

The Politics of Parental Leave:

Is Paid Parental Leave an Effective Means of Promoting Gender Equity in the Workplace?



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<http://faculty.virginia.edu/familyandtenure>

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Leveling the Playing Field?

Research Context

- **Most developed nations mandate paid leave**
- **US policy mandates unpaid leave**
- **California passes paid leave in 2002**

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Leveling the Playing Field?

Research Rationale

- **Nationwide survey of paid leave in academia**
- **Academia is a “crucial case”**
 - **Academics experience work-family conflict that is representative**

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Universal Paid Family Leave

8 weeks paid time off,
all American
workers

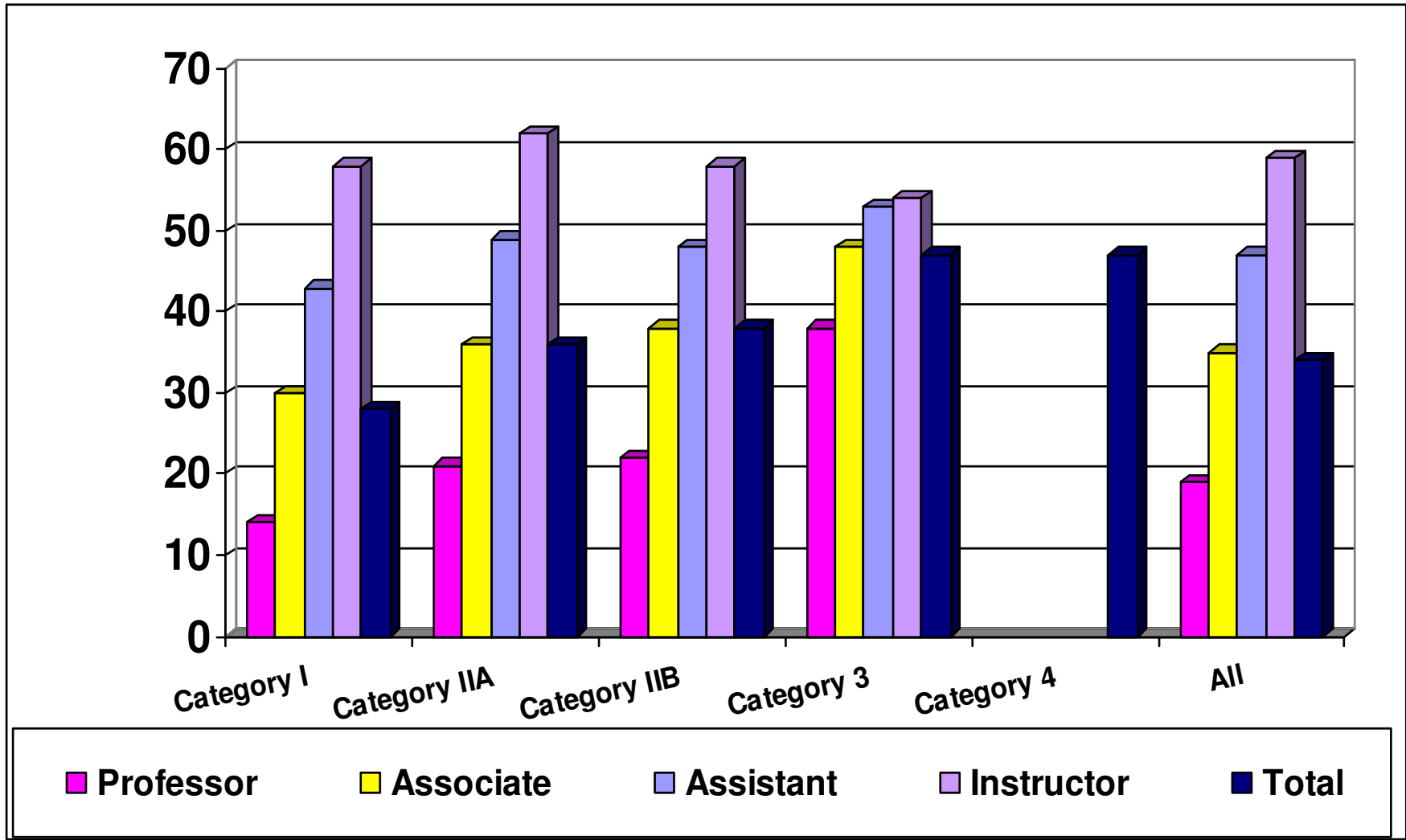
\$2 Billion



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Gender Segregation in Academia

