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# National Review:

## Work Conditions & Discrimination among Pregnant & Parent Workers in Australia

Evidence & Insights Report

2024

PSC Global Observatory



Australian Government  
Australian Research Council



University of  
South Australia

Centre for  
Workplace  
Excellence

The authors encourage the dissemination and exchange of the findings and information provided in this report.

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*We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to improve work conditions for pregnant and parent workers.*

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Work Conditions & Discrimination  
among Pregnant & Parent Workers in  
Australia**

**Evidence & Insights Report**

Psychosocial Safety Climate Global Observatory  
Centre for Workplace Excellence, Justice and Society  
University of South Australia  
2024

# MESSAGE FROM THE RESEARCH LEAD

I initiated this National Review to shine light on the current state of work conditions for pregnant and parent workers. This work was inspired by hearing countless anecdotes from fellow parents and pregnant women regarding their treatment within workplaces. As such, it is my hope that the findings presented in this report catalyse much needed change across Australian workplaces and beyond. So many of us are parents and make wonderful contributions to society; we all deserve to experience equity and safe and healthy workplaces.

This National Review is timely and significant. In Australia, the Federal Government has started to respond to related issues of inequality via updates to the paid parental leave system. However, implementing parental leave improvements alone will not counter the vast discrimination, disadvantage, and bias experienced by pregnant and parent workers.

Respondents of this National Review and the public have put forward a strong and urgent call for vast change in Australian workplaces in relation to the work conditions of pregnant and parent workers. This is something that we hope this National Review will drive.

I want to acknowledge that being able to carry out this research, and prepare this report, has been due to collaborative and strong efforts by many. Thank you to the leadership team at Justice and Society (UniSA) for providing me with the initial kickstart funding for this project.

I would also like to thank my colleagues for your continuing inputs and support. We come from different backgrounds and each bring unique expertise and insights to this space. Each stage of this research has been conducted at the highest academic level, with great rigor and care because of the excellent team.

On behalf of the research team I want to thank all the people who completed the survey and shared this survey on with fellow parents. Executing this project would not have been possible without you all.

Many thanks,

Dr Rachael Potter



Dr Rachael Potter  
*Research Fellow, Justice and Society  
University of South Australia*

# Table of Contents

# S T I L L I N G S C O N T E N T S

01.	Introduction	1
02.	Project Objectives	4
03.	Methodology	5
04.	Demographics	8
05.	Legislative Context	9
06.	Overall Discrimination	10
07.	Disclosing Pregnancy	12
08.	Findings: Pregnancy	13
09.	Findings: Parental Leave	16
10.	Findings: Return to Work	19
11.	Call to Action	23
12.	Practical Recommendations	24
13.	References	25

This National Review was undertaken to convey the prevalence of work-related discrimination, disadvantage, and bias in relation to pregnant and parent workers who are a dominant yet vulnerable subgroup in our society (Adesoye et al. 2017; Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC] 2014; Cuddy et al. 2004). Over 20% of all Australian households have young children (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021) and the percentage of dual-earner parent couples with children under 18 years has increased from 53% in 1996 to 61% in 2016 (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2018). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) report that the number of Australian children has increased over the last fifty years and the number is estimated to grow to 6.4 million by the year 2048. Despite the high prevalence of Australian workers who have children, there is scarce large-scale research exploring their unique work-related experiences and how they are treated in their workplaces.

The last major National Review on pregnant and parent workers in Australia was undertaken in 2014 by the AHRC. Results showed that almost half (49%) of Australian mothers and over a quarter (27%) of Australian fathers surveyed experienced discrimination during stages of either pregnancy, parental leave or return-to-work since the birth or adoption of a child. The AHRC (2014) prepared a 'Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return-to-work National Review Report', which provided in-depth findings and information as to how employers can support pregnant workers, mothers, and fathers. Noted in the report, the AHRC called for recurrent national surveillance of the work conditions and discrimination towards pregnant and parent workers. Yet an up-to-date national review has been absent since this time.

“I was bullied upon my return to work and made to lift heavy kegs and alcohol cases. The stress affected my breastmilk, and I was made to express in the toilet.”

It is important to note that since the 2014 review there have been shifting patterns of workforce composition which are clearly gendered, such as a further increase in women's participation. Yet, women are still 'naturally' expected to take on more care roles and tasks within the home/family and at work, even in countries with more progressive gender equality (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir 2021). This compromises their capacity to complete their work and progress their careers.

