

Women Returning from Maternity Leave

Excerpts from NCT: The experiences of women returning to work after maternity leave in the UK

Yet despite the strengthened legislation and often enhanced benefits, this survey has found that one in three women (39%) find it difficult or very difficult to return to work after maternity leave. The cost of a difficult transition back to work is not only personal it also affects the team and organisation for which they work. Just 10% of respondents had formal support from their employers e.g. re-induction program or phased start and only 1% of respondent had the support of a coach or counsellor.

This survey has found that mothers are not given enough support in returning to work after maternity leave. A poorly managed reintegration back into the workplace and lack of support often have a detrimental effect on women's well-being.

Source: NCT: Liz Morris (HR researcher) Aston Business School.

Claire Cohen writing for the Telegraph newspaper reported that an "American study concluded what thousands of women already suspected: employers are more likely to hire an under-qualified candidate, than one who's taken a career break... Indeed, new research by PwC, Women Returners and the 30% Club says that two-thirds of female professionals end up working below their potential when they return to work after career breaks.

They estimate that out of the 427,000 women in the UK on a career break, around 249,000 are likely to enter lower-skilled roles when they return to work. While a further 29,000 women are forced to work fewer hours than they want due to a lack of flexible working. These downgraded women can end up experiencing a 12-32 per cent reduction in hourly earnings - or an average £4,000 per year."

Mothers' perceptions of work-life balance:

- 55% wanted to allocated their time differently since becoming a parent
- 44% of mothers agreed that there was some impact of work on home life
- 36% of mothers felt that their life was more in balance than ever
- 23% of mothers felt that home commitments affected their work

Reasons for returning to work

Respondents were asked to select all their reasons for returning to work.. The most common reasons were financial necessity (68%), a desire for intellectual stimulus (48%) and a desire for social contact with other adults (35%).

Return reasons

Financial 68%
Keep my brain alive 48%
Social contact with adults 35%
Assumed I always would 24%
Belief in vocation 22%
Feeling valued 20%
Time away from children 19%

Concerns about returning to work:

Respondents were asked to indicate all their concerns about returning to work. The most common concern related to childcare (60%). Over half of the women were worried about their child missing them (53%), a third felt that their child's development might be affected by them going back to work (32%) and 15% felt that it might be tricky to continue breastfeeding after their return to employment

Alongside concerns about their child, women had worries about managing multiple responsibilities and having enough time to do everything (21%). There were also specifically work-related concerns. A third reported concern about the attitude of their boss and/or their colleagues (33%); and one in ten were concerned about job availability.

Concerns about returning to work

Childcare 60%
Time to do everything 57%
Missing my child 56%
My child missing me 53%
Ability to be a good mother 47%
Adversely impacting my child's development 32%
Money 32%
Ability to remember things 31%
Ability to be a good employee 28%
Attitude of boss and or colleagues 33%
Ability to do parts of the job 21%
Ability to concentrate 20%
Ability to continue breastfeeding 15%
Job availability 10%
Loss of social life 8%
Ability to balance different identities 3%

Return to work experiences

Mothers were asked to provide an overall rating for their most recent return to work on a 5-point scale (1="Very difficult" and 5="Very easy").

- 39% rated their return to work as "difficult" or "very difficult"
- 11% changed employer or became self employed on or shortly after returning to work

Return adjustment

Difficult as I missed my child 34%
Emotional to begin with then got used to it 26%
Difficulty concentrating 18%
Increased workload/exhaustion 10%
Isolation/loneliness 9%
Difficulty remaining in one place for a long time 8%
Bored 7%
Difficult as I missed my friends 4%

Work place process or formal support e.g. induction program

- 10% of respondents had formal support from their employers e.g. re-induction program or phased start
- 1% of respondent had the support of a coach or counsellor

Sources of support

Support from friends, family and partner 42%
Supportive boss 37%
Having close friends at work 30%
Other colleagues who had recently gone through the same 26%
Other* 6%
Support from the HR department 5%
Pleasant and secure place to breastfeed 3%

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