Proportion of Female Faculty by Rank and Type of Institution



Does Paid Leave *Level the Playing Field?*

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What is the state of mind that is most propitious to the act of creation . . . to write a work of genius is almost always a feat of prodigious difficulty . . . Generally material circumstances are against it. Dogs will bark; people will interrupt; money must be made; health will break down. . . But for women . . . these difficulties were infinitely more formidable . . . In the first place, to have a room of her own . . . was out of the question . . .

Virginia Woolf, 1929



Two Surveys

- **Institutional survey, n=162**
- **Individual survey, n=184**
109 men, 79 women

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Institutional Survey

Paid Leave

- **At least 6 weeks of full relief from teaching duties with full pay**
- **Full pay & half relief from teaching duties for one full semester**
- **Half pay & full relief from teaching duties for one full semester**

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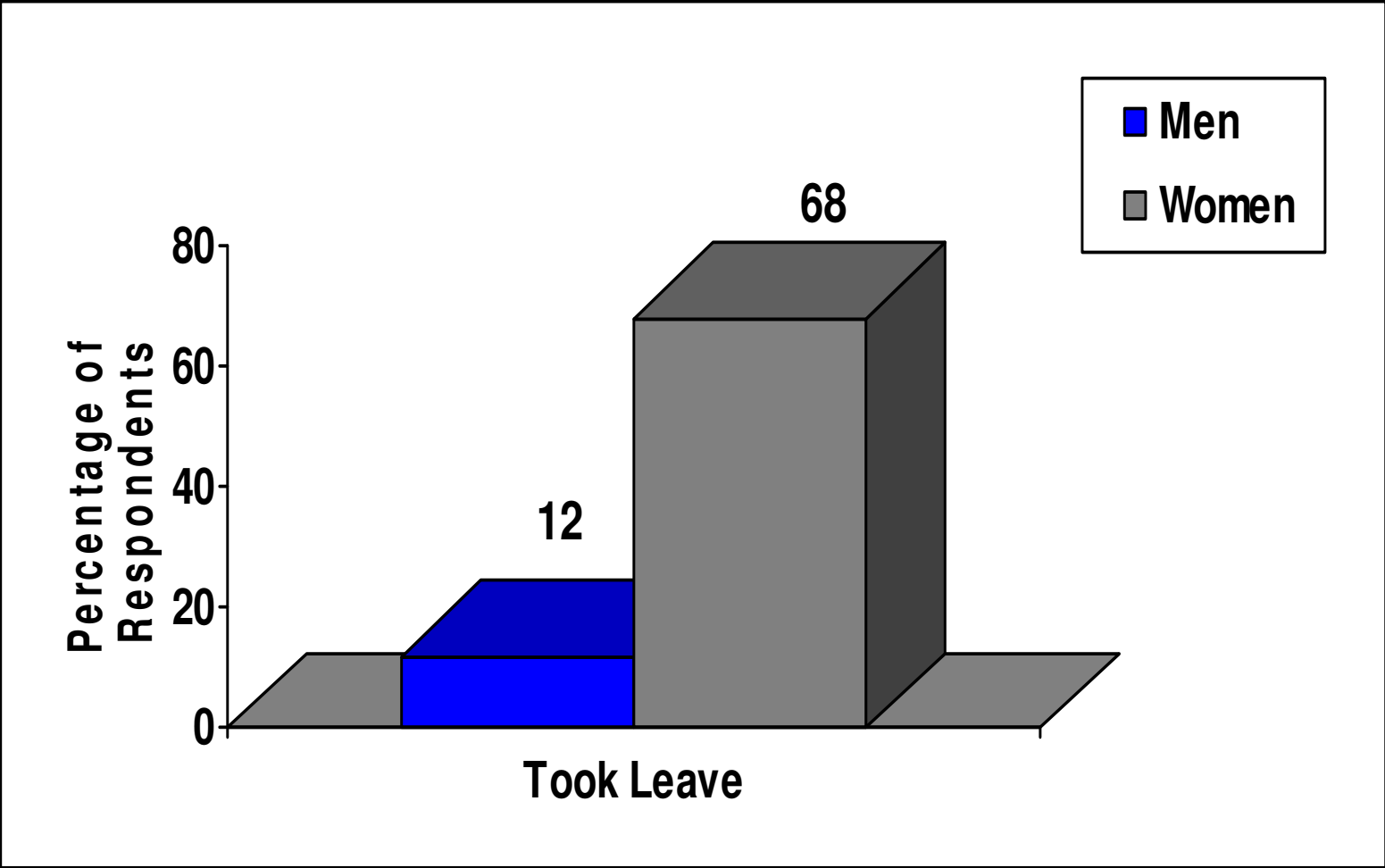