In addition, parents in precarious work arrangements are more disadvantaged than those in permanent roles. For example, in Australia, workers are only entitled to Government paid parental leave if they have been working for their employer on a regular and systematic basis for at least 12 months (Equal Opportunity SA 2021). Even if eligible for this leave, Australia has the least generous statutory Paid Parental Leave scheme among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations (Equity Economics 2021) and the fourth most expensive out-of-pocket fees for childcare in the world (Grattan Institute 2020). This issue is exacerbated for Australian women, whose bodily labour during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding can compromise their choices to return to work when desired or necessary (Fitzpatrick et al. in press). Australian men, by contrast, struggle to access paid parental leave schemes to fulfil caring roles that often go against historical assertions of masculinity: a worker and provider for the family rather than emotionally engaged with day-to-day caring tasks and relationalities (Elliott 2016).

Beyond the reductive dichotomy of men and women, the voices of parents whom identify as non-binary or gender-queer have been overlooked in the research literature, especially in terms of their needs and experiences of work-related discrimination. Gender-inclusive studies of pregnant and parent workers are therefore desperately needed and will provide insight into challenges faced by all types of workers and families.

Pregnant and parent workers represent a substantial and growing proportion of the workforce. Obtaining new national evidence will permit (1) pregnant and parent workers' legislative and organisational policies to be properly informed and/or evaluated using national data, (2) stakeholders to gain greater clarity on current issues experienced by these workers, and (3) pregnant and parent workers' voices to be heard and drawn upon to improve their work design. It is intended that our up-to-date National Review provides the much needed data to address these points.





# PROJECT OBJECTIVES

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01

## To understand the key issues at a national level

The National Review presents a clear national picture of the main issues that pregnant and parent workers are experiencing at work. Workplace discrimination is a main focus of this National Review.

02

## To be gender inclusive

The National Review used inclusive language and welcomed pregnant and parent workers of all genders.

03

## To gather rich insights from workers

The National Review provides an opportunity for workers to share their voice on their experiences and to put forward new recommendations. An in-depth investigation of respondents' qualitative responses will be presented in a companion publication.



# METHODOLOGY

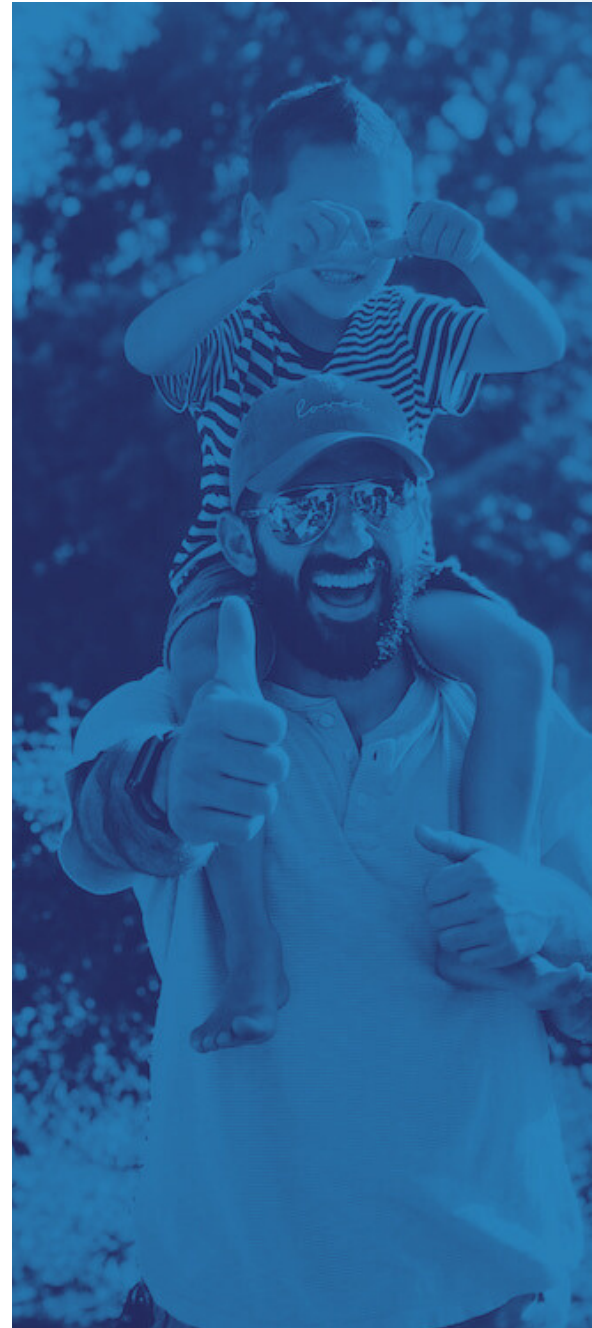
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## Procedure

We constructed a survey that extends the issues and themes presented in the mothers' and fathers' AHRC survey (2014). We sought permission from the AHRC to incorporate some of their key themes, but also added various other open and closed questions (and a novel survey structure) to facilitate a mixed-method inquiry into the topic of work-related discrimination for pregnant and parent workers. The National Review survey was designed to be inclusive of all genders and used gender-inclusive language throughout.

