

# Family and Medical Leave-Taking among Older Workers

## Issue Brief—Worker Leave Analysis and Simulation Series<sup>1</sup>

January 2017

Workers who are 55 years old and over are projected to remain the fastest growing segment of working adults in the U.S. through 2022.<sup>1</sup> Health, longevity, education, and attitude are some of the reasons for their continued labor force attachment. In recent years, older workers have also either delayed retirement or re-entered the workforce due to financial losses in the Great Recession.<sup>ii</sup> Older workers face different challenges and responsibilities than their younger counterparts. For example, health impediments are a concern among older workers, as the number of serious medical conditions increases by age.<sup>iii</sup> In addition, older workers have more elder caregiving responsibilities: more than 22% workers ages 45 to 64 typically care for a parent, and six in ten caregivers report work impact due to caregiving.<sup>iv</sup>

In this brief, we explore the family and medical leave-taking behaviors among older workers age 55 and over, compared to younger workers, using information from DOL's Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Employee Surveys of 2000 and 2012. Family and medical leave is defined in the DOL FMLA 2012 Survey as leave for one's own serious health condition; caregiving for a serious health condition of a parent, spouse, relative, or child; for a new child; or to respond to the military deployment of a family member.

In this Issue Brief, we explore family and medical leave use among older workers (55 and over) using data from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL FMLA) Family and Medical Leave Act Surveys of 2000 and 2012.

This brief is part of the Worker Leave Analysis and Simulation Issue Brief Series and is part of a study funded by the Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office. For more findings in the Series, please visit <https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/WorkerLeaveStudy/>

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM KEY FINDINGS

- Older male workers increased their FMLA leave use in 2012 compared to 2000 (from 11% to 20%).
- Own illness (68% of female workers and 77% of male workers) was the main reason for the longest leave taken by older workers in 2012.
- Older female workers took their longest leave for caregiving responsibilities more frequently than older male workers (30% versus 21%, respectively) in 2012.
- Compared to the 25-39 year old age group, older workers age 55 and over were both more likely to take family and medical leave (6 percentage points more likely) and receive pay for their longest leave in the last 18 months (8 percentage points more likely).

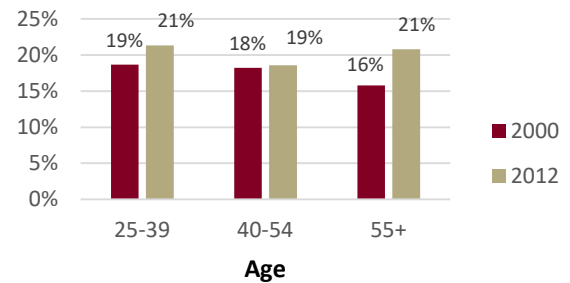
In the pages below, we provide more details on each of the key findings.

<sup>1</sup> This project was funded, either wholly or in part, with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office under Contract # DOL-OPS-14-U-00040. The contents of this publication do not represent the views or policies of the Department.

## FAMILY- AND MEDICAL LEAVE-TAKING INCREASED FROM 2000 TO 2012 FOR OLDER MEN ONLY

In 2012, 21 percent of older female workers (age 55 and over) and 20 percent of older male workers (age 55 and over) took a family and medical leave in the last 18 months.<sup>2</sup> Overall, this represents a 5 percentage point increase in leave-taking for these older workers from 2000 to 2012 (See Exhibit 1). Interestingly, **the increase in leave-take for those age 55 and over was entirely driven by men, who increased their leave-taking by ~10 percentage points from 2000 to 2012 (from 11% to 20%) to catch up with women, while women's rates remained the same.** Family and medical leave-taking among prime age groups 25-54 remained roughly the same over from 2000 to 2012, at about 19%.<sup>3</sup>

Exhibit 1. Family and Medical Leave Taking by Age Group and Year (n=4,982)



## OLDER WORKERS TAKE LEAVE FOR DIFFERENT REASONS THAN YOUNGER WORKERS

Reasons for taking the longest family and medical leave vary dramatically between the youngest age group (age 25-39) and the older age groups (age 40-54 and 55 and over). Exhibit 2 shows the main reason for taking the longest family and medical leave in the last 18 months in 2012, by age group and gender. The most frequent reason for the longest leave taken for the 25-39 age group is for a new child (49% of women and men). Alternatively, in 2012, the majority of older workers, age 55 and over, took their longest family and medical leave for their own serious health condition (68% of women and 77% of men).

