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Workers' Access To And Use Of Leave From Their Jobs In 2017–18

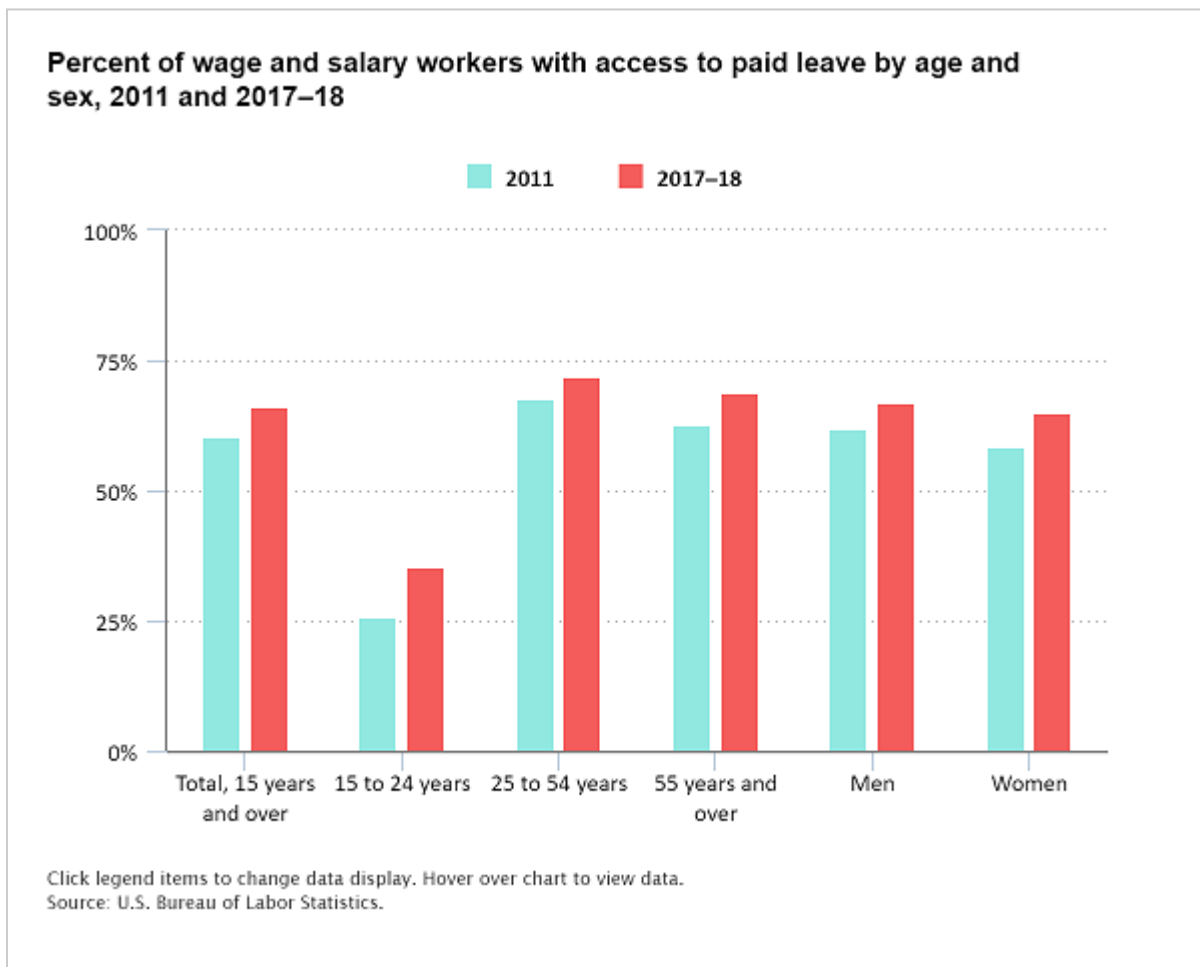
Stephanie L. Denton

Balancing work and family needs is a challenge for workers and their employers. Having good data on the availability and use of leave is essential for understanding that balance. This Spotlight on Statistics examines workers' access to and use of leave from their jobs in 2017–18. It looks at the reasons for which workers can take leave, their use of leave, and the reasons they did not take available leave even when they needed to.

Change in access to paid leave from 2011 to 2017–18

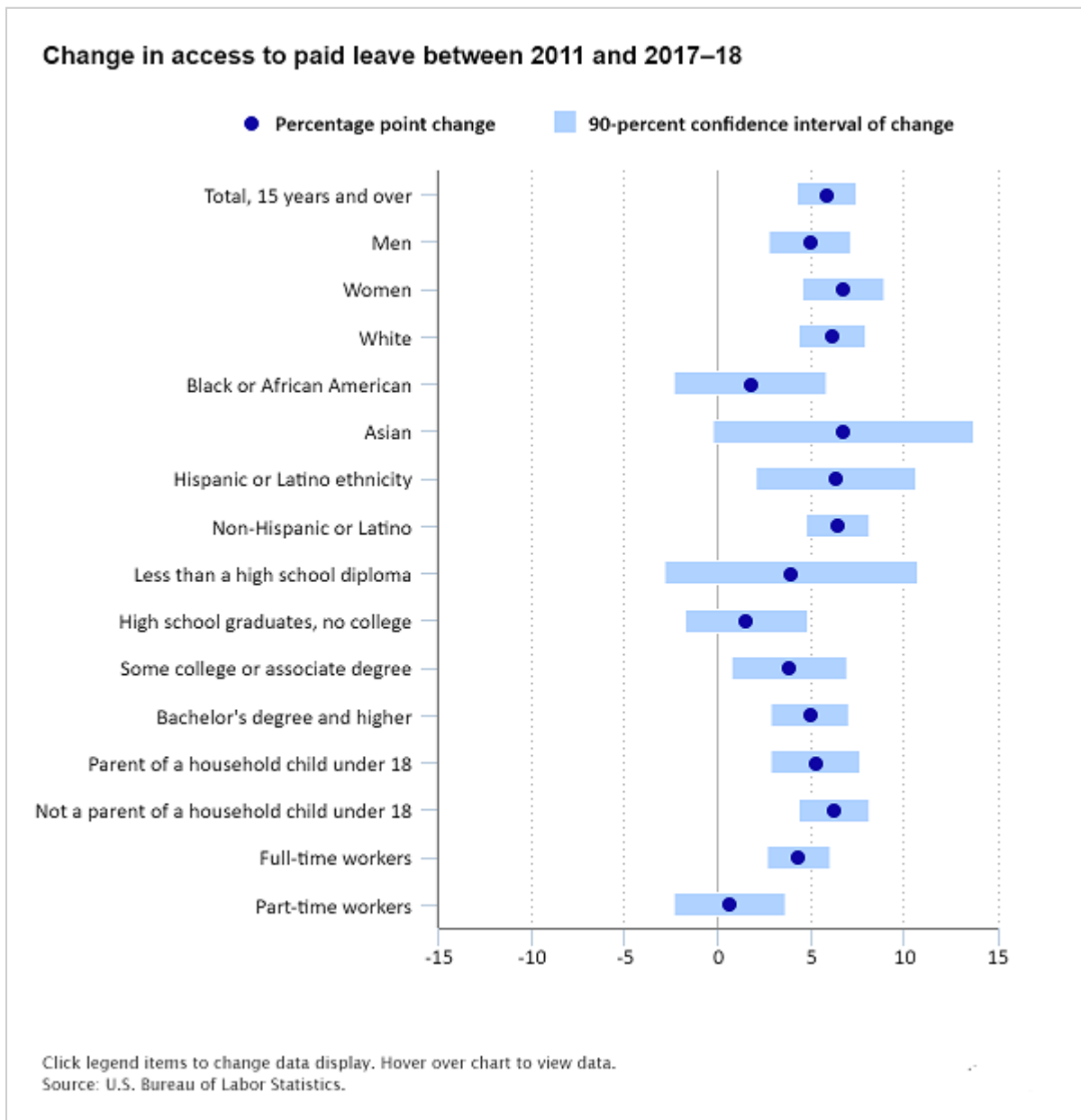
Sixty-six percent of wage and salary workers age 15 and over were able to take paid leave from their jobs in 2017–18, up from 60 percent in 2011, which was the last time these data were collected. Those early in their career (between the ages of 15 to 24) experienced the largest gain in access to paid leave, increasing from 26 percent in 2011 to 35 percent in 2017–18. Workers ages 25 to 54, as well as those age 55 and over, also experienced increases in access to paid leave over this time period.

