



Research Report

National HSE Research: Engagement and Experience of Working Parents in the HSE on return to work from Birth / Adoption of a child

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1.0

Supporting working parents and women in work is and will continue to have a direct impact on the delivery and provision of high quality health care. Supporting the ‘working parent’ should be placed high on the organisation’s corporate agenda.

Recommendation 2.0

Employers should have robust policies and procedures in place and ensure that line managers are fully trained and briefed so that the organisation maintains a consistent and equitable approach.

Conduct review of all existing HR policies relating to pregnant employees and working parents:

- Maternity Leave
- Adoption Leave
- Parental Leave
- Paternity Leave
- Fertility Treatment/Assisted Human Reproduction Policy
- Pregnant Employees and Risk Assessment
- Breastfeeding Support Policies

This review should also look at the next phase of policy development; implementation practices and norms across the health sector, identifying good practice examples, discrepancies and inconsistencies.

Recommendation 3.0

Parents, mostly mothers, deciding whether to stay at home or return to work after birth or adoption of a baby are presented with the difficulty of meeting their children’s needs while balancing childcare costs and the need to continue in a meaningful and purposeful career. Employers should see flexible working for parents as one option in meeting this balance.

Review all flexible working policies, arrangements and practices across the organisation and identify how gender bias impacts on workers. Identification of best practice procedures and processes in relation to flexible work arrangements and flexible work environments will inform the organisation and support pregnant employees and working parents.

Recommendation 4.0

Employers should provide relevant easily accessible information to assist and communicate to employees, thus creating optimal staff engagement.

Develop a one-stop ‘information source’ for employees setting out all employee entitlements/benefits, HR policies, processes and protocols relevant to pregnant employees/working parents. Employees and managers should have access to information that allows for proactive management and planning of maternity/adoptive leave. One-stop shop for information should also include clear signposting and contact details to services that can provide assistance and further information to employees and managers.

Recommendation 5.0

Returning to work following maternity leave is a challenging and demanding transition. Employers with mentoring programmes based on rich conversation relationships allow employees develop a greater understanding, take control and flourish.

Extend coaching and mentorship specific to working parents and new mothers returning to work e.g. 'Maternity Coaching' to support working mothers in all aspects and stages of pregnancy and on return to work, to find solutions to issues, successful transition back to work and help them perform to their highest potential both at work and at home. The establishment of an informal 'buddy system' or mentorship is another support network where working parents and especially mothers returning to work from maternity leave can access advice and information from other parents and mothers who have lived the same experiences.

Programmes to support the health and wellbeing of working parents should be developed and delivered and directed at each stage of parenting. Managers should be competent in Health and Safety Risk Assessment and in how to conduct risk assessments for pregnant and breastfeeding employees. Managers should be knowledgeable in managing workplace stress and competent in conducting workplace stress risk assessment, understand signs and symptoms of stress and post-natal depression. Managers should be knowledgeable on employee health and wellbeing supports available to employees e.g. Employee Assistant Programmes, StaffCareLine, Occupational Health etc.

Recommendation 6.0

Employers should provide formal support structures with clear standardised implementation processes and practices to proactively manage maternity/adoptive leave to ensure job satisfaction, greater engagement in work, positive mental health and clear planned work for work colleagues and services.

Formal pre-planning Maternity Leave processes should be developed to facilitate a framework of communication and human resource best practice between managers and employees; to include pre-planning of work up to commencing leave, support i.e. flexible work/leave options and arrangements, suitable communication methods when on leave, and agreed re-induction when returning to work. Formal pre-planning should also include planning of replacement cover for leave including establishment of appropriate skill-mix and robust business cases.

Recommendation 7.0

Employers protect employees from attitudes that can contribute to unfair treatment and detrimental treatment on the grounds of pregnancy, childbirth and maternity/adoptive leave.

Attitudes linked to pregnancy discrimination in the workplace should not be tolerated. Specific training should be provided for managers to ensure that they are knowledgeable in all aspects of protecting and supporting pregnant employees and working parents. Human Recourse initiatives e.g. 'Values in Action' and 'Positive Workplace' address attitudes and behaviours in the workplace, and rollout of such initiatives should be supported.

Recommendation 8.0

Employers should ensure that they take a lead role in supporting pregnant employees and working parents throughout their working career and that organisational decisions impact positively on employees and health service delivery.

A review should be conducted to look at the challenges presented to the organisation in relation to replacement cover for leave and specifically how not having replacement cover impacts on pregnant employees, managers, work colleagues, clients and service users.

A 'Career Programme' for employees should be developed to afford employees the opportunity to focus on developing their personal self to further career progression and profession development. This programme should also ensure that HR processes and work practices support and enable employee participation e.g. funding, study leave, work experience, shadowing, mentorship etc.

Ensure that employees are aware of HSE 'Leadership Academy' and have opportunities provided to them to undertake leadership training and roles.

Support roll out and implementation of HSE 'Workforce Planning' throughout the organisation.

Recommendation 9.0

Employers continue to work towards developing a workplace that encompasses a culture where gender balance is not just norm but core to business success.

Inclusion, Diversity and Equality, policies and best practice should be central to supporting all employees. Working mothers have specific supports as do working fathers, and employees who do not have children. HR functions should continue to develop a work culture where every employee is included, engaged and valued throughout their whole career.