We aimed to collect data from at least 1000 pregnant and parent Australian workers. As stated, respondents of all genders were invited to take part. The survey was able to be completed by persons over 18 years old, living in Australia and either pregnant and at work, on parental leave and/or have returned to work since the birth or adoption of a child within the last 10 years. Both primary and secondary caregivers were able to participate. Due to the psychologically sensitive nature of the issue, we were proactive in providing respondents with relevant contacts for support networks.

Data collection commenced in January 2023 and was finalised in December 2023. Various channels of recruitment were employed to achieve this nationally dispersed sample size. There was a heavy reliance of snowballing and dissemination across various national and state-based industry and agency networks. Recruitment dissemination approaches included printed posters, social media posts, sharing in forums, LinkedIn posts, emailing key contacts who then emailed the study information to members, social media influencers and media stories. To mitigate the risk of bot responses, we embedded bot detection protocols and screening in the survey.



# METHODOLOGY

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## Measures

### ***Discrimination***

A wide range of forms of discrimination were included in the survey, encompassing areas such as working conditions, offensive remarks and employment changes. We undertook an in-depth review of the literature to target all possible types of discrimination. Some questions were adapted from the AHRC 2014 survey. During the drafting stage of the survey, we engaged with various academic and industry experts for feedback to produce a comprehensive survey that presented a full range of discriminatory behaviours. It is important to note that all questions were clearly phrased as being experienced either because of pregnancy, being on parental leave or returning to work after the arrival of a child, rather than happening to occur during this stage. The survey also contained open questions and gathered contextual information relating to discrimination. Once the survey was generated in Qualtrics, a group of external academics were engaged to test and complete the survey and to provide feedback on its operation. The final survey contained items relevant to each stage, with 18 items relating to pregnancy, 16 items for parental leave and 26 items for return-to-work. Items were rated on one of three rating systems (1) 1 – never; 2 – rarely; 3 – sometimes; 4 – very often; and 5 – always; (2) 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree; or (3) 1 – yes or 2 – no. Individual items can be found throughout the results tables below.

### ***Negative Acts***

The Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al. 2009) was used for evaluating workplace bullying exposure during the pregnancy and return-to-work stages. 19 items from the work-related bullying and person-related bullying subscales were used. The scale utilises a five-point rating system to gauge the frequency of negative behaviours experienced within the preceding 6 months (1 – never; 2 – now and then; 3 – monthly; 4 – weekly; and 5 – daily). The statements encompass direct and indirect negative actions indicative of workplace bullying yet refrain from explicit terminology such as "bullying" or "harassment." Cronbach's alpha for the NAQ-R for pregnancy and for return-to-work were both .94, indicating excellent internal reliability.

Discrimination and negative act questions were framed as being **because of** the respondents' pregnancy, parental leave, and return to work as a parent - and not just during these stages.

# METHODOLOGY

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## Statistical Analysis

Overall discrimination was calculated by determining if the respondent gave a response indicating discrimination. This was defined as reporting the following responses: 'Now and Then', 'Monthly', 'Weekly' and 'Daily' responses; 'Sometimes', 'Very Often' and 'Always' responses; 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' responses; and 'Yes' responses). Hence, responses such as 'Never' and 'Rarely' were omitted. In the analysis of **overall discrimination rates**, we excluded questions regarding flexible work arrangements, as even if reverse-coded these questions do not align with the definition of workplace discrimination. However, we provide the results for these two aspects under the relative section i.e. return to work results. We also excluded items relating to breastfeeding due to the fact this statement is not applicable to all respondents and many mothers do not breastfeed their children. In this report, we also describe some of the respondents' qualitative contextual insights surrounding why and when they notified employers of their pregnancy.