The percentage of women with access to paid leave increased from 58 percent in 2011 to 65 percent in 2017–18. The percentage of men with access to paid leave increased from 62 percent to 67 percent over the same time period.



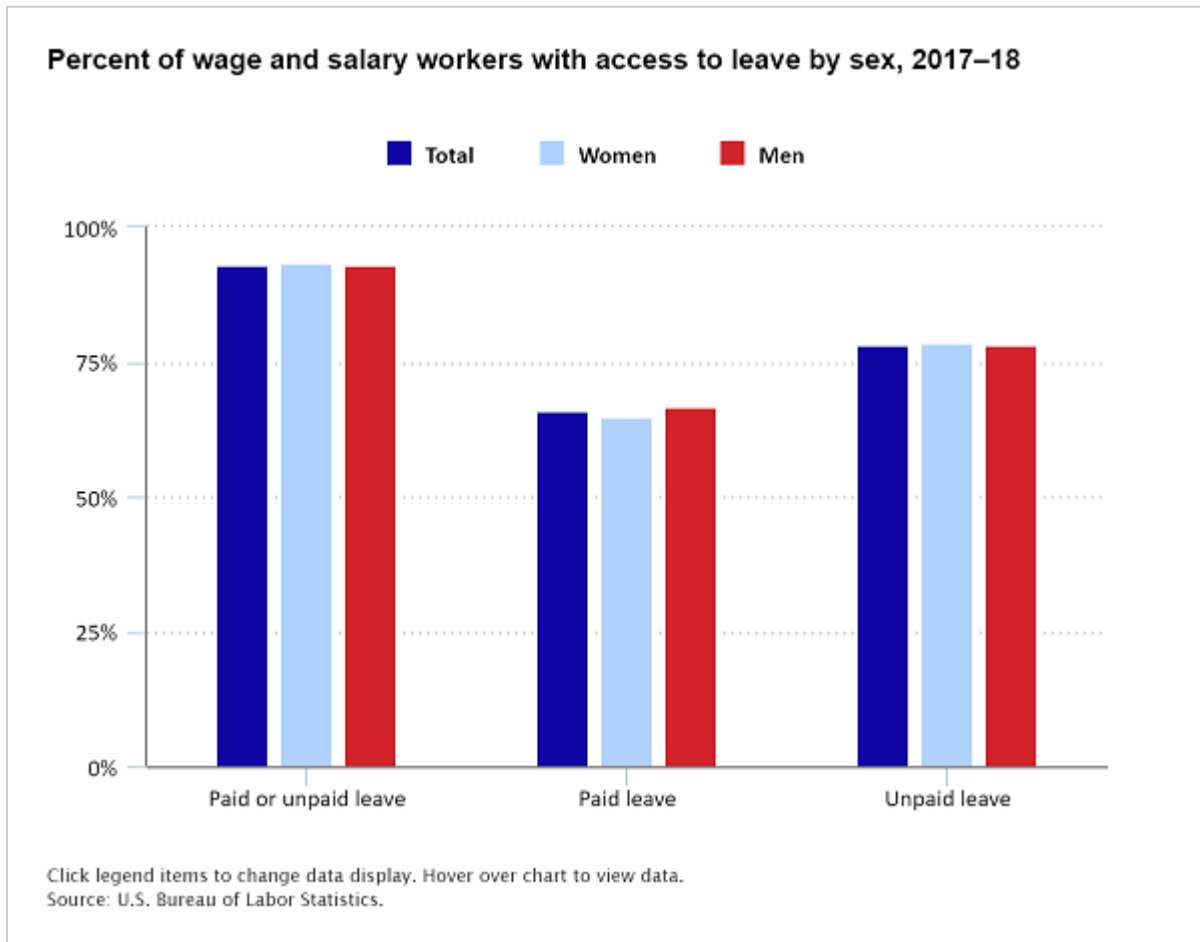
Widespread gains in access to paid leave between 2011 and 2017–18

The gains in access to paid leave between 2011 and 2017–18 were widespread. Gains occurred for men and women, Hispanics and non-Hispanics, workers with higher levels of education, parents with children in their household and workers who did not have children in their household, and full-time workers. In the chart, the 90-percent confidence interval—denoted by the light blue bar—represents the symmetric range of values around the estimate. This range means there is a 90-percent probability that the actual change is within that range of values. If the change is statistically significant, the light blue bar does not cross the zero line. Estimates by educational attainment are for people age 25 and older.



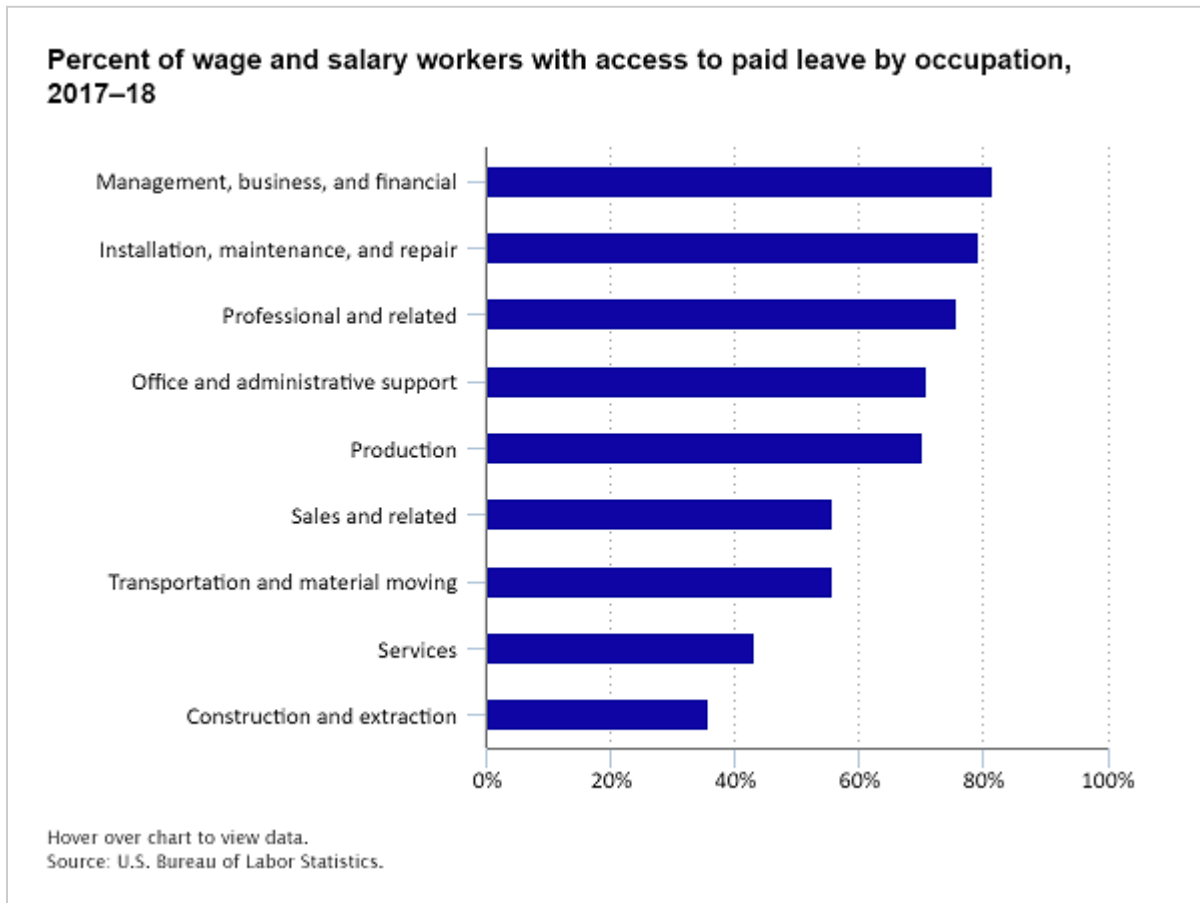
Access to paid and unpaid leave in 2017–18

