



Latinos Least Likely to Have Paid Leave or Workplace Flexibility

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Introduction

Good jobs that offer paid leave and flexibility are associated with a variety of health and economic benefits. Unfortunately, people of color—especially Latinos—are less likely than their white counterparts to have access to these jobs.

Disparities in job quality exist both as part of historical trends resulting from decades of institutionalized racism and the fact that workers of color are more likely than white workers to be employed in low-wage, low-quality jobs. Data recently released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as part of their annual American Time Use Survey shows that employed people of color are less likely than white workers to have access to any kind of paid leave or workplace flexibility. Anyone who has ever gotten the flu, needed to stay home to care for a sick loved one, or welcomed a new child into their home should understand that there are times when employees cannot be at work—but too often that means losing a day's pay.

What's more, flexibility sometimes is needed more than paid leave—in most families today all of the adults work, which means that there is often no one free to drive a child to a dental appointment, or to wait for the repairman to come fix the refrigerator. But these events do not necessarily mean a worker needs to take an entire day off, when simply being able to alter when or where work takes place would suffice.

Yet people of color are less likely to have access to these types of workplace benefits—and in every case Latinos are the least likely to have access to any form of paid leave or workplace flexibility. Policies such as the Healthy Families Act, which would allow workers in firms with 15 or more employees to earn up to seven paid sick days a year, creating a national paid family and medical leave insurance program as the Center for American Progress has suggested, or implementing the kind of workplace flexibility promoted by the Obama administration could go a long way toward addressing these inequities.¹

This issue brief examines the problems faced by people of color—especially Latinos—because of the lack of federal paid leave policies on our nation.

Paid leave

Virtually everyone gets sick sometimes, but not everyone is able to take the necessary time off from work to get better. Overall fewer than 6 in 10 workers (57.1 percent) have access to paid sick days through their job, meaning that for 57.3 million workers, getting the flu could mean either losing a day’s pay or potentially their job.² Less than half of workers can take paid time off after the arrival of a new child (45.5 percent), and only slightly more (46.9 percent) are guaranteed unpaid leave due to the eligibility requirements of the Family and Medical Leave Act.³

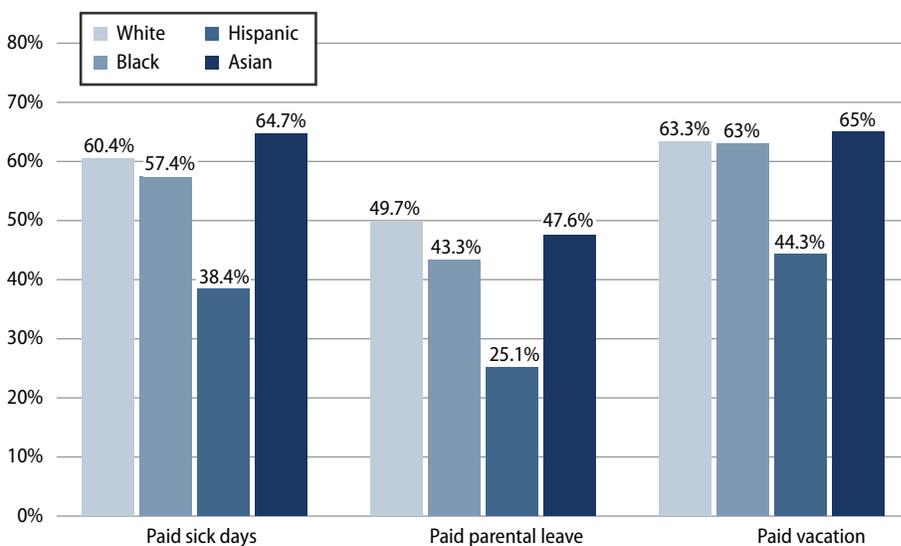
The picture looks even worse when broken down by race and ethnicity. Across the board, Latinos are the least likely to have access to paid sick days (only 38.4 percent) or paid parental leave (only 25.1 percent) of any racial or ethnic group. (see Figure 1) Some opponents of paid leave legislation argue that workers do not need leave that is specifically earmarked for illness or birth when they can take paid vacation instead. Fewer than half (44.3 percent) of Latino workers, however, even have access to paid vacation, and many workers cannot use vacation on a moment’s notice, like when a child wakes up with a high fever and a father needs to take an unplanned sick day. For too many Latinos, being a good worker and a good family member has become mutually exclusive.

