of paid maternity leave available in enterprise agreements, with 14 weeks being the most common period.

It is against the backdrop of these indicators of increases in the prevalence and duration of parental leave that we conduct our analysis of employer-paid maternity leave in 2005 and 2010. Our data enable us to focus directly on the usage of leave, thus avoiding the limitations of estimates based on employer surveys (which have been available only for large organisations outside the public sector and which shed limited light on access within organisations) or employees' perceptions of access (which may lack accuracy). In the following section we explain our research design and elaborate further on our datasets.

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<sup>2</sup> These difficulties were highlighted in another ABS series (Cat. No. 6310) when relatively smooth yearly increases in the proportion reporting access to paid maternity and paternity leave were interrupted by a fall from 45 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men in 2008 to 37 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men in 2009 (ABS, 2009, 2010). This fluctuation presumably reflected confusion around the time the government announced its plans for a paid parental leave scheme, underlining the limitations of measures based on perceptions of access.

## 4. Research design, data and methods

Our specific research questions are set out below, along with an overview of the design of our analysis. We then describe our survey data and analytic samples. This is followed by a description of the variables used in the analysis and the analytic models applied.

### *Research questions and design*

In line with the aims outlined earlier, our research addresses the following questions:

1. Did usage (in terms of uptake and duration) of employer-paid maternity leave increase over the period 2005 to 2010?
2. What were the main influences on uptake and duration of employer-paid maternity leave in 2005 and 2010, and did these influences change over the time period?
3. Was usage of employer-paid maternity leave entitlements more or less evenly distributed in 2010 compared with 2005?

In order to address the first question we use our survey data (described more fully below) to provide a descriptive overview of uptake and duration of employer-paid maternity leave in 2005 and 2010. The second and third questions require analysis of these data in multivariate models to identify influences on leave uptake and duration and the extent to which these have changed over time. On the basis of the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier, for both uptake and duration we assess the impact of employment-related variables indicative of employees' status or skills (occupation and annual income) as well as the extent to which employees might provide 'numerical flexibility' for their employer (part-time vs full-time status, and permanent vs fixed-term or casual contract). We also examine indicators of 'institutional' influences on the availability of leave: specifically public vs private sector and the size of employing organisations. While we anticipate, on the basis of the theoretical literature, that employment-related variables will be the primary determinants of access to (and thus use of) leave, we also control for a number of social and demographic indicators that might impact on labour force attachment and decisions over the use and duration of leave. These include age, education, marital status, ethnic background and whether this was a mother's first child. Housing tenure is also included as another aspect of the family context and financial security that could influence decisions over paid employment and leave-taking. Our analytic models assess the impact of these variables in 2005 and 2010.

### *Data: surveys and analytic samples*

Our analysis is based on data from two surveys that collected information directly from mothers on leave usage around the time of a birth. The first, entitled the Parental Leave in Australia Survey (PLAS), was conducted in 2005 as a nested study within the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). It was distributed to the LSAC infant cohort, a national sample of children born between March 2003 and February 2004 (for further details see, Soloff, Lawrence and Johnstone, 2005). Responses to PLAS were received from 3,573 of the 5,061 mothers surveyed, a response rate of 70.6 per cent. The second survey, entitled the Baseline Mothers Survey (BaMS), was conducted in late 2010 and early 2011 as part of the government-funded evaluation of

PPL scheme.<sup>3</sup> It was delivered to a sample drawn from recipients of the Baby Bonus for a baby born in late 2009, approximately 12 months prior to the introduction of the PPL scheme. Responses were received from 2,587 mothers who would have been eligible for PPL had it been available at the time, with a response rate of 81.1 per cent (Martin *et al.*, 2012).

A number of restrictions were applied to the samples from these surveys to enhance their comparability and relevance for the analysis. As our focus was on employer-paid maternity leave we excluded mothers who were self-employed, and to enhance comparability (given differences between the samples in the level of detail collected from those who changed employers or worked very short hours prior to the birth of their child) we excluded those who worked for more than one employer in the year prior to the birth and those who worked fewer than 10 hours per week. In PLAS, of the 2,462 mothers who had worked prior to the birth of their child we excluded 43 who worked for more than one employer, 166 who worked fewer than 10 hours per week and 205 who were self-employed. We also dropped cases with missing values on covariates and key variables ( $n=68$ ). The final analytic sample for PLAS was 1,980 mothers. From the 2,587 BaMS mothers, all of whom were working prior to the birth, we excluded 186 who had worked for more than one employer in the year prior to birth, 12 who worked fewer than 10 hours a week and 165 who were self-employed. We also dropped cases with missing values on covariates and key variables ( $n=208$ ). The final analytic sample for BAMS was 2,016 mothers.

