

RUNNING HEAD: Having (a piece of) it All

Master of Arts (Communication) Thesis

Having (a Piece of) It All: An Exploration of Mothers' Perceptions of Organizational Culture
and Reduced Work Schedules in Canada

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Dedication

To my daughter, Quinn. You are the light of my life. You are the reason I am so passionate about this discussion. Always aim high, and never give up! Love – Mom

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Abstract

As the number of women in professional employment continues to increase, so does the number of families with both parents working in paid employment. This has rendered a stressful reality for families, especially mothers as they attempt to balance the often conflicting and demanding roles: work and motherhood. Workplaces have embraced the metaphor of “organizations as cultures,” yet these cultures remain childless. Despite the range of research on motherhood and employment, there is a lack of ‘mothers’ voices’ in the research to shine a light on what the actual demographic needs to feel supported in their career and family roles. Through survey research, this study examined the perceptions of mothers living in Canada about the current landscape of organizational culture, how they feel they are treated once they return from maternity leave, and what types of work schedules they feel may alleviate work-family conflict.

Overall, mothers surveyed in this study wanted the same thing – more professional opportunities that offer a reduced schedule or flexibility that accommodates family care. Mothers who were surveyed want to maintain their professional selves, but motherhood also plays a critical role in their lives. The constraints of the traditional workday are becoming obsolete with the advancement of technology, creating the perfect opportunity for employers to re-evaluate these traditional models and begin to help take the burden off families who desire a better work-life balance.

Keywords: Motherhood, employment, part-time work, professional employment, organizational culture, organizational behaviour, maternity leave, work-life balance, work-life conflict

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To my “Quinny Bear,” you had no choice but to participate in this crazy adventure with your dad and I (and you didn’t always make it easy on us!), but I hope we have shown you what hard work and determination can accomplish.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The moment a mother contemplates returning to the workforce after maternity leave, she ponders a barrage of questions: Should I stay home, or should I return to work? What are the advantages and disadvantages? What about my children—who will take care of them? Will everyone and everything be okay if I return to work? Can I make enough money to make it worthwhile? Do I want to work? (Eriksen, Jurgens, Garrett, & Swedberg, 2008). Childcare remains a taboo term in the business world and the two worlds—professional and family—has yet to blend (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Riad, 2007). While the number of women in the Canadian workforce has more than doubled since 1976 (Paid work, 2009), women are still the primary caregivers to their young children (Stevenson, 2012). This makes decisions about careers and family roles complicated as the two roles can both be highly demanding and often conflicting (Slaughter, 2012).

The concepts of work-life balance and family-friendly workplaces are not amenable to precise definition. Different people interpret work-life balance differently, with some needing more personal time than others to experience well-being. In recent years, there has been an exponential growth in work-life balance discourse because of: (1) globalization, (2) new technologies that have brought about workplaces that are 24/7, blurring the distinction between work and home (Chandra, 2012), and (3) the decline in secure ‘standard’ employment where a worker has one employer, works the full year, full time, and expects to be employed indefinitely (Schellenberg & Clarke 1996; Vosko, 1997). Combined, these factors have rendered work an increasingly demanding and stressful experience (Wattis, Standing, & Yerkes, 2013). Statistics

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are hard to come by, but the trend for more flexible working schedules is on the upswing and employees are demanding reduced work time from their employers (Bersin, 2014; Deloitte, 2016). A recent global survey of millennials found that 75 percent wish they could have greater flexibility over where and when they work and felt this would make them more productive employees (Deloitte, 2016). This demand has, at least in part, been attributed to families where both parents work outside of the home and to women's rejection of the "dead-end, part-time jobs" they once accepted (Worron, 1986).

Women have also progressed considerably regarding education in Canada. In 1990, about one-quarter of women aged 25 to 54 had not earned a high school diploma, and only 14 per cent had a university degree. In 2008, 62 per cent of all university undergraduates were women (Women and Education, 2015).

Women's education and career status may be rising, but one 2009 survey from the United States found that 62 per cent of full-time working moms (those working 40 or more hours per week) would work part-time if the option were available to them (Pew Research Trends, 2009). The Canadian Mental Health Association says that 58 per cent of Canadians report "overload" due to the pressure associated with their many roles: work, home, family (Work-life Balance: Make it Your Business, n.d.). This indicates that there is a desire for mothers to lessen their work-family conflict and to find a better work-life balance. Work-family conflict is an inter-role conflict which appears when the requirements of one role make it difficult for an individual to fulfill the needs of the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). To reduce work-family conflict, some individuals try to reach an acceptable level of work-life balance (Clark, 2000), where an individual must learn to reconcile work-related and family-related requirements and an organization must create a supportive culture in which employees can focus on their jobs once

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they are at work (Bourhis & Mekkaoui, 2010). Working part-time to maintain their professional skills may provide this balance. Yet, educated, professional females who are mothers remain marginalized and under-studied.

Research Gaps

Research on mothers working part-time focuses on the negative aspects of lost wages and inequalities (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Gungor & Biernat, 2008), and the social desirability of part-time employment is often under scrutiny because of the less-than-full use of female human capital, which may harm the emancipation of women (Mees, 2006). The literature also finds that part-time employment is polarized into low-wage occupations and that women who switch from full-time to part-time employment often experience a downgrading of their job (Connolly & Gregory, 2008). Ceasing employment during children-rearing ages and resuming employment afterward leaves significant gaps in a resume, making part-time work seem like a wiser choice since it allows women to maintain professional skills and social connection (Bosch et al., 2010). The opposing view is that part-time jobs imply under-utilization of the labour force. Given the current aging population in Canada, the underutilization of human capital has negative implications for future economic growth and public finance (Jaumotte, 2003). On the other hand, some people, especially women with dual responsibilities, could opt out of labour market participation without the option of part-time work (Bosch et al., 2010).

The research suggests a misunderstanding around mothers' professional ambitions and family care responsibilities and little opportunity for mothers to find the balance they desire. Current research also neglects to ask the question: How do mothers feel about current professional employment opportunities in Canada after maternity leave? Existing research

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focuses on women who want to return to work full time and have trouble because of the cost of childcare (Stevenson, 2012), or the wage gap and missed years of experience, known as the motherhood wall or mommy-track careers. The media also add to the conversation by discussing research studies that find being a stay-at-home mom is better for children (Mooney, 2013) or that children of working moms are more likely to succeed in life (Patel, 2015). Ball (2004) notes that “how mothers feel about caring for children has been given insufficient attention in current childcare and gender equality policies” (p. 86). Others have observed that care must become a more valued activity in both social and economic terms (Fraser, 1994; Hantrais, 2004; Land, 1999; Williams, 2000). This recognizes that ‘care’ is an activity which women have historically done, continue to do, and continue to want to do (Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds, & Alldred, 2003).

The goal of this study was to assist in identifying factors that need to be addressed regarding mothers’ perceptions of organizational attitudes towards their absence and return to work after maternity leave and their thoughts on part-time or reduced hours professional employment.

Research Questions

The motivation to carry out this research came from my own experience of becoming a mother while working full-time in public relations and being a graduate student. I struggled considerably with the decision to return to work after my one-year maternity leave, and I knew from conversations with many other mothers that I was not alone in this struggle. I grew frustrated at the lack of part-time employment options in my chosen professional field. I investigated further the trends and perceptions of motherhood and employment, but again I grew

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frustrated at the lack of “mothers’ voices” in the research, media, and policy. This led me to develop the following overarching research questions for this thesis:

RQ1: What work schedules do mothers want available to them in professional positions in Canada?

RQ2: How do mothers perceive the current state of organizational culture towards them when returning to the workforce after maternity leave?

RQ3: How does the organizational culture affect a mother’s decision to return to work?

Through a transformative paradigm lens, this research explored mothers’ perceptions of organizational culture towards them after having children and their thoughts on what part-time employment would mean for them and their family life. To answer these research questions, I surveyed mothers currently living in Canada who have a college or university education and children between the ages of one and 12. I asked participants a series of closed questions (‘yes’ or ‘no’) (quantitative) and open-ended questions (qualitative) to learn more about their experiences. Secondary and popular (media) literature further informed my research. In this thesis, I present a perspective of how mothers living and working in Canada feel about the organizational landscape. By openly discussing the challenges and possible solutions for women in professional jobs, the focus shifts from individual problems to larger, systemic issues that must be challenged (Careless, 2011).

Limitations

For this research study, I limited participants to women currently living in Canada, with children between the ages of one and 12, and who work in professional fields that require education above a high school diploma. For this study, professional areas and professional job

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opportunities were defined as employment in fields that need a university or college education or specialized training and that are traditionally salaried positions. Professional employment is typically defined as:

being engaged in work, predominantly intellectual and varied as opposed to routine mental, manual, mechanical or physical work. It involves the consistent exercise of discretion and judgement in its performance. It also requires knowledge of an advanced type in a field of learning acquired by a prolonged course of specialized intellectual instruction and study in an institution of higher learning, or from an apprenticeship or an employee who has completed the courses of specialized intellectual instruction.

(“Professional Employee Law and Legal Definition,” n.d.)

These limits are meant to be practical, not discriminatory. As previously stated, the number of female university graduates is increasing, and women are rejecting the part-time jobs that underutilize their skills and, as the literature review (chapter two) discusses, the number of part-time positions are decreasing in Canada. The emergence of the knowledge economy has also been widespread and continuous over the past three decades. According to a report by Human Resources Development Canada, by 2004, more than 70 per cent of all new jobs created in Canada required some form of postsecondary education; 25 per cent required a university degree. In contrast, only six per cent of new jobs required less than a high school education (Distance as a Postsecondary access issue, 2008). For these reasons, I chose only to include women who work or have worked in traditionally salaried or higher paying (above minimum wage) jobs that require university/college education or specialty training.

Thesis Outline

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This first chapter has introduced why this study is important and why I decided to research this topic. Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature that explores the gendered division of household labour, employment behaviours in different cultures, family-friendly work policies, Canadian statistics and part-time employment models. Chapter Three describes the theoretical lens and methodology of this study. Chapter Four presents the results of the survey research. Chapter Five offers a discussion of the results based on a series of themes identified through the survey. Chapter Six summarizes the conclusions arrived at through the research and data analysis in this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This research study began with an extensive review of literature related to motherhood and employment, focusing on cultural norms of women's employment trends. Specifically, I considered the "Dutch Model" of employment and the demand and trend for family-friendly work policies and perceived work-life balance and the perceived effect on employee engagement. I also reviewed current Canadian statistics and policy surrounding part-time employment trends as well as a study on "new concept part-time" employment.

In this chapter, I first review the gendered division of childcare and household labour. Although not the focus of my research, I felt it was important to give context to why I chose to focus my research solely on mothers and not include fathers. While attitudes, available time, and perceived power in a relationship may influence the division of household labour, research tends to show that gender may affect it more (Arrighi & Maume, 2000). Many studies (Pleck, 1985; Thompson & Walker, 1999) find support for the belief that men should contribute to family labour when their wives are employed. But, families also tend to view wives as supplemental earners (Ferree, 1990) rather than as co-providers (Vannoy-Hiller & Philliber, 1989), not translating into men's contribution to household labour. This leaves wives with what researchers call the second shift – working in the paid labour force while doing most of the unpaid labour at home (Coltrane, 2000). Studies have also argued that, unlike fathers, the time mothers spend with children is thought to be essential to proper child development (Hays 1999). Moreover, cultural shifts towards an ethos of intensive mothering have meant that women devote even more time to their children today than ever before (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012).

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Although much of this research is up to three decades old, the literature reviewed reveals that many of these trends have not changed and dual-earner households feel the same pressures of previous generations. The reviewed literature also does not consider the growing number of same-sex couples with children or lone-parent households. The 2016 Canadian census found that same-sex marriages make up one per cent of Canadian families, although this is growing rapidly (Same-sex couples in Canada in 2016, 2017). From 2011 to 2016, the number of same-sex couples rose by 72,880 couples or 12.9 per cent. Over the 10 years between 2006 and 2016, the number of same-sex couples increased by 60.7 per cent (Same-sex couples in Canada in 2016, 2017). The same can be said for lone-parent families, which make up only nine per cent of the Canadian family population (Portrait of households and families in Canada, 2015). Heterosexual couples still make up the majority of dual-parent household in Canada, comprising of 67 per cent of all census families in 2011 (Portrait of families and living arrangements in Canada, 2015).

Gendered Division of Childcare and Household Labour

The influence of gender in childcare is often reported in feminist and sociological literature (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Oechsle & Geissler, 2003), but is less visible in business-related research. Studies report a continuing imbalance of time spent on these tasks for men and women and conflict when roles overlap. As women continue to pursue professional careers, they face the struggle of balancing their various life roles: employee, mother, wife, partner, daughter, citizen (Careless, 2011).

One of the most consistent empirical observations in family research is that women still do most of the housework and childcare, even though women's participation in the labour force has increased considerably (Coltrane, 2000). Although egalitarian attitudes are often found and

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lead to greater equality, the relevant empirical evidence is not consistent, and women continue to do most of the household labour despite the contemporary egalitarian ideology (Poortman & Van Der Lippe, 2009). Research has found that achieving an equal division of household labour remains difficult given persistent cultural conventions for separate gender spheres and inadequate family-workplace policies (Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2015). This has led scholars to conclude that the revolution in gender equality has stalled (England, 2010; Hochschild, 1989). The average hours that women spend on housework decreased from 30 hours per week in 1965 to 17.5 hours in 1995, while the hours men spend on housework increased from five to 10 hours over this period (Bianchi et al., 2012). However, as of 2010, men did the same amount of housework— 10 hours per week – as in 1995 (Bianchi et al., 2012).

Hook (2004) found that on average, women reported spending more time on childcare, housework, informal support, and volunteering than men. Men reported spending more time on paid employment. The total time allocated to the various tasks was strikingly similar, but men mainly focused their energy on paid labour. This study also revealed that time spent on housework was not related to the hours of paid employment, suggesting that women felt an increased responsibility to perform duties outside their paid job even when they work similar hours to their spouses. These socially constructed ideals from past generations seem to prevail today when many women are also committed to pursuing careers (Careless, 2011).

Women may be committed to pursuing their careers. However, how women feel about caring for their children has received little consideration in scholarly research and public policy. Childcare must become a more valued activity in both social and economic terms (Fraser, 1994; Hantrais, 2004; Land, 1999; Williams, 2000).

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The Dutch model

The employment behaviour of women is determined mainly by country-specific cultural norms and values, which, in turn, may also influence the development of institutions (Pfau-Effinger, 1993). Consider the Dutch part-time employment model, which is unique. The participation rate of women in the labour force in the Netherlands is high. Only in Scandinavian countries do more women participate in the labour force. At the same time, three out of five working Dutch women work 30 hours or less per week (Bosch et al., 2010). The Netherlands has been characterized as “the only part-time economy of the world” (Freeman, 1998), entering the 21st century as a “one-and-a-half-job-per-household’ economy (Visser, 2002).

The Dutch government has implemented several laws since the late 1980s to protect part-time employees, including extending the applicability of the statutory minimum wage and the minimum holiday allowance to part-time contracts, giving part-time workers an explicit right to equal treatment (on wages, overtime payments, bonuses, and training). In 2000, the Dutch government awarded workers the right to request an upward or downward adjustment in the number of working hours within their current jobs, and employers must honour this request unless there are conflicting business interests (Bosch et al., 2010).

This model has received media attention from around the world, with headlines reading “Dutch Women are the happiest in the world” (Olien, 2010), “Working Part-time May Explain Why Dutch People Are Among the Happiest in the World” (Moss, 2015) and “How Dutch Women Got to be the Happiest in the World” (Ward, 2011). However, some worry that the career model stunts women’s career growth, including Dutch economist and feminist Helene Mees who argues that Dutch women have become complacent (Ward, 2011). Mees runs an

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organization called ‘Women on Top’ that strives to push more Dutch women into ambitious career paths. Its slogan is “Out with the part-time feminism!” The organization points to part-time work as a significant factor in a lingering pay gap and asserts that we are moving backward in the feminist movement.

The common availability of part-time professional positions gives Dutch women more freedom of choice in their working status, be it part-time or full-time. Only four per cent of Dutch women state they would want to work more hours (Ward, 2011). Dutch women argue that they have smashed the vicious circle of guilt that traps Western women, to embrace a progressive form of work-life balance (Ward, 2011). The country also consistently ranks the highest among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries for happiness and well-being, ranking at 7.3 out of 10—higher than the average of 6.6 for all OECD countries (OECD Better Life Index, n.d.). The female employment rate is also well above OECD average at 69.9 per cent compared to 57.5 per cent (OECD Work-Life Balance, n.d.). This increase in female employment in the Netherlands is due, at least in part, to the increase in part-time employment opportunities. In the 1980s, 35 per cent of women worked outside of the home, and in 2009 that number doubled to 70 per cent. Currently, 61 per cent of employed women are working part-time in the Netherlands (OECD Work-Life Balance, n.d.).

Employer Support for Family-Friendly Policies

The Dutch employment model works because it has government support and policies in place to protect workers, as well as organizations committed to creating cultures that support work-life balance (Bosch et al., 2010). Family-friendly workplaces are organizations that offer a variety of programs and policies to help alleviate work-life conflict for employees. Some

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examples of these programs or policies include on-site daycare, compressed work weeks, flex hours, and family days.

Studies show that policy and government support does not change the outcomes for working parents when they feel there is a lack of support in the work culture and fear negative career consequences associated with taking advantage of family-friendly policies. However, offering programs and policies does not translate into employees who feel that the organization is concerned for their well-being (Allen, 2001; Andreassi, & Thompson, 2008; Thompson, Jahn, Kopelman Prottas, 2006; Ko, Hur, & Smith-Walter, 2013). For example, Lobel & Kossek (1996) contended that offering family-friendly workplaces does not address employee concerns unless practices are also accompanied by a change in organizational culture regarding the appropriate interaction between work and family life (Ko et al., 2013). While the field of organization studies has embraced the metaphor of organizations as “cultures,” there has been no consideration as to why these particular “cultures” appear childless (Riad, 2007). Work and family continue to be viewed as separate spheres, not interconnected (Taylor, 2001). This occurs despite increasing acceptance and expectation that women should be in paid employment. However, studies also show that women are still responsible for the majority of childcare and household tasks (Caillier, 2012; Crompton, Lewis, & Lynette, 2007). The assumption is that family responsibilities will not impinge on work commitments. However, the demands of employment continue to disrupt individuals’—and especially fathers’—participation in the domestic sphere where “spillover” from work to home is a consistent outcome of work within the contemporary economy (Hyman, Scholarios, & Baldry, 2005). Less research has focused on family-to-work spillover, the “neglected side of the work-family interface” (Crouter, 1984). Examples of outcomes associated with negative family-to-work spillover include more pronounced psychological distress at work

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due to poor marital and parental role quality (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992), decreased job satisfaction (Burke, 1988), greater likelihood of leaving the company (Burke, 1988), and increased absenteeism (Goff, Mount, & Jamison,). Crompton (2006, p. 213) has also argued that many “valued” (i.e., higher level) employees, particularly women, fail to take advantage of work-life policies for fear of damaging their prospects for organizational advancement – or, in some cases, job security. Regarding professional occupations, home life frequently becomes highly structured and determined by task allocations, so as not to interfere with work, whereas paid work has the character of more open and fluid time (Lyon & Woodward, 2004).

Employers who balk at the idea of family-friendly work policies because they assume it will increase costs are not considering the costs associated with stressful working conditions. Employers who invest in keeping their employees healthy and in providing the flexibility needed to meet family obligations should realize savings by reducing health costs, absenteeism, and employee turnover while having a more committed workforce (Halpern, 2005). Studies have also shown that when mothers perceive the organizational culture to be supportive, they are more committed to the organization and plan to return to work more quickly after having a baby (Kelly et al., 2008; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999), change jobs less frequently, and are less likely to exit the labour market after childbirth (Glass & Riley, 1998; Houston & Marks, 2003).

Work-Life Balance

The interface between work and personal life (mainly family) has been characterized by terminologies such as work-family conflict (Reynolds, 2005), work-family spillover (Barnett, 1994) and work-life balance (Dex & Bond, 2005). Essentially, it is argued that interference often exists between work and non-work aspects of life, involving inter-role conflict in which role

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pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77).

In the current organizational landscape, working hours are not restricted to the workplace. With the use of mobile phones and laptops, an increasing number of employees are working in their homes “after hours” in addition to their time spent in the workplace (Tietze & Musson, 2005). As the demands of work intensify, there has been a continuing focus by many researchers on the notion of work-life balance and how this might be attained (Parris, Vickers, & Wilkes, 2008). The term work-life balance has entered the public lexicon, at political, organizational, and individual levels (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004; Lingard & Francis, 2005).

Research (Valcour, Ollier-Malaterre, Matz-Costa, Pitt-Catsoupes, & Brown, 2011) has shown that the culture of work-life support in a company is the most powerful predictor of employee work-life balance as well as a critical element in job performance, organizational commitment, and intention to remain with the company. The business case for the support of these arrangements and practices is that work-life balance has been shown to be a factor which has the potential to affect important workplace issues, such as employee turnover, stress, organizational commitment, absenteeism, job satisfaction and productivity (Bloom & Van Reenen, 2006; Parris et al., 2008).

