

Article

Employers' Perceived Career Impact of Canada's Parental-Leave Extension from 35 to 61 Weeks—"An Empty Gift"

Rachael N. Pettigrew 

Department of General Management and Human Resources, Bissett School of Business, Mount Royal University, 4825 Mount Royal Gate SW, Calgary, AB T3E 6K6, Canada; rpettigrew@mtroyal.ca; Tel.: +1-403-440-6846

Abstract: Introduced in 1990, Canadian parental-leave policy has seen several iterations. The most recent policy change, introduced in December 2017, extended parental leave from 35 to 61 weeks, resulting in longer work interruptions. Forty-six structured interviews were conducted to explore Canadian employers' perception of how use of the new extended leave may impact employees' careers. Though some employers offered explicit support for employees, a large proportion of employers felt that use of the longer leave would negatively impact employees' careers. The presence of unions appeared to insulate employees from a career impact. A thematic analysis revealed that the career impact perceived by employers resulted from concern for employees' missed opportunities (e.g., training, promotions), length of absence, specific employment situations (e.g., role, level in the organization, career ambitions, and tenure with the organization), and gendered views of employee leave use. Given that the vast majority of Canadian parental-leave users continue to be women, this research highlights the presence of considerable workplace stigma for work interruptions and that longer parental leave may only serve to exacerbate that stigma, especially for women. Recommendations and implications for parental-leave policy, workers, and employers are discussed.

Keywords: parental leave; employer; career impact; gender; Canada



Citation: Pettigrew, R.N. Employers' Perceived Career Impact of Canada's Parental-Leave Extension from 35 to 61 Weeks—"An Empty Gift". *Merits* **2022**, *2*, 170–186. <https://doi.org/10.3390/merits2030013>

Academic Editor: Dominik Froehlich

Received: 1 July 2022

Accepted: 1 August 2022

Published: 5 August 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Canadian family-leave policy first introduced maternity leave over 50 years ago, followed by parental leave over 30 years ago. Both policies are intended to support working families' ability to juggle the responsibilities of work and family, while also maintaining a parental connection to the workforce. Parental leave policy in Canada has moved through several iterations through the years and the latest policy change was announced in December 2017, which extended the maximum duration of parental leave from 35 to 61 weeks. Each time the policy is amended, employers must adjust their approaches with employees, change their internal policies to be consistent with legislation, and comply with the new rules. Though legally, employers must comply with legislative changes, they hold their unique perceptions regarding the efficacy of the changes and the impact on their organizations and employees. All policy changes come with benefits and challenges, and understanding how employers perceive these policy changes is essential to better understand the environment within which employees attempt to utilize the new extended leave. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to understand Canadian employers' perceptions of the career impact resulting from employees' use of the 61-week parental leave. This research is crucial to better understand the employer contexts within which parents take leave, understand how the legislative change is received in workplaces, and whether there will be impact on employees upon its use.

1.1. Parental-Leave Policy

Canada introduced maternity-leave legislation in 1971, which entitled birth mothers who met the qualifications (i.e., hours with one employer) to fifteen weeks of leave [1].

In 1990, the Parental Benefits Program (i.e., parental leave) was introduced, adding 10 weeks of additional leave that both mothers and fathers could share, thus beginning fathers' access to leave after the arrival of a child [1]. Parental leave was extended from 10 to 35 weeks (shared by parents) in 2000, which offered parents more time and greater flexibility to share leave between parents [1]. Announced in December 2017 and implemented in January 2018, the most recent change extended the maximum duration from 35 to 61 weeks [2] and, as with previous versions of leave, either parent can take the extended leave in its entirety or it can be shared as parents choose. Parents have the freedom to select a duration of leave that works for their family, but the parents' combined parental leave cannot exceed 61 weeks. In other words, the 61-week extension simply allows for more flexibility, but leaves shorter than 61 weeks can still be selected. Parental leave (and maternity leave) cannot be taken part-time, and parents need to take maternity and parental leave within the first 18 months of a child's life. With the extension, for example, if a mother takes both maternity leave and the extended parental leave, this would become an 18-month leave, given that cis-gendered fathers cannot access maternity leave. Parental-leave policy requires employers return leave users to their previous job or one of equivalent pay and responsibility when they return from parental leave [2].

There are two components of parental leave—the leave and the Employment Insurance (EI) benefit—and both have different qualifications. For example, an employee could qualify for leave without meeting the EI qualifications, which would result in unpaid parental leave. The qualifications for EI include having worked 600 insurable hours with a single employer in the previous year [2]. EI benefits pay 55 percent of an employee's weekly salary to a maximum of \$638 a week for 35 weeks of parental leave [2]. Those taking the new 61-week leave will receive 33 percent of their weekly salary to a maximum of \$383 per week for 61 weeks [2]. It should be noted that due to the required qualifications, roughly 38% of women [3] and an unknown percentage of men do not have access to paid parental leave.

Parental benefits are federally legislated; there are slight variations in qualifications and requirements by province and territory. However, the province of Quebec has its own parental-leave program, established in 2006, called the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP). QPIP offers different parental-leave policies and benefit rates to the rest of Canada. QPIP includes non-transferable leave for fathers, more generous qualifying criteria, and a higher wage replacement for those on leave [4]. Canada's policy is relatively progressive when compared to countries such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom [5], but Canada (55 percent) offers much lower wage-replacement rates than many European countries (e.g., 70–100 percent of salary) [6–9]. As wage loss is a common concern for leave takers, research shows that higher wage-replacement rates lead to higher parental-leave uptake, especially among men [10,11], which is a significant concern for the 61-week parental leave that drops to 33 percent.

1.2. Parental-Leave Usage

In Canada, parental-leave use is still gendered, as it is primarily taken by women. In 2016, 12.9 percent of those outside Quebec who took or intended to take parental leave were men [12], with indications that this figure rose to 15% in 2018 [13]; however, women make up the vast majority of leave takers (85%). Not only is the use of leave gendered, but so is the length of leave [14]. Canadian mothers report an average leave length of 47.6 weeks (including both maternity and parental leaves) [15], whereas fathers' leaves are an average of 5 weeks or less [16] outside of Quebec.

Given that the primary users of parental leave have been women, when parental-leave policy was extended from 10 to 35 weeks, the result was that women's absences from the workforce were simply lengthened, rather than a jump in fathers' leave taking [17]. Based on the research by Margolis et al. [17], we would assume that with the extension from 35 to 61 weeks, women will again remain the primary users of this extended leave, which will simply reinforce the persistent perception that parental leave is a maternal benefit. When leave is feminized, it also makes leave-taking much harder for men [18]. If sharing

parental leave between partners does not increase and women are both the most frequent users of leave and also have longer work interruptions than men, the result will likely lead to greater workplace stigma against women. This research aims to clarify whether the stigma resulting from work interruptions, such as parental leave, persists, and what impact the longer leave may have on this stigma.

2. Literature Review

Understanding employers' perceptions of legislation, such as that surrounding parental leave, is also important to better understand the context within which employees take leave. If employees prospectively anticipate whether using the extended leave would have a negative impact on their employees' careers, this would demonstrate the organizational culture and its family-friendliness. In addition, research has identified that employees have historically been concerned that the usage of family-friendly policies, such as parental leave, could negatively impact their careers [4,19,20]. Hearing directly from employers themselves to understand if this is a legitimate concern, in light of the extended leave, is important so that employees can make informed choices.