While there remains a potential difficulty in comparability between the samples due to the timing of the surveys in relation to the births (such that a greater proportion of PLAS mothers had returned to work at the time of the survey), our comparisons are unlikely to be affected by this difference given the relatively short duration of paid leave periods and the likelihood that they would be taken prior to other forms of leave including unpaid leave. We can thus be reasonably confident that, in both samples, mothers had completed any paid leave taken by the time of the survey.

### ***Dependent variables***

As our questions focus on both uptake and duration we used two dependent variables. The first measure indicated whether mothers took any paid maternity leave (1 = yes; 2 = no). The second differentiated the amount of paid leave taken by mothers. Our leave duration measure was dichotomous, with 1 = took more than three months leave, and a reference category of 0 = took up to and including three months leave; this was due to the distribution of leave duration and the small number of mothers taking long paid leave.

### ***Covariates***

The rationale for selection of covariates has been presented above (see 'Research questions and design'). Here we explain how these variables were measured, commencing with the set of employment-related variables highlighted as potentially relevant in the literature. Indicators of mothers' skills and employment status prior to the birth of their child (occupation and income) were measured as follows. Occupation

<sup>3</sup> BaMS was conducted primarily in 2010 although some data were also collected in early 2011. As data were mainly collected in 2010 we use this throughout as the survey year.

included four categories: 1 = Managers (reference), 2 = Professionals, 3 = Sales, Service and Clerical workers, and 4 = Trades workers, Technicians and Labourers. Mothers' annual income prior to the child's birth was adjusted for inflation between 2005 and 2010 and comprised six categories: 1 = 78,000+, 2 = 52,000-77,999, 3 = 36,400-51,999, 4 = 26,000-36,399 (reference), 5 = 15,600-25,999 and 6 = <15,600. The potential to provide numerical flexibility for employers was measured by a dummy for whether or not the mothers were working full-time (with a referent category of part-time) and a measure of contract type differentiating between 1 = permanent (reference), 2 = fixed-term and 3 = casual.

Covariates representing 'institutional' influences included sector and organisation size. Sector was represented as 1 = private (reference), 2 = public. Organisation size comprised the following categories: 1 = <20 employees, 2 = 20-100 employees, 3 = >100 employees (reference).

Finally, the social and demographic controls included in the models were measured in the following ways. Mother's age at the time of the survey was included as a continuous measure. Highest level of education was measured as 1 = <Year 12 (reference), 2 = completed Year 12, 3 = trade/certificate/diploma and 4 = Bachelor degree or higher. Marital status at the time of the child's birth comprised three categories: 1 = legally married (reference), 2 = cohabiting, 3 = not living with a partner. Ethnic background differentiated 1 = Australian born (reference), 2 = migrant, English speaking, and 3 = migrant, Non-English speaking background (NESB). A dummy for whether this was the mother's first child was coded 1 = yes. Housing tenure distinguished between 1 = own outright (reference), 2 = purchasing, 3 = private rental and 4 = public housing or other. All variables were synthesised across both data sets.

### ***Analytic models***

While our first research question could be addressed with simple descriptive statistics from the two analytic samples, the others required the development of multivariate models, first to examine the influences on whether or not mothers used employer-paid maternity leave and second to assess the influences on leave duration. We used logistic regression in both cases as the dependent variables were dichotomous. The models were estimated separately for the PLAS and BaMS samples. In addition, to determine if there were significant differences in the associations between the covariates and the uptake and duration of employer-paid leave between the two years we re-estimated all models on a pooled data set of the PLAS and BaMS mothers and interacted the year of data collection (2005 for PLAS and 2010 for BaMS) with all model covariates. This enabled us to determine whether the differences between mothers' use of leave across the two time points were significant, taking into account compositional differences in the two samples.

## **5. Findings**

Results from the descriptive task of identifying the extent of change in the use of employer-paid maternity leave over the period 2005-2010 are set out in table 1. Comparison of the two datasets highlights marked differences, with 52 per cent of mothers in the BaMS analytic sample (in 2010) having taken some employer-paid maternity leave, compared with 40 per cent of the PLAS analytic sample (in 2005).