How organizations help employees reach a satisfactory balance between work and personal life has become an important issue in human resource management and the development of organizational culture (Beham, Prag, & Drobnic, 2012). In many European countries, part-time work is often regarded as essential to achieving a balance between work and family life and is advocated by national governments and the European Union (Beham et al.,

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2012). Part-time work is thought to provide employees with more convenient working hours; decrease conflict, stress, and exhaustion; and enable them to better meet their personal and family responsibilities (Barnett, & Gareis, 2002). Empirical studies about part-time work and work-life balance have reported inconsistent findings (Beham et al., 2012). However, research among professional women in high-level jobs has indicated a positive link between part-time employment and their work-life balance (Hill, Martinson, & Ferris, 2004a; Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004b).

Canadian statistics

Even with a positive correlation between supportive employers and organizational commitment from employees, current Canadian statistics show that finding employer support for family-friendly workplaces may be difficult. Canada has a lower-than-average part-time employment rate despite its higher-than-average labour force participation rates (Bosch et al., 2010). Since 2000, there has been an increasing trend of part-time work among OECD countries, but Canada's percentage of females working part-time decreased from 21 per cent to 19 per cent. While Canadian prime-aged women's labour force participation is ten per cent higher than the OECD average (82 vs. 72 per cent), the part-time employment percentage is four per cent below OECD average (Bosch et al., 2010). These results are not surprising given that the relevant policies in Canada are not supportive of part-time workers. For example, the qualifying period to access unemployment benefits is subject to working hours in Canada—that is, the length of required employment hours for a half-time worker must be twice as long to qualify for unemployment benefits (OECD employment outlook, 2010).

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Canada's current Liberal Government has promised to make collecting unemployment insurance (EI) benefits easier (Campion-Smith, 2015) and ensured that federally-regulated workers could get more flexible work conditions, such as working from home and changing hours to accommodate family needs (Nickel, 2015). Now, Canadian organizations must be willing to adapt to a changing culture that is no longer childless.

New-concept part-time model

One model that attempts to address these concerns for both employers and employees is new-concept part-time work. In contrast to most part-time jobs, these are high-status, career-oriented, reduced-hours options that conserve pro-rated professional salaries and benefits (Barnett & Gareis, 2000). Job prestige, income, and career opportunity are important to many professional women, and some companies, such as IBM, have begun to offer new-concept part-time employment options. Meiksins & Whalley (2002) call it customized work and report it as a growing trend. The hope is that this option might ameliorate the tendency toward mommy-track careers – jobs with fewer advancement opportunities – and convince women to continue to make professional career contributions as they embark on their family life. One study (1996) of IBM workers in the U.S., comparing employees who worked full-time to mothers who worked in the new-concept part-time positions, reported significantly greater work-family balance and did not report significantly fewer career opportunities. The part-time group reported 47 per cent fewer work hours and 41 per cent lower income than the full-time group. The data supported the notion that new-concept part-time work is a viable option to assist women in professional careers to successfully integrate their family career (Hill et al., 2004b).

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Data from this study also supported the notion that offering new-concept part-time professional positions may be a useful strategy to recruit and retain professional employees with critical skills for organizations. The study found that, of the 'reduced hours' group, 23 per cent reported they would have left their job to stay home full time if the part-time work option had not been available. Another 58 per cent said they would have left their job to work for another company that offered greater flexibility. Only 19 per cent indicated they would have continued working full-time for the company. It appears that new-concept part-time employment is a strategy that may have enabled 81 per cent of these women to stay employed with IBM, rather than going to work for someone else or leaving the workforce altogether. The researchers concluded that new-concept part-time positions may provide the time professional women need at the beginning of their family career when children require the greatest parental investment. Given that these women represent key talent required for meeting business objectives, data like these can reinforce management's efforts to provide greater flexibility in the workplace, especially when the results are so clear: Providing employees with greater flexibility and demonstrating trust in their ability typically increases productivity and organizational commitment.

The following chapter will review the theoretical framework and methodology used for this research project.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Theoretical Lens

There is a general lack of research on our understanding of mothers' perceptions of organizational culture towards them after maternity leave and of mothers' potential desire for alternative professional employment opportunities. I approached my research through a transformative paradigm lens. Mertens (2007) argued that the transformative paradigm provides a framework for addressing issues of social justice in the research process. The ontological assumption of the transformative paradigm holds that socially constructed realities are influenced by power and privilege. The transformative paradigm recognizes that "voices of those who are disenfranchised based on gender, race/ethnicity, disability or other characteristics" (Mertens, 2007, p. 214) can be excluded in research. Within this paradigm, mixed methods are preferred to highlight issues of need (quantitative data) and to give voice to these issues (qualitative data) (Hodgkin, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to add a "middle perspective" of mothers' voices about part-time professional employment to the conversation about motherhood and working, which currently lacks options other than either staying home to raise children or working full time (professionally). Transformative research provides a voice for the participants, raising their consciousness or advancing an agenda for change to improve their lives. It becomes a united voice for reform or change (Creswell, 2014). By surveying mothers about their perceptions and experiences with part-time professional employment in Canada, a form of employment that is not as popular in Canada as it is in other countries, this research acted as an outlet for mothers in

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Canada to express their professional and family desires and discuss a rarely used employment option (part-time professional employment) that may help families achieve work-life balance.

Method

Data collection began in August 2017, after receiving ethics approval from Mount Saint Vincent University's Research Ethics Board (file #2017-007). I used survey research as the method to gather participants' perspectives.

The survey I designed to collect data for this study included open-ended questions (qualitative) and multiple-choice questions (quantitative). I developed three surveys. All surveys included demographic questions: age, number of children, marital status, education, and job title. Participants were then asked:

“If the opportunity was or had been available to you to work part-time or at a reduced schedule upon returning from maternity leave, would you have taken the reduction in hours?”

Participants who responded “yes” or “maybe” were directed to Survey A (Appendix G).

Respondents who responded “no” were directed to the following question:

“What factor(s) were a part of the reason for not wanting to work reduced hours? (check all that apply).”

Possible responses were: “I want to work full time,” “Our household costs would not allow me to reduce my income,” “It is too hard to find part-time childcare,” and “Other” with an option for explanation. Respondents who replied that they wanted to work full time were directed to Survey C (Appendix J). All other replies were directed to Survey B (Appendix I). There was overlap in some questions across Surveys A, B and C; however,

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this approach allowed me to also ask targeted questions and avoid asking questions that were not relevant to participants' experiences, desires and responses.

To analyze the quantitative data generated from the surveys, I used descriptive analysis, describing the basic features of the data in the study. More specifically, I used statistical descriptive analysis which provides a summary of information contained (De Vaus, 2013, p.207). To analyze the qualitative data generated from the surveys, I took a thematic approach. The purpose of the thematic approach is to identify patterns of meaning across a data set that answers the research questions (The University of Auckland, n.d.). To accomplish this, I first familiarized myself with the data by reading the responses from each individual survey participant and then reading all responses to each survey question, one at a time. This allowed me to become immersed and familiar with the content of the survey responses. I then used ATLAS.TI, a qualitative data analysis software, to code and search the data for themes, identifying important features of that data that were helpful in answering the research questions. This comparison appears in Chapter Four: Results.

Research Design

Sampling. To target participants for this study, I used snowball sampling (or chain-referral sampling), a non-probability sampling method used when the target population needed can be difficult to locate. More specifically, I used exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling, where the first subject recruited to the sample group provides multiple referrals. Each new referral is explored until primary data from a sufficient number of samples is collected (Research Methodology, 2017). On my Facebook and Twitter accounts, I posted the purpose of my research study (Appendix C) and a link to the letter of informed consent (Appendix D). On

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Facebook, I asked my friend group to “share” the post, and on Twitter I “tagged” the Canadian organizations The YummyMummyClub, Canada Moms and Toronto Mommies. This allowed their followers to see my information. On Facebook, I received 15 shares and on Twitter I received 7 retweets. I also emailed information about my study (Appendix B) to two Canadian mommy-bloggers but did not receive a response.

Data Collection. I distributed the survey(s) electronically through social media and via email to Canadian organizations whose targeted audience are moms. In the body of the social media posts and emails, I introduced myself, explained the purpose and context of the research study, and provided a link to the Letter of Informed Consent which, once accepted, directed participants to the survey (see Appendices B, C, and D for the social media posts, introductory email and letter of informed consent).

The survey was administered online using Survey Monkey. This software calculates responses electronically and displays them in graphs and tables (which I have used to display data in this thesis, Appendix K). Participants had the option to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty, per the letter of informed consent (see Appendix D).

I aimed to collect 25 to 50 responses. In one week, I received a total of 59 completed surveys. After one week, I determined that I had received sufficient responses and was not receiving enough additional responses to keep the survey open longer. Participants were guaranteed that their survey responses would remain anonymous and would not be connected to their responses in any way.

Responses. In total, 77 individuals responded to the survey. Eighteen were disqualified for not meeting the requirements of the intended survey respondents, either not being the age of

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majority in Nova Scotia, not having a child between the ages of one year old and 12 years old and/or not meeting the education requirements. Participants who were disqualified were directed to a page thanking them for their willingness to participate and (still) offering them an opportunity to enter the prize draw intended for eligible participants. Fifty-nine individuals completed the survey. Individuals from six out of 10 Canadian provinces participated in the survey, with the majority being from Nova Scotia (33), followed by Ontario (18), and then Alberta (5), Manitoba (1), New Brunswick (1), and Newfoundland and Labrador (1).

Of the 59 respondents, 40.68 per cent were between the ages of 33-37, 27.12 per cent were over the age of 38, 23.7 per cent were ages 28 to 32, and 8.5 per cent were 23 to 27 years old. Most participants (59.32 per cent) had one child, 35.6 per cent had two children and five per cent had 3 children. Almost all the participants were married or in a common-law relationship (91.5 per cent), one per cent was single parents, five per cent were separated from their partner and one per cent was divorced. Of the 59 participants, 76.3 per cent worked full-time, 10 per cent worked part-time, 8.5 per cent were self-employed and 5 per cent were not currently employed.

All respondents remained anonymous, and participation in the survey posed minimal risk to the participants, as defined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics: "... research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research."

The next chapter presents the results of the survey responses received from the 59 participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

I collected data through a survey that branched off into three possible sets of questions depending on how the respondent answered. The target group was mothers with children between the ages of one and 12, who have a university or college education and who work or have worked in Canada in professional fields. Fifty-nine women responded to the survey (n=59). All respondents answered a series of demographic questions about education level, number of children, marital status, job title, and age. Respondents were then asked about part-time work and how they associated it with work-life balance and whether, if the option had been available to them, they would have worked part-time after returning from maternity leave. Of the 59 respondents, the 51 who answered “yes” or “maybe” to whether they would have taken the opportunity to work part time (n=51) were directed to Survey “A” (Appendix G). Survey A sought to determine why these mothers said they would or might work part-time if the option was available to them and to understand their experiences with their workplace cultures after returning from maternity leave.

The eight respondents who answered “no,” they would not have taken the opportunity to work part-time if the option were available to them were directed to a question asking them to indicate why they would not want to work part-time. Of these eight respondents, four provided reasons, specifically that they were not able to reduce their income or that part-time childcare was too difficult to find. These four respondents were directed to Survey “B” (Appendix I). Survey B sought to understand these respondents’ views on part-time employment and their perceptions of their workplace culture after returning from maternity leave.

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The remaining four respondents answered that they would not take the opportunity to work part-time post-maternity leave because they want to work full-time. These four respondents were directed to Survey “C” (Appendix J). Survey C sought to understand if these respondents felt part-time opportunities should be available to those who wish to have these opportunities and how they perceived their workplace culture after returning from maternity leave.

Demographic Questions

The following demographic questions were answered by all respondents (n=59). These questions gave insight to the participants’ personal living situations which could play a role in how they feel about part-time work and their own careers. Understanding these details about the participants offers context for the mothers’ views of organizational culture and part-time employment.

Q: What is your highest level of education?

Education	Number of participants (n=59)	Percentage of participants
College diploma/Associates’ degree	14	23.7 %
Undergraduate degree	28	47.5%
Graduate degree	17	28.8%

Table 1. Participant distribution, by education level.

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Q: What province do you reside in?

Province	Number of participants (n=59)	Percentage of participants
Nova Scotia	33	55.9 %
Ontario	18	30.5%
Alberta	5	8.5 %
Manitoba	1	1.7 %
New Brunswick	1	1.7 %
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	1.7 %

Table 2. Participant distribution, by province of residence.

Q: What is your age?

Age Range	Number of participants (n=59)	Percentage of participants
23-27	5	8.5 %
28-32	14	23.7 %
33-37	24	40.7 %
Over the age of 38	16	27.1 %

Table 3. Participant distribution, by age group

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Q: How many children between the age of 1 and 12 live in your household?

Number of children living in the household	Number of participants (n=59)	Percentage of participants
1	35	59.3 %
2	21	35.6 %
3	3	5.1 %

Table 4. Participant distribution, by number of children living in the household.

Q: What is your marital status?

Marital Status	Number of participants (n=59)	Percentage of participants
Married/Common-law	54	91.5 %
Separated	3	5.1 %
Divorced	1	1.7 %
Single	1	1.7 %

Table 5. Participant distribution, by marital status.

Q: Are you currently employed?

Employment status	Number of participants (n=59)	Percentage of participants
Full-time	45	76.3 %
Part-time	6	10.2%
Self-employed	5	8.5 %
Not employed	3	5.0 %

Table 6. Participant distribution, by employment status.

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Q: Which of the following most closely matches your current job title? If you are not employed, note which of the following most closely matches your last job title.

Job Title / Position	Number of participants (n=59)	Percentage of participants
Entry level position	2	3.4 %
Analyst or Associate	18	30.5 %
Manager	8	13.6 %
Senior Manager	1	1.6 %
Owner	2	3.4 %
Nurse	3	5.1 %
Educator	13	22.0 %
Social services	2	3.4 %
Dental hygienist	2	3.4 %
Sales	1	1.7 %
Engineer	1	1.7 %
Insurance claims adjuster	2	3.4 %
Executive Assistant	1	1.7 %
Mental health counsellor	1	1.7 %
Program coordinator	1	1.7 %
Currently unemployed	1	1.7 %

Table 7. Participants distribution, by job level or job title.

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Filter Questions. I began the survey with two “filter questions.” These questions were designed to determine which branch of the survey (A, B or C) the respondents would be directed to depending on how they responded.

I first asked the women if they felt working at a reduced or part-time schedule would provide them with a better work-life balance. Of the 59 respondents, 43 answered “yes,” that they felt it would provide them with a better work-life balance. Eleven respondents said it might provide a better balance, and five said “no,” that they did not think it would give them a better work-life balance.

Next, I asked the women whether they would have taken the opportunity to work less than full-time hours after maternity leave if it had been available to them. Of the 59 respondents, 39 answered “yes,” that they would have taken a reduction in hours. Sixteen answered that they might have taken the reduction in hours and eight answered that they would not have reduced their work schedule after maternity leave.

Survey A

The respondents who responded with either a “yes” or “maybe” to the second filter question—“**If the opportunity was or had been available to you to work part-time or at a reduced schedule upon returning from maternity leave, would you have taken the reduction in hours?**”—were directed to Survey A (n=51).

Multiple choice questions were mandatory, and open-ended questions were optional. Some participants’ responses to open-ended questions have been edited for grammar, syntax, and clarity. Below, I state each survey question and then describe the ensuing quantitative and qualitative results.

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Q: How do you feel working at a part-time or reduced schedule upon returning from maternity leave would affect your career?

This open-ended question was optional for participants, and 48 of the 51 respondents to Survey A responded to this question. Eight respondents noted that working at a reduced schedule would positively affect their work-life balance and that they would be “grateful” for or like the opportunity to work in their profession in a part-time capacity. Three respondents recounted their own experience of working part-time after maternity leave. Of these, two felt it was sometimes difficult to balance and to also keep up with work demands, and one respondent answered that it has been a positive experience “being able to do all the things I love, my job, being a wife and being a mother.”

The most common concern among participants who completed survey “A” was that shifting to part-time employment would affect their seniority or advancement opportunities (n=21). Five participants also noted that it would be impossible to find part-time work in their chosen profession and that working part-time would mean downgrading in their careers. Other concerns noted by participants were co-workers or employers potentially viewing them as not taking their career as seriously or being an equal team player, less money for personal or lifestyle items, and potential difficulty re-integrating into a full-time position when they were ready. However, even with these concerns, the majority of respondents (n=38) to this open-ended question in Survey A had said that they would reduce their working hours if the option had been available to them, and fourteen said they “might” take the opportunity to work part-time. This indicates that even with the concerns listed; these women would be willing to work part-time if an appropriate option was available for them.

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Q: Do you feel working at a reduced or part-time schedule would strengthen your commitment to the organization?

Participants had the option of selecting “yes,” “no” or “maybe.” Twenty-four respondents (n=51) said “yes,” that working part-time would strengthen their commitment to an organization. Thirteen said it ‘might’ strengthen their commitment, and 14 said it would not strengthen their commitment to an organization.

Participants (n=51) then had the option to elaborate on why they would or would not feel more committed to their employers if they could reduce their working hours. Forty-eight chose to explain their previous answer as to why working a reduced or part-time schedule would or would not strengthen their commitment to an organization. The three most common responses from respondents in support of having a strengthened commitment (n=28) were: (1) having a better work ethic and feeling more present or focused while working; (2) feeling grateful and more committed to an employer if the employer was supportive of work-life balance and part-time employment opportunities; and (3) feeling more committed to an organization because it would give them more time for their families.

In opposition, respondents (n=10) felt working part-time wouldn’t strengthen their commitment to an organization for a number of reasons: (1) the respondents’ level of commitment was based on job satisfaction or happiness with an organization (n=3), (2) the respondents felt they would not be able to maintain their status or workload as a part-time employee which would weaken their commitment to their career and organization (n=4), and (3) respondents said it would depend on what part-time hours looked like (n=3). For complete respondents’ answers, see Table 2 in Appendix K.

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In Survey A, before the next question, I first provided a statement to describe how the Dutch government has implemented several laws to protect part-time workers, as discussed in Chapter Two (Literature Review). I also reported the prevalence of part-time work among Dutch women. I intended this explanation to provide an example that these types of work opportunities are available in other countries before asking the participants' questions about the kinds of opportunities they feel are provided to them in Canada. The statement read as follows:

“Statement: In 2000, the Dutch government awarded workers the right to request an upward or downward adjustment of the number of working hours within their current jobs, and employers must honour this request unless there are conflicting business interests. The country also has other laws that protect part-time workers, and 3 in 5 Dutch women work part-time while their children are young.” The survey then proceeded with a series of questions.

Q: Do you feel your employer would have provided you with such an opportunity if you had approached them about a reduction in hours?

Respondents to this question had the option of selecting “yes,” “no” or “I’m not sure.” Twenty-two respondents (n=51) said “yes,” that they felt their employer would have provided them with an opportunity to reduce their working hours. Eight respondents replied with “I’m not sure,” and 21 respondents said they did not feel their employer would have reduced their hours.

Q: If you have approached an employer about a reduction in hours after maternity leave, please describe that experience. What was the outcome?

Responding to this question was optional. Thirty-eight participants responded. Seventeen (n=38) indicated they had no experience approaching an employer about reducing working hours. Sixteen (n=38) responded that they had approached their employer about reducing their

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working hours. Of those 16 participants, six responded that their employers said ‘no,’ they would not accommodate a request for fewer working hours; nine responded that their employer accepted the request for a reduction in hours (although one of these nine participants stated she would be demoted if she chose to reduce her hours); two respondents (n=38) stated that they were laid off shortly after requesting a reduction in hours; and two respondents had flexible work hours available to them but chose not to take them for personal reasons or circumstances that would not work for them. Three (n=38) respondents who requested part-time or a reduction in hours work, were unionized workers for unidentified school boards who have a part-time program that allows employees to reduce their hours for up to five years after their children are born. See Table 3 in Appendix K for respondents’ complete responses.

In Survey A, before the next question, I first provided a definition of family-friendly work practices and policies in case any of the participants were unaware of what family-friendly work policies meant. The definition read as follows: Family-friendly work practices are generally defined as policies that make it possible for employees to more easily balance family and work, and to fulfill both their family and work obligations (The University of Kansas).” The survey then asked participants a series of questions about family-friendly work practices.

Q: Do you feel your employer supports family-friendly work practices?

Respondents had the option of selecting “yes,” “no” or “prefer not to say” for this question. Of the 51 respondents, 25 answered “yes,” that they feel their employer supports family-friendly work policies; 24 answered that their employer does not support these policies, and two respondents indicated they would prefer not to respond.

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Q: If your workplace provides family-friendly policies, do you feel you have been or would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies?

Respondents had the option of selecting “yes,” “no” or “prefer not to say” for this question. Seventeen of the 51 respondents said “yes,” they felt they would be penalized. Twenty-six indicated they felt they would not be penalized for partaking in these policies. Eight respondents indicated they would prefer not to answer this question.