2.1. Organizational Culture

Corporate culture is defined as "a system of shared values defining what is important, and norms defining appropriate attitudes and behaviours that guide members' attitudes and behaviours" [21] (p. 166). Per role theory, corporate culture results from feedback from both social structures and surrounding groups, which create the norms and expectations of the organization. Corporate culture can range from family-friendly to not family-friendly at all [22] and can have a significant influence on employees' decisions to take advantage of family-friendly policies, such as parental leave. Researchers suggest that work environments, rather than the policy itself, need to evolve and change to reduce the experience of work-family conflict for employees [23]. The organizational culture surrounding leave use can have a serious impact on uptake and resulting career consequences [24]. Employees who work in organizations that promote a strong ideal-worker model [25], or revere workers who are fully committed to their work roles over outside obligations, were more likely to report negative career impact [20].

2.2. Organizational Culture and Gendered Use of Leave

Women are, by far, the predominant takers of parental leave in Canada, and the stigma women have faced for workplace interruptions has been long-standing and deeply entrenched. The stigma can often differ depending on gender and is seen across other family-friendly policies, such as flexible working. Chung [26] found that "stigma is gendered, in that men are more likely to discriminate against flexible workers, while women, especially mothers, are more likely to suffer such discrimination" (para. 1). Though fear of negative career impacts was cited as a barrier to leave use for men, women were more likely than men to report the negative impact of leave on their careers [20].

Male and female employees' leave taking may have identical impacts on their co-workers and their employers; however, employers have more potential influence on the leave use of fathers given that their leave use is seen as more negotiable than that of mothers. Both parenting and parental-leave use are seen as women's obligations by the organization's social norms and are, therefore, not open to the same kind of scrutiny as fathers' parenting responsibilities or leave use [18,27]. Men might also forgo leave taking because they have observed the negative impacts that care responsibilities have had on women's careers [28], but are also likely to limit their leave use if they perceive that there will be consequences from their employer [24]. However, in some cases, men's own gendered views of care responsibilities influence the uptake of leave [8].

McKay and Doucet [29] found that employers do not explicitly expect or encourage men to take leave, and fathers are concerned about workplace resistance to leave use [30,31]. In addition, because a male employee's leave use can be seen as discretionary [32], it may

flag competing commitments or be perceived as disloyal by the employer and, in turn, may have a negative impact on their wage [19,33] or opportunities for advancement [4]. In some cases, leave taken by fathers is viewed with suspicion by the employer, perhaps viewed as a long vacation rather than for parenting [4,34]. However, when men do take leave, it is often due to support and cooperation at the employer level [6]. This highlights the need for workplace cultures that support leave, for both mothers and fathers, to encourage increased uptake by fathers [35], which would both facilitate other fathers' use of leave and also reduce the stigma women face in the workplace for work interruptions.

2.3. Career Impacts of Leave Use

Employees may fear that their decision to take parental leave will have a negative impact on their careers. Research has clearly identified that the negative career impact of leave taking on both men's and women's careers is a legitimate concern [4,19,20]. Those taking parental leave will likely face some consequences since leave taking involves an "interruption in job trajectory and development and often results in missed income, promotion, benefits, and the possibility of downgrading upon return" [36] (p. 189), not to mention the impact on earning potential over one's lifetime [28,37]. Those who are highly educated, compared to those with lower levels of education, are likely to face higher expectations (e.g., travel and long hours) from the employer, and may face a wage penalty and the potential cancelling or deferral of promotions post-leave-use [19].

There are a variety of examples of negative career impacts resulting from leave use. Employers are obligated to offer employees returning from leave their old job or an equivalent one; however, this policy is not respected by all employers [29,36]. Those taking leave receive significantly lower performance evaluations upon return, earn lower salaries, and receive fewer promotions when compared to employees who did not take leave [38]. Research found that men who take leave, compared to those who did not, are less likely to receive a promotion [39]. Morosow and Cooke [33] found that although a sustained wage penalty was not experienced by all men, the highest-wage fathers incurred a temporary wage penalty, but the lowest-wage fathers experienced the most significant penalties. They also found that career impacts were more significant for those fathers taking solo parental leave than for those fathers who took initial time off after the child's arrival, suggesting that a longer, solo parental leave flags a commitment concern that a short leave does not [33]. Berdahl and Moon [32] found that men who played an active and visible role in parenting were confronted with more workplace harassment than fathers who were less involved, which suggests there can be consequences for employees who break the gender-role expectations within the workplace culture.

Although men also face career impacts [19], the research identifies women as being more likely than men to report concern for the negative impact childbearing will have on their careers [40]. Evertsson [19] found that the longer women's leaves, the higher the wage penalty they faced; moreover, a larger wage impact was cited for highly educated leave takers in Sweden. Whereas men faced an income penalty for leave use, women faced a larger income impact which worsened the longer they were on leave [19]. Research has drawn a direct link between early-career leave use and the length of use with the gender gap, which creates a discrepancy between the lifelong earning potential of men and women [37]. This research does not bode well for women's use of the parental-leave extension. Additionally, this research suggests that drastically increasing men's leave use may be an effective way of reducing the career impact and wage penalty experienced by women.

2.4. Organizational Influence on Policy Usage

The simple existence of a legislated or organizational family-friendly policy does not mean that it will be used by employees [11,41–43]. The use of leave may directly conflict with the organizational norms, gender-role expectations, and goals of the organization, and support may vary by industry and employer characteristics [44]. In other words, both the policies themselves and the workplace cultures play a significant role in leave use and

in the potential for career consequences [44]. With this in mind, employers must develop and maintain organizational cultures of explicit and proactive support for the uptake of family-friendly programs. There is a strong need for explicit and active support by managers and the organizations more broadly [45] to create a culture of policy usage, where employees feel free to take the time they need to support their families without fear of repercussions. If companies want to support their employees, they must explicitly encourage leave use [35], because parents who perceive organizational support of leave taking will be more likely to take parental leave [18,31,35,46]. Organizations must realize that creating and maintaining positive, family-supportive organizational cultures will give them a competitive advantage in the tight market for strong and dependable talent, especially for hard-to-fill roles.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this research was to better understand Canadian employers' perceptions of the career impacts of employees taking the newly extended 61-week parental leave. Given that the extension of parental leave from 35 to 61 weeks is relatively recent, there is limited research on the extension. Previous work has explored employers' general perceptions of and internal policy adaption to the extended parental leave [34], but at the time of submission, no research has explored Canadian employers' perceptions of the career impact on employees using the extended leave. In addition, parental-leave research tends to be more fulsome in its exploration of employees' perceptions and use of leave, rather than employers' perceptions of the leave or its use. In addition, qualitative research is limited in the employer perception of family-friendly policy literature. It is essential to explore employers' views of this legislative change to better understand the workplace context and climate within which employees are making the decision to take parental leave and the length of leave. Legislative changes bring both benefits and challenges for employers and employees, and it is important to understand how employers perceive these changes to anticipate how these views might impact employees. This research makes a strong contribution to the literature by filling a gap in the literature, discussing the 61-week leave extension, and it also holds up a lens to Canadian employers' perceptions of this extension.

4. Methodology

As this was the first step in understanding Canadian employers' perceptions of the career impact of extended-leave use, an exploratory, qualitative study was conducted. Human resources (HR) professionals working for Canadian employers were recruited for participation after approval from the Human Research Ethics Board was received. Participant recruitment included solicitation on social media, cold-calling HR departments, advertising on the Chartered Professionals in Human Resources of Alberta website, and extending an invitation to the business school's HR Industry Partnership Council. Potential participants were sent an email that included both the consent form and the interview questions for review.

