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# **Experiences of women returning to work after maternity leave**

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

**Masters in Applied Psychology in Organisational Psychology**

at

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### **Abstract**

With an increase in the number of women in the workforce, numerous studies have looked at the importance of parental leave and benefits of cash, predictors of postpartum depression, and how they affect women, handling work-family conflict, family friendly policies and many more. Of particular interest for many working women is research looking at working mothers and the issues that have an impact on mothers. Longer duration of leave has been shown to have numerous physical and mental health benefits for the mother and the child, such as mother-infant attachment. Similarly, workplace support and work-life balance were found beneficial for working mothers. This study investigates factors such as work-life balance, social support, length of maternity leave and mental health. It explores both the positive and negative impacts these factors have on mothers and their babies once mothers return to work. The study used a qualitative methodology, interviewing 11 working mothers. The participants had returned to work within the last three years, some as recent as four weeks, at the time of the interview. Participants had at least one child under the age of four. The sample of working mothers included most of the mothers working full-time, some working part-time and one mother working as self-employed. Template analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts. Analysis revealed that working mothers returned to work for myriad reasons after having been on government aided maternity leave. Work-life balance policies like reduced hours and returning part-time initially for some mothers were found along with an understanding supervisor and supportive colleagues. In conclusion, working mothers desired longer leave citing their need to bond with the baby as one of the reason. Mothers had satisfactory support from family, friends and workplace. In addition to the government mandated parental leave policies, working mothers found a lack of information on any additional policies offered by their organizations and preferred more communication on them.

## MOTHERS RETURNING TO WORK

**Dedication**

For my family, who inspired and encouraged me at every step to work hard.

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## MOTHERS RETURNING TO WORK

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

#### **Research Aims**

Mothers returning to work after maternity leave experience a new chapter in their life with the support of their partner and family. The primary aim of the present study is to explore how motherhood influenced the working life experiences of women returning to work after maternity leave. This study aims to gain an insight into the lives of mothers and their struggles with at least one child under the age of four. The study also aims to understand their difficulties encountered.

#### **Thesis Outline**

Chapter One presents an introduction with the background of this topic. The introduction deals with why this topic is important in recent times. Also it presents statistics from past years with respect to the number of women in the workplace.

Chapter Two presents a review of literature with respect to the four main areas covered in this study-work-life balance, social support, duration of the maternity leave and psychological well-being.

Chapter Three presents the methodology used in this study. Individual interviews were used to gather data about women's experiences. I provide a table with the description of the women interviewed and provide a detailed explanation about the procedure used to schedule interviews, etc.

Chapter Four presents the findings and discussion of this research. This chapter provides an analysis of the themes that appeared in the interviews and discusses the analysis in relation to the literature review.

Chapter Five presents a conclusion to the study and highlights key conclusions with respect to the research question. In addition, limitations of this study are discussed and guidelines for future research are also discussed. Also recommendations for possible better policies and better facilities for mothers returning to work are highlighted in this chapter.

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### **Rationale**

This research will give us an insight into the lives of new mothers who have returned to the workforce within the last three years and will highlight what affects women after an addition to the family that presumably brings about a change in their work in addition to their personal life. Research on issues like length of the maternity leave, work-life balance, and social support for new mothers highlights the mothers' maternal health (Chatterji & Markowitz, 2004, Hyde, Klein, Essex & Clark, 1995). Overall these topics throw light on the new mothers' experiences after return to work.

Length of maternity leave has benefits for mothers, according to some studies. Chatterji and Markowitz (2004) claim the length of leave has positive or negative effects on maternal and infant health and well-being and postpartum health. The negative effects of inadequate leave include poor mental health for mothers and a risk of infections, gastrointestinal problems and type 1 and 2 diabetes. With respect to mothers' health, Chatterji & Markowitz (2004) found that new employed mothers were more prone to "respiratory infections, breast symptoms, and gynaecologic problems" (p.5). Parfitt and Ayers (2014) found that some of the negative effects of new parenthood include anxiety and depression. Milgrom et al. (2008) identified numerous variables such as socio-economic factors, biological factors, psychiatric factors, social support and stressful life events as symptoms of postnatal depression. According to Parfitt and Ayers (2014) anxiety disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), panic and obsessive compulsive disorder are common for women during the transition as a new parent. There is evidence that anxiety disorders were more predominant, for women, during and after pregnancy than depression (Brockington, Macdonald & Wainscott, 2006). They also found that most of the mothers with psychiatric problems suffered from at least two of the disorders like "depression, anxiety, PTSD, Obsessive-compulsive Disorder (OCD)" (p.4).

Longer maternity leave is essential for a smooth and easy transition for the mothers into the workplace. Physical and psychological transitions could be associated to new parenthood. The positive effects of longer paid leave could potentially be useful and instrumental for maternal health. The benefits could be

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“physical recovery from childbirth, depression or postpartum blues, changes in marital relationships and role identities, and infant health problems”

(Brockington, Macdonald & Wainscott, 2006, p.3).

The duration of maternity leave has an impact on the transition from being a fulltime mother to a fulltime working mother. There are various reasons why some mothers choose to return to the workforce. Mothers in this study have mentioned some of the reasons for their return to work in the findings. In order to encourage mothers to return to the workforce after maternity leave family friendly policies and practices must be encouraged by organisations. Beauregard and Henry (2009) state that organisational policies not only retain staff but improve organisational performance. Providing work-life balance policies may contribute to lower costs for the organisation by providing lower salaries for the employees in exchange for the utilisation of these practices. In addition to policies mothers also require support from family and workplace to transition into work and balance motherhood. Perceived supervisor support and family support is instrumental to alleviate work-life conflict. These topics are further explored in detail in the next chapter.

## Background

Women are increasingly returning to work after childbirth. Participation of women in workforce has increased globally and remained steady at 52% for two decades between 1990 and 2010, according to the United Nations (The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics, 2010). To understand the change in pattern for women in paid employment, it is important to view the increase in figures as a worldwide trend, especially in New Zealand.

According to Houston and Marks (2003) the participation rate of women with pre-school children between 1988 and 1998 went up significantly from 45% to 55%. Around the same time, according to Houston and Marks (2003), it was common for working women with preschool children to work part-time. Approximately 65% of such women worked part-time. Wilkinson (2008) stated that participation of women in NZ has increased in the workforce in the last decade. According to Ravenswood and Kennedy (2012) due to the introduction of

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Acts like Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act in 1980, Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act in 1987 and Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Act, patterns of women entering paid employment changed. In the last 50 years, employment rate for women increased from 37% to 50% between 1967 and 1982. This rate increased by only 5% till 2001. On the other hand, in dual income households with children under 5, the rate of change increased from 38% to 50% in 2001. Evidently the number of hours couples worked, with dependent children where at least one parent worked long hours also increased from 34.2% in 1981 to 44.3% in 2001. However, according to Flynn and Harris (2015) participation of women in New Zealand workforce between the ages of 25-49 has increased from 54.5% in June 1994 to 63.3% in June 2014. The participation rate of partnered mothers increased by 7.8 percentage points. However while comparing New Zealand with other OECD countries Johnston (2005) reported that women between 25-34 years of age participated the least in NZ. New Zealand was ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> out of 24 OECD countries in the participation rates of women between 25-29 and 30-34 years of age. As of June 2016, according to the Ministry for Women, participation of women in the labour force has increased by more than 50% since 1986 and is above the OECD average. According to the Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) (March 2016 quarter), more parents opt to work rather than stay at home to look after the children. In February 2017, it was reported that employment for women of working age in New Zealand hit a new record with 65.2% either in employment or looking for jobs (“Kiwi women in workforce hits new record,” 2017).

These statistics demonstrate that women are increasingly choosing to work after childbirth as women in the workforce have steadily increased. For years, as the statistics suggest, number of women with children in the workforce have increased. Women, as Baxter (2008) reports, return to work due to financial necessity. Women are employed as family workers 20 percentage more than men and are more likely to be employed in part time employment. On one hand this could be compatible with better work-life balance. On the other hand part time jobs provide low hourly wages, low job security and less opportunities for women to progress in their job roles (World’s Women, 2015). The following chapter

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discusses the main issues explored in the research that possibly affect working mothers.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

This chapter reviews literature with respect to duration of maternity leave, work-life balance, organisational, familial support, support from community services and the mothers' psychological wellbeing. It is imperative to look into each of the above mentioned factors to see how these factors may affect women's experiences in returning to work. These factors possibly influence the mothers' desire and readiness to return to work.

Factors explored in this research affecting women's experiences of returning to work after maternity leave:

1. Importance and benefits of longer maternity leave
2. Work-life balance practices
3. Social support from family and at the workplace
4. Mental health esp. postnatal depression

### **Maternity leave**

Satisfaction with the duration of maternity leave influences a mother's decision to come back to work. Employer offered paid or unpaid leave for full-time working women is an incentive to return to the same organization.

Parental leave policies demonstrate support for new mothers to return to work. For example, Berger and Waldfogel (2004) have stated that women in USA return to work quicker than their peers in other countries, that is, soon after 12 weeks. Berger and Waldfogel (2004) found that "the average length of maternity leave in 19 OECD countries is 10 months, whereas the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 in the USA provides less than 3 months" (p.333). According to Guendelman, Goodman, Kharrazi and Lahiff (2014), most women returned to work within 12 weeks of giving birth due to financial constraints. A country's maternity leave policy influences working mothers' desire to return to work after the conclusion of duration of leave.

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New Zealand amended the Paid Parental leave Act in 2002. The Act proposed 14 weeks of paid parental leave for mothers. From April 2016, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment in New Zealand changed the Act from 14 weeks to 18 weeks of paid parental leave. The Parental Leave and Employment Protection Amendment Bill (No 2) extends to non-standard and primary carers, that is, casual, temporary and grandparents or anyone who is taking care of the child instead of the parents full-time. This is a beneficial policy because this enables parents especially new mothers to go back to work if they desire to do so with the types of social support available while adequately having had time to recover from any pregnancy complications and to care and bond with the newborn.

In New Zealand, from April 2016 Employment NZ changed the parental leave laws. Women who have been working for the same employer for “at least an average of 10 hours a week in the 12 months immediately before the arrival of the child” (Employment New Zealand, 2016) are eligible for 52 weeks of extended leave including the 18 weeks of paid leave. Another law states that “up to 26 weeks of extended leave available if worked for an average of 10 hours a week in the six months immediately before the arrival of the child”. If employees are not eligible for the leave because they are new at the organization they can get “parental leave payments (i.e. they have been employed at least 10 hours a week for any 26 weeks of the 52 weeks just before the child’s arrival)”.

Currently, part-time or fixed term contract employees are not eligible for paid maternity leave. Since 2015 Shared Parental Bill in NZ allows mothers, fathers, partners and adopters to plan how they would choose to share the time off of work after childbirth. This is useful because it provides flexibility in sharing the family leave (Employment New Zealand, 2015). Based on these policies, Woolnough and Redshaw (2016) state that women decide whether to come back to work before returning to work.

Due to financial strain and inadequate instrumental social support women may prefer to return to work earlier than the available duration of the parental leave. The primary concerns involved, over the years, for the discussion on parental leave policy are “health protection for mothers in paid work, equal

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opportunities, gender equity at home, access to adequate antenatal and birthing care” (Callister & Galtry, 2006, p.38).

Over the years various issues have been debated in the government leading to the introduction of paid leave in New Zealand. Callister and Galtry (2006) explain that it is necessary that taxpayers provide paid leave because of the societal benefits it offers. The benefits include promoting equal opportunities between men and women so that women can hold their position during child-bearing, progress in economic performance, promoting importance of motherhood and fatherhood and better use of human resources because of retaining women workers and supporting parents to work under less strain.

### *Benefits of longer maternity leave and drawbacks of insufficient leave*

An ideal length of leave is essential for mothers to recover from any complications they may have had from childbirth. Research has found a positive link between the duration of maternity leave and mother’s physical and mental health. Barnes (2013) reasons that transition to motherhood is a complex subject to research because it involves a change in family roles.

Several studies have reported the benefits of longer leave. Not many studies have focused on the relationship between maternity leave and the physical health of mothers. Chatterji and Markowitz (2004) report that it takes about six weeks after childbirth for women’s reproductive organs to go back to their pre-pregnant state. Working mothers who return prematurely after childbirth are more likely to experience “respiratory symptoms, breast symptoms and gynaecologic problems” (Chatterji & Markowitz, 2004, p.5). Most women during this period are known to suffer slight physical discomfort such as “fatigue, back or neck pain, respiratory symptoms, headaches, breast soreness, delivery related complications, constipation, and sexual concerns” (p. 377). The long maternity leave period can provide the necessary healing time for mothers physically and psychologically. According to Dagher, McGovern and Dawd (2014) taking maternity leave after childbirth helps mothers recover from “pregnancy, labour, delivery” (p.405) emotionally and physically. Longer maternity leave gives the mother more time to recover and arrange for alternative child care (Hyde, Klein & Essex, 1995).



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On the clinical side, according to Dagher et al. (2014), the DSM-IV states that within four weeks of childbirth it is likely that mothers may develop postpartum depression. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (DSM-IV) is a manual published by the American Psychiatric Association that covers all mental health disorders for children and adults (Heffner, 2017). Dagher et al. (2014) found that the first three months, especially, pose a high risk for postpartum depression for the mother. A longer leave duration of 26 weeks was associated with reduced risk of postpartum depression for some working women after childbirth. Goodman (2004) states that between three and six months postpartum depression may develop and if left untreated it may last beyond the first year of childbirth. Taking maternity leave of six months or more after childbirth reduced the risk of postpartum depression. Aitken, Garrett, Hewitt and Keogh (2015) noted that maternity leave helps mothers bond with their child and adjust to the new role of motherhood while also having a secure paid employment to go back to at the end of the leave.