The participants who responded yes (n=17) then had the option to elaborate on their experiences. Twelve participants chose to provide examples or explain why they felt they would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies. Six respondents indicated that their employer did offer some form of family-friendly work policies, but that they would feel uncomfortable or thought they would be penalized for using these policies. Two respondents said that they would personally feel uncomfortable using their employers’ family-friendly work policies because they felt they would be letting their team down. Two respondents said that “family days” or time off required for family care was very rarely or never accommodated. Two respondents said that these types of policies were not available in their place of employment. See Table 4 in Appendix K for participants’ complete responses.

Q: Do you feel your most recent place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace?

Respondents had the option of selecting “yes,” “no” or “prefer not to say” for this question. Thirty-four respondents said “yes,” they felt their employers were supportive of mothers in the workplace; 16 said they felt their employers were not supportive; and one respondent indicated a preference not to answer this question.

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I gave participants the option to tell me about their experiences with their employers and whether they felt supported as a mother in the workplace. The most common response for respondents who felt their employer was supportive of mothers was the option for flexible hours and understanding of the need for flexible hours. Three respondents felt they were supported in the workplace because their organization or department was largely female/mother dominated, so there was a mutual understanding of family demands. Other responses from participants who felt supported in the workplace included:

- a hospital employee who received a package while on maternity leave about how to continue to breastfeed while returning to work
- Another two participants wrote: (1) “My employer is very supportive of parents in the workplace and the unique needs that arise because of being a mother to young children. I feel as though I can approach my employer with regards to work-life balance and make alternate arrangements when necessary.” (2) “They allow me to bring my son to work on days when I’m stuck for a sitter.”

Respondents who felt their employers were not supportive of mothers in the workplace most commonly answered that their employer was not understanding of family demands or that their employer did not allow flexible work options. Some participant responses included:

- “There are no accommodations made for mothers, and it is expected that we still participate in all after work activities and are penalized if we don’t, even though these activities are unpaid and after hours.”
- “They do not understand that when my child is sick and needs to be picked up, that I do not have a choice in the matter. I feel a major level of guilt.”

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To see all responses, see Table 5 in appendix K.

Q: Do you feel you were treated or perceived differently by your employer or workplace after returning from maternity leave?

Respondents to this question had the option of selecting “yes,” “no” or “prefer not to respond.” Fifteen respondents (n=51) said “yes,” they felt they were perceived differently by their employer after returning from maternity leave. Thirty-one responded that they did not feel they were perceived differently, and five respondents indicated they would prefer not to respond to the question.

Participants who answered “yes” (n=15) had the option of describing why they felt they were perceived differently by their employers or workplace after returning from maternity leave. Thirteen respondents answered this question. Four respondents indicated that they felt their employer perceived them as having a shift in priority toward family, affecting their commitment to their work. Three respondents felt their employer did not understand that their home demands had changed since having children which affected their ability to work outside of business hours. Three respondents said that they felt their roles were perceived as “less important” or that they lost “status” in their organization. Two respondents felt there was less opportunity provided to them for advancement after returning from maternity leave. One respondent said they felt they were perceived differently in a positive way, and that their employer was “even more understanding of my needs now that I have a family to attend to.” Respondents’ complete responses can be found in Table 6 in Appendix K.

In survey A, before the next question I provide participants with a definition of organizational culture to ensure participants understood and had the same meaning for

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organizational culture when answering the following questions. The definition was as follows:

Organizational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values and beliefs which govern how people behave in organizations. These shared values have a strong influence on the people in the organization and dictate how they dress, act and perform their jobs (as defined by study.com)

Q: Did the organizational culture at your place of employment affect your decision to return or not to return to work after maternity leave?

Respondents had the option of selecting “yes,” “no” or “prefer not to say” for this question. Fifteen respondents said “yes,” the organizational culture did affect their decision and 36 said it did not affect their decision. No participants selected “prefer not to say.”

Q: If you returned to work after maternity leave, what were some of the motivating factors? (check all that apply)

For this question, respondents had the option of selecting “money,” “career advancement,” “pressure from outside sources,” “the desire for a career,” “I did not return to work,” and “other.” Of the 51 respondents, the largest motivating factor to return to work was money (88.24%), followed by the desire for a career (43.14%), career advancement (39.22%), and pressure from outside sources (7.84 %). Six respondents said it was for “other” reasons. Of these six, two responded that their reasons were health benefits, two responded that they enjoyed their jobs, one returned to work but decided to leave after a few months to raise her family, and one said both parents needed full-time employment to receive daycare subsidy. Four respondents did not return to work after maternity leave.

Q: If you chose to stay home with your child(ren) did you worry about the repercussions this choice might have on your future career (if you were planning to return to your field)?

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This question was only made available to respondents who indicated they did not return to work (n=4) in the previous questions and was not a mandatory question. Respondents could select “yes,” “no” or “unsure.” Three respondents answered the question. Two indicated they felt there would be repercussions for taking time to raise their children, while one respondent said she did not feel there would be repercussions.

Q: Do you have any additional thoughts or experience you would like to share about returning or not returning to work after maternity leave?

This question was optional and gave respondents a chance to elaborate or provide additional context to their previous answers. Twenty-four respondents answered this question. One of the most commonly shared sentiments about the choice to return or not to return to work after maternity leave is that, as one participant stated, “it is simply not an easy choice.” Another echoed this sentiment, responding that it was a “tough choice.” Even the respondents who said they were happy to return to work described struggles finding a work-life balance.

Five participants responded that they felt working outside of the home was good for their mental well-being and enjoyed having the opportunity to be social at work. Three participants described their experiences of choosing to stay home. One wrote that it “was the best decision I have ever made,” while the other two wrote that it has been difficult to re-enter the workforce with a gap in their resumes. Ten participants noted that they believe part-time or reduced work schedules should be available for parents while their children are young. However, the underlying theme present in most answers was that women, even women who desire to return to work, struggle with the thought of leaving their children to return to work when a maternity leave ends.

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Q: Do you have any additional thoughts or experiences you would like to share about opportunities for professional part-time employment for mothers in Canada?

This question was optional for respondents, and thirteen respondents (of the total 51) chose to provide their thoughts on opportunities for professional part-time employment for mothers in Canada. Nine respondents indicated that they felt part-time professional employment and pay should be made available and/or that they would take the opportunity if it was available to them. One respondent advocated for work-from-home jobs for mothers. One respondent noted that she did not believe professional part-time opportunities exist in Canada. One respondent described a personal experience, stating that she felt many employers still have a prejudice against mothers in the workplace and that she had trouble finding employment after maternity leave. One respondent quoted advice she had previously heard:

“Allowing mothers to work part-time benefits both the mother and employer. The mother gets time for family and the employer gets a more productive and effective employee. Employees working at 80 or 90 per cent are typically able to meet the objectives of a 100 per cent job.”

Filter Question 3. This question was shown to the eight of 59 respondents who indicated that they would not work part-time or at a reduced schedule if the option had been available to them.

I asked the eight participants what factor(s) were a part of the reason for not wanting to work reduced hours. I gave the participants the option of choosing from the following responses: “household costs would not allow them to reduce their income,” “to hard to find part-time childcare,” “I want to work full-time,” or “other reason”.

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Of the eight respondents, seven said that their household costs would not allow them to reduce their income, four said they want to work full-time and one respondent said that it is too hard to find part-time childcare.

Survey B

Respondents who stated that their household costs would not allow them to reduce their income or that it was too hard to find part-time childcare were directed to survey “B” (n=4).

Q: If your circumstances would allow you to work a reduced schedule, would you want to take that opportunity?

Respondents (n=4) were given the option of selecting “yes,” “no” or “unsure.” Three respondents indicated that, yes, they would take the opportunity to work a reduced schedule if their circumstances would allow and one respondent said they were unsure.

Q: How do you feel working in a part-time capacity after having children may affect your career? Please explain.

Of the four respondents, two felt working part time after having children could impact their career negatively. One respondent did not believe it would affect her career negatively and one respondent, who identified as an educator, said it was hard to work a reduced schedule because course times change frequently. For respondents’ complete responses, see Table 9 in Appendix K.

In Survey B, before the next series of questions about family-friendly work policies, I first provided a definition for ‘family-friendly work practices’ in case any of the participants were unaware of what family-friendly work policies meant. The definition was as follows:

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Family-friendly work practices are generally defined as policies that make it possible for employees to more easily balance family and work, and to fulfill both their family and work obligations (The University of Kansas)

Q: Do you feel your employer supports family-friendly work policies?

Of the four respondents, one replied “yes,” that they felt their employer supports family-friendly work policies. Three respondents said they did not feel their employer supports these types of policies.

Q: If your workplace provides such policies, do you feel you have been or would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies?

Respondents had the option of selecting “yes,” “no” or “prefer not to say” for this question. Two of the four respondents indicated that, “yes,” they felt they would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies, one said they would not be penalized and one respondent indicated they would prefer not to answer the question.

Q: Do you feel your most recent place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace?

Of the four respondents, one said “yes,” that she felt her employer was supportive of mothers in the workplace and three said they did not feel their employers were supportive.

I asked the three participants who responded “no” to describe their experience to better understand why they did not feel their most recent employer supported mothers in the workplace. They indicated that taking sick days for their children was a problem. One respondent also said

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that personal calls from the school or children's care provider were not allowed. Respondents' full responses can be found in Table 10 in Appendix K.

Q: Do you feel you were treated or perceived differently by your employer or workplace after returning from maternity leave?

One of four respondents said "yes," that she felt she was treated or perceived differently by her employer. Three respondents said they did not feel they were treated differently.

I asked participants who responded "yes" to this question to describe their experience. The one respondent who replied "yes" wrote the following:

"I was moved to a lower level job, to operations building far away from management and other skilled employees. I was constantly micromanaged by my male colleague, who had lower qualifications than mine, but was paid more and got promoted right after I returned from maternity leave, so that he would become my boss, and I was the only employee he personally "managed".

Survey C

Respondents who said they did not want to work at a reduced or part-time schedule because they want to work full-time were directed to Survey C (n=4).

Q: How do you feel working in a part-time capacity after having children may affect a woman's career? Please explain.

The four participants in Survey C responded as follows to this open-ended question:

- "Possible loss of career advancement, limited time to acquire and practice new skills."

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- “Depending on their career working part-time could either be of no difference or I think it could hinder their chances of furthering their career as most employers are looking for full-time people in higher roles in companies.”
- “Taking a year off significantly reduces a woman’s traction in the organization. You have to almost start from scratch when you come back and re-climb the reputation ladder. People almost forget your value and you must reintegrate into conversations which can be difficult in management. This would be much more difficult to do if you were only working part-time. People wouldn’t see you as much as an asset if they couldn’t consistently rely on you. I think it would be incredibly stifling.” “Allow a woman to do both and not have to give up her career. Too many women must choose between the two, when they really want to do both.”

In Survey C, before the next question, I first provided a statement to describe how the Dutch government has implemented several laws to protect part-time workers, as discussed in Chapter Two (Literature Review). I also reported the prevalence of part-time work among Dutch women. I intended this explanation to provide an example that these types of work opportunities are available in other countries before asking the participants’ questions about the types of opportunities they feel are provided to them in Canada. The statement read as follows: In 2000, the Dutch government awarded workers the right to request an upward or downward adjustment of the number of working hours within their current jobs, and employers must honour this request unless there are conflicting business interests. The country also has other laws that protect part-time workers, and 3 in 5 Dutch women work part-time while their children are young.

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Q: Do you feel Canadian employers should provide parents (particularly women) with an opportunity to work a reduced schedule after having children?

Of the four respondents, three said “yes,” that they felt employers should provide parents with this opportunity, and one respondent replied no. I then gave the participants an opportunity to elaborate on their “yes” or “no” response to this question. Of the four respondents, three said that, if a business could accommodate, it would be beneficial for one parent to work reduced hours while children are young and that it would create a better work-life balance. One respondent said that a business should not have to bear the burden for more than a year-long maternity leave and that it would make entering the workforce as a young woman much more difficult because she could be seen as a liability to hire. Respondents’ full responses can be found in Table 13 in Appendix K.

In Survey C, before the next question, I first provided a definition for family-friendly work practices and policies in case any of the participants were unaware of what family-friendly work policies meant. The definition read as follows: Family-friendly work practices are generally defined as policies that make it possible for employees to more easily balance family and work, and to fulfill both their family and work obligations (The University of Kansas).

Q: Do you feel your employer supports family-friendly work practices?

Of the four respondents, three replied “yes,” that they felt their employer supported family-friendly work practices, and one respondent said no.

Q: If your workplace provides family friendly policies do you feel you have been or would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies?

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Of the four respondents, one said “yes,” that she felt she would be penalized for partaking in these types of policies. Three respondents said no. The one respondent who replied “yes” to the question was asked to explain why she felt she would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies. She wrote:

“It wouldn’t be overt, but covertly it would be spoken about and less advancements and opportunities would be sent my way.”

Q: Do you feel your current or last place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace?

All four respondents said “yes,” that they believe their current or last place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace. I then asked the four participants to explain or provide an example as to how they felt their employers support mothers in the workplace. They responded as follows to this open-ended question:

- “Never had an issue having to take time off due to the children.”
- “Within my company we are able to work a flexible schedule either by working modified shifts or working from home when needed.”
- “They were happy and accommodating. My only complaint is they don’t understand sick time once you are back from maternity leave. Putting a child in daycare results in them getting sick ALL THE TIME for months until their immunities build up. That irritates a workplace.”
- “I am currently on an extended maternity leave and will have no trouble returning to my career. I am very grateful for that opportunity.”

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Q: Do you feel you were treated or perceived differently by your employer or workplace after returning from maternity leave?

Of the four respondents, two said “yes,” that they felt they were perceived differently, and two said no, that they did not feel they were perceived differently by their employer after returning from maternity leave.

The two participants who responded that, yes, they felt they were treated or perceived differently by their employer after maternity leave both expressed the same concern that their employer was concerned about when they would have another child. One respondent also replied that she felt her employers demanded less of her after maternity leave, and one respondent said that she was not considered for a change in job/role. Full responses can be viewed in Table 16 in Appendix K.

In survey C, before the next question I provide participants with a definition of organizational culture to ensure participants understood and had the same meaning for organizational culture when answering the questions that followed. The definition read as follows: Organizational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs which govern how people behave in organizations. These shared values have a strong influence on the people in the organization and dictate how they dress, act, and perform their jobs.

Q: Did the organizational culture at your place of employment affect your decision to return or not return to work after maternity leave?

Two of the four respondents chose to answer this “yes” or “no” question. Both respondents replied “no,” that the organizational culture at their place of employment did not

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affect their decision about returning to work. I then asked the participants to elaborate on their “no” response. The two respondents respectively replied with the following answers:

- “I went back to work because I wanted to and needed to financially. It had nothing to do with my workplace culture.”
- My decisions have always been based on what was best for my family, in consultation with my husband.”

Summary

Overall, the results demonstrate that mothers believe working part-time would provide them with a better work-life balance, with 72.9 per cent respondents replying “yes,” that it would provide them with a better work-life balance and that they want the opportunity to work part-time, professionally and in their chosen career paths. Most respondents (86.4 per cent), when asked if they would like to reduce their working hours, replied “yes” or “maybe.” Additionally, another three respondents later indicated that if their financial circumstances would allow, they too would choose to work part time or at a reduced schedule.

The results regarding how mothers perceive their workplace culture were more split than their desire for professional part-time work. Sixty-six per cent felt their employers were supportive of mothers in the workplace. However, only half of the respondents (49.15 per cent) felt their employers were supportive of family-friendly work practices and one third of all respondents (33.89 per cent) felt they would be penalized if they took part in family-friendly work practices.

In the next chapter, I analyze and discuss these results and state further implications of this research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This study investigated mothers' perceptions of professional part-time employment and their experiences with organizational culture and how workplace policies affect their career after maternity leave in Canada. Specifically, this study sought to explore three research questions: (1) What work schedules do mothers want available to them in professional positions? (2) How do mothers perceive the current state of organizational culture towards them when returning from maternity leave? (3) How does organizational culture affect a mother's decision to return to work? To address these research questions, I employed a survey comprised of quantitative and qualitative questions. This study sought to give voice to mothers' lived experiences of working professionally and raising children—a voice that is currently missing from the research and literature.

The study found that more than half of the mothers surveyed would like to work part-time or on a reduced schedule while their children are young. Seventy-three per cent of mothers surveyed felt working fewer hours would provide them with a better work-life balance than working full-time and nearly half said it would strengthen their commitment to an organization if they were able to reduce their working hours. However, respondents' perceptions and experiences with organizational culture varied, with positive and negative experiences, indicating that experiences rely heavily on the people within an organization and its culture and policies.

The major findings of this research are that: (1) mothers understand the potential "risks" of being employed part-time, yet they still desire to work part-time while their children are young and feel part-time employment would provide them with a better work-life balance; (2)

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two-thirds of mothers think their employers do support family-friendly work policies, while the remaining one-third think they would be penalized for using such policies; and (3) household costs and finances are the dominant factors motivating women when deciding whether to return to work after maternity leave, not organizational culture. These findings will be explored and discussed in this chapter.

RQ1: What work schedules do mothers want available to them in professional positions?

The mothers surveyed desire to work part-time while their children are young and understand the potential “risks” of being employed less than full time.

The current literature on mothers and paid employment has looked at every aspect from the relative “good” and “bad” part-time jobs (Tilly, 1995; Webber & Williams, 2008), how part-time work affects a woman’s career trajectory (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Gungor & Biernat, 2008), and the impacts of family-friendly work policies (Barnett & Hall, 2001; Crompton, 2006). Some studies affirm non-traditional work arrangements¹ (Barnett & Hall, 2001; Halpern, 2005), while others discredit them (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Gungor & Biernat, 2008). Yet, the research has neglected to ask what type of work schedules mothers desire, and how they feel opportunities that accommodate their needs would affect their perceived work-life balance.

American statistics show that 61 per cent of mothers would prefer to work part-time (Pew Research Trends, 2009). A similar statistic for Canadian mothers did not exist. The survey completed for this study found that a similar percentage of the mothers surveyed would take a reduction in working hours if the opportunity were presented to them. Additionally, three mothers surveyed who did not want to work part-time because they would prefer to work full-

¹ Jobs outside of the typical 9-to-5 with a set office space.

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time were in favour of parents having the choice. When asked if they felt employers should provide the opportunity to mothers to reduce their work schedule, these three mothers respectively responded:

“I think it would be great for our society if everyone had the option when their kids are young.”

“This should be a choice for the mother and father if they want to work a reduced schedule, if it is possible for the employer to offer.”

“I think a modified work week to create a better work-life balance is of great benefit for everyone, not just parents.”

Twenty-four of the 55 mothers who were asked how they felt working part-time while their children are young would affect their career reported that part-time work would stunt their career growth or provide them fewer opportunities for advancement. Mothers also noted that employers are not usually eager to hire employees who work fewer hours and that jobs that do offer fewer hours include less pay and status. Mothers' perceptions about how their career trajectory may be affected if they were to reduce their working hours after having children align with current research that finds mothers who work part-time face inequalities in the workplace and years of lost wages (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Gungor & Biernat, 2008).

Other issues noted by participants were that they would not be able to continue in their current profession on a reduced schedule and would most likely need to take a job below their status and pay-grade. These findings are consistent with the literature that finds part-time work is polarized into low-wage occupations and typically downgrading in job status when women do

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make the switch from full-time to part-time (Connolly & Gregory, 2008). This indicates that a social and organizational issue exists.

A majority of Americans (75 per cent) reject the idea that women should return to traditional roles in society, staying home to tend to the home and children, and believe that both husband and wife should contribute to the family income (Pew Research Trends, 2009), yet little consideration is given to how the traditional career model affects dual-earner families. Feminist scholars have argued that the "professional" model of careers is a "male model" (Acker, 1990; Moen, & Roehling 2005; Williams, 2000). Employers typically presume that professional workers will devote themselves to their careers, work long hours, and require minimal accommodation for their personal lives. This "ideal worker norm" is one that only men, and arguably, women who are not mothers, can approximate (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Williams, 2000). These constraints can feel suffocating for women, as demonstrated in the following statement from a survey respondent:

"Fewer job opportunities are presented to me based on them knowing that I have little children and I may not always be reliable due to their illness, appointments, etc. Men are treated much differently than the women in my office."

Despite its widespread use in both the popular and the academic press, the term "work-life or work-family balance" is an underdeveloped concept (Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009). The construct rests upon the assumption that work-life balance is an individual choice and personal responsibility, thereby ignoring structural, cultural and gendered constraints and letting organizations off the hook (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007; Ransome, 2007). However, Hewlett (2007) touts the benefits of the "scenic career route" (in

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contrast to the "fast track") as a superior, more realistic, career model that enables better work-family balance. She praises company policies that support and legitimize part-time work because, in her view, conventional work schedules discriminate against mothers (Greenhaus & Allen, 2010).

