

Impact of The Family Leave Act

Samy Babikerali, Sergio Gonzalez Cintron, Sophia Hamid, Raj Patel, Arohi Shiraskar

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

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Marco Scipioni, Justin Grandinetti

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Unveiling the Influence of the Family Leave Act on Women in the Workforce (1990-2000)

Introduction

During World War II, women entered the workforce to support the war effort. However, as many opted to continue their employment post-war, new challenges arose, particularly concerning child and family care. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was implemented in 1993, recognizing this shift and the need for a harmonious work-family balance. The FMLA allowed eligible employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected annual leave for specific family or medical reasons. This report centers on investigating this law's impact on women's unemployment rates. To achieve this, the implementation and scope of the FMLA is explored with an emphasis on its significance for women, families, industries, and the government. Using charts and graphs to conduct a statistical analysis of FMLA's impact on women's unemployment rates, considering key variables like age and education. Thus, the study seeks to investigate how the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 impacted women's unemployment between ages 16 and 54 from 1988 to 1998, particularly considering education levels.

Context and Implications

As civil rights movements emerged during the 20th century, women's rights movements were among the most prominent. This was fueled by long discrepancies between the two genders in the labor force. In 1993, it was found that 54% of women were “back at work within a year of their child’s birth” (Waldfogel, 1999, p.1). The FMLA was one of President Clinton's first acts following his inauguration. “The signing of this bill culminated years of political debate about the necessity of mandating family leave” (Scharlach et al., 1995, p.1). While the act only covered ten percent of all private-sector worksites, it covered 60 percent of private-sector employees (U.S. Dept. of Labor., 1996). The bill went into effect in August 1993, and it allowed leave from

work for the following reasons, “birth, adoption, or foster care placement of a child; caring for a spouse, a child, or a parent with a serious health condition; and serious health condition of the employee” (Family and Medical Leave Act Sample, nd.). This followed the early 1990’s recession and was seen as continuing the neoliberal restructuring of the U.S. economy that was taking place at the time (Kotz, 2003).

An example highlighting the disfavor of women, and specifically pregnant women in most occupations is that of Angela Anderson. In a significant Louisiana bank, Mrs. Anderson received a reputable position; however, as soon as her president found out that she was pregnant, without getting a chance to celebrate her new role, the promotion was revoked because the president “... could not rely on a pregnant personal assistant” (Wren & Kidwell Jr., 1996, p. 61).

This is one of many stories documenting women's discrimination in the labor force. As women's call for justice triumphed over the extensive period of prejudice, The U.S. government started enforcing laws like the Pregnancy Discrimination Act and the Family and Medical Leave Act. These laws prevented pregnancy from being a cause for any woman to be turned down and gave them the right to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, respectively. This allowed for leeway in the dynamics of families, industries, and governments.

Women in the immediate family are stakeholders in this project because they will have increased opportunities to get higher-paying roles in the workforce. As women in the labor force increase, children will spend more time in nurseries than ever before. This is but one industry that will benefit from women's employment “The growth in women’s labor force participation has made it more difficult for women and men to be available to care for newborn children or seriously ill family members” (Scharlach & Grosswald 1997, p. 3), while families struggle to manage their responsibilities, employment opportunities would rise in industries such as

nurseries where they assist with these struggles. Alternatively, other industries could face managerial issues such as a decline in productivity due to the impacts of the FMLA law. The government is also a stakeholder because the politicians and the economy are impacted.

Presuming the implementation of these laws increased women's employment levels, insights from this report will enhance women's experience in the labor market because it will inform women of their rights in the job market. Overall, women have less power and opportunities in the paid labor market, they are usually segregated into lower-paying jobs (Elison, 1997) (Cotter et al., 2003). Hence increasing women's employment in competitive industries. Additionally, the government will be able to collect more taxes from families, therefore increasing the GDP in the United States.

