**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 271**

**Part C Submission Response**

**Challenges**

I found that my team leader often made inappropriate comments (e.g. suggesting I assess abortion as an option) shrouded as being helpful. That shouldn’t be allowed. I was having trouble managing my stress levels around workload and my pregnancy-related health issues. We are offered unlimited sick leave but it actually doesn’t exist. Managers and team leaders seem to want the time back but there is no way to work the overtime considering health, sleep and a long commute (low wages prevented me from buying a family-welcoming property any closer).

I was told to choose a buddy but he didn’t keep in touch and my team leader (against our policy didn’t update me much at all). I was scared to return to work not only because of the stress and unwelcoming culture but also because I physically couldn’t do the things I could before I got pregnant (e.g. crouch down). I wasn’t told there was legislation/policy around adapting to my needs. I’m currently in the situation where my pay will be reduced (after having my hours verbally agreed) because I can’t drop my little one off at child care any earlier, I can’t pick her up any later, I can’t really afford to move, I can’t afford a nanny and I don’t have family who can help.

I think it’s safe to say that my career is over. I’m retraining for another line of work. I may have lost all faith in management everywhere (too cruel and unethical trying to push out a single mother when your boss may have indicated that it’s you or her). I’m glad I didn’t have many major financial goals because we have only just been getting by for around 3 years now. Many sleepless nights. Very unproductive all around. I’m currently in discussion with my union representative but I still don’t feel strong enough for a court battle.

Workplace measures that have helped: colleagues with reliable work and private advice, ergonomic assessment, no longer relying on lifting heavy paper-based files, and being flexible (e.g. working 2 days per week).

**Measures that would help:**

- explaining beforehand that if you work part-time, opportunities for training and advancement will not be provided

- better reporting/disclosing why men get the opportunities over the rather more qualified women

- assigning someone with experience and resources in this area as a sort of shadow mentor to the affected person

- somehow making it so HR enforce the policies and collect objective data rather than just blindly following what supervisors say at that moment

- providing a way of annonymously reporting up the line as to what is happening to an affected person (outside of the current formal process that is currently monitored and controlled by the people who are doing the bullying)

- a guaranteed place at a locally-convenient childcare centre/affordable nanny service

- acceptance across the board that sleep is the highest priority for parents and the best way to recover and some day be more efficient (rather than spending waking hours stressing, drinking coffee, applying for new jobs, retraining, compiling a docier against the organisation or complaining about what a shockingly terrible situation this is)

**Information and support

What information or support was provided to you about your rights and entitlements while pregnant, while on parental leave and upon returning to work after parental leave? Who provided this information?

If none was provided, what information or support would have assisted you?**

I was told that I could work as little as 2 days per week in my current role or be provided with an equivalent level position if my role ceased to exist, unlimited sick and carers’ leave, that I would have a resettling period, and I could work from home/a more convenient location. This turned out not to be the case, even though others still enjoy these benefits. I wasn’t provided with any information that I can remember around the legislation. I feel that I was led to believe that my career would be unaffected – how false that is – opportunities and training aren’t even available to me anymore. This information was solely provided by my team leader. I would have been better from someone in HR.

I would have liked to know that there was support for physical challenges/disabilities, and that the organisation as a whole is supportive (at all levels of life stage).

**Good practices that assisted you

What policies, programs or support did or would have assisted you while you were working while pregnant, on parental leave or after returning to work following parental leave?**

I would have liked to have a more mobile workstation (e.g. from home) especially in the latter stages of my rather troublesome pregnancy. They could have asked for confirmation from my doctor of any related health issues – it seems they still don’t believe me years on but I don’t know what evidence they would accept. It would have been good to have someone overseeing every parentally-challenged person in the organization to disclose what rights we have.

I would have liked weekly email updates on workplace changes and monthly email updates on opportunities/promotions across the floor. It may have encouraged me to return earlier knowing some people left and others joined. A monthly/quarterly email update with supportive words would have helped me to return earlier. Another thing is that I was told the contractor replacing me was on monthly renewal, but when I tried to return, I had to wait another 6 months because my team leader told me he was on a 6-month contract that was just renewed (without checking with me). (He is now my boss.)

**Recommendations for the National Review Report

What sorts of outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Review?**

a. Immunity from productivity sacking/provision of workplace support within 42 months of birth (so parents would have the ability to respond to such action, as that is when the child is more able to take care of themselves and parents sleep habits begin to recover)?

b. The ability to apply for 3 years unpaid maternity leave.

c. Optional retraining program upon re-entry to the workplace.

d. Pro-formas and a fact sheet for both female and male parents and supervisors on what they might expect in relation to leave and productivity at each stage of parenting/life stage.

e. The screening process for promoting managers should be based more on ethics and integrity rather than numerical KPIs – it seems their promotion hinders on saving money rather than long-term support and overall productivity. Diversity training doesn’t seem to be enough.

f. That nanny services are also covered by the current child care supplement schemes, like child care centres are.

g. An anonymous and less confusing way of assessing what your income / Centrelink support will be online (with adequate telephone support with people who speak in plain language, in case you don’t know what scheme is which).

h. An anonymous reporting system that requires only a telephone call/online survey without further support required by the overworked parent in order to have a human rights complaint investigated.