Examination of these figures shows that change occurred in both public and private sectors over the time period: specifically, the proportion of mothers working in the public sector who took some employer-paid maternity leave rose from 72 to 85 per cent over the time period, while in the private sector the change was from 21 to 35 per cent.

Table 1 - PLAS and BaMS mothers employed before the birth and working >10 hours per week – use and duration of employer-paid maternity leave

	<i>PLAS (2005)</i>	<i>BaMS (2010)</i>
Took paid maternity leave (%)	40	52
Took maternity leave by sector (%)		
Public	72	85
Private	21	35
N	1,980	2,016
Average paid maternity leave duration (months) <sup>a</sup>	2.55	3.93
Average paid maternity leave duration by sector		
Public	2.74	4.00
Private	2.17	3.84
N	793	1,044

*Notes:* <sup>a</sup> Excludes those who took no paid maternity leave.

Table 1 also illustrates an increase in the average duration of paid maternity leave: from a little over 2.5 months in 2005 to nearly four months in 2010. Again, increases were evident in both sectors: from less than three to four months in the public sector and from a little over two to almost four months in the private sector.

### **Multivariate models**

Descriptive statistics for the variables included in our multivariate models are set out in table 2. Consistent with the findings reported in table 1, there is a decrease in the proportion of respondents taking no employer-paid maternity leave in 2010, and an increase in the proportions taking longer periods of leave. Social and demographic variables are the next items listed in the table, and we note the strong similarity in composition of the samples across the two years, with the only notable differences being a slightly higher proportion with Bachelor or higher degrees in 2010 (alongside a lower proportion with trade certificates or diplomas) and a higher proportion reporting that they owned their house in 2010 (with a lower proportion reporting that they were purchasing a home). Employment-related variables are listed next in table 2, which again shows broad similarity across the two samples. Apart from some contrasts in very broad occupational groupings, the main differences are a higher proportion of respondents in permanent positions in 2010 (balanced by a lower proportion employed as casuals) and a higher proportion of respondents employed in large (>100 employees) organisations (alongside a smaller proportion in organisations with <20 employees). These contrasts could reflect genuine changes in the labour market composition of mothers over time, but most likely reflect differences in sampling processes between the two surveys. As we undertake separate multivariate analyses for each year, differences in the samples are unlikely to influence the associations observed.

Table 2 - Descriptive statistics for model covariates, PLAS (2005) and BaMS (2010) – percentages<sup>a</sup>

	<i>PLAS (2005)</i>	<i>BaMS (2010)</i>
Duration of paid leave		
No paid leave	60	48
Up to 3 months	32	22
More than 3 months	8	30
Total	100	100
Age (mean)	32	32
Marital status at birth of child		
Married	80	77
Cohabiting	15	19
Not living with a partner	5	4
Total	100	100
Ethnic background		
Australian born	83	80
Migrant – English speaking	9	7
Migrant – NESB	8	13
Total	100	100
First child (1=yes)		
0	46	48
1	54	52
Total	100	100
Highest level of education		
Less than Year 12	8	8
Year 12	13	17
Trade certificate/diploma	34	24
Bachelor degree or higher	45	51
Total	100	100
Housing tenure		
Own outright	8	19
Purchasing	70	56
Private rental	15	21
Public housing/other	7	3
Total	100	100
Occupation in job before birth		
Managers	6	9
Professionals	37	36
Sales, Service & Clerical workers	33	47
Trades, Technicians & Labourers	24	8
Total	100	100
Part-time/full-time status in job before birth		
Part-time	43	44
Full-time	57	56
Total	100	100
Contract type in job before birth		
Permanent/ongoing	75	83
Fixed-term	5	6
Casual	20	11
Total	100	100
Sector in job before birth		
Private	64	67
Public	36	33
Total	100	100

Table 2 - Descriptive statistics for model covariates, PLAS (2005) and BaMS (2010) – percentages<sup>a</sup> (continued)

	<i>PLAS (2005)</i>	<i>BaMS (2010)</i>
Employer size in job before birth		
<20 employees	25	15
20-100 employees	19	14
>100 employees	56	71
Total	100	100
Annual income in job before birth		
78,000 or more	5	6
52-77,999	18	21
36,400-51,999	23	24
26,000-36,399	20	24
15,600-25,999	21	17
<15,600	13	8
Total	100	100
N	1,980	2,016

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Figures have been rounded and may not sum to 100 per cent.

