

Are Parental Leaves Considered as  
Work Interruptions by  
Survey Respondents?  
A Methodological Note

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# *Research Goals*

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- Compare: parental section to work history sections
- Evaluate reliability
- Make recommendations to improve survey quality
- Using pilot “Living in Canada Survey” (LCS)

# *Two sections have relevant information*

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:  
ental leave?  
es? (in month)  
*ental leave”*

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:  
ns of six months or longer?  
each ? (in year)

*re of own child(ren)”*

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rk interruption

# *Literature: terminologies vary*

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- few studies measure parental leaves and work interruptions, especially in retrospective surveys
- definition and duration of parental leave changed over time
- Work interruption: “does not work” = “job interruption” = “unemployment.” ?

# *Literature : challenge on comparison*

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- It matters whether parents return:  
to their original jobs, or  
in the same job status (part/full-time)
- parental leave  $\neq$  work interruption

# *Reviewing the GSS questionnaires:*

*Retrospective surveys: 1984, 1995, 2001, 2006*

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- Minimum duration and measurement unit of duration for work interruption vary
- “returned to the same job after each work interruption?” & “perform similar duties?” asked only in 1995
- Reasons associated with each interruption vary

# *Reviewing the GSS questionnaires:*

*Retrospective surveys: 1984, 1995, 2001, 2006*

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- The 2001 and 2006 GSS introduced a new section “Maternity or paternity leave”, but...

GSS: varying questions and categories =>  
hard to distinguish parental leave from work interruption section

- In LCS, data on parental leave were collected along with respondents’ parental histories

# Pilot Living in Canada Survey (LCS)

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- Fall 2008
- Samples:
  - 3,178 age 15+,
  - around 1,600 households
  - 4 provinces (NB, PQ, ON, SA)
- 981 respondents ever had work interruption
- 559 interruptions by men, 1012 by women



# Result: work interruption related to childcare

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- “Caring for own children” => main activity when reporting work interruptions (543 out of 1571)
- Among women, 52% of work interruptions are related to childcare; among men, only 3%

## Result: duration of parental leave (PL)

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- Among the 951 observations of children born/adopted after 1997:
  - **N=263(28%) : PL 6+ months**
  - N=77(8%) : PL 6- months
  - N=498(52%) : either not taking parental leave or not answering the question on parental leave

# Comparing and matching procedures

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- Matching information of parental leave to work interruptions:
  - Beginning and end of dates
  - Main activities
    - Restrictive version
    - Non-restrictive version
- Both the restrictive and the non-restrictive versions are included in the analysis

# Results: matching parental leave to jobless spell

Table 5: Distribution of jobless spells according to main activity among observations of children for which parents reported taking a parental leave, by birth order of the child

	Doing any activity (A1+A2)				Caring for own children (Only A1)			
	Match	%	Mismatch	%	Match	%	Mismatch	%
1st Child	61	48	48	41	54	46	55	43
2nd Child	52	41	46	40	48	41	50	39
3rd Child*	15	12	22	19	15	13	22	17
Total	128	100	116	100	117	100	127	100
%	52		48		48		52	

Source: Living In Canada Survey (LCS 2008). \*Including 3rd, 4th, and 5th children.

# Results: types of mismatch/inconsistency

Four error types summarized from 116 mismatching cases

Never report Jobless spell.	76	66
Not report a jobless spell yet since the child was born in 2008 or did not specify the year	12	10
Report jobless spell, but the year entering jobless does not match	28	24
Sum	116	100

Source: Living In Canada Survey(LCS 2008)

# Who are mismatched?

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- Those whose child is older  
(Z significant at 0.1)
- Those whose parental leave is shorter  
(Z significant at 0.05)
- Multivariate logistic: only “shorter parental leave” significant (Z significant at 0.05)

# Conclusions

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- Our analysis suggests that collecting standard employment histories and jobless spells might not correctly reflect individuals' work interruptions, particularly with regards to parental leave;
- A substantial proportion of parents do not seem to consider parental leaves as “jobless” or “non-working” episodes;
- It does confirm the conceptual and methodological difficulties encountered when trying to distinguish between employment and work.

# Recommendations

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- Collect the year and month of all relevant events;
- Ask parental leave in parental section, rather than in work interruption section;
- Asking whether respondents return to their original job after a parental leave and whether they were working on a full-time or part-time basis;
- Clarify the definition of what constitutes a non-working period or jobless spell should thus be a priority if we want to improve the reliability of employment and jobless histories.