

Parity during parenthood: Comparing paid parental leave policies in Aotearoa/New Zealand's universities

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Abstract

Increasing employee access to paid parental leave (PPL) is an important step to achieving gender equity in higher education. Although Aotearoa/New Zealand has recently increased PPL to the 26 weeks recommended by the World Health Organisation, the level of payment is capped at below minimum wage. For parents working or seeking to work at universities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, information about the PPL policies of these workplaces is essential for informed decision-making. This article reviews the PPL policies of the eight universities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, analysing these in terms of structural work-life support and cultural work-life support. The authors contribute autobiographical reflections to supplement the policy analysis with examples of real-life effects of the policies that are reviewed. The article finishes with a set of recommendations that would enhance employee wellbeing at universities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, including expanding access to leave and removing both gendered language and requirements to repay leave.

Key words

Parental leave, equity, higher education, university policy

Introduction

Decades of research into gender and equity shows the importance of paid parental leave (PPL) for the wellbeing of both infants and parents, and in particular the impact on women's¹ wellbeing. Yet adequate PPL continues to be elusive for primary carers and families all over the world (ILO, 2017). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) recommends a minimum of 14 weeks paid leave for people recovering from birth (ILO, 2017), and the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends 26 weeks paid leave from the perspective of infant wellbeing (WHO, 2019). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, recent changes in government policy have extended PPL to meet the WHO recommendation of 26 weeks, yet closer analysis reveals the 'paid' part of this leave is capped at below minimum wage. Universities in Aotearoa/New Zealand top up government parental leave, and this extra support is essential if universities are to meet their equity and wellbeing goals and to be internationally competitive institutions. Within New Zealand, universities diverge in their PPL policies, the implementation of such policies, and the surrounding institutional cultures that work to both enable and disable equity. We analyse the characteristics of PPL policies of Aotearoa/New Zealand's eight universities using policy analysis and autobiographical case studies of lived experiences of PPL in four of these universities.

Our two-pronged approach ensures that our analysis considers not only the structural and cultural work-life support and barriers that employees face in Aotearoa/New Zealand universities, but also these employees' contextual lived experiences. Structural work-life support has been defined as support that 'alters human resource policies and practices and job structures to enhance flexibility to increase worker control over the location, place or amount of work, or provide additional instrumental resources such as information and direct services to

enable individuals to be able to combine employment with caregiving or other important non-work roles' (Ernst Kossek et al., 2010, p. 4). Cultural work-life support is defined as informal workplace social and relational support and is understood to be essential to employees accessing structural work-life support (Ernst Kossek et al., 2010). For example, cultural work-life support could include departments with a work culture where it is acceptable to bring in infants during research and teaching, and that actively support flexible work arrangements, such as working from home. Structural work-life support could include policies that support parents who come back from leave. Some universities, for example, provide academics returning from parental leave with a period of research and study leave, grants that support them in pivoting their research to a different area if required (particularly for field-based disciplines), or grants that support the academic to regain connection with their professional community by providing funding for caregivers to attend conferences along with the academic and baby. This assists parents to continue an active research portfolio and protects them against situations where they may be forced to 'make up' for teaching they could not do while on leave.

Since the industrial revolution, home and work life are often viewed as separate facets of society in western cultures. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, however, these two worlds are increasingly recognised as being intertwined. This is partly the result of increasing numbers of women in the workforce, but can also be attributed to the move towards a bicultural society, where Māori values become better incorporated into the 'mainstream' (Baker, 2010; Pringle & Tudhope, 1996). One social practice that explicitly acknowledges the links between home and work is PPL, where new parents can access full or partial pay while staying at home caring for newborns and recovering from giving birth.

Parental leave has many societal benefits: it promotes gender equity in both the labour market and the home; it protects and promotes the wellbeing of parents and children; it supports fertility rates in the population; and it maximises the employment and utilisation of skills in a workforce (Callister & Galtry, 2006; McDonald, 2000; 2002). There is also ongoing debate about whether PPL increases birthing rates as more of the population may elect to have children (Callister & Galtry, 2006; Lalive & Zweimüller, 2009). This is of particular interest in countries with ageing populations, a situation which increases the care load while decreasing the labour force, among other negative economic effects.

In the context of universities, women are a key way to expand university labour talent pools (Harris et al., 2013), and adequate PPL is essential for keeping women employed in particular. Therefore, it is important for universities to develop strong parental leave policies. In Canada, PPL was introduced earlier than a similar policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and resulted in a higher rate of maternal employment (Baker, 2011). Globally, women are under-represented and under-served in academia (Brower & James, 2020; McAllister et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2020) and improving PPL could begin to address some of these inequities (Baker, 2010, 2011; Broomhill & Sharp, 2012). Across the world, adequate university PPL policies are also an indicator of women's bargaining power in the university, so they not only *contribute to* equity outcomes but also *result from* equity initiatives that empower women university employees (Epifanio & Troeger, 2019). An increasing number of studies have shown that PPL for fathers in heterosexual relationships is linked to increased ongoing paternal caregiving throughout a child's life, benefiting both fathers and children (Rehel, 2014). In sum, there are clear benefits to PPL, yet there is also a surprising lack of consistency among these policies across different industries and even within sectors, such as higher education. It also becomes clear from the literature that there is little research on gender diverse experiences of PPL in Aotearoa/New Zealand and that this work is urgently needed.