Ball (2004) has previously noted that “how mothers feel about caring for children has been given insufficient attention in current childcare and gender equality policies” (p. 86). This study has given attention and voice to mothers. It has provided them with a forum to say that it should be acceptable for women to want to spend time caring for their children while also working and progressing in their chosen profession. These mothers feel that working part-time or at least reduced from 40 hours per week would be the answer, as indicated by their survey responses:

“I would be thrilled to have professional work at a part-time rate. It would allow me to contribute to my family and my career while being better able to put my family first. There are very few professional roles offered part-time.”

“I believe companies should offer this. Many mothers do not want to return to full-time work when their children are one-year-old and are forced to choose between working and leaving their child or lack of money.”

RQ2: How do mothers perceive the current state of organizational culture towards them when returning from maternity leave?

Two-thirds of mothers surveyed feel their employers support family-friendly work policies, while one third feel they would be penalized for taking part in such policies.

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Nearly two-thirds of the mothers surveyed for this project feel their place of employment supports family-friendly work policies and supports mothers in the workplace, while the other one third feel they would be penalized for taking advantage of these policies and do not feel supported in their organization. This indicates that organizations are moving in a direction that supports the notion of families in the workplace. However, there is still work to be done to end the discrimination some mothers feel in the workplace.

Family-friendly work policies are a human resource practice designed to help employees alleviate the conflict between work and family roles (Friedman, 1990). At first glance, family-friendly policies appear to be an ideal solution to gender-equity concerns in the workplace (von Hippel, Kalokerinos & Zacher, 2017). However, there can be unexpected trade-offs between well-intended human resource management practices and employee outcomes (Grant, Christianson, & Price, 2007). In today's business culture, a policy written in a guidebook does nothing to change the culture. Many mothers surveyed said they felt penalized for taking part in their company's policies and felt they were perceived differently as mothers:

"Even though my company has flex work options and family-friendly policies, at times it feels you are being judged for taking advantage of these policies too often."

"I was not considered for a change in job/role because my superiors knew I was planning to have another child, and therefore go on another maternity leave."

Penalties are often unspoken, embedded in corporate culture and can be difficult to dislodge (Stewart, 2012). Family-friendly policies must be practiced and accepted by all levels of management to help alleviate the perceived or real threat of penalties. These penalties can be perceived by employees, as these surveyed mothers' experiences demonstrate:

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"I feel like my employer says they are family-focused and allow flex schedules, but it does not apply to 90 per cent of the jobs in the organization. I feel they say these things to sound employee-centric, but they do not practice what they preach."

"Although my employer is flexible and understanding when time off is needed due to child commitments only a certain amount of time is truly tolerated."

Or, real consequences and penalties can force mothers out of the workplace, as told by one mother in her survey response:

"I had to leave my place of employment. They made it very uncomfortable to the point of insinuating how poor my choices were as far as prioritizing my life, work vs. family."

Similar studies have found that these perceived penalties and stereotypes that mothers fear are commonly found in the workplace. Mothers are thought to be conserving energy for their family responsibilities or regarded as having less energy to expend at work after meeting their domestic responsibilities (Voydanoff, 2004). These stereotypes can make it even more challenging for women to manage their multiple identities (Hodges & Park, 2013), where the expectations of being a good mother conflict with those of being a good employee (Wallace & Young, 2008).

The current landscape of the workplace demands that employees be highly committed to their organizations, which is translated into managers' expectations for their employees to work long hours and prioritize work over personal life (Hyman, Baldry, Scholarios, & Bunzel, 2003; Hughes & Bozionelos 2007). Furthermore, over the last decade of economic uncertainty, organizations have faced challenges derived from the financial crisis, organizational restructuring and intensive competition in the business environments, which have fostered 24-hour services

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that negatively affect the work-life balance of employees (Cegarra-Leiva, Sanchez-Vidal, & Cegarra-Navarro, 2012). Technological advancements, such as teleworking, make it so that employees must be available for an organization even during their 'holidays' or 'weekends.' Moreover, due to Canadians debt being above a "critical threshold" in 2017 (Tencer, 2017), and perceived insecurity in the labour market, employees feel they need to demonstrate their commitment to their organizations by a continual presence at the workplace (Hyman et al., 2003).

On the other hand, scholarly literature also suggests that offering family-friendly work practices are perceived by the employees as organizational support for their personal lives, which in turn positively affects employees' behaviour, morale, and results in the workplace (Cegarra-Leiva et al., 2012). Allen (2001) found that perception of work-life support increases commitment and job satisfaction and reduces turnover intentions. The mothers surveyed for this research confirmed a similar finding. Forty-seven per cent of mothers would feel more committed to their employer if they were to reduce their working hours and would boost their morale and work ethic. Two participants discussed how they felt working fewer hours would make them a better employee:

"Working fewer hours means having more time with my children [providing a] good work-family balance. If I am not stressed from being overworked, I would have a clear mind and be able to put more effort into the work I do."

"I would be fully present while at work as I would be able to get home and parenting responsibilities done while off work. I would be less distracted."

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One study from the University of Minnesota investigating Best Buy Co.'s headquarters flex time program ROWE (Results Only Work Environment) found a flexible work schedule that focuses on results and not just activity cut turnover at the company's headquarters by 45 per cent while improving productivity (Stych, 2011). The study, which followed 300 employees who worked on the flex plan and 300 who continued to work the traditional 9-to-5, showed that six per cent working under the flex plan left during the study period left the company, compared to 11 per cent of the control group. The researchers said the study was so successful that Best Buy Headquarters continued to allow its employees to work under the ROWE program, with 90-95 per cent of its 4,000 employees using the program in 2011 (Stych, 2011). The program focuses on results, not time. One of the primary researchers of the study, Phyllis Moen, said: "It moves away from the time cages developed around the work day in the middle of the 20th century in a way more compatible with a 21st-century workforce" (University of Minnesota, 2011).

Best Buy Headquarters saw great success with ROWE, but in 2013 incoming CEO Hubert Joly ended the program in favour of a different management approach. However, many companies are still implementing ROWE or variations of the program in 2017 and receiving positive results, not only from an employee satisfaction standpoint but a business standpoint as well. For example, a US-based risk-software company implemented ROWE and saw a 20 per cent increase in its customer base and reduced business expenses by 12 per cent (Parris, 2016).

RQ3: How does organizational culture affect a mother's decision to return to work?

Household costs and finances are the dominant factors motivating women when deciding whether to return to work after maternity leave, not organizational culture.

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Mothers surveyed were quick to discuss their workplace cultures and the issues with or the support they receive from their employers and co-workers. However, organizational culture rarely affected a mother's decision to return or not return to work after maternity leave, with 72 per cent of mothers responding that it did not influence their decision making. When asked why they returned to work, the most common answer from all three survey groups was the need to contribute financially to their household, followed by the desire to have a career. This is not surprising given the state of the economy and rise in everyday costs (Tencer, 2017; Carmichael, 2017).

The literature shows that, to retain top talent, businesses need to re-evaluate their structure and place more importance on corporate culture than ever before (Deloitte, 2016). However, employers may not feel the weight of demand from employees to incorporate such policies or attempt to eliminate the stigma behind them. Organizational culture is noted as one of the top deciding factors for new employees (Deloitte, 2016). However, mothers returning to work after maternity leave have a different set of priorities and needs that must be met regardless of workplace culture. Some mothers surveyed expressed discontent with the culture of their workplace but had no choice but return to work full-time because the option of part-time or reduced hours was not available and the opportunity to leave paid-employment was also not a reality: "I believe companies should offer part-time. Many mothers do not want to return to work full-time when their child is one and are forced to choose between working and leaving their child or face a lack of income."

The findings outlined in this discussion align with Mertens' (2007) explanation of the transformative paradigm which provides a framework for addressing issues of social justice through the research process. The ontological assumption of the transformative paradigm holds

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that power and privilege influence socially constructed realities. The transformative paradigm recognizes that "voices of those who are disenfranchised based on gender, race/ethnicity, disability or other characteristics can be excluded in research (Mertens, 2007, p. 214). By collecting and analyzing data from mothers in different parts of the country, this thesis provides mothers with a voice to express their desires surrounding motherhood and professional employment, and it sheds light on the disconnect that still exists between the demands of motherhood and the demands of the workplace.

This research provided a platform for the participants to offer their insights and perceptions on motherhood and professional employment, and it provided them with a confidential outlet to express their thoughts and concerns—an opportunity they may not otherwise be afforded in the workplace.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This study explored mothers' perceptions and lived experiences of returning to work after maternity leave and how they felt it changed their careers. The study also examined what types of work arrangements mothers desire outside of the traditional 9-to-5 and how that may affect their perceived work-life balance.

The study employed a survey methodology to collect data from mothers living and working in Canada who have a university or college education and children between the ages of one and 12, an age range where children typically require the most care and supervision and, thus, the time when most mothers consider alternate working schedules. The survey results demonstrated that many mothers would work part-time or at a reduced schedule if they could find a job relevant to their skills, experience, and education, but that these types of jobs are difficult to come across in Canada. The results also revealed that even mothers who do not desire to work less than full-time believe it should be an option for parents to reduce their hours while their children are young.

The experience of returning to an organization after maternity leave and how mothers felt they were perceived by their employer varied significantly with the mothers who completed the survey. Nearly two-thirds said they felt supported by their employer and that family-friendly work policies were in place and they felt comfortable using them. The remaining one-third thought they were perceived differently by their employer after returning from maternity leave and felt they would not have access to or would be penalized for using family-friendly work policies. However, even with negative corporate culture experiences, this rarely affects a

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mother's decision to return or not return to work after maternity leave. Today's economic state and the rapid rate of inflation has created a society that requires both parents to work outside the home, and the lack of opportunities in professional part-time employment (Bosch et al., 2010) does not provide options for families aside from having both parents contribute financially to the household.

Overall, mothers surveyed in this study wanted the same thing – more professional opportunities that offer a reduced schedule or flexibility that accommodates family care. It is clear mothers who were surveyed desire to maintain their professional selves, but motherhood plays the critical role in their lives too. The constraints of the traditional workday are becoming obsolete with the advancement of technology and the ability to work from various locations, creating the perfect opportunity for employers to re-evaluate these traditional, nine-to-five models and help remove the burden from families who desire a better work-life balance.

Limitations

The survey received responses mostly from Nova Scotia and Ontario, with only nine responding from other provinces. I originally intended for the research to reflect mothers' perceptions about professional employment and organizational culture from across Canada. However, because I relied heavily on word-of-mouth and the power of social media to distribute the survey, this may have affected the response rate from provinces where I have limited connections. A second limitation is the response rate. Fifty-nine mothers completed the survey. While this number surpassed what I anticipated receiving, it is a low figure in context of the population of mothers in Canada. Thus, both limitations mean that the results of the survey cannot be thought to represent of the whole of mothers in Canada.

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Directions for Future Research

The limited representation from mothers in the West Coast of Canada could provide an opportunity for a similar study to examine the perceptions of mothers in that region. There is also the need to study employers who have formal policies that support mothers working reduced hours after having children and how this model affects business, notably costs, employee retention and corporate culture and family-friendly policies.

Final Thoughts

I felt very passionately about providing mothers with a voice in the conversation about motherhood and professional employment because, as a mother myself, I know the decision between the two is never black and white. While every mother's experiences are different and unique, being a mother also creates a shared experience. Whether it be social constraints or ideals that metaphorically hold women in the lead caregiver role, it was evident in mothers' survey responses that family needs and responsibilities come first, not out of duty but because mothers value and treasure their role as mothers. The role of motherhood has remained relatively unchanged over the decades, but the role of women has grown and changed drastically, which has created a conflict for women who desire to seamlessly blend work and family.

The voice of the media, or power of social media can make it scary for mothers to admit that they struggle to leave their children every day or struggle to maintain a full-time career with their other responsibilities. To this end, I draw on the voices of two mothers surveyed:

“Returning to work was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life. I cried for months leading up to my return to work and still cry almost a year later because I miss my babies

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so much. They are so little and spend more time with their daycare providers than they do with me. That hurts my heart.”

“I want to do meaningful, stimulating, appropriately paid work (based on my skills and experience) but not full-time. That is hard to come by. When my child starts school next year, I want to drop her off, go to work and pick her up. That is not possible with my current schedule. I may ask to reduce my hours, but I’m worried it will look like I’m struggling. Which, I guess at times I am.”

By providing a voice for mothers with this study, I hope that the conversation about integrating motherhood and professional careers will continue and employers will recognize the value of supporting their employees who are parents. Part-time or reduced work schedules will not appeal to everyone. Not all mothers want to take the “scenic route” in their career, and many families are bound by financial constraints. This runs contrary to employers’ popular belief that what you must do for one you must do for all. Part-time employment has proven in many countries to be a viable option to keep women in the workforce, while providing them the extra hours they need to care for and, more importantly, enjoy their family.

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Appendix A

**PANEL ON
RESEARCH ETHICS**
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE



Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Jessica Gillis

*has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)*

Date of Issue: **3 March, 2016**

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Appendix B

Letter of Information to participating groups and their members

Dear {insert group name here}:

I request your assistance reaching mothers living and working in Canada within your community. Please review the following message and forward this email to your members.

Thank you for your assistance.

Dear Mothers:

My name is Jessica Gillis. I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts (Communication) program at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. A requirement of this program is to conduct original research to complete a master's thesis. The purpose of my research is to examine and describe mothers' perceptions of (Canadian) organizational attitudes and behaviours towards a woman's return (or not to return) to work after maternity leave and to discover if Canadian mothers feel part-time professional employment opportunities are needed in Canada and would help accommodate family care.

The research and the research questions were designed to help mothers currently living and working (or who have worked) in Canada have a voice in the conversation about motherhood and professional employment—a conversation that currently lacks the voice of mothers.

Participants for this study should be mothers, currently living in Canada, with children between the ages of one (1) and twelve (12). Participants should have a university or college education (or advanced training in their prospective field) and currently work or have worked in a traditionally salaried professional position

All participants' responses will remain anonymous.

The survey can be accessed via a link at the end of this email. The survey is expected to take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

If you agree to participate in this research, please follow the link to the Letter of Informed Consent. If you check the box indicating that you agree to the conditions as outlined in the Letter, you will be redirected to the online survey.

Individuals who complete this survey will have the option to enter a draw for a \$100 gift card. Names entered into this draw will not be linked to the survey responses submitted.

All participants' responses will remain anonymous.

Thank you.

Jessica Gillis
Master of Arts (Communication) student
Department of Communication Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University

HAVING (A PIECE OF) IT ALL

Appendix C

Recruitment Text for Social Media Posts

Moms! be a part of the conversation about motherhood and professional employment!

My name is Jessica Gillis. I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts (Communication) program at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. A requirement of this program is to conduct original research to complete my master's thesis. Please consider my request for your participation below and I look forward to your (confidential & anonymous) responses!

The purpose of my research is to examine and describe mothers' perceptions of (Canadian) organizational attitudes and behaviours towards a woman's return (or not to return) to work after maternity leave and to discover if mothers feel part-time professional employment opportunities are needed in Canada and would help accommodate family care.

Participants for this study should be mothers, who live and work (or have worked) in Canada with children between the ages of one (1) and twelve (12). Participants should have a university or college education (or advanced training in their prospective field) and currently work or have worked in a traditionally salaried professional position.

The survey can be accessed via this link {insert hyperlink here}. The survey is expected to take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

If you agree to participate in this research, please follow the link to the Letter of Informed Consent. If you check the box indicating that you agree to the conditions as outlined in the Letter, you will be redirected to the online survey.

Individuals who complete this survey will have the option to enter a draw for a \$100 gift card. Names entered into this draw will not be linked to the survey responses submitted.

All participants' responses will remain anonymous.

HAVING (A PIECE OF) IT ALL

Appendix D

Letter of Informed Consent for Participating Canadian Mothers

My name is Jessica Gillis. I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts (Communication) program at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. A requirement of this program is to conduct original research to complete a master's thesis. The purpose of my research is to examine and describe mothers' perceptions of (Canadian) organizational attitudes and behaviours towards their return (or choice not to return) to work after maternity leave and to discover if Canadian mothers feel part-time professional employment opportunities are needed in Canada and would help accommodate family care.

The results of this study will be presented during a thesis defense that will be open to the university community. The results of the study will be written and may be shared with the academic community and public in the form of conference presentations and journal articles.

I ask that you consider participating in this research study. As a participant, you will be asked to answer a series of multiple choice and open-ended questions. Once submitted, your responses will be sent directly to me. All answers remain anonymous and therefore cannot be attributed to any participant. You will have the option to withdraw from the research up until you submit your responses online. You may also contact me if you wish to review the results when my thesis becomes publicly available.

If you have any questions about my research or if you would like further information on this study, please email me at [REDACTED]. If you have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB), c/o MSVU Research Office, at (902) 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

If you agree to participate in this research, please check the appropriate box below and complete the online survey.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Gillis
Master of Arts (Communication) student
Department of Communication Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University

Please check the appropriate box:

- Yes, I agree to participate in this study (You will be directed to the survey)
- No, I do not agree to participate in this study.

HAVING (A PIECE OF) IT ALL

Appendix E

Demographic Survey Questions for All Participants

What is your age?

- 19-22 years
- 23-27 years
- 28-32 years
- 33-37 years
- Age 37 or older

How many children over the age of 1 and under the age of 12 live in your household?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

What Province / Territory do you reside in? _____

What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married / Common-law
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

What is your highest level of education?

- High school diploma
- College diploma / Associate's degree
- Undergraduate degree
- Graduate degree
- PhD

Are you currently employed?

- Yes - Full-time
- Yes -Part-time
- Yes – self-employed
- I'm not employed

Which of the following most closely matches your current job title? If you are not employed, note which of the following most closely matches your last job title.

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- Intern
- Entry Level
- Analyst / Associate
- Manager
- Senior Manager
- Director
- Vice President
- Senior Vice President
- C level executive (CIO, CTO, COO, CMO, Etc)
- President or CEO
- Owner
- Doctor
- Nurse
- Lawyer
- Educator
- Other (please describe)

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Appendix F

Filter Questions to Determine Which Survey Route the Participate Completed

Do you feel working at a reduced or part-time schedule would provide you with a better work-life balance?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

If the opportunity was or had been available to you to work part-time or at a reduced schedule upon returning from maternity leave, would you have taken the reduction in hours?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

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Appendix G**Survey A**

3. How do you feel working in a part-time capacity after having children may affect your career? Please explain:

4. Do you feel working at a reduced or part-time schedule would strengthen your commitment to the organization? Please explain:

5. In 2000, the Dutch government awarded workers the right to request an upward or downward adjustment of the number of working hours within their current jobs, and employers must honour this request unless there are conflicting business interests. The country also has other laws that protect part-time workers, and 3 in 5 Dutch women work part-time while their children are young.

a) Do you feel your employer would have provided you with such an opportunity if you had approached them about a reduction in hours?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

b) If you have approached an employer about a reduction in hours after maternity leave, please describe that experience. What was the outcome?

6. Family-Friendly Work practices are generally defined as policies that make it possible for employees to more easily balance family and work, and to fulfill both their family and work obligations (The University of Kansas)

a) Do you feel your employer supports family-friendly work practices?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

b) If your workplace provides family-friendly policies, do you feel you have been or would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies?

- Yes
- No

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- Prefer not to say

c) **If you responded yes, please explain**

d) **Do you feel your most recent place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace?**

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

e) **please describe your experience.**

7. **Do you feel you were treated or perceived differently by your employer or workplace after returning from maternity leave?**

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

7B. **If you responded yes, please describe your experience.**

Organizational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs, which governs how people behave in organizations. These shared values have a strong influence on the people in the **organization** and dictate how they dress, act, and perform their jobs.(as defined by study.com)

8. **Did the organizational culture at your place of employment affect your decision to return or not return to work after maternity leave?**

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

9. **If you returned to work after maternity leave, what were some of the motivating factors? (check all that apply)**

- Money
- Career Advancement
- Pressure from outside sources
- the desire for a career
- Other (please explain):

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10. If you chose to stay home with your child(ren), did you worry about the repercussions this choice might have on your future career (if you were planning to return to your field)?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Please explain:

11. Do you have any additional thoughts or experiences you would like to share about returning or not returning to work after maternity leave?

12. Do you have any additional thoughts or experiences you would like to share about opportunities for professional part-time employment for mothers in Canada?

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Appendix H

Filter Question 3– For Survey Participants who responded “no” to Filter Question 2

What factor(s) were a part of the reason for not wanting to work reduced hours? (check all that apply).

- I want to work full-time
- Our household costs would not allow me to reduce my income
- It is too hard to find part-time childcare
- Other (please explain):

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Appendix I

Survey “B”

If your circumstances would allow you to work at a reduced schedule, would you want to take that opportunity?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

How do you feel working in a part-time capacity after having children may affect your career? Please explain

Family-Friendly Work practices are generally defined as policies that make it possible for employees to more easily balance family and work, and to fulfill both their family and work obligations (The University of Kansas)

Do you feel your employer supports family-friendly work policy?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

If your workplace provides such policies, do you feel you have been or would be penalized for part-taking in family-friendly work policies?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Do you feel your most recent place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

If you replied no, please describe your experience?