On average, 93 percent of workers had access to either paid or unpaid leave in 2017–18. Sixty-six percent of wage and salary workers had access to paid leave at their jobs. Seventy-eight percent of wage and salary workers had access to unpaid leave, and an additional 9 percent were unsure whether they had access to unpaid leave. There was little difference in access to paid leave and unpaid leave by sex.



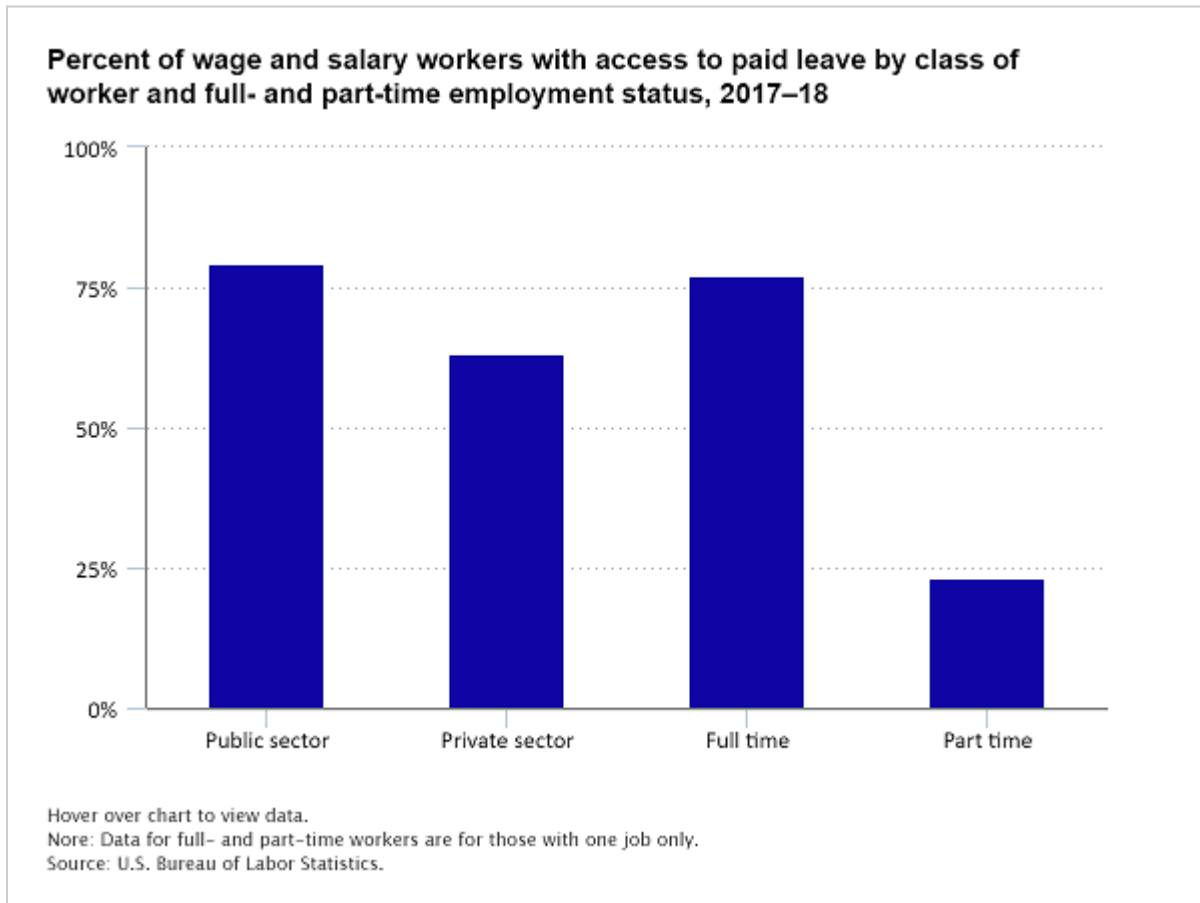
Access to paid leave by occupation

Wage and salary workers in management, business, and financial operations occupations (82 percent); installation, maintenance, and repair occupations (79 percent); and professional and related occupations (76 percent) were the most likely to have access to paid leave. Workers in construction and extraction occupations (36 percent) and service occupations (43 percent) were the least likely to have access to paid leave.



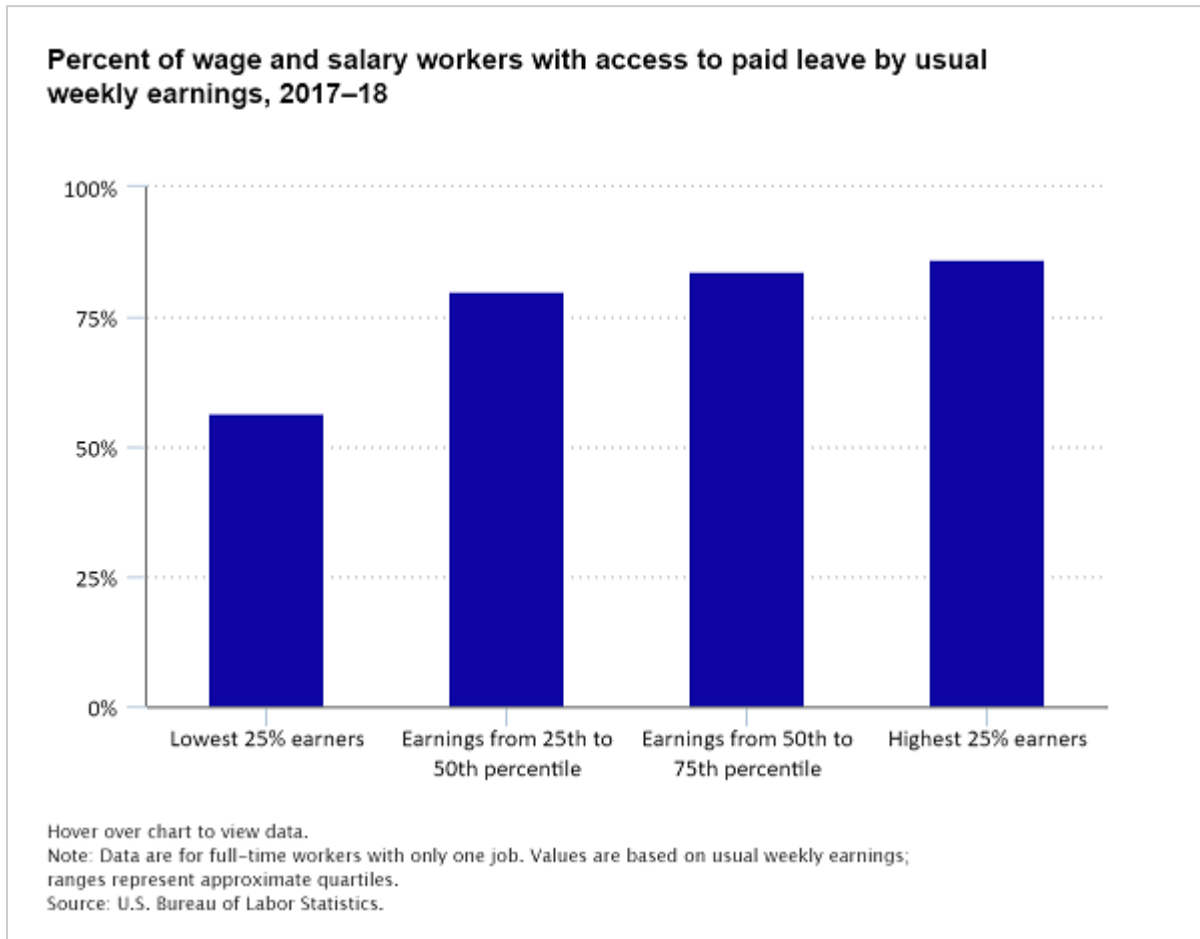
Access to paid leave by class of worker and full- and part-time employment status