Length of leave is also important for babies because some mothers may breastfeed during their leave. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends breastfeeding for at least the babies' first six months. This, according to Strang and Broeks (2016) promotes healthy growth and development and nourishment for the babies' brain growth. Returning to work early might prevent breastfeeding and have a negative impact on the babies' health. Hence WHO (2011) recommends to encourage breastfeeding, 26 weeks, which is 6 months, of paid maternity leave should be legislated. Strang and Broeks (2016) report the numerous benefits of breastfeeding for infants. Infants who were breastfed for at least three months of their age had reduced risk of "suffering gastrointestinal problems, various types of infections, obesity and Type 1 and 2 diabetes, among other reduced risks" (p.10). Also in another study by Kramer and Kakuma (2002) found that in developed and developing countries infants breastfed for at least six months had reduced risk of gastrointestinal infections as compared to infants who were mix-breastfed from age 3 or 4. Van Rossum, Buchner and Hoekstra (2006) (as cited in Strang and Broeks, 2016) supported this by concluding that there was better advantage in exclusively breastfeeding for six months. Some long term benefits of breastfeeding reported in the research are reduced risk of being

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overweight in the later stages of life (Horta, Bernardo, Bahl, Martines & Victora, 2007). Total blood cholesterol level was also found to be reduced in the later stages of life for infants who were breastfed. (Owen, Whincup, Odoki, Gilg & Cook, 2002)

Returning to work after childbirth is a new situation with difficulties and the unfamiliarity causes stress. It can be presumed that even though returning to the same environment is an advantage, it is stressful as the work environment may have changed and new rules, technology, colleagues or style of work may have been introduced inducing unfamiliarity in a situation. Longer leave has benefits for organizations trying to form a healthier workforce with women being an important part of the workforce. Longer maternity leave provides room for the mother to make a smooth transition into motherhood while being in paid employment

Cooklin, Rowe and Fisher (2011) report another aspect of maternity leave is mother-infant attachment. They state that the emotional bond between mother and infant is critical to the mother's psychological wellbeing. Leaving the infant is seen as an emotional separation anxiety and the mothers express guilt, sadness or anxiety about leaving the child with a caregiver. Although research suggests that separation anxiety is normal and indicative of a strong bond between mothers and infant. Various studies suggest that high separation anxiety is linked to maternal pain whereas low separation anxiety may be linked to lower maternal connection and inadequate bonding with the baby. Maternal anxiety, according to Cooklin, Rowe and Fisher (2011), is significant for maternal mental health. The attachment is expressed as separation anxiety and influences decisions of returning to employment post childbirth. In their study they focused on mother-infant relationship at ten months into employment after childbirth, they found that mothers with higher separation anxiety were more likely to exit the workforce. Hyde et al. (1995) found that inadequate maternity leave period was associated with likelihood of depressive symptoms in mothers. But this was more common in mothers already undergoing marital complication and who felt motherhood was not rewarding.

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Booth-Laforce and Roisman (2014) state that how a parent feels about their childhood attachments is how they feel about their attachment with the child. The mother's childhood attachments determine how she bonds with her child, forming a strong attachment. Meins (2017) explains that insecure attachments for the baby may lead to "physical ill health, delinquency, mental illness, substance abuse, poor job prospects and criminality" (p.22). Moutsiana et al. (2015) provide scientific explanation to the negative effects of poor attachment between mother and child. According to them, behaviour of a mother during the initial months postpartum determines the quality of the environment and the base for a strong attachment. They further explain that the first few minutes after birth the infant is primed to touch, voice and face. Kim, Strathearn and Swain (2007) explains that maternal brain reacts to these cues. This lays the foundation for a caring and nurturing environment. However, perinatal and/or postpartum depression can temper the caregiving.

Ruhm (2000) found that long duration of maternity leave was associated with lower child mortal rates. An insecure or poor attachment or bond formed in early infancy affects the mother as well as the child. Poor attachment indicated the child's impaired "socioemotional development, poor behavioural and cognitive development" (p. 250) later in life.

### **Work-life balance**

Hall and Rife (2015) define work-life balance as "the extent to which an employee experiences feeling fulfilled and having his or her needs met in both work and non-work facets of life" (p.4).

There are statistics to support the literature that better organizational policies are necessary incentives for women to return to work after maternity leave. In 2001, Statistics New Zealand found that there was availability of increased opportunities for women at the workplace (Statistics NZ, 2012).

With the increase of women at the workplace it is important to look into work-life balance, especially for women, because they are still the primary caregiver. Statistics NZ (2012) found that partnered mothers with children under the age of 4 had 79.5% work-life balance satisfaction as compared to 73.4% of

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sole mothers. Although, the difference is not significant, parenting with a partner can assist in balancing responsibilities smoothly for partnered mothers. Being primary caregivers meant that women looked for more flexible working conditions. This could be especially true for sole mothers. Also the age of the youngest child was related to mothers' work commitments-fulltime or part time. For mothers working fulltime with children younger than 4 years of age the satisfaction rate was 55.7% as compared with sole mothers with the same age children was 52.9%. This difference is also found to not be significant.

38.3% of partnered mothers, as compared to 31.6% of sole mothers, tended to work additional hours from home because of their job role and responsibilities. The difference was significant and showed that that partnered mothers had more job satisfaction and worked more hours on an average per week because of partner support. Also 54.7% of partnered mothers tended to work in jobs with flexible hours as compared to 40.1% of sole mothers. This difference is significant, although sole mothers may require more flexible hours than partnered mothers due to being the sole caregiver for the child. On the contrary, sole mothers may tend to work more hours due to being in a single income household. Due to supportive organizational policies and flexible working arrangements working mothers could telecommute instead of working on-site. This can be viewed as benefiting sole and partnered mothers.

Work-life balance is an important issue which affects women, especially those working full-time (Yu, 2014). Brough and Kelling (2002) state that women in NZ still spend more time than men working in their households in addition to their paid employment. Hochschild and Machung (2012) found that even though women have equal opportunities at the workplace the same has not been mirrored in their domestic life. Konrad and Mangel (2000) support that women often had to balance family responsibilities with work pressures thus being more under pressure than men. Instead the household work is seen as a second job or an additional month with working hours per year. Warren (2004) stated that part-time work is seen as beneficial for women who prefer to remain in paid work in order to "maintain their labour market skills, earn a small independent wage and sustain their interests outside of work" (p.100) alongside their domestic responsibilities.

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Work-life balance is receiving importance in management and other fields by “researchers, government and employee representatives” (De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott and Pettit, 2005, p. 90). Work-life balance strategies (WLB strategies) is defined as “those that enhance the autonomy of workers in the process of co-ordinating and integrating work and non-work aspects of their lives” (De Cieri et al., 2005, p.90).

Employers and employees benefit from the implementation of WLB strategies. Employers and employees view the benefits from different perspectives. The working conditions provided are viewed as benefits by employees to help them manage their family and work responsibilities. (De Cieri et al., 2005). Meanwhile, employers may have a different plan in mind while implementing WLB strategies. The reasons for advocating the implementation of WLB strategies for employers may be different. While on one hand employers may look to increase productivity by implementing these strategies for their employees, on the other hand Gray and Tudball (2003) claim that this may be more for economic purposes like cost reduction for the employer than based on the needs of the employees. Gray and Tudball (2003) further explain that employers may be indifferent to financial compensation and the non-financial aspects of the job. As a result employees may discuss with their employers to work for a lower salary in return for access to family-friendly work-life balance strategies.

Cappelli (2000) reported that employers look to save financially by retaining staff. According to Wilkinson (2008) training new staff is costly and hence implementing work-life balance initiatives reduces this cost. According to Crompton and Lyonette (2006) governments in Europe made work-life balance policies a priority because organizations are concerned about their ability to replace these workers. This negotiation of employees to work for low wages in return for WLB strategies has led to low level and low paying jobs. Thus financial reasons have encouraged women to seek employment to reduce poverty. For this reason, it was found that women who worked during pregnancy are more likely to return to work sooner and to the same employer (Hofferth & Curtin, 2006).

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De Cieri et al. (2005) found that in their study conducted with Australian organizations 57.2% had implemented WLB strategies for some employees, 40.5% have implemented the strategies for all employees and only 2.3% had not implemented any strategies at all. On one hand, out of the organizations that have introduced strategies, approximately 50% of organizations have less than 20% of their employees utilising the initiatives and on the other hand approximately 6% of organizations have more than 80% of employees using these initiatives. According to De Cieri et al. (2005) the more initiatives available the more likely employees were to use it. However, the evidence for their usage suggests that organisational culture that indicates workplace support encourages employees to use it. The numbers show that some organisations have a supportive culture that encourages its employees to use family friendly practices whereas majority of the organisations may have family friendly practices in place but their usage may be discouraged.

For mothers who have returned to the workforce, this is especially true. Smith and Gardner (2007) found that in their study women used more initiatives than men. Awareness of policies meant employees used more initiatives (Smith & Gardner, 2007). However, there are numerous reasons why availability and awareness of policies did not necessarily mean the use of said policies. Prejudices at workplaces on utilising parental leave initiatives are seen as lack of commitment to work (Greenhaus, Ziegert & Allen, 2012).

The importance an organisation placed on functional facets of work rather than cultural aspects was viewed as unsupportive (Smith & Gardner, 2007). Focusing more on the quantity of work and the number of hours put in rather than on the benefits of such mechanism to the employer and employee was viewed as unaccommodating. In addition to unsupportive organisational culture, some other barriers to using the strategies included lack of communication between HR and staff regarding the implementation of the strategies, senior management involvement and a subsequent evaluation of the strategies. Wilkinson (2008) supported this by stating that organisations that “promoting long working hours, high organisational commitment, provide unsupportive work environments, attitudes of supervisors and senior officials and lack of communicating the strategies” impede the implementation of the strategies for employees (p. 122).

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Department of Labour in NZ released a report supporting the positive relationship between the culture of the organisation and the utilisation of work-life balance strategies (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2007) (as cited in Wilkinson, 2008).

Wilkinson (2008) found a study conducted during the 1990s showing Australian employers recognized the benefits of implementing work-life balance policies to retain their best employees. This was viewed as the employers' commitment to the policies and its implementation for the employees by "introducing flexible work arrangements, as well as child care and family and parental leave policies" (p. 122).

Various studies have focused on work-life balance strategies in Australia and New Zealand. In a study by Lingard and Lin (2004), it was found that females in the construction sector had high turnover, burnout, and work-family conflict. Hence women valued work-life balance policies more and considered that a deciding factor for their employer's support and commitment. Consequently commitment from employers determined turnover.

For women, WLB strategies are about managing work and family demands. Organizations could provide flexible working hours which could include part-time employment, for a specific time period. Warren (2004) states that part-time jobs are beneficial to women because it is a way to perform their domestic responsibilities as well as be a part of the labour market. A large number of women are employed in lower level part-time roles. Ginn and Sandall (1997) reported that women having part time employment and/or lower level occupations experienced reduced stress as a result of a better balance between work and home based responsibilities. This constraint demonstrates the fact that part-time and low level jobs tend to provide more flexibility while reducing stress and are less physically demanding. Research has found that lower level part-time jobs not only reduce stress but also make the balancing of home and work responsibilities more manageable thus contributing to having a better work-life balance than those who are employed in higher level fulltime jobs. Warren (2004) reported that reduced working hours meant more time for caring responsibilities which in turn reduced their social lives. On the other hand, the women's financial situation also

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contributes to their achievement of work-life balance. Low pay rates could be a determining factor in work leisure balance because leisure depends on the quality of life. Also this presents a disadvantage in terms of having dependents and lower pay rates (Warren, 2004).

However, work-life balance does not necessarily mean reducing work-life conflict. Work-life conflict can be defined as “work interfering with family and family interfering with work” (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992, p. 66). Similarly, De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott and Pettit (2005) define work/life conflict as “a form of inner role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and other life domains, such as family, are mutually incompatible in some respect, whereby participation in one role is made more difficult by the virtue of participation in the other” (p.91).

With the increase in the number of mothers in paid employment, it can be expected that they experience more work-family conflict. Frone et al. (1992) found that the main predictors of work-family conflict were “job stressors, family stressors, job involvement and family involvement” (p.66). Skinner and Chapman (2013) found that longer working hours in Australia and New Zealand was seen as work interference in family life. Brough, O’Driscoll and Biggs (2009) found that increased conflict between work and family domains may lead to “reduced satisfaction, lower levels of organisational commitment, and a decline in psychological health and well-being” (p.72). The negative impacts of work-life conflict stated can affect productivity by displaying “reduced performance, psychological withdrawal, absenteeism, and turnover” (Brough et al., 2009, p.73). Brough and O’Driscoll (2005), in one of their previous studies found that dual-income households tend to feel the stress of work and family domains more and having dependent children contributes to that. Although having more than one child has an impact on the extent to which the parents manage the two domains. Brough et al. (2009) reflect that parents become experienced in handling the responsibilities as the children get older. Also the more children they had the more experienced they became in handling work and family obligations.

According to Haar, Spell and O’Driscoll (2009) with the increase in flexible work practices, there will be an “increased interdependence of work and



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family spheres which intensifies the conflicting demands of work and family” (p.200). It has already been established that women experience greater work-home conflict than men mainly because of being the primary giver and having higher family demands. Various studies have noted how work-family conflict is negatively associated with relationships. Time-based conflict, that is, time demands may lead to “preoccupation with one role while participating in another role” (Haar et al., 2009, p.202). Quick, Henley and Quick (2004) state that self-expectations to balance work and family lives is high. They quote that an important part of achieving the balance is to realize the demands they are placing upon themselves and to learn to place more realistic expectations to achieve balance in both parts of their lives. Haar et al. (2009) also suggest that employees focusing on themselves will lead to achieving more balance. Spending more time on themselves was seen as reenergizing and reorganization of family and work aspects and thus being able to cope with the challenges these domains presented. The return to work could be managed by working reduced hours, telecommuting, etc.

On the other hand, family members can be also be used as help when demands from work interfere with family. As Frone, Barnes and Farrell (1994) found that increased conflict also led to use of domestic services like housekeeping irrespective of the employee’s income. In addition to this, other stress reduction techniques were found to help manage conflict better but not reduce it. Haar et al. (2009) argue that in a country like New Zealand which is geographically smaller than USA, family help is given more importance because of close knit families and it is easily available. Cultural influence was seen as a way to deal with the conflict. Organisations can help their employees manage conflict better as well, for example by providing employees more control over their jobs to help integrate work and family demands, that is, to provide perceived autonomy. Batt and Valcour (2003) define control as “the belief that one can exert some influence over the environment, either directly or indirectly, so that the environment becomes more rewarding or less threatening” (p. 192). Thus having control over start and end time of work, family leave for vacations or family functions, and being able to contact family during work can provide the ability to integrate work and family demands.

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Beauregard & Henry (2009) suggest that policies such as compressed work week or telecommuting increase performance because of employees working from home. Perceptions of organisational support leads to improved organisational performance such as “reduced overheads in employees working from home, improved productivity among employees working at peak hours, social exchange processes” (Beauregard & Henry, 2009, p.10).

