

# Workplace discrimination is rife for pregnant women and working parents, finds Australian study

July 31 2023

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A new study shows that 20 years after it was outlawed in Australia, workplace discrimination is still rife for pregnant women, especially those returning to work after maternity leave.

Among the most concerning findings from a University of South Australia study is the revelation that more than 60% of new mothers returning to work say their opinions are often ignored, they feel excluded, and are given unmanageable workloads.

A quarter of women surveyed said their workplace did not provide appropriate breastfeeding facilities and almost one in five were refused requests to work flexible hours or from home.

The study, led by UniSA researcher Dr. Rachael Potter, is the first national review of pregnant and working parents since 2014, and shows that scant progress has been made in the intervening years.

More than 550 women and new caregivers have been surveyed to date, and researchers are seeking more participants.

"The results we have collected so far are concerning," Dr. Potter says. "Our study not only highlights existing discrimination faced by [pregnant women](#) and new parents returning to work, but also offers valuable insights into the areas that require improvement."

Other key findings include:

- 30% of pregnant women received no information about their upcoming leave entitlements, which is a [legal requirement](#) in workplaces.
- 23% of women said they felt they needed to hide their pregnant belly at work.
- While on leave, 22% had their tasks or job altered against their wishes, and 73% would have liked to take more [maternity leave](#) to care for their child.
- 38% reported negative or offensive remarks for taking time off

work to care for a sick child.

- 13% were treated so badly they had no option but to resign

"Less common but just as shocking were reports from some women who were made redundant, their contracts not renewed, and some who were denied toilet breaks when pregnant and not granted leave for medical appointments," Dr. Potter says.

Survey respondents provided the following responses:

- "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."
- "I was bullied upon my return and made to lift heavy kegs and alcohol cases without any ease. The [stress](#) affected my breastmilk, and I was made to express in the toilet."
- "I was told my position was no longer available and that I could move to a different store which required one hour travel time each way."
- "I had to fight to remain employed just after returning to work, despite being an experienced, hard-working, and previously valued employee."

Dr. Potter is seeking more participants for the survey that sheds light on the challenges faced not only by pregnant women and those returning to work, but also from new fathers and parents.

"The prime objective of this study is to identify where the issues are and use the evidence to improve work practices, ideally through stricter government policies and legislation," Dr. Potter says.

**More information:** Study: [National Study on Parents' Work](#)

[Conditions: Pregnancy, Leave and Return to Work](#)

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Workplace discrimination is rife for pregnant women and working parents, finds Australian study (2023, July 31) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-07-workplace-discrimination-rife-pregnant-women.html>

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