Individual Survey

- **Survey of Assistant Professors**
 - **With Children under two**
 - **In Tenure-Track Positions**
 - **Institutions with Paid-Leave Policies**

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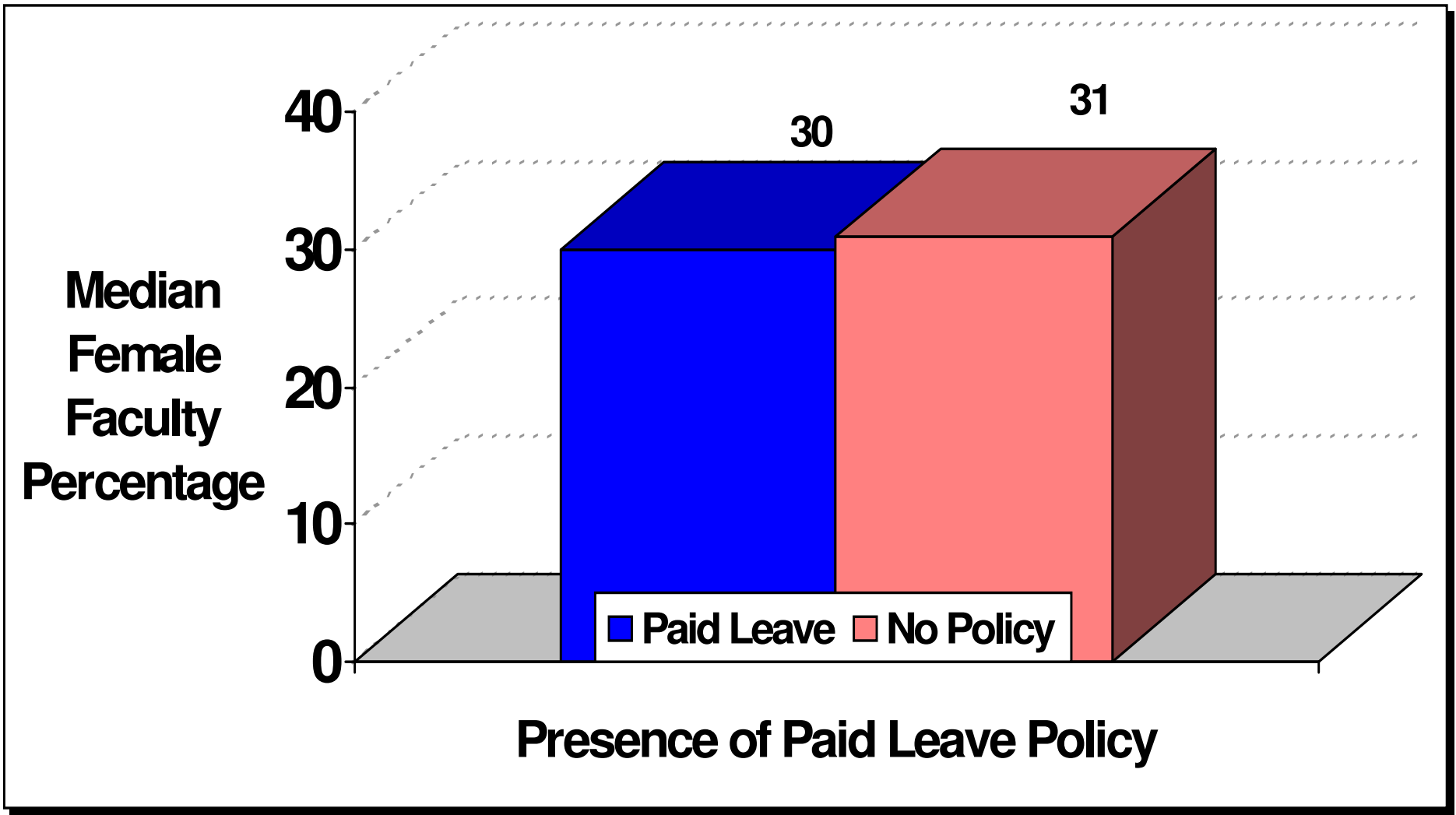