The lack of paid sick days can have serious consequences—both for individual workers’ health and for our economy. Of any racial group, Latinos are the least likely to have visited a clinician or dentist in the past 12 months.⁴ In 2010 more than 42 percent of Latinos did not make a single trip to a medical provider. This is 15 percent higher than the average for all Americans, 12.6 percent higher than the average for blacks, and 20 percent higher than the average for whites. Moreover, in 2010 nearly 55 percent of Latinos did not see a dentist.

FIGURE 1

Latinos least likely to have access to paid sick days or paid parental leave

Percentage of workers age 18 and older with access to paid leave by race and ethnicity, 2011



Source: Authors’ analysis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ American Time Use Survey, 2012.

Neglecting or being unable to make regular visits to a medical provider can result in costly emergency room visits and poor health outcomes. One study showed that if paid sick days were made universal, the United States would have 1.3 million fewer emergency department visits each year, saving \$1.1 billion annually.⁵

Workers also often need to take paid sick days in order to care for an ill child or family member—a task that more often falls on women, although men increasingly need such leave too. Interestingly, while Latinas are less likely to have access to any type of leave compared to other women, they are more likely to have access to paid leave than Latino men. These rates are still abysmally low, however, as only 42.3 percent of Latinas and 35.9 percent of Latino men have access to even a single paid sick day, compared to about 60 percent of African Americans and whites. (see Table 1)

TABLE 1
Latino men and women have the least access to various forms of paid leave

Percentage of workers age 18 and older with access to various forms of paid leave by gender, race, and ethnicity, 2011

	Paid sick days	Paid parental leave	Paid vacation
All men	57.9	44.5	68.0
White	61.9	49.2	66.6
Black	59.7	45.8	40.0
Hispanic	35.9	20.0	75.7
Asian	n/a*	n/a*	n/a*
All women	56.3	46.6	57.3
White	58.8	50.2	58.2
Black	55.6	41.2	60.0
Hispanic	42.3	32.6	50.6
Asian	54.5	38.6	54.8

Source: Authors' analysis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey, 2012.

* Not applicable due to sample size

Access to parental leave among Latinos is the lowest of any racial group despite their being more likely to have young children in need of care or supervision. Of the sampled working population, Latinos skew younger (the median age was 37), and a quarter are between ages 18 and 27. The median age for whites is 42; for blacks, 43; and for Asian Americans, 37.

Nearly 60 percent of Latino workers have children under the age of 18, compared to less than 40 percent of white workers or black workers. Latino workers are also more than twice as likely as whites to have multiple children—12.8 percent, compared to 6.1 percent. This is just another instance of why providing parental leave is of vital importance to Latinos. As a population more likely to have young or multiple children, they should have equal access to paid leave.

Many workers lack paid leave because they are employed only part time. The data, however, show that this relationship does not explain why Latino workers are less likely to have paid leave. The rate of full-time versus part-time work for Latinos is roughly the same as for whites and blacks—approximately 82 percent—and only slightly higher for Asian Americans, at 86 percent.

While part-time work may not account for racial disparities in access to paid leave, the type of employment does make a difference. Nearly 50 percent of blacks and Latinos surveyed are in working-class families—defined as families whose total income is less than \$40,000 per year—twice the rate of whites and Asian Americans.

Asian Americans, who have the highest rates of access to paid sick days (64.7 percent), paid vacation (65 percent), and flexibility (63.8 percent), were the most likely to be professional-class workers (40.94 percent). Professional-class workers are those with a total family income of at least \$75,000 per year, who have at least a bachelor's degree. This class of work generally has superior benefits and leave policies. In comparison, 24.43 percent of whites are in the professional class, only 11 percent of blacks, and just 8.03 percent of Latinos. This discrepancy in class of employment largely accounts for the lack of benefits among black and Latino workers.