Our first multivariate models, examining whether employer-paid maternity leave was taken or not, are reported in table 3. We note initially that there is some consistency across the two years in terms of the variables strongly associated with leave-taking, and in the direction of those associations. As anticipated, it is the employment-related variables presented in the bottom half of the table that are most important for taking paid leave. The social and demographic factors are much less important and there are few significant associations. Highly statistically significant negative associations between leave-taking and both fixed-term and casual (compared with permanent) status are evident, underlining key divisions in the Australian labour market in access to employment entitlements. In addition, the likelihood of taking paid maternity leave in both years is significantly higher for public sector employees and significantly lower for employees in organisations smaller than the reference category of >100 employees. Another significant influence on the use of paid maternity leave is annual income, with those on salaries higher than the reference category of \$26,000-\$36,399 more likely to have taken paid leave than those in that category, and those on lower incomes less likely to have done so. Overall these findings suggest that taking employer-paid maternity leave is determined primarily by access, with availability more likely in the public sector and larger organisations, and more likely for those earning higher incomes, but considerably less likely for those with non-permanent status, and somewhat less likely for those on lower incomes, even when other influences are controlled for.

Table 3 - Logit models of uptake of employer-paid maternity leave by social, demographic and job characteristics, PLAS (2005) and BaMS (2010) – coefficients (b), standard errors in parenthesis

	<i>PLAS (2005)</i>	<i>BaMS (2010)</i>
Age	0.02 (0.02)	0.03* (0.01)
Marital status (reference Married)		
Cohabiting	-0.19 (0.21)	-0.07 (0.17)
Not living with a partner	-0.03 (0.37)	-0.04 (0.34)
Ethnic background (reference Australian born)		
Migrant – English speaking	-0.32 (0.24)	-0.08 (0.23)
Migrant – NESB	-0.43 (0.24)	-0.23 (0.18)
First child	-0.33* (0.15)	0.02 (0.15)
Highest level of education (reference <Year 12)		
Year 12	0.18 (0.31)	0.40 (0.26)
Trade certificate/diploma	0.18 (0.28)	0.07 (0.26)
Bachelor degree or higher	0.53 (0.29)	0.62* (0.26)
Housing tenure (reference Own outright)		
Purchasing	-0.30 (0.24) <sup>a</sup>	0.29 (0.16)
Private rental	-0.16 (0.30)	0.10 (0.20)
Public housing/other	0.04 (0.36)	0.14 (0.40)
Occupation (reference Managers)		
Professionals	0.62* (0.27)	0.48* (0.22)
Sales, Service & Clerical workers	0.24 (0.29)	0.31 (0.22)
Trades, Technicians & Labourers	0.13 (0.29)	-0.34 (0.32)
Employed Full-time (reference Part-time)	-0.27 (0.19)	-0.37* (0.17)
Contract type (reference Permanent)		
Fixed-term	-2.78*** (0.31) <sup>a</sup>	-1.17*** (0.26)
Casual	-3.48*** (0.37)	-3.99*** (0.39)
Public sector (reference Private)	2.31*** (0.15)	2.26*** (0.17)
Employer size (reference >100)		
<20 employees	-1.50*** (0.19) <sup>a</sup>	-2.06*** (0.21)
20-100 employees	-0.89*** (0.17) <sup>a</sup>	-1.58*** (0.18)
Annual income (reference 26,000-36,399)		
78,000 or more	1.02** (0.30)	0.93** (0.28)
52-77,999	0.79*** (0.22)	0.85*** (0.20)
36,400-51,999	0.48* (0.20)	0.55** (0.17)
15,600-25,999	-0.55* (0.23)	-0.02 (0.21)
<15,600	-1.08** (0.33)	-0.70* (0.31)
Constant	-1.17 (0.76)	-1.73** (0.61)
N	1,980	2,016

Notes: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001. <sup>a</sup> Interactions suggest that the difference between this coefficient and the coefficient for the BaMS sample are significantly different at p<0.05.