Do you feel you were treated or perceived differently by your employer or work place after returning from maternity leave?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

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If you responded yes, please describe your experience.

Appendix J

Survey “C”

Do you feel working at a reduced or part-time schedule would provide you with a better work-life balance?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

If the opportunity was or had been available to you to work part-time or at a reduced schedule upon returning from maternity leave, would you have taken the reduction in hours?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

What factor(s) were a part of the reason for not wanting to work reduced hours? (check all that apply).

- I want to work full-time
- Our household costs would not allow me to reduce my income
- It is too hard to find part-time childcare
- Other (please explain) :

How do you feel working in a part-time capacity after having children may affect a woman’s career? Please explain.

In 2000, the Dutch government awarded workers the right to request an upward or downward adjustment of the number of working hours within their current jobs, and employers must honour this request unless there are conflicting business interests. The country also has other laws that protect part-time workers, and 3 in 5 Dutch women work part-time while their children are young.

Do you feel Canadian employers should provide parents (particularly women) with an opportunity to work at a reduced schedule after having children? Please explain:

Family-Friendly Work practices are generally defined as policies that make it possible for employees to more easily balance family and work, and to fulfill both their family and work obligations (The University of Kansas)

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Do you feel your employer supports family-friendly work policy?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

If your workplace provides family-friendly policies, do you feel you have been or would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

If you replied yes, please explain

Do you feel your current or last place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Please describe your experience.

Do you feel you were treated or perceived differently by your employer or work place after returning from maternity leave?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

If you responded yes, please describe your experience.

Organizational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs, which governs how people behave in organizations. These shared values have a strong influence on the people in the **organization** and dictate how they dress, act, and perform their jobs.(as defined by study.com)

Did the organizational culture at your place of employment affect your decision about returning or not returning to work after maternity leave?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Please describe your experience

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Appendix K

The following figures and tables represent the responses collected from participants via Survey Monkey.

The following charts in appendix K were generated by Survey Monkey. The horizontal axis in each chart represents the percentage of respondents who selected the corresponding option on the left side of the chart.

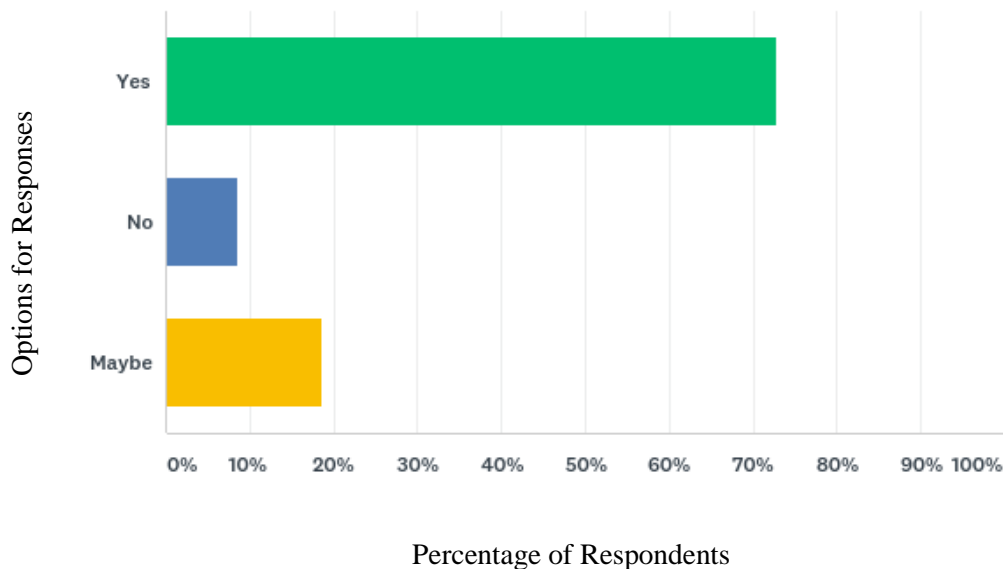


Figure 1. Responses to Survey Question: Do you feel working at a reduced or part-time schedule would provide you with a better work-life balance?

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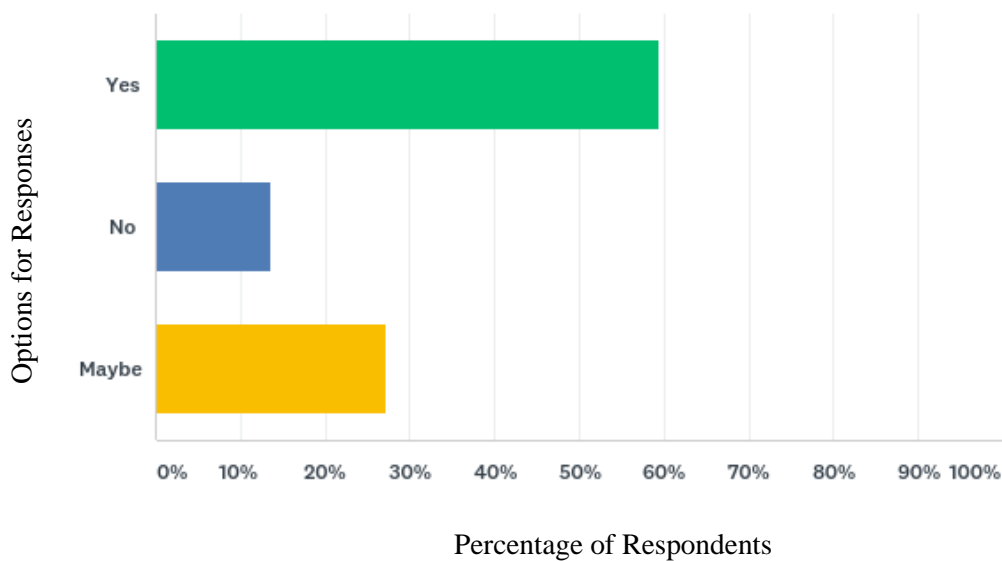


Figure 2. Responses to survey question: If the opportunity was or had been available to you to work part-time or at a reduced schedule upon returning from maternity leave, would you have taken the reduction in hours?

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Survey “A” Data

Table 1.

Responses to Survey “A” question: How do you feel working in a part-time capacity after having children may affect your career? Please explain:

Though my hours are part-time, as a manager I am still on call every day and frequently get interrupted on my days “off”. I have to be more focused to get all of my tasks done working part-time vs. full-time as my work load has not decreased. I also am left out of a lot of the employee “fun” because I am not there all the time (i.e. they have boss bought treats on days I’m not there, go out for activities that I am excluded from, etc.)

I work in unionized environment, it would affect my seniority.

Less working hours, less money – less I can afford in terms of vacations, clothes, going out, etc.

I feel that opportunities would not be offered to me to develop as I wouldn’t be there full-time and others would feel my career was not my priority. But if I could work a reduced schedule (by maybe 8hrs/week), I would have a much better work/life balance and have more energy to give my career while I’m there.

I feel I may not be as connected to my patients as I would have to let some go. I also feel I wouldn’t learn as much working part-time as I would full-time.

Less opportunities to advance

It will deteriorate as employers are not really eager to hire people who work less

It may make me less focused

Only positive way. You still can build your career, won't have gaps in your resume, will be at the same page with your business needs and demands.

Viewed as less of a contributor and less of a team player from my colleagues.

Most of the women who are not mothers yet seem to get ahead and are given more responsibilities. There are the before and after maternity

I feel as though you aren't given as much responsibly and therefore can't acquire certain skills as quickly as before.

Not sure.as long as child care is available, that's all I care.

It would limit my options significantly. I don't think I could find a part time position in my current field so I'd likely have to take a pay cut in addition to reduced hours as I'd have to work in a different field completely.

Negatively. It's a fast moving career and would be hard to keep up
My concern would be that I would lose my current job or a "reorganization" could happen where my current position would be eradicated and a new, similar one introduced that I would have to apply for.

It's hard to get ahead at my day job without working full time. People also take you less seriously. It's difficult to find a part time job, with a good wage and hours.

Possibility for advancement are reduced ig you are part time as full time employee would have priority on higher

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level jobs. Most management position are not available at all for part time.

it would be amazing... but financially I need to be full time right now...

We wouldn't be working solely to pay for childcare, we could find part time care. Spending more time with & raising our own children.

I would feel as if my work would suffer not being there full time. However, being home with my children would not only save on daycare costs but make me happier all around - which in turn would make me happier and more hard working while at work.

No change

Part time not avail in my career - if it was - a lot of people would take the opportunity, but I feel my opportunity for advancement would be nil

I would be worried about losing my seniority status as well as a potential pay cut.

The university where I work doesn't have permanent part-time positions for staff. Also, part time work often ends up being just as much work!

I wouldn't have opportunities to advance my career to a senior level.

Working part-time would most likely require a change in my career. My current position would not allow for me to work part time.

It may not help me advance in my career, but as long as it will keep me in my position or something equivalent without the chance of loosing my job, I would be beyond grateful. I can focus on advancing my career when my children are in school

I'd have fewer opportunities simply because I'm not around. Less time at work in favour of family would also give the impression I think family is more important because employers have a skewed sense of reality

It would affect the time spent at the job affecting my knowledge of what was happening at the office, would affect co-worker relationships, advancement potential etc

Negatively. I feel I would still be expected to do a full-time job in half the hours. Mostly because I would not expect that my colleagues/ boss would be supportive/ understanding. They would be challenged to recognize the reduction in hours.

did work 90% after my first child. It did not negatively impact my career. The acceptance of part-time workers in my organization varies depending on your boss and their perception of working part-time.

it will be better than giving up work al together.

I feel if I had reduced to part time I would not have the ability to return to full time status when I needed to. Less opportunity for movement.

Reduce my chance for advancement.

It wouldn't as a nurse I'm at the top of my pay scale and jobs are based on seniority

Positively - I feel like working full-time and missing out on extra time with my child would have made me resent my job

I did work part time and it has had a significantly positive impact on my life. I can be a mother, a wife, and a

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teacher. All things I enjoy. I feel one aspect is not over shadowed by the others.

I am working part time and it sometimes makes things more challenging. I miss out on networking and social opportunities with coworkers, and am not always a part of decisions made by staff because I am not there when they are made. Sometimes, I cannot participate in trainings because they are full days and I work part time. It's hard to keep up.

It would hurt my chances of progressing towards feeling like I'm thriving in my career

In my profession (I am an educator), working in a part-time capacity may impact my career in several ways. Time spent away from the classroom, for example, may impact my students' academic success and emotional well being as they try to adjust with having more than one teacher. It may also affect my ability to stay up to speed with necessary professional development, staff meetings, parent conferences and overall communication between myself and my school community. It may leave me feeling 'out of the loop' so to speak and, in turn, have a negative impact on the way in which I view my work life.

Perhaps difficult to go back full time when you are ready, and perhaps not in the role you occupied when leaving to care for child

I lost my seniority at my job (of 8 years) because I reduced my hours. I got laid off because I was part-time while they kept the girl who was hired to cover my maternity leave.

It would be difficult to find permanent part time work in my field

Limiting. Very few part time positions at the level I'm qualified for and therefore appropriately paid part time work

I wouldn't be able to stay in a manager position

It would take longer to advance, people may think that work is no longer a priority.

Working part-time would definitely stunt my advancement, I would be passed over for promotions by for full-time employees

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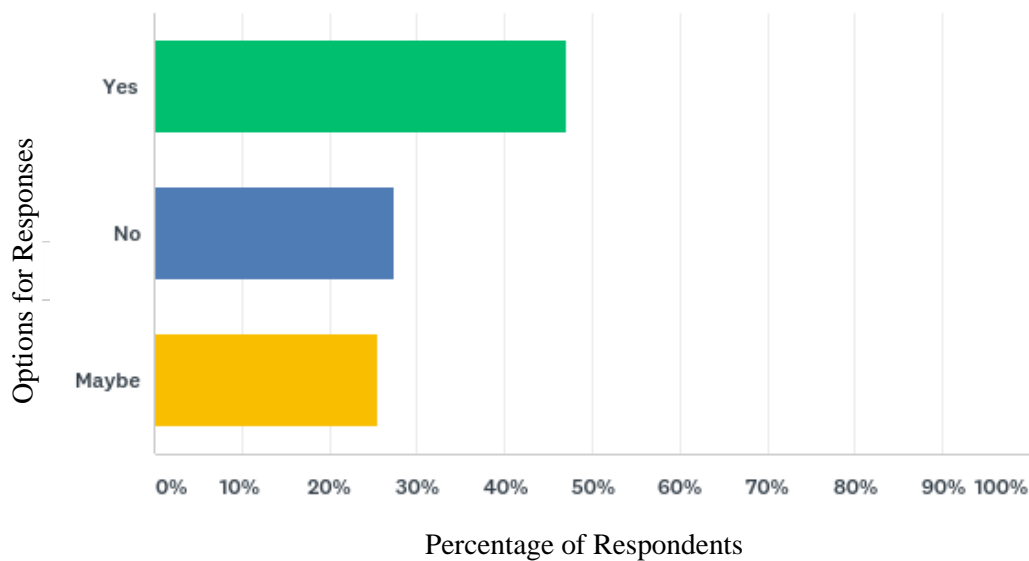


Figure 3. Responses to Survey “A” question: Do you feel working at a reduced or part-time schedule would strengthen your commitment to an organization.

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*Table 2.***Survey “A” participants explain their thoughts on why or why not working part-time would strengthen their commitment to an organization.**

My level of commitment depends job satisfaction not number of hours.
It would not
I love my job and patients. Less hours I I can commit means I see less of patients, and my boss will likely find somebody who can offer all possible working hours.
I wouldn't feel the need to consider changing careers to give more to my family
I feel eventually it may weaken my commitment to the organization
full time employees are more dependable
Na
Instead of leaving the workplace, making an arrangement shows that this place wants me as a professional and caters to my family needs
You make your input. You help your company doing your job
Can be better at being fully present while at work as i was able to get "home/parenting" stuff done while off work. Less distracted
Have to be very organized now to work full time and raise two kids.
Simple appreciation!
I returned to work at an 80% schedule and although I was grateful to my company for it the amount wasn't reduced enough, and I decided to stay home anyways.
You are showing at least you care to work.
I would be more likely to stay with a company who offered flexibility in scheduling. But my job would never be my top priority - it will always be my family. So, I say maybe...
I currently work two-part time jobs and while I like both I find it hard to fully commit to either. If I worked a little bit more at one job and stop working the other I would be better focused on one job but still have time for family
I feel it could foster a greater work/life balance, and having a reduced amount of time to complete my responsibilities could compel an even greater work ethic. However, I would be concerned that it could create more stress and I would end up working longer hours to complete projects without additional compensation.
I wouldn't feel burnt out as quickly and would be more dedicated to my time there, knowing I have more family time.
If my organization allows me to find a good balance between my career and my family life, I would definitely want to stay in the organisation.

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Shift work and work life balance is more than hours... the number isn't as important as schedule (days, nights, 8's vs 12's etc.)

Wouldn't be so stressed about home life, and spending time with family

Working less hours means having more time with my children and have that good work - family balance. If I am not stressed out from being over worked, I would have a clear mind and be able to put more effort into the work I do.

No change

I would feel as though my organization values my family as much as they value me

I think I would miss a lot of information relating to curriculum and changes.

t would acknowledge demands as family life changes. Also, people caring for aging parents would benefit

because it would show they care about work life balance

I think working part time would give me more energy. I would be more focused at work and would have the time I need to do all of the other things (house work, cooking, grocery shopping) that i need to do.

I would be grateful that they would let me have the opportunity to let me work part-time. I would not feel the need to find another job to suit my needs at home.

d likely work more effectively because I'm in the office less and I might enjoy it more if I was there less

If the company wasn't a good fit for my schedule I would leave. I would be committed to a company where I was a good fit but not committed if I were not. Part time opportunities may or may not affect this

Because I would be able to do what I love still but still be able to put my family first. By working full time I am not able to always put my family first.

The fact that part-time work is an option, is a wonderful asset and makes the company more attractive. However, in our current under-resourced environment, it does not seem feasible to work a part time schedule and meet all the job commitments.

I will have solid part time hours which i would want to utilize every min of to make sure i meet my deadlines

More energy to put into the things I am working without feeling like I am neglecting family responsibilities.

It would depend what part time looked like

I'm lucky to be in a position where I came back at a very reduced schedule and feel that the company I am with respects my decision to cut back drastically on my hours and I am very committed to staying with the company because of this.

I have time to prep my days without always having to take work home. This allows for interruption free time sonny job is fine well

I do work part time and I have more time to prepare since my work already requires me to bring it home.

As an educator, upon return from my 1st maternity leave I was given a very tough schedule to teach. It made for an uneasy return to work. I feel working part-time, I would not be valued or feel like part of the school community.

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It depends on how my organization makes me feel about working part time. If I still feel valued and respected by my employer, then yes it may certainly strengthen my commitment to them and increase the likelihood that I'll remain a long-term employee.

If they were supportive, yes

Having the option of reduced hours would show me that my workplace truly values work/life balance

Not sure, I feel like I might work harder in less hours, so I felt like I was not perceived to be doing less, or I might work harder because the workload might still be the same, even if part time

I might have a more pleasant attitude toward the organization for being flexible

I wouldn't be able to keep up with the fast pace

Currently I feel I am always at work and don't get to see my family enough, like it is forced on me. With reduced hours, I'd be able to find the balance needed to enjoy both work and family life.

I would feel happier and appreciative of the opportunity being offered. I would be more loyal

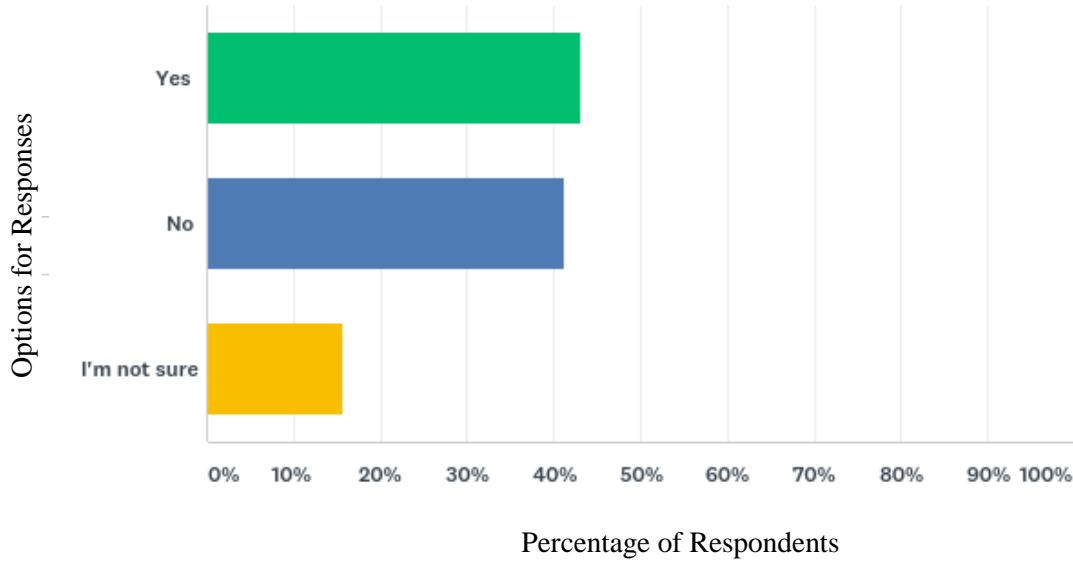


Figure 4. Responses to Survey “A” question: Do you feel your employer would have provided you with the opportunity to work at a reduced schedule if you approached them about it?