Seventy-nine percent of public-sector workers had access to paid leave, compared with 63 percent of private-sector workers. Among single jobholders, full-time workers were about three times more likely than part-time workers to have access to paid leave—77 percent, compared with 23 percent.



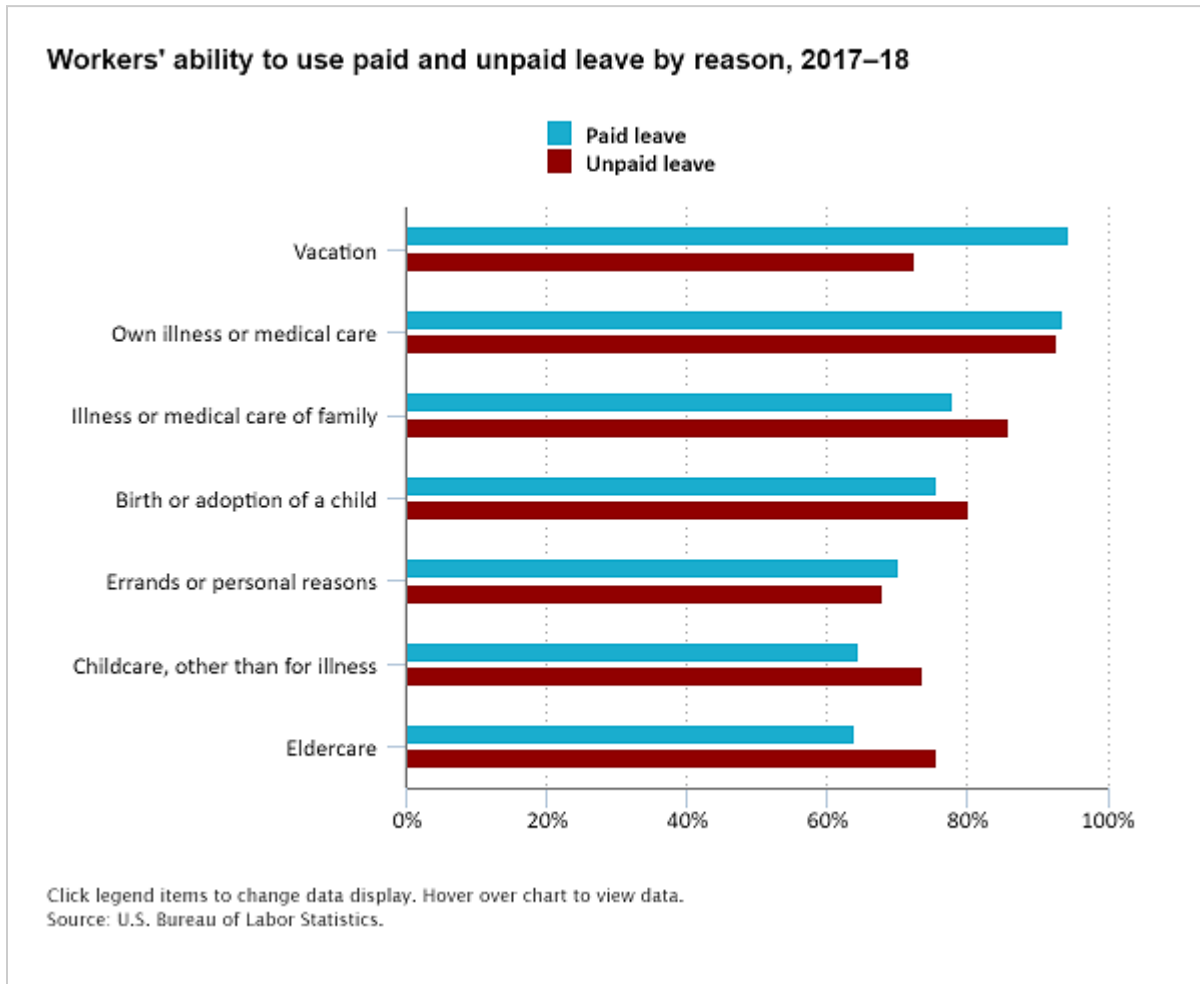
Higher earners had greater access to paid leave

Among full-time wage and salary workers with only one job, higher earners had greater access to paid leave. Eighty-six percent of workers in the top 25 percent of earners had access to paid leave, compared with 57 percent of workers who were among the lowest 25 percent of earners.



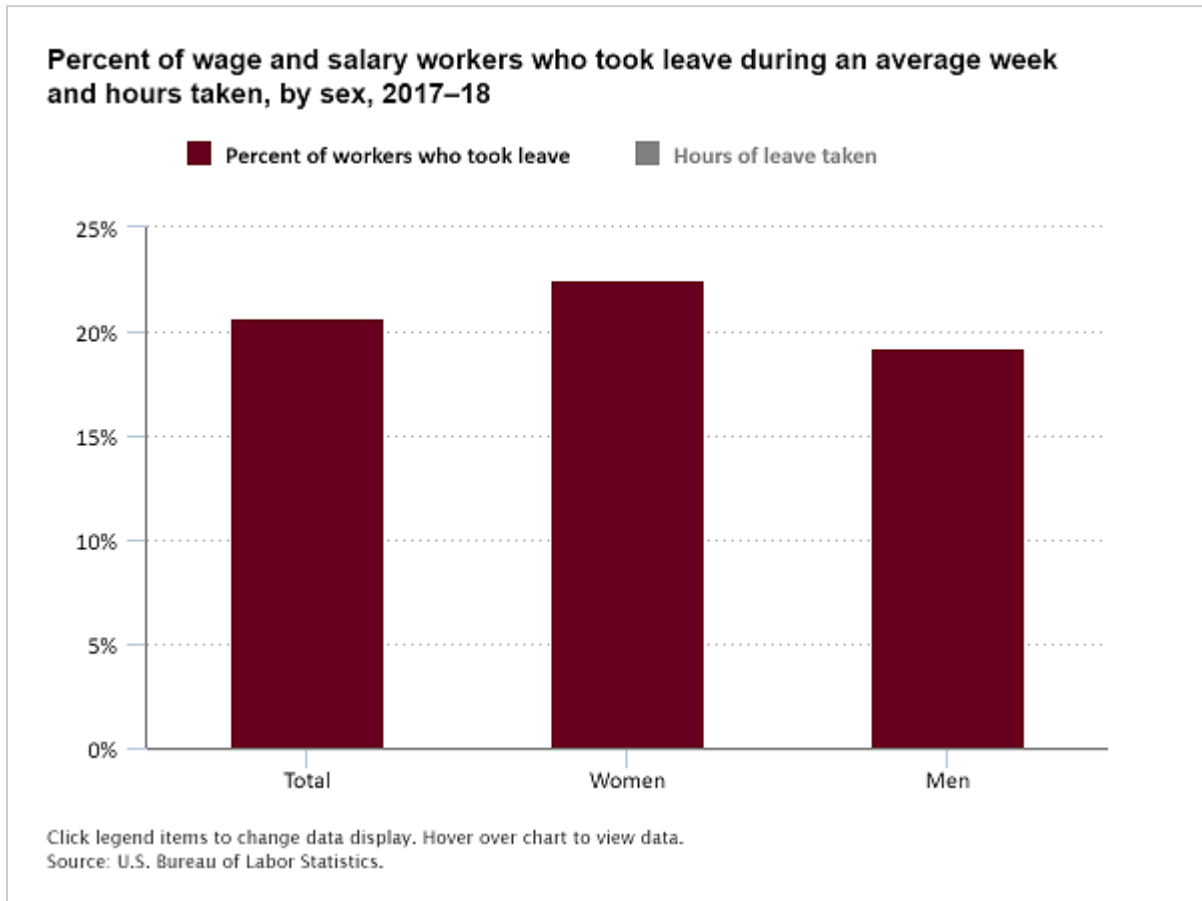
Workers' ability to use paid and unpaid leave by reason

