



## Questions and Answers about Paid Sick Days A Sloan Work and Family Research Network Fact Sheet

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### Introduction

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared Fact Sheets that provide statistical answers to some important questions about work–family and work–life issues. This Fact Sheet includes statistics about Paid Sick Days. (Last updated: April 2009)

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### Who supports paid sick leave?

- ✔ **Fact 1** “A substantial majority of all socio–demographic and political groups consider paid sick days a very important worker’s right. Paid sick days are scored more highly by African Americans rather than other racial and ethnic groups (92% vs. 67–77%)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).
- ✔ **Fact 2** “...77% [of Americans believe] that having paid sick days is ‘very important’ for workers. Among workplace standards that are widely recognized under state and federal laws, this level of importance is...on par with the 77–82% saying family and maternity leave, a minimum wage, and time–and–a–half pay for overtime are very important” (Smith, 2008, p. 1).
- ✔ **Fact 3** “Fully 86% [of Americans] favor a law that guarantees paid sick days for all workers... (Support is the same whether paid sick days are proposed as a ‘basic labor standard’ or merely as a legal requirement)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).
- ✔ **Fact 4** “On a 0–10 scale [where ‘10’ means that you agree very strongly and ‘0’ means that you don’t agree at all], 48% [of Americans] give paid sick days the highest rating of a 10 as a ‘basic workplace standard’ and 50% score it a 10 as a ‘basic worker’s right’” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).
- ✔ **Fact 5** “On a 0–10 scale [where ‘10’ means that you agree very strongly and ‘0’ means that you don’t agree at all], fully 80% [of Americans] gave paid sick days a 6 or higher as a ‘basic workplace standard’ and 84% scored it as a ‘basic worker’s right’” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).
- ✔ **Fact 6** “Majorities of all socio–demographic and political groups agree that paid sick days are both a ‘basic worker’s right’ and a ‘basic workplace standard.’ African Americans led other groups [in the belief that paid sick days are a ‘basic worker’s right’] (91% to 60–79%) [More people from all ethnic groups believe that paid sick days are a ‘basic’ workplace standard’ (Hispanics 95%, African Americans 93%, Whites, 83%, Others 78%)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).



✔ **Fact 7** “When a specific plan is proposed that would give full-time workers up to nine paid sick days per year, it is endorsed by 79% [of Americans] and 85% [back] a similar plan calling for up to seven paid sick days per year... Likewise, a plan that calls for part-time workers to get a pro-rated amount of paid sick days is favored by 82% regardless of whether it is based on nine or seven days” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).

### ? How does income influence access to paid sick leave?

✔ **Fact 1** “[The] majorities of all socio-demographic and political groups agree that paid sick days are both a ‘basic worker’s right’ and a ‘basic workplace standard’” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).

✔ **Fact 2** “Paid sick days are scored more highly by those with low incomes vs. high incomes (82% vs. 70%)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).

✔ **Fact 3** “Only 47 percent of low-wage employees (bottom 25% of wage distribution) have paid sick leave compared with 84 percent of high-wage employees (top 25% of wage distribution)” (Bond, Galinsky, & Hill, 2002, p. 9).

✔ **Fact 4** “Only 68 percent of the U.S. workforce have paid time off for personal illness, with managers and professionals, more highly compensated employees, and older employees having greater access than other employees” (Bond, Galinsky, & Hill, 2002, p. 9).

✔ **Fact 5** “Support [for legislation requiring paid sick days] declines with income from 90–93% for those earning less than \$40,000 a year to 78–79% for those earning \$80,000+” (Smith, 2008, p. 3).

✔ **Fact 6** Of people with low incomes, 84% believe that paid sick days are a ‘basic worker’s right’ and 87% believe they are a ‘basic workplace standard.’ In people with high incomes, 72% believe that paid sick days are a ‘basic worker’s right’ and 80% believe they are a ‘basic workplace standard’ (Smith, 2008, p. 2).

### ? How does political affiliation public opinions about paid sick leave?

✔ **Fact 1** “While 83% of liberals say [paid sick days are] very important, only 71% of conservatives agree. (The relatively small groups that are extremely liberal and extremely conservative diverge from the overall liberal-conservative pattern.) Likewise, strong Democrats rate paid sick days as more important than strong Republicans do (86% to 67%)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).