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*Table 3.***Survey “A” participant experiences with asking their employers to reduce their working hours after maternity leave.**

Theme / Outcome	Response
Employee asked for reduction / Employer said “Yes”	My employer was/is very dependent on me and was/is willing to do anything to keep me at that job
	I wanted to work a reduced schedule and was easily given 80% but any more or job sharing was out of the question. They were happy to pay me a little less and have my take Fridays off but I felt as though I was expected to output as though I was working 100%.
	My employer had no problem with me taking a reduction in hours so long as it did not impact the company negatively. Once they confirmed this I was approved, the process took about a week.
	I worked 90 % for two years after my first child was born. The only issue I had was putting up firm boundaries around my working hours and making sure others did not infringe on them.
	I went from working full-time to working 12 hours or less a week. They were completely understanding and accommodating.
Employee asked for a reduction in hours / Employer said “No”	The answer was absolutely “no” because it would have to be given to every mother and I wasn’t a special case
	I was told there was no need for part-time employees at the moment, the amount of work would require to hire someone else to compensate and they would not accept part-time
	It was a straight no – they explained that I could use my vacation hours should I wish to work less but that my position is a full-time job and I am required to work full-time
	They rejected the idea, they said they needed a full-time position
	I submitted the form required by my company, it was not even for a reduction in hours but an earlier start-time and earlier end time. I was advised it would not be fair to other employees that did not have children.
	The experience was negative. My boss (who went through IVF to have a child) shockingly told me that she would not be able to accommodate my part-time request. She said it would have to be a new job that would be advertised, and anyone could apply for it.
Did not ask employers	My boss would simply hire somebody else. And will reduce my hours to a minimum, so I would be forced to look for another place to work.
	Flex work options exist within my organization, but are not necessarily available for all employees/ positions. I have mentioned to my superior that it is something I may want to consider, during a casual conversation and

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	<p>was told that we could discuss it further. I did not pursue the issue further, only because shortly after our conversation I found I was pregnant again.</p>
	<p>Never asked because it has never been an option to anyone else</p>
	<p>I did not, but I could apply for a part-time position or contract when one is available.</p>
	<p>I did not ask. Government was cutting a lot of jobs and the first ones to go were part-time positions.</p>
Employer Offers a Program for a reduction in hours	<p>I requested it and they granted it. I was very nervous about it because I was worried they would be upset or inconvenienced by it. However, my union rules state that I could go part-time up to five years after having a child, and then choose to return full-time. I chose to remain part-time.</p>
	<p>I applied for a reduced schedule after my second child, and the request was granted. I first had to think long and hard about the possibility of not being able to go back full-time when I wanted. They had the ultimate final say. They do try to accommodate, but needs of schools comes first. It was a bit of a gamble, but it worked out for me in the end.</p>
	<p>Our school board offers a five-year program that allows for a reduction in schedule without penalty. Its wonderful</p>
	<p>I had the ability with my last job to work part-time but the part-time position included over-night shifts which was not an option with three children.</p>
Employee asked / Employers said “yes” but with conditions or negative effects	<p>I was told by my previous employer that I would have to switch departments to work part-time (going backwards in the company with no opportunity for advancement). Then they laid me off when I was 7 months pregnant.</p>
	<p>They agreed to reduce my hours, but then later laid me off.</p>
	<p>I didn't go back immediately. My son was 3 and a full-time job at an organization I've always wanted to work at landed in my lap. I did request a 4-day work week for the summer due to challenges with finding childcare (I had not been looking for full-time work, so I was not prepared). This was offered to me, but it was noted that my case was an exception.</p>

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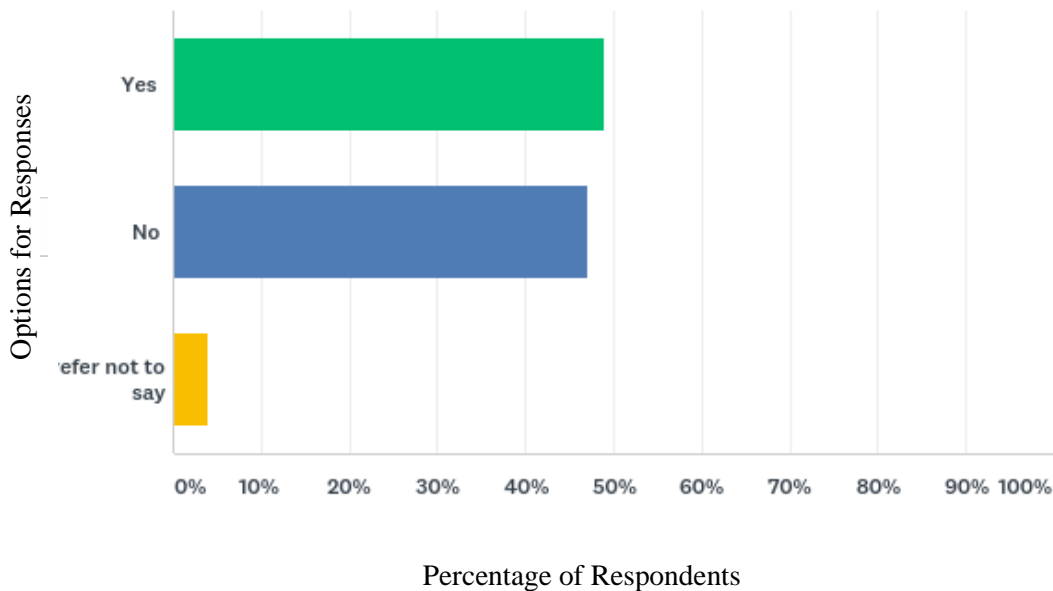


Figure 5. Responses to survey “A” question: Do you feel your employer supports family-friendly work practices?

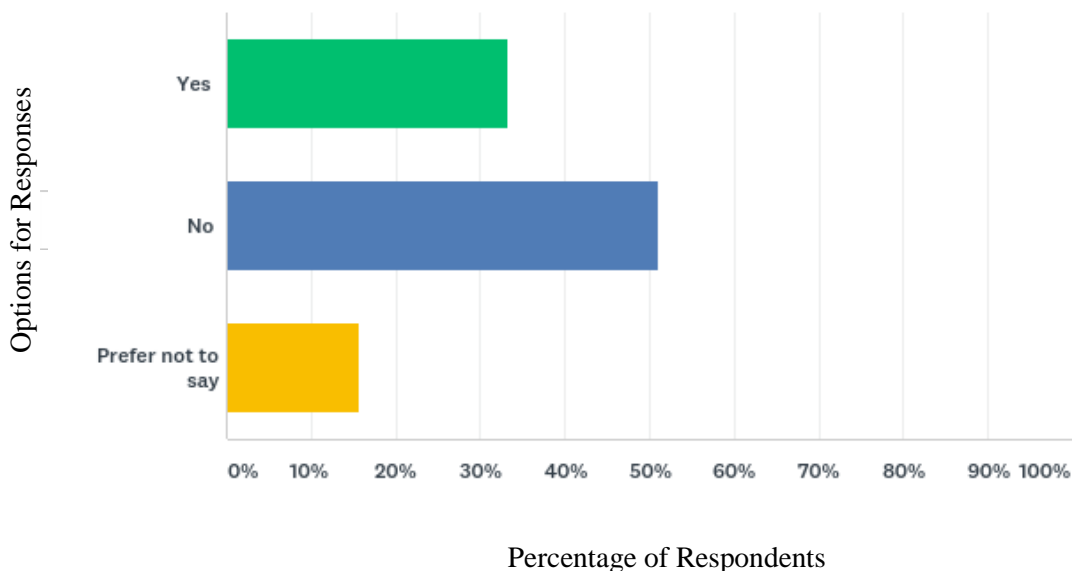


Figure 6. Responses to Survey “A” question: If your workplace provides family-friendly policies, do you feel you have been or would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies?

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*Table 4.***Survey “A” participants thoughts on why they felt they would be penalized for partaking in family-friendly work policies.**

Theme	Response
Employer has policies in place / Respondent felt they would be perceived negatively for using them	I feel like my employer says they are family-focused and allow flex schedules, but it doesn't apply to 90% of the jobs in the organization as they can never accommodate. I feel like they say it to sound employee centric but don't live what they preach.
	Although my employer is flexible and understanding when time off is needed due to child commitments only a certain amount of time is truly tolerated
	Even though my company has many flex work options, and family-friendly policies, at times it feels you're being judged for taking advantage of these policies too often.
	My organization has program like flex time and adjusted schedules or work from home options, but it is very clear that part-time is not an option.
	They are available, but use is still stigmatized and its harder to advance
Respondent felt personally uncomfortable using family-friendly policies	I feel I would be viewed as a lesser contributing part of the team
	I think I would feel more personally uncomfortable doing so, and be left with the feeling of letting the team down even though I strive to be a very hard worker.
Employers did not support or offer family-friendly policies	I quit. They made it very uncomfortable to the point of insinuating how poor my choices were as far as prioritizing my life, work vs. family
	Just that life balance is not highly regarded but that may be due to my terrible manager prior to mat leave
	It would not be considered acceptable to my former employer

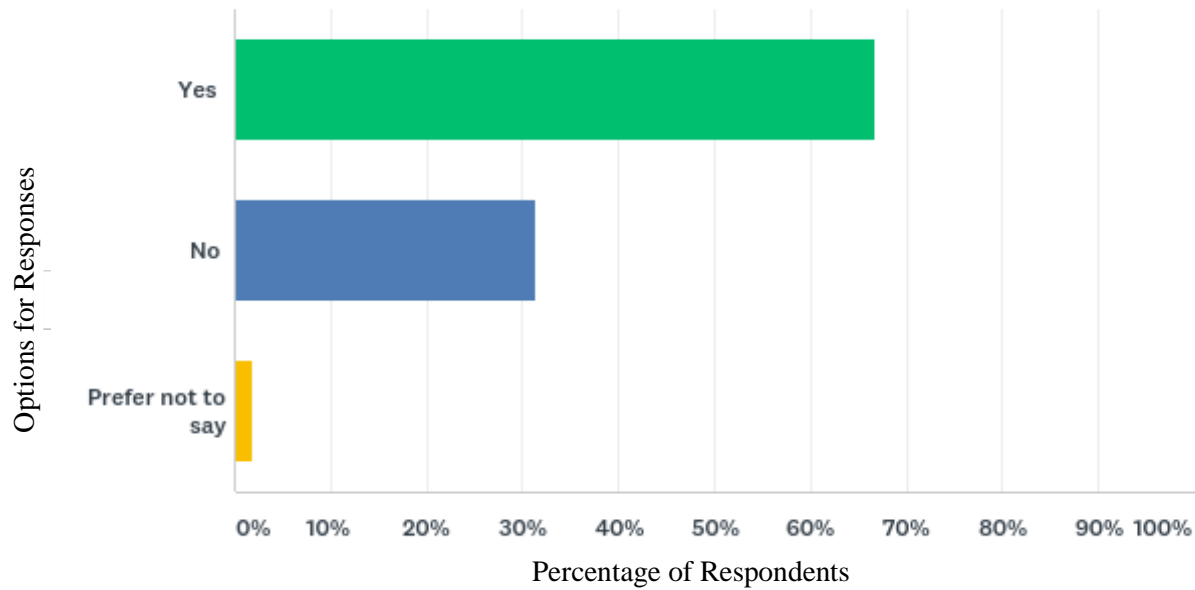


Figure 7. Responses to Survey “A” question: Do you feel your most recent place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace?

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*Table 5.***Survey “A” participant experiences with feeling supported or not supported in their most recent place of employment.**

Theme	Response
Employer perceived as supportive	An opportunity for flexing hours, dependent sick days, opportunity to work from home
	I believe they supported mother's but do not allow accommodation in hours
	My boss works with a bunch of women constantly pregnant or on mat leave and coming back He has a kid himself and is more forgiving if we need to call in sick to be with our sick child.
	My hours are flexible, based on availability of childcare. If my child is sick, I can stay home and take care of them.
	I was coop intern while pregnant from 5 months to delivery and my work schedule was flexible, I was able to work from home, people around were very friendly and supportive
	Somewhat flexible with time off needed
	I worked with a handful of female engineering with families. We had a fantastic daycare in the building and they were willing to drop down to an 80% work schedule.
	Where I work, there are a lot of mothers.
	I say yes, because in my position I can leave my "work" at work ... however, even one level up from my job, there are expectations to devote "personal" time to clients and events. There are no women of young children in these positions, only single/ unmarried or those with grown children and still only a few women in total.
	I could take time off as needed, and they were very supportive and accommodating to my pregnancy and older child.
	I never experienced bad feelings when I needed to take a day (or a few days) off to take care of my children when they were sick. Managers are very understanding when it comes to this.
	I work at a children's hospital. I have a three-year-old and currently on maternity leave with my second son. While on maternity leave I received mail from the he hospital congratulating me on my second son and information regarding "how to still breastfeed while returning to work". They have designated areas for working moms to be able to take breaks to pump. I have also had to take days off last minute because my son has been sick, or come in late due to emergency doctors' appointments and coworkers and management have always been more concern about making sure my son was healthy than about me missing a few hours here and there. While pregnant, I have always tried to schedule doctors' appointments on my lunch breaks- sometimes it doesn't work out or they run late, I have been told each time "to put myself and the health of my baby first and they will worry about the work" it is a great place to work, and I am extremely lucky to work in a place that supports working mothers.
	They were to an extent quite supportive if time off was needed however preferably with as much advanced notice as possible. We have about 35 hours of personal time for the year which is nice to have but if I was a single parent would not have been enough. My child was sick a lot the first year in

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daycare and I missed a lot of time because of that.
New management appears to be much more eager to support
I am a teacher and many women are mothers as well
My director is supportive of using the workplace policies, that's crucial
My supervisors are awesome about not sure about over all in the organization
They are supportive in terms of easing back to work. I have a flexible job in terms of the time that I come in to work or if i need to leave in an emergency. If i do need extra time off I do need to use my own annual leave.
When I was pregnant with my first child, I was worried about letting my team members know. However, there was no reason for worry. I continued to be involved in challenging and engaging projects and continued to be seen as a strong performer.
I am working from home and my employer has been very supportive.
For the most part, they are supportive however there are not enough days if children are sick unable to attend childcare. They were no issues with myself when taking maternity leave but I have heard other employees for the company have remarks made that were discriminating towards mothers.
They were very accommodating before I left for mat leave and after I came back
I was able to take a full extra semester off without pay with no fear of losing my job. Then I returned to a reduced schedule and will continue with this into the foreseeable future
My employer is very supportive of parents in the workplace and the unique needs that arise because of being a mother to young children. I feel as though I can approach my employer with regards to work - life balance and make alternate arrangements when necessary. I am however still conscious of the fact that, on the whole, the department of education does not allot specific days to educators to address day to day concerns such as accompanying children to appointments, staying home with children when they are sick, etc. Within my school, the support is definitely there but the system as a whole does not seem to value giving parents allotted time in our contracts to address these common family concerns.
I had a very supportive Principal at the time of caring for my younger children... lucky me! It's not always like this however. Some Principals don't have the "family first" idea. Work place first...
My current employer allowed me to set a schedule based on my family needs.
Generally, yes, there is flexibility, but it depends on the type of work you do and whether or not your manager is in fact family friendly. Policies may be in place, but not everyone feels permission to make use of them.
Flexible hours, unlimited family leave, work from home, people have bought older kids to work on snow days etc
I work for myself now. :)
They allow me to bring my son to work on days I'm stuck for a sitter
To a certain extent yes, they understand if my child is sick or needing to leave early to attend a special event

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Employer perceived as not supportive	sometimes I have to stay very long hours with out enough notice
	I work in sales so it depends on me to make my schedule and it's nobody's problem but mine if I have any kind of emergency
	There are no accommodations made for mothers and it is expected that we still participate in all after work activities and are penalized if we don't. And theses activities are unpaid hours that we are expected to participate in.
	No flexibility given for reduced schedule
	My manager was not flexible in the schedule at all
	They do not understand that when my child is sick at daycare and needs to be picked up, that I don't have a choice in the matter. I feel a major level of guilt.
	When staff come back from mat leave they can be placed anywhere within the organization but they're really bad at communicating that with people so they tend find out their new schedule with a day or two notice
	Hard to get time off if needed.
	Our schedules are hectic and not accommodating to day care schedules, if I didn't have a partner who worked normal hours we would be screwed for childcare
	Although they offered the opportunity to remain part time, the amount of work required is extremely challenging to balance with a family, and the government has cut our sick days. With two kids who get sick, plus getting sick myself for over a week when run down, I completely ran out of sick days. We need more work life balance and opportunities to be off work when needed for family and personal reasons!
	It does not feel like there are enough hours in the day to have an appropriate work/family life
	I work shift work, with early shifts and late nights, it is near impossible to figure out babysitters/daycare to cover it all and the only way I was able to go back to work was because I have a great family that is able to help out so much. This made it very stressful going back to work after mat leave. The workplace could not do anything to help my situation.

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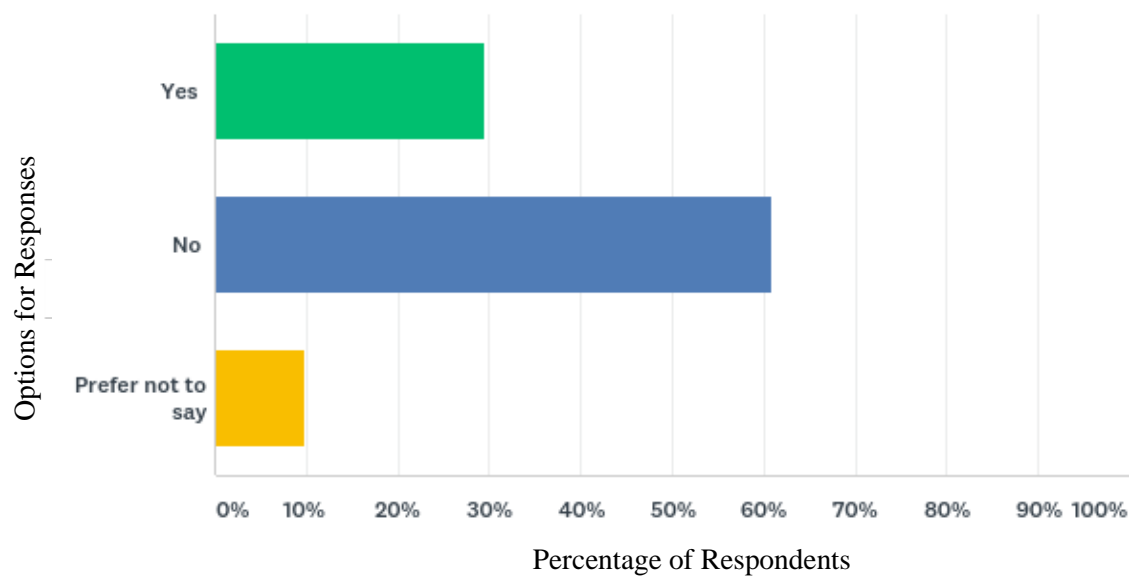


Figure 8. Responses to Survey “A” question: Do you feel you were treated or perceived differently by your employer or workplace after returning from maternity leave?

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Table 6.**Survey “A” participants experiences with being treated or perceived differently by an employer or workplace after returning from maternity leave?**

Employees still expect and want me to be available all the time when there are times childcare is just not available. I am expected to get as much done as a full-time manager. I am also left out of a lot of "team" things.

I think you are perceived as having a priority shift towards raising kids rather than being a go getter

I used to go on courses constantly but after mat leave... Nothing

When I returned at 80% I felt as though I was put into an area that wasn't as busy as before and therefore it wasn't as challenging and rewarding.

Especially with daycare and sick days, you're seen as being tied up all the time

I felt compelled to request less work after mat leave because before mat leave I used to come in early and stay late every day. My work was a big part of my life. But now my family is priority. Now we travel together so I have no flexibility in when I arrive and leave work. I arrive at 8 leave at 4:30 because that is what we need to do as a family. My colleagues recented that I for less work now but they didn't understand why.

Worries about commitment or having to accommodate more sick days to care for kids

Less job opportunities are presented to me based on them knowing that I have little children and I may not always be reliable due to their illness, apt, etc... Men are treated much differently than the women in my office.

They assumed that all I wanted to do was get home and take care of my home and family

There is always some status lost after being off on maternity leave. Working your way into a position and then having someone take over some or all of that position while you are gone.

As an educator, I returned to the worst schedule I have had in my 12 years of teaching

Yes, but not in a negative way. If anything, my employer (i.e. school administration) is even more understanding of my needs now that I have a family to attend to.

I was made to feel like my role wasn't important anymore and that they were doing me a favour by allowing me to return.

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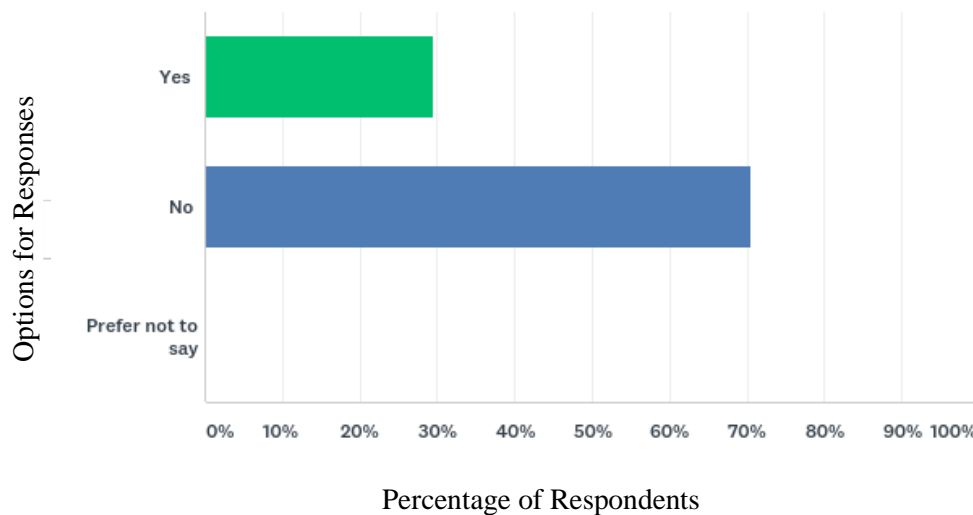


Figure 9. Responses to Survey “A’ question: Did the organizational culture at your place of employment affect your decision to return or not return to work after maternity leave?