HR representatives were asked to answer questions as representatives of their employer, rather than sharing their personal opinions. HR professionals are perfectly positioned to answer questions regarding the impact of parental leave on the employees on behalf of their employer as they are involved in the lifecycle of those on leave, the employees' leave applications, transitions to leave, managerial support, backfilling while employees are on leave, and supporting returning employees. HR professionals also have a bird's-eye view of employee promotions and compensation, and are key stakeholders in the organizational climate within which leave is taken. Participating employers received an executive summary of the research findings.

Between November 2018 and August 2019, 15- to 30-min semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted. As this was part of a larger project [34], the interview schedule included 24 questions addressing employer demographic information (e.g., industry, size, proportion of female employees, and union status), current maternity- and parental-leave

usage by gender, supplemental parental-leave policies offered, perceptions of parental leave, and how the leave extension had been received at the organizational level. Finally, the interviews concluded with the question “Do you perceive the additional length of parental leave having an impact the careers of employees in your organization?” with a dichotomous yes/no answer; then, the participants were asked to explain why and/or how employees’ careers might be impacted. The answers to these two questions were analyzed for this paper. The forced-choice dichotomous yes/no question was intended to encourage the participant to consider explicitly whether employees in their organization would experience career impacts from taking the longer leave, but followed this with an opportunity to fully explain.

4.1. Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim [47] and a thematic analysis was utilized [48], and the coding was conducted manually. The intent of the analysis was exploratory, rather than verification, and involved direct analysis or counting of the responses [49]. The transcript responses to each question were reviewed, initial categories (themes) emerged, and codes were assigned to themes. Several iterations of this process were undertaken to confirm the themes, and adjustments were made as needed [50].

4.2. Sample

HR representatives of 46 Canadian employers were interviewed. Employers in the sample varied in size, sector, unionization, sector, industry, proportion of female employees, and experience with parental leave. Employers ranged in size from 43 to 15,000 employees. A total of 40 employers in the sample were in the private sector and 20 of the 46 employers reported being unionized or partially unionized. The sample of employers included ten different industries, per the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) (Table 1) [51].

Table 1. Counts and percentages of participating employers by NAICS industry.

| Industry | <i>n</i> | Percent |
|---|----------|---------|
| Retail trade | 3 | 6.5 |
| Wholesale trade | 3 | 6.5 |
| Professional, scientific and technical services | 4 | 8.7 |
| Oil and gas extraction and services | 20 | 43.5 |
| Construction | 3 | 6.5 |
| Recreation | 2 | 4.3 |
| Health care | 3 | 6.5 |
| Educational services | 4 | 8.7 |
| Public administration | 3 | 6.5 |
| Transportation | 1 | 2.2 |
| Total | 46 | 100 |

As data collection was based in Alberta, there was strong representation from the oil and gas industry (20); however, none of these employers operated exclusively in Alberta. The total sample included employers that operated within one province (15), across several provinces (9), and in two or more countries (22), with reported Canadian headquarters in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario. The average percentage of female employees reported by individual employers ranged from 6 to 91 percent, with a sample average of 40 percent. Finally, the reported proportion of female employees varied by industry, from an average of 25 percent in the oil and gas sector to 60 percent in education and recreation, and between 30 and 55 percent in the remaining industries.

A total of 44 of the 46 employers in the sample had experience with employees taking parental leave. Of the 44 employers with experience managing parental leave, 37 reported that fathers in their workplace had taken parental leave; however, it was much less frequent and for shorter durations (e.g., weeks to a couple of months) than mothers’ use. In the

sample, the number of employees taking leave ranged from 0 to 500, with a sample average of 43 leave takers. Employers noted that employees' use of the parental-leave extension represented an extremely small proportion of their parental-leave use. In this sample, just 6 employers noted receiving several requests and only 4 employers reported a single request for the extended leave. Only one employer, in education, felt that access to the leave extension had contributed to an increase in parents sharing parental leave.

These low uptake numbers for the 61-week leave are not surprising given that this was intended to be a prospective study, and data collection quickly followed the policy change. Several employers reported having an employee on 61-week parental leave, but no employers in the study had a leave taker return from a 61-week leave, given that data collection occurred between November 2018 and August 2019; this makes their comments about the impact on employees' careers prospective and anticipatory in nature. However, this prospective view is important because it illuminates the climate within which employees request extended leave.

5. Results

5.1. Perceived Career Impact of Leave Extension

When participants were asked "Do you perceive the additional length of parental leave having an impact on the careers of employees in your organization?" 30 respondents said no, it would not have an impact and 16 said yes, it would have an impact on careers. Of those who indicated that taking the longer leave would impact employee careers, 11 were from the oil and gas sector, with construction (1), health care (1), educational services (1), and professional, scientific, and technical services (2) also represented.

Reports of career impacts were similar for unionized (63.6%) and non-unionized employers, (62%) with employers saying employees would face no career impacts from extended-leave use. A larger proportion of public organizations (83%), than the private sector (64%) indicated no career impact upon employees' uptake of the longer leave. Those employers who have higher proportions of female employees more frequently indicate no career impact than those with smaller proportions of female employees. A total of 13 of the 16 organizations that indicated that they perceived career impacts resulting from the use of extended leave reported that the proportion of females in their workplace was under 40%. In addition, the proportion of participants indicating career impact was higher for employers who had never had an employee take parental leave (44%) than for those who had managed leave use previously (32%).

5.2. Career Impact Thematic Analysis Results

Upon completion of the thematic analysis [48], six themes were identified that were related to perceived career impact following the use of the 61-week parental leave. Themes identified were as follows:

1. Explicit employer support for parental leave users.
2. Seeing the length of leave as a non-issue in their organization.
3. Employees shielded from career impact by union membership.
4. Career impact resulting from missed opportunities (e.g., training, promotions, or professional development).
5. "It depends" responses indicated that the potential career impact was linked to several specific employment situations or scenarios.
6. The final theme addresses gendered responses.
7. Finally, the discrepancies between participants' responses to the dichotomous (yes/no) question and their long answers is also addressed.

Upon evaluating the themes by industries in the sample, some interesting findings surface. All employers in the recreation, health-care, and transportation industries were positive in their responses, with a mixture of expressed explicit support for leave users or statements that career impact was a non-issue. Employers in wholesale trade, construction, educational services, and public administration were mixed (positive and negative) in their

responses, and answers included explicit support, non-issue, union protection, and missed opportunities. Employers in the oil and gas industry represent the largest proportion of the sample (20) and their responses fell into the following themes: explicit support (4), non-issue (2), missed opportunities (10), “it depends” (4), and gendered replies (7). Therefore, two-thirds of the responses from employers in the oil and gas sector expressed that career impacts would result from the use of extended leave.