Context

The context in which PPL policies exist is important. Before moving onto university policies, we discuss the degree to which Aotearoa/New Zealand's current parental leave allowances are inadequate by international standards. We then outline how parental leave policies and wider cultural work-life support within universities contribute to gender disparities within university employment. We discuss this in terms of structural work-life support and cultural work-life support (defined in the Introduction), where structural work-life support entails policies for parental leave in Aotearoa/New Zealand and cultural work-life support relates to the lived experiences of these policies and gives insight into how people within institutions provide informal support or contradict formal policy.

Aotearoa/New Zealand parental leave (structural work-life support)

Since 1 July 2020, employed primary caregivers in Aotearoa/New Zealand are entitled to 26 weeks' government paid leave, with a maximum payment of \$606.46 per week before tax, and further unpaid leave totalling 52 weeks (New Zealand Government, 2020). The maximum weekly payment is 22% less than a 40-hour week on minimum wage in Aotearoa/New Zealand (\$756 before tax). Any parental leave (paid or unpaid) exceeding 52 weeks is at the discretion of the employer. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the legal definition of a primary carer specifies: a woman who has had or is having a baby; their spouse or partner; an adoptive parent; a home-for-life parent; or a whāngai caregiver (a Māori practice where a child is raised by someone other than their birth parents, often from within their family) (New Zealand Government, 2020). The government definition above is problematic and we acknowledge that people of other genders can also be birthing parents. PPL is targeted at primary carers within the first few months of birthing, adopting, or caring for a baby or child under a whāngai arrangement, and can only be used by one carer (New Zealand Government, 2020).

Aotearoa/New Zealand was among the last of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries to introduce legislation for PPL (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, debates surrounding the introduction of parental leave have largely been centred around 'women's role in society, as paid workers and as carers of children' (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 210), with discussions ranging from the early idea that it is a women's role to care for children to the later belief that women are the untapped labour source for 'growing the economy' (Callister & Galtry, 2006; Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012).

Aotearoa/New Zealand's parental leave policies are inadequate when compared internationally (Forbes, 2009; Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012) and have recently come under scrutiny. For example, UNICEF ranked Aotearoa/New Zealand as the third worst for parental leave entitlements across 41 high- and middle-income countries (Chzhen et al., 2019). Based on 2017 figures, the report identified that New Zealanders were only able to access the equivalent of eight weeks full-time paid leave, due to the low government contribution to parental leave which equated to half the average income (Chzhen et al., 2019). Morrissey and Williamson (2018) critiqued the New Zealand government's general lack of engagement with the low levels of parental leave payment, noting that this reflects a devaluing of the carer role in Aotearoa/New Zealand society. Morrissey and Williamson (2018) also note that increased payments lead to an increase in male carers participating in parental leave, which is crucial for redistributing care work in societies aiming towards gender equality (Dombroski, 2020). Even though PPL periods have been extended since this report to 26 weeks (commencing July 2020),

the fact remains that the level of pay is still capped below the minimum wage, which seems to assume that primary carers have other income earners in the household to make up any household income shortfall.

Our low government investment in PPL means that Aotearoa/New Zealand workers are reliant on their employers to create cultural and structural work-life support that encourages and makes possible meaningful parental leave. Meaningful parental leave is leave that, first, grants birthing parents enough time to recover from giving birth and second, gives babies enough time

Table 1 Conditions of university PPL

Factor	AUT	UoA	Waikato	Victoria	Massey	Canterbury	Lincoln	Otago
Length of service before being eligible	6 months	12 months	12 months	12 months	6 months	12 months	12 months	6 months*
Number of weeks institutional paid leave	9 weeks	9 weeks	6 weeks**	10 weeks	6 weeks	9 weeks	6 weeks	12 weeks
Whāngai/ Adoptive leave	As above for children under 5	As above for children under 5	As above	As above	As above for children under 6	As above for children under 6	Not mentioned	14 weeks unpaid***
Type of staff eligible	Fixed term/permanent	Fixed term/permanent	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Permanent	Not specified	Not specified
Job protection clause	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Repayment of PPL if you resign	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Does policy mention work while on leave?	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
"Special" leave?	No, you can use sick leave	No	10 days unpaid	10 days	10 days unpaid	No	10 days unpaid	10 days unpaid
Partner's parental leave length	1-2 weeks unpaid	Not specified	2 weeks unpaid	2 weeks	1-2 weeks unpaid	2 weeks unpaid	1-2 weeks unpaid	2 weeks paid
Gendered language	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Type of document	Information sheet/ Collective agreement	Policy	Information sheet/ Collective agreement	Information sheet/ Collective agreement	Information sheet/ Collective agreement	Collective agreement	Policy	Policy
Policy publicly available on the university website?	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

* For Otago eligibility is defined as the length of contract you have remaining rather than the length of service before being eligible for