Percentages of Female Faculty

- If paid leave is effective at leveling the playing field for women professors, then we would expect to see **universities with generous paid leave policies have higher percentages of female professors** after the implementation of the policy than before.

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Research Time

- If paid leave is effective at leveling the playing field for women professors, then we would expect to see **leave-takers reporting the same amount of time available for research and writing** as their non-leave-taking colleagues.

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Research Time

“How does the time you spend now on research and writing compare to the time you spent before your child was born?”

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Research Time

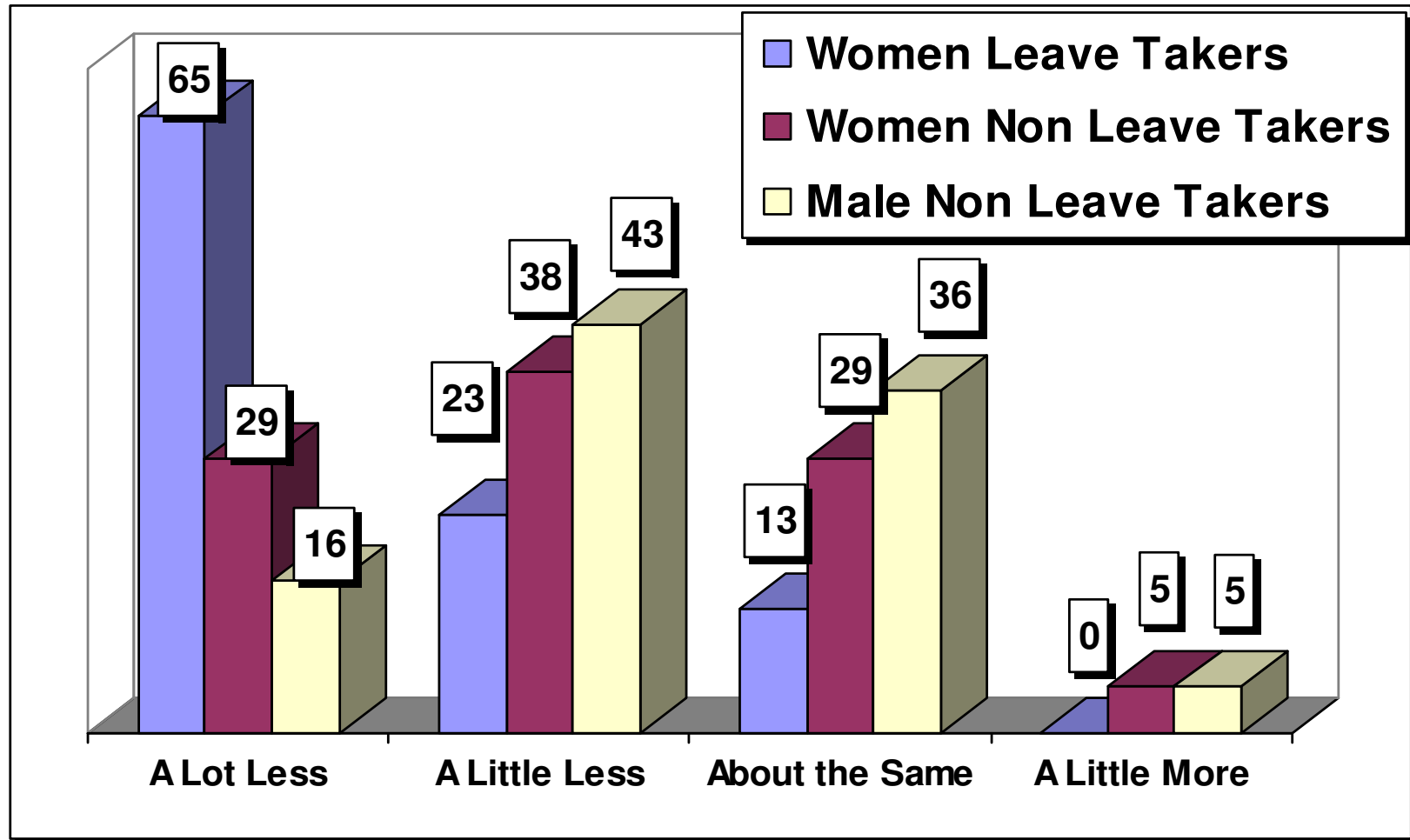
Leave-takers, regardless of gender, are more alike in their response to questions of research time availability than their colleagues of the same gender who had not taken leave. And *female leave-takers reported the most dramatic loss of research time of all four groups.*