A look at incomes divided into quintiles tells a similar story: 56.4 percent of Latinos are in the bottom 40 percent of earners. This compares to 33.3 percent of whites, 44.53 percent of blacks, and 30.19 percent of Asians. Just more than 10 percent of Latinos are in the top 20 percent of earnings, compared to 13.69 percent of blacks, 23.13 percent of whites, and almost 40 percent of Asian Americans.

Low-wage work typically offers fewer benefits and less flexibility, which further illuminates why Latinos disproportionately lack benefits. Despite being among the most vulnerable populations economically, susceptible to falling into poverty with even one lost paycheck, low-wage workers have the least protections.

Flexibility

Flexibility allows workers to alter the hours, days, or location where they perform their work. While certain types of flexibility may not be feasible for some occupations—surgeons should not operate from home, and school teachers cannot typically decide to hold class on the weekends—at least some flexibility is theoretically possible for many workers. Only a little more than half of all workers (55.8 percent), however, have access to any form of workplace flexibility. (see Figure 2)

Latinos have the least access to workplace flexibility of all groups surveyed. Flexible hours, which are available for just less than 40 percent of Latinos, would allow workers

to shape their schedules to better fit non-work obligations. For instance, a parent could go in early to work in order to leave earlier to pick up a child.

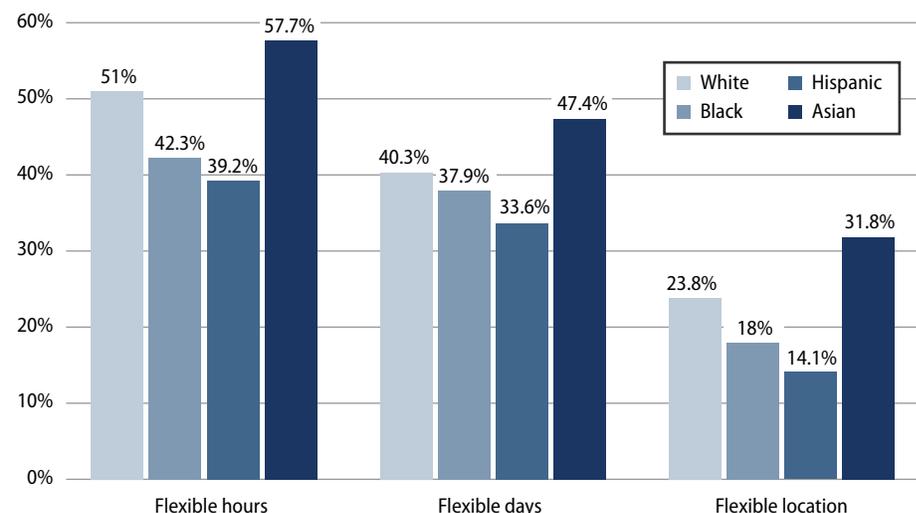
Of all workers surveyed, 48.7 percent had access to flexible hours. Flexible days are less prevalent, available to just less than 40 percent of all workers. Latinos, however, still have the least access, at just 33.6 percent. Flexible location—the ability to work remotely or from outside the office—is even more rare. Just 14.1 percent of Latino workers have this option, compared to 18 percent of blacks, 23.8 percent of whites, and 31.8 percent of Asian Americans.

Jobs lacking any form of paid leave or flexibility present challenges for any worker or family, but they are not uncommon among Latinos. Despite making up just 13.3 percent of the population, Latinos make up a quarter of all workers who lack both flexibility and any form of paid leave. This double whammy is only compounded when reminded of the type of work this group is more likely to have: low wage, working-class jobs. (see Figure 3)

FIGURE 2

Only about half of all workers have access to workplace flexibility

Percentage of workers age 18 and older with access to workplace flexibility by race and ethnicity, 2011