Workers 39 years and older had higher rates of caregiving leaves (leave to care for a serious health condition of a parent, spouse, or child) than the 25-39 year old age group. We also observe gender differences in caregiving leaves for those workers over age 39, with women being more likely than men to take caregiving leaves as their longest leaves. This gender difference was not evident in the 25-39 age group.

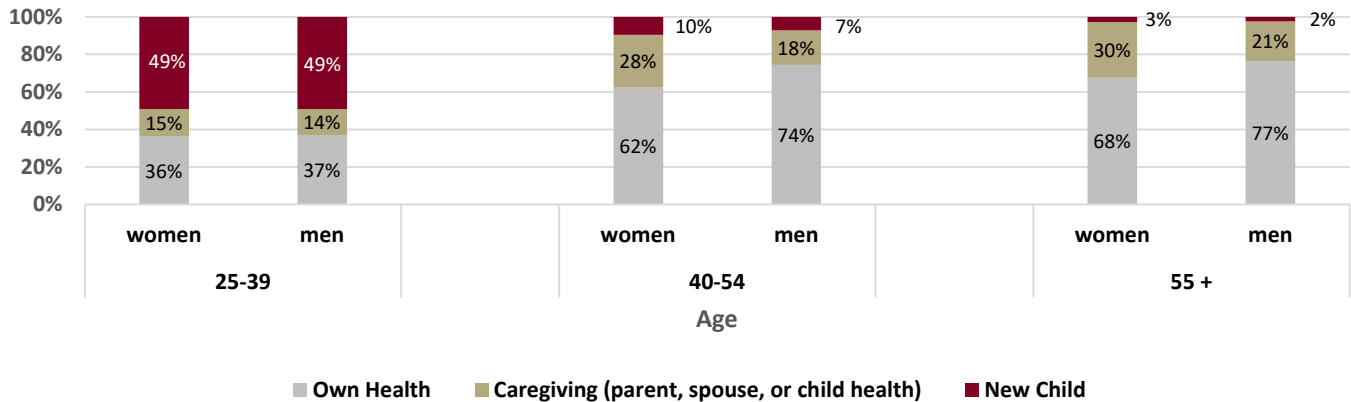
## LEAVE DURATION INCREASED FROM 2000 TO 2012 FOR ALL WORKERS

There is a notable trend in increased leave duration of the longest family and medical leaves from 2000 to 2012. This is the case for all three age groups (see Exhibit 3). For example, the 25-39 age group doubled the share of the longest leaves that are over 60 days from 2000 to 2012 and the 40-54 age groups nearly tripled this number. Older workers age 55 and over had a more gradual lengthening of the longest leave. From 2000 to 2012, the longest leaves mostly shifted from 10 days or less to 11-30 days.

<sup>2</sup> Family or medical leave taken in the last 18 months is defined as leave taken for own illness; spouse's, relative's, child's or parent's health; care of a new child; military deployment of a family member (in 2012 only); or other listed responses. Leave-taking responses in 2012 included a new category in the survey for military deployment of family members. However, only 13 respondents in our analytical sample responded with a military deployment reason.

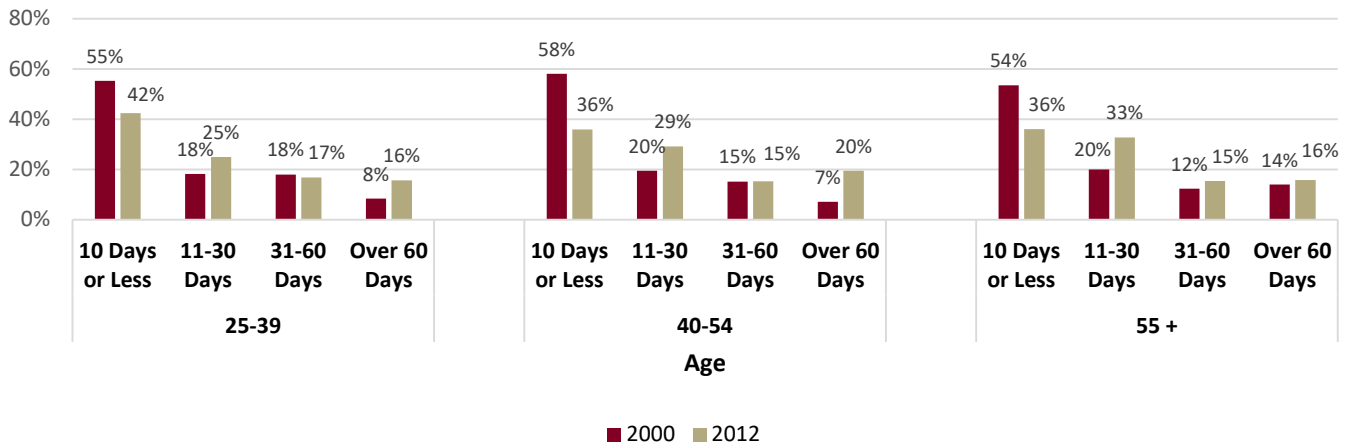
<sup>3</sup> Statistical significance is assessed at 5% level for all estimates in this brief.