As explained earlier, in order to investigate whether the observed associations were significantly different in 2010 compared with 2005 we re-estimated the models on a pooled data set from both years, interacting the year of data collection (2005 for PLAS and 2010 for BaMS) with all model covariates. Some significant differences were apparent across the years, mainly in relation to employment characteristics. While those on fixed-term contracts were less likely than those on permanent contracts to use employer-paid leave in both years, they were significantly more likely to use it in 2010

than in 2005. Other significant differences were that, compared with mothers working in large organisations (with >100 employees), mothers in small (<20 employees) and medium (20-100 employees) organisations were significantly less likely to have used employer-paid leave in 2010 than in 2005. These results may be due to sample differences across the two time points, given the higher proportion of mothers in permanent positions and the lower proportion in organisations with <20 employees in BaMS compared with PLAS. To the extent that they represent real changes over the time period, they indicate somewhat contrasting influences on changes in the evenness of distribution.

Table 4 - Logit models of duration of employer-paid maternity leave, >3 months leave compared with up to 3 months leave, by social, demographic and job characteristics, PLAS (2005) and BaMS (2010) - coefficients (b), standard errors in parenthesis

	<i>PLAS (2005)</i>	<i>BaMS (2010)</i>
Age	0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Marital status (reference Married)		
Cohabiting	0.32 (0.29)	-0.25 (0.20)
Not living with a partner	-0.46 (0.55)	-0.03 (0.45)
Ethnic background (reference Australian born)		
Migrant – English speaking	0.27 (0.33)	0.46 (0.28)
Migrant – NESB	-0.07 (0.37)	-0.38 (0.21)
First child	-0.01 (0.22)	0.13 (0.16)
Highest level of education (reference <Year 12)		
Year 12	0.26 (0.61)	0.49 (0.38)
Trade certificate/diploma	0.49 (0.54)	0.42 (0.37)
Bachelor degree or higher	0.11 (0.55)	0.36 (0.36)
Housing tenure (reference Own outright)		
Purchasing	0.21 (0.34)	-0.12 (0.18)
Private rental	0.54 (0.42)	-0.22 (0.23)
Public housing/other	0.49 (0.50)	-0.37 (0.52)
Occupation (reference Managers)		
Professionals	0.33 (0.42)	0.08 (0.26)
Sales, Service & Clerical workers	0.55 (0.48)	0.19 (0.27)
Trades, Technicians & Labourers	0.51 (0.47)	-0.04 (0.43)
Employed Full-time (reference Part-time)	0.18 (0.28)	-0.05 (0.18)
Contract type (reference Permanent)		
Fixed-term	-0.19 (0.66)	-0.03 (0.30)
Casual	0.55 (0.85)	-0.51 (0.77)
Public sector (reference Private)	1.05*** (0.23)	1.33*** (0.14)
Employer size (reference >100)		
<20 employees	0.09 (0.38)	-0.87* (0.40)
20-100 employees	-0.25 (0.30)	0.19 (0.28)
Annual income (reference 26,000-36,399)		
78,000 or more	0.17 (0.48)	-0.51 (0.30)
52-77,999	0.65 (0.32)	0.07 (0.22)
36,400-51,999	0.20 (0.30)	-0.08 (0.21)
15,600-25,999	-0.18 (0.40)	-0.41 (0.26)
<15,600	-0.40 (0.69)	-0.23 (0.44)
Constant	-3.91** (1.16)	-0.09 (0.77)
N	793	1,044

Notes: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001.

Our second set of multivariate models, examining influences on the duration of paid maternity leave, is reported in table 4. The analysis identified fewer influences on duration than were found for uptake, with employment in the public sector the only variable significantly associated with leave duration greater than three months in 2005. A positive association between public sector employment and longer leave-taking was also evident in 2010, alongside a negative association between employment in a small organisation (<20 compared with >100 employees) and longer duration leave. In contrast with the analysis of uptake, for leave duration there were no significant differences apparent between 2005 and 2010 when we ran our pooled data models.

## 6. Discussion

Drawing on two large population studies conducted in 2005 and 2010 that were broadly representative of working mothers, our analysis has produced a number of findings that extend understanding of the extent of, and influences on, employer-paid maternity leave in the Australian context. Consistent with indications from other data sources on the expanding prevalence of employer provisions, our analysis produced clear evidence of an increase in uptake and duration of employer-paid maternity leave from 2005 to 2010. Increased usage occurred in both public and private sectors, hence the aggregate change was not simply a 'private sector catch up' effect, but was indicative of developments in the public sector also.

