**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 210**

**Part C Submission Response**

While pregnant with my first child, I received a promotion, which I thought was a fantastic indication of the regard that my employer had for my skills and ability, and boded well for my return to work following parental leave. Apart from the odd comment from a colleague about my size (which I think every pregnant woman experiences!) I did not experience discrimination or difficulties at work while pregnant.

I returned to work part time, 3 days per week, when my child was 7 months old. I found that I was slotted into a different area/position and given tasks that were not time critical. I felt sidelined. Colleagues, sometimes well meaning, would complete my work for me on my days out of the office, so that I felt I needed to constantly check emails to ensure that I was on top of all aspects even on non-work days and people did not feel the need to cover for me. I had to work very hard to re-establish myself and the trust of my co-workers that I was still able to pull my weight despite the change in my working hours.

I have since had two more children, and this same process happened each time I have returned to work. This is despite the fact that I completed at least two years back in the workplace between each period of parental leave.

My career stalled. I missed out on my next promotion. I had missed a lot of personal and career development while on leave and afterwards had no ability to 'catch up' on this. I was not supported to develop career goals and instead had to slot in to whatever role I was asked to fulfill. In the end I was moved from secondment to secondment, into very stressful, unfamiliar environments, with no clear role for me in my organisation in between. This was soul destroying.

Meanwhile, a male colleague sought to take parental leave (in our employment terms, the same type and period of leave was available to mothers, fathers and adoptive parents). He was subjected to a protracted negotiation process and was only in the end able to take half the time (6 instead of 12 weeks) not as full time leave, but as a reduction to 3 days per week. This was appalling, and demeaning both to him and the women who took the leave. It imposed a double standard: the men were too valuable to take the leave as offered, but the women were dispensable. I know it also placed a lot of stress on his family because they had planned that he would take up the primary carer role for the period of the parental leave. His inability to take the leave meant that his partner was restricted in her return to work, with all the flow-on effects that would have had for her. I have not heard of any other male in the organisation who has since taken parental leave.