A critical review of the supportive measures in place for those returning from maternity/adoption leave at South Wales Police (SWP)

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Introduction

SWP Chief Constable's Delivery Plan includes "People" as a priority which has prompted a review of all SWP policies.
In 2021, 81 SWP employees had a period away from the workplace due to maternity or adoption leave (SWP, 2021), therefore it is important to ensure that current procedures are effective in supporting their integration back to the workplace.

Research Objectives

1. To critically evaluate literature to gain an understanding of the impact of returning to work for employees returning from maternity/adoption leave.

2. Conduct a benchmarking exercise with other police forces regarding supportive measures that are offered to employees returning to work and compare this to current SWP measures.

3. To identify appropriate data collection techniques in order to review current SWP supportive measures and determine whether they are effective in assisting employees back to work.

Literature Review

Main themes when researching types of challenges for mothers returning to work:

Work/life balance – the need to adjust to the responsibilities of raising a child and managing a career (Williams, 2018)

Post Natal/Adoption Mental Health – mothers can experience feelings of guilt, pressures to be the "perfect parent" and Post Natal/Adoption depression symptoms which impact return to work (Tena, 2022; Hays, 1996).

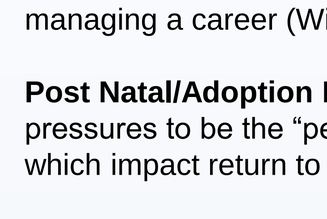
Attitudes of line managers/workplace – Lack of support from line management can lead to those returning feeling isolated, feeling as if they have to work harder to prove themselves or in some cases, it can lead to some resigning from their jobs (Burt, 2018; Williams, 2018)

Benchmarking Exercise – UK Police Forces

- 12 responses from 43 UK police forces
- 6 respondents had the same supportive measures as SWP

Additional measures that some forces had in place included:
- Specific Breastfeeding policy and process
- Weekly newsletter sent to employees on leave
- Maternity/Adoption "KIT Day" events
- Maternity/Adoption support networks

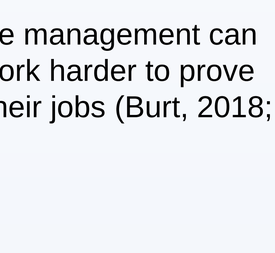
Methodology

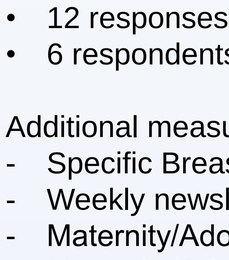


What – Methodological Triangulation method to include both quantitative and qualitative data in order to validate and draw sound conclusions (Dawson, 2009; Noble, H. & Heale, R. 2019).

Who – Cluster sampling (Simkus,2022). SWP employees who have returned from maternity/adoption leave within the past 3 years.

How - **Quantitative Data – Online Survey**
Total online surveys sent: 230
Questions relate to what support employees received and what, if any improvements they feel could be made. Mixture of open and closed questions.





Qualitative Data - Focus Group
2 x Police Staff 3 x Police Officers volunteers to take part in online meeting. Questions focused on trends from survey. All participants have returned from maternity leave.
*No volunteers came forward from those who had been on Adoption Leave.

Findings

Online Survey

Overall Response rate = 60 **(26.5%)**

Supportive Measures offered	Number of Employees		
	Maternity	Adoption	Overall %
Phased Return	67%	100%	68%
KIT Days	67%	67%	67%
Flexible Working	42%	33%	41%
Maternity and Adoption Champion	29%	33%	30%
Return to Work Plan	14%	33%	15%
Mandatory Training/OST Support	14%	0%	14%
Mentor	7%	0%	7%

Supportive Measures utilised	Number of Employees		
	Maternity	Adoption	Overall %
Phased Return	★ 68%	100%	70%
KIT Days	45%	66%	46%
Flexible Working	42%	66%	43%
Maternity and Adoption Champion	15%	0%	15%
Return to Work Plan	10%	0%	10%
Mandatory Training/OST Support	7%	0%	7%
Mentor	3%	0%	3%

★ 1 additional employee utilised a phased return but was not offered this by their line manager.

Maternity/Adoption Champions

85% of those who did not have a Maternity/Adoption Champion stated the reason was because they were "not aware" of the champions, however there were some positive comments from those who did.

> ***"My pregnancy champion was amazing and always on hand to answer any queries I had" (Police Officer,2022)***

General Feedback – Key theme highlighted need for more line manager support.

> ***"I feel that some staff/supervisors are not fully aware of the impact this can have on people's lives and mental health" (Police Staff,2022)***

> ***"Awareness around perinatal depression and anxiety for supervisors – ESSENTIAL" (Police Officer,2022)***

Overall employee experience rating ★★★☆☆

Focus Group

When respondents were asked what their main concerns were when returning to work, 4 out of 5 stated adjusting to the new work-life balance and the need for flexible working.

Line management support
All participants raised line manager support as a major factor to their return to work experience, none of the participants had a return to work plan. As highlighted in the literature review, lack of support can have a negative impact on employees, therefore this will need to be an area for improvement.

Maternity/Adoption Champions
Mixed experiences with those who had a champion, common problems were lack of communication both before leave and when returning to work, champions who were not in a similar role couldn't relate and some have limited knowledge.

Further improvement suggestions
All participants felt there that if there had been the opportunity to network with other colleagues, this would have helped them feel less isolated.
SWP could learn from other organisations who have successfully set up employee networks such as the Welsh Senedd (Senedd Cymru, 2021).

Conclusion

Whilst data shows overall employee experience to be satisfactory, it appears that not all of the supportive measures in place are being regularly offered to, or utilised by employees and others do not seem as effective as they should be, for example Maternity and Adoption Champions. Line manager support also appears to be a key factor to employee experience and has been highlighted in both the survey and focus group. Feedback and the benchmarking exercise has also provided some potential gaps to be explored further.

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