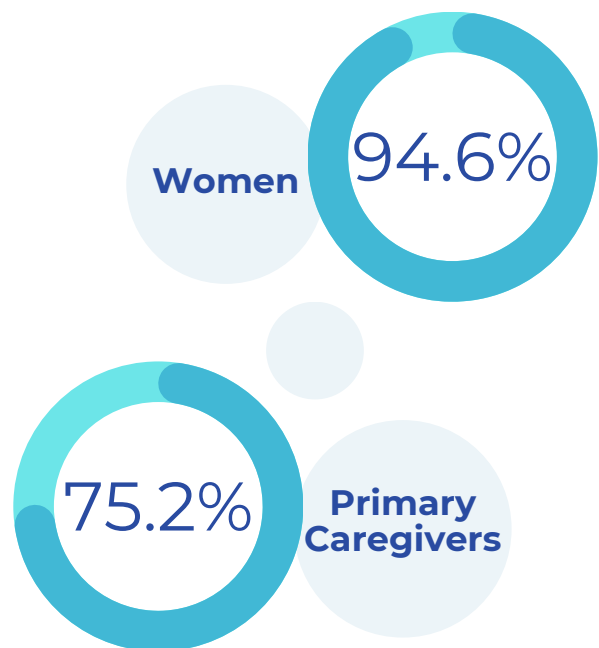


# RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 1225 pregnant and parent workers were recruited, with a final sample of 1048 participants after data cleaning. There were 178 (17%) respondents that were currently pregnant and at work, 246 (23.5%) on parental leave and 624 (59.5%) had returned to work following parental leave (within the last 10 years). A total of 783 respondents completed the pregnancy questions, 722 respondents completed the parental leave questions and 502 completed the return-to-work questions.

Most respondents were the primary caregiver of a child or children (n = 788; 75.2%), with the rest being the secondary caregiver (n = 80; 7.6%). 17.2% did not respond. 5.3% of the sample stated that they cared for a youngest/only child with a chronic illness or disability. 94.6% of respondents identified as female, 4.5% identified as male, .4% identified as non-binary/gender-queer/gender-fluid, .2% identified as 'other' and .3% preferred not to say. Most of the sample were aged between 30-34 years (38.7%), 35-39 (29.8%), 40-44 (14.2%), 25-29 (11.5%), 45 year and older (4.2%) and 18-24 (1.7%).

Respondents were dispersed across all Australian states and territories, comprising New South Wales (26.3%), South Australia (23.3%), Queensland (21.7%), Victoria (18.4%), Western Australia (6.4%), the Australian Capital Territory (1.4%), Tasmania (1.2%) and Northern Territory (1.2%).



State	ABS	Sample
NSW	31.3%	26.3%
Vic	25.6%	18.4%
Qld	20.5%	21.7%
SA	7.0%	23.3%
WA	10.8%	6.4%
Tas	2.2%	1.2%
NT	0.9%	1.2%
ACT	1.8%	1.4%

In terms of comparing to the broader population, South Australian perspectives are somewhat over-represented and Western Australia under-represented (NSW 31.3%, SA 7.0%, QLD 20.5%, VIC 25.6%, WA 10.8%, ACT 1.8%, TAS 2.2% and NT 0.9%). This could be because SA was the location of the study. WA had limited traction, but this national data provides an important starting point for future research.

# RELATIVE LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

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Pregnant and parent workers have long been protected by several legislative policies. All employers should make all reasonable adjustment to the workplace to accommodate pregnancy and should consult with employees during this process (Fair Work Ombudsman 2024). In the context of pregnancy and/or familial responsibilities, workers are protected by policies such as the:

(1) **Sex Discrimination Act**, whereby the AHRC provides information and can address claims of discrimination based on sex;

(2) **State and Territory Anti-Discrimination Laws**, which make it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against employees on various grounds including sex, pregnancy, breastfeeding and family responsibilities (note this law was updated during December 2022 with specific reference to breastfeeding);

(3), the **Fair Work Act** that includes **National Employment Standards**, which delineates leave rights, keeping in touch provisions, transfer to a safe job, or 'no safe job' leave; consultation rights while on parental leave, return-to-work guarantee and right to request flexible work arrangements; and family responsibilities

(4) the **Work Health and Safety Regulatory framework** delineates obligations to ensure that the risks to employee physical and psychological health be managed as much as reasonably practicable.

Beyond the legislative policies, **the AHRC has a practical toolkit** to support carers in the workplace and Fair Work Australia has specific policy documents focusing narrowly on parental leave and flexible work arrangements. In addition, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA 2019) has information that highlights the importance of supporting pregnant and parent workers by providing breastfeeding facilities, leave entitlements, and flexible work in their **Gender Quality Diagnostic tool**.



# OVERALL DISCRIMINATION RATES

N = 1048

We first present an overview of the overall discrimination outcomes experienced by the whole sample.

To calculate overall discrimination across each stage we only included those respondents who completed the entirety of the questions for that stage (e.g. pregnancy). A total of 735 respondents completed all the pregnancy questions, 713 respondents completed all parental leave questions and 453 completed all return-to-work questions. Note for this particular analysis we excluded breastfeeding related questions as not all women breastfeed, as well as the question on flexible work arrangements as this does not necessarily fall under the term discrimination.

