**Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review**

Submissions from women and men who have experienced discrimination at work while pregnant, or while on or on return to work after taking parental leave

**Submission Number: 162**

**Part C Submission Response**

I had no particular challenges when I was pregnant or on parental leave. The challenges I experienced were on returning to work and negotiating appropriate part-time work that acknowledged my prior skills and competencies.

Prior to my second child, I was in a significant leadership [position] in education. However after my second child, I chose to work part-time and it was difficult for me to secure appropriate employment.

Initially I was able to secure a job-share arrangement. I was told at the outset that it wouldn’t last (until my second child started school and I was obliged to return to full-time work or resign). It lasted two years. The job-share arrangement worked well until I was ready for a new challenge in my job.

I attempted to gain another part-time leadership position. I was told again and again that it wouldn’t be possible: Leadership positions were not part-time, according to my employer. I approached other employers in the same industry and they told me the same thing. Part-time leadership positions did not exist. While I would be able get part-time work, there was no leadership position that could be part-time.

I finally gained a one-year part-time temporary position leading a project within a school. There is some leadership involved in the position but it is neither satisfying nor challenging. I am not happy with the way I am being treated and I neither feel value nor respected in my current workplace. This may or may not be due to the fact that I work part-time. Although I have many skills, much experience and have asked again and again for opportunities to contribute to the workplace, I am told that because I work part-time, I am unable to take on extra responsibilities.

I have spent much of this year seeking another part-time leadership position as I am not happy with my current situation. Again, I am told repeatedly that part-time leadership positions do not exist. I have been advised to work part-time in a regular position and come back to leadership when I am ready to work full-time. I have been regularly asked whether I would work full-time. I feel pressured to work full-time if I want to be challenged in my role and yet I simultaneously feel forced to take a backward step in my career in order to look after my young children. My career is on hold because I have young children.

I have recently accepted a part-time teaching position for next year. It is not leadership but I hope it will use some of my skills and challenge me to learn some new ones. This will also mean a pay cut because I will no longer be on a leadership position on the pay scale.

There have been no workplace measures that have supported me in my challenges. In fact, any time that I have sought support from my superiors and support network colleagues, it is explained to me that leadership positions can’t be part-time.

The support I received from the union was inadequate as they were not clear on the legislation and the agreements about flexible working arrangements. Moreover, what I was seeking was not just flexible working arrangements but a role that acknowledge my skills, experience and expertise. My rights and entitlements do not seem to extend to ensuring that I work in a role that is commensurate to what I was working in prior to my second child.

Certainly it would have helped if I was put in direct contact at the union with someone who knew and understood the legislation that applied to my situation because I was always going through a second person who didn’t know it.

As for what my employer could have done, I believe that my employer is increasingly becoming family un-friendly rather than the other way around. 3 years ago I was able to negotiate a job-share leadership position whereas now that is simply not possible. I am told of other job-share leadership arrangements that are being suspended even though the employees would like to continue.

Although my employer has some policies and procedures about flexible working arrangements, they are extremely difficult to locate and I’m not even sure whether they are out-of-date or currently applicable. There is one particular document about Parental Leave and I remember the meeting when it was presented to staff. We were told that we shouldn’t have to use it because the Principal didn’t want anyone becoming pregnant! I remember feeling guilty both times I fell pregnant because of the effects it would have on the workplace and my employer.

I don’t think women who want to work part-time should be disadvantaged in the workplace. I might choose to work part-time but I am still an effective worker who is willing to contribute more than my fair share. I don’t think it is fair that my career should be put on hold for years because the workplace can’t accommodate flexible working arrangements. I now run the risk of losing my skills, not keeping up with current trends in leadership and not being as employable in the future because I can’t get a part-time leadership job now.