

Women workers face tradeoffs, researchers find

March 12 2013, by Mary Catt

Are American women making headway in the workplace? Yes and no, according to new research by ILR School Professors Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn.

Although women in the [United States](#) are more likely to hold managerial or professional jobs than women in other developed countries, they are less likely to [work](#) outside the home than women in 16 other nations, the researchers learned.

Between 1990 and 2010, the United States fell from a rank of sixth to 17th for women's [labor force participation](#) out of 22 Organisation for [Economic Cooperation](#) and Development (OECD) nations. But the slide could be a reflection of more advanced work-life policies in these other countries, Blau and Kahn conclude in a report published in January by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

After dramatic gains in the 1970s and '80s, the percentage of women working in the United States crept up by just 1.2 points to 75.2 percent between 1990 and 2010, according to statistics used in the report. Meanwhile, women in Spain, Italy, Germany and France posted double-digit gains.

Between 1990 and 2010, parental leave for American workers went from zero to 12 weeks; in 16 other countries, parental leave increased from 37 weeks to 57 weeks, on average.

Longer parental leaves, job protections for part-time workers and government-subsidized child care appear to increase the percentage of working European women, Blau and Kahn found.

However, "... there may be a tradeoff between some policies that make it easier for women to combine work and family and women's advancement at work," the authors conclude.

Entitlements to long paid parental leaves and part-time work might attract [European women](#) to options that reduce their consideration for high-level positions requiring long-term, full-time commitments, Blau and Kahn said.

They explained that the same policies that facilitate part-time work might also compromise careers through statistical discrimination by employers who cannot tell which [women](#) workers might be good candidates for higher-level positions.

Blau and Kahn presented the paper at the January meetings of the American Economic Association in San Diego.

More information: Paper: [Female Labor Supply - Why is the US Falling Behind?](#)

Provided by Cornell University

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