** Eligible staff are also offered a 3-week top-up of the government PPL

*** This is in addition to the 12 weeks PPL primary caregiver can apply for in cases of Whāngai/Adoptive leave

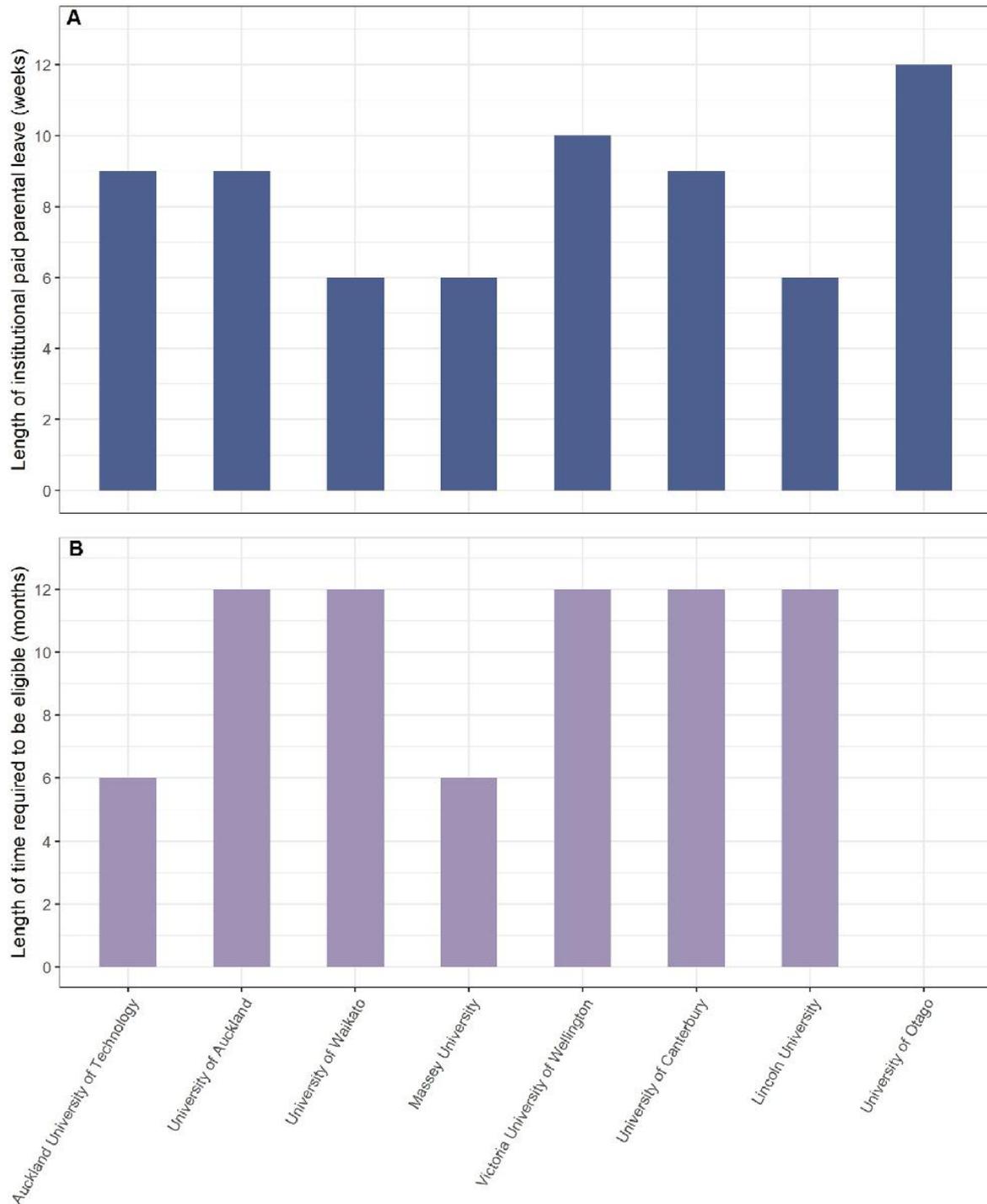
to become well established in feeding and sleeping routines. For breastfeeding parents, that time period is usually 6 months, which is the earliest recommended age to introduce other foods (WHO & UNICEF, 2019). Given the low government investment, it is important to consider what Aotearoa/New Zealand universities offer in addition to government PPL.

Additionally, there are concerns internationally that even when it is accessible, men are not taking parental leave (Corte Rodríguez, 2018) and this concern is reflected in Aotearoa/New Zealand by the recent campaign *Kiwi Dads*, which encourages more men to utilise parental leave by sharing stories of men who have opted to take this leave (Keogh, 2019). This low uptake by men internationally also contributes to bias against the employability of women, with employers being more likely to employ a man who will be less likely to take parental leave (Corte Rodríguez, 2018). Interestingly, there have been steady calls for paternity-specific leave to be introduced as a way of combating this, but Aotearoa/New Zealand has yet to take this step (Families Commission, 2007; National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, 2008; Human Rights Commission, 2010; New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 2016; Reilly & Morrissey, 2016). It is, however, a legal requirement for employers in Aotearoa/New Zealand to provide one to two weeks of unpaid partners' leave (The Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act, 1987). Establishing paternity-specific leave can also lead to employers being more supportive of PPL in general (Baker, 2011). Worldwide gender-inclusive parenting policies are becoming increasingly popular (Baker, 2011) and have 'been motivated by efforts to increase the opportunities and rights of fathers to care for their infants and young children with minimal income loss' (Baker, 2011, p. 60). It can also lead to more equitable sharing of parental responsibilities, as opposed to gender specific leave which sees fathers take on economic parenting and mothers take on practical parenting which increases their economic reliance on their partner (Baker, 2011).