**Exhibit 2. Reason for Longest Family and Medical Leave in the last 18 months, by Age and Gender (year=2012, n=1,264)**



Note: Chart excludes military deployment (13 respondents), other relative health (37 respondents) and other reason (5 respondents) in our sample.

**Exhibit 3. Duration of Longest Family and Medical Leave, by Age and Year (n=2,240)**



### LEAVE-TAKING IS MORE PREVALENT AMONG OLDER WORKERS

Only 19 percent of older workers took family or medical leave in the last 18 months in the 2000 and 2012. However, those who took leave differed in systematic ways from workers who did not on demographic factors and education levels. We explored factors associated with family and medical leave-taking in the 2000 and 2012 Employee Surveys in a regression framework. The statistically significant estimates are presented in Exhibit 4 (See Appendix for full regression results.) We found that those age 55 and over were 6 percentage points *more likely* to family and medical take leave compared to the 25-39 year old age group. This higher propensity to take leave may reflect greater personal healthcare or caregiving responsibilities of older workers or their greater ability to exercise their option to take leave when it's needed, compared to younger workers.

In addition, there are trends in education levels, gender, and the presence of children in the household, all else held equal. Those with a college degree or higher were 3 percentage points *less likely* to take leave compared to those with only a high school degree or less. Men were 5 percentage points *less likely* to take leave than women. Workers with kids in the household were *more likely* to take leave.

**Exhibit 4. Linear Probability Model Regression Results for Leave-Taking among Workers (n=4,250)**

Dependent Variable: Took Family or Medical Leave in the Last 18 Months	Change in Likelihood
<b>Mean of Dependent Variable</b>	<b>19.0%</b>
Age: 55 years old and over (ref: 25-39 age group)	<b>0.063**</b>
Education: College/Grad School (ref: HS or less)	<b>-0.034**</b>
Gender: Male (ref: female)	<b>-0.054**</b>
Children in Household: 1 (ref: no children)	<b>0.133**</b>
Children in Household: 2 kids (ref: no children)	<b>0.106**</b>
Children in Household: 3 kids (ref: no children)	<b>0.085**</b>
Children in Household: 4 or more kids (ref: no children)	<b>0.170**</b>

\*\*\* p<=.01, \*\* p<.05

Note: Other covariates included survey year, race, marital status, and income; Data is from the 2000 and 2012 DOL FMLA Employee Surveys.

### OLDER WORKERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO TAKE PAID LEAVE

The majority (69%) of workers received at least partial pay for their longest family and medical leave in the last 18 months in the 2000 and 2012. However, the 31% of workers who took unpaid leave were poorer, less educated, and younger on average than those received some pay, all else held equal. This might explain the inability of younger workers to take more leaves compared to older workers. We examined factors associated with receiving paid leave for the longest leave in the last 18 months in a regression framework. Our statistically significant results are presented in Exhibit 5 (See Appendix for full regression results.). Worker in age groups 40-54 and 55 and over are *more likely* than the 25-39 age group to receive pay for their longest family and medical leave. In addition, those with higher incomes and higher levels of education are *more likely* to have received pay for their longest leave. Further, men were 5 percentage points *more likely* than women to have received pay for their leave.

**Exhibit 5. Linear Probability Model Regression Results of Paid Leave use Among Workers Age 25+ (n=2,042)**

Dependent Variable: Received Paid Leave	Change in Likelihood
<b>Mean of Dependent Variable</b>	<b>68.5%</b>
Age: 40-54 years old (ref: 25-39 age group)	<b>0.063*</b>
Age: 55 years old and over (ref: 25-39 age group)	<b>0.075**</b>
Income: 30K to less than 50K (ref: less than 30K)	<b>0.166**</b>
Income: 30K to less than 50K (ref: less than 30K)	<b>0.166**</b>
Income: 50K to less than 100K (ref: less than 30K)	<b>0.301**</b>
Income: 100K+ (ref: less than 30K)	<b>0.335**</b>
Education: Some College (ref: HS or less)	<b>0.097**</b>
Education: College/Grad School (ref: HS or less)	<b>0.157**</b>
Gender: Male (ref: female)	<b>0.048*</b>

\*\*\* p<=.01, \*\* p<.05

Note: Other covariates included: survey year, race, marital status, and number of kids in the household; Data is from the 2000 and 2012 FMLA surveys.