Several studies cited in Beauregard and Henry (2009) state the negative consequences of work-life conflict such as “increased stress and burnout, difficulties in staying awake, lack of concentration, and low alertness, reduced levels of general health and energy” (p.11). This demonstrates the conflict for mothers with young dependents. In addition to increased stress, reduced job satisfaction was another factor seen due to increased work-life conflict. Brough, O’Driscoll and Biggs (2009) found that “reduced job and family satisfaction, lower levels of organizational commitment and a decline in psychological health and wellbeing” (p. 72) are evidence of increased interference of work-family conflict. It can be assumed that employment of both parents creates additional burden with respect to their time and energy because of commitments in both work and family domains. Especially for mothers, who were the primary care giver, it was seen that 68% of mothers working full-time before childbirth worked part-time after childbirth (Whitehouse, Baird, Diamond & Hosking, 2006). This was also seen in relation to decreasing career prospects as for employed mothers the effect of a career break after childbirth was an immediate concern. New parents struggle with their new routine because of the changes in the hours they work or because of factors such as sickness in the baby, work demands in family life and vice versa. This can mainly be constituted as ‘time-based conflict’ (Brough et al., 2009). The constant demands on their time are linked to increased stress and the negative effects mentioned above. On the other hand, it is presumed that reduced working hour leads to better work-life balance.

Most family-friendly policies are implemented keeping the child rearing responsibilities of women in mind. Yu (2014) states that the changing patterns in women’s employment can be linked to women exiting workforce or opting to work part-time. This is especially true for women after childbirth because of lack of childcare facilities at work and flexibility in working leading to increased

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work-life conflict. Eikhof, Warhurst and Haunschild (2007) present that by making assumptions and not taking into account an individual's work and social lives there is a perception that 'work' is negative and is separate from family life. Skinner, Hutchinson and Pocock (2012) report that surveys showed that the difference between actual and favoured working hours for fulltime workers is stark because of the time pressure experienced. But Pocock and Skinner (2013) state that due to technology, teleworking has led to employees being able to manage work-life demands outside of office. Whereas women working part time in dual income households reported to be more satisfied with their work-life balance than in sole income households.

The importance of work-life balance initiatives for individual and organisations is an imperative part of research, especially for women. On the whole, organisational support is indicative of how employees utilise the policies of work-life balance. By providing these policies organisations are able to attract and retain more candidates. This in turn reduces conflict between existing employees and leads to organisational effectiveness. Work-life balance can be maintained by myriad strategies both by new working mothers and by an organization's initiatives. Working mothers can achieve balance with the help of social support by their families and colleagues.

### **Social Support**

Workplace initiatives, familial support and support from community services can act as support for a working mother with social support being a coping tool for stress. Morrison and Bennett (2006) suggest that people with strong social support have less demanding and healthier lives. The quality of a relationship is noteworthy to recognize how social support helps deal with stress.

Availability of social support forms an integral part of working mothers' decisions to return to workforce (Gray & Tudball, 2003). Providing workplace support is beneficial to both the employer and the women who want to or need to work. Nowak, Naude and Thomas (2013) explain how family and organisational support were used by mothers after return to work. They found how responsibilities for childcare were managed as part of family decisions around the

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time of return to work following a period of maternity leave. In this study, for example, women health professionals in Australia who were on maternity leave were surveyed. After gathering quantitative and qualitative information it was found that more than 50% of respondents expected to have childcare provided solely by family members (spouse, grandparents), while 15% were expected to make use of formal arrangements such as childcare alone. It was also seen that respondents experienced conflict between the stated organizational family-friendly policy of their workplaces and practices at the management level.

Flexibility provided by employers did not encourage childcare arrangements. Hence they identified issues for workplaces that would enable the optimal return to the workforce by professional women following maternity leave. The various issues focused on were the support women receive from their supervisors and peers, accessible and affordable childcare facilities, support for breastfeeding within the workplace, flexibility of work hours on return to work and family leave options. Another issue is the level and type of employment to which a woman is able to return following maternity leave. This can be done by planning for the return to work during pregnancy which could influence whether women return after maternity leave and in what capacity (Houston and Marks, 2003). The managing of maternity leave involves managers, colleagues and the women themselves. This management can have a direct influence on an employee's decision to return to work (Houston and Marks, 2003). The different types of WLB strategies include flexible working arrangements, childcare, family leave, etc.

### *Family support*

Kim and Ling (2001) hypothesized that spouse support reduces work-life conflict. The spouse's attitude towards wife's career and lending emotional support reduces work-life conflict. Providing emotional and instrumental support leads to less interference of work-life in family life and vice versa. Brough, O'Driscoll and Kalliath (2005) found that family members can provide emotional and instrumental support. This may contribute greatly to the reduction of work-life conflict. Family members were seen as a buffer for work-family conflict (Kim & Ling, 2001). They state that emotional support is when the partner takes interest in

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the spouse's work. Whereas Instrumental support is helping in household chores and childcare. This can reduce stress of parental responsibilities and time. Brough, O'Driscoll and Kalliath (2005) report that family support was linked to higher family satisfaction and less psychological strain. In their study with New Zealand women, it was found that family related responsibilities interfered with their work-life because the number of dependents in the family increased conflict for the parents.

A large number of studies suggest that social support has a positive effect on psychological wellbeing. Brough and Kelling (2002) noted that partners were viewed as a source of greater support than work colleagues and/or official organisational support services. According to their study, Brough and Kelling (2002) support that partners can increase female confidence and this is especially effective in decision making. Also women with partners tended to rely more on their partners than on their work colleagues for "job related social support" (p.36) as well. This is true for partnered mothers but the contrary can be claimed for sole mothers without partners. For this, Brough and Kelling (2002) stated that sole mothers can get equal amounts of social support from other family members. However, Michel, Mitchelson, Pichler and Cullen (2010) found that in addition to social support, number of hours worked and schedule flexibility determine how work and family demands are managed within and outside work and family domains.

### *Organizational Support*

In addition to discussing how work-life balance can be achieved with the help of policies, such policies can be seen as part of organisational support. Organisational support with such policies helps to increase work-life balance and attempts to alleviate work-life conflict.

Dikkers, Guerts, Dulk, Peper and Kompier (2004) defines a supportive organizational culture as where organizations give importance to an employee's non-work roles in addition to their work roles and try to accommodate the non-work needs so that employees can focus on work tasks better. On the other hand, a "hindering organizational culture" (Timms et al., 2015, p.85) is that where organizations provide a clear message to employees to choose work over non-

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work or personal issues. This demonstrates that in such an environment employees will have to prioritize work over personal in fear that there will be penalties to their career progression.

Keeping women in paid employment in mind, organizations can design policies that assist in successful work-life balance and act as incentives for women to come back to work after their maternity leave. One of them is flexible work arrangements. The Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007 in New Zealand (Fursman & Zodgekar, 2009) was implemented so that employees can make changes to the hours they work. The study reported that flexible working hours was most desirable to the families that did not have this arrangement, especially time off for special events related to their families. Lack of flexible working hours was reported as a reason for not being able to spend time with family.

Allen, Johnson, Kiburz and Shockley (2013) claim that flexitime, that is, when the work is completed and flexplace, where the work is completed, provides employees the ability to complete work when and where they prefer. This is beneficial in terms of employees choosing how their time and energy is used. It is helpful to manage their schedule for non-work responsibilities such as school events, doctor's appointments, family functions, etc. This is seen as a valuable resource by employees. Not only does it reduce commuting but it also increases personal productivity by saving time and energy resources and reducing stress. Telecommuting or working from home is also beneficial because it reduces absenteeism by allowing employees to work from home with taking care of important family responsibilities rather than miss a complete day at work (Allen et al., 2013).

In addition to flexible hours, compressed work weeks, telecommuting, organizational support with family friendly policies includes "dependent care, family or personal leave, job sharing, family leave programs, onsite child care, financial or informational assistance with child care" (Beauregard & Henry, 2009, p.9). Such policies not only have been associated with increased performance but also with increased commitment and decreased turnover intention.

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On the other hand, Kossek and Michel (2011) have argued that working from home blurs the boundaries between work and personal issues, subsequently affecting physical and psychological boundaries. This could rather lead to conflict than be an alternative to resolving work-family conflict. Schmidt and Neubach (2007) have stated that working from home increases the urge to be distracted by the urge to watch television or defer doing a work task. Also when and where the employees work from and complete their work tasks is not interchangeable. Employees may be able to complete the task from home but under a rigid timeframe or complete according to their timeframe but be onsite to complete the task. Thus flexplace may not reduce conflict but blur work and family roles and make it more difficult for employees to choose. The employees may not necessarily have the resources and skills required to avoid conflict (Lapiere & Allen, 2012).

Providing family leave is seen as an important aspect of organisational policy, especially parental leave. Whitehouse et al. (2006) report that fathers in Australia are most likely to not use the parental leave unless there are provisions for flexible use and/or wage compensation.

Awareness of work-life balance strategies was seen as managerial support (Smith and Gardner, 2007). As discussed before Mauno, Kinnunen and Ruokolainen (2006) state that perceived organisational support (POS) is viewed as an important factor when it comes to work-family conflict. Bakker, Demerouti and Euwema (2005) claim that organisational support assuages burnout, stress, cynicism or any other interferences of work into family. Child care services policies have been reported to increase organizational commitment. Although they are aimed at women, Yu (2014) points out that offering such services is related to the “much desired schedule flexibility” (p.214). Women also perceived a positive link between organizational commitment and work-life practices. The work-life practices of an organization had an effect on women’s commitment to the organization. Offering schedule flexibility and child care services increases the organization’s likeability among new employees. Rau and Hyland (2002) state that organizations that provided flexible working hour policy were preferred by employees with high levels of conflict between work and family, that is, work-life conflict. Especially for returning mothers perceived organizational support and the

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existing workplace culture determine their transition once they re-join work (Brough et al., 2009).

In addition to organizational support by means of policies, Thompson, Brough and Schmidt (2006) report that supervisor support is important because they determine the access to the policies eventually. The role of the organization in retaining employees is to create “supportive work culture”. O’Driscoll et al. (2003) confirm that a supportive work environment mainly depends on the managers or supervisors to portray a family friendly culture. This also works to reduce turnover intentions. Brough and Frame (2004) report that female employees have higher levels of turnover than male employees and that married employees have lower levels of turnover intentions. This indicates working women are mainly dependent on the employment conditions of the spouse. So in order to fulfil domestic and work responsibilities women presumably require more family friendly policies and according to Smith and Gardner (2007) use more policies than men too.

Supervisor support is one of the main kinds of social support at workplaces. Brough and Frame (2004) report that more the social support, lower are the intentions of turnover amongst employees. Supervisor support was seen as having a stronger effect on turnover intentions and job satisfaction. Thus an awareness among supervisors is important to reduce stress. O’Driscoll et al. (2003) outline the assistance managers and supervisors can give their employees. Apart from emotional support, O’Driscoll et al. (2003) suggest that supervisors should offer flexible working arrangements which are specifically useful to the employees in need. Also supervisors must be able to balance organisational needs with individual needs of the employees. Allan, Johnson, Kiburz and Shockley (2013) found that emotional and social supervisor support reduced conflict and stress and made the employees feel valued.

Behson (2005) observed that informal policies were more effective and viewed more favourably than formal policies. Informal policies are those that do not exist formally in the organization but through supervisor support employees make use of the flexibility in their schedule provided by their supervisors or managers. Cook (2009) stated that supervisors were also influential in reducing



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turnover intentions. Supervisors can be viewed as an organization's representatives which shows the organization's value of its employees. Skinner and Chapman (2013) found that when such mechanisms are put into place employees respond with loyalty, commitment and increased productivity to show their appreciation for the organization's policies. Although some organizations do not have formal initiatives, managers can still provide flexibility by informally supporting these mechanisms. Powell and Mainiero (1999) believe this depends on the manager's views and beliefs on work-life balance.

According to Haar (2004) if employees experienced conflict from work into home or vice versa they were highly likely to quit the job for a "less stressful workplace" (p. 35). Grover and Crooker (1995) (as cited in Haar, 2004) state that employees look for organizations that offer "paid parental leave, flexible work practices, domestic leave" (p.36) even if they did not directly benefit from these policies. These policies also have been associated with low turnover intentions because they promote greater work-family balance.

In addition to these policies, telecommuting was seen favourably by employees leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of turnover intentions because of the flexibility available in place and timing of their work. Flexible hours and telecommuting led to low levels of absenteeism (Halpern, 2005) and high levels of improvement in performance rated by their supervisors. (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006). Although family friendly policies may have some effect on reduction of stress it is important to note that organisational culture is what has been known to have negative relationship between such policies and reduced strain (Allen 2001). Lappiere et al. (2008) found that employees of organisations perceived as being family friendly and supportive reported less conflict. The availability of family-friendly policies and initiatives such as "particularly flexible work arrangements (e.g., flextime, compressed work weeks, telework)" (p.94) in a supportive environment was a reassurance to employees that utilizing these policies will not be a detriment to their prospects of promotion in their career.

According to Allen (2001) family friendly workplaces display more tolerance to flexplace and dealing with personal issues at work. This flexibility

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provided results in less family interference at work due to less pressure of being onsite. Thus family friendly workplaces contribute to better work-life and job satisfaction. McNall, Masuda, Shanock and Nicklin (2010) state that by offering flexible working arrangements organizations demonstrates their commitment to employees' wellbeing. This provides employees control to schedule their demands from work and non-work domains and perceive the ability to cope with these demands. Anderson, Coffey and Byerley (2002) found that formal initiatives included "alternatives to traditional full time, long hours and fixed place work arrangements" (p.790) provided more flexibility and control for employees to manage their work and family responsibilities.

The other dimension of having flexibility is the organizations' commitment to its employees (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Family friendly policies such as telecommuting, compressed work week, etc. offered by organizations can attract new employees while retaining employees and reducing work-life conflict. Brough et al. (2009) found that some organizations have implemented some initiatives such as "childcare support, job sharing, flexible work hours, and compressed work weeks" (p.73). Glass and Riley (1998), however found that accessibility to the organizational work-life balance policies was dependent on status of job role, autonomy, salary and other employment benefits.

