

Advice for employers on helping working mothers who 'suffer a 3 per cent pay penalty'^[1]

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Source: The Irish Times

Format: Article

Publication Date: 18 Apr 2017

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EXCERPTS

Employers have experienced targeted focus being placed on gender equality, however, other factors can be side-lined or not recognised which also affect equal pay. According to a survey conducted by the Université Paris-Saclay, comparing the earnings of a female employee who has children and one who does not can also alter the pay scale of employees.

Coined 'The Motherhood Pay Penalty', research has further quantified the issue. The survey reports that female employees in France will be paid three per cent less per child than their female counterparts who do not have children. The survey also argues that male employees suffer no disadvantage at all, regardless of the number of children they may have.

The author of the study, Lionel Wilner, has called for public intervention to tackle the "unfair" and "noticeable hourly wage difference following childbirth".

The findings do not raise new or isolated concerns and similar surveys have been undertaken in the UK regarding the motherhood pay penalty. However, what can employers in the Republic of Ireland do to tackle this pay penalty?

The October 2016 Low Pay Commission report found that almost a quarter of women working part time, did so to 'balance caring responsibilities' and in addition to this, employees on national minimum wage were more likely to be in a single adult household. Arguably this could be interpreted to support the fact that female employees with children are more likely to sacrifice position or pay.

Considering an increase in the accommodation of flexible working and encouraging the advancement and parity of part-time positions may positively affect the penalty.

Flexible working can bolster retention regarding mothers who, without some may find themselves having to relinquish working ties or taking subordinate roles. Being able to preserve employment and duties, in a flexible manner may embolden employees to remain within the labour market on comparable salaries.

In the 2015 OECD economic survey, it was found that the Republic of Ireland had significantly high childcare costs. The report detailed that 'these high costs can lead to women (as the primary carers) either exiting the labour market altogether or seeking part-time employment in order to offset the full cost of childcare.'

Therefore, extending the offer of child care provisions would certainly assist many mothers who wish to recommence their careers where they left off after having a child. As a costly expenditure, assistance with childcare, be it vouchers or even access to free care may allow many employees to return to their roles and continue to progress.

Contemplating the treatment employees receive following pregnancy would be prudent for any employer. Many mothers find themselves in a situation where, due to care, they are physically unable to return to work. The provision of caring facilities such as breastfeeding areas will render the employee able, if they so wish to return at their own discretion.

Returning to work after having children may change the dynamics of employees' relationships with work. The focus for employers is to recognise alternatives and close the gap on pay discrepancies, where mothers can continue to work without conditions or restrictions thus allowing for continued and unbridled access to career and progression.

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