Based on the analysis, the group with the highest reported discrimination was the return-to-work sample (91.8%), followed by pregnant workers (89%) and then those on parental leave (84.7%).

**91.8%**  
Return to work

**89.0%**  
Pregnancy

**84.7%**  
Parental leave

“Because of pregnancy I had to take on casual work, as a full time job would not accommodate pregnancy illness.”

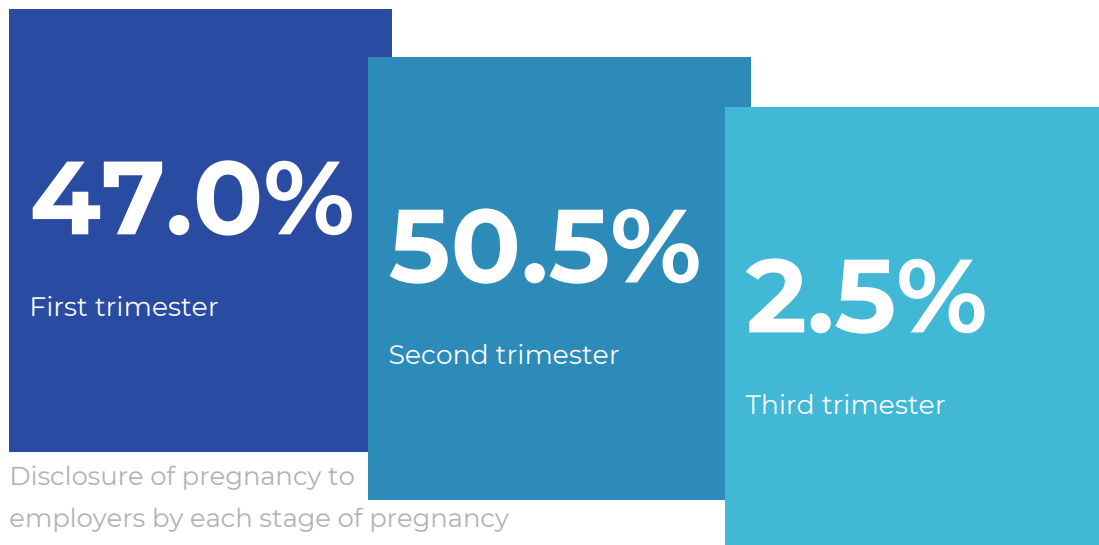




# DISCLOSING PREGNANCY AT WORK

n = 783

A total of 783 respondents completed the pregnancy questions. Most pregnant workers informed their employer of their pregnancy during the second trimester (n = 432; 50.5%), followed by the first trimester (n = 402; 47.0%) and then a smaller proportion in the third trimester (n = 21; 2.5%). Most pregnant workers reported having on-going or permanent work arrangements (n = 656; 76.0%), followed by fixed-term contracts (n = 106; 12.3%), casual or temporary employment (n = 63; 7.3%), 'other' (n = 17; 2.0%) or being self-employed (n = 21; 2.4%).



Through an open text response, respondents provided various reasons—or factors of importance—regarding when they notified their employers. Most workers notified their employer early due to experiencing pregnancy symptoms such as nausea and fatigue that may be apparent, may impact their job, and/or needed support through job redesign. Many stated they were starting to look visibly pregnant and felt a pressure to disclose their pregnancy.

Other respondents felt a responsibility to inform their employer so adequate plans could be made regarding covering future work and organising logistics such as maternity leave. Many other pregnant workers preferred to wait longer to inform employers due to concerns of pregnancy loss and wanting to ensure a viable pregnancy. A small proportion of respondents stated that they felt positively motivated, comfortable, and supported by managers enough to notify them early in the pregnancy.

“I had changed roles and did not want to say anything earlier as I was concerned it may have prevented me from securing the role.”

# PREGNANCY, WORK CONDITIONS & DISCRIMINATION

n = 783

**32.7%**

Received no information about their upcoming leave entitlements

**21.2%**

Did not receive training that they would have otherwise received

**25.4%**

Felt as though they needed to hide their pregnant belly

”

**“I was told I wouldn't want to return to work as I would be “clucky”. My career was severely impacted by my pregnancy, and I was forced to give up my team leader role.”**