✔ **Fact 2** “Politically, 96% of liberals endorse general legislation [requirements for paid sick days] vs. 70% of conservatives, and [on paid sick days] as a ‘basic labor standard,’ the liberal-conservative divide is 94% to 75%. General legislation is backed by 94% of strong Democrats vs. 69% of strong Republicans and as a ‘basic labor standard,’ it is 95% for strong Democrats and 75% for strong Republicans” (Smith, 2008, p. 3).



✔ **Fact 3** “Politically, liberals and Democrats are more supportive than conservatives and Republicans are [of paid sick days as a ‘basic worker’s right’ and a ‘basic workplace standard’]. On worker’s rights, 96% of liberals vs. 68% of conservatives agree, and on workplace standards it is 94% to 81%” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).



### How does union affiliation influence opinions about paid sick leave?

✔ **Fact 1** “Paid sick days are scored more highly by union households vs. non-union households (84–87% vs. 74%)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).

✔ **Fact 2** “Union households back [both legislation requirements and workplace standards on paid sick days] more than non-union households (89–100% vs. 83% on legislation and 91–92% vs. 84% on ‘basic labor standard’)” (Smith, 2008, p. 3).

✔ **Fact 3** “Union households are more supportive than non-union households are [of paid sick days as a ‘basic worker’s right’ and a ‘basic workplace standard’] (86–100% vs. 77% for worker’s rights and 90–100% vs. 83% for workplace standard)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).

✔ **Fact 4** The high level of support for paid sick days converts into political capital, with 46% saying that a candidate backing such legislation would make them more likely to vote for him/her and just 10% indicating that they would be less likely to vote for the candidate. An additional 42% responded that a candidate’s position on paid sick days would not make them more or less likely to vote for him/her and 1% [were] unsure... This is a net gain of 36 percentage points for pro-paid-sick-days candidates. (Among likely voters the gain to the pro-paid-sick-days candidate is slightly smaller at 34 percentage points)” (Smith, 2008, p. 3–4).

✔ **Fact 5** “Supporting an exemption for smaller employers loses support for a candidate with 12–17% indicating they would be more likely to vote for a candidate backing an exemption, 31–34% saying it would make them less likely to back such a candidate, and 50–53% reporting it won’t make a difference... This is a net loss of –14 to –22 percentage points” (Smith, 2008, p. 3–4).



### How does gender influence opinions about paid sick leave?

✔ **Fact 1** “Support is higher among women than men [for legislation requiring paid sick days for workers and for paid sick days] as a ‘basic labor standard’ (90–91% to 80%)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2–3).

✔ **Fact 2** “Women are more supportive than men [of paid sick days as a ‘basic worker’s right’ and a ‘basic workplace standard’] (85% to 73% on worker’s right and 87% to 82% on workplace standard)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).

✔ **Fact 3** “[The] majorities of all socio-demographic and political groups agree that paid sick days are both a ‘basic worker’s right’ and a ‘basic workplace standard.’ Of the same sub-group differences that appeared on



the importance measure...Paid sick days are scored as “very important” by more women than men (86% vs. 66%)” (Smith, 2008, p. 2).



### How does employer size affect opinions about paid sick leave?

❑ **Fact 1** “People are divided about how a paid-sick-days requirement should apply to smaller employers... 70–78% [of Americans favor] a plan that would require employers with [fewer than] 10–15 employees to offer just six paid sick days rather than the nine days that larger employers would have to provide... Similarly, 61–74% [favor] a plan that would permit smaller employers to offer five paid sick days rather than the seven days required of larger employers” (Smith, 2008, p. 3).

❑ **Fact 2** “When people are asked if small employers should be exempted from providing paid sick days, the public is evenly divided with 48–51% supporting a small-employer exemption and 48–50% opposing it...” (Smith, 2008, p. 3).

❑ **Fact 3** “[W]hile 35–37% believe that smaller employees should provide [the] same number of paid sick days as larger employers, more (46–50%) back having smaller employers provide ‘some, but fewer’ paid sick days than larger employers are required to” (Smith, 2008, p. 3).

❑ **Fact 4** “Only 11–15% support having smaller employers provide no paid sick days... Of those who favor exempting smaller employers..., only 4–5% [back] having smaller employers provide no paid sick days” (Smith, 2008, p. 3).



### How does paid sick leave affect child care?

❑ **Fact 1** In a study of how workplace conditions influence a parent’s ability to care for his or her sick children, “parents who had either paid sick or vacation leave were 5.2 times as likely to care for their children themselves when they were sick” (Heymann, Toomey, & Furstenberg, 1999, p. 870).