In addition to documenting increases in the uptake and duration of employer-paid maternity leave, key issues for our analysis were the identification of influences on leave usage and the extent to which these had changed over time. Our multivariate models highlighted the importance of employment-related factors as influences on usage: in particular, in both years we identified a strong negative association between non-permanent (casual and fixed-term) employment status and leave uptake, as well as positive associations with location in the public sector, in large organisations with >100 employees, and in comparatively well-paid jobs. These results suggest that uptake in 2005 and 2010 was primarily determined by access to provisions rather than by 'choices' associated with social or demographic characteristics, and they reflect the inequalities of access that might be expected in association with a system of employer-provided leave entitlements. They are in many ways consistent with theoretical arguments about the risk of a polarisation between those with and without meaningful access to leave entitlements under such conditions.

We further investigated whether the extension of employer provisions was associated with amelioration or exacerbation of these inequalities by examining differences in influences between 2005 and 2010. The results of this pooled data analysis, which (as we noted earlier) may partly reflect compositional differences in the two samples, suggested that increases in the uptake of leave have been unevenly distributed among working mothers. For those on fixed-term contracts, although the likelihood of using employer-paid leave was still lower in 2010 than for those on permanent contracts, the 'penalty' of fixed-term status appeared to have lessened in 2010. While our data cannot shed light on why this might have occurred, a potential explanation may be that fixed-term employment has become more prevalent in professional occupations and areas of the labour market where employers are more likely to have inclusive policies

and practices. However, the results also suggested an increasing ‘penalty’ for those employed in medium and small (compared with large) organisations, with the negative association between leave uptake and location in smaller organisations significantly larger in 2010. These findings (again to the extent that they represent real change) are consistent with increasing polarisation in access and usage over time. In addition to these findings, we note the persistence over time of strong negative associations with casual status and positive associations with income – both of which underline the ongoing inequalities likely to accompany employer-paid provisions.

Our analyses of duration of leave suggested that this aspect of leave-taking may be less readily ‘explained’ than leave uptake. The significant and positive association between public sector employment and longer leave duration in both years again underlines the persistence of uneven distribution with employer-paid entitlements, as does the presence in 2010 of a negative association between employment in small organisations and longer duration leave. However, we found no evidence in our pooled models that these dimensions of uneven distribution had significantly increased over time.

## 7. Conclusion

This article has examined usage of employer-paid maternity leave and influences on uptake and duration in Australia in 2005 and 2010. Employer-paid maternity leave schemes have been a central aspect of the Australian parental leave environment, with several sources indicating their increased prevalence over recent years. Our main aims were to document and explain changes in employer-paid maternity leave usage in this context. We undertook the first examination of recent change in the use of employer-paid maternity leave in Australia and the first comprehensive analysis of influences on uptake and duration. The samples we utilised were broadly similar in composition, and the surveys were constructed in ways that allowed collection of similar data on leave usage.

Our findings confirmed significant increases in the uptake and duration of employer-paid maternity leave in 2010 compared with 2005 in both public and private sectors, and underlined the importance of employment-related factors in influencing outcomes. Employment in the public sector, in large organisations and in permanent and relatively high-income jobs were consistently and positively associated with uptake, while public sector employment was consistently and positively associated with longer duration leave. These results suggest that usage is closely linked with access and highlight the persistent inequalities inherent in systems primarily reliant on employer-provided benefits, signalling marked divisions in access to paid-maternity leave in the pre-PPL Australian context. However our pooled data models provided mixed evidence on increasing polarisation: in these models employment in medium or small (compared with large) organisations was associated with a lower likelihood of paid leave uptake in 2010 compared with 2005, suggesting an increasing divide; however those on fixed-term employment contracts were more likely to use paid leave in 2010 than in 2005 (albeit while still significantly less likely than permanent employees to do so in both years).

In conclusion we reflect briefly on the policy implications of our findings and

directions for further research. Our analysis underlines the importance of expanding access to paid maternity leave in Australia, particularly to those who lack the opportunity to utilise paid leave arrangements offered by employers, and who also tend to be those in the most vulnerable positions in the labour market. Eligibility is thus a crucial consideration in policy development and future research will need to assess the effectiveness of the current, or any future, paid parental leave policy in expanding access to and use of entitlements. A further issue highlighted by our analysis, which has drawn attention to the increasing usage of employer-paid provisions in Australia, is the potential interaction of paid parental leave policy with existing employer entitlements and the extent to which employers extend, maintain or retract their provisions in the context of a national scheme. An understanding of employer-paid provisions and the direction of change prior to Australia's first paid parental scheme will be essential for assessing the impact of current and future policies.

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