Brough et al. (2009) have stated that along with parental leave organizational policies such as "flexible work hours, telecommuting, compressed work weeks, job sharing, child-care support" (p.73) would support women returning to work. Telecommuting is referred to as distance work or virtual work (Allen, Golden and Shockley, 2015). Several studies show that people who telecommute report higher job satisfaction than those that telecommute rarely or too much (Allen et al., 2015). Golden (2006) observed that employees that telecommute often show organisational commitment and less turnover intention. Telecommuting was also positively associated with relationship quality with leaders and lower work-life conflict and negatively associated with the quality of relationships with team members or colleagues. Golden (2006) found that the extent of interaction between team leaders and team embers determined the relationship between job satisfaction and telecommuting. The disadvantage of

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excessive telecommuting was seen as decreased job performance because of professional isolation (Golden, 2008). On the contrary, excessive telecommuting was also associated with lower turnover intentions. On the one hand, telecommuting may blur personal and work boundaries, on the other hand it may allow employees to switch comfortably between work and family roles. Employees who telecommuted were seen as working overtime. But as mentioned above, employees that do not have the skills to balance both domains with blurred boundaries and with the belief that virtual working will help them balance both roles may attempt to telecommute. Allen et al. (2015) has stated a number of factors that are effective to make telecommuting work. The extent to which employees can telecommute depends on the autonomy of their job. The independence to choose the method to complete a work task is imperative to make this decision. It was also seen that higher the autonomy higher was the job satisfaction.

Another important policy, which should be made mandatory, is the family leave policy. Maternity leave allows mothers with new born to take time off to recover and care for the baby as well as themselves. It provides a guarantee that mothers will be able to return to the same job or a similar one after returning to work and possibly to the same employer. Waldfogel et al. (1998) found that offering maternity leave policies and child care policies increased retention and the chances of women returning to the same employer as discussed above. Evidence suggests that this is the case in United States and Japan. Also returning to the same employer encourages women to retain and grow their experience and tenure while also providing an increase in wages. Evidence supports this theory by studies conducted in USA and Britain (Waldfogel, 1998). Brough, O'Driscoll and Kalliath (2005) found that women preferred flexible working arrangements to return to work in New Zealand. Brough, O'Driscoll and Kalliath (2005) report that colleague support is important because it increased job satisfaction and reduced stress at the workplace.

Brough et al. (2009) showed that supervisor support was an important predictor of job satisfaction, occupational stress, and turnover intentions than family-friendly policies. Houston and Marks (2003) have emphasized the fact the women with support are more likely to return to work after childbirth. Support

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like friends, family, workplace or domestic was anticipated so that returning to work and work transitions became easier. In a study conducted by McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley and Shakespeare-Finch (2005) they found that women with dependents stated that without flexible working arrangements they would not be able to continue working full-time. This organisational support is imperative for women's transition back into their job and if they prefer to return at all.

Thompson et al. (2006) suggested that irrespective of the organisational policies offered, women perceived family friendly practices and beliefs of their supervisors as an indication of supportive work environment.

Besides supervisor support, colleague support was also seen as a main factor of low turnover intentions and job satisfaction. Turetken, Jain, Quesenberry and Ngwenyama (2011) found that employees with interdependent jobs that require interaction with team or organisation members and to be physically present onsite demonstrated lower productivity. Allen et al. (2015) state that jobs which required interaction with others hindered telecommuting. This was seen as social and professional isolation especially with team leaders if employees chose to telecommute with interdependent jobs. This was associated with poor job performance and higher turnover intention (Golden, Veiga & Dino 2008). On the contrary, being in an office gave a sense of inclusion than being connected by satellite office or home (Morganson, Major, Oborn, Verive & Heelan, 2010). Face time with colleagues improved quality of relationships at the workplace. For supervisors telecommuting is a concern because they cannot physically monitor the work by employees, especially for interdependent tasks. (Greer & Payne, 2014).

Having supportive supervisors provided women with job security and reduced level of conflict and turnover intention. (Batt & Valcour, 2003). In their study Brough and Kelling (2002) report that having a partner had a positive effect on their psychological strain. Also it was found that partnered women with dependents reported greater family to work interference. Thus Brough and Kelling (2002) report that women with dependents reported greater work-family conflict than men because it was found that additionally women continue to work in their households more than men. Being partnered mothers can alleviate the stressors mentioned above to some extent. In most research conducted it is found that

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partners were seen to contribute positively towards the psychological wellbeing of the mothers and dependents negatively mainly due to the demands that of the dependents was seen as affecting performance at work.

Overall organizational support can be viewed as affecting work-life balance and duration of parental leave. Several studies have shown that organisational support is linked to better job performance from employees. Lyness, Thompson and Franscesco (1999) found that pregnant women who perceived workplace support in terms of family and work policies were found to return to work sooner after childbirth and reported greater organizational commitment. Milward (2006) found that supportive workplace environment gave a sense of validation to women as both employees and mothers. Employer support thus determines women's return to work and facilitates an intention to work after childbirth. In addition to this, anticipated support can encourage women to return to work on a full-time or part-time basis. A detailed literature review of how social support is imperative in organisations and outside for employees especially females can be found in the next part of this chapter.

### *Community services*

In addition to organizational and familial support, postnatal care by means of community services have been seen to have an impact on the mother's and baby's health and wellbeing. New parents may come into many situations post-delivery regarding neonatal or maternal health. Community services support new mothers with childcare and breastfeeding issues. Ellburg, Lundman, Perrson and Hogberg (2005) looked into postnatal care services in Sweden about the utilisation of postnatal services for maternal and neonatal health. They found that half of their participants had contacted such services for breastfeeding issues and more than half for the babies' health. In New Zealand, some of the community services that help new mothers by providing a plethora of assistance include Plunket, Bellyful and Space.

Plunket is a not for profit organization that takes care of new-born's health and mother's mental and physical health. Mothers are assigned midwives during their pregnancy, labour and delivery. After the delivery mothers receive community support from Plunket until the child reaches age five. Plunket

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measures the infant's milestones as the child grows up. According to their website ("Plunket", n.d.) Plunket is the "largest provider of free support services for the health, development and wellbeing of children under five" ("Plunket", n.d.). After the age of five, a GP replaces Plunket for the child's care. Bellyful is a helpful organisation that provides meals to new mothers for free. They include criteria such as a child must be less than three months of age and there must be a serious illness in the family to request their services. Although there is limited use for many new mothers as not all mothers may need this service, it offers assistance without any financial assessment performed and the services are free. ("Bellyful", n.d.). Space is another organisation that provides parenting services to mothers with advice from "sleeping and crying, establishing attachment". It helps new mothers connect with other new mothers to discover parenting tips and styles and the child's development. ("Space", n.d.)

Such services provide mothers resources for help with any issues with the baby while giving mothers time to recuperate after childbirth. They also equip mothers with practical parenting skills to deal with the challenges faced with their health and their babies' health. These services are not mandatory for new mothers hence parents can choose the services that they desire. Not a lot of research has been done on these community services with regards to how they are impacting New Zealand families, especially mothers.

### **Mental health**

Mental health is an important variable determining women's experiences after returning to work and an important element in mental health is stress. Studies have found that stressful events can be associated with negative psychological conditions (Benjaminsen, 1981), with Brown and Harris (1978) arguing that stress can lead to depression. Sanderson (2004) defines stress as "a state of challenge or threat that disrupts the normal rhythm and balance of a person's life" (p. 92). Friedman (2002) states that it is stressful to be in new and unfamiliar circumstances. Acquiring a new job, transitioning into a different career path or an addition to the family can be sources of stress. Spector, Bruck and Allen (2002) state that stress at work could include long hours, deadlines and responsibility.

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Stress arises due to the pressure of 'fitting in' the society, behaving suitably in social situations or trying to handle a situation and resolving the problem at hand.

Schmied et al. (2013) conducted a study in Australia and NZ where postpartum depression and anxiety was researched it was found that between birth and 6 months postpartum, 12.8% of women reported postpartum depression which was caused due to lack of social support, especially poor partner relationships. Hyde et al. (1995) found that new mothers experience stress and psychological distress, especially employed women. It is, therefore, understood that a mother who has to work may feel stress leading to anxiety or depression. Adding a role has negative psychological consequences. This shows how significant work environment support is to assist women transition into work after a long maternity leave.

Chatterji and Markowitz (2004) state that sometimes returning to work earlier than the actual maternity leave or previously intended maternity leave increases symptoms of depression. On one hand it is argued that women in employment are empowered and may have access to necessary resources to seek help reducing symptoms of depression. On the other hand, this leads to stress due to role overload (Rosenfeld, 1989). Schmied et al. (2013) report that common factors of depression include "low socio-economic status, low social support, poor partner relationship and unwanted pregnancy" (p. 173).

Marital status and job role are significant in psychological distress. Lack of social support, marital conflicts, etc. are factors leading to depression few months after childbirth. Unemployment results in financial strain which is a major concern for new parents hence returning to work (Saurel-Cubizolles, Romito, Ancel & Lelong, 2000). This was further explained that such financial uncertainties and apprehension for the future of the baby can lead to psychological stress. In addition to this, taking on a new role also causes mothers to split their attention between motherhood and employment. Schmied et al. (2013) found that between 10%-20% of women in NZ and Australia experienced from severe depression for at least a few months after birth during the first year. Leach, Poyser and Fairweather-Schmidt (2017) report that 7%-13% of pregnant mothers have experienced perinatal depression and anxiety. Several factors have been listed as

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contributing to postnatal depression such as “stressful life events, depression and anxiety during pregnancy, low levels of social support, previous history of depression, and the personality factor of neuroticism, delivery complication, socioeconomic status, unemployment, lower education attainment” (p.753) to name a few. Milgrom et al. (2008) explain that family income and education are variables for postnatal depression as well as “a nonstressful antenatal environment has some protective role postnatally” (p.154).

### Summary

In conclusion, four factors have been identified in the literature that are particularly relevant to the experience of mothers returning to work after childbirth: work-life balance, social support, duration of maternity leave and mental health. These factors are all inter-related and cannot be viewed independently. Work-life balance deals with the utilization of available strategies and policies and barriers to their utilization at the workplace. Social support includes familial support, policies offered by the organization which again demonstrate organization culture through supervisor and colleague support. Social support and length of maternity leave affect a mother’s psychological wellbeing and mental health. Various work-life balance policies include factors such as breastfeeding at the workplace which are directly linked positively to mother’s and infant’s mental and physical health. As a result it is important to look into how these policies affect mothers’ lives while continuing to build on these initiatives in the private and public sector. It is worthwhile to note that working mothers contribute to the public as well as domestic sector by working two jobs, that is, a paid job and the job of a mother. Keeping women in the workforce encourages them for promotion and to step up the ladder of job roles that can lead to high achieving and high paying jobs. Also this is a major step towards achieving gender parity in the workforce. This may eventually give way to more women centric initiatives at the workplace affecting every other area of her life.

### Objectives

The main objectives of this study are

- 1) To determine their satisfaction with the duration of their maternity leave.



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- 2) To understand the incentive for new mothers to come back to work.
- 3) The ways in which the mothers balance work and family responsibilities.
- 4) To examine the social support at work and by family.
- 5) To investigate any issues with psychological well-being.

## **Chapter Three- Methodology**

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section outlines the ethical considerations for this study. Section two outlines the type of qualitative method, recruitment, sample, procedure of the study and interview guide. Section Three outlines the procedure of analysis.

### **Part One**

#### **Ethical Considerations**

A proposal for ethical approval was submitted and approved by the University of Waikato Psychology Research and Ethics Committee. On the application, I identified potential ethical issues such as the participant's identity. The names of the participants were removed from the interview recordings and the transcripts to protect their identity. Code names made up by the participants were used instead. Subsequently, participants were asked to sign information sheets and consent forms which explained the study and the participants' rights as to their choice in participation. (See Appendix B for information sheet and Appendix C for consent form). The application reflected that the interview would be stopped if the participants were distressed due to the questions. In the consent form participants were asked if they would like to receive the themes of the analysis, findings, and transcripts of the interviews. At the end of the study, copies of the findings will be made available to the participants. The participants were assured that the recordings will be deleted from the recorder and the recordings and the transcripts will be saved on a secure computer.

### **Part Two**

#### **Research method**

Qualitatively, interviews were used to investigate the experiences of mothers returning to work after maternity leave. Participants were interviewed based on the main topics of research. (See Appendix A for interview questions). The interview guide is outlined below with some interview questions. The interview questions were developed keeping the main topics of research in mind.

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Additionally questions were developed based on the issues that commonly may affect working mothers returning to work after their maternity leave.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. All participants were asked the same questions to elicit a range of answers so as to analyze the issues and compare the differences.

### **Recruitment**

Initially, after ethical approval was obtained, a list of childcare centres in Hamilton were shortlisted by Google search. (<https://www.childcareonline.co.nz/directory/childcare-centres-hamilton.html>). I called the centres to see if they were interested in my research and if they would be willing to put up the posters (see appendix E) for the mothers in their centre to participate. Then emails (See appendix D) were sent out to the managers of the childcare centres with an outline of the research, interview questions, and posters in advance to ensure the centres were willing to give permission to access the mothers. In addition to this, in the later stages of the research to obtain participants posters were put up around University buildings. An email was also sent by the Communications department of the University to the Secretaries list with my contact details and the poster with an outline of the research. Mothers returned to the workforce with children under the age of four and who were willing to participate could contact me and set up interview times and dates according to their convenience. The interviews were held at mutually convenient locations. Participants were also requested to pass on information to any other mothers in their contact who might be interested.

### **Research Participants**

The participants recruited were required to fulfil two conditions:

- They must be mothers with at least one child under the age of four.
- They must be in fulltime or part time employment.

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All participants had returned to work within the last three years after their maternity leave. The details of the participants with their pseudonyms are shown in Table 1 below.