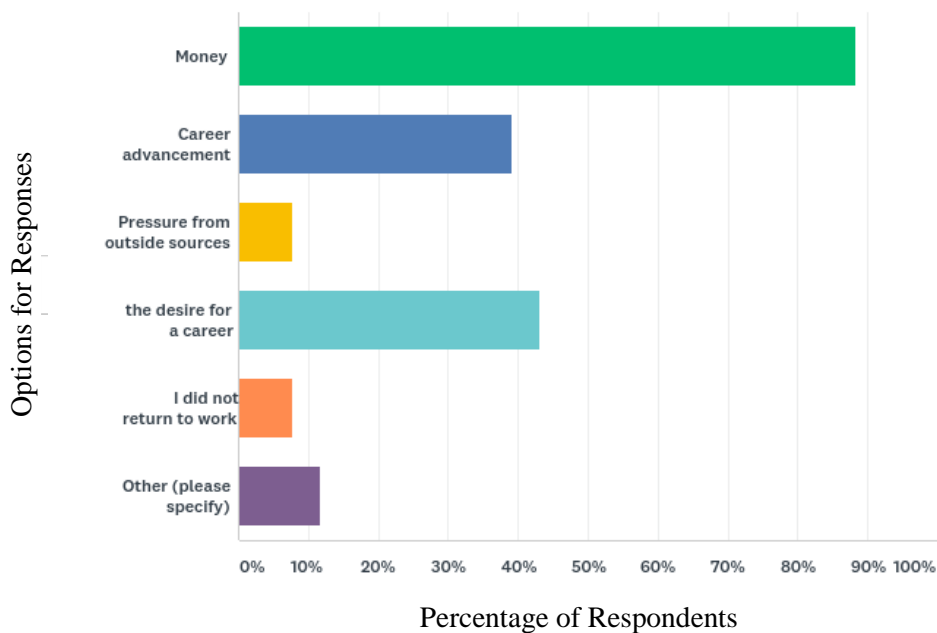


Figure 10. Responses to survey “A” question: If you returned to work after maternity leave, what were some of the motivating factors?

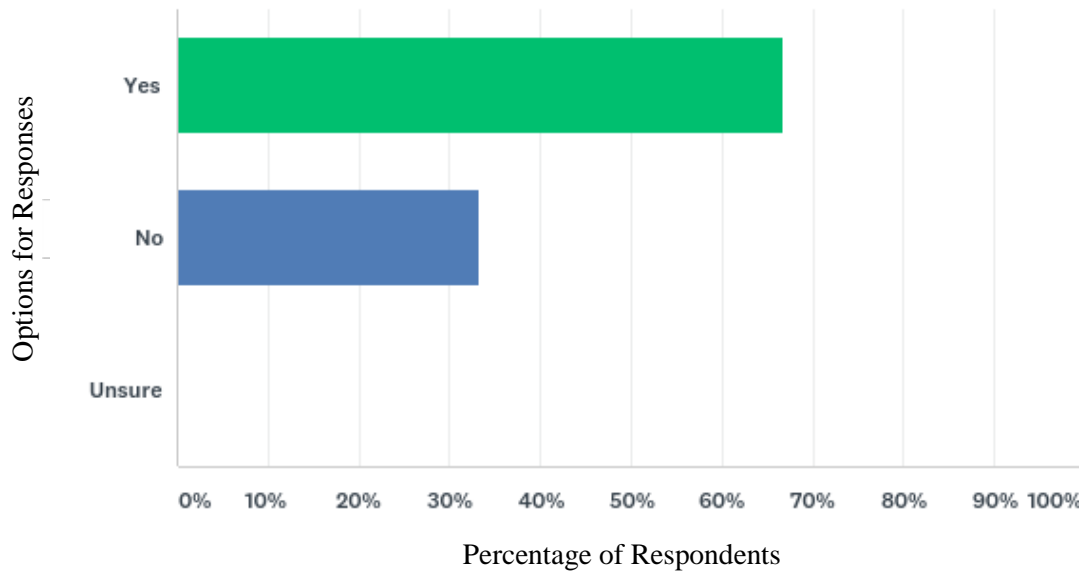


Figure 11. Responses to survey “A” question: If you chose to stay home with your child(ren) did you worry about the repercussions this choice might have on your future career (if you were planning to return)

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Table 7.

Survey “A” respondents’ thoughts and experiences on returning or not returning to work after maternity leave.

I actually returned to work when my child was 4 months old and allowed my husband to take the rest of mat leave because his employer topped up his full salary. I also realised how important my career was to my mental health when I was off on mat leave!

Some days I am happy to have a break from the kids and other days I wish I was a stay at home mom. It flip flops.

I strongly believe that any flexibility for moms from employer she is a strong step in the right direction.

Every woman has to refresh her brain and mind, her life after staying home, so I believe that it's a good choice to be back to work and start socializing again

I decided to go on my own.

I was so happy with my decision to pause my career while I raise my young children. It has been 6 years and 3 kids later and it was the best decision I have ever made.

I VERY strongly desired to work part time after mat leave, but it is not financially possible at this time. I found a new job when I returned from mat leave a few months ago and it's so busy I'm working really long hours and it's the exact opposite of everything I hoped for. It's extremely stressful.

I think a gradual return would be a great solution and would be used by many mothers

It would be nice if workplaces had the option to reduce hours after maternity leave. I wouldn't necessarily want to go down to part-time, but maybe every second Friday off or something equivalent to keep that good work and family balance.

I stayed home & cared for other children as well as my own. It is in my field of work, but not what I wanted to do. We really had no choice because the position I was in didnt pay enough for daycare & bills.

I would love if the opportunity presented itself for 18-month work leave with continuing benefits, not the same benefits spread over the 18 months

It was a tough choice, but I cannot imagine having only one income in our household!

I was happy to return to work after a year of maternity leave. I do feel that a reduced work day would allow me to spend more quality time with my child because I would not be so busy trying to do everything else and watch my child at the same time.

Returning back to work was the hardest thing Ive ever had to do in my life. I cried for months leading up to it, and still cry almost a year later because I miss my babies so much. They are so little and spend more time with their daycare providers then they do with me. That hurts my heart. I should be raising my children, not someone else -- at least until they start school.

I definitely feel that I had trouble getting a position after taking two years off to be with my children. I also felt "left behind" in terms of getting more job skills and getting promotions

Working reduced hours (90%) was ideal for me in transitioning back to the workforce after a full year of

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maternity leave. I now work 100% while raising two young children. Life-work balance has been much more challenging. I am tempted to reduce my hours again, but am afraid of interrupting the momentum of my career trajectory if I reduce my time.

If the option had presented itself I would have loved to return on a part time basis to work. The other limiting factor is the availability of part time childcare for when I was at work. Often places would need you to pay for full time to secure your spot and then you need to work full time to afford the childcare. In an ideal world both parents' places of employment would be understanding so children could be raised by their parents not strangers. I feel that I missed so much of my children's childhood.

I would not have returned to work if I did not have the option to work remotely.

I am trying to get back into the work force after having been home with my children. It is DIFFICULT and I almost regret having stayed home.

As a teacher, my perspective may be slightly different than someone working in a different workplace. Sometimes my employer was very supportive of my choices, but I did feel pressure from parents to attend after school meetings or to use my time to contact them when convenient for them. Also, there was some (mild) pressure about coaching/clubs. It becomes difficult to fulfill obligations such as these because you may not have another source of childcare when you are expecting to be the one at home in the afternoons with your child. I think people also think when I leave I have less preparation to do at night, but it's the same - I'm in the classroom less but have just as many subjects to prepare for. I felt pressure to return to work because of all the time I spent preparing for a career and the money it took to get me through university - it seemed wasteful to give it up at this point.

There should be one parent home, raising the child, for as long as possible. This is however not easily done nowadays because of finances. It is not ok for your child to spend more hours with a babysitter than a parent! No one care for a child like a parent...

I struggle with it. I want to do meaningful, stimulating, appropriately paid work (based on my skill, experience and responsibilities) but not full time. That is hard to come by. When my child starts school next year, I want to drop her off, go to work and then pick her up. That is not possible with my current schedule. I may ask to reduce work hours, but I'm worried it will look like I'm struggling. Which, I guess I am at times.

It is simply not easy.

I wish I could have adjusted my schedule to work less evenings and weekends when my son was small

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*Table 8.***Survey “A” respondents’ thoughts and experiences about opportunities for professional part-time employment for mothers in Canada?**

I do not believe this really exists in Canada. I work in a large field in Canada and do not know of any part time opportunities in my field of you want to maintain a professional career

I had 2,5 years gap in my resume and no one wanted to hire me because of mat leave. I found a job only because of references from good friend of mine. I feel this prejudice and for me it's kind of discrimination as I'm the same as other candidates and even more qualified, but employers are not ready even to give me a chance to prove myself on the interview. Very disappointing experience. Very sad that so many companies still act against women with kids.

I believe a lot of parents (moms) would return part time after having 2+ kids.

I feel like if there were more interesting part time positions (2/3 days a week) more women would be interested in filling them.

I would be thrilled to have professional work at part time rate. It would allow me to contribute to the family and my career while being better able to put my family first. There are very few professional roles offered at part time.

I would take advantage of this in a heart beat if it was an option

I believe companies should offer this. Many mothers do not want to return to full time work when their children are one-year old and are forced to choose between working and leaving their child or a lack of money

One very supporting leader came from the perspective that allowing mothers to work part-time benefited both the mother and the employer. The mother got extra time for family matters and the employer got a more productive and effective employee. The 80 & 90% workers were able to meet the objectives of a 100% job for less money.

I strongly advocate for WFH jobs for mothers.

Job sharing would be a fantastic idea to promote collaboration and avoid the "gaps" that occur in your knowledge of the organization when you are not there.

if you can afford to go back part-time, do it! There is better balance in the home, and less stress!

I wish more employers would be flexible and allow part-time/reduced hours.

I would love just even for that option to be available.

Filter Question 2 Data (n=8).

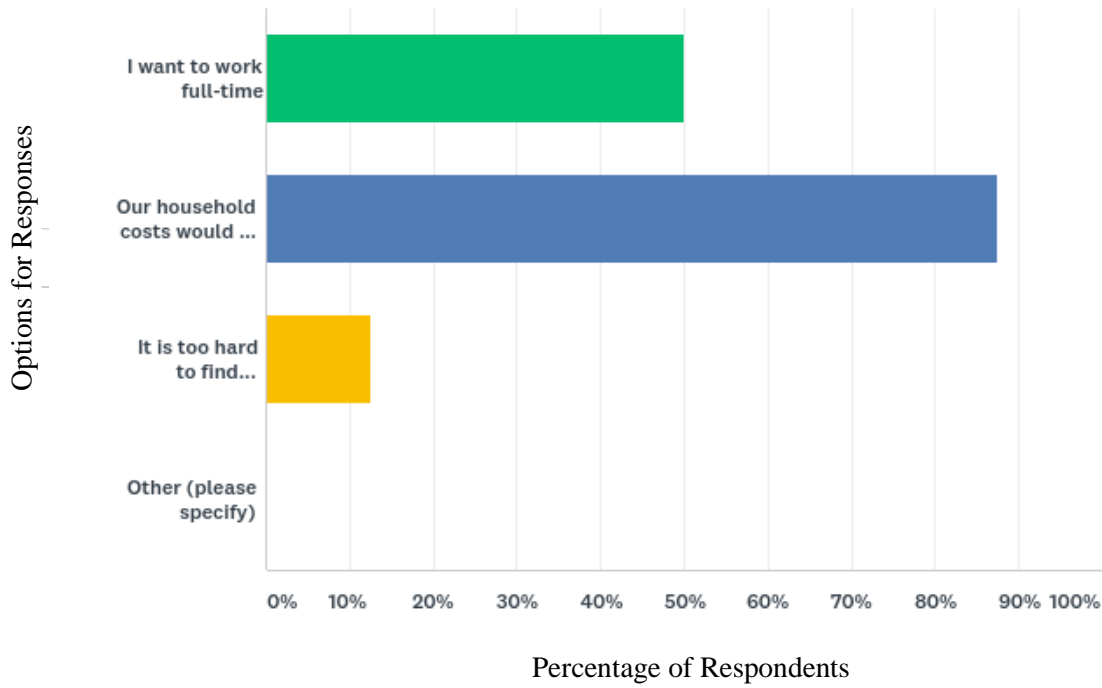


Figure 12. The reasons why participants previously selected that they do not wish to work at a part-time or reduced schedule.

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Survey B Data (n=4)

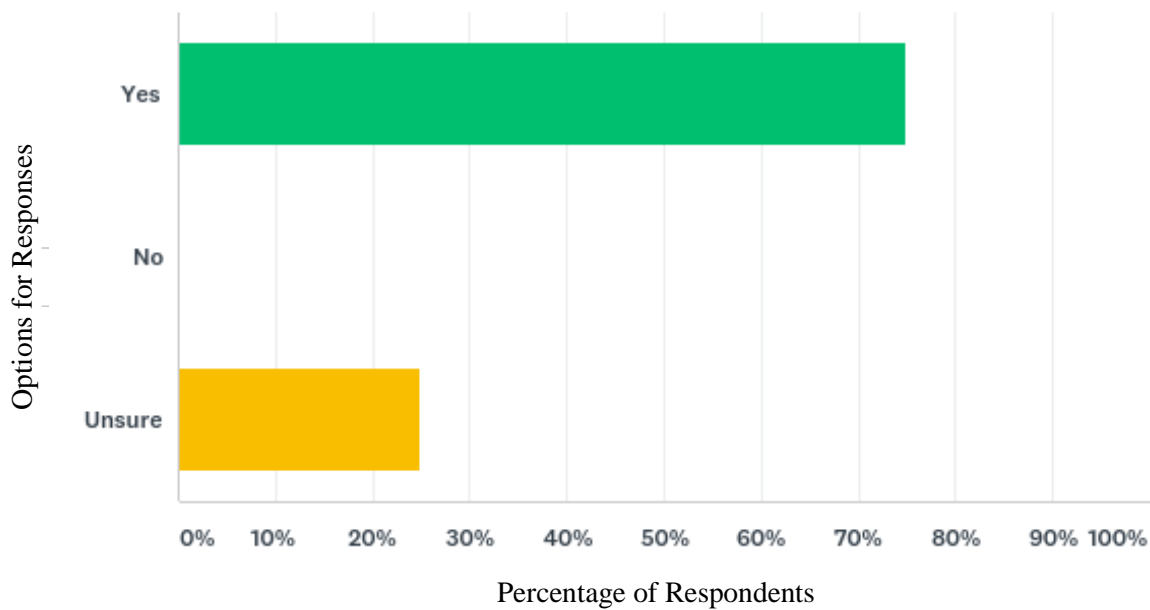


Figure 13. Responses for Survey “B” question: If your circumstances would allow you to work a reduced schedule, would you want to take that opportunity?

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*Table 9.***Mothers perceptions on how working in a part-time capacity after having children would affect their career.**

Not in a good way

I would not be considered for serious jobs

I don't believe it would affect my career

As a teacher, our schedules revolve around periods in the day, sometimes a reduced schedule can affect the courses you teach. You also are not guaranteed to have a reduced work day as your periods off can be at any point in the day.

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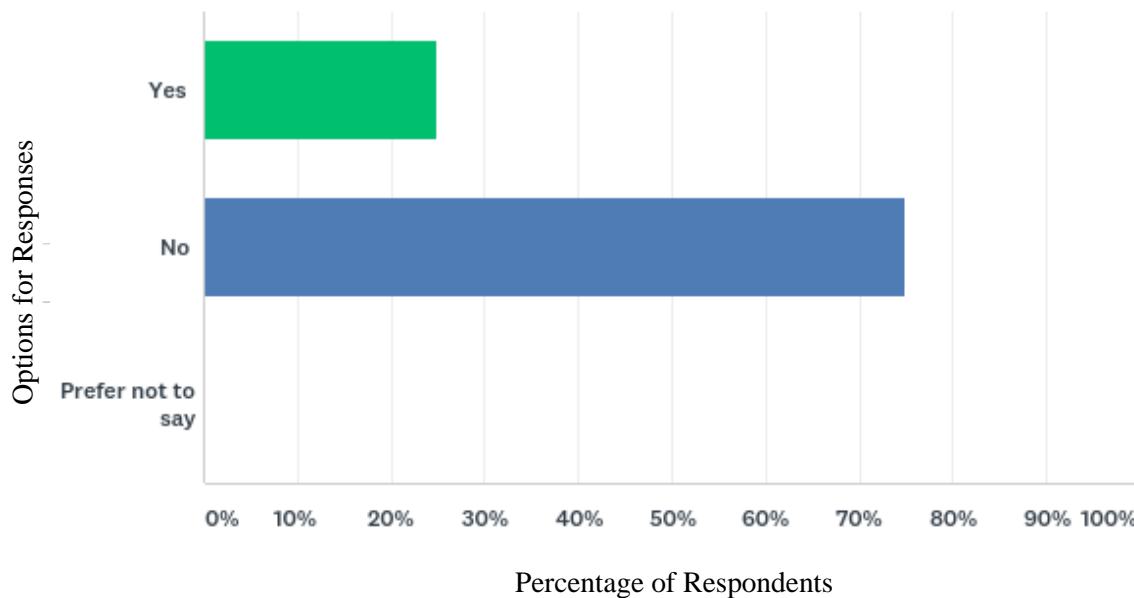


Figure 14. Responses for survey “B” question: Do you feel your employer supports family-friendly work policies?

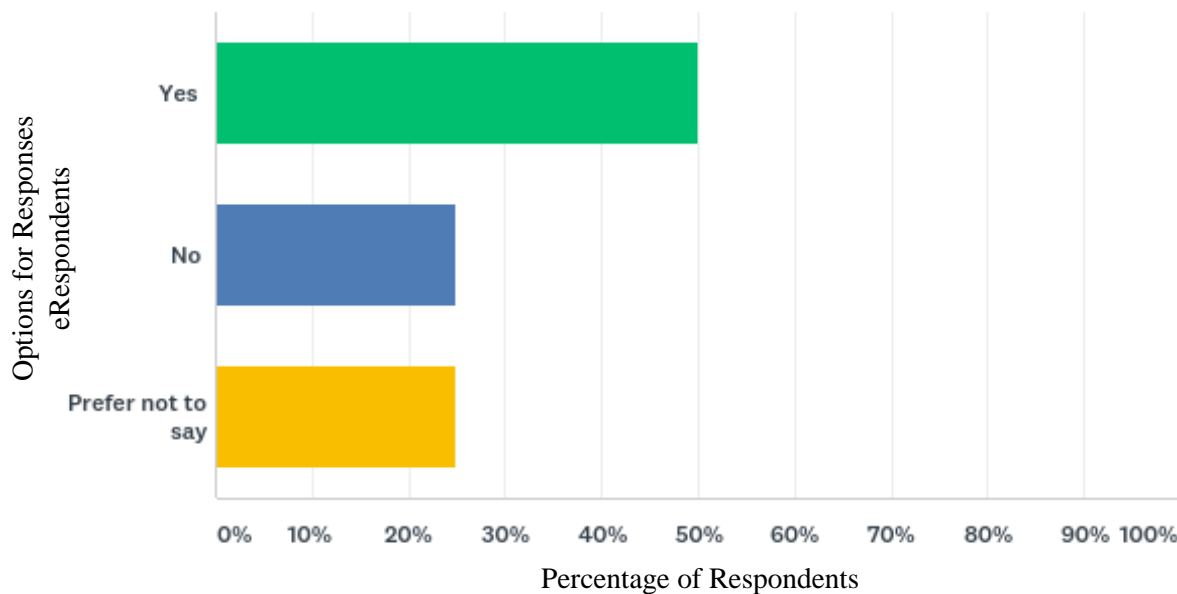


Figure 15. Responses to survey “B” question: if your workplace provides family-friendly polices, do you feel you have been or would be penalized for partaking in such polices?

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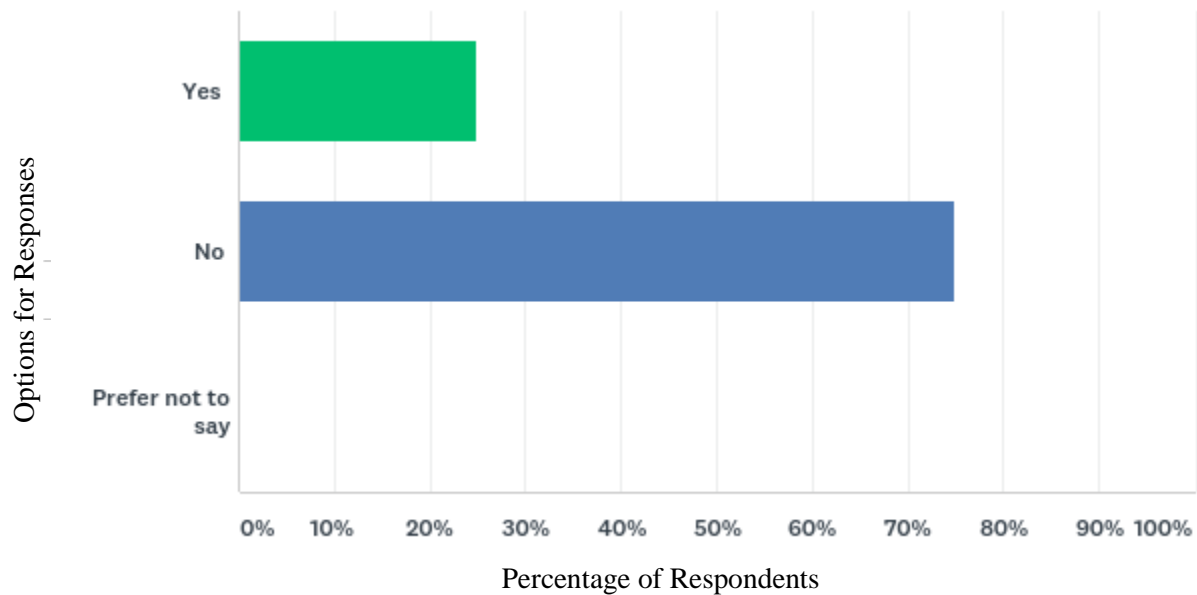


Figure 16. Responses for survey “B” question: Do you feel your most recent place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace?