## IMPLICATIONS

Using DOL FMLA Employee Surveys from 2000 and 2012, we examined the differences in family and medical leave-taking between older workers (age 55 and over) and younger workers. Because of demographic shifts and the recent economic recession, older workers now constitute the fastest growing segment of the U.S. labor force. Older workers' growing and prolonged participation in the workforce, along with health issues, their increased caregiving responsibilities, and their greater ability to exercise their option to take leave when it's needed may have increased their leave-taking compared to younger workers.

In 2012, about 20% of workers age 55 and over took family and medical leave in the last 18 months. This represents a 10 percentage point increase for older male workers from 2000 to 2012. This shift may represent a demographic change in the workforce as older men postponed retirement or re-entered the workforce in post-recession years. Workers of all ages were also taking family and medical leaves with longer durations in 2012, compared to 2000. Overall, more flexible workplaces that allow for more part-time work, remote work, or phased retirements for older workers may better support their increased demand for and duration of family and medical leave needs and enable greater financial security for older workers.

Encouragingly, while older workers age 55 and over were more likely to take family and medical leave than the 25-39 year old age group, they were also more likely to receive at least some pay for their longest leave in the last 18 months. However, women were more likely than men to take leave and less likely to receive pay. In addition, workers with lower levels of education and income were less likely to be paid for leave, all else held equal. Thus, workers of all ages in lower socioeconomic brackets are more likely to face significant financial hardship in the case of a serious family or medical leave.

## TECHNICAL APPENDIX

Our analysis combines the DOL FMLA 2000 and 2012 cross-sectional survey datasets. We weighted all proportions and calculated the standard errors using jackknife estimation and replicate weights provided in the 2000 and 2012 surveys. We tested the differences in proportions highlighted above using t-tests.

We ran separate linear probability regressions for leave-taking in Exhibit 1 and the receipt of paid leave in Exhibit 2. Below, we report the coefficients and standard errors from the linear probability models. The sample size of workers in the models was as follows: 4,250 workers Exhibit 1 and 2,042 workers in Exhibit 2. The sample sizes in Exhibit 2 are smaller than in Exhibit 1 because Exhibit 2 examine only workers who took family and medical leave in the last 18 months.

The dependent variable in Exhibit A1 was whether an individual took family and medical in the last 18 months. The reference category was individuals who did not take family or medical leave in the last 18 months. In the 2012 FMLA employee data, the dependent variable was constructed from question a5 in loop 1 that asked about the main reason for the longest family or medical leave in the last 18 months. The reasons for this leave included own illness, parent illness, spouse illness, child illness, other relative illness, care of a new child, or issues related to military deployment. There were also 5 respondents coded as “other response.” In the 2000 FMLA employee data, the dependent variable was constructed from question a3 that asked about the longest family or medical leave the individual had taken since January 1, 1999. The reasons for this leave included own illness, parent illness, spouse illness, child illness, other relative illness, and care of a new child.

The dependent variable in Exhibit A2 was whether the individual received at least some pay for their longest family and medical leave in the last 18 months. The reference category was individuals who took entirely unpaid leave for their longest family or medical leave in the last 18 months). In 2012 data, the dependent variable includes only respondents where their longest leave was the same as their most recent leave (indicated by question a20) in order to create a comparable dataset to the 2000 data. Question a45 indicated if pay was received for any part of the most recent leave. In the 2000 data, the dependent variable includes respondents who took family or medical leave as their longest leave since January 1, 1999. Question a10 indicated if pay was received for any part of the longest leave.

**Exhibit A1. Family or Medical Leave –Taking in the Last 18 Months among Adults Age 25 and Over: Linear Probability Model**

<b>Dependent Variable:</b>	
<b>Took Family or Medical Leave in the Last 18 Months</b>	
<b>Mean of Dependent Variable</b>	<b>19.0%</b>
Year: 2012	<b>0.006</b> (0.012)
Age: 40-54 years old	<b>0.011</b> (0.013)
Age: 55 years old and over	<b>0.063**</b> (0.016)
Race: African American	<b>0.030</b> (0.018)
Race: American Indian or Alaskan native	<b>0.008</b> (0.039)
Race: Asian	<b>-0.020</b> (0.029)
Race: Other	<b>-0.013</b> (0.021)
Income: 30K to less than 50K	<b>0.016</b> (0.018)
Income: 50K to less than 100K	<b>0.017</b> (0.018)
Income: 100K+	<b>0.003</b> (0.024)
Education: Some College	<b>0.010</b> (0.012)