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Name	Ethnicity	Number of Children	Employment Status	Single/partnered mother	Partner's Employment status
Participant 1	Pākehā-European	2: 5 years 2 years	Full-time	Partnered	Full-time
Participant 2	Māori-European	3: 10 years 7 years 8 months	Full-time	Partnered	Full-time
Participant 3	Pākehā-European	13 months	Full-time	Partnered	Full-time
Participant 4	Pākehā-European	2: 3.5 years 10 months	Part-time	Partnered	Full-time
Participant 5	Māori-European	3: 7 years 5 years 2 years	Full-time	Partnered	Full-time
Participant 6	Pākehā-European	19.5 months	Full-time	Partnered	Self-employed
Participant 7	Pākehā-European	19 months	Full-time	Partnered	Full-time
Participant 8	Māori-European	2: 5 years 1 year	Full-time	Partnered	Self-employed
Participant 9	Māori-European	2 years	Full-time	Partnered	Full-time
Participant 10	Pākehā-European	3: 5.5 years 4 years 9 months	Part-time	Partnered	Full-time
Participant 11	Pākehā-European	2: 3 years 18 months	Full-time	Partnered	Full-time

Table 1: *Participants' information*

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### **Procedure**

A total of 11 participants were interviewed. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour. The same questions were asked to all the participants as this was a semi-structured interview. However as per the conversation, follow up questions were asked. All participants were partnered mothers with their partners working. While setting up interviews, I ensured the participants via email that the interview can be held at a time and on a day of their convenience. The interviews were held at mutually convenient places where the participants were comfortable discussing the personal issues. Information sheet and consent form were sent out in advance but the participants had not read them before the interviews. However at the start of the interviews the participants read the information sheet and signed two copies of the consent form. Participants were given a copy of the consent form. The participants agreed to audio recordings.

### **Interview guide**

The first part consisted of demographics of the children and asked the following questions

- Child's age
- Single or partnered mother

No mothers in this study were single mothers.

The second part focused on the duration of their maternity leave asking some questions such as

- Did you plan on returning to work after maternity?
- Unpaid or paid maternity?
- How long was your maternity leave?
- Job satisfaction before and after maternity leave

The third part focused on work-life balance asking some key questions such as

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- What are the challenges you have to face in managing your work and family responsibilities?
- Do you have any pressures or difficulties with respect to work-life balance?

The fourth part consisted of social support from family and organization and included the following questions

- What kind of support do you receive from your family and organization?
- What are the organizational policies your organization is willing to offer?
- Is there anything the organization could do to have a positive impact on your life?
- What are the other kinds of help you have? (community or health services used)

The final part consisted of some additional questions discussing any issues the participants wanted to further discuss. In addition to work-life balance, their psychological wellbeing was asked about as to how they handled the responsibilities with the mental pressures of being a parent with working fulltime.

The interviews followed the structure with flexibility on the occasions when I wanted to know more about an issue, in which case I asked follow-up questions relevant to the research. Additionally I maintained a natural flow to the conversation. During the initial interviews I asked the interview questions but as I gathered more information I saw a pattern in the answers and in order to ensure I gathered this data from subsequent interviewees, I included an additional question in the later interviews.

The question was

- If the mothers had used any particular community services for any issues they might have had with their psychological wellbeing?

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Also an additional question at the end asking about any further issues they might want to discuss always led to additional information like selection of childcare, etc. At the end as a show of appreciation for their time and help with my research I presented them with a \$10 MTA voucher for fuel.

### **Part Three: Analysis**

The interviews were transcribed verbatim soon after and saved under each of the participant's code names. Transcriptions did not include any speech fillers.

#### **Analysis**

A structured approach to interviews led to template analysis. Template analysis was used because it is a flexible technique where fewer procedures than grounded theory are detailed. Grounded theory adapts a more detailed structure where researchers look into how, why and what they do by interaction with data, colleagues and themselves (Charmaz, 2008). This allows the researcher to tailor it according to their requirements. (King, 2012). King (2012) argues that template analysis is similar to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) but allows for analysis of larger sets of data easily and is less time consuming. IPA is the method where the participants self-reflect and interpret their experiences. It is mainly focused on the participants "experience, understandings, perceptions and views" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p.88). Template analysis allowed the interview data to be analyzed with the flexibility to adapt it to the needs of this study. Based on template analysis, each question was analyzed, providing a descriptive summary with illustrating quotes. The summary was further analyzed in detail to compare and contrast between ranges of different answers.



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**Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion**

Interview questions were sectioned into length of maternity leave, work-life balance, social support and mental health. Analysis was done based on the order of these sections. Each section discusses the findings in detail along with illustrating quotes to support these findings. The table below represents information about the participants' maternity leave. Each duration of leave represents the amount of leave taken by the mother for each child.

Name	Duration of Maternity leave	Paid or unpaid maternity leave	Use of informal childcare	Use of formal childcare	Time being back at work
Participant 1	6 months	Paid Paid	No	Yes	1.5 year
Participant 2	7.5 months	Paid Paid Paid	No	Yes	4 weeks
Participant 3	13 months	Paid	No	Yes	2 months
Participant 4	3 months 6 months	Paid Paid	Yes	Yes	3 months
Participant 5	5 months	Unpaid Unpaid Paid	Yes	Yes	2.5 years
Participant 6	12 months	Paid	No	Yes	7 months
Participant 7	12 months	Paid	No	Yes	6 months
Participant 8	15 months 6 months	Unpaid Paid	Yes	Yes	8 months
Participant 9	10 months	Paid	Yes	Yes	8 months
Participant 10	12 months	Unpaid Unpaid Unpaid	Yes	Yes	3 months
Participant 11	12 months	Paid Paid	No	Yes	6 months

Table 2: *Information on participants' maternity leave*

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### Section One

#### **Likes and dislikes about job and job changes**

Mothers highlighted various aspects of their maternity leave. Three mothers returned to the same organisation but under different job roles as the previous job roles they had had either become defunct or the roles had been replaced with other people. In a way, nonetheless, all three mothers received a promotion from their previous job roles. A promotion or a better job role was an incentive to change roles. Another mother having received a promotion had become a team leader leading to a change in her responsibilities.

“I was the institute manager...I was approached by staff to say if I would be interested in a different position and so I went through negotiations and when I came back from leave I came back into a business manager role”(P8)

Most mothers interviewed returned to the same jobs they had before leaving for maternity leave. This finding supports Hofferth and Curtin (2006) who suggested that women return to the same employer because it may be difficult to look for another employment because of the costs involved in searching for another job. There may be a lack of opportunities depending on their socio-economic conditions. The women in this study may have returned to the same employer because of the costs and time involved in looking for a new job. In addition to this, mothers returning to the same employer mentioned access to “informal” arrangements such as verbal agreements with supervisors to leave early for family events. Also benefits such as unlimited sick leave were an incentive for mothers to return to the same employer.

All mothers enjoyed their job on the whole. Two mothers said they liked the variety their roles offered.

“Probably what I like about my role is that the variety you get in being a contractor in my position I go to work with a lot of organizations who do a lot of different things. We get to find out about a lot of different things that

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are going on and sort of apply my brain power to a lot of brain challenges which are enjoyable.”(P4)

One mother said she liked the job because she had a supportive boss.

“I love it. I think it's because I've got a fantastic boss he's really cool really supportive.”(P5)

Another mother said she liked the job because she was working in an all women environment.

“It is driven by women who are so passionate about everything. So that's what kind of drew me into this role but at the same time it was to be able to work alongside them knowing that their work is my work too. Like we are all a team so this is the work we develop. So it is awesome...it is very strong and the women I work with are determined on what they want so they will go from go for miles you know just to do the work that they do and produce it the way it should and the outcome is beyond. So once the work load its out our research goes out it's delivered a vast amount of universities indigenous communities so that in that sense that makes me proud to be where I am.”(P9)

Another mother said she liked the job because she received positive feedback from her boss.

“Feedback from my manager has always been positive so pretty good.”(P6)

One mother mentioned her passion for communication and sales as the reason for enjoying her job.

“But my role generally is great and I do love what I do. It's very...there's a lot of communication required and it's although not direct sales it is related to that and of course sales and things is a passion of mine so yeah it definitely ticks all the boxes in terms of a good job.”(P3)

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One mother liked her job because of the autonomy it provided. Two mothers cited flexibility in managing their responsibilities as a key element in enjoying her job.

“I’ve got a bit of autonomy. Running a team so I can create my role as I see fit. My managers support me to do that...you can kind of create things for yourself here.”(P2)

“Flexibility in my work environment, more leadership in terms of my phone work area and less staff management responsibilities...this position I can lend more towards research and areas.”(P8)

Most mothers reported no significant changes in their job responsibilities. Although for some mothers new jobs meant new responsibilities. A couple of mothers said that they enjoyed their job because it had variety. A supportive work environment and working in a strong, inspiring work environment like working with strong women also contributed to liking of the job. Apart from that, passion for the job contributed to liking the job. Passion for the job also included flexibility and autonomy in the roles. The freedom and ability to create and run things on their own was seen as important. Also flexibility to lead and focus on the job itself was another aspect.

Klerman and Leibowitz (1999) found that greater work experience in a job led to mothers returning to their jobs because of their commitment and passion for the job along with their job skills. The findings are similar to the study in that some mothers had returned to the same organisation because they had been in that organisation for some years. This, in addition to their passion, commitment, flexibility and autonomy in their job led to mothers returning to the same job.

### **Plans to return to work and transition after returning to work**

All mothers, except one, said that they had intended to come back to work after maternity leave. All mothers had decided to come back because it was necessary for financial concerns.

One mother said that she had set time to come back because of financial strains.

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“I knew was I was coming back I had set time because financially I knew that.”(P5)

One mother said that if she felt it hadn't been the right time she wouldn't have come back.

“I had assumed I would but if I felt it wasn't the right thing I wouldn't have returned...My intention was to come back to work but for whatever reason if it didn't feel like it wasn't the right thing for me I wouldn't have done that.”(P11)

Only one mother said that she chose not to come back at the time.

“my partner was in a good job we were financially stable...I chose to not go back at the time...I wasn't bonded to a contract so I think once I had my daughter...she was quite small and then over the course of 7-8 months I felt like I needed that escape of having my own time being that being that I want to go back to work” (P9)

In addition to their plans to return to work, mothers were asked how they transitioned into their role after maternity leave.

“I have been in this role a long time so coming back I'm not coming back and learning any new skills or anything. I'm just doing the work that's familiar to me but getting used to your child being away from you in care is the hard part...The transition for me coming back to work was fine although it feels odd to suddenly not be with the baby anymore.”(P11)

“I suppose I had worked within the corporation for quite a bit of time before I left it was very easy to slip back in. I knew the role and I knew the job, I knew all of the people in the company and I knew there wasn't really much learning to be had...there is always learning to be had but. You know I found the transition back in to my actual role very easy. I did find it a little bit hard to leave my son.”(P3)

One mother said that she initially worked part time after returning and then worked full time after 2-3 months of return.

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“Initially I came back more like not on a part time basis but the hours were shorter I worked from 9-3 so that was for about first two or three months it was just to get into the groove of working but then also getting the children back into that sort of because they were used to their mum being at home. I think it was 2-3 months it might have been and from there I went to full time.”(P5)

The findings support Hock, Christman and Hock (1980) who found that women plan to return to work because of their role satisfaction with regards to their job. The findings, however, are in contradiction with Galtry and Callister (2005) who report that plans to return to work, especially to the same employer, are associated with the labour market conditions at the time of return. Women in this study planned to return to work because of financial issues which is discussed in the next part of this section. They did not mention the labour market conditions at the time of their return.

### **Main drivers to return to work**

Mothers intended to come back to work for myriad reasons. Some mothers mentioned they would have liked more time to be with the baby. Nonetheless, one mother said if it hadn't felt like the right time she wouldn't have returned. Most mothers returned fulltime to work. They got back into work mode as soon as they came back. After being a fulltime mum returning to full time work was a tough transition in addition to fulfilling responsibilities. On the other hand, being on leave didn't necessarily mean being out of touch with the organisation. Some organisations had undergone major changes hence the anxiety of the changes was reduced as a result of already being informed of the changes around the organisation. However, most of the mothers interviewed said they returned to work for financial reasons.

“For the sake of my daughter and we had bought a house so it was important to be financially secure for both parents to be working” (P9)

“Because of my financial situation we have a mortgage” (P5)

Another mother was self-employed and returned to work on her contracts once they came through after having taken a sufficient amount of maternity leave.

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Her spouse's job financially secured them allowing her to take a long maternity leave.

"I could take as long as I want. It is just that a contract came up...financially it is also nice to have two incomes rather than one. We could have managed on just one. We have done for a long time now because I had quite a difficult pregnancy...I wasn't working for a while but we can do it" (P4)

In addition to financial reasons, mothers felt the need to come back to work because it gave them a sense of self and independence.

"main driver was that for my own self I was happy that independence of coming to work and knowing I am financially securing our whanau and just for me the independence that I gained" (P9)

"You get your sense of yourself back" (P3)

Also positive feedback from their supervisors or managers, supportive colleagues at the workplace contributed to the motivation of returning to the workplace. Also some mothers said they started craving adult company by the end of their maternity leave and wanted to return to work, especially because they did not view themselves as 'maternal'.

"I think the feedback from my manager has always been positive"(P6)

"It was about having adult company...I wanted to try and get back to it if I could" (P6)

"I wouldn't call myself a natural mother like a mothering person. I was going nuts. I wanted to get out of the house." (P1)

"I'm not a strongly maternal person but I am happy to have kids in my life"(P4)

In addition, some craved the challenges of a working life. This was supported by the fact that they enjoyed their job and appreciated the autonomy and independence of their job role.

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“I am also challenged by busy and working life...I was ready to get my hair out of children and newborns in particular to do something new” (P4)

“I enjoyed my job and I didn’t want to give it up” (P1)

“I’m a team leader so I’ve got a bit of autonomy. Running a team so I can create my role as I see fit. My managers support me to do that” (P2)

Another incentive was the opportunities their workplace provided. They were passionate about their job and hence decided to return to work at the time they did.

“my role is great and I love what I do. There is a lot of communication required...sales is a passion of mine so it ticks all the boxes in terms of a good job” (P3)

“my commitment to the things I’m passionate about has a lot to do with why I came back. Also I received a position, an opportunity was presented so I decided I would come back” (P8)

One mother returned to work because the organization offered unlimited sick leave so she could take those for her sick daughter.

“...Unlimited sick leave which is actually another reason I came back. If I had taken more time off then potentially I would have had to quit the job then I doubt If would've got another job at the organization in that sense the organization is a good employer. So they've unlimited sick leave on the basis that I do my work so I had to use quite a bit of sick leave recently...In case she gets sick...”(P7)

All mothers mentioned money was the main incentive for them to return to work. They had a mortgage and had to return to work. Similar to the findings Brough et al. (2009) found in their study that mothers went back to work because it provided them a little extra and it was manageable for them to have two incomes in a household. According to Houston and Marks (2003) if people have long-term financial repercussions they are more likely to succeed in achieving their targets to secure their future. The key is planning ahead of time anticipating a ‘rainy day’ and saving for it accordingly. The findings add to these studies that



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finance is a major reason for women and hence women return to plan and secure the future for their families.