Vacation (95 percent) and own illness or medical care (94 percent) were the most common reasons for which workers could use paid leave. The most common reasons for which workers could use unpaid leave were for own illness or medical care (93 percent) and the illness or medical care of a family member (86 percent).



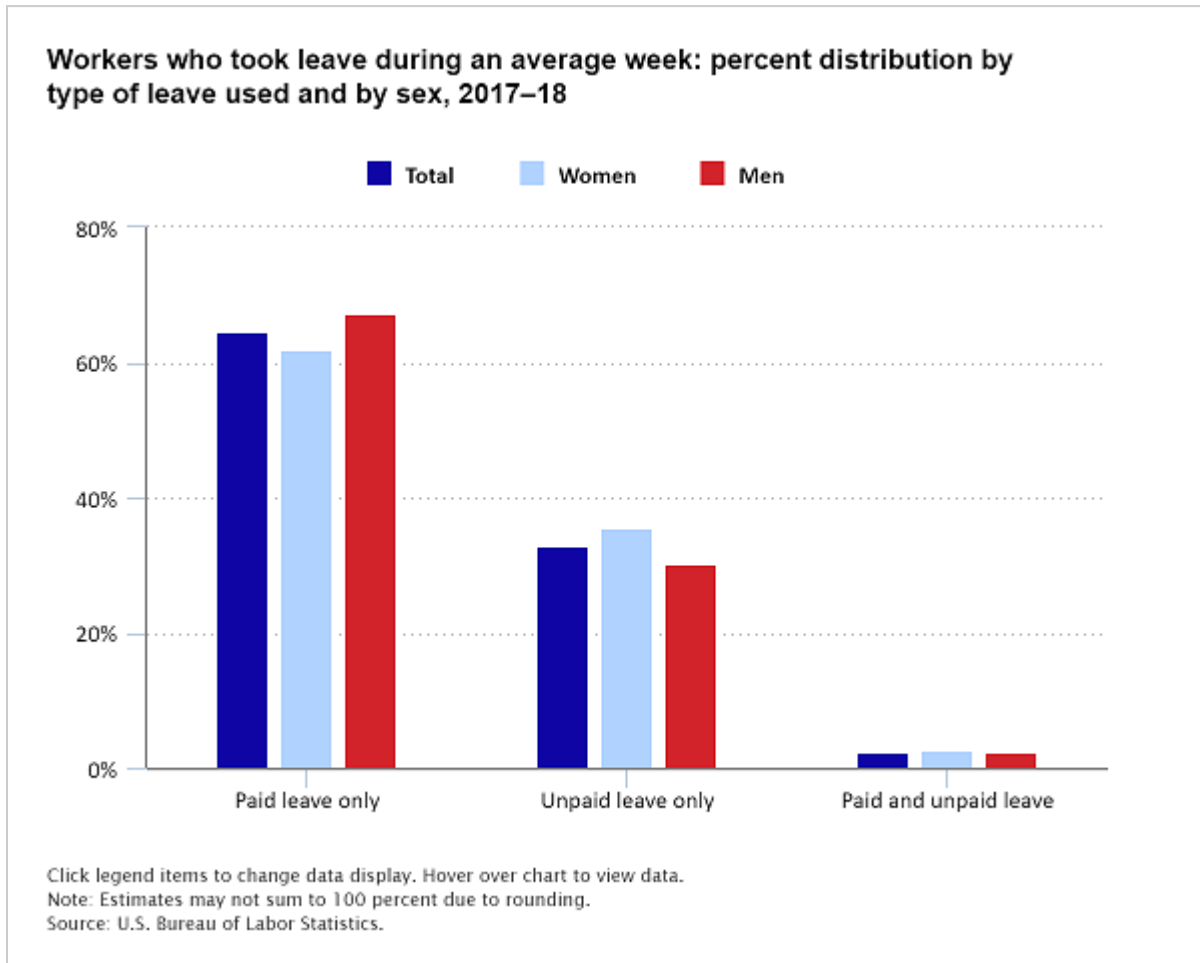
Use of leave in 2017–18

During an average week, 21 percent of wage and salary workers took leave, either paid or unpaid, from their jobs. These workers took an average of 13.7 hours of leave. Women were more likely than men to take leave from their jobs during an average week (23 percent, compared with 19 percent).



