

Enterprise and Business Committee inquiry follow-up work:

Chwarae Teg would explore whether any research had been undertaken which demonstrated that returning mothers were being forced out of employment or sacked as a consequence of not being able to meet their work obligations against their parenting obligations

While there does not seem to be any research specifically looking at whether women returners have been forced out of work or sacked, a number of small pieces of research and surveys around maternity and pregnancy discrimination more widely have been conducted over the past few years. These give a flavour of issues being encountered by women and some anecdotal evidence which shows some negative attitudes towards them, e.g. needing more flexibility in order to balance work and care. These are summarised and signposted below.

A larger piece of research on maternity and pregnancy discrimination has been commissioned and will be carried out by the EHRC. A publication date is not available yet but it is likely to be early 2015. The press release from November 2013 announcing the research is available here:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/news/2013/november/commission-tackles-pregnancy-discrimination/>

Chwarae Teg research

While not a focus of our research for 'A Woman's Place', experiences of returning to work following maternity leave were discussed during the in-depth interviews.

The experiences below were not experienced by a large enough number to include in the full report but provide some useful anecdotal evidence that is relevant to this topic. Interviewees who discussed returning to work highlighted 2 main types of experience:

1. Some women had felt that their employer had made their return to work easier than it might have been. This was usually through keep-in-touch days and discussing expectations and preferences for women's employment after maternity leave. A number of women talked of their employers helping them to negotiate a flexible work pattern or working part-time; *'I sat down with them and discussed what I could do when I went back. I went back to my old position. They created special hours just for me because I had difficulties with childcare'*;

2. Other women felt that they were losing out on opportunities as a result of having been off work, or going back to work on reduced hours.

The experiences that women had on returning to work seem to depend on two main factors:

1. The degree to which their manager was seen as family-friendly and helpful. However, in some cases, it seemed that the women's experiences were dependent on the 'good character' of their manager rather than clear procedures and arrangements for women returning to work
2. The size and scale of the operation. Larger employers with established HR functions tended to have clearer procedures and processes around maternity leave and women returning to work, which was seen to make the return to work easier.

We also gathered some anecdotal evidence of how maternity leave affected employment:

- 1 woman told us how she felt disadvantaged on returning from maternity leave as a proportion of her pay over the previous year was linked to performance, which she lost relating to the time she had been away.

Other recent research into maternity and pregnancy discrimination

- [Unison](#)
 - Conducted a survey in 2013 that showed 1 in 4 women feel discriminated against.
 - The survey found that women feel pressurised into returning to work before they are ready and some employers targeting women returners for redundancy selection.
- [Mumsnet](#)
 - Conducted a survey in 2013 which showed that of women who return to work after starting a family 60% felt less employable since having their child and 75% said it was harder to progress in their career.
 - Other findings were that on returning to work 25% said their line manager was not supportive and of this group 46% said they were made to feel guilty for leaving on time to collect their child/ children and 26% said they felt their job was under threat.
 - Asked about what employers could do to be more family friendly the single most popular workplace policy was flexible working (28%) followed by emergency childcare provision (15%) and job shares (9%)
- [Slater and Gordon](#)

- 2013 survey found that 1 in 4 mums who have returned to work believe they have been subjected to discrimination, either before or after the birth of their child.
- Two thirds said things have been 'difficult' for them since they returned from maternity leave. Common complaints were being overlooked for promotion and being forced to watch more junior employees progress faster up the career ladder.
- The most common attitudes mums faced were other worker's frustration at their part time hours, not being included socially or in business-related matters and a general perception that their role is just a job now rather than a career.
- In fact, one in four has been made to feel they're no longer required in their current workplace and the same number has even had pressure on them to leave their position or reduce their role.
- [Fawcett Society – Alliance against pregnancy discrimination in the workplace](#)
 - Have produced a fact sheet which includes some anecdotal evidence about maternity discrimination, in particular women being made redundant as a result of taking maternity leave.
- [TUC](#)
 - Recently conducted a survey which closed on the 16th May as part of a wider project on discrimination against pregnant women and women on maternity leave.

Older research reports

- [Fawcett Society – “Not having it all”](#)
 - In 2009, the Fawcett Society published this report which looked at the cost of maternity leave on mothers.
 - The report considered the impact on the gender pay gap and the move of many mothers into part-time, insecure posts which are below their skill level in order to balance care.
 - The report argues that for many mothers moving into these roles is not a choice but the only way they can balance work and care.