Universities and gender disparities (cultural work-life support)

Structural work-life support is shaped by cultural work-life support, which means that universities will implement policies based on the culture of work-life support. Unfortunately for women and gender diverse people, academia is widely understood to reward masculine behaviours (Martin, 2000; Fisher, 2007; Öhrn et al., 2009; Acker, 2012, 2014). It is therefore unsurprising that women in academia are more likely to be single and childless (Baker, 2012), with fewer mothers than fathers or childless women reaching senior rankings in universities (Probert, 2005; Bracken et al., 2006; Monroe et al., 2008). Younger women in academia take shorter lengths of parental leave, accessing childcare to return to their careers (Baker, 2012). Women are also over-represented in precarious (i.e. part-time, fixed-term) employment (Stringer et al., 2018), which can be problematic given that, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, people are required to have worked for 6 months at 10 hours per week for at least 26 weeks of the year to access parental leave (New Zealand Government, 2020). Parents fear that, if they take leave, they will face judgement from colleagues, or worse, resentment as colleagues may need to take up new parents' internal workload during their leave (Williams, 2004; Samble, 2008). The lack of recognition of the impact of family responsibilities on parents' and particularly women's progression into key leadership roles, needs to be acknowledged (Airini et al., 2011).

Figures 1A Length of institutional PPL and 1B Length of time for eligibility



Materials and methods

This article uses two lenses to understand the PPL policies of Aotearoa/New Zealand universities. The first is an analysis of the different PPL policies at each university. Specifically, we compare six elements of PPL policies across the universities: 1) eligibility and length of PPL; 2) whāngai and adoption; 3) working while on parental leave; 4) job protection; 5) other types of leave; and 6) language of policies and other parental leave documents. This analysis addresses the structural work-life support and barriers that can be experienced by people accessing Aotearoa/New Zealand universities. Parental leave policies and associated documents

(i.e. information sheets, academic collective agreements) where specific parental leave policies did not exist were obtained for each university in June 2019 (see Table 1). The second lens used to analyse PPL policies draws on the lived experiences of the authors to explore the cultural work-life support and barriers to accessing PPL in Aotearoa/New Zealand universities. We are a group of cisgender women, all currently employed by Aotearoa/ New Zealand universities, with varied experiences and at different career stages. Among the authors, we have had 11 children and 17 pregnancies (including miscarriages) while working or studying at postgraduate level in Aotearoa/New Zealand universities. We wrote up short descriptions of our experiences with paid and unpaid parental leave, and discussed these in four Zoom focus groups as we prepared the data and paper text. We organised our lived experience texts around the different kinds of leave we had taken; these are reported in the examples offered below alongside the policy analysis.

Results: Structural and cultural work-life

The results section is organised by policy analysis followed by narratives of the lived experiences of the authors, with a final summary of how these reflect structural and cultural work life.

Length and eligibility of PPL

All Aotearoa/New Zealand universities offer a period of PPL in addition to what the government provides (Table 1), which we refer to as institutional PPL. However, the length of institutional PPL is highly variable among universities and ranges from six to 12 weeks, with an average of 8.4 weeks (Figure 1A). Eligibility for institutional PPL by academic staff members employed by universities is determined by meeting certain criteria which include previous length of service, number of hours worked per week and staff type (Table 1). At seven out of the eight universities, parents must have worked for 6-12 months prior to being eligible for institutional PPL (Figure 1B). Some universities offer partial PPL if parents have not been working for the required time. For example, at Victoria University of Wellington, if parents have been employed for less than 12 months they may be eligible for three weeks of additional PPL rather than the full ten weeks. At the University of Canterbury, University of Auckland, Victoria University of Wellington, University of Waikato, and Lincoln University, parents must be employed for at least 12 months continuously before being eligible for full institutional PPL. Comparatively, at Auckland University of Technology, both fixed-term and permanent staff are eligible, provided they have worked on average ten or more hours for at least six months. The University of Otago's parental leave policy has arguably the least restrictive eligibility criteria: rather than requiring staff to have given a certain amount of service before they are eligible, staff must have at least six months remaining at the end of their contract. We note that contractor staff and students are not provided any financial support by universities in the form of PPL. Universities mirror New Zealand government policy on who is eligible for parental leave, i.e. there is no specific parental leave for fathers, mothers or gender diverse parents.