This assumption finds validation in the outcomes following the enactment of such legislation. Even though the law had achieved its goal of balancing workplace demands and family needs, it fell short in addressing other crucial facets, for instance, the wage gap. As the industries benefited with more available workers, there were some fluctuations in the wage gap due to gender differences. Despite the abundance of opportunities for women in the workforce post-FMLA, they continued to face unequal pay, especially if they were parents, “Temporary Disability Insurance, which enables new birth mothers to take paid leave, was robustly associated with narrower gaps between mothers and fathers” (Strader, 2022, p.1). Remarkably, this observation emerged decades after the law's enactment, highlighting how social and economic factors had, over time, hindered the law's intended purpose. This, in turn, had a discernible impact on women's confidence and encouragement in the workforce, potentially leading some to choose unemployment over discrimination.

Alternatively, given the implementation of these laws did not affect women's employment, politicians will lose credibility. However, they will gain powerful insight into the statistical data that lead their policies to fail, which could guide the creation of more effective policies in the future.

The ethical considerations evaluated in this project include deontology, consequentialism, and virtue. Considering deontological ethics, all the possible influences on women's unemployment between 1988 and 1998 were appraised. Some of these influential factors include recession and social movement. Additionally, the possible consequences of the FMLA and the potential impacts of publishing the report were reviewed. Lastly, the day-to-day life of families and how women's and men's lives could be affected were explored to satisfy the virtues.

Measurements

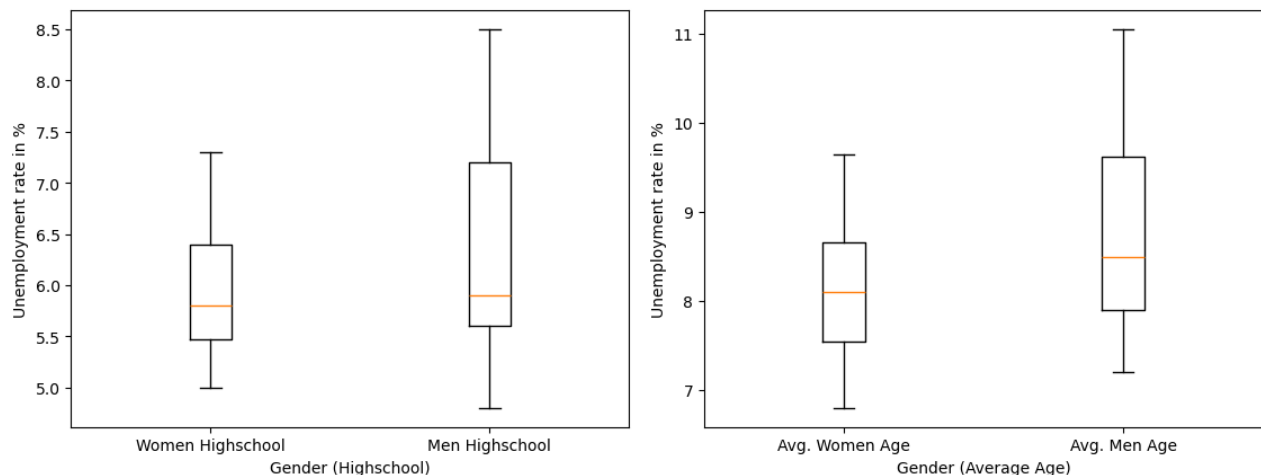
Since the FMLA permits employees to take leave for family care responsibilities, particularly for children, women's unemployment within the age range of 16-54 years was evaluated. This specific age bracket was chosen due to its relevance as a typical demographic for women in the workplace. Additionally, it aligned with a period when women may have childcare responsibilities, including the potential for pregnancy. Thus, this approach showed an appropriate impact of the FMLA. Moreover, an additional independent variable was defined as the education status, categorized into different levels (e.g., high school, college, etc.) to assess how variations in education correlated with changes in unemployment rates.

The given variables were measured using qualified statistical data from the Economic Policy Institute's State of Working America Data Library, which encompassed unemployment rates for various age groups, education levels, genders, races, and other factors. The unemployment rate, serving as the dependent variable, unveiled the impact of the FMLA

comparing differences in men's and women's statistics. Additionally, employing men as the control variable eradicated the influence of other confounding variables, such as socioeconomic mobility within the time period, on the observations and conclusions.