## QUESTION

## PERCENT AGREE

Received no information about upcoming leave entitlements	32.7
Felt as though they needed to hide their pregnant belly	25.4
Job was altered against wishes	21.6
Were unsuccessful in gaining a promotion they thought they had earned	21.4
Did not received training that they would have otherwise received	21.2
Received less salary and/or bonuses or less of a pay rise and/or bonus than their colleagues	17.0
Received negative or offensive remarks from management regarding their pregnancy	16.6
Received negative or offensive remarks about job performance	14.4
Were made to work in unsafe conditions	14.1
Received negative or offensive remarks from peers about their pregnancy	12.3
Not granted leave for medical appointments for pregnancy or pregnancy-related illness	11.8
Were not given an appropriate work uniform	9.9
Treated so badly they felt they had to leave	9.4
Were made redundant and/or restructured out of a job	8.6
Did not have their contract renewed	8.5
Were threatened with redundancy or termination of employment	7.4
Were denied toilet breaks as needed	5.9
Had their employment terminated	4.2

# NEGATIVE ACTS EXPERIENCED DURING PREGNANCY

n = 783



**“We have poor systems for pregnancy in the workplace. Often companies have breastfeeding policies, but nothing for pregnancy. This leaves people open to project their opinion or experience on pregnant people, impacting their experience and often leads to discrimination.”**

## QUESTION

## PERCENT AGREE

Were exposed to an unmanageable workload	66.5
Had their opinions ignored	53.9
Were given tasks with unreasonable deadlines	48.5
Were ordered to do work below their level of competence	45.7
Were ignored or excluded	39.0
Had someone withhold information which affected their performance	37.5
Had excessive monitoring of their work	35.9
Had key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	35.5
Were pressured not to claim something that they were entitled to (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlements etc.)	34.7
Had insulting or offensive remarks made about their person, attitudes or private life	26.7
Were ignored or faced a hostile reaction when they approached	25.3
Had rumours or gossip spread about them	24.4
Experienced repeated reminders of errors or mistakes	24.3
Received hints or signals from others that they should quit their job	23.3
Were humiliated or ridiculed in connection with their work	20.2
Received persistent criticism of errors or mistakes	19.5
Had allegations made against them	15.9
Were the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm	14.1
Had practical jokes carried out by people they didn't get along with	12.7



# EXPERIENCES DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

n = 722

A total of 722 respondents completed the parental leave questions. 95.8% of the sample who answered the parental leave section described taking parental leave or other leave to care for their only/youngest child around the time of their child's arrival. Of the respondents who took leave, most took between 6-12 months leave (n = 376; 50.0%), followed by more than 12 months (n = 191; 25.4%), followed by 3-6 months leave (n = 143; 19.0%) and then less than 3 months (n = 42; 5.6%). 4.2% reported having no leave.

540 (71.7%) of the relevant sample had access to other leave apart from Government Paid Parental leave. Most respondents stated that their partner had access to parental leave (n = 453; 60.2%) but 264 (35.1%) did not and 36 respondents (4.8%) answered that the question was not applicable to them. The majority of respondents (n = 561; 74.5%) would have liked to have taken additional leave to care for their child, while n = 192 (25.5%) responded that they did not.

**71.7%**

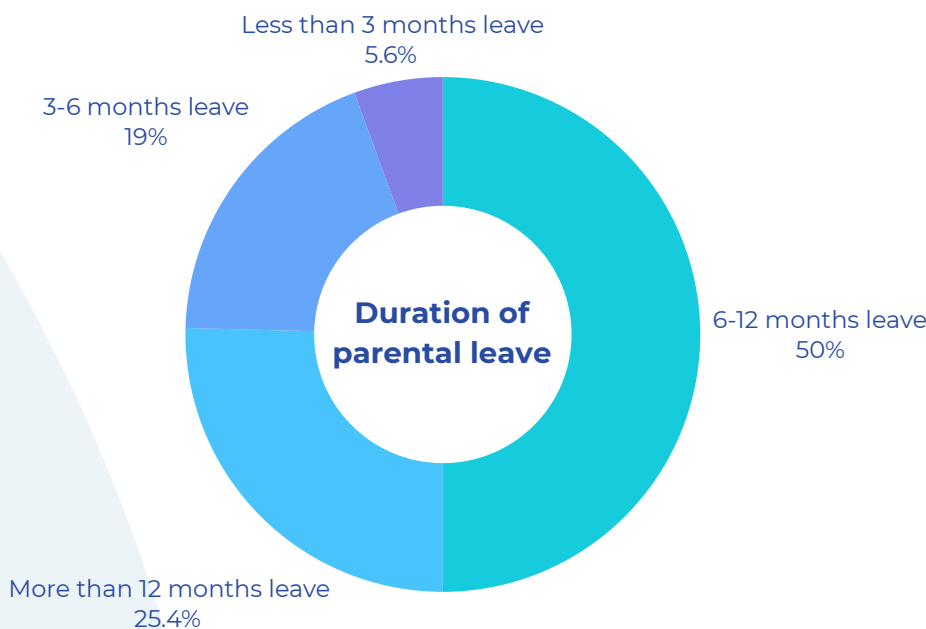
Had access to other leave apart from Government Paid Parental Leave