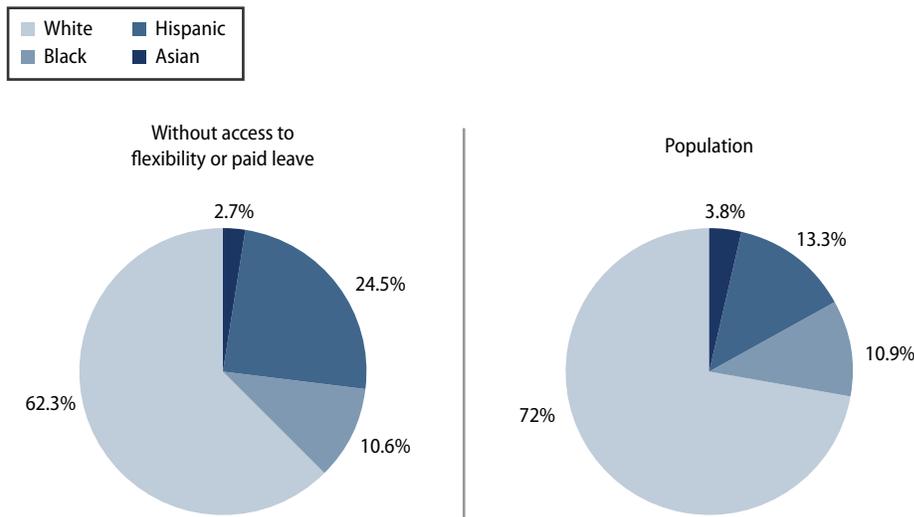


Source: Authors' analysis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey, 2012.

FIGURE 3

Latinos least likely to have access to flexibility or paid leave

Percentage of workers age 18 and older without access to workplace flexibility or paid leave by race and ethnicity (compared to the population's racial and ethnic makeup), 2011



Source: Authors' analysis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey, 2011.

Conclusion

The importance of paid leave and flexible scheduling is readily apparent to anyone who works or has been cared for by someone who does. Latino workers, who disproportionately lack these benefits, are especially susceptible to the economic challenges presented by low-wage work alongside minimal or no benefits. Policymakers should aim to guarantee that no employee need worry about lost wages or, worse, a lost job, just because he or she needs to take leave or develop a more flexible schedule to care for themselves or a loved one.

Good public policies for workers are crafted to ensure all workers benefit, not just those with the highest salaries or the best jobs. If the Healthy Families Act were passed into law, for example—which President Obama said he would do if it passes in Congress—workers would accrue paid sick leave based on the number of hours they work.⁶ This means even part-time workers would still earn access to paid leave, though at a time-adjusted rate. The paid family and medical leave insurance program proposed by CAP was intentionally developed to ensure it covered the highest-possible number of workers, including workers of color.⁷

Inclusive policies for workers are necessary as the need for time away from work to recover from an illness or care for a family member is nearly universal. It is high time that our workplace policies reflected that fact.

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Endnotes

- 1 Healthy Families Act, H.R. 1879, 112th Congress; Heather Boushey and Sarah Jane Glynn, "The Many Benefits of Paid Family and Medical Leave" (Washington: Center for American Progress, Forthcoming); Council of Economic Advisors, "Work-Life Balance and the Economics of Workplace Flexibility" (2010).
- 2 Author's calculations based on the American Time Use Survey Leave Module and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Hours, and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics survey.
- 3 Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey - 2011 Results (Washington: Department of Labor, 2012) ; Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, H.R. 1, 103rd Congress, available at <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/103/hr1>; Jane Waldfogel, "Family and Medical Leave: Evidence from the 2000 Surveys," Monthly Labor Review 124 (9) (2001): 17-23.
- 4 Brett O'Hare and Kyle Caswell, "Health Status, Health Insurance, and Medical Service Utilization: 2010" (Washington: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012).
- 5 Claudia Williams Kevin Miller and Youngmin Yi, "Paid Sick Days and Health: Cost Savings from Reduced Emergency Department Visits" (Washington: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2011).
- 6 Healthy Families Act.
- 7 Heather Boushey and Sarah Jane Glynn, "Comprehensive Paid Family and Medical Leave for Today's Families and Workplaces: Crafting a Paid Leave System That Builds on the Experience of Existing Federal and State Programs" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2012).