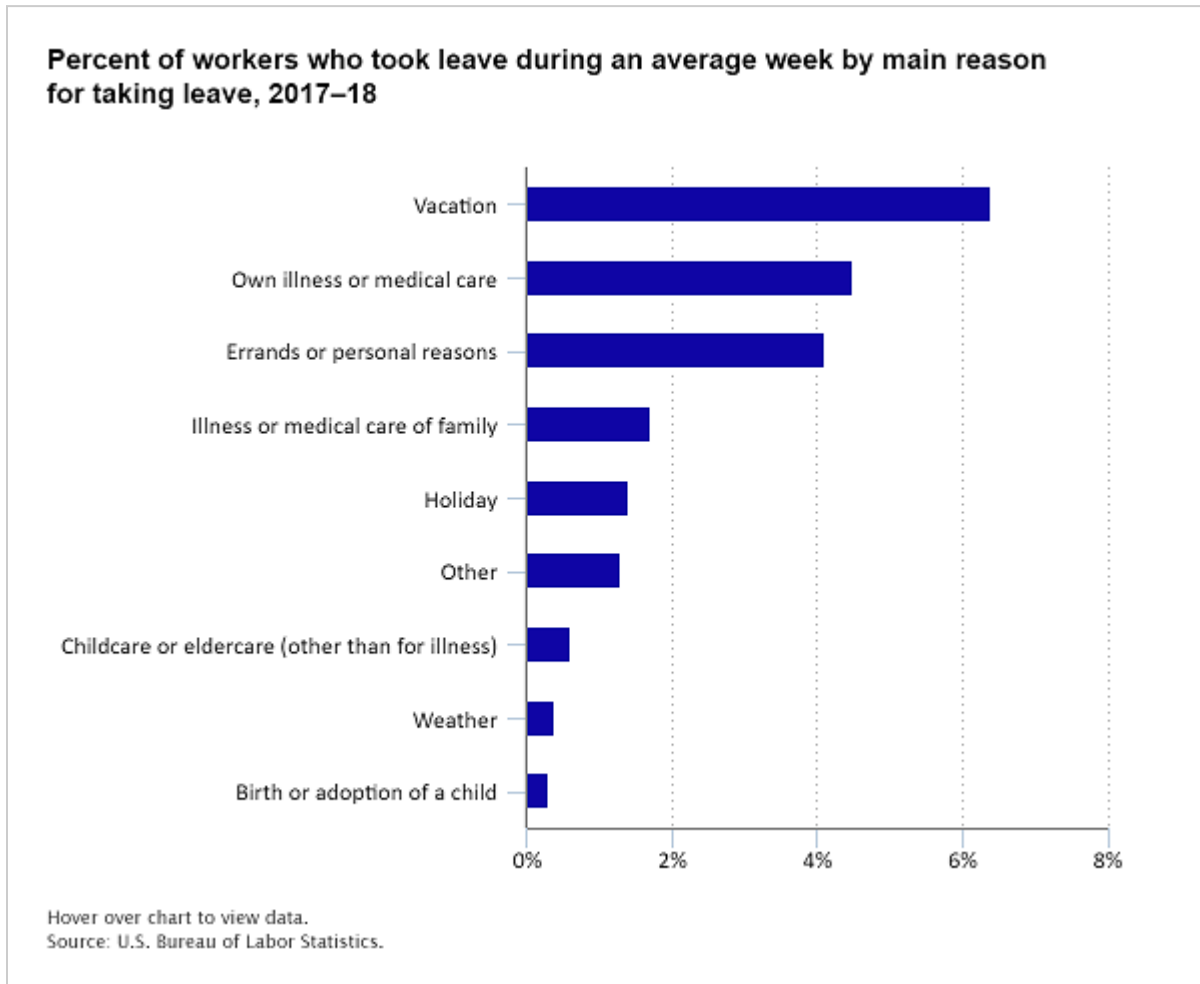
Use of paid or unpaid leave

Of those wage and salary workers who took leave from their jobs during an average week, about two-thirds used paid leave. Men were more likely than women to use paid leave only, and women were more likely than men to use unpaid leave only.



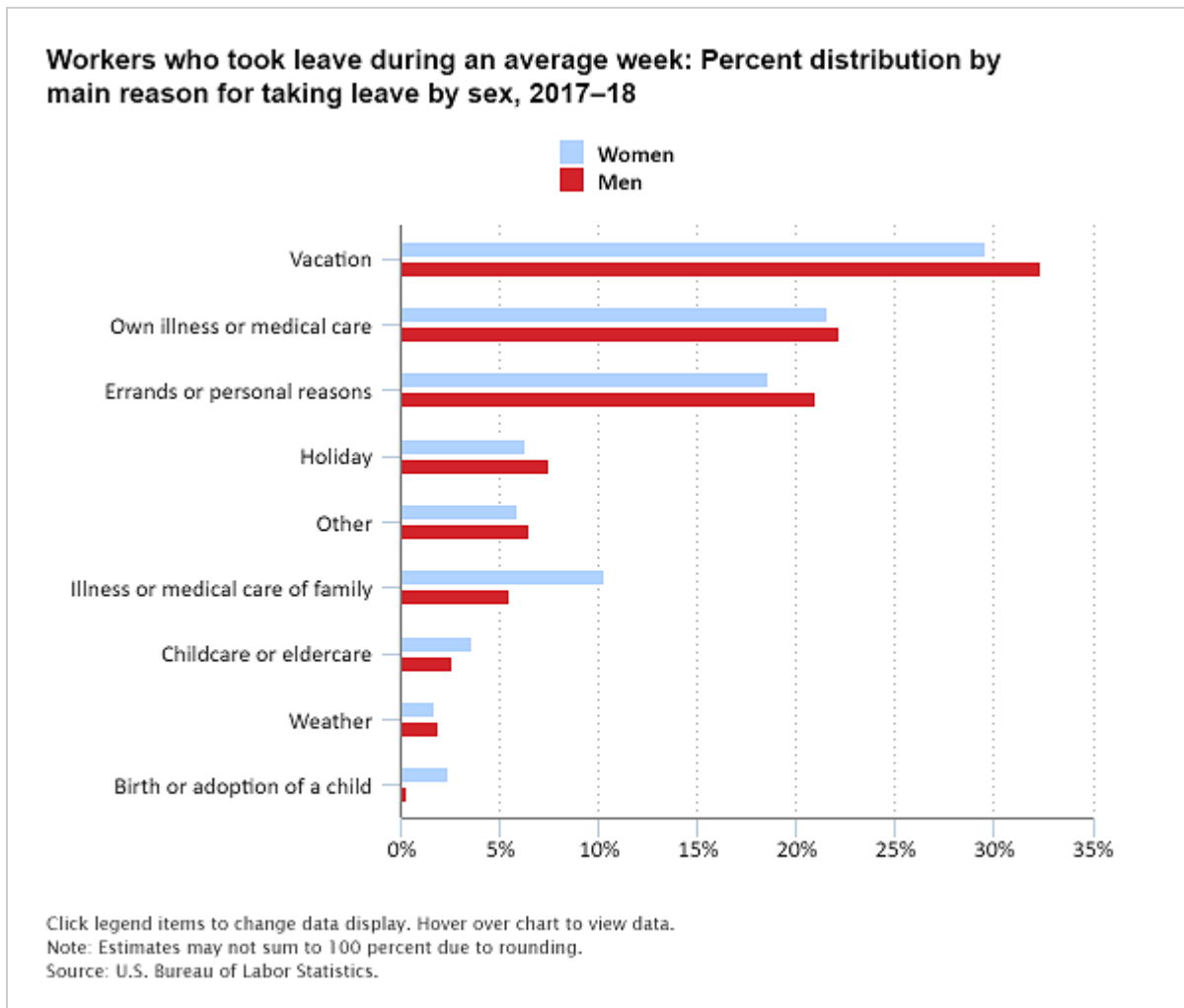
Reasons for taking paid and unpaid leave in an average week

In an average week in 2017–18, 6 percent of wage and salary workers took leave from their jobs to vacation, 5 percent took leave because they were ill or needed medical care, and 4 percent took leave to run errands or for personal reasons.



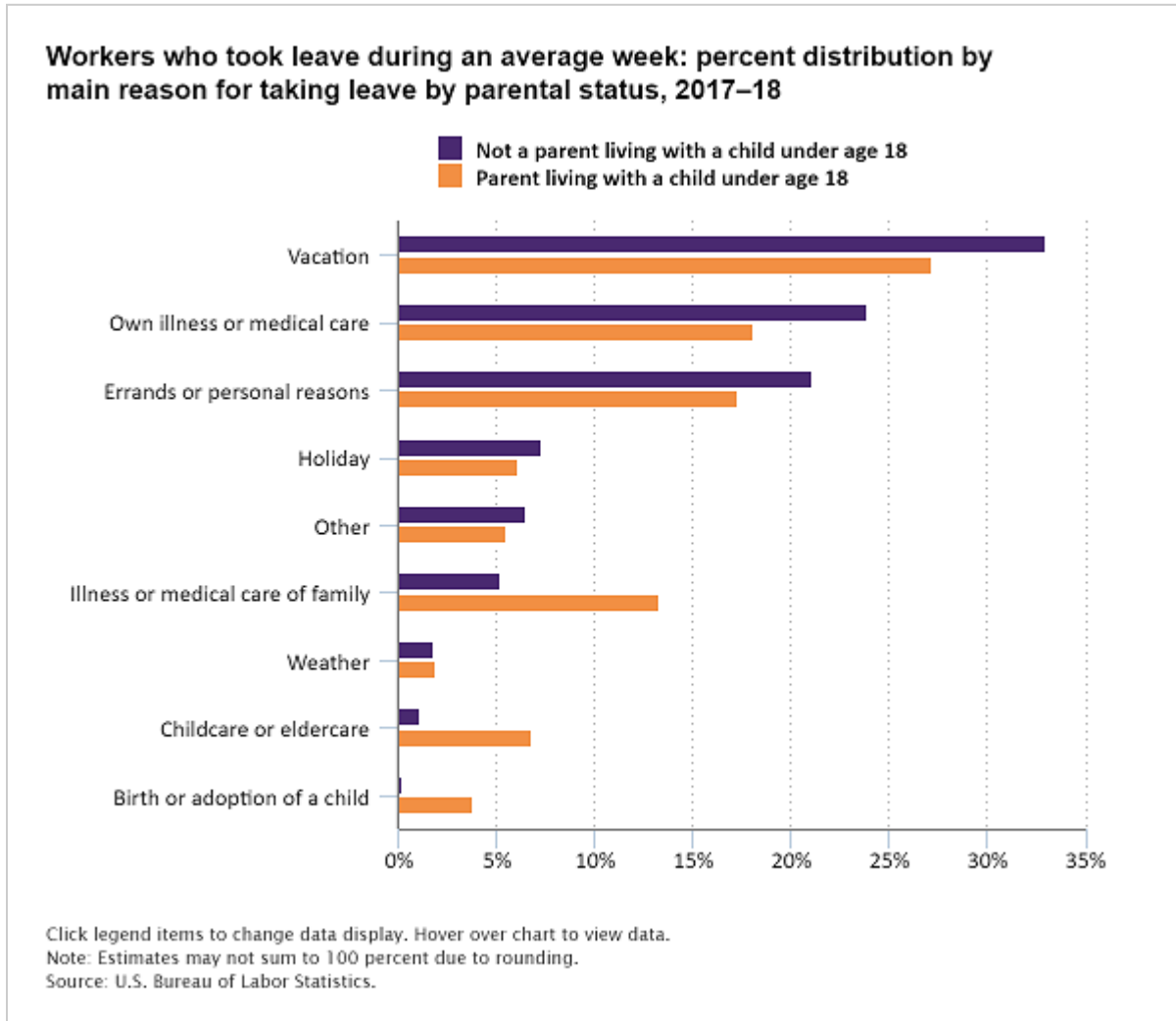
Women were more likely than men to take leave from their jobs to care for family