**35.1%**

Had partners who did not have access to parental leave

**74.5%**

Would have liked to have taken additional leave to care for their child



# EXPERIENCES DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

n = 722

**43.8%**

Missed out on training opportunities and/or opportunities for promotion

**21.3%**

Were pressured to begin or finish their leave earlier or later than they wanted

**50.8%**

Were not informed about changes in the workplace that could affect them

**“My employer (and many others) find it hard to figure out the 'keep in touch' days which are available through the government paid parental leave. It would have been nice to be able to easily access these and attend a day here and there during my unpaid portion of leave.”**

## QUESTION

## PERCENT AGREE

Were not informed by their employer about changes in the workplace that could impact them	50.8
Were not included in communication about their workplace or celebrations	46.9
Missed out on training opportunities and/or opportunities for promotion	43.8
Had a partner that did not have access to or was denied access to flexible work arrangements	38.8
Did not receive a pay rise or bonus, or received a lesser pay rise or bonus than their peers at work	29.7
Had their tasks or job altered against their wishes	26.9
Had an employer who was unsupportive towards them during parental leave	22.2
Received negative/offensive remarks from management because they requested/took leave to care for their child	21.9
Had their work role replaced permanently by another employee	21.5
Had their employer pressure them to begin or finish their parental leave earlier or later than they wanted	21.3
Received negative/offensive remarks from their peers because they requested/took leave to care for their child	16.4
Were made redundant/or restructured out of a job	9.3
Did not receive leave that they were entitled to	9.0
Were threatened with redundancy/termination of their employment	8.0
Did not have their contract renewed	7.8
Had their employment terminated	5.3

# 22.4%

of parent workers were made redundant, restructured out of a job, did not have their contract renewed, or had their employment terminated





# RETURNING TO WORK, WORK CONDITIONS & DISCRIMINATION

n = 502

## 43.9%

Received negative comments regarding working part-time or requiring flexible work hours

## 45.1%

Provided with less opportunities for career advancement and/or promotion

“I feel like I miss opportunities because I’m ‘just a Mum’, only work four days a week or might get pregnant again.”

## 26.9%

Not provided with appropriate breastfeeding or expressing facilities

A total of 502 respondents completed the return-to-work questions. When returning to work following the birth of their child, most respondents had a work arrangement that was on-going or permanent (n = 398; 75.0%), a fixed-term contract (n = 61; 11.5%), casual or temporary (n = 45; 8.5%), self-employed (n = 16; 3.0%), or another arrangement (n = 11; 2.1%). There were 436 (82.7%) respondents that returned to the same employer after the arrival of their child.

### QUESTION

### PERCENT AGREE

Were still expected to meet deadlines if they were sick or their child/children were sick	59.0
Were provided with less opportunities for career advancement and/or promotion	45.1
Received no information about their return-to-work entitlements	44.6
Received negative/offensive remarks regarding working part-time/requiring flexible work hours	43.9
Were given less opportunity/recognition because they returned part time	42.6
Received negative/offensive remarks regarding being seen as a less committed employee	40.5
Received negative/offensive remarks regarding requiring time off to care for a sick child	40.0
Returned to a job with lower status/less responsibility	34.0
Were provided with less opportunities to access training	30.9
Received negative/offensive remarks about their job performance	19.4
Received negative/offensive remarks regarding breastfeeding or expressing milk	17.4

# RETURNING TO WORK, WORK CONDITIONS & DISCRIMINATION

n = 502

**34.0%**

Returned to a job with lower status or less responsibility

**30.6%**

Had their tasks or job altered against their wishes

**30.9%**

Were provided with less opportunities to access training

**“I had to fight to remain employed just after returning to work, despite being an experienced, hard-working and previously valued employee.”**

## QUESTION

## PERCENT AGREE

Had access to flexible work arrangements	59.5
Were encouraged to engage with flexible work arrangements	37.1
Had their tasks/job altered against their wishes	30.6
Were not provided with appropriate breastfeeding/expressing facilities	26.9
Received less salary and/or bonuses, or received a lesser pay rise or bonus than their peers at work	23.0
Had an unsuccessful request for flexible hours/working from home	22.3
Had their role permanently replaced by another colleague	19.4
Were treated so badly that they felt that they had to leave	14.9
Had their hours altered against their wishes	13.0
Had unsuccessful requests for leave due to illness or problems with their baby or child	8.7
Were made redundant and/or restructured out of a job	7.7
Were threatened with redundancy or termination of their employment	6.8
Did not have their contract renewed	5.8
Were made casual	3.9
Had their employment terminated	3.5