5.3. *Explicit Support for Leave Users*

A third of the employers in this sample expressed explicit support for their employees and their use of the extended leave. Employers acknowledged that their employees had lives outside work and had care responsibilities. One employer stated that their organization is “very flexible, supportive of young families. We have a cultural norm of support and positive culture, where unpaid leaves are welcome” (oil and gas extraction services). While discussing explicit support, one participant (large professional, scientific, and technical company) alluded to the commitment of senior leadership to building a supportive culture, saying the 61-week leave “won’t impact, if anything our CEO is focused on encouraging female leadership and embraces work/family culture.” This CEO is building a culture of employee support, which is also reflected in another employer’s comment: “culturally [extended leave] will benefit the organization and people will benefit, return fully rested, and ready to get back to work” (public administration). Though most would not suggest that parental leave is a “restful” experience, the employer is expressing the potential benefits for both the employer and the employee. An unexpectedly positive respondent said, “we support leave and are happy that employees are having babies, [leave use] gives new employees an opportunity to get their foot in the door” (educational services). Meanwhile, other participants provided evidence of employer support and examples of actions that counter negative career impact. For example, “We do promote people who are on leave and employees can receive salary increases while gone” (oil and gas extraction producer) or “when [an employee is] up for promotion, we won’t even look up if you have been on leave” (recreation services).

5.4. *Extended Leave Is a Non-Issue*

For seven of the respondents, the use of the longer parental leave was considered a non-issue in their organization. Some felt that there was not a substantial difference between 35 and 61 weeks, saying things such as “same as 12 months, not an issue” (wholesale trade), “not a huge difference between 12 and 18 months” (public administration), or “6 months in the scheme of things is no big deal, maintain touch points, pre-leave, post-leave and throughout the year at the discretion of the employee” (service company in oil and gas industry). Clearly, their perception was that taking the longer leave would not introduce a significant difference compared to 12-month-leave use.

Other respondents felt that the extended leave was a non-issue because of the characteristics of their organization or type of work. One participant in public administration felt the employer was “slow-moving, so getting up to speed won’t be hard” following a longer leave. Another participant from a transportation company suggested that the mobility of their workforce meant that workers come and go and move location regularly, limiting the stigma of parental-leave use. In response to how the extended leave might impact employees’ careers, a participant said, “not even a little because leaves are common and no one really notices who is gone. People are constantly moving between 47 locations” (transportation organization).

Workforce gender composition influenced the perception that extended leave was a non-issue, but for different reasons. Employers who reported an extremely high proportion of female employees seemed to feel that the frequency with which they handle leave and their experience with managing many employees coming and going made the longer leave a non-issue for their employer. An employer in retail said, “no career impact, 91% female workforce, [parental leave is] so common we are used to dealing with it at management and

employee levels”; this reflects research that confirms that female-dominated organizations have more experience with family-friendly policies [52] and, therefore, face fewer penalties for leave use [24]. In contrast, several in male-dominated organizations [oil and gas extraction services] felt that given that the majority of leave users are female, parental leave of either length would be irrelevant to their organization and they did not expect to see uptake [34]. As previous research suggests, the mothers in male-dominated workplaces may face penalties, especially when leaves are long [24]. For others within this sector, it was the type of work itself, in addition to gender, that limited their exposure to dealing with leaves of any length: “mostly men doing remote, seasonal work, rotational shifts (week on week off), not a lot of men take parental leave”; therefore, the discussion of the impact of the leave extension was seen as irrelevant or a non-issue.

5.5. Protective Factor of Unions

Several employers in this sample stated that employees’ careers in their organization would not be impacted, specifically because they were “protected by collective agreement” (educational services). Unionized work environments are often known to have more progressive and family-friendly policies [53] and the collective agreement helps uphold and protect workers’ benefits and access to policies. One employer in educational services with three unions stated that “employees might be impacted, but the union will control these variables.” An employer in oil and gas extraction services that was partially unionized, with predominantly female workers (administration) being unionized and predominantly male workers (field workers) reportedly being non-unionized, stated that “unionized women are protected so no impact, but I cannot say the same for men.”

5.6. Long Absence Leads to Missed Opportunities

A third of employers claimed that uptake of the 61-week parental leave would lengthen employees’ absence from the workforce, resulting in negative impacts on their careers. Some employers felt that any leave from work, either 35 or 61-week, has an impact, generally acknowledging that time away from work had the potential to slow career progression or trajectory. One employer in wholesale trade suggested that parental leave “always does [impact careers] regardless.” A multi-national tech company stated that the challenge with long absences is “maintaining skills, they get pregnant and start checking out [of work] even before they leave.” Other employers said the use of parental leave of any length “could hinder progression after return to work” (oil and gas extraction service company), lead to “slower career progression, as many come back and switch to part-time” (oil and gas extraction company), and one’s “ability to get promoted decreases” (public administration). One employer in retail insists that there is “no negative retaliation” from their employer toward leave takers, but employees need to consider whether an “18-month absence is appropriate for one’s role.” A construction company outlines the general challenges of parental-leave use, saying that in a “growth company, things change (managers, acquisitions) and it is difficult for both the business and the employee to manage the transition and getting back up to speed.” Though these comments describe the general career impact associated with leave taking, several employers perceived the longer 61-week leave to exacerbate the career impact.

Several employers perceived that the longer 61-week leave “may impact professional growth, the longer you are gone” (construction company). This perspective is highlighted by the comments from an oil and gas extraction services company. “It’s tough to be gone for 1 year, tougher to be gone for 18 months. Things change more and [it is] hard to return. [There is] no way longer leaves won’t have an impact.”

Employers acknowledge that a “business changes a lot in 18 months” (oil and gas extraction company) and that “18 months is a long time to be away, you are basically relearning your job” (another oil and gas extraction service company) when you return to work. This is mirrored by another oil and gas extraction company, saying, in a more punitive tone: “In 1½ years you miss an entire cycle. You have elected to be out, there

are natural consequences. A lot happens in 1½ years, new technology, customers, new systems, rules. There is a lot of catching up to do." It is clear that for some employers in this sample, especially those in the oil and gas extraction industry, the stigma of leave use increases the longer the absence from the workforce.

Concerning longer leaves being worse for career impact, several employers raised concerns about the possibility of multiple leaves. If a female employee takes both maternity (17 weeks) and extended parental leave (61 weeks), they would be gone for a year and a half. Per the legislation, the employee can qualify for a second maternity/parental leave (18 months) immediately following their first, but they would not qualify for EI benefits for the second leave. Thus, employers would need to hold the employee's role for 3 years. Though one can imagine that this would not be a common occurrence, it was still flagged as a concern by several employers. It is more likely that parents may have children 2 to 3 years apart, therefore, leading to being on leave for 3 out of 5 years. Employers acknowledged the challenge that "even 12 months affects a career and it's worse for 18 [months], having several kids in short window equals exiting [the workforce] for 3 years" (oil and gas extraction service company) and being "away for 3 years makes it hard to keep skills current" (public administration). An oil and gas extraction company highlighted how candidates may be compared based on their leave use, saying "The fact is a woman takes two 18-month leaves and there will be an impact, for example comparing 2 candidates and one with 5 years in the workforce" compared to the other who has been gone 3 of the last 5 years. This statement is disheartening and demonstrates the very real career impact that multiple leaves, especially for those of longer lengths, may have on career progression and access to promotions, especially in certain industries.

5.7. Career Impact? It Depends . . .

Five employers felt as though the acceptability of leave use or the potential for career impact as a result of leave use were influenced by situational or contextual factors, such as the type of role, level in the organization, one's career ambitions, and tenure with the organization. The type of role an employee performed seemed to influence the potential career impact. For example, employees in "minimum wage jobs would not be impacted in the same way and would see minimal career impact" (retail) compared to those in management roles. Career impact was perceived to be contingent on the level of an employee's role within the organization by several participants. In other words, "it depends on the track you are on" (large wholesale trade). Several employers suggested longer leaves present challenges for those in managerial or senior roles. One large employer in retail said the "impact of leave use for employees is not a huge impact, but for the manager/director level [using extended leave] would have bigger impact" on an employee's career. Another employer in construction said that using extended leave is "absolutely harder for managers and professional roles."