No paid leave

For half of our children birthed during our employment at a university in Aotearoa/New Zealand, we (the authors collectively) did not meet the eligibility criteria for institutional PPL and therefore did not receive it. This resulted in us either having to return to work earlier than

we would have liked and/or working while on leave/recovering from giving birth.

Example 1: I returned to a previous employer and was ineligible for institutional parental leave. I have a really supportive department and was able to continue to work right up until I gave birth and afterwards. It was frustrating that, despite having worked at the same institution for eight years, I was made ineligible as I left to upskill and then returned in another role.

Example 2: I applied for a new job while pregnant and was not eligible for either government leave or university leave. Fortunately, I was coming from a system overseas and was able to access leave and a pay-out from my previous job to sustain my family. Instead of beginning the job at the time originally proposed, I negotiated a delayed start date and began as an unpaid visiting fellow before the baby was born. Unfortunately, this affected my promotion pathways as I was not counted as an employee at that time.

The two examples above indicate that when structural work-life policies do not apply to individuals (i.e. they are not eligible for institutional PPL), then these individuals are largely reliant on cultural work-life support.

Returning to work earlier than desired

Ineligibility for PPL resulted in three of the authors having to return to work much sooner than they would have liked due to financial pressure. In different ways, our families relied on our financial contributions, and, in some cases, relied solely on our financial contributions, rendering underpaid or unpaid leave out of reach.

Example 1: I took the government leave (\$588.25 per week) for 22 weeks but then returned to work soon after due to financial and social pressure. This was earlier than was healthy for myself and my baby.

Example 2: I returned to work two weeks after giving birth as I was ineligible for both government and paid institutional leave. I felt immense pressure to be seen on campus when we weren't in lockdown, as several of my colleagues have been vocal about the mis-match between motherhood and academia and continue to find the presence of my children in my office inappropriate.

Example 3: I took nine weeks university paid leave for my youngest child but could not afford to take the full government leave of (then) 18 weeks, due to the pressure of mortgage payments and being the sole income earner. I also felt pressure about letting my colleagues down, and took up extra work covering for a colleague's secondment when I returned to work to 'pay back' the extra work my colleague had done 'for me'. This added a significant amount of stress to my family life, as my baby had to cope with me being out of the house for long hours.

The examples above indicate that when structural work-life policies do not provide parental leave with financial security, individuals are likely to return to work earlier and rely on the cultural work-life mechanisms to support them. In some cases, this can mean that individuals are not supported by institutions and colleagues and must take on extra work in response to these expectations.

Used all government PPL

As well as university PPL, the New Zealand government offers its own PPL scheme (as outlined above). Only one of the authors took the option of using the full amount of government PPL.

Example 1: I used all of the government paid leave and the nine weeks offered by the university but returned to work immediately after paid leave ran out. While we may have been able to figure out how to survive on one income so I could stay home with our baby for a year, as a postdoc well aware of the job market competition, I felt I needed to return to keep up work productivity. This pressure was not good for my wellbeing or my productivity when I returned to work.

While there are structural work-life policies in place to give individuals the option of staying home for up to 26 weeks, it is clear from this example that social work-life and financial pressures mean that academic women are unlikely to take the full 26 weeks of government PPL, as this break away from work is seen as ‘unproductive’ in a competitive job market.

52-week extended parental leave

All university parental leave policies and associated documents stipulate that, provided the staff member meets eligibility criteria (usually being employed for six or more months), they will be eligible to 52 weeks of extended, unpaid leave, which is consistent with the terms of the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act (1987). Several policies include a clause that stipulates if the employee resigns prior to returning to work, they will be required to repay all money received from the university for institutional PPL (University of Auckland, University of Waikato and University of Otago).

Example 1: As a pregnant early-career researcher on a fixed-term contract who has been offered other academic job opportunities, it is very limiting knowing I must return to my current position at the end of parental leave or be required to pay back my nine weeks of university PPL. I will only have months remaining on my fixed-term contract upon my return and it seems very unfair that I am constrained by this and this makes it difficult to support my whānau financially.

Example 2: Taking unpaid parental leave is not an option in Auckland city. The rising rents and costs of living make it impossible to exist with one parent at home without going into significant debt unless the working partner is on a salary at least three times that of the median income in New Zealand (\$52,832).

Notably, none of the authors were in a financial position to take the full 52 weeks of extended unpaid leave. This ‘decision’ of not taking the full 52 weeks undoubtedly interacts with other social and economic issues in Aotearoa/New Zealand, including the cost of housing and food. But it also reflects the pressures of the academic job market, where stepping out for long periods of parental leave does not only affect household budgets in the short term but also potential earnings over one’s career as a whole. Beyond financial pressures, it is difficult to step aside from works in progress, such as ongoing research projects and grants, classes tailored to one’s own special areas, and postgraduate students on timelines for submission. Although the 52-week unpaid leave is an important legal provision, it is built on a model of nuclear households, where one parent is a main breadwinner and another parent’s income is in more of a supporting role. Our experiences highlight the importance of full-pay leave in the university sector, particularly for academics.

