**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: 73**

**Part C Submission Response**

Whilst on maternity leave, my position was filled by the manager’s best friend. My replacement did not not go through a formal interview process. I took leave for 9 months. Before I returned to work, I gave 4 weeks notice as was stipulated in our organisational policy. Literally in this time, a new senior management position was created and my maternity replacement was promoted above me and became my manager upon my return. I was NOT given an opportunity to apply for this job, even though my experience and qualifications were far superior. It was not even explained or discussed that there would be a new position created. This was a very awkward and difficult situation for 3 years, until my manager (my maternity leave replacement) finally resigned. Realistically, this was my promotion and represented a vast increase in salary for me and my family. This would have made a significant difference in our lives, given our extra childcare expenses. This was pure discrimination based on the fact that I was on parental leave at the time this position was magically created. Had I never had a baby, I would not be subjected to this form of discrimination or experience. Very little was done or support provided by the HR department, despite my initial discussions with them to try to work out what had happened. In the end, the HR Director did offer an apology for the way she was appointed and that I should have been given a chance to apply for this job. This was 3 years after the event and very close to a nervous breakdown on my behalf.

Upon returning to work and facing this difficult situation, I also uncovered that there was no support for any mothers returning to work. I joined the Union not knowing where to turn or if my position was safe. I also set up a group for mothers who have recently had children and re-joined the workforce. We discussed our very different experiences in returning to work at the same organisation. I discovered that everyone had a different experience, some worse than mine, some better, but there was no level of consistency across the organisation and it didn’t seem to matter if you were the receptionist or if you had a PhD on how you were treated. It all depended on your direct manager. Overall, the experiences were appalling. Many people were asked to perform different tasks to their PD – most were of lower responsibility. I had very little to do and very little responsibility. As a high-performing professional this was also a form of work-place stress. Other return to work mums were expected to fit a full-time job into whatever their part-time hours were (either 2 or 3 days). This was unrealistic. The part-time nature of mothers returning to the workforce was openly encouraged in policy but realistically frowned upon. The internal culture was quite different to the policy. For example; my female, single-mother manager stated about a colleague working 2 days a week that she is “not serious” and “I don’t know why she bothers”. I felt like I had no support and no-where to turn. I was working 3 days a week, so what did that say about me? Was I serious? Of course I was, but not in my manager’s eyes. No wonder I wasn’t even considered for a promotion. I was working 3 days a week, because that’s what I thought Part-Time was. I didn’t know or understand that this could be flexible. It was never discussed or explained to me. It’s interesting to note, that these perceptions and comments were often from other women, not men. One would think that other women would understand and be empathetic; this is not always the case.

I think this review is critical to share people’s experiences. I know I am not alone. There are others in my organisation and other friends who have experienced similar forms of discrimination upon their return to work. This is completely unfair, unjust and unreasonable. I would like to see this put on the national agenda, for other working mums to feel like they are not alone and then for some real action to occur. We need to make all employers aware that discrimination in any form is illegal. That Mums who are returning to work, especially after having their first child, are juggling a ridiculous amount of “stuff” e.g. co-ordinating drop-offs, pick-ups, sick children, getting them feed and dressed and out the door, I had the added burden of paid childcare, some kids aren’t even sleeping through the night. These women have just gone through a mind-blowing, life-changing experience. Some may have experienced PND for the first time. Paid work should help to bring about balance in women’s lives, both financial and cerebral, as required. It should make them feel better about themselves. I know I am a better Mum for working. Mums who return to the workforce for necessity or sanity, shouldn’t be penalized, marginalized or discriminated against. Our careers should not be jeopardized because we choose to have children. This is certainly not happening to men.

The mums@work (http://www.mumsatwork.com.au/) organisation was a great help. I openly and whole-heartedly appreciated their support and assistance in finding my sanity in the intense craziness when I returned to work. It is a wonderful organisation, with fabulous ideas and suggestions about making this transition easier for Mums and workplaces. I contacted them myself out of pure desperation from my own experience.

I don’t want to name names, but my organisation is a Not for Profit leader in the education sector, not a corporate or multi-national and I would have expected fairer treatment overall. Just goes to show that discrimination against women, mums in particular, happens in all business sectors.