Additionally, the findings show a couple mothers were impatient to get to work because they didn't feel they were maternal. Four mothers said they enjoyed their job because they were passionate about their role and commitments. Having said that, all mothers were reasonably satisfied with their work. One mother was self-employed; hence even though the reasons were financial she felt she had the liberty to choose her schedules thus balancing domestic responsibilities with work.

### **Importance of leave for mothers**

10 mothers said they wanted to take the leave to bond with the baby. They wanted the time to be with the infant in their initial months of growth. Some of the illustrating quotes below shed more light on this.

“I wanted to bond with my baby. I wanted it. I wanted to bond I wanted to create a connection. I wanted to watch them grow and learn and be there in the very beginning formative months and stuff.”(P1)

“But I think it is hard enough juggling a 3, 4, 5,6,7,8 months old child working let alone 1, 2, 3-month-old child with a constant working and no routine it's just impossible to look after a child and work in those first three months. Unless there is someone on the side to look after the child for you it's just not feasible.”(P4)

“I mean to have time with my child. I don't really sort of see if you can financially take time off I think it makes sense because if you are going to have a baby and go straight back to work after six weeks mentally and physically you are not always ready to go back and then the child misses out on the time with mom.”(P6)

“I think because I was a first time mother and I didn't really know what to expect and I was being the first baby I really wanted to spend on developing my own skills as a mum I suppose and then when I had her I was quite attached to her”(P8)

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“I believe that the baby needs to be with his mother. It’s the most time you can give to the child when they are an infant the better. The more time you can I’ve to the child when they are an infant the better. So that’s why I wanted at least a year’s leave.”(P11)

One mother said that the time was helpful because it gave them time to think about what to do after childbirth, whether they wanted to get back into the force and if so what kind of work they wanted to get back into.

“I kind of needed to rethink on what I wanted during that period of time having the time off. I think about what job I am looking for because I've been branched out into different things in terms of my background of workforce...I'm glad that time off because it led me to where I am now”(P9)

Another mother said she took the time off because she could as that was the only time she could take a leave and have a guaranteed job to come back to in addition to bonding with her daughter.

“Because I could. It's the only time you can take leave and you are guaranteed your job back. Because I wanted to breastfeed until a year and didn't want to start formula feeding if I didn't have to. To bond with my daughter otherwise it would be a little bit too early to come back to work otherwise. They just seemed too young.”(P7)

On the contrary, when asked about the reason for their duration of maternity leave most of the mothers said that bonding with the baby was the main incentive in taking the amount of leave that they took. Also the mothers took the maximum amount of leave that they could without stretching themselves financially.

These findings highlight that working mothers invariably returned to work because they were satisfied with their job before they left for maternity leave. There are no studies that connect women’s satisfaction, confidence and their like and dislike of the job to their return to work. These findings are important because they show that working mothers are confident in performing their responsibilities during pregnancy despite any difficulties they might have had and decided to

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return to work before the start of maternity leave. Woolnough and Redshaw (2016) support this by stating that women may wish to return part-time because they want to continue caring for their children while developing their skills and talents at work. On the contrary, part-time roles do not exist in leadership roles (Houston and Marks, 2003) and this is essentially a downgrade in roles for women who want to work part-time (Warren, 2010). The transition in to work can also be a tough time. Although the findings in this study report that these women transitioned smoothly into work even though they had no crossover period with the interim employee that replaced them while they were gone. The common thread found was that mothers did not feel anxious about returning after a long period as they returned to familiar surroundings and people. According to the mothers no new skills had to be learned and they were returning to work with the same people. However, the mothers did mention that even though the integration into work was smooth they wanted to spend more time with their baby and it was hard spending time away from their infant.

The main reason was to form a connection with the baby and watch them learn and grow in their early years. Those who could afford it took longer leave. Three mothers cited that the baby and the mother are not ready emotionally and physically go to back to work. One mother said that taking the amount of leave was important for the mother's and the baby's transition to fulltime work.

On the other hand, one mother said she took the time off because that was the only time a mother could take paid leave and have a guaranteed job to come back to. Although all mothers agreed that the infant is too young to be left with someone other than the mother, it is also important for the mother to spend time with the baby because more time spent with the baby, the better is the baby's health. Also this gives a mother time to develop new skills, especially for first time mothers who do not know what to expect. This provides time for the mother to heal physically and emotionally and ready for transition into work.

Alternatively, one mother said that taking this time off was important because she was breastfeeding and didn't want to start formula feeding. Ogbuanu, Glover, Probst, Liu and Hussey (2011) reported that in their study mothers returning to work later continued to breastfeed for a longer period of time. On the flip side, one mother said that she took time off to reflect on the kind of job she wanted to

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do if and when she came back into the workforce. Also most of the women returned to work fulltime. Regarding duration of maternity leave Ogbuanu et al. (2011) state that job security and informal arrangements between employer and employee will encourage women to return to work after their maternity leave. This is especially true if employers allowed mothers to return to work delayed so that this supportive environment encourages them to return to work.

Most of the women said they would have loved to spend more time with their baby. Reasons for the need to spend infant's initial months included caring for the infant and feelings of guilt of leaving the infant with someone other than family. This was similar to Millward (2006) who found that women returning to work were affected by feelings of guilt and self-doubt. Initially leaving the baby with someone other than family can be stressful for both the baby and the mother. It was found that mothers in this study had taken as much leave as they could take from the financial perspective without stretching themselves too thin hence had to return to work at the time they did. Ideally they desired more time with their infants. In support of longer maternity leave, Aitken et al. (2015) stated that providing a satisfactory maternity leave women had sufficient time to heal physically and psychologically in addition to bond with the baby. Aitken et al. (2015) also state that maternity leave helps mothers acclimatize to new roles while providing job guarantee. The findings support these studies by providing the mothers perspective on the need for longer maternity leave.

### **Satisfaction with leave**

While 7 mothers said they wanted more time to stay with the baby, 4 mothers said that they were satisfied with the duration and were ready to come back to work at the time they did.

One mother said she was dissatisfied with the maternity leave comparing it to other countries and listing benefits of why a longer leave was necessary.

“For maternity leave in general very dissatisfied...eighteen weeks is not good enough if you look at you can associate the growth of developing children to the later stages of their life in terms of how they are successful so if you come back and look at how a child is raised they are raised with

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love, they are raised with time, the parents aren't stressed because of money, the parents have got time to be at home, there is no pressure to go back to work, there's support structure, there's collective parenting there's all these sorts of things that are wrapped around the child. So if you've got resources to be able to do that you see a child progress through their later stages of life, decreased offending criminal offending, decreased dissatisfaction on not getting jobs and increased support for their education you know there's a whole raft of things that come into place when you actually wrap around resources in the early stages of your child's life... Essentially it should be a year you know parents should have the opportunity to be at home with their children raising their children but six months at a minimum would give them a better start.”(P8)

A couple mothers said that they would have preferred 6 months of paid leave and that would be a satisfactory amount of leave.

“But in an ideal world I think about six months would be probably what would best work for me because you're got some kind of regularity”(P4)

“So on a level it would be nice to be able to have a longer period of time paid leave the option of whether or not I'm ready to go back to work. I do think it's a good starting point.”(P1)

One mother stated that she needed the time to regroup and think about her future career wise. Hence she was satisfied with her leave.

“I'm satisfied with the leave otherwise I wouldn't have time to regroup to on my thoughts where I will send myself career wise but in saying that it could've been handled better like I could've gone back to work to kind of remind myself that workforce because I kind of planned it out once I knew the focus was yes I'm going to be a mum this is exciting and this is my everything just thinking about what her room would look like so my focus kind of went away in terms of workforce. So it could've been handled better” (P9)

Four mothers said they were satisfied with their maternity leave because in addition to the government paid leave they also had access to unpaid leave. Some

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mothers utilised the unpaid maternity leave from their organisations because they could afford it due to their spouse's job. Having said that, on the whole, all women were reasonably satisfied with the duration of maternity leave.

Whitehouse, Hosking and Baird (2008) found that women returned to work early because of lack of sufficient duration of paid leave. The findings support Whitehouse, Hosking and Baird (2008) where the findings show that women returned to work early because of insufficient leave in addition to financial constraints. Chatterji and Markowitz (2004) have discussed the benefits of a longer leave and drawbacks of inadequate leave.

### Section Two

All mothers explained how they balanced work and domestic responsibilities. Some said good support system like family and friends or childcare helped when they had to work long hours or when they worked during the day. Otherwise, scheduling their day in advance was beneficial to avoid any stress during the day. A couple mothers said working part time or reduced work hours helped with work-life balance. Although most mothers said they did not work weekends and after work hours a couple of mothers said that even though their priority was children they worked after their children went to bed because of their passion and commitment to the job as also the need to meet a deadline.

While six mothers said they had no difficulty or pressure, three mothers responded with how they dealt with it. Whereas two mothers did not particularly experience any pressures. Not working from home, avoiding too many commitments was seen as separating work and family life. In contrast, some mothers experienced difficulty and guilt with leaving their child with someone other than them. Whereas living up to high standards of home life expectations was seen as a pressure for one mother. Both cases show societal pressure and potential judgement from others.

On the other hand, interference of family life in work-life was a major difficulty. Work-life conflict was mostly associated with having a sick baby and interferences such as getting late to work, limited understanding of work and thus not being able to meet deadlines, working late nights taking care of the baby

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during the day and travelling for work. The findings support the research that role conflict, that is, conflict between motherhood and employment could create issues with balancing and cause job dissatisfaction (Brand & Barreiro-Lucas, 2014).

### **Job Satisfaction**

Mothers were asked to rate their job satisfaction before and after their maternity leave on a scale of 1-5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. All mothers said that they were reasonably satisfied with their job before their maternity leave. Half of the participants rated their satisfaction level as more than 3 and the other half rated it below 3. Three mothers rated their job satisfaction before the leave as a 5. Three mothers rated a 4. Five mothers rated a low 2 or 3 because they rated the circumstances that affected their job at the time rather than the whole job. It was seen that there was an increase in the satisfaction levels of the mothers who reported a low satisfaction level. There was a difference seen between the mothers who changed jobs and the mothers who returned to the same job. Out of the three mothers who had a change in jobs, one mother reported no change in her satisfaction level before and after maternity leave. For the other two mothers there was a significant level of increase where the level went from a 2 to 4.5. Out of the seven mothers who didn't change jobs, only one reported no change in her satisfaction level whereas the one mother who reported a low level had increased satisfaction level after the leave. The mother quoted that personal issues at work were mentally, physically and emotionally draining her and taking focus away from work.

Although after returning from maternity leave the job satisfaction for three of the five mothers who had reported low satisfaction before mentioned an increase in their level of satisfaction. The other two mothers reported the same level of satisfaction as before. For the mothers reporting a high level before the leave, they reported the same level after the leave too for the following reasons.

“I have been in this job a long time now so I'm not sure if it is the right thing moving forward so yeah. But you get to a place where you have done the additional but at the moment I am still here. (P11)

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“I’ve issues with having two bosses one who pays me and one who knows what I do on a day to day basis and that is stressful.”(P7)

Mothers based the ratings on the circumstances rather than the whole job itself. They rated any difficulties they experienced then and found overall their satisfaction with their job role was high. The mothers experienced difficulties within their industry. It was to do with the industry more than their pregnancy. A couple mothers said they had difficulty with the downtime their industry was going through. Whereas one mother mentioned the difficulty with her pregnancy contributing to issues in balancing work and study and managing her other children. All mothers said they enjoyed their job but there were some aspects which they thought could change.

“I’d say it went from a 5 to 3 back 5 in certain parts of what I was doing I enjoyed and then eventually it did go to a 1 being the issues of a team member of mine being that she influenced me to be in this role and then being adamant during the role their own personal issues” (P9)

“It’s hard taking things in isolation so the job itself I really liked I would probably give a 5. But with all of the circumstances probably rate it a bit lower like 3-4 because it was a lot all at once. A lot of pressure to work and do my studies and I found my pregnancy quite difficult this last one...so all the circumstances made it a bit harder.”(P10)

One mother mentioned the lack of autonomy and work to do during the week. One mother said as her husband worked away from home one month on and one month off hence the organization offers compressed work weeks during the times her husband is away. Mothers mentioned supportive work environment as positive work elements. Similar to the findings, one study conducted by Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian and Wilk (2004) hypothesised that positive relationships at the workplace provided a sense of empowerment to women which in turn contributed to their job satisfaction. Their study also supported the theory that structural empowerment, that is, perceived presence of empowering conditions led to increased levels of job satisfaction. Findings are similar to another study by Thomas and Ganster (1995) who found that supervisor support was perceived as having a positive effect on job satisfaction. The present study



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also looks into job satisfaction before maternity leave and if that was a determinant for mothers to return to work. The findings indicate that mothers may have returned to work because of their job satisfaction prior to maternity leave but it cannot be said conclusively that job satisfaction before leave was a major reason to return to work. The positive effects are discussed in the literature review.

### **Balance of family and work**

All mothers responded that they had good work-life balance. They said they had to make it work somehow which was the only way to ensure that they had a decent work-life balance. Four mothers rated a 4-5 on a response scale of 1-5. One mother said 3.5 and 3 mothers answered 3. Two mothers said they had a decent balance but could be better.

When asked how they manage their work-life balance, the mothers explained their whole routine and how they schedule each activity and incorporate any extracurricular or social activities they might have. One mother who responded with a 4-5 said that her husband worked one month on and one month off in a different country and that was hard to juggle with being a single parent for those months.

“I suppose my work hours really help with that...if I was starting at eight as I would normally do, it would be horrendous, so I'm really grateful for the time that they've given to help me do that and then picking him up I can pick him up at four and gives me a good amount of time to organize his tea and everything else...it's just myself so I don't have to stress too much about cooking for my husband...Feel pretty agile and we go and do various bits and pieces as well and having just been got here we find that lots of people message us here visit us here although it is hard emotionally to be separated...it is much better when there are two of you to share the load”(P3)

Another mother who travelled for work sometimes and had to leave early mornings or come back late nights said that she didn't check emails at home or work from home.

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“You just make it work. As I said I’ve got the advantage once I’m home my work stops. I don’t have to be checking emails I don’t have to be doing all that stuff. It pretty much doesn’t encroach on family time.”(P1)

One mother talked about scheduling activities as a family. This helped her bond with her children and compensate time for work and study during the week.