Whāngai/adoption

At some universities, people who adopt children are not given the same PPL opportunities as those who give birth. The University of Waikato information sheet about parental leave states that leave is available in the event of both birth or adoption, whereas Lincoln University does not state whether their institutional PPL applies both to parents who give birth and those who adopt. Other universities, such as the University of Canterbury, explicitly include whāngai and adoption in their PPL provisions (see Table 1).

None of the authors of this paper had experience with whāngai/adoption. However, we encourage those who do to bring their experiences into the public sphere through publishing their stories, in order to highlight the importance of the inclusion of whāngai/adoption in parental policy.

Working while on parental leave

The Keeping In Touch (KIT) initiative was introduced by the New Zealand government in April 2016 (Morrisey and Williamson, 2018). An employee can work up to 52 hours during parental leave and be paid through KIT days; this increased to 64 hours on 1 July 2020 (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2019). KIT days can help prepare the employee for their return to work and ease the transition process. Additionally, employers/team members can also gain from the employee's valuable input to ongoing projects. Only four university policies mention working during parental leave and only the policies/documents of Lincoln University, University of Waikato and Massey University explicitly allow for the use of KIT days.

The University of Otago's Parental Leave Policy (2015) states that 'Staff are not permitted to work while on any form of PPL'. However, we believe that there needs to be much more flexibility around working while on parental leave. All the authors of this article worked while on parental leave. This was in part due to student commitments, pressure to remain competitive in the neoliberal academic job market, and (somewhat ironically) mandatory administrative tasks such as performance reviews. Notably, each of our work periods during parental leave both exceeded the 64 hours currently allowed through KIT and was unpaid. It is worth noting that it was also difficult to locate KIT information on university websites. We collectively felt immense social pressure to remain 'productive' and 'competitive', and below are some examples of what we did following giving birth.

Example 1: I completed a grant application, a job review, supervised research students and hosted an international guest. I worked all through the PPL period. I felt like because of the type of system we work in, we are still trying to produce no matter what kind of leave we are on. There was an expectation when I returned to work that I owed others, and I took on a very large teaching and convening load, so essentially, I made up (and more) for any teaching that I had not done while on leave, even though this teaching was covered by a temporary appointment. I am still suffering from burnout and heightened mental health issues from this experience, which has negative impacts on my children.

Example 2: I was finally eligible for the university's PPL for my fourth child, but took a sabbatical after the nine weeks institutional PPL ended, instead of government paid parental leave. I worked from home around breastfeeding, hosted an international collaborator in my home, produced a 58-chapter edited collection and assisted a PhD student to completion. I would have preferred to have taken six months leave rather than put myself and my family under the pressure of having to produce a sabbatical project while caring for a newborn.

Example 3: As a postdoctoral researcher, I felt immense pressure to continue working while on parental leave to ensure I remained competitive for permanent faculty positions. For this reason, while on maternity leave, I worked over 200 hours, published four papers and did over 15 media interviews.

Job protection

Five out of eight policies and documents from Aotearoa/New Zealand universities specifically mention that, upon return to work after PPL, job security is guaranteed. However, the wording is such that universities reserve the right to terminate the employee based on their position type. For example, section 7 of the University of Otago's parental leave policy states: 'While on Parental Leave an employee's job must be kept open unless a redundancy situation occurs under a Management of Change process, or the job is a key position and a temporary replacement is not reasonably practicable. The employee's job may be filled on a temporary basis'. Temporary parental leave cover is an important aspect of parental leave provisions, but what is not visible here is the fear of losing one's job because of reduced productivity while working with a young baby and *not* being able to take leave.

Partner leave

There is no information provided regarding partners' leave in the University of Auckland parental leave policy, whereas most other universities allow one to two weeks of unpaid leave for partners of a birthing parent. This is especially important where both parents work at the same institution, since, in those cases, only one parent can take PPL and the other must take partners' leave. The University of Otago is the only university that offers two weeks (ten days) of paid leave for partners. If both parents are employed by the same university, most policies stipulate that the length of PPL can be shared between them. Comparatively, at the University of Auckland and Auckland University of Technology, only one parent can receive institutional paid leave, which significantly limits the flexibility required for many families. None of the authors are 'partners' so are unable to provide insight into the cultural aspect of partner leave but believe it is important that these stories are shared in order to raise awareness of an important aspect of PPL.

Other types of leave

In addition to PPL, five universities allow 10 days of unpaid leave for pregnant people (Table 1). Comparatively, at Auckland University of Technology, staff are allowed to take normal sick leave for pregnancy-related issues and associated appointments.

Despite having unlimited sick leave, one of the authors who developed a serious illness during her pregnancy had to take many days of unpaid sick leave for appointments associated with the illness. Collectively, we have had many illnesses connected to pregnancy, including gestational diabetes, pelvic dysfunction, hyperemesis gravidarum, pubis symphysis separation and sciatica, which would not be covered by normal sick leave. Some university travel insurance policies also explicitly exclude pregnancy related claims.

Only one policy (Lincoln University) specifically mentions special leave for premature babies. Section 3.3 *Entitlement to Preterm Baby Payment of their Parental Leave Policy* states: 'Additional parental leave payments of up to 13 weeks are available from the government if your baby is born prematurely before 37 weeks'. There is, however, no extra university support offered in these policies if staff have preterm babies.

