Childcare challenge for shift workers [1]

Low-paid young parents, especially those working shifts and zero-hours contracts, struggle to manage childcare, according to research by the TUC.

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EXCERPTS

A survey by the Trades Union Congress of more than 1,000 parents aged between 20 and 35 and with a household income of less than £28,000 a year was carried out as part of the umbrella group's campaign for better jobs for mums and dads.

The study found that more than two in five of the parents surveyed believed asking for family-friendly working patterns led to them getting fewer hours, worse shifts and in some cases losing their jobs.

Around a quarter of parents (26 per cent) told the TUC they had their shifts changed at short notice, and one in five had been given their rota less than a week in advance, making planning childcare difficult.

In addition, more than half of parentsworking in low-paid sectors like retail, hospitality and social care said they were not aware of their employment rights, and 63 per cent did not know they had a right to unpaid parental leave.

As a result, half of the parents surveyed were not using one or more of their legal rights to time off, with one in three taking annual leave to cover their child's sick day in the last year.

The TUC has called for all workers, including parents, to have the right to be given their shifts one month in advance, helping working parents to plan childcare commitments.

The organisation is also campaigning for all working parents, including zero-hours contracts workers, agency workers and those in casual work, to have the same parental rights in their jobs. Currently these rights are only available to workers with ‘employee' status, leaving 1.5m workers without access to these rights if they become parents.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said, ‘Too many workplaces expect mums and dads to forget all about their kids as soon as they walk through the door. But it's a nightmare to plan childcare when your boss changes your shifts at the drop of a hat, and you never work the same weekly hours twice.

‘Many parents fear losing shifts, taking unpaid leave or being viewed badly at work if they need time off to look after their kids. And it is shocking that some mums and dads are being stopped from taking their children to hospital when they are sick.

‘All workers should be given notice of their shifts at least one month in advance. Everyone at work should get the same parents' rights from day one - and everyone should be given written information about these rights.

‘My advice to working dads and mums is this: join a union today. Your union will make sure you get your legal rights to time off to look after your kids.'

Ellen Broomé, chief executive at the Family and Childcare Trust, added, ‘We are not surprised by these findings showing how parents are struggling to balance work and childcare. Parents face a postcode lottery when finding the childcare they need to be able to go out to work as only half of local authorities reporting enough childcare for working parents in their area. For parents lucky enough to find nearby childcare, many will struggle to make work pay after paying for childcare which on average costs £116 per week for just a part time nursery place.

‘We urgently need a childcare strategy to make sure there is enough childcare for every family who needs it and that every parent is better off working once they have paid for childcare.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

Region: Europe [3]

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