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HOW CAN EMPLOYERS SUPPORT NEW MOTHERS? | Aparna Sharma | Consulting Editor | The People Management



The Problems

Balancing work with parenting duties can be a serious struggle. For new mums, making the transition back to work after maternity leave can be a difficult process. To understand more about the struggles working mothers face during this time, and how businesses can best support them, I found a 2019 survey of 1,000 mothers from across the world with children under 16 about their experiences on returning to work. The results highlight common major problems, as well as giving insight on how they might be solved.

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Research highlights that difficulties returning to work after maternity leave are commonplace. 9 in 10 women (88%) face issues with their work place during this transition. Among the most significant found by the survey are:

- 54% struggled to balance their time between childcare and work
- Over half (52%) felt guilty for spending so much time away from their children
- One-third (33%) struggled to cover childcare costs
- One in ten (12%) suffered from mental health issues related to their return to work

Consequences of these issues are significant, both for the mothers themselves and the businesses they work for. As a result of struggles returning to work after maternity leave, half of mums (49%) reduce their working hours, and a further one in five (19%) leave their employment altogether. This represents a high turnover of experienced staff, which could be reduced should organizations offer more support to employees.

Infact, in India lack of workplace support from organisations is a major reason for women to drop off from the workforce besides family, societal & personal reasons.

How to Help:

1. Flexible Working

At times, parenting can be unpredictable. Sickness bugs, sports days, and school plays all come as part of the package, and it's not always possible for mums and dads to plan ahead for these events.

Trying to make it to all events, or having to miss out, can cause stress for working parents. Flexible working is one way to alleviate this pressure. Flexitime allows working mums to leave earlier to get to that parents' evening on time and come in a bit earlier or work through lunch to make the time up. This allows working parents to get where they need to be, without impacting on their productivity at work.

2. Remote Working

Spending time away from home and having to be in the office 9 to 5, on top of commuting time, can be a huge demand for parents with young children. If you're able to in your business, consider assigning staff a

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proportion of hours they can work from home each week. This will mean staff will be onsite for all necessary meetings and contact time, but otherwise, are able to fit their work responsibilities around other demands.

For example, it may be helpful for parents to work in the morning, then head home in the afternoon and complete the remainder of their hours after their child's bedtime. Again, this allows more freedom for your workers to balance work responsibilities with seeing more of their children, which should make them feel happier in the office.

3. Onsite Creches

This handy workplace benefit is still not widely seen in the UK, India etc. They are worth considering, however, for the incredible convenience, they offer staff. Having a creche on-site means parents aren't missing out on time with their kids because of their commute. It also means they are on hand if a child becomes ill.

Knowing their children are nearby and reachable can be incredibly reassuring to new parents, allowing them to focus more on their work and the task at hand. The 1st two solutions have been working well due to current work from home situation due to the pandemic.

The above steps could really have a significant impact on the lives of mums and dads who work for your company. Have a realistic discussion with your management team about which of these can feasibly be introduced in your organization and start planning how to do this. The initial investment should pay dividends in the increase in staff satisfaction and retention.

Diversity & Inclusion team across organisations around the world are consciously working hard to ensure integration of new mothers back into the mainstream in their organisations. This is a step to help plug the leak in the talent pipeline.

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