

# Flexibility at work key to helping women maintain careers after childbirth

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Flexibility in the workplace is the key to helping women maintain their career trajectory after childbirth, new research by the University of Kent

has shown.

Looking at the UK, the study highlights that it is 'the ability to take advantage of the opportunity to work flexibly that is most useful' in preventing women from dropping out of the [labour market](#) after having their first [child](#).

The research, led by Dr Heejung Chung, of the University's School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, found that women who were able to use flexitime were only half as likely to reduce their hours after the birth of their child.

This effect was especially the case for women who used flexitime prior to the birth of their child as well as after, the researchers found.

The researchers observed that more than half of women in their study sample reduced their working hours after the birth of their child, while less than a quarter of women who were able to use flexitime reduced their hours.

The study showed that it is the use of flexitime - rather than perceived access to it - that matters most. The researchers found that 'for mothers with new-borns, perceived access to flexitime in itself may not be enough to tackle the work-life balance demands they are faced with. The flexibility needs to be enacted to really make a difference'.

The research will have implications for the debate over the UK's gender pay gap, say the authors. 'Flexible working may help alleviate some of the negative consequences of the [motherhood penalty](#), by allowing mothers to remain in human-capital-intensive jobs, which can help diminish the [gender wage gap](#)'.

Further, allowing mothers to maintain their employment status 'will have

major implications for retaining human capital for companies and societies as a whole,' the authors conclude.

Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexitime and teleworking (Heejung Chung and Mariska van der Horst) is published in the journal *Human Relations*. See: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0018726717713828>

**More information:** Heejung Chung et al, Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexitime and teleworking, *Human Relations* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/0018726717713828](https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726717713828)

Provided by University of Kent

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