Others felt that if employees who had ambitions to move up in the organization used the extended leave, it would negatively impact their upward career mobility. "When considering 'high potential' promotion, gaps in work history have an impact" (construction company). Another employer said, "it depends on the nature of [the] position, if focused on career advancement then stick to a year and those who are not as focused [on career advancement] take 18 months" (large oil and gas extraction company).

The timing of leave use seemed to matter to the employer when discerning the potential impact of leave use on one's career. An oil and gas extraction service company described how timing influences perception within their organization.

It really depends on the individual, [leave use] might give them a hiccup but they could recoup, but not here. It depends on position, if you have been here for 8 or 9 years and you have proven yourself then this may not have a huge impact, but if you are here for 6 months and go [on parental leave] it's a big problem.

Another company suggested that "if they take it in early career it could change the trajectory of their career" (oil and gas extraction company), and not in a positive

direction. In addition to the length of time one is employed with an organization before taking leave, the time between leaves was also an important consideration. As mentioned earlier, several companies suggested that taking back-to-back leaves or leaves close together would have a compounding negative effect on employees' careers. In conclusion, one employer stated that "timing makes a difference".

5.8. Gendered Impact

It should be noted the question posed to participants was gender-neutral—"Do you perceive the additional length of parental leave having an impact on the careers of employees in your organization?"—given that all parents (i.e., fathers, mothers, and co-parents) have access to parental leave. Parents can share the 61-week leave as they see fit, including a father taking the extended 61-week leave in its entirety. However, it is clear that employers presume women are the primary users and, when discussing parental-leave use, immediately address the impact on women's careers. That said, with a few exceptions, this perspective is rooted in their workplace experience, given that the vast majority of parental-leave users outside Quebec are women and that men usually take shorter leaves [16]. The ongoing stigma for workplace interruptions lies squarely on the shoulders of women. Employers acknowledged that "there is still stigma and no uptake from men" in their organization (oil and gas extraction service company), while also acknowledging that "if employees [male and female] share parental leave with partners it will reduce the stigma" (another oil and gas extraction service company). In fact, one employer felt that the longer leave could potentially exacerbate the existing "bias against women, and increase the bias against women" insinuating that longer leaves may result in a hiring bias if longer leaves became the norm. An employer spoke directly to hiring discrimination when commenting on the hiring of pregnant women:

"Let's be honest, pregnant interviewees, [the] company looks at them and thinks I don't want to be interviewing again in 6 months, not that anyone would discriminate but think of the business decision there" (oil and gas extraction service company).

Despite their dismissal, this is, in fact, an example of discriminatory behaviour (e.g., hiring bias) based on a protected ground and is illegal conduct in Canada.

Speaking specifically to the extended parental leave, one employer in construction was concerned about the policy's impact on women's careers, saying, "I think this policy is an empty gesture to allow for more time, but no additional money. Not good for women's careers or wallets." This employer is identifying a weakness in the new parental-leave 61-week parental leave policy. The policy does create opportunity for flexibility, but results in longer absence from the workplace, which is associated with negative career impacts, but with no financial upside from EI payments; thus, the new policy can be perceived as an empty gift. In addition, if women continue to be primary users of the leave in its entirety, this will perpetuate the workplace penalty women face for work interruptions; however, if it were to become more common practice for parents to equally share leave, the stigma would be more equally spread out between employees.

5.9. Discrepancies in Participants' Perceptions of Career Impacts

During the thematic analysis, it became clear that some employers indicating that employees would experience no career impact went on to discuss examples of career impact. In other words, when comparing their yes/no responses to the impact question with their responses to the open-ended description of the impact, it became clear that there were inconsistencies, or rather, "No impact, but" replies. In other words, there were some participants who initially responded that employees would not experience a career impact for using the longer leaves, but then, went on to describe several ways in which the longer leave would, in fact, impact employees' careers. Of the 30 participants who reported no career impact, 20 provided follow-up comments that were consistent and supported the perception of no career impact for longer leaves; these included comments

ranging from longer leaves being a non-issue to explicit support (18), but also comments stating that employees would not be negatively impacted because they were protected by their unions (2). This means that only 20 of the 46 employers in this sample clearly and explicitly supported leave use or felt that it was a non-issue.

The ten remaining employers who offered contradictory responses to the dichotomous and open-ended questions cited primarily (8) that long absences from the workplace led to missing promotions or professional-development opportunities and created challenges for reintegration into the workforce (e.g., restructuring, changing systems, and evolving technologies). Several other participants suggested that use of the extended leave could have an impact, but the impact depended on the circumstances (e.g., the point in their career or their tenure with the organization).

6. Discussion

This research aimed to understand Canadian employers' perceptions of career impact resulting from employees' use of the extended 61-week parental leave. The employer responses indicated that there are mixed perceptions of impact, ranging from clear and explicit support for employees to clear, and sometimes shockingly frank, descriptions of the workplace penalties resulting from leave use. Therefore, it appears that employees' use of and experiences with leave could be very different depending on the employer for which they work.

6.1. Parental-Leave Policy Implications

The parental-leave extension was designed to offer flexibility to families and allow more time for sharing leave between parents. However, the parental leave, as designed, falls short in a number of ways. First, the legislation changes could have been designed to first increase fathers' use of leave, but it would appear, from this sample, that this has not been the result of the 61-week extension. Roughly 85 percent of leave users in Canada (outside Quebec) are women [13], and there seems to be no sign in this sample that the leave extension has increased men's parental-leave uptake; therefore, women will continue to bear the brunt of the stigma from work interruptions.

In fact, the parental-leave extension was called "ill advised" in previous literature, because it was perceived to be ineffective in disrupting the gendered usage [54]. The increased stigma faced for the longer leave will not increase men's usage of leave. In addition, it should be noted that the more a policy is viewed as a "woman's policy" the harder it is for men to take, potentially reinforcing the gendered usage we already see in Canada and fortifying the perceptions discussed earlier of men's leave being discretionary, suspect, or simply viewed as a vacation [4,32,34,55].

Second, the parental-leave extension, although it offers families flexibility, has the very real potential to compound the stigma already faced by leave users. Although support for employees leave use is evident, this research also confirms the very real stigma that some leave users face. As evidenced by this research, if women are the primary users of leave and if the 61-week parental leave elongates women's absences from the workplace, this may compound the stigma faced by women. This stigma and the longer workplace interruptions may actually lead to increased hiring bias against women and leave users as highlighted in this paper. This supports previous research that finds work interruptions and prolonged absences in early career can "cause life-long disadvantages for women's careers, earnings and pensions" [37] (p. 1).

The results of this research suggest that leave-use stigma persists in the workplace. Combining the ever-present stigma with the historical gendered use of leave, it is clear that the elongation of the leave period will have a disproportional and negative career impact on women. The parental-leave policy redesign should have introduced a use-it-or-lose-it policy for fathers, such as paternity leave offered in Quebec or the "daddy quota" offered in Sweden. Although a 6- to 8-week shared parenting benefit for fathers and co-parents

was introduced in March of 2019, access to it relied on men sharing the mothers' leave; therefore, it excluded fathers whose partners did not qualify for leave [56].

