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

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Research Goals

• 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

- **Parental Section**:
  - How many times have you taken parental leave?
  - How long did each leave last? (in month)

- **Work History Section**:
  - Have you taken any work interruptions of six months or longer?
  - Beginning and end of each? (in year)
  - Main activity?
    - Taking care of own child(ren)
  - Work interruption
Literature: terminologies vary

- 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

- It matters whether parents return: to their original jobs, or in the same job status (part/full-time)
- parental leave ≠ work interruption
Reviewing the GSS questionnaires:
Retrospective surveys: 1984, 1995, 2001, 2006

- 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
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)

• 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

• “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)

- 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

• 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

| Child Order | 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

| Error Description                                                                 | Count 1 | Count 2 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| 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?

- 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

- 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

• 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.