This chart shows the distribution of workers taking leave, either paid or unpaid or a combination of both, by their main reason for doing so. Of the 21 percent of workers who took leave from their jobs during an average week, women were more likely than men to take leave because a family member was ill or needed medical care. Among those who took leave, 10 percent of female workers took leave for this reason, compared with 6 percent of male workers.



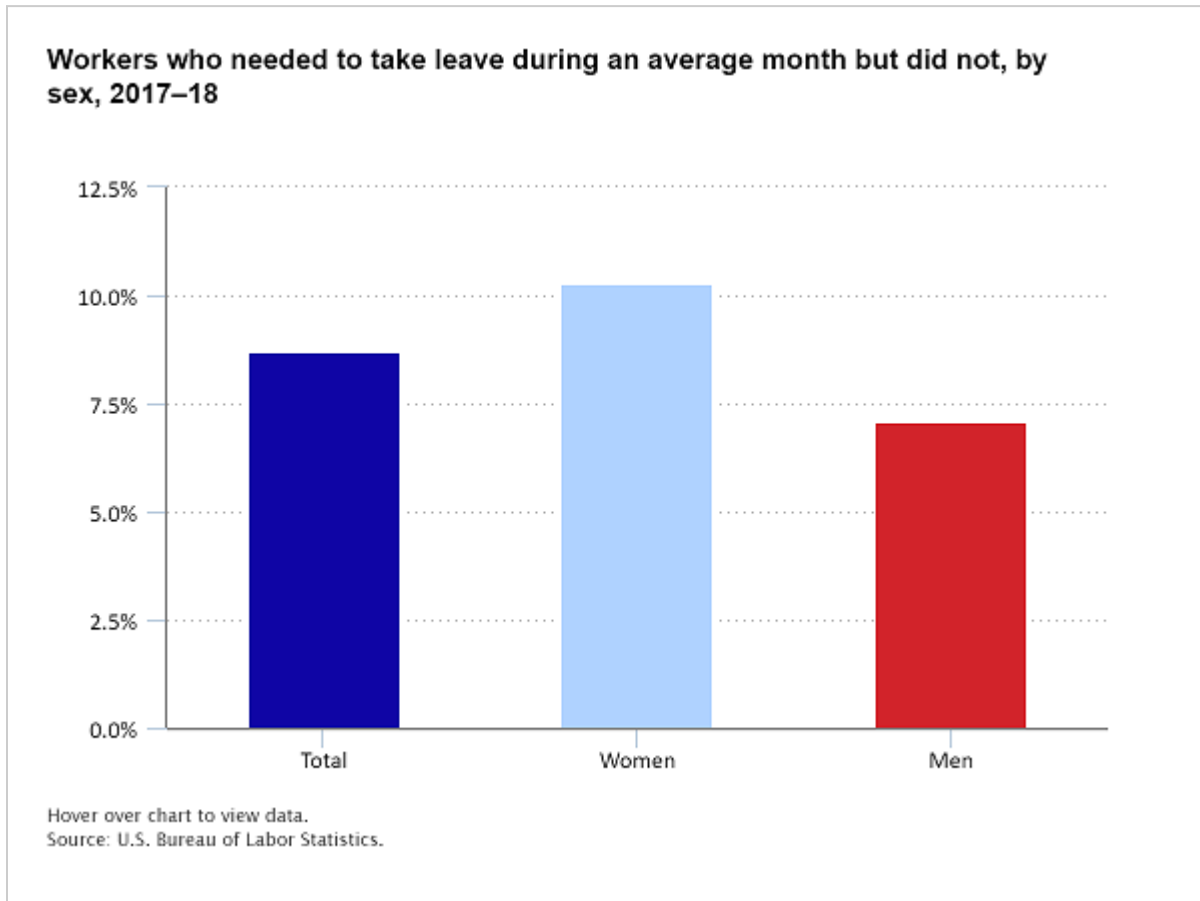
Parents living with children were more likely to take leave from their jobs to care for family

Among workers who took leave from their jobs during an average week, parents living with children under age 18 were more likely to take leave because a family member was ill or needed medical care than were workers who were not parents living with children (13 percent, compared with 5 percent). Those who were not parents were more likely to take leave for their own illness or medical care (24 percent) than were workers who were parents of household children (18 percent). This includes paid leave, unpaid leave, or a combination of both.