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Research Time

“How much time, research and writing, compared to before birth?”



Work/Family Attitude

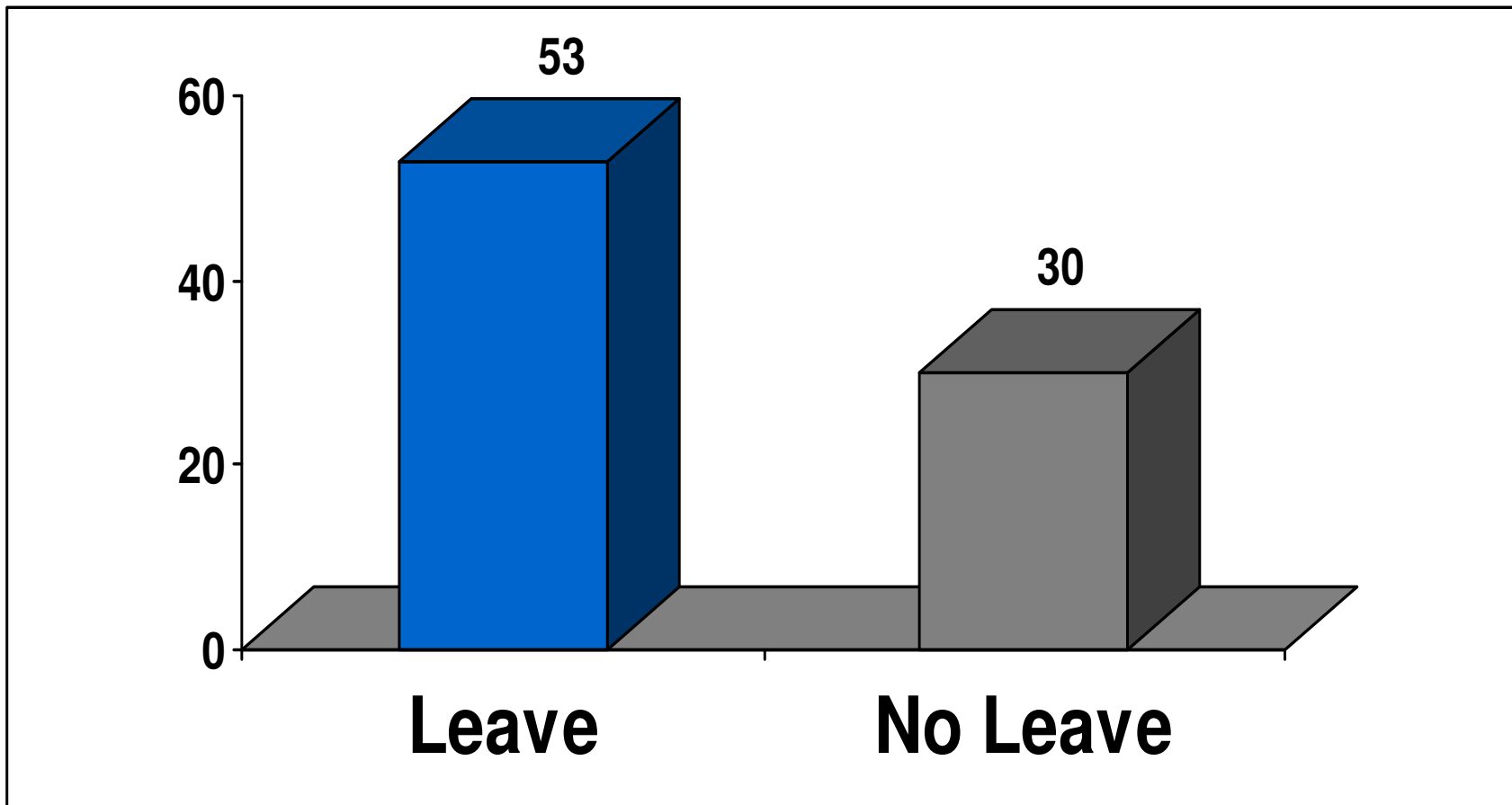
- If paid leave is effective at leveling the playing field for women professors, we would also expect to see **a lower percentage of leave-taking women reporting that they have thought about dropping off the tenure track.**

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Work/Family Attitude

“I have considered dropping off of the tenure track.”