“It's definitely been a struggle in the past and even when I came back I felt drowning but now I feel like we out together a good schedule and planning family things we are at a good balance right now...that's a huge thing. Scheduling...I think I'm a personality that thrives on schedules. It's That planning because otherwise we find jobs to do and we end up all being grumpy because we are upset the house isn't clean they are upset that they're sitting around not doing anything not spending time with us. So scheduling in those job days scheduling in those fun days that kind of stuff is what's worked for us.”(P10)

Two mothers said that a good support system is the key to balancing.

“Family good support systems I think if I didn't have my parents around and my husband around I think it would be very difficult and highly stressful just because of my position...my children take priority but when they go to bed I’m working...that's my own development and commitment to the job because I'm passionate about it about what I do.”(P8)

Parallel to the findings, Pocock (2005) report that organisational culture determines how the available work-life balance policies are utilised. Similar to the strategies mentioned by the mothers, Gregory and Milner (2009) state that strategies like “part-time working and other reduced working-hour arrangements, and school term-time working” (p. 4) for women working in public sector could bring about a good work-life balance.

### **Pressures difficulties and challenges**

Six mothers said they had no difficulty with work-life balance while 5 mothers said they had some sort of pressure to deal with. Three mothers outlined how they

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dealt with the pressures and difficulties. One mother said that social activities that clash with work-life are avoided so as not to have too many commitments.

“It’s pretty much a conscious decision to not load yourself with too many commitments. When you’re a working mum for both of us full time working we tend to not take too many commitments put too much pressure on our time with the kids. So we pick up and choose what we do.”(P2)

“I’m quite good at shutting off and not thinking... I mean I don’t have work emails on my phone, I attend to when I’m at work. I don’t think too much about work.”(P11)

Another mother said not working from home and not checking emails was another way to avoid pressures. Another mother said that even though there will be some days busier than others but her partner and she have managed it pretty good. More than one mother said when the baby gets sick, taking care of the baby and working was tricky, especially if the mother was self-employed.

“I think the biggest difficulty is when the baby gets sick. I think that would be the biggest pressure and the biggest challenge...having a sick child at home, on your working days and I still have to complete my work tasks. So my nights just get later. I have to work weekends” (P4)

One mother had difficulty getting to work on time and another mother had difficulty meeting deadlines coupled with a limited understanding of her work.

“I’d say the pressure for myself is the leave sometimes there’s deadlines I can’t meet. That could be because my daughter could be sick that’s my priority is to be at home with her. Two it is out of my hands in terms of the work it is. It’s just either I don’t have an understanding about it or I can’t articulate what that is about if I am not aware of what that type of work is. That would be for me that’s the main pressure of work-life balance is. It is not meeting those deadlines.”(P9)

On the other hand one mother had difficulty leaving her child with someone else while she was at work.

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“Initially I found it really hard leaving them and handing them over to someone else there is certain guilt I find that comes with being a mom I found that was the hardest thing I had to overcome was that it is the guilt that it should be my responsibility that I'm having to pay someone else to do what I should be doing...That's my biggest hurdle I had to overcome. I'm never going to be fine. I think there are so many pressures. There are pressure from other people and little comments you know but yeah it was just trusting and believing what my husband and I decided to do in the end.”(P5)

Also one mother said she had pressures to maintain a good home life because of social media.

“I feel like there's sort of social pressure to do both things really well. I take a lot of pride in my identity and my work and how well my work is done. There is this certain expectation...we all still live in an age of Pinterest and Instagram and we are supposed to have these perfect family holidays and birthday parties...I feel pressured and it's self-inflicted.”  
(P10)

Mothers were asked what the main challenges they experienced were. Two mothers said they had challenges with time management. One mother said she did not talk to her husband until evening when she first saw for the day due to their hectic schedules. Another mother said that sometimes she has to work after hours or take work home which cuts into her time with family. Three mothers cited not having enough hours in a day as a challenge. One mother battled with tiredness. For another mother travelling was a challenge. One mother said attention to her children was the main challenge as buying them maternal things instead of giving them your time was not enough. Three mothers responded positively that having proper transport system around the city so that travelling time is cut and having supportive partner and boss curbed the challenges.

“My challenge is my husband and I don't talk to each other all that much because he gets up and goes to work at 5.20 I get up at 5.30 and I get ready and then get baby up at 7. So we don't talk to each other in the morning...the first time I see him is at 5.30”(P7)

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“There are not enough hours in a day and you feel like you are constantly rushed...juggling all things you need to do to get out of the door to get to work is... Can be quite prolonged. I am an organized person at work but I’m not so organized at home. There is only enough space in the brain to be organized and it happens to be at work. Organization comes to the forefront at work whereas at work you are in this crazy kind of meddle.”(P11)

“Attention to the children” (P8)

“going from work mode into home mode although I also enjoy my job. I do my best at work. I also don't bring much of it home. I think that's probably one way of coping with it. I won't respond to emails unless I'm working from home I don't answer my phone my work phone at home. I won't respond to emails at home after hours. I make sure I deal with them all in the day”(P3)

“my boss is very supportive...my husband and I share the load with that as well. He will quite often be able to leave work early to make sure they are there.”(P5)

“my partner is pretty supportive and so he is also available he works locally at the moment if there is times where he can if his work allows he can kind of pick her up drop her off like if he is between jobs”(P6)

On the whole, 8 mothers said they experienced challenges with time management that is, dividing time between work and family, insufficient time, tiredness, attention to children. On a positive note, three others cited supportive partner, boss alleviated having any challenges.

These findings suggest that informal arrangements, as discussed in the literature review, between employers and employees enable women to have better work-life balance. Flexibility with getting to work a few minutes late, extending deadline to accommodate family responsibilities, reduced work hours and the option of returning part-time was perceived as having a supportive boss. Another important thing was the perception of encouragement from supervisors or managers. Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport (2006) stated that organisational culture

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determines the usage of informal or formal organisational policies and can affect people negatively, if they do use them leaving them feeling undervalued. Hence the findings support that even if informal work arrangements are in place, supervisors and managers determine the extent to which they are used by employees. Thomas and Ganster (1995) focused on how family friendly workplaces can affect working mothers positively. Their statistics supported the literature review that when employees perceive their control on making decisions on their work schedules such as attending to a sick baby or working reduced hours some of the pressures and difficulties can be relieved.

### Section Three

#### **Family, friends and workplace**

Some mothers did not have family nearby and had friends as support, some had family but did not use them for fear of being a burden in addition to their other grandkids, some took their immediate family's help while some took their husband's family's help as their immediate family lived overseas. Having said that, all mothers rated their support from family and friends as satisfactory. Although mothers who had families that lived faraway said that they wished they had family close by and the support was better.

Mothers were asked about their support system in the form of family, friends and organization. Only mother said that she didn't have family around, neither did her husband. Three mothers said that their family lived overseas and depended on their husband's family to babysit their child occasionally. This was difficult sometimes because they had other grandkids and these mothers hesitated to add to their burden. Five mothers said that they had immediate families around and they helped with their babies. Two mothers said that even though they had family around they did not take help from them and relied on childcare or opted out of going out altogether. This was sometimes the case even with mothers who had families nearby. One mother said even though her family helped take care of the baby while she was at work they lived far away. Also it was commonly seen that mothers had multiple "sets" of people who helped take care of the baby like parents, sisters-in law, aunts, etc. However, partner support was important to

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mothers in this study. Similarly, Häggman-Laitila (2003) reported that for mothers support from their families and partners in household chores and child care was important. Leahy-warren, McCarthy and Corcoran (2012) found in their study that most of the mothers reported their partner, immediate families, especially their mothers and friends as providing all kinds of social support, such as instrumental, informational, appraisal and emotional support. In addition to family, mothers had friends who helped them with taking care of sometimes occasionally too.

“my family is (overseas) my husband’s family is all local between Cambridge and Hamilton. My husband’s dad lives half a block away from us and then his mum, his sisters and brothers all live in Cambridge so we have the opportunity...They are amazing support”(P10)

“Both our parents are local so that makes it a lot easier. So there's definitely support from our parents. Makes it a lot easier and that can just be anything from just offering to if we need to ...have the need to look after her or anything or can they do anything or anything like that so just having them close by is good.”(P6)

“We also have really good support from our friends. We’ve very strong network of friends in Hamilton. We are really lucky. We’ve got really good friends who I know if I called up and said look can you walk the dog, can you take Sam for a walk because I’ve got to work for an hour that would really help with what I do. They would be happy to do that. So we’ve got phenomenal friends. Very lucky.”(P4)

Apart from family and friends, mothers also answered how organizational policies, managers, colleagues provided support with child care. In addition to 18 weeks paid leave by the government, mothers received family leave from their organizations. Some mothers received unlimited sick leave. Also some mothers received a top up for their maternity leave from their organization. One mother was allowed to return to work part time and one mother worked reduced hours whenever her husband was away to take care of their son. Mothers also said that they had supportive boss/manager, colleagues. When all mothers asked said their managers were supportive with flexible hours. If mothers needed to leave to tend

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to sick baby they were allowed to leave no questions asked. 5 mothers received payments from the organization in addition to the 18 weeks' pay.

When asked about the organization could do, two mothers said there was nothing they could do more. Two mothers said that they had not read any policies offered by the organization. The information was hard to find about the 18 weeks' pay too. One mother said it would be good if the university provided changing rooms in case she had to get her baby. At the workplace, mothers said they had not read any policies offered by the organisation except for the standard employee agreement available everywhere. Furthermore, mothers felt there wasn't anything more the organisation could do to help them and felt it was not their job to help them anymore. Although some mothers did feel they needed more from their organisation like payment structure, more baby friendly facilities on site.

"I remember calling the organisation to ask if there was somewhere I could express because I was breastfeeding him and they had told me someplace I think it was the cowshed which is kind of ironic. It was like room that was opened up into this courtyard I thought this is so inappropriate. Completely inappropriate place."(P10)

"Ensuring the policies that come through are supportive of women who have come back in to the workforce within the year of maternity leave. So for example there's a working from home policy and there's another policy that has come out so those all have an impact on how you position yourself in your role. So maybe reflecting how those policies support"(P8)

"The biggest thing would be how our pay structures work...we get paid monthly and that's a calendar month and not every 4 weeks. There are months when there are 5 weeks. So a benefit would be if our company would put us on a salary or at least a retainer and then paid us above that the hours that we work...juggling finances when you have no idea how much you are going to earn next month gets a little bit tricky."(P1)

Most studies looked at family friendly work policies and workplace support as important forms of support system s for working mothers. Supervisor support highlighted their support for employees who desired more work-life



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balance (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). In addition to having an encouraging supervisor, policies that enable work-life balance such as telecommuting, flexitime, child care, job sharing and family leave was preferred by employees. Thomas and Ganster (1995) reported that family friendly work policies had an effect on women's attitudes and wellbeing. They added that family friendly supervisors represented organisations that supported family friendly policies and encouraged its employees especially mothers to utilise them.

### **Community services and childcare**

When asked about other kinds of help they had when they went to work. All mothers said they had their kids in childcare or homebased care. Two mothers said they used homebased care for their baby. All others said they used childcare/day-care. Mothers also reasoned why and how they chose their childcare. All mothers said they put their kids in childcare once they returned to work, that is, before the child was a year old, except two mothers who returned to work after a year of childbirth. But mothers put their infants in care before they came to work to get the child used to being in care and for a smooth transition.

One mother used a community called Space and another used Bellyful.

“It's good because we always get in terms of the balance of family we always have...that's kind of puts in a safe place knowing that she is developing her skills, her learnings at Kohanga and for me to be able to physically see that development online that makes me feel like okay she is safe that's okay they are priority sort of and then on the work side it's like there's the deadline so that's a priority so I won't say it takes focus away from her but it put me in that place like that she is ok.”(P9)

One mother said she used church as a community service when her child was sick.

“So we belong to a church that we attend. They always do a two week roster after the babies are born where you don't have to cook dinner. Which is incredible. There is another group called bellyful. That's a community service group. And they do the same thing they provide for new mums I forget how many meals it is. Half a dozen meals or something. Initially and then if you feel you need more support or you

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have a sick baby or whatever else then they'll do more I think. We utilized more with my second son again with my second son we found that transition really hard esp. with him in hospitals”(P10)

“With my first baby I went to a play centre called Space which is a weekly thing for the first year of his life. You meet with other moms and you talk through. I mean other mom but also with the person who is leading the session who is typically a registered nurse or has some kind of childcare qualification...It is kind of support for new mums.”(P11)

One mother said she and her husband were a part of a singing group and they received support from them during pregnancy and continue to receive after childbirth. In addition, the mother also mentioned maintaining a great relationship with her midwife.

“I guess there is help in a sense so I do kapa haka with my partner...my team gave me the option to perform but from their own perspective it was we care about your health we care about your wellbeing for your sake and baby's sake so we prefer you not perform being that we don't want anything to happen to you. And that to me showed like I wasn't thinking about the risks of what would happen. I was thinking I'm going to perform with my partner, I'm pregnant and I'm going to perform so their support from our team has been huge...it's cultural support overall... still have that relationship with my midwife with me now still catching up how's baby that's been awesome.”(P9)

Support from midwives was looked into (Wilkins, 2006). The findings support Wilkins (2006) as mothers mentioned having support from their midwives even after the children had completed the amount of time with midwife visits. The study found that social support was important to aid women's transition into motherhood.

## Section Four

Psychological wellbeing was looked at to determine if mothers experienced postpartum depression or any other mental health issues. It was found that one mother experienced psychosis in addition to postpartum depression. While some

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others said that they experienced postnatal depression and sought help from counsellors or friends. Mothers who experienced postpartum depression reported that talking to their partners or friends helped them with their depression.

Three mothers did not experience any kind of postpartum depression. Most of the mothers experienced postpartum depression. Although some of the mothers said they didn't know it at the time that they were experiencing postpartum depression.

“I think to a degree I would say every mother does if I'm being honest. Because it's not perfect and I think having esp. from a woman who first had her child you have this perception about how it's going to be but it's the complete opposite it is hard work... There are probably times I would get looking back now I did have a little bit of postnatal depression. But I didn't know at the time.”(P5)

Also one mother did not have any resources to assist her with treatment for postpartum depression. Without anyone to refer her to the psychologists for the treatment, she said it was difficult to get any treatment. One mother went to a counsellor because she felt an outsider would be non-judgemental and had the outsider's perspective into her issues.