Not using leave even when needed

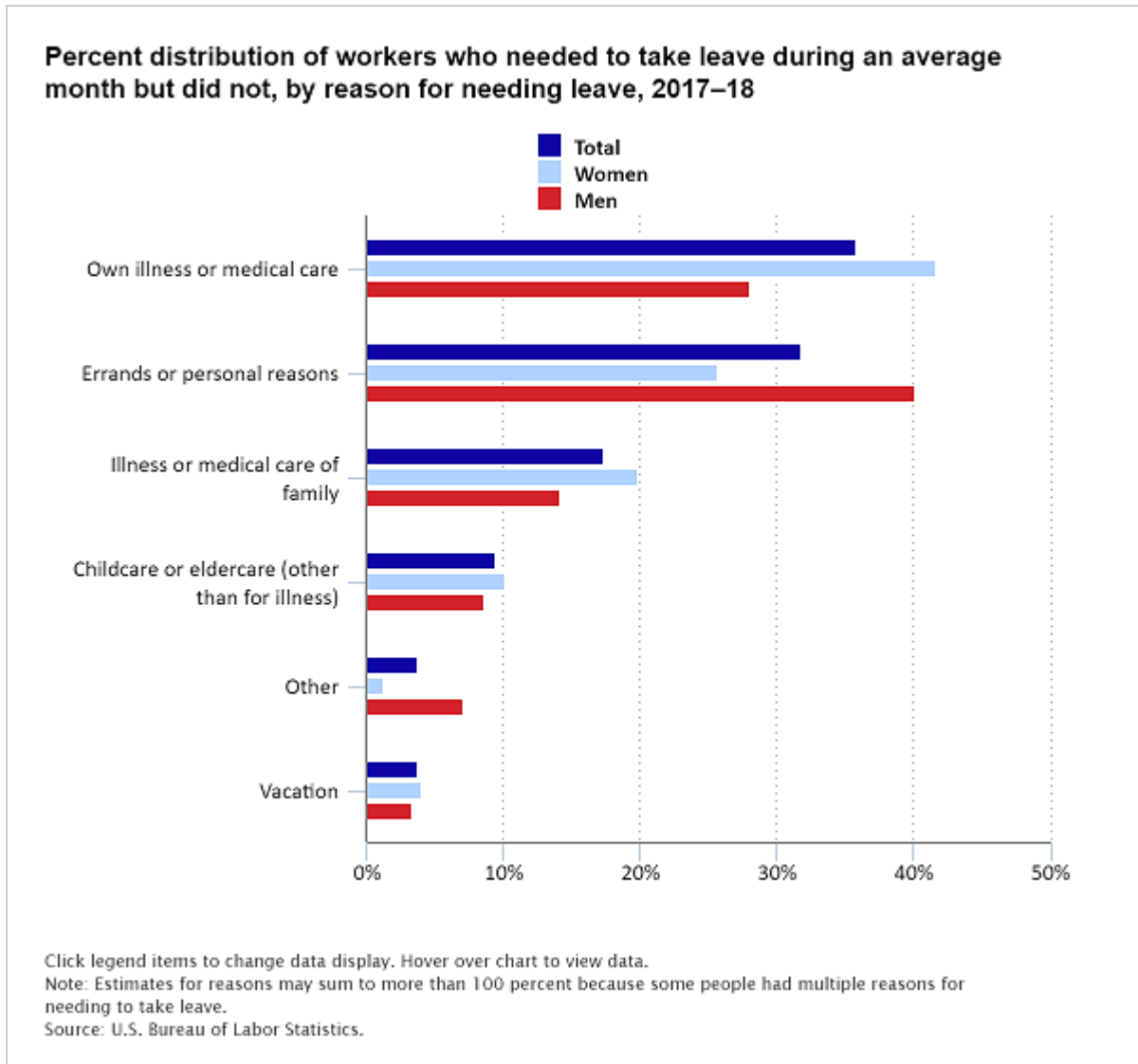
Nine percent of wage and salary workers needed to take leave during an average month, but for various reasons they did not take leave. During an average month, women were more likely than men to experience times when they needed to take leave from their jobs, but did not (10 percent, compared with 7 percent).



Reasons for needing, but not taking, paid or unpaid leave

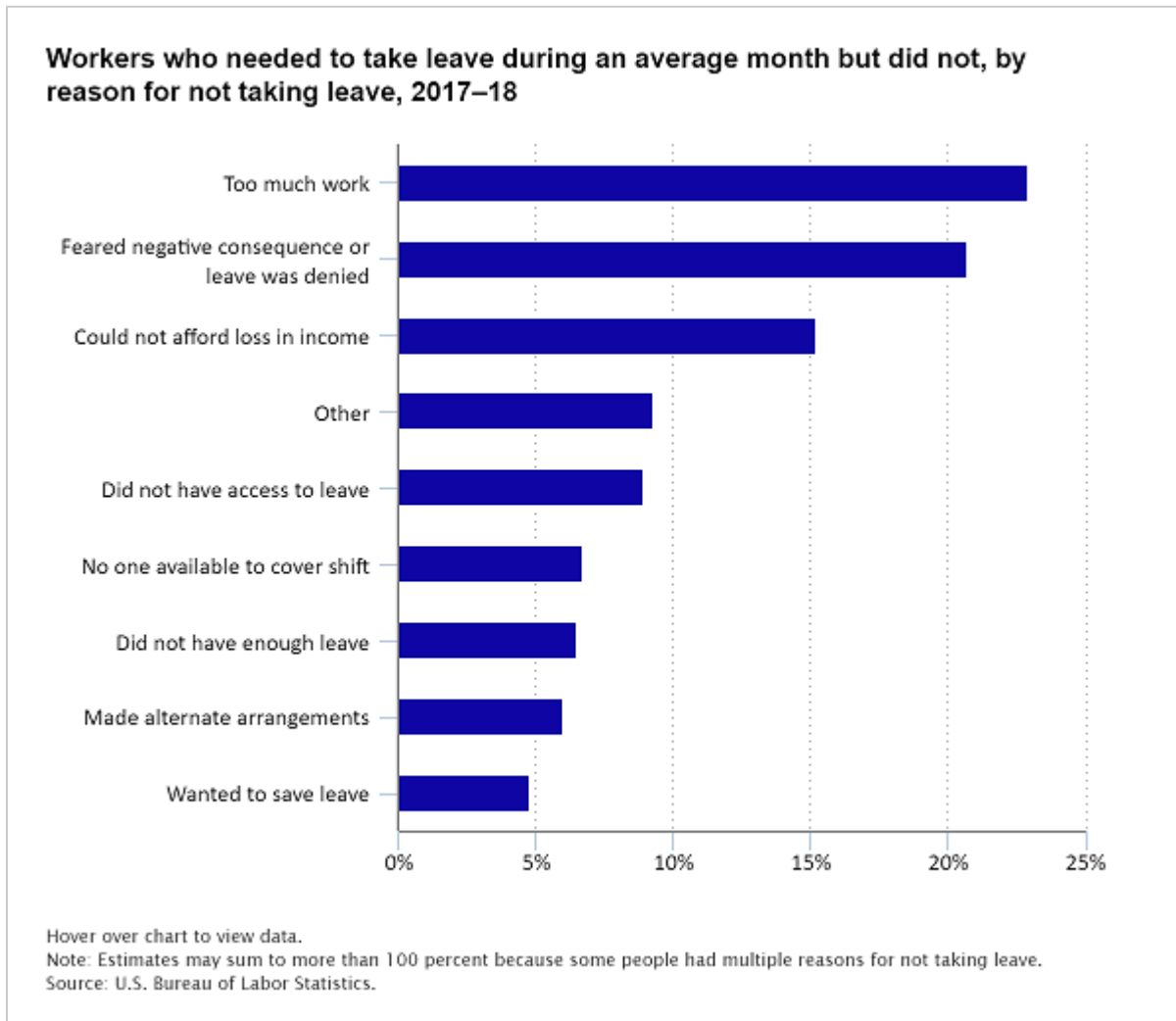
About one-third of workers who needed to take time off from work, but did not take it, needed to take leave for their own illness or medical care, and about one-third needed to take leave for errands or personal reasons.

Of those women who needed to take leave but did not, the most common reason for needing leave was for their own illness or medical care (42 percent). By comparison, men most often needed leave for errands or personal reasons (40 percent).



Reasons for not taking leave

Of the 9 percent of workers who needed to take paid or unpaid leave during an average month but did not, 23 percent of them did not take leave because they had too much work. Other common reasons for not taking leave were because workers feared negative employment consequences or because their leave request was denied (21 percent), and because workers could not afford the loss in income (15 percent).



More information

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The data in this Spotlight on Statistics are from the [American Time Use Survey](#), a continuous survey that provides nationally representative estimates of how, where, and with whom Americans spend their time. From January 2017 through December 2018, the survey included supplemental questions called the Leave and Job Flexibilities Module. The module was sponsored by the [U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau](#). The data were collected directly from workers age 15 and older who were wage and salary workers at their main job. The data exclude all self-employed workers. Data are 2017–18 averages.

These data on leave were collected directly from workers and thus represent workers' knowledge on these topics. Workers sometimes do not know whether they can use leave until they need to do so.

More information about the 2017–18 Leave and Job Flexibilities Module, including the questionnaire and data files, is available at www.bls.gov/tus/lvdatafiles.htm.