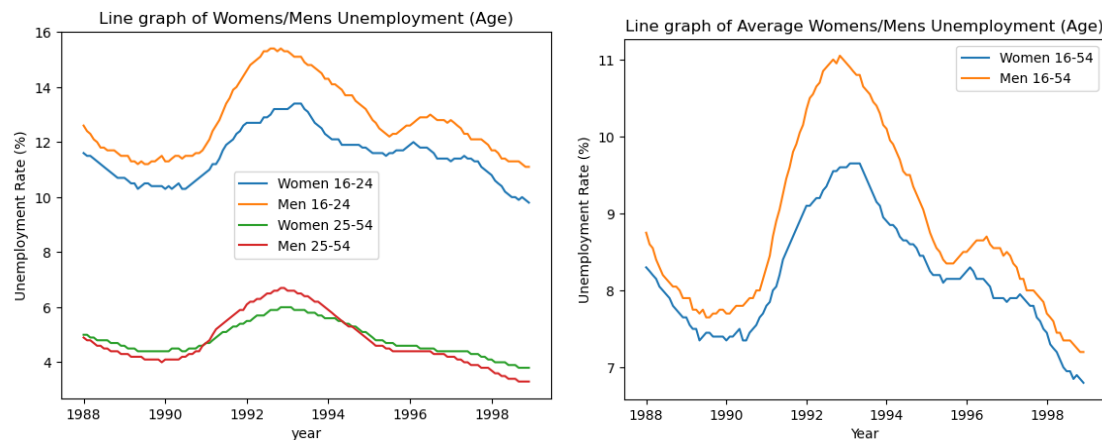
Data

The data used in this report is extracted from an unemployment dataset that breaks down unemployment by age, gender, education, and race. It provided unemployment rates as far back as 1978. To narrow down the dates relevant to the years the FMLA was implemented, only unemployment rates between 1988 and 1998 were selected. This was possible by creating a data frame that filtered the dates by year and excluded any dates below 1988 and above 1998. Furthermore, columns that included gender, education, and age were extracted into labeled data frames to plot graphs and calculate statistics relevant to the FMLA's impacts. To paint a bigger picture, additional columns were inserted to group all relevant age variables (16-24, 25-54) by calculating their average unemployment.



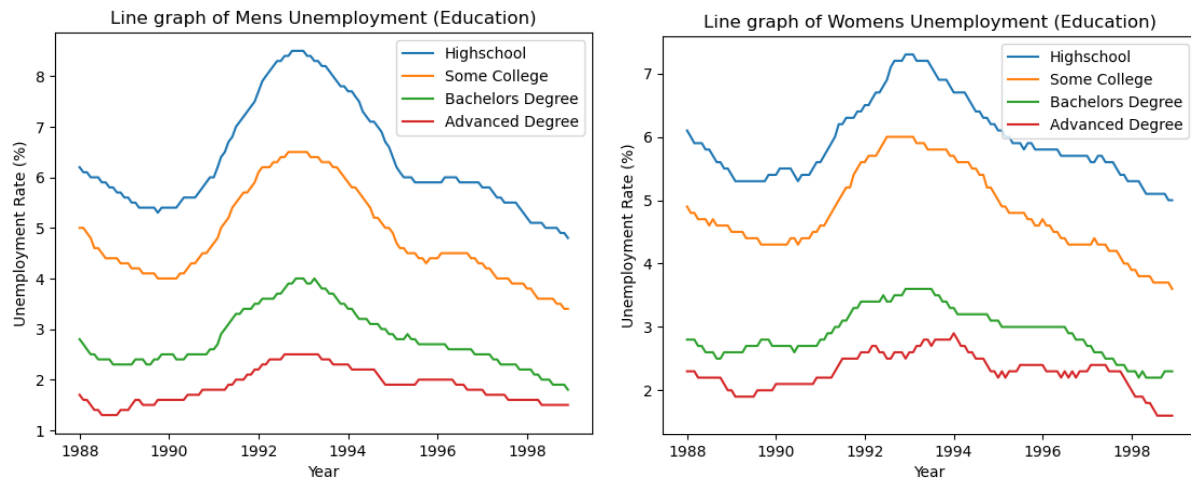
For statistical analysis, gender by high school and age are selected because they are the variables targeted by the FMLA. Starting with gender (high school), women had a lower mean (5.95) and standard deviation (0.63) compared to men (6.36) (1.07) respectively.

