

### **Personal responses**

**The Commission is keen for people to tell us about their experiences of time away from work to have a baby and how this has (or could be) affected by the provision of paid parental leave. For example, issues that you might address could include:**

**☐ Were you eligible for paid or unpaid parental leave? If eligible, did you take it all – and if not, why not?**

As a public servant I was eligible for 14 weeks paid parental leave (the additional 2 weeks were to be taken out of the personal leave bank), I took all of this leave at half pay. I also took any other outstanding leave, and managed to have some form of paid leave for close to 10 months (I had not taken holidays for the previous two years). As the main bread winner in our family without access to paid maternity leave, and with no family living in the same state as ourselves, I would not have been able to stay at home for such a long length of time without pay.

**☐ Did (or would) it affect the time you took off work, your capacity for breastfeeding, the baby's and your health, stress, relationships, your interaction with your baby, and your family life generally? How and why?**

For my first child (second child due in June), I ran out of funds at 10 months, so I returned to work, whilst still breast feeding my child (he refused to learn to eat, drink breast milk from a cup/ bottle). I was certainly much more stressed at this time, then if I could have waited until he was much more into his solids, if I didn't have to feed him during the day, and if work had somewhere where he could be feed that was appropriate. I don't think I would have been able to breastfeed my child if I had to go to work. I didn't find that I could express enough milk, and he had problems with drinking from any thing apart from the breast.

**☐ What were the distinctive benefits of prenatal as opposed to postnatal leave?**

I required a medical certificate to work beyond 36 weeks (even though I sit behind a desk, and my brain still functions). I used this opportunity to extend my time at work, as I wanted to access as much leave as possible for time with my child. My son came at close to 42 weeks, so I was very happy not to have finished work too early. I am unsure of the benefits of too much prenatal leave, however, I was fit and healthy during my pregnancy and thus didn't suffer from complications that many women do.

**☐ Did your partner get paid parental leave, and did you both use it to care for the baby?**

No, my partner does not get any paid parental leave, nor access to any real parental leave. He works for a small business, and does not have this opportunity.

**☐ Did you use other types of leave to care for your baby? If so, what types and for how long?**

Yes, I used all of my outstanding leave to extend my paid maternity leave. I also used this leave at half pay. I am due to have my second child later this year, and will use all of my long service leave at half pay to extend my leave to 12 months at half pay.

**□ What were the good and bad aspects of the leave arrangements?**

Good, got paid for some of it, I was allowed to access other leave to extend the paid period, but I had to take it all at half pay to be able to afford to stay at home.

**□ How did your leave arrangements affect your employer? Was your employer positive or negative about you taking leave. Why?**

Generally positive experience about the leave

**□ Did you return to work? On a full time, part time or casual basis? To the same employer? To the same or a similar job?**

I returned to the same job on a part time basis, and was allowed to increase my hours over time, to full time. The current conditions that I work under allow me to request part time work, until my youngest child is 2.

**□ Did your leave arrangements affect how quickly you went back to work? In what way?**

I would have taken more time (ie 12 months off) if I had access to more leave, I would love to have used more of my personal/ sick leave to do this. For my second child, I will be able to use long service leave to extend the period of leave that I have. I have to go back to work, for financial reasons, I am the breadwinner in the family, and without my salary, even at half pay, we would be having financial difficulties.

**□ Is the amount of paid or unpaid parental leave now available from your work sufficient?**

No – I think 12 months pay would be better, even 6 months (which is now standard at most universities around Australia) would be better. Life doesn't just stop because you have a baby. We still have a mortgage to pay, insurance (house, car, medical), rates, bills etc... I am the main breadwinner in the family, and without my salary, we would not survive.

We do not use any other care for our child. He stays with his father all day. We don't have any family in the same state as us, and we don't think child care was a suitable alternative (we tried and he hated, we hated it so we didn't persist).

**Duration and generosity of benefits**

*Should the rate of payment be linked to the employee's wage (either current or an average wage over a recent period)? If not, what basis should be used for the parental leave payment?*

Yes, leave should be linked to the individual's pay. Not all women are the secondary earner in the family, and people make decisions on their salary. An individual spending a year or two out of the work force shouldn't be penalised by just getting the average wage. A woman's working career is approximately 40 years in length. Why should we be penalised for having a couple of years off to look after children?

***How long should a parent receive paid parental leave for? Why? What benefits would arise from longer or shorter periods of paid leave?***

Personally either 12 months should be paid. From my personal experience I was able to focus more on work the more my child developed and made it past major milestones. A 12 month child is a much different being to a 6 week old one.

***At what time in the prenatal period should people be entitled to parental leave? Should each parent have a separate entitlement for leave, or should there be an amount of leave to be shared between the parents? If the leave were to be shared, should there be an amount that is reserved for exclusive use by either parent?***

You can use sick leave to have an operation, or to recover from an operation such as a knee reconstruction, but you can't generally use sick leave whilst waiting to give birth. As you generally don't know when you are going to give birth, this is a difficult issue. I personally would prefer to be allowed to be on personal leave, or some other leave anytime after 38/39 weeks. But then my babies come late. There needs to be some flexibility here.

Ideally there would be some leave accessible to all parties in the relationship.

***Is there a case for a different period of leave for parents of children in different circumstances (such as children born with a disability)?***

Yes, I imagine the adjustment to different circumstances would be harder to deal with, then just the adjustment to having a new born.

***To what extent (and why) would an increase in the availability and duration of paid parental leave significantly alter the quality of infant care and outcomes for the child?***

Family wellbeing – our child found child care a very difficult arrangement, and thus we have not used it yet. We will use it, once he is of a suitable age. I think that by not having the opportunity to stay at home, and earn some money on maternity leave, individuals are forced into making this choice. This can be very stressful. I also don't think that large child care facilities can realistically give very young infants the quality care that they deserve, a staff ratio of one adult to five infants is very different to an at home situation. If people didn't require to place their infants into child care from such a young age, then there would be more childcare workers and places available for children over the age of one.

***What is the appropriate duration of leave to maximise such benefits, and should any minimum period be mandated?***

Yes, 6 months should be the minimum. Have people even considered how hard it is to work when you only get to sleep in 3 hour intervals, exclusively breastfeed (as per WHO guidelines), learn about your child, and adjust to a completely different lifestyle? For first time mothers it can be especially difficult to predict when you want to come back to work, and how functional you will be.

I don't think that the baby bonus is the sole solution, nor should it be seen as an alternative to paid maternity leave. We would be very happy to access only maternity leave, with no baby bonus, provided that paid leave was extend to at least 6 months. The baby bonus would only cover my salary for a month. However, when you are not paid a salary, there are other impacts on your financial activities, for example, without a salary you don't continue to receive any superannuation.

I think there are other solutions too, if government didn't pay family tax benefit, A and B (we don't currently qualify for both of these), the child care rebate, and the child care benefit, and the baby bonus, then maybe there would be more funds available for maternity leave.