How academic staff accrue annual leave while on parental leave differs by university. At most universities, except for the University of Otago, annual leave continues to accrue but it is paid at the rate of the employee's average weekly earnings for the 12-month period directly before annual leave is taken. Staff returning from parental leave and taking annual leave may therefore be paid at a lower rate than their salary, depending on the length of their parental leave. In contrast, the University of Otago's PPL policy ensures that the payment of both sick leave and annual leave will be calculated based on an employee's normal pay rate and FTEs prior to taking parental leave. Interestingly, the Massey University parental leave information sheet and collective agreement state that staff must reduce their annual leave allowances prior to taking parental leave.

Example 1: I didn't realise that, while I was on parental leave, my annual leave had been accruing at the university. When I took that leave over Christmas, I noticed my pay check was lower than normal. I hadn't been aware that annual leave is calculated on the average of your earnings in the previous 12 months, so my pay-out was less due to being on parental leave and being paid at a lower rate during that time. I felt financially penalised for taking parental leave, which further marginalises women and parents in academia.

Language of policies and other parental leave documents

Some of the language and wording used in these policies is offensive and requires more careful attention and thoughtful changes. The Massey University Parental Leave Fact Sheet labels pregnancy as a ‘condition’. This is problematic because it implies that having children is a form of illness and that someone on parental leave is merely at home relaxing, rather than doing the important work of caring for a baby. Furthermore, many of the policies use highly gendered language, such as ‘birth mother’, ‘female’, and ‘maternity leave’. The University of Auckland Parental Leave Policy also uses ‘she/he’, which inaccurately suggests gender is binary. When these policies come up for review, we strongly suggest that reviewers consist of a diverse range of people and that language be more inclusive. Although it is important to recognise the effects of such policies on women’s inclusion in the workplace, these policies are not only for women, but are for all parents and caregivers. Gendering policies may have the unintentional effect of further entrenching childcare as a woman’s duty, while also unnecessarily excluding parents of other genders, particularly non-binary parents.

Discussion

Aotearoa/New Zealand universities provide international leadership in many areas and have some of the better work-life balance policies in the OECD. Yet PPL is still clearly lacking. As our policy analysis and narratives have shown, inadequate PPL is a significant issue, particularly for early-career academic parents. Given that Aotearoa/New Zealand universities are under scrutiny for their gendered pay gaps (Brower & James, 2020), as well as the glass ceilings faced by many Māori and Pasifika women (McAllister et al., 2020), the time is ripe for considering the role of PPL in alleviating a portion of this gap. Our analysis of the PPL policies of Aotearoa/New Zealand’s universities brings up several key areas for nation-wide discussion: the need for structural support in addition to personal support from managers and colleagues; the problematic assumptions around definitions of primary caregivers; and the need to treat PPL as an opportunity to invest in both future generations (on multiple levels) and diverse workplaces.

PPL as an investment in future generations

While some authors frame PPL in terms of university ‘generosity’ (Ray et al., 2010), it is perhaps more accurate to frame it as an investment in future generations. Given the ‘leaky pipelines’ for minoritised groups internationally (Fradella, 2018), and particularly for Māori and Pacific women academics in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Naepi et al., 2019; McAllister et al., 2019), investing in PPL is an important step in making sure universities have a diverse range of leaders, researchers and educators. As Naepi et al. (2019) discuss, Māori and Pacific academics are much more likely to enter academia through diverse entry points, and to be navigating the pathways while having children and caring for families. Representative leadership in higher education is an investment in future diversity and quality research informed by knowledges from many traditions. Yet reaching representative leadership is hindered by structures that do not support the intersectionality of being (particularly) a woman navigating maternity, an early-career researcher, and belonging to a minoritised or racialised group.

PPL is an investment in family wellbeing. While the accessibility of childcare and government funding of childcare has improved in the past 20 years in Aotearoa/New Zealand,

there remains a vulnerable period in an infant's life, where the ideal for infant development is connection to a few key caregivers and proximity to a parent. Abel et al. (2001) found that although there is a lot of diversity, Māori, Pasifika and Pākehā understandings of the early months of an infant's life all emphasise that practical support needs to be provided to mothers as they navigate the embodied transition to parenthood. Paid parental leave is essential to removing financial stress for families during this time, enabling a transition that is respectful of the developing infant's needs as they connect to a small range of safe caregivers and develop as a healthy person.

Structural support

Although it is helpful to have supportive managers while negotiating the transition to parenthood, this alone is not enough. Well-developed and thoughtful university policies are required to protect parents and families against the possibility of unsupportive managers. Moreover, having institutional parental leave funded from within university departments is problematic, as it creates pressure on caregivers at multiple levels. It could also impact their colleagues, who may be expected to take up heavier workloads rather than the university employing people to step in for people on parental leave. Centrally funding parental leave within institutions could relieve some of this pressure and foster a culture where parental leave is welcomed and normalised because it is well resourced. Topping up government leave to meet a parent's usual pay is one way to decrease the stress brought about by financial concerns of having a baby: there are enough points of stress transitioning back into work without adding financial stress to the mix. Our collective experiences and work expectations while on leave were highly influenced by managers, particularly where policies did not meet the needs of caregivers. Using sabbatical as leave, or using up leave on a part-time basis were not practices supported by policy, but were put in place only by negotiation with managers. Relying on individual negotiation can potentially lead to increased inequality, as both managers and employees have diverse capabilities, cultures and expectations around negotiation. Research has previously shown this can have negative outcomes for women in particular (Bowles et al., 2007).