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*Table 10.***Mothers who did not feel supported by their workplace describe why they did not feel supported.**

No sick time when kids are sick.

The few employers I tried to work for did the following: 1. Would not allow me to take a day off when I needed it. 2. Would penalise me for taking a sick day to stay home with a sick child, or leaving an hour early to attend doctor appointment. 3. Would not allow personal calls, so if the nanny or school would call me for some emergency I could not take the call. 4. Required to sign papers that I agree to work overtime. 5. Did not officially require overtime, even told me to go home at 5 pm, but provided workload that could not be handled within regular hours, so that many employees had to stay after ours hush-hush and could not even claim overtime pay from their employer, because they were told not to do overtime. 5. Also did not pay for sick days that I had to take, which created financial problems. It is very hard to focus on work when you constantly have financial headaches.

They are not compassionate about taking days off for sick children.

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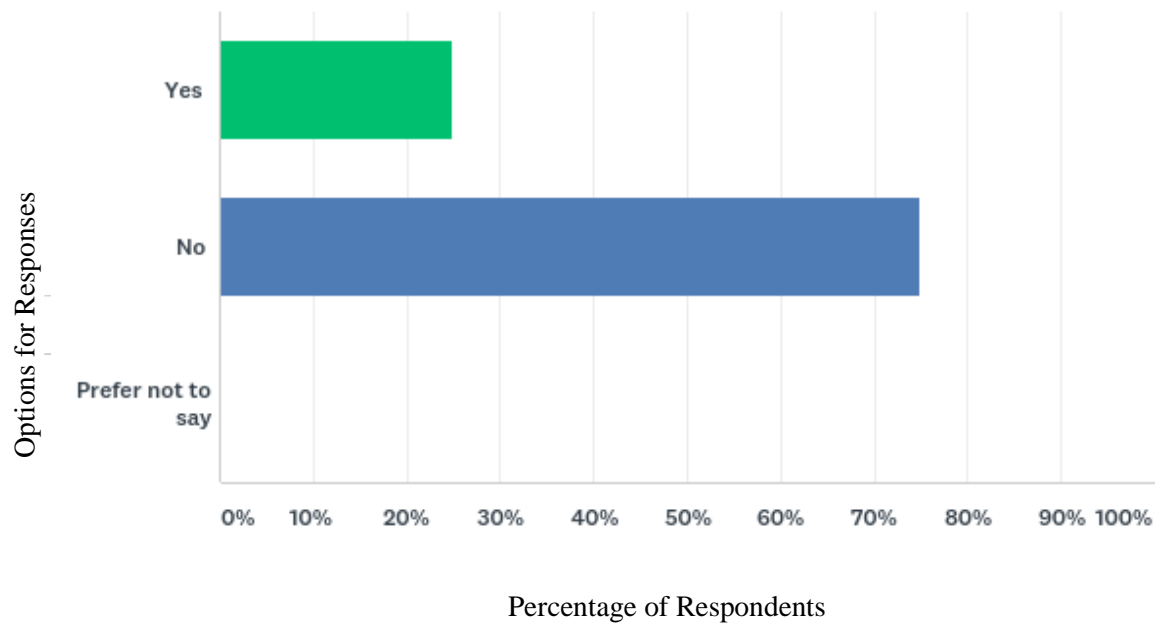


Figure 17. Responses for survey “B” question: Do you feel you were treated or perceived differently by your employer or workplace after returning from maternity leave?

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*Table 11.***Mothers who felt they were treated or perceived differently by their employer describe their experience**

I was moved to lower a level job, to operations building far away from management and other skilled employees. I was constantly micromanaged by my male colleague, who had lower qualifications than mine, but was paid more and got promoted right after I came back from maternity leave, so that he would become my boss, and I was the only employee he personally "managed".

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Survey “C” Data (n=4)*Table 12.***Mothers describe who they feel working part-time after having children may affect a woman’s career.**

Possible loss of career advancements, limited time to acquire and practice new skills

Depending on their career working part-time could either be of no different or I think it could hinder their chances of furthering their career as most employers are looking for full-time people in higher rolls within companies.

Taking a year off significantly reduces a woman's traction in the organization. You have to almost start from scratch when you come back and re climb the reputation ladder. People almost forgot your value and you have to reintegrate into conversations which can be difficult in management. This would be much more difficult to do if you were only working part time. People wouldn't see you as much as an asset of they couldn't consistently rely on you. I think it would be incredibly stifling.

Allow a woman to do both and not have to give up her career. Too many women have to choose between the two, when they really want to do both.

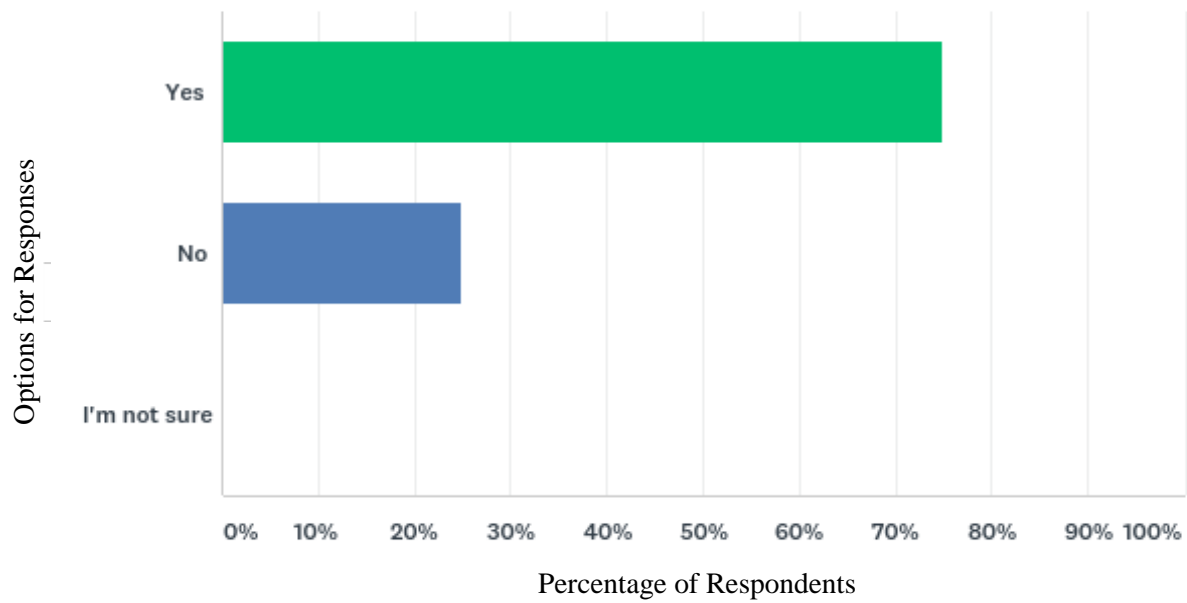


Figure 18. Responses to survey “C” question: Do you feel Canadian employers should provide parents with an opportunity to work a reduced schedule after having children?

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Table 13.**Mothers perceptions on why employers should or should not allow parents to reduce their work hours after having children.**

Theme	Responses
Parents should have the choice to reduce hours	Should be a choice of the mother/father if they want to return to a reduced schedule, if it is possible for the employer to offer.
	I think a modified work week to create a better work life balance is of great benefit for everyone not just parents
	I think it would be great for our society if everyone had the option when their kids are young.
Employers should not have to accommodate	I don't like the especially women part. It should be equal to all around. Also, the office shouldn't have to bare that burden for longer than a year. It would make entering the work force as a younger woman so many more difficult because you would be seen as a liability to hire because they couldn't be for sure you would come back to fill capacity. Yes there are laws to protect against this but they can easily be skirted around.

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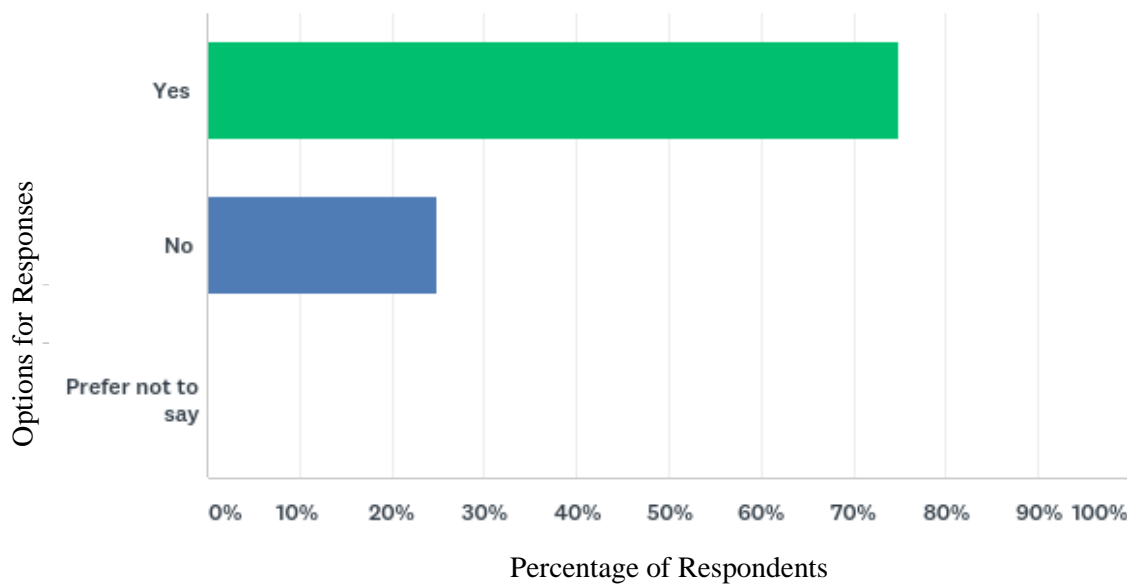


Figure 19. Responses to Survey “C” question: Do you feel your employer support family-friendly work practices?

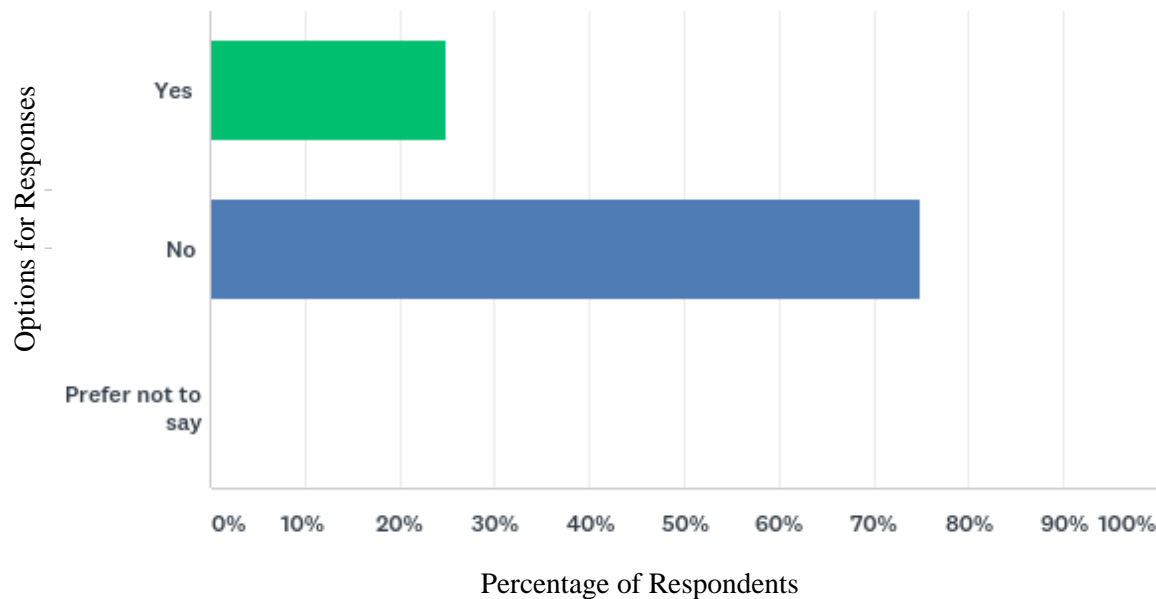


Figure 20. Responses survey “C” question: If your workplace provides family-friendly policies, do you feel you have been or would be penalized for partaking in these policies?

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*Table 14.***Mothers perceptions of why they felt they would be penalized for taking part in family-friendly work policies at their place of employment.**

It wouldn't be overt but covertly it would be spoken about and less advancements and opportunities would be sent my way.

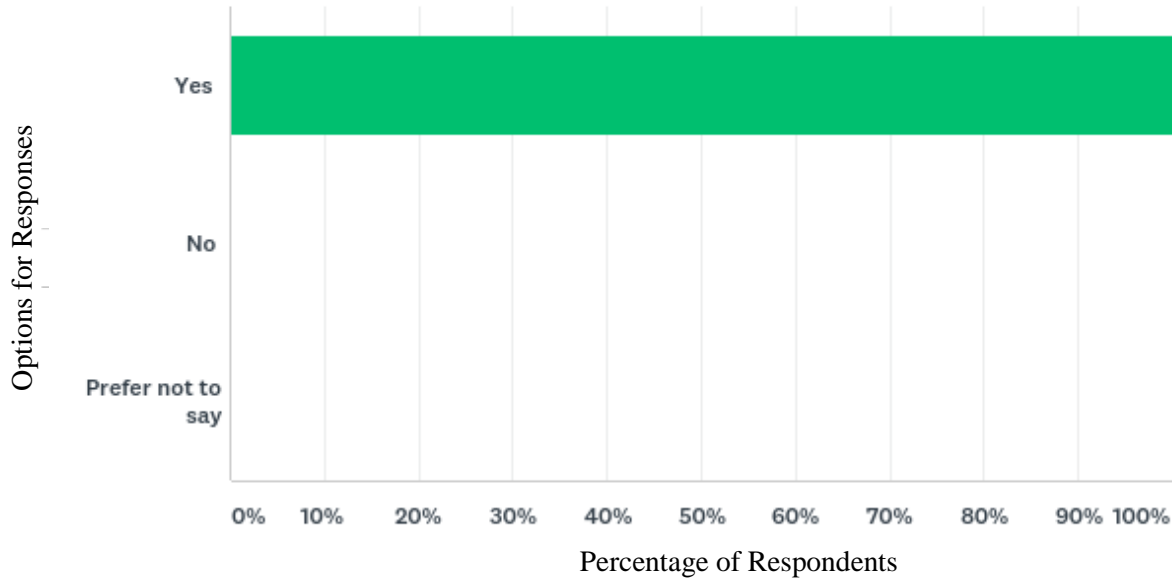


Figure 21. Responses to survey “C” question: do you feel your current or last place of employment was supportive of mothers in the workplace?

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Table 15.**Mothers experience with feeling supported in their workplace**

Never had an issue having to take time off due to my children

Within my company this question would vary. In my role, we are more able to work a flexible schedule either by working modified shifts or working from home when needed.

They were happy and accommodating. Not really much to say about it at all. My only complaint is they really don't understand sick time once you are back. Putting a kid in daycare results in the getting sick ALL THE TIME for months until their immunities build up. That irritates a workplace

I am currently on an extended mat leave (16 months) and will have no trouble returning to my career. I am very grateful for that opportunity.

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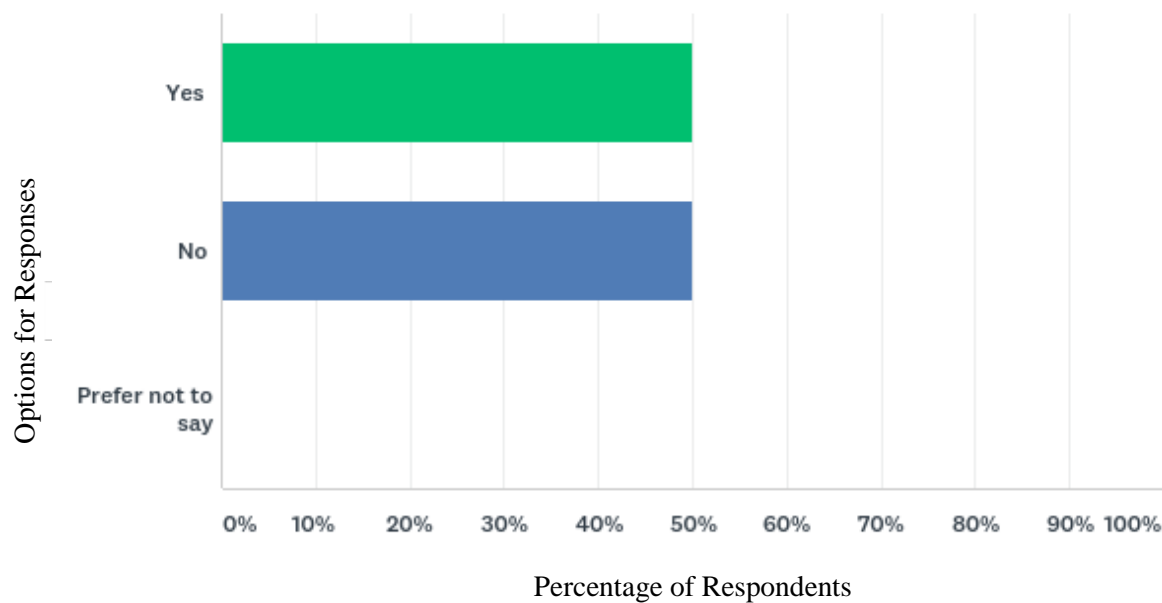


Figure 22. Responses to survey “C” question: do you feel you were treated or perceived differently by your employer or workplace after returning from maternity leave?

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*Table 16.***Mothers experiences with feeling they were treated or perceived differently by their employer after maternity leave**

They keep asking about the second kid (when I'm having one). They also seem much more concerned about my work-life balance and aren't being as demanding

I was not considered for a change in job/role because my superiors knew I was planning to have another child, and therefore go on another mat leave.

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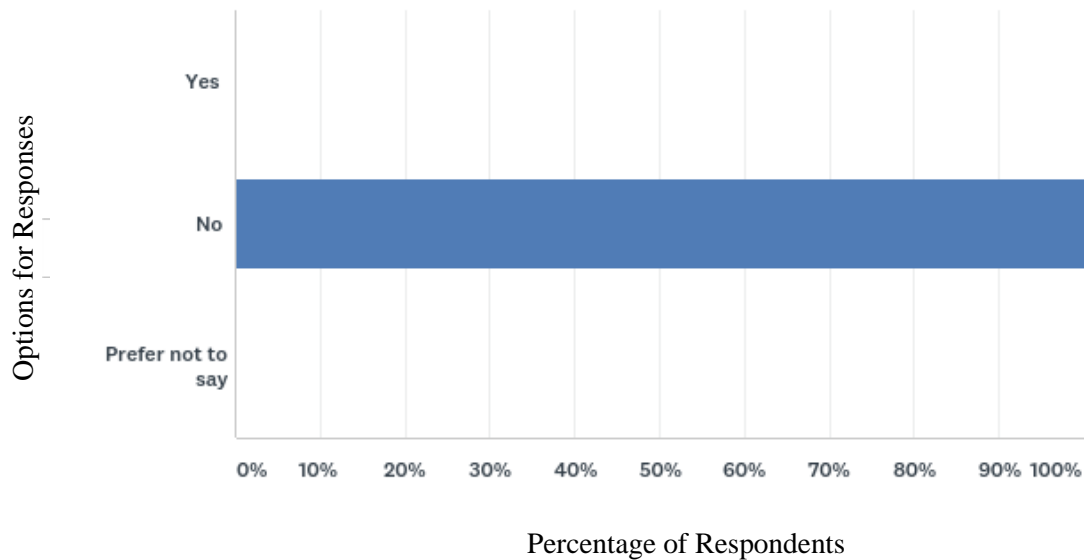


Figure 23. Responses to survey “C” question: Did the organizational culture at your place of employment affect your decision to return or not return to work after maternity leave?

*Table 17.***Mothers describe why organizational culture did not affect their decision to return to work after maternity leave**

I went back because I wanted to and need to financially. Had nothing to do with my workplace culture

My decisions have always been based on what was best for my family, in consultation with my husband.
