Motherhood in America • 2017 Report
The Current Status of Motherhood in America

There are 25.1 million mothers in today’s workplace, and the total number of women in the workforce has increased significantly over the past 60 years. These women are driving leading companies and organizations forward, but we don’t know nearly enough about their motivations, values, and experiences as working mothers.

64% OF WOMEN DECIDE TO LEAVE THE WORKFORCE BEFORE THEY HAVE THEIR CHILD

The Motherhood in America report tells us what women want and value on their journey into motherhood. Because 64% of women decide to leave the workforce before they have their child, companies need to support female talent from the moment these women walk in the door in order to keep their businesses relevant and successful.

There are three low-cost, high-impact strategies that employers — of all shapes and sizes — can adopt now to invest in their long-term success:

1. Flexible Scheduling
2. Benefits Utilization and Manager Training
3. Breastfeeding Support

Who’s Telling Us Their Story – And Why It Matters

Ovia Health surveyed Ovia Pregnancy users all across the country and received nearly 2,000 responses. The top industries represented in the survey data were (in order): healthcare, education, retail/grocery, and food services. 44% of our respondents worked for an employer with 500+ employees and half (49%) were with their employer for three or more years before giving birth.

Just over one-third (34%) of women did not return to their job once they had a baby. 11% of those women went back to work for a new employer, and of the women who did return to their job, the majority did it for financial reasons (73%). Only 12.5% of the women who returned to work said that they did so because they loved their job.

This is where the problems lie for today’s employers. 60% of millennials consider themselves open to new professional opportunities, and they change jobs more frequently than previous generations.\(^3\) This means that working women who are becoming mothers today are a flight-risk: they’re open to change and actively pursue it. If employers fail to become female and family-friendly by making deliberate and thoughtful changes to their policies, practices, and culture, they will lose the top talent they already have and risk undermining the recruitment of new talent.

Across women who returned to work, 23% felt unsupported by their employer’s postpartum schedule flexibility, and almost half (43%) of women who left their job felt that their employer could have done things differently to keep them in the workforce, such as providing support via flexibility.

77% of women cited flexible scheduling (e.g., gradual return to work postpartum, modified hours, consistent breaks, option to work remotely, and the ability to shift hours to accommodate childcare conflicts) as something that they wanted — and needed — from their employers.

Respondents shared examples of ways in which their employers’ flexibility made working motherhood possible. One explained that her employer let her “come back part time for nine months” to ease the transition back into the office. Another benefited from short-term flexibility when her employer “provided flexible hours when I didn’t [yet] have full time daycare.” Similarly, many women who didn’t return to work said that a modified work schedule (“being able to ease into full-time work”) and flexible hours to accommodate childcare would have greatly impacted their decision to remain in the workforce.

Enabling women to work on their own terms can cultivate both efficiency and loyalty — or, in other words, help mitigate a woman’s flight-risk.
Only one-fifth (19%) of survey respondents who left their job described their workplace as a “good place for new mothers.” 28.6% of respondents said that they were unsatisfied with their support from employee benefits, and approximately one-third (30%) were dissatisfied with their coaching/guidance about returning to work. 43% of respondents placed top value on employer programming to help navigate the maternal health system.

Improving communication saves more than feelings: it saves dollars. The cost of a new hire can range up to 200% of the departing employee’s salary. Managers who are trained to communicate proactively with their employees about the company’s benefits and resources — both before an employee shares news of her pregnancy and afterwards — are showing employees that their wellbeing matters in the workplace. One respondent said that simply learning about her “health insurance and a dependent FSA” helped her stay in the workforce.

Another company tried to recruit me away but I’m staying put because I love the benefits at my company.

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70% of respondents wanted better support for breastfeeding and almost one-third (29%) of women who returned to work felt “not at all supported” by their employer’s nursing/lactation facilities. In fact, one respondent said that “they cut my pay for pumping breast milk.”

Breastfeeding a baby is one of the best choices a mother can make for her baby’s health, as well as her own.\(^5\) Being at work almost always puts physical distance between women and their children, making breastfeeding a logistical challenge. When an employer makes it easier for women to breastfeed, it sends a clear message to all employees that the workplace values both their health and the health of their family.

**Employer Tip**
Create a dedicated Mother’s Room, where women can pump (or nurse). The room should be objectively comfortable, private, easy to reserve and have access to electricity. Nursing mothers also need a sink to clean pump pieces, as well as refrigeration for their expressed milk.

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What Working Mothers Want

The workforce is changing, and women are the future of business. This survey was designed to help employers identify policies and practices that will strongly resonate with working mothers, such as flexible scheduling and breastfeeding support. Additionally, employers may experience a greater return on investment when they train managers to communicate in a clear and supportive way about company resources and benefits. Keeping women and mothers on board can be as simple as ensuring they understand all that your company has to offer.

At Ovia Health, our mission is to improve the lives of women and families — and creating family-friendly workplaces is integral to that work. We believe that organizations will succeed if they make more woman- and family-centered decisions, and we are partnering with leading employers to help put this change into motion.

To truly create family-friendly workplaces, we need your help. Join us by visiting oviahealth.com to learn more about our work and our personalized maternity benefits solution.
About Ovia Health

Ovia Health supports women, from preconception and pregnancy through postpartum and parenthood, as they navigate their most important health and life decisions. We partner with leading employers to provide a personalized maternity benefits solution that prevents healthcare costs and creates a family-friendly workplace. We also help brands connect with women who are making daily decisions to improve the wellbeing of both themselves and their families.

Ovia Health was founded in 2012 to improve the world for women and families by reimagining and enhancing the relationship that women and families have with the healthcare system, the workplace, each other, and themselves. Our co-founder and CTO, Alex Baron, created the data-driven algorithm that powers our solutions when he and his wife were trying to start a family. His algorithm, powered by machine learning, was successful for both his own family, as well as the millions of women we’ve helped on their journey to parenthood.