Clarifying and expanding primary caregiving

While it is important to include all kinds of caregivers who do the important work of caring for children, the concept of a 'primary carer' is increasingly problematic in an era where both parents might be expected to participate in care and work. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, primary caregiving can legally refer to more than one person (for example two parents can both be primary caregivers). However, the connotations of this phrase and its use in government PPL and university policies require one person to be clearly identified as the 'primary' carer, thus relegating others to 'secondary' carers. To work towards greater equality in caregiving, while acknowledging the embodied birth and care work that women and birthing parents in particular are often expected to carry out, it makes sense to be more clearly inclusive in PPL language. Some people operate with days-on/days-off primary caregiving; some partners take up daytime primary caregiving while others might be doing night-time caregiving; some grandparents might be doing whāngai caregiving or extra caregiving while also working. It may be that policies need to be extended to include more diverse groups, clarifying that PPL is available to birthing people, breastfeeding people and caregiving people as required, while not being limited to only include the weeks after birth.

Where to next? Policy recommendations

To create supportive and equitable universities that have a more representative range of people at all levels, including leadership, PPL provisions need a serious overhaul. Our analysis of policies and lived experiences has led us to the following recommendations for Aotearoa/New Zealand universities:

1. Remove length of service requirements. We have shown that the *length of service* required before becoming eligible for university PPL is clearly prohibitive and prevents many parents from accessing it. We suggest that staff are eligible regardless of how long they have worked at the university.
2. Top up government leave to full pay. Rather than providing six to 12 weeks of additional institutional PPL to eligible staff, we suggest that universities top up the government leave to employees' full salary for the entirety of government leave (i.e. 26 weeks). Government PPL (i.e. a maximum of \$606.46 per week) is significantly less than academics' regular salary. It therefore further financially disincentives people from taking parental leave and magnifies gender inequities.
3. Extend leave to all staff regardless of contract length. All staff should be eligible for PPL regardless of the nature of their contract. Women are disproportionately represented in precarious employment (Stringer et al., 2018) and therefore continue to be disadvantaged by PPL policies, which, despite their good intentions, continue to exclude some parents.
4. Guarantee job security. Upon returning from PPL, job security should be guaranteed under all circumstances. This is particularly important, as those on parental leave are unlikely to be in a strong position to apply for other jobs while caregiving for infants.
5. Remove repayment clauses. Similarly, clauses that stipulate PPL must be repaid if you resign while on leave should be removed from policies, because this does not reflect the transitional nature of much academic employment. Paid parental leave should be treated like any other pay, with the notice period of resignation matched to the usual period of notice in the contract.
6. Retain advancements and pay annual leave at the normal rate. Primary carers are already disadvantaged and discriminated against within academia, as it is a system that is historically built upon the working norms of white men (Rose 1993). Providing annual leave at a lower pay rate than their normal salaries further financially penalises parents who take parental leave. We suggest that, akin to the University of Otago's policy, universities pay out annual leave at the rate earned before parents take parental leave.
7. Flexible working options while on leave. We need flexible working options while on leave. Our narratives show that academic labour continues, often unpaid and unacknowledged through the duration of parental leave, despite some policies directly stipulating that employees cannot work on leave. If workers on PPL are having to do a day's work a week, for example, due to commitments to students or research projects, this should be explicitly sanctioned and added on to the end of the leave.
8. Normal sick leave for pregnancy-related illnesses. Staff should be able to use normal sick leave for pregnancy-related illnesses. While this is practiced informally in some institutions, official policy should clarify that it is permitted.
9. Partners' leave should be provided in addition to PPL. This is particularly important when both parents are at the same institution and may need a few weeks of leave at the same time. Parents who work at the same institution should not be disadvantaged in doing so and should each be eligible for institutional PPL.

10. Remove gendered language in policies. In line with universities' outward espousals of valuing diversity and equity, we suggest that gendered language is removed from policies and more inclusive and representative wording is used.

If Aotearoa/New Zealand universities are serious about investing in future generations of representative leadership, PPL policies are an essential starting point.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Dr Flavia Donadelli, Dr Rachael Ka'ai-Mahuta and Jo Waitoa for their assistance in understanding parental leave policies at Aotearoa/New Zealand universities. Tara McAllister thanks Te Pūnaha Matatini for funding her postdoctoral position. We thank the reviewers for their constructive feedback.

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Notes

1 Our article reflects a focus on women due to the make-up of the authorship team, but we are encouraged by the growing discussions and recognitions of the diverse genders of parenthood. It is increasingly important that research explores not only maternity leave but also parental leave for people of all genders.

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