

EMPLOYMENT

FACT SHEET

Pregnant Workers Make Up a Small Share of the Workforce and Can Be Readily Accommodated: A State-By-State Analysis

March 2013

Pregnant workers in physically demanding jobs are often terminated, forced to quit, or involuntarily placed on unpaid “medical” leave because they ask for simple, reasonable, and temporary accommodations during their pregnancy such as avoiding heavy lifting or a stool to sit on. Instead of honoring these requests, many employers jeopardize the health of women and their pregnancies by making pregnant workers choose between continuing to work under unsafe conditions or losing their paycheck. Losing a job can be calamitous for these workers and their growing families. In families with children, 41 percent of mothers are primary breadwinners.¹ Women in low-wage jobs are particularly likely to work in physically demanding jobs with little flexibility, and thus are especially likely to need accommodations at some point during their pregnancies;² these low-wage women workers are even more likely to be their families’ primary breadwinners.³

Women are about half of all workers,⁴ but only a very small share of workers are pregnant in any given year. Moreover, many pregnant workers will not need any changes in their jobs during their pregnancies. That subset of pregnant workers who do require accommodations at some point during their pregnancies will thus be a minuscule percentage of the workforce.

- Women workers who gave birth in a particular year represented an average of just 1.6 percent of all employed people each year between 2009-2011.⁵

- In each state, the share of workers who gave birth in a particular year was very small – on average, between 1.2 and 2.0 percent.⁶
- Even when only employed women of childbearing age are considered, an average of just 4.7 percent had given birth in a particular year.⁷
- Because many, many pregnant workers do not require any kind of special accommodation at work, the percentage of the workforce needing a pregnancy accommodation in any given year is considerably lower than these already very small percentages.

As the data below demonstrate, the share of workers who give birth each year is small – only 1.6 percent of all workers—and a significantly smaller share of workers would require pregnancy accommodations. Yet, the needs of the women affected are acute—these workers have been terminated, suffered miscarriages or other health complications when employers denied them accommodations, been forced onto unpaid leave, or been reassigned to inferior positions because of their pregnancies. Providing reasonable accommodations for the pressing needs of this small share of workers will not significantly burden employers, but will in fact produce important benefits in the form of employee retention and increased morale.⁸ Accommodating pregnant workers ensures that these women can continue to do their jobs—a good thing for both employee and employer.

Table 1. Percentage of Workers Who Give Birth Per Year*

State	As a share of employed women of childbearing age	As a share of all employed people
<i>United States</i>	4.7%	1.6%
Alabama	5.0%	1.7%
Alaska	4.8%	1.5%
Arizona	4.3%	1.4%
Arkansas	4.5%	1.5%
California	4.6%	1.5%
Colorado	4.6%	1.5%
Connecticut	4.3%	1.4%
Delaware	4.1%	1.4%
District of Columbia	3.6%	1.4%
Florida	4.1%	1.4%
Georgia	4.8%	1.7%
Hawaii	5.4%	1.7%
Idaho	5.6%	1.9%
Illinois	4.6%	1.6%
Indiana	5.0%	1.7%
Iowa	5.2%	1.7%
Kansas	5.9%	2.0%
Kentucky	4.7%	1.6%
Louisiana	5.0%	1.7%
Maine	4.3%	1.4%
Maryland	4.8%	1.7%
Massachusetts	4.2%	1.5%
Michigan	4.5%	1.5%
Minnesota	5.1%	1.8%
Mississippi	5.2%	1.8%
Missouri	4.7%	1.6%
Montana	5.5%	1.8%
Nebraska	5.4%	1.8%
Nevada	4.8%	1.6%
New Hampshire	4.3%	1.4%
New Jersey	4.6%	1.5%
New Mexico	4.7%	1.5%
New York	4.3%	1.5%
North Carolina	4.6%	1.6%
North Dakota	5.7%	1.9%
Ohio	4.5%	1.5%
Oklahoma	4.8%	1.6%
Oregon	4.3%	1.5%
Pennsylvania	4.5%	1.5%
Rhode Island	4.5%	1.6%
South Carolina	5.0%	1.7%
South Dakota	5.6%	1.8%
Tennessee	5.7%	1.9%
Texas	4.8%	1.6%
Utah	5.7%	2.0%
Vermont	3.7%	1.2%
Virginia	4.6%	1.6%
Washington	4.2%	1.4%
West Virginia	3.9%	1.3%
Wisconsin	5.0%	1.7%
Wyoming	4.9%	1.5%

*Data are averages for 2009-2011 from the American Community Survey

- 1 Sarah Jane Glynn, Center for American Progress, The New Breadwinners: 2010 Update (Apr. 16, 2012), available at <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/labor/report/2012/04/16/11377/the-new-breadwinners-2010-update/>. Primary breadwinners are defined as women who earn as much or more than their partners or who are single mothers providing the sole income for their family.
- 2 In cases collected by the National Women’s Law Center, pregnant workers who have been terminated from their jobs include sales associates, truck drivers, nursing home workers, letter carriers, train conductors, airline agents, and security workers. See NWLC, THE PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT: MAKING ROOM FOR PREGNANCY ON THE JOB (2012), http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pregnantworkersfairnessfactsheet_w_senate_bill_number.pdf; A BETTER BALANCE, ET AL., WHY WE NEED THE PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT: STORIES OF REAL WOMEN (2012), http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/PWFA_Stories.pdf?docID=11442.
- 3 *Supra* note 1. In the bottom quintile of family income, nearly 70 percent of working wives earned as much or more than their husbands in 2010.
- 4 In February 2013, women 16+ comprised 46.8 percent of all employed workers. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table A-1 Employment status of civilian population by sex and age available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t01.htm> (last visited Mar. 12, 2013).
- 5 NWLC calculations from Integrated Public Use Microdata - American Community Survey (2009-2011 three-year estimates), Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota, available at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/> (last visited Jan. 22, 2013). In the American Community Survey, employment status is only available for people 16 and older. Data on the number of women who gave birth in the last twelve months are only available for women age 15-50. For that reason, we focus on women 16-50 who gave birth in the last twelve months, referred to in this fact sheet as “women of childbearing age”. These variables cover the vast majority of births in the US each year. In 2010, only 0.5 percent of all births in the United States were to women 15 and under or 50 and over. See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Births: Final Data for 2010 (Aug. 28, 2012), National Vital Statistics Reports, Volume 61, Number 1, Table 2. Births, by age of mother, live-birth order, and race of mother: United States, 2010, available at http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr61/nvsr61_01.pdf.
- 6 *Id.* Figures are 2009-2011 three-year estimates.
- 7 *Id.* Figures are 2009-2011 three-year estimates.
- 8 For a discussion of the effects on employers’ bottom lines and the business case for pregnancy accommodations, see NWLC, THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ACCOMMODATING PREGNANT WORKERS (2012), http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pregnant_workers_business_case_12.04.12.pdf.