Finally, given that leave users receive no additional EI wage replacement for the longer absence and face increased stigma for an 18-month leave, the parental-leave extension may be an "empty gift", especially for women. In addition, this lower wage replacement offered for the 61-week leave will not likely increase men's usage of leave, as previous research has indicated that men are more likely to take leave when the wage replacement is high [10,11].

6.2. Employers' Perceptions of Career Impact

For those employers addressing the career impact of leave, the majority felt it was the length of time away from the workplace that resulted in a negative career impact. In line with previous research [36,39], employers felt that being away from the office meant leave takers missed professional development and promotional opportunities, potentially leading to a slower career trajectory, or extending the time to the next promotion; therefore, they suggested that the longer one is gone, the more opportunities one misses. This supports previous research that suggests that women experience less of a career impact when they take a shorter, rather than longer, leave [57]. The findings also suggested that some employers perceive those who take longer leave as being less invested in their careers or less career-focused than those who take a shorter leave, which supports Evertsson's [19] similar findings.

In addition, another group of employers were focused not on what an employee misses, but on how much the workplace can change during an absence (e.g., restructuring, new rules, software changes, or a shift in customers), and the longer the absence, the more changes may occur. The employers' concerns regarding changing organizations, as it relates to career impact, are rooted in the perceived time and effort it would take to reintegrate or onboard the employee and get them up to speed upon returning from leave. If the employer changes dramatically, the employer can anticipate a long runway for the employee to get up to speed upon return, which could resemble onboarding a new employee if changes are significant. Employers consider that the potential cost of onboarding, loss of productivity, and the duration of time getting up to speed might slow employees' progress or professional pathways. Despite the obvious costs, the employer may be overlooking the potential benefits to the employee while on leave (e.g., increased efficiency of time-use at work, a rebalancing of priorities, and a reinvestment in their work due to the need to earn). The development of policies and procedures to support those departing and returning from leave would likely make these transitions smoother and get employees up to speed faster. When employers complain about the challenge of post-leave reintegration, they may actually be identifying either the absence of these off-boarding or onboarding policies or the inadequacy of their existing policies and practices in this space to support employees.

6.3. Implications for Employees: Futility of Avoiding Career Impact

From an employee perspective, one may wonder if the extended parental leave is safe to take. In addition to the time away from the workplace, the potential career impacts following leave use described in the interviews depended upon specific situational or contextual factors, such as the type of role, one's level in the organization, one's career ambitions, and one's tenure with the organization. Interpreting these findings, one is left with a feeling that leave takers, primarily women, are "damned if they do, damned if they don't." In other words, it feels as though there are contradictory thoughts regarding how leave taking might impact one's career or how best to avoid a negative career impact. For example, respondents felt that entry-level workers may not be as severely impacted, but also that taking parental leave too early in one's career or too early in your tenure with the organization could be career-limiting. In contrast, an employee who waits until their career is established will find taking parental leave as a manager or senior member of the organization more difficult to navigate, and the organization might feel that one's role may not be "suited" to an 18-month leave. In addition, employers suggested that

employees need to put in the time and prove themselves before they take leave, but also suggest that taking leave at the managerial level might be seen as irresponsible or inhibit one's further career trajectory. Likewise, employers warned that those who had ambitions to move up or cared about their careers should stick to a 35-week leave, but also said that those who reach senior roles may find it inappropriate or too challenging to take longer leave. Previous research found that women who were career-oriented were more likely to wait until their career had been particularly successful to have their first child [58], which means that employers may be likely to see career-ambitious women delay their first children and take leave while in management roles.

More contradictory views include the following: Employers suggest that having children too close together would lead to a prolonged, potential 3-year absence, which would make it tough for the leave user to stay current and reintegrate into the organization. However, at the same time, employers will also penalize an employee if they have two children two years apart, as they might be looked over for a promotion if they have taken two parental leaves in the last 5 years, citing, "you have elected to be out, there are natural consequences." Given this discussion, clearly, employees may face negative career impacts resulting from any number of possibly-conflicting reasons; therefore, perhaps the only way to control negative career impact, other than not taking leave at all, is by carefully selecting one's employer.

6.4. Implications for Employers

This research highlights, for leave users, the sheer importance of the organizational culture of their employers. The organizational culture of an employer plays a crucial role in leave uptake, especially for men [6,59], but also in the career impact that one may face. It is clear from this sample that there is a range of employer perspectives on leave use and leave users, which highlights the importance of assessing, to the extent that one can, employers' family-supportiveness, the existence of family-friendly policies, and support for their uptake before joining an organization.

Previous work highlights that those employers who have progressive employee and family-supportive policies and strong work-family cultures often do so to give themselves a strategic advantage in recruiting and retaining key talent [34]. The availability of family-friendly policies makes companies more appealing to job hunters, facilitates recruitment [60,61], increases job satisfaction, positive mood, and lessened withdrawal behavior [62]. Some employers in this sample seemed to have developed supportive work environments and support employees' use of parental leave, while roughly half of the employers in this sample have yet to do so, which based on previous research could have an impact on not only their employees' use of leave, but also employee satisfaction, recruitment, and retention [34,60–62].

Though not all employees have the privilege of discretion, the choice of the employer or industry in which one works may be directly linked to their eventual career trajectory or the impact, or lack thereof, they experience as a result of leave use. As workplace characteristics influence leave use and the subsequent potential penalty, employer selection and culture are important for women, but also for men [24]. Thinking beyond just salary, potential employees need to think critically about employers' cultures, policy offerings, and employee support when considering employment options.

7. Limitations

This research was designed to quickly follow the legislative change to parental leave in December of 2017, in order to gather a prospective view of employers' responses to the extended leave. Understanding employers' thoughts on the program was important in order to better understand the work environments within which employees choose to request extended leave. The limitation of the prospective research is that, given the limited uptake of the parental-leave extension in this sample, respondents are hypothetically answering questions based on their previous experiences with the employer, rather than based on

actual experience; the risk is that their prospective thoughts might differ than the actual experiences of leave users. To compare prospective and informed responses and allow time for employers to have more experience in managing the 61-week leave, participants were informed about a follow-up study, scheduled for 2023–4, and all participants agreed to be interviewed again. Future research should also explore employees' perceptions and use of the leave extension. In addition, future research would ideally include a national sample, including employers from all provinces and territories.

8. Conclusions

This research explored Canadian employers' perceptions of how the new 61-week parental-leave extension may impact employees' careers. Employers varied in their reports of the career impacts that might result from uptake of the longer leave, with over fifty percent of the sample suggesting that negative impacts could occur. This research makes a contribution to the literature by enhancing our understanding of a relatively new legislative change, from an employer perspective, that has received limited attention in the literature. The themes that emerged from the thematic content analysis included considerable employer support for leave users, seeing leave use as a non-issue in their organization, unions as a protective factor from career impact, impact resulting from missed opportunities, "it depends" responses, and gendered responses. A large proportion of employers who felt that employees would be impacted felt that this resulted from the length of absence from the workplace, in light of how quickly organizations can change. Employers, through their responses, made it clear that they saw women as the primary users of leave and, when discussing the impact of leave, often discussed its impact on women. Stigma around parental leave and work interruptions is real and it is evident from this research that the leave extension will exacerbate the existing stigma, impacting primarily women in the workplace, while also making it harder for men to take. Given the range of support and perceived career impact between employers and across industries, it is clear that the implications are twofold. First, there is a real concern that the parental-leave extension may compound the workplace stigma of leave use already experienced. Second, although there are exceptions noted in this sample, Canadian employers need to broaden their understanding of the benefits of family-friendly policies and cultures; moreover, they need to recognize that if they fail to evolve their gendered views of leave and leave takers, the result will be a loss in their competitive advantage, and resulting in increased costs related to recruitment and turnover.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Board of Mount Royal University (#101455 and approved 7 June 2018).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Due to human research ethics, the author cannot share the data.

