

# Mothers Stay Home? Parental Leave Public Opinion and Benevolent Sexism

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### Research Question

Does benevolent sexism impact public opinion on parental leave? Is maternity leave more encouraged than paternity leave?

### Theory

Benevolent sexism (sexist attitudes framed in a positive light) will lead people to prioritize maternity leave over paternity leave, pressuring mothers to take longer leave and fathers to return to work sooner.

### Methods:

- Global Survey Experiment
- 700N, 50% female, all employed
- Measured benevolent sexism, then assigned treatments

Benevolent sexism measure (Glick and Fiske 1996) asks respondents to indicate their agreement with statements such as "many women have a quality of purity few men possess."

2 randomized treatments:

**(Male coworker / Female coworker)**

"Imagine a scenario where a trusted coworker is dependable and good at his/her job. You learn that he/she will soon take 8 weeks of paid paternity/maternity leave..."

Asked about coworker's **duty to return to work after 8 weeks** rather than extending to 12 weeks.

Regression models with sexism and treatment interacted, and relevant controls.

### Duty to Return to Work | Small treatment effect

On a scale of -2 (strongly disagree) to 2 (strongly agree), respondents with the female coworker treatment disagree slightly more, on average, that their coworker has a duty to return to work.

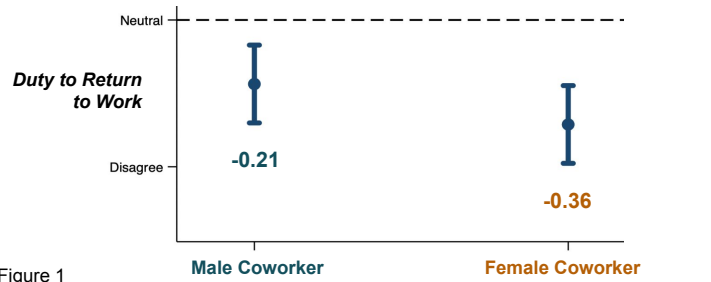


Figure 1

### Duty to Return to Work | Treatment and sexism interaction

For respondents with high levels of benevolent sexism, the female coworker treatment predicts *disagreement*, while other levels of sexism predict neutrality.

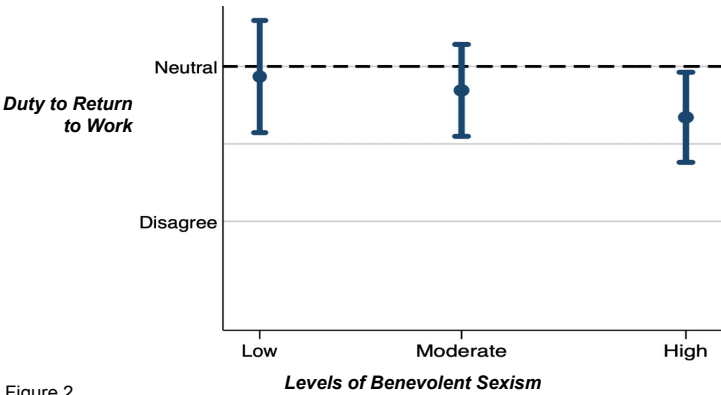


Figure 2

### National Parental Leave Policy (Female Coworker)

For respondents with low *and* high levels of benevolent sexism, the female coworker treatment predicts support.

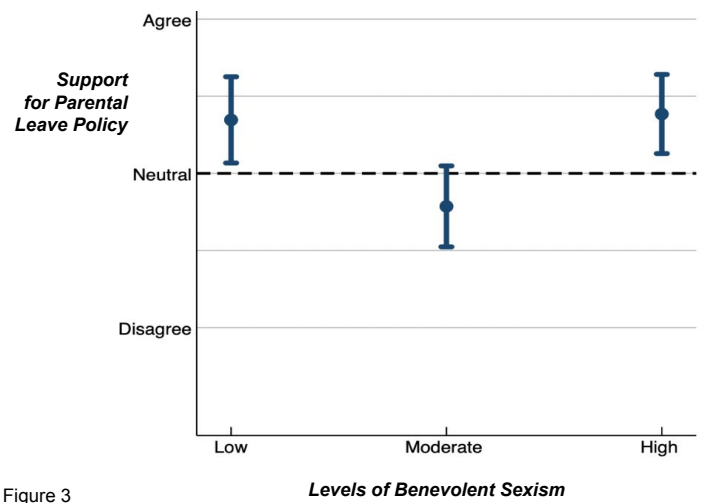


Figure 3

### Discussion

Equal parental leave is increasingly popular as an option, but in practice, working fathers still take less time off than they are allotted compared to working mothers.

Cultural norms, reinforced by benevolent sexist attitudes, may be incentivizing men to take shorter paternity leave and women to take longer maternity leave. Women and men may face different pressures from their workplace regarding work/life balance.

Surprisingly, both high and low levels of benevolent sexism predict support for government mandated parental leave policy, perhaps for different reasons.

*In the regression analysis where we interacted sexism with the treatment, we controlled for gender, age, global region, gender of boss, gender proportion of coworkers, marital status, parental status, and education.*