“I have depression and I had it before I had my girls. When I had Georgia as I said that was anything but normal I was in hospital for 9 days afterwards and during that period I experienced psychosis which is very freaky. And trying to get help for that was really hard.”(P1)

“Professional help. Talk to someone outside...I did some counselling sessions and I think for me it was more of the talking to someone who had an outlook of who I was...I had a bit of breaking point where I just would cry because it just felt like that was the best thing to do for myself. So I did go to a doctor () and I was explained what my emotions is and what I was feeling being just drained, also much from being a stay at mum but it was more of the drain of motions and not feeling wanted or not having my own independence.”(P9)

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All mothers who experienced depression did not take Plunket's help even though Plunket helps take care of the mother's psychological wellbeing in addition to the infant's development. Most of them relied on their friends to get through it.

"I had a lot of friends and family who were supportive. Again my mother in law she used to come in all the time and I learnt a lot on friends that were mums that would say you are not being crazy and that's okay and you know this is normal this is how your feeling you are tired you are this you are that. I think it was trying to rationalize because it is sort of new."(P5)

Leahy-Warren et al. (2012) stated that postnatal depression can affect mother-infant attachment and general maternal functioning. One mother said that she experienced depression but did not know it at the time. In support of this finding, Leahy-Warren et al. (2012) reported that postnatal depression is commonly found in new mothers and it can be difficult to identify. They reason for this is partly because mothers are disinclined to talk to health care professionals. In their study, Leahy-Warren et al. (2012) found that mothers who received emotional support were less likely to experience depressive symptoms at after 6 weeks of delivery. The early detection and treatment determine the duration of the postnatal depression. Hence early detection and intervention is important. The findings are similar to Leahy-Warren et al. (2012) who found that higher levels of social support from family and friends was associated with lower levels of postnatal depression. The finding that mothers reported their partners or friends as support in dealing with postnatal depression is supported by studies in the literature review where partners' support alleviated depression or symptoms of depression.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this study, mothers with at least one child under the age of four were interviewed about their experiences of returning to work. They were interviewed on their satisfaction with the maternity leave, their perspective on why their duration was important and their motivations to reenter employment. Once they had returned to work their transition and balance of employment and motherhood was explored detailing their specific challenges and pressures. Corresponding with this the study aimed to explore support in their personal and professional lives by means of family, friends, manager, colleagues, policies and practices, community services to understand the extent to which this helped in their work-life balance and the changeover from being full-time mother to integrating their jobs with home life. Lastly mental health as influencing their overall life was looked into.

Literature review suggests the benefits of a long maternity leave on the mothers' and babies' physical and mental health. A longer duration has more positive effects than negative which the studies' support suggesting that governments must look into providing longer leave. Their satisfaction with the leave determines if the women would return to work. The main reasons for return to work were financial although women's independence and sense of self was a close second on why they returned to work. Most working mothers planned to return to work before leaving for maternity leave citing their socio-economic conditions and desire to work. Keeping the benefits of mother-infant attachment in mind, mothers in this study also supported the research that bonding with baby was healthy for both the mother and baby alike. Women in this study were working before motherhood hence integrating personal and professional responsibilities was important for the participants.

Literature review dealt with various strategies that can be employed to attain better work-life balance (WLB). Similar to the strategies reviewed, working mothers depended on partner support, reduced working hours and access to organizational policies for better WLB. For access to policies, supervisor support was deemed most important. They determined the culture in the organization with their support and encouragement for their utilization. Pressures and challenges can

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commonly be found in new parents. Being late to work, sick baby, meeting deadlines and guilt over leaving infant with someone other than a family member were some of the challenges the mothers faced. The participants' organizations did not offer any policies except for the mandatory paid parental leave and family leave which is accessible to all employees. However, supportive bosses had verbal understanding with their employees regarding flexible working arrangements which provided flexibility in a working mother's life.

Similarly, social support was seen as alleviating stress as familial support, especially partner support was important to women in this study. All participants had routines that worked as part of their strategy for balancing responsibilities. Organizational policies were also included as support for working mothers. The positive effects of familial support highlighted the mothers' ease into employment. The support signified the mothers' perspective on leaving their child with a family member, relief from worrying about dropping off or picking up the child from childcare and help take care of the infant if the mothers worked after hours. Selection of childcare was an important decision because the decision had cultural importance attached to it. Some participants indicated their desire for their children to learn and be in a surrounding where Māori culture was taught and the language was spoken. It was important to both mothers and their partners alike, that their child learn and be in touch with their cultural roots.

Lastly, the mothers were interviewed about their psychological wellbeing, whether any delivery complications, antenatal risk factors for depression, major life events or the added responsibilities had an effect on their mental health. Some mothers experienced postnatal depression but only one participant talked to a professional. Rest of the participants talked to their friends to overcome postnatal depression. Although the studies mention antenatal risk factors such as socio-economic factors, biological factors, etc., the reasons for the mothers' undergoing postnatal depression has not been explored in this study. Overall, this study attempts to understand how the above mentioned factors affect a working mother's life.

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### **Limitations**

The main limitation with this study is the sample was based in Hamilton only. Only a small number of women were interviewed. Hence there is scope for collecting a larger sample of women. Also future studies can be concentrated on women from a particular profession since this sample consisted of women from diverse backgrounds. The findings are mainly based on the responses of the participants in this study. A larger, more diverse sample would provide a wider range of answers. Additional research into the reasons for mothers' issues with postnatal depression can be explored to discover the relation between new motherhood, already existing risk factors and their psychological wellbeing.

### **Practical recommendations**

Organizations must have consistent pay structures for working mothers. Although this may depend on the industry the mothers work in, having a steady income provided financial security and as a result provides job satisfaction. Organizations can promote more formal family-friendly practices such as telecommuting, compressed work weeks or part-time. Instead of verbal arrangements with supervisors or managers, the organizations can create policies that are accessible to everyone in the organization, especially to working mothers. Once policies have been put in practice, organizations must ensure proper implementation of these policies. Additionally before mothers go on maternity leave organizations can provide all relevant and necessary information on parental leave payments. Organizations can provide changing rooms for new mothers so that if mothers bring their infants to work there can be an appropriate place for the mothers to feed and change the baby.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Research questions

#### Demographics-

- I. Name (nickname/ code name)
- II. Age (child's age too)
- III. Living arrangements (single, partner)
- IV. Occupation (Mother's + partner's)
  1. How long have you been back at work?
  2. Are you currently working part-time or full-time?
  3. What was your role prior to taking leave?
  4. How did you feel prior to childbirth about your position?
    - A. How satisfied were you with your job?
      - a. What did you like about your role and what did you dislike?
    - B. How confident were you performing your job responsibilities?
  5. Did you plan on returning to work after maternity leave?
  6. Why did you want to return to work?
    - A. What were your main drivers that motivated you to return to work?
  7. How do you feel about the duration of the maternity leave?
    - A. How many months did you take for maternity leave?
    - B. Paid or otherwise?
    - C. How important was it to you that you take the duration of the leave?
    - D. Was it a satisfactory amount of time?
  8. How do you feel equipped (mentally or physically) to deal with the new responsibilities as a parent?
    - A. Do you have a good work-life balance? [response scale of work-life balance]
    - B. How do you balance work and family responsibilities?
    - C. Do you have any pressures or difficulties with respect to work-life balance?
  9. Do you receive support
    - A. Family
      - a. What kind of support did you receive from your family?

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b. Was the support received satisfactory?

B. organization

- a. What kind of support did you receive from your organization (supervisor, manager, colleagues) once you returned to work?
- b. What are the organizational policies your organization offers or is willing to offer?
- c. Do you use the policies?
- d. Which policies do you use?
- e. How valuable do they prove to you?
- f. Do you think there should be any additional policies that would make have a positive impact on your life?

C. Other resources?

10. How do you feel now that you have returned to work?

- A. Are there new responsibilities at work?
- B. Are there any major changes in your job responsibilities?
- C. How satisfied are you with your work now?

11. Are there any other issues you would like to talk about?

## MOTHERS RETURNING TO WORK

### Appendix B: Consent Form

A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant.

Research Project: Experiences of women returning to the workforce after maternity leave.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick (✓) the appropriate box for each point.	YES	NO
1. I have read the Participant Information Sheet (or it has been read to me) and I understand it.		
2. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether or not to participate in this study		
3. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given regarding the study and I have a copy of this consent form and information sheet		
4. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty		
5. I have the right to decline to participate in any part of the research activity		
6. I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.		
I understand that the interview will be recorded.		
I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material, which could identify me personally, will be used in any reports on this study.		
I wish to receive a copy of my transcript.		
I wish to receive a copy of the themes.		
I wish to view the summary report of the results.		

Declaration by participant:

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Psychology Research and Ethics Committee (Dr Rebecca Sargisson, phone 07 557 8673, email: [rebeccas@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:rebeccas@waikato.ac.nz)).

Participant's name (Please print):

Signature:

Date:

Code name (Please print):

Declaration by member of research team:



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I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it. I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name (Please print): Divya Sriram

---

Signature:

Date:

---

## Appendix C: Information sheet

### Introduction

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project that investigates the experiences of working women who have returned to the workforce after maternity leave.

### Why am I doing the project?

The project is part of my Master's Thesis for my degree, Masters in Applied Psychology (MAppPsy) in Organizational Psychology at the University of Waikato. It is hoped that the research could shed light on topics such as work-life balance, social support system, mental health, organizational policies and duration of the maternity leave so that struggles of new working mothers can be highlighted. These broad issues will contribute to a better understanding of the challenges of women and the need for resources to assist in childcare and for the new mothers themselves to deal with such challenges.

### What will you have to do if you agree to take part?

This research has received ethics approval. If you are interested, you can ask for the response slips to fill in with your details from the daycare centre office and I will get back to you. Alternatively, see poster for contact information and you can contact me.

1. We will arrange a time and place that is convenient and appropriate for you.
2. There will be one interview with myself during which I will ask you questions about your responsibilities after returning to work after maternity leave.

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3. When I have completed the study I will summarize the findings which I will be more than happy to send you.

### **How much of your time will participation involve?**

One interview lasting no more than an hour.

### **Will your participation in the project remain confidential?**

If you agree to take part, your name will not be recorded in the interview and the information will not be disclosed to other parties. There will be code names given to each participant. Your responses to the questions will be used for the purpose of this project only. My supervisors will see the transcripts only with your code names on. You can be assured that if you take part in the project you will remain anonymous.

### **What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?**

You may find the project interesting and enjoy answering questions about how you juggle work and family life, what kind of support system you have to help with childcare, etc. The study will provide information about the effective ways for mothers to be a part of a child's life without having to sacrifice work or vice versa.

Disadvantage could be that you are not comfortable talking about some issues in your life but I can assure you that the interview will not veer into extremely personal questions.

### **Do you have to take part in the study?**

No, your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part, you have been approached because you are working mother whose participation can help with my research.

If you do agree to participate you are free to withdraw up until four weeks after the interview if you change your mind, after which write-up of results will begin.

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If you decide you would rather not participate in this study you need not fill the response slip. You do not have to give a reason. Simply ignore this and no further contact will be made.

Psychology research and Ethics committee convenor: **Dr. Rebecca Sargisson**

**Phone:** 07 557 8673; **Email:** rebeccas@waikato.ac.nz

**Researcher:** Divya Sriram, Master in Applied Psychology (Organizational Psychology), University of Waikato

**Ph:** 0220180307

**Email:** ds145@students.waikato.ac.nz

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Maree Roche, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato

**Email:** mroche@waikato.ac.nz

## MOTHERS RETURNING TO WORK

### **Appendix D: Letter to the childcare center**

Dear Sir/madam

I write this email to sincerely request your assistance in my research project.

My name is Divya Sriram and I am a MAppPsy student in the University of Waikato.

I am currently doing my thesis on the experiences of mothers returning to work after maternity leave. I am looking to explore topics like the duration of the maternity leave, social support system, mental health and organizational policies. I am looking to interview mothers who are working and have to balance work and family responsibilities. I am hopeful this will shed some light on their struggles and highlight any resources in term of childcare.

I am looking to interview working mothers who have returned to work and whose children are less than four years old. The interviews will be no more than an hour. These will be recorded. The participants will not be identified in the recordings or the transcripts. Code names will be given to the participants. The transcripts and the summary of my findings will be made available to the participants upon request.

I am requesting you to please show this email to the mothers and if they are interested ask them to fill in the response slips that I am attaching with this email. I will come around and collect it. Also I have posters to advertise my research in daycare centers. With your permission, I would like to hand deliver the response slips and the advertisement to your care Centre.

Additionally, if the potential participants feel like they have to withdraw after they have filled in the response slips, they are free to do so.

Participants will be receiving a \$5 voucher for petrol as gift of gratitude for their time and help.

I am attaching the information sheet and consent forms as well for your understanding of the confidentiality of my research along with the advert for my

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research. If there are any concerns, you can email me at this address or contact me on 0220180307.

The criteria for the participants is

- Working mothers
- They have at least one child.
- The child/children must be no older than 4 years of age.

If you are willing to permit me to contact your clients, please respond to this email and I will get in touch with you to provide you with the response slips and the posters.

Sincerely

Divya Sriram

## MOTHERS RETURNING TO WORK

**Appendix E: Poster**

## ATTENTION MOTHERS!!!



*Every mom is a Supermom*

INVITING YOU TO PARTICIPATE  
IN A RESEARCH TO EXPLORE  
YOUR EXPERIENCES OF  
RETURNING TO WORK AFTER  
MATERNITY LEAVE

Interviews will be no longer than  
ONE hour.

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IF:

YOU ARE A WORKING MOTHER

YOU HAVE ATLEAST ONE  
CHILD THE CHILD/CHILDREN  
ARE LESS THAN 4 YEARS OLD

Investigating your experiences of returning to work after maternity leave

The research aims to investigate the daily challenges of a working mother like maintaining a work-life balance, her psychological well-being, the social system she has and the benefits provided by the organization for childcare. These themes can shed light on the implications for mothers as to her own well-being in addition to evaluating the resources for childcare that can be provided to new mothers to adjust to the changes in her work environment.

For more information, contact: **Divya Sriram** Researcher and Student, Masters of Applied Psychology (Organizational Psychology), University of Waikato.

**MOTHERS RETURNING TO WORK****Appendix F: Response slip**

Name:

Email address/Phone number:

Convenient days:

Convenient time:

Researcher: Divya Sriram, University of Waikato, Master's in Applied  
Psychology (Organizational psychology)

Phone: 0220180307

Email: [ds145@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ds145@students.waikato.ac.nz)