Conflicts of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to disclose.

References

1. Marshall, K. *Fathers' Use of Paid Parental Leave*; Perspectives on Labour and Income, Statistics Canada: Ottawa, ON, USA, 2008; Available online: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2008106/article/10639-eng.htm> (accessed on 30 June 2022).
2. Government of Canada. EI Maternity and Parental Benefits: What These Benefits Offer. 2022. Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-maternity-parental.html> (accessed on 1 August 2022).
3. McKay, L.; Mathieu, S.; Doucet, A. Parental-leave rich and parental-leave poor? Inequality in Canadian labour-market based in leave policies. *J. Ind. Relat.* **2016**, *58*, 543–562. [CrossRef]
4. Harvey, V.; Tremblay, D.-G. Paternity leave in Québec: Between social objectives and workplace challenges. *Community Work Fam.* **2018**, *23*, 253–269. [CrossRef]
5. Baird, M.; O'Brien, M. Dynamics of parental leave in Anglophone countries: The paradox of state expansion in liberal welfare regimes. *Community Work Fam.* **2015**, *18*, 198–217. [CrossRef]
6. Brandth, B.; Kvande, E. Workplace support of fathers' parental leave use in Norway. *Community Work Fam.* **2019**, *22*, 43–57. [CrossRef]

7. Lappegard, T. Couples' Parental Leave Practices: The Role of the Workplace Situation. *Day Care Early Educ.* **2012**, *33*, 298–305. [CrossRef]
8. Narvi, J.; Salmi, M. Quite an encumbrance? Work-related obstacles to Finnish fathers' take-up of parental leave. *Community Work Fam.* **2018**, *22*, 23–42. [CrossRef]
9. Ray, R.; Gornick, J.; Schmitt, J. *Parental Leave Policies in 21 Countries: Assessing Generosity and Gender Equality*; Center for Economic and Policy Research: Washington, DC, USA, 2009; Available online: http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/parental_2008_09.pdf (accessed on 30 June 2022).
10. Karu, M.; Tremblay, D.-G. Fathers on parental leave: An analysis of rights and take-up in 29 countries. *Community Work Fam.* **2017**, *21*, 344–362. [CrossRef]
11. Wells, M.B.; Sarkadi, A. Do Father-Friendly Policies Promote Father-Friendly Child-Rearing Practices? A Review of Swedish Parental Leave and Child Health Centers. *J. Child Fam. Stud.* **2011**, *21*, 25–31. [CrossRef]
12. Doucet, A.; Lero, D.S.; McKay, L.; Tremblay, D.-G. Canada country note. In *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2018*; Blum, S., Koslowski, A., Macht, A., Moss, P., Eds.; International Network on Leave Policies and Research; 2018; Available online: https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/Leave_Review_2018.pdf (accessed on 30 June 2022).
13. Doucet, A.; Mathieu, S.; McKay, L. Redesign Parental Leave System to Enhance Gender Equality. Available online: <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2020/redesign-parental-leave-system-to-enhance-gender-equality/> (accessed on 27 October 2020).
14. Findlay, L.C.; Kohen, D.E. Leave Practices of Parents after the Birth or Adoption of Young Children. In *Canadian Social Trends*; Statistics Canada: Ottawa, ON, Canada, 2012; Catalogue Number 11-008-X; Available online: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/11-008-x2012002-eng.htm> (accessed on 30 June 2022).
15. Employment and Social Development Canada. 2016/17 Employment Insurance Monitoring and Assessment Report. 2018. Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/employment-social-development/programs/ei/ei-list/reports/2016-17-EI-MAR-EN.pdf> (accessed on 4 August 2022).
16. Beaupre, P. *Family Matters: Parental Leave in Canada*; Statistics Canada: Ottawa, ON, Canada, 2021; Available online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210210/dq210210a-eng.htm> (accessed on 30 June 2022).
17. Margolis, R.; Hou, F.; Haan, M.; Holm, A. Use of Parental Benefits by Family Income in Canada: Two Policy Changes. *J. Marriage Fam.* **2018**, *81*, 450–467. [CrossRef]
18. McKay, L.; Marshall, K.; Doucet, A. Fathers and parental leave in Canada: Policies and practices. In *Father Involvement in Canada: Diversity, Renewal, and Transformation*; Ball, J., Daly, K., Eds.; UBC Press: Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2012; pp. 207–223.
19. Evertsson, M. Parental leave and careers: Women's and men's wages after parental leave in Sweden. *Adv. Life Course Res.* **2016**, *29*, 26–40. [CrossRef]
20. Samtleben, C.; Bringmann, J.; Bünning, M.; Hipp, L. What Helps and What Hinders? Exploring the Role of Workplace Characteristics for Parental Leave Use and Its Career Consequences. *Soc. Sci.* **2019**, *8*, 270. [CrossRef]
21. O'Reilly, C.; Chatman, J. Culture as social control: Corporations, cults, and commitment. *Res. Organ. Behav.* **1996**, *18*, 157–200. Available online: http://faculty.haas.berkeley.edu/chatman/papers/30_CultureAsSocialControl.pdf (accessed on 4 August 2022).
22. Sallee, M.W. Gender Norms and Institutional Culture: The Family-Friendly Versus the Father-Friendly University. *J. High. Educ.* **2013**, *84*, 363–396. [CrossRef]
23. Kelly, E.L.; Kossek, E.E.; Hammer, L.B.; Durham, M.L.; Bray, J.W.; Chermack, K.; Murphy, L.A.; Kaskubar, D. 7 Getting There from Here: Research on the Effects of Work–Family Initiatives on Work–Family Conflict and Business Outcomes. *Acad. Manag. Ann.* **2008**, *2*, 305–349. [CrossRef]
24. Bygren, M.; Duvander, A.-Z. Parents' Workplace Situation and Fathers' Parental Leave Use. *J. Marriage Fam.* **2006**, *68*, 363–372. [CrossRef]
25. Acker, J. Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gen. Soc.* **1990**, *4*, 139–1014. [CrossRef]
26. Chung, H. Gender, Flexibility Stigma and the Perceived Negative Consequences of Flexible Working in the UK. *Soc. Indic. Res.* **2018**, *151*, 521–545. [CrossRef]
27. Daly, K.; Ashbourne, L.; Hawkins, L. Work-life issues for fathers. In *Handbook for Work-Family Integration: Research, Theory, and Best Practice*; Korabik, K., Lero, D.S., Denise, L., Eds.; Academic Press: Burlington, MA, USA, 2008; pp. 249–266.
28. Baker, D. *Maternity Leave and Reduced Future Earning Capacity*; Australian Institute of Family Studies: Melbourne, VIC, Australia, 2011; Volume 89, pp. 82–89. Available online: https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/fm89i_0.pdf (accessed on 4 August 2022).
29. McKay, L.; Doucet, A. "Without Taking Away Her Leave": A Canadian Case Study of Couples' Decisions on Fathers' Use of Paid Parental Leave. *Father. A J. Theory Res. Pract. About Men Father.* **2010**, *8*, 300–320. [CrossRef]
30. Kaufman, G. Barriers to equality: Why British fathers do not use parental leave. *Community Work Fam.* **2017**, *21*, 310–325. [CrossRef]
31. Haas, L.; Hwang, C.P. Is Fatherhood Becoming More Visible at Work? Trends in Corporate Support for Fathers Taking Parental Leave in Sweden. *Father. J. Theory Res. Pract. Men Father.* **2009**, *7*, 303–321. [CrossRef]
32. Berdahl, J.L.; Moon, S.H. Workplace Mistreatment of Middle Class Workers Based on Sex, Parenthood, and Caregiving. *J. Soc. Issues* **2013**, *69*, 341–366. [CrossRef]
33. Morosow, K.; Cooke, L.P. The Impact of Taking Family Leaves Across Finnish Fathers' Wage Distribution. *Soc. Forces* **2021**, *101*, 202–226. [CrossRef]
34. Pettigrew, R.N. Canadian Employers' Reaction and Policy Adaptation to the extended, 61-week parental leave. *Can. Stud. Popul.* **2020**, *47*, 97–109. [CrossRef]