Education: <i>College/Grad School</i>	<b>-0.034**</b> (0.012)
Gender: <i>Male</i>	<b>-0.054**</b> (0.009)
Marital Status: <i>Married</i>	<b>-0.018</b> (0.014)
Children in Household: 1	<b>0.133**</b> (0.019)
Children in Household: 2	<b>0.106**</b> (0.016)
Children in Household: 3	<b>0.085**</b> (0.019)
Children in Household: 4 or more	<b>0.170**</b> (0.049)
N	4,250

\*\*\* p<=.01, \*\* p<.05

Note 1: All independent variables are categorical variables. In the regression, the reference category for year was 2000, the reference category for age was 25-39 years old, the reference category for race was white, the reference category for income was less than 30k; for education, the reference category for highest level of educational attainment was high school or less, the reference category for gender was female, the reference category for marital status was not married, and the reference category for the number of kids in the household was 0 kids.

### Exhibit 2. Paid Leave Taking among Adults Age 25 and Over: Linear probability Model

Dependent Variable: Received Paid Leave for the longest Family or Medical Leave in the last 18 months	
Mean of Dependent Variable	68.5%
Year: 2012	<b>-0.036</b> (0.021)
Age: 40-54 years old	<b>0.063*</b> (0.026)
Age: 55 years old and over	<b>0.075**</b> (0.027)
Race: African American	<b>-0.054</b> (0.044)
Race: American Indian or Alaskan native	<b>0.106</b> (0.062)
Race: Asian	<b>0.037</b> (0.036)
Race: Other	<b>0.007</b> (0.029)
Income: 30K to less than 50K	<b>0.166**</b> (0.030)
Income: 50K to less than 100K	<b>0.301**</b> (0.027)
Income: 100K+	<b>0.335**</b> (0.032)
Education: Some College	<b>0.097**</b> (0.026)
Education: College/Grad School	<b>0.157**</b> (0.023)
Gender: Male	<b>0.048*</b> (0.018)
Marital Status: Married	<b>-0.050</b> (0.028)
Children in Household: 1	<b>0.017</b> (0.030)
Children in Household: 2	<b>-0.048</b> (0.039)

Children in Household: 3	<b>0.040</b> (0.039)
Children in Household: 4 or more	<b>-0.015</b> (0.051)
constant	<b>0.391**</b> (0.032)
N	2,042

\*\*\* p<=.01, \*\* p<.05

Note 1: All independent variables are categorical variables. In the regression, the reference category for year was 2000, the reference category for age was 25-39 years old, the reference category for race was white, the reference category for income was less than 30k; for education, the reference category for highest level of educational attainment was high school or less, the reference category for gender was female, the reference category for marital status was not married, and the reference category for the number of kids in the household.

<sup>i</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2013). *Labor force projections to 2022: the labor force participation rate continues to fall*. Department of Labor Monthly Labor Review. Retrieved from: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2013/article/labor-force-projections-to-2022-the-labor-force-participation-rate-continues-to-fall.htm>; Pitt-Catsouphes, M., and Smyer, M. A. (2007). *The 21st century multi-generational workplace* (Issue Brief No. 09). Chestnut Hill, MA: Chestnut Hill, Mass: Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College.

<sup>ii</sup> Employee Benefit Research Institute. (n.d.) *2010 Retirement Confidence Survey*. Retrieved from: [https://www.ebri.org/pdf/surveys/rcs/2010/FS-02\\_RCS-10\\_Expectns.pdf](https://www.ebri.org/pdf/surveys/rcs/2010/FS-02_RCS-10_Expectns.pdf); Rix, S.E. (2011). *Recovering from the Great Recession: Long Struggle Ahead for Older Americans* (Insight on the Issues 50). AARP Public Policy Institute. Retrieved from: [http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/econ-sec/insight50\\_recovering.pdf](http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/econ-sec/insight50_recovering.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Sloan Center Aging and Work. (2015). *Health and the Older worker*. Retrieved from: <http://www.bc.edu/research/agingandwork/publications.html>; National Alliance of Caregiving and the AARP Public Policy Institute. (2015). *Caregiving in the U.S.* Retrieved from: <http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/caregiving-in-the-united-states-2015-report-revised.pdf>