Leave-Takers' Perceptions of Policy Effectiveness

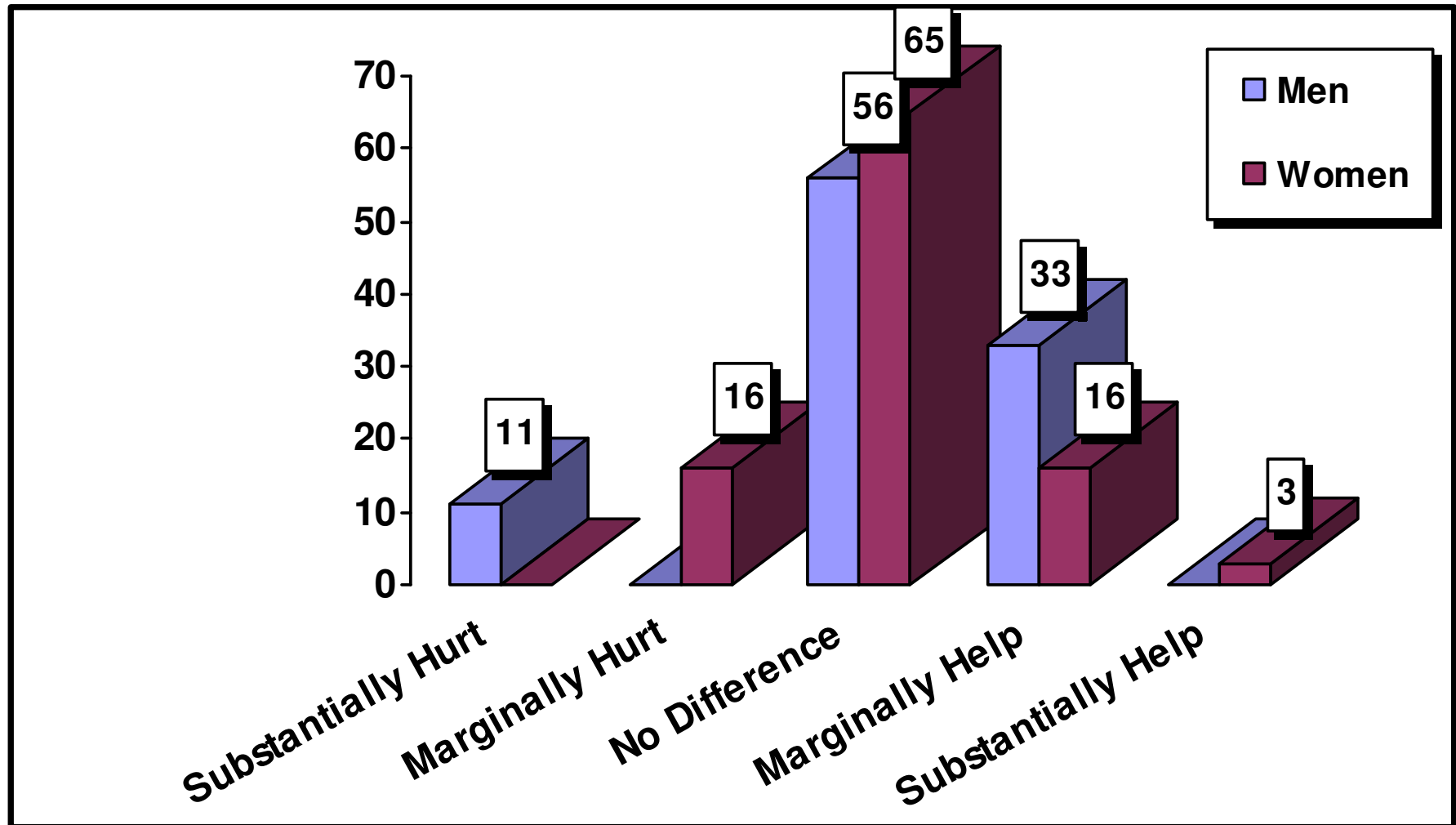
- If paid leave is effective at leveling the playing field for women professors, **leave-takers should believe that the policy was effective in helping them achieve tenure.**

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Leave-Takers' Perceptions of Policy Effectiveness

Did Taking Leave Help or Hurt Your Tenure Chances?



Stigma

- If paid parental leave is effective at leveling the playing field for women professors, **we would expect to see no stigma associated with policy utilization.**

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Stigma

- **Institutional Survey**

“Did leave-takers encounter any bias?”

Yes	0%
No	100%

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Stigma

“Family leave, reduction of duties, and stopping the tenure clock result in marginal candidates getting tenure.”

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
Women	64%	30%
Men	49%	38%

$p = .045$

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Results Summary

- Policy not associated with *higher percentages of female faculty*
- Policy not associated with *higher rates of promotion for female faculty*

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Results Summary

- **Leave-taking women: *less time for research and writing***
- **Leave-taking women: *more likely to think about dropping off the tenure track***

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Results Summary

- **Both male and female leave-takers believe: *policy has no effect on tenure.***
- **Leave-taking women: *mixed career expectations* – some higher, some lower**

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Results Summary

- **Some survey response evidence of *stigma*.**
- **Strong anecdotal evidence of *stigma*.**

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Leveling the Playing Field?

- *Paid leave may operate as a political fig leaf. The institutional results indicate that the policy by itself does not result in higher levels of achievement for women, making the use of political capital to establish the policy, a poor investment.*

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Leveling the Playing Field?

- *This policy may be necessary, but not sufficient.*
- *There is incongruence between the needs of the target population and the policy design. . . making the short duration of a post-childbirth leave policy inadequate.*
- *Generates unrealistic expectations.*



Leveling the Playing Field?

- *This policy may generate unintended consequences in the form of stigma for policy users, which in turn perpetuates the very gender discrimination it is intended to alleviate.*

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