35. Whitehouse, G.; Romaniuk, H.; Lucas, N.; Nicholson, J. Leave Duration After Childbirth: Impacts on Maternal Mental Health, Parenting, and Couple Relationships in Australian Two-Parent Families. *J. Fam. Issues* **2013**, *34*, 1356–1378. [CrossRef]
36. Campbell, A. Proceeding with “Care”: Lessons to be Learned from the Canadian Parental Leave and Quebec Daycare Initiatives in Developing a National Childcare Policy. *Can. Fam. Law J.* **2006**, *22*, 171–222. Available online: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1359818> (accessed on 20 June 2022).
37. Kuitto, K.; Salonen, J.; Helmdag, J. Gender inequities in early career trajectories and parental leaves: Evidence from a Nordic welfare state. *Soc. Sci.* **2019**, *8*, 253. [CrossRef]
38. Malin, M. Interference with the right to leave under the Family Medical Leave Act. *Empl. Rights Employ. Policy J.* **2003**, *7*, 1–35. Available online: <https://www.kentlaw.iit.edu/institutes-centers/institute-for-law-and-the-workplace/publications/employee-rights-employment-policy-journal/v7n2> (accessed on 4 August 2022).
39. Lero, D.S.; Richarson, J.; Korabik, K. *Cost-Benefit Review of Work-Life Balance Practices—2009*; The Canadian Association of Administrators of Labour Legislation: Toronto, ON, Canada, 2009.
40. Kin, C.; Yang, R.; Desai, P.; Mueller, C.; Girod, S. Female trainees believe that having children will negatively impact their careers: Results of a quantitative survey of trainees at an academic medical center. *BMC Med. Educ.* **2018**, *18*, 260. [CrossRef]
41. Kramer, A. Unions as Facilitators of Employment Rights: An Analysis of Individuals’ Awareness of Parental Leave in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. *Ind. Relat. A J. Econ. Soc.* **2008**, *47*, 651–658. [CrossRef]
42. Rehel, E.M. When Dad Stays Home Too. *Gen. Soc.* **2013**, *28*, 110–132. [CrossRef]
43. Thompson, C.A.; Beauvais, L.L.; Allen, T.D. Work and family from an industrial/organizational psychology perspective. In *The Work and Family Handbook: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives and Approaches*; Pitt-Catsoupes, M., Kossek, E.E., Sweet, S., Eds.; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers: Mahwah, NJ, USA, 2006; pp. 283–307.
44. Nordberg, T.H. Managers’ views on employees’ parental leave: Problems and solutions within different institutional logics. *Acta Sociologica.* **2019**, *62*, 81–95. [CrossRef]
45. Swody, A.; Powell, G.N. Determinants of employee participation in organizations’ family-friendly programs: A multi-level approach. *J. Bus. Psychol.* **2007**, *22*, 111–122. [CrossRef]
46. Smeaton, D. *Dads and Their Babies (Research Report No. 44)*; Equal Opportunities Commission: Manchester, UK, 2006; Available online: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=3&cID=665> (accessed on 4 August 2022).
47. Braun, V.; Clarke, V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual. Res. Psychol.* **2006**, *3*, 77–101. [CrossRef]
48. Braun, V.; Clarke, V. *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*; SAGE Publication: London, UK, 2013.
49. Freitas, H.; Moscarola, J.; Jenkins, M. *Content and Lexical Analysis: A Qualitative Practical Application*; Merrick School of Business, University of Baltimore: Baltimore, MD, USA, 1998; WP ISRC No. 070498.
50. Anderson, R. *Thematic Content Analysis (TCA): Descriptive Presentation of Qualitative Data Using Microsoft Word*; Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Sofia University: Palo Alto, CA, USA, 1997.
51. Statistics Canada. *North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Canada 2017*; Statistics Canada: Ottawa, ON, Canada, 2017; Available online: <http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=307532&CVD=307533&CPV=61&CST=01012017&CLV=1&MLV=5> (accessed on 4 August 2022).
52. Manou, S. Work-Family Balance from a Gender Perspective: Some Observations from Finland. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylän yliopisto, Finland, 2008. Network News: The international Corner, Sloan Work and Family Research Network. Available online: http://workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/sites/workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/files/imported/archive/networknews/The_Network_News_Interview_54_Int.pdf (accessed on 4 August 2022).
53. Bond, S.; Hyman, J.; Summers, J.; Wise, S. *Family-Friendly Working? Putting Policy into Practice*; York Publishing Services: York, UK, 2002.
54. Mayer, M.; Le Bourdais, C. Sharing Parental Leave Among Dual-Earner Couples in Canada: Does Reserved Paternity Leave Make a Difference? *Popul. Res. Policy Rev.* **2018**, *38*, 215–239. [CrossRef]
55. Doucet, A.; McKay, L. Fathering, parental leave, impacts, and gender equality: What/How are we measuring? *Int. J. Sociol. Soc. Policy* **2020**, *40*, 441–463. [CrossRef]
56. Department of Finance. *Backgrounder: Canada’s New Shared Parenting Benefit*. 2018. Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2018/04/backgrounder-canadas-new-parental-sharing-benefit.html> (accessed on 15 September 2019).
57. Pertold-Gebicka, B. Parental leave length and mothers’ careers: What can be inferred from occupational allocation? *Appl. Econ.* **2019**, *52*, 879–904. [CrossRef]
58. Fitzenberger, B.; Steffes, S.; Strittmatter, A. Return-to-job during and after parental leave. *Int. J. Hum. Resour. Manag.* **2016**, *27*, 803–831. [CrossRef]
59. Moen, L.V.; Kvande, E.; Nordli, K. Father’s Use of Parental Leave in Organizations with Different Institutional Logics. *Soc. Sci.* **2019**, *8*, 294. [CrossRef]
60. Beauregard, T.A.; Henry, L.C. Making the link between work-life balance practices and organizational performance. *Hum. Resour. Manag. Rev.* **2009**, *19*, 9–22. [CrossRef]
61. Casper, W.J.; Buffardi, L.C. Work-life benefits and job pursuit intentions: The role of anticipated organizational support. *J. Vocat. Behav.* **2004**, *54*, 391–410. [CrossRef]
62. Rhoades, L.; Eisenberger, R. Perceived organizational support: A review of the literature. *J. Appl. Psychol.* **2002**, *87*, 698–714. [CrossRef] [PubMed]