# NEGATIVE ACTS WHEN RETURNING TO WORK

n = 502



## QUESTION

## PERCENT AGREE

Were exposed to an unmanageable workload	64.8
Had their opinions ignored	59.8
Were given tasks with unreasonable deadlines	58.3
Were ordered to do work below their level of competence	52.4
Had someone withhold information which affects their performance	49.4
Were ignored or excluded	43.4
Experienced excessive monitoring of their work	41.2
Were pressured not to claim something that they were entitled to (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlements etc.)	37.7
Had key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	37.7
Were ignored or faced a hostile reaction when they approached	27.9
Received hints or signals from others that they should quit their job	25.5
Received repeated reminders of errors or mistakes	24.1
Had insulting or offensive remarks made about their person, attitudes or private life	23.1
Had rumours or gossip spread about them	21.2
Were humiliated or ridiculed in connection with their work	20.7
Received persistent criticism of errors or mistakes	20.7
Had allegations made against them	14.9
Were the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm	12.2
Had practical jokes carried out by people they don't get along with	10.2



# CALL TO ACTION

This National Review foregrounds the extensive nature of work-related discrimination, disadvantage, and bias for pregnant and parent workers in Australia. Our findings outline that parents returning to work reported the highest levels of discrimination, closely followed by pregnant workers and then those on parental leave. There are clear issues regarding inappropriate workload allocation and poor social treatment (e.g., having opinions ignored and career progression opportunities stalled). Aspects such as not receiving information regarding leave entitlements and not receiving appropriate breastfeeding facilities are in direct opposition with Australian law. It is apparent that whilst legislation exists to protect pregnant (and to a lesser extent parent workers), this National Review indicates these principles are not being enacted within organisations.

The National Review highlights significant areas for improvement. For instance, pregnant workers experienced prejudice and felt as though they need to hide their changing body (25.4%); had work tasks changed without consultation (21.6%); and a third did not receive information about leave entitlements (32.7%). Employers have a clear role to play in enacting a duty of care – particularly management and human resources. Online guidance already exists, suggesting that perhaps external auditing of these processes is required. We propose having a public-facing Fair Work Ombudsman that focuses specifically on pregnant and parent workers.

Given evidence of extreme national discrimination towards these workers—most of whom identified as women—there needs to be public attention directed towards this issue such as public campaigns outlining what constitutes discriminatory actions or inadequate work conditions for pregnant and parent workers.

**“I was denied permission to wear tights and a belly support while pregnant, despite the fact I was on my feet and had hip pain while working.”**

An overhaul in Australian workplace culture through large-scale government intervention and education, is clearly needed to address the serious issues such as being provided with less opportunities, recognition, and inappropriate breastfeeding facilities. It is imperative to use the evidence garnered from this national review to make progress in this space and create more equal, fair, and healthy workplaces for all working Australians.

The significance of these issues evidenced by our research suggests an annual National Review should be established to track changes. Targeting participation from pregnant and parent workers identifying as male and gender-diverse will strengthen understandings of how policy could support opportunities for caring roles for people of all genders.

Future research and practice should improve the translation of national policy (e.g., legislation) into effective workplace practices that promote greater social fairness for pregnant and parent workers. There are clear gaps in action that have been illuminated by this review.

**“I had to involve my union because my employer was going to get rid of me.”**

# PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Consultation should occur between employers and employees at each stage. Consultation may include understanding pregnancy-related needs, discussing access to 'keep in touch days' during parental leave, as well as regarding any work role changes when returning to work.
- ▶ There should be appropriate space for breastfeeding or expressing milk if needed (e.g., locked door, comfortable chair, breastmilk storage facilities).
- ▶ Management and HR should foster a workplace culture that is inclusive and does not tolerate disrespect or negative acts.
- ▶ Organisational policies should move away from gendered language and uphold greater gender equality such as through providing partner's parental leave and/or flexible work arrangements.
- ▶ Training and career progression opportunities should be available to all regardless of the work arrangement.
- ▶ There needs to be ergonomic role adjustments to minimise risk of harm.
- ▶ There must be greater mandatory regulation of employers to ensure they are meeting their legal requirements.



## Who can help?

The Australian Human Rights Commission

Transitioning Well

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency

Fair Work Ombudsman

Your union & union women's committees

“Senior management have a lot of good things written down in policy, but reality is very different.”

“During pregnancy my boss told me pregnancy was not an illness when I requested time off with severe nausea.”

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