**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 222**

**Part C Submission Response**

Challenges

While I was pregnant my organisation was being restructured. Colleagues in my team lost their jobs. I retained my job, but resigned while I was on maternity leave. My workplace has a policy of supporting all women returning after maternity leave to work part-time hours. Due to the restructure and loss of staff, I would have had to somehow fit my full-time role into the part-time hours I wanted and was entitled to work, without much support. My full-time role, previous to me falling pregnant, could run up to 70+ hour work weeks. I really could not see how it was possible to manage the workload within part-time hours without my health suffering, so I decided to resign from the position. My line manager was aware of this reasoning on my part and offered no solutions to the workload issue.

I found it difficult to find another job, as I was shocked to encounter an awful lot of discrimination throughout my job search. It was clear that despite my extensive experience, quality work, good reputation and positive references, I was an unattractive candidate because I had a small child and would probably leave to have another as soon as possible - in other words, my focus would not be on my work and I would be an unreliable employee. I know this because I joined a few recruitment agencies and received feedback that I was difficult to place despite my credentials.

I also had an extremely unpleasant experience at one job interview where the interview panel asked me, "Where did I see myself in five years?" I replied, "Working for this organisation". A panel member bluntly replied, "Well, that's obviously a lie because you'll be off having more babies." Throughout the interview my commitment to the role was questioned fairly aggressively and despite answering these challenges fairly well I think, it seemed nothing I could say could convince the panel of my commitment to my work and my career - what was more infuriating is that I had ruled out having another child and wanted to immerse myself in my career and work.

I am now employed on a permanent part-time basis but I have had to take a few steps down in my career. I work for someone who is much less experienced than me. I feel like I could contribute so much more but I was not employed to do so - I am, effectively, an assistant, after working at management level for a number of years before having my son. It is incredibly difficult to find part-time work similar to the work I was doing before I had my son.

The consequences of all this was that for a period of a year my family lived under considerable financial stress as we depend on two incomes to make ends meet.

I did not take any action against any of the parties mentioned - I was so desperate to find a job. That was my focus.

What workplace measures would have helped you to respond to the challenges I faced?

A genuine workplace culture that recognises that it is a real loss of expertise, capability and capacity when women are not brought back into organisations at the level they were working at, and following on from this, it is in the workplace best interest to support women to come back in on part-time hours. We are really productive employees, in addition to our experience and abilities. There needs to be a recognition that this also benefits men, because flexible workplaces open up more choices for men as well - they can choose to take paternity leave for longer periods of time, or come back part-time as well. They might choose to use the flexibility to study or start a business (as may women) - flexibility is not just about parenting.

Information about my rights and entitlements while pregnant and while on parental leave was available from HR - often I had to find it myself.

Recommendations for the National Review Report
- Workplaces need to develop a greater understanding of discrimination against pregnant women, and the seriousness of the consequences of breaking laws.
- Publicity campaign promoting a hotline/advisory service for women experiencing discrimination
- We need to find ways to 'normalise' longer parental leave periods for men. Can the national paid parental leave scheme be more like those you see in Scandinavia, where the leave is shared between both parents?
- We need to change our work culture to promote the positives of flexibility for everyone, not just mothers, not just parents. When everyone benefits there will be less discrimination against mothers.