

PMW 12

Ymchwiliad i feichiogrwydd, mamolaeth a gwaith yng Nghymru

Inquiry into pregnancy, maternity and work in Wales

Ymateb gan: TUC Cymru

Response from: WalesTUC

1. The Wales TUC

- 1.1 The Wales TUC is the collective voice of the Welsh trades union movement and is the largest democratic membership based civic organisation in Wales. With 49 affiliated trades unions representing around 400,000 workers in the public, private and third sectors; the Wales TUC represents the views of workers in communities across the whole of Wales. A constituent part of the British TUC, the Wales TUC has devolved responsibility for Welsh issues, including all matters within the remit of the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh government.
- 1.2 Unions in Wales elect delegates to the Wales TUC Conference which decides collective union policies for Wales and itself elects the Wales TUC General Council to oversee the delivery of Welsh policy. The Wales TUC also delivers UK wide and international matters as part of the TUC.
- 1.3 The Wales TUC plays an integral role in the social partnership model of governance developed with the Welsh Government and employers in Wales. Our aim is to make Wales a fair work nation.
- 1.4 We welcome the opportunity to make this formal response on behalf of the Welsh trades union movement. It represents the collective views arrived at democratically on behalf of all our affiliated unions and their memberships. We approach consultations in this way rather than organise 400,000 individual responses however our single collective response should be given due consideration appropriate to the weight of numbers it represents.

2. Pregnancy and maternity discrimination

Pregnancy discrimination forces tens of thousands of women out of their jobs every year. It is not just confined to a few workplaces, it is happening on an industrial scale.

Action must be taken to tackle this issue and the Welsh Government must extend protection for pregnant women and new mums who are at risk of discrimination.

The TUC has lobbied the UK Government to stop charging women up to £1,200 to take a pregnancy discrimination claim and has asked the UK government to extend the time limit for new mothers to bring a pregnancy discrimination claim. The introduction of tribunal fees has been a gift for Britain's worst bosses and allowed them to get away with mistreating pregnant women and working mums. Just 1% of women who are discriminated against in pregnancy claim against their employer to tribunal.

Wales TUC advice to women is to join a union. As the Equality and Human Rights Commission highlighted recently, pregnant women and new mums are treated better in workplaces that recognise trade unions. Wales TUC asks the Welsh Government to provide a cast-iron guarantee that Brexit will not result in weaker protections for women at work and to lobby the UK government to remove the cost of bringing a pregnancy discrimination claim.

3. Childcare offer and working mothers

Wales TUC recognises the value of women in the workplace and how it is crucially important to support women throughout their working lives. This includes during pregnancy, maternity leave, and returning to work, but also during other transition times where they may need to take on caring responsibilities, the menopause or when they are undergoing pressures in the workplace which could affect their mental health.

We also recognise the value and role of fathers and the positive impact they can have when they play an active role in their children's lives. It is important that fathers are encouraged and can take up a more active caring responsibility to ensure more equitable treatment in workplaces between mothers and fathers. Workplaces also need to recognise the role of fathers and allow them flexibility, alternative working practises and more suitable terms and conditions to allow them to carry out this role.

The current childcare offer for 3 and 4 year olds is currently in place, but for many working parents this does not seem adequate to address the burden

of the cost of childcare. Many working families are still finding that their childcare costs outweigh their wages received when going to work. This is particularly true for working mothers who may face discrimination for wanting flexible working conditions, may already feel the impact of the gender pay gap and who feel that their role within the workplace has been undermined by their role as a mother.

4. Better Maternal Mental Healthcare

Wales TUC's position on better maternal mental health care is based on a resolution adopted at Wales TUC 2016 Conference, which is as follows:

"Conference is appalled that according to the Maternal Mental Health Alliance there are seventeen mother and baby units in the United Kingdom, but none in Wales. This means women who suffer with mental health problems during pregnancy or in the months after giving birth are not getting the standard of care they want or deserve.

"This is a big problem, given that one in ten women suffers from mental ill-health either during pregnancy or in the first year of motherhood. Where mother and baby units do not exist, mothers may be admitted to adult wards where they can be separated from their babies."

The Wales TUC welcomes this consultation as discussion in the provision of better maternal mental health. The Wales TUC calls on the Welsh Government to develop a clear action plan for the development of services. We want to see decent and high quality maternal mental health provision in Wales, looking at how perinatal mental health services are currently provided and how the Welsh Government can improve services for mothers, babies, fathers and families.

Mental health issues in pregnancy and after birth are common, affecting at least one in ten women:

- **Depression** - around 11% of pregnant women and approximately 13% of early postnatal women experience depressive symptoms, and approximately 5% have a major depressive disorder.

- **Anxiety** disorders in the perinatal period (pregnancy, childbirth and the first postnatal year) are also common, affecting around 13% of women
- Women with existing or previous mental health conditions have a higher **risk of relapse** at this time

Although rates do not differ between pregnant and non-pregnant women, identification and treatment is lower in pregnancy, poor identification and a lack of appropriate and timely support have an impact on the outcomes for women, their babies and their families.

Most women who are pregnant continue to work, if they are suffering from mental health issues it is essential that they receive the right support and advice in a timely manner.

It is therefore important that Trade Unions form part of the response to better maternal mental health as working mothers who have mental health issues may find themselves further discriminated against. Wales TUC as the collective body for Trade Unions in Wales, supports the work that Trade Unions do to ensure that mental health training is undertaken and that proper risk assessments and health and safety assessments are carried out for pregnant women, including gathering information and signposting on perinatal and postnatal mental health.

5. Future engagement with Trade Unions

In respect of detailed responses to the terms of reference set out in the consultation, unions affiliated to the Wales TUC within the health sector are best placed to engage in greater detail on this matter and we understand that those discussions are taking place. Wales TUC would be pleased to engage along with those unions and would be happy to provide a joint detailed response (including responses from our affiliate unions) in the form of a letter at a later date if needed.