❑ **Fact 2** In a study of working parents, 42% of sample participants cared for their children when they were sick, whereas 58% continued to work. Parents who cared for their children reported they could do so because of paid leave policies at their workplace: “29% were able to use paid vacation and personal days, 14% received paid leave to care for sick family members, and 11% were able to use their own paid sick leave” (Heymann, Toomey, & Furstenberg, 1999, p. 872).



### Which countries provide access to paid sick leave?

❑ **Fact 1** “At least 145 countries provide paid sick days for short- or long-term illnesses, with 136 providing a week or more annually. More than 81 countries provide sickness benefits for at least 26 weeks or until recovery. The U.S. provides only unpaid leave for serious illnesses through the FMLA, which does not cover all workers” (Heymann, Earle, & Hayes, 2007, p.5).



## What is the reaction to legislation around paid time off (PTO)?

**Fact 1** “The public is quite divided as to whether PTO would fulfill paid-sick-days requirements... Thus, 55% favors having employers giving at least nine days of PTO being exempted from having to also provide paid sick days, while 42% [oppose] this exception. Even more closely, 47% said that if PTO covered at least nine days, employers should still be ‘required to provide separate paid sick days,’ 47% thought ‘they should be excused from providing’ paid sick days, and 6% had no opinion” (Smith, 2008, p. 3).

The Network has additional resources related to this topic.

1. Visit a topic page on Paid Sick Leave at: <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/topic.php?id=42>

Topic pages provide resources and information, including statistics, definitions, overviews & briefs, bills & statutes, interviews, teaching resources, audio/video, suggested readings, and links.

2. Visit our database of academic literature with citations and annotations of literature related to the issue of Paid Sick Leave. You can connect to this database at:

[http://library.bc.edu/F?func=find-b-0&local\\_base=BCL\\_WF](http://library.bc.edu/F?func=find-b-0&local_base=BCL_WF)



## References

Bond, J. T., Galinsky, E., & Hill, E. J. (2002). *When work works: Summary of Families and Work Institute (FWI) research findings*. New York, NY: Families and Work Institute.

“The NSCW surveys representative samples of the nation’s workforce once every five years (1992, 1997, 2002). Sample sizes average 3,500, including both wage and salaried employees and self-employed workers” (p. v).

Several of the questions in the National Study of the Changing Workforce were taken from or based upon questions in the Quality of Employment Survey (QES) conducted three times by the Department of Labor from 1969 to 1977. Although the NSCW is more comprehensive than the QES in addressing issues related to both work and personal life and has a stronger business perspective, having comparable data from over a 25-year period has provided a unique opportunity to look at trends over time. The 2002 NSCW uses 25 years of trend data to examine five topics in depth: women in the workforce, dual-earner couples, the role of technology in employees’ lives on and off the job, work-life supports on the job, and working for oneself versus someone else (p. v).

To link directly to the Summary of FWI research findings, please visit: <http://familiesandwork.org/3w/research/3wes.html>

Heymann, J., Earle, A., & Hayes, J. (2007). *The Work, Family, and Equity Index: How does the United States measure up?* Montreal, QC and Boston, MA: Project on Global Working Families. Retrieved April 25, 2009, from <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/ihsp/WFEI2007FEB.pdf>



With the support of the Ford Foundation, the Work, Family, and Equity Index is the first venture to systematically define and measure successful public policies for working families in 177 countries. The evidence-based study uses extensive data from independent research, government sources, academic institutions, professional organizations, and a wide range of international bodies, including the UN, OECD, the World Bank, and the ILO.

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Heymann, J., Toomey, S., & Furstenberg, F. (1999). Working parents: What factors are involved in their ability to take time off from work when their children are sick? *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 153, 870–874.

This study was developed in response to research indicating that sick children recover faster when they are cared for by their parents. The authors sought to determine the work conditions that permit and restrict parental ability to care for their sick children. The sample consisted of urban working parents between the ages of 26 and 29 years who participated in the Baltimore Parenthood Study. The participants were of mixed income levels.

The abstract of this article is available at: <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/153/8/870>

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Smith, T. W. (2008). *Paid sick days: A basic labor standard for the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (Report to the Public Welfare Foundation). Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Retrieved from <http://publicwelfare.org/AboutUs/documents/PollReportFINALa.pdf>

"The National Paid Sick Days Study (NPSDS) was designed and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago with support from the Public Welfare Foundation. The NPSDS is a telephone sample of adults living in households in the United States. Interviews were completed in English and Spanish. The field dates were June 27, 2008 to July 31, 2008. A total of 1,493 cases were collected" (Smith, 2008, p. 43)

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