Additionally, women had less lower quartile (5.48) and upper quartile (6.40) relative to men (5.60) (7.20). Moving on to gender (average age), women again observe lower mean (8.17), standard deviation (0.75), lower quartile (7.55), and upper quartile (8.66) meanwhile men stand at (8.80) (1.12) (7.90) (9.63) respectively. Finally, across both variables, men express higher ranges than women which further refines the narrative that all these statistics indicate that women who only obtained high school diplomas between the ages 16 and 54 in that time period had generally lower unemployment than men with the same degree and age.



Taking a deeper look at women's and men's line graphs between 1988 and 1998. A noticeable negative slope between 1988 and 1990 reached its minimum at around 7% for both men and women. This period of economic expansion followed a brief recession from 1990 to 1991. During this period, the graph reflects the impact of the recession as unemployment began to rise around 1990. Even Though the recession ended in 1991, unemployment continued to rise with a sharp upward trend that reached its peak at 15% for men and 13% for women. The peak occurred in the year 1993 when the FMLA was implemented. However, the FMLA was not the only factor that contributed to the beginning of the long drop in unemployment, it was a factor that contributed to it, a catalyst that sped the process. An overview of the line graphs showcases that men have higher volatility in employment rates, that both women and men have higher

unemployment rates between the ages of 16 and 24 across all levels, and that 1993 was a pivotal year for the decrease in unemployment.



Equally as important are the education level graphs as they demonstrate how much of the changes in unemployment were due to economic factors. Similar to the age graphs, a downward trend occurs in 1988 and 1990, reaching its minimum in 1990. While the line graph shifts to an upward trend in unemployment for men and women with high school and college degrees, men with bachelor's and advanced degrees observe a gentle slope, and women observe almost no slope until 1991.

Equivalently to both genders and the line graph, unemployment had a sharp upward trend that continued until 1993 and was more apparent in education levels of highschool and some college. Men's unemployment peaked slightly higher at almost every education level, high school (8), some college (6), bachelor (4), and advanced degrees (2), while women's unemployment stayed at (7), (6), (3), and (2) respectively.

Lastly, the unemployment rate decreases at a sharper slope for high school and some college graduates than for bachelor and advanced degree graduates, which infers that while the FMLA was not the sole factor in reducing unemployment, it certainly played a role. Ultimately,

the unemployment line graph by education level provides further insight and evidence of the claims made under the unemployment graph by age.

Conclusion

The study focused on assessing the impact of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 on women's unemployment rates. The analysis revealed that post-FMLA, there was a noticeable decrease in unemployment rates among women aged 16 to 54 years. This trend was especially pronounced in groups most likely affected by childcare and family responsibilities. Additionally, the study emphasized the importance of education in influencing unemployment rates, higher education correlates with lower unemployment rates. The findings support the evidence that implementing the FMLA had a positive impact not only on women's employment rates but arguably had a more positive impact on men's unemployment rates. This connects with the research question aimed at understanding the FMLA's effect on women's unemployment. By offering job-protected leave for family and medical reasons, the FMLA appears to have opened up a more stable employment environment for women and men, particularly those with family care responsibilities. This suggests that policy interventions can effectively address specific labor market disparities, such as gender and family care. While the study offers valuable insights, its limitations open prospects for further research. The focus on unemployment rates as the primary outcome may not fully capture the complications of labor market participation, such as underemployment, part-time work, or job quality. The study's demographic focus (women aged 16-54 from 1988 to 1998) might limit its applicability to different periods or demographic groups. Furthermore, accessing data on the total population of both men and women in the workforce would create more accurate research. Future research could extend this analysis to

examine the long-term impacts of the FMLA, its effects on diverse demographic groups, and other labor market outcomes like wage growth and career progression. Additionally, exploring the interaction of the FMLA with other social and economic policies could provide a more holistic understanding of its impact on the labor market.

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