



Mother-Friendly Workplace Initiative



TheNetwork
for Consumer Protection

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Protection of the right to breastfeed:

More and more women of childbearing age have been entering the workforce over the last two decades. Women may make up as much as 20 to 35 percent of the workforce in Southern Asia. Women are working outside the household, in work that keeps them far from home for long hours with rigid regimes. Increasingly, women are seeing themselves and being viewed by society as independent economic units responsible for their own economic survival and well being. In 1990, 828 million women were officially estimated to be economically active in the labor force.

Since the definition of economic activity excludes such unpaid work as subsistence agriculture, household work and childcare, the actual figures for women at work are far higher. An ILO document states that 'many women want to work and now exer-

cise a freedom denied to previous generations. Others are forced to survive.'

The majority of workers are also parents. Woman's dual role as worker and mother needs to be viewed in its entirety. Society must respect and accommodate women's productive and reproductive roles. Child bearing is a biological function that only women can assume. Yet, society denies most women maternity benefits. Maternity benefits are basic human rights for women. Women who are employed are entitled to paid maternity leave because it is a health measure to protect mothers and infants in the late pregnancy and early post-natal period. Maternity leave is essential to allow a mother to recover from birth and breastfeed her infant. It gives her the opportunity to spend time with and nurture her young child and help the newborn adjust to a new environment. Paid maternity leave guarantees a continuing source of income and employment security during a potentially vulnerable time.

Women who receive maternity leave are more likely to remain in the workforce; this has economic benefits for employers and social benefits for women, families and society.

Maternity protection legislation

As more women are becoming economically active, it is necessary to provide adequate facilities to allow women to combine the care of their infants with productive work. Promotion and protection of breastfeeding should take into account not only the benefit for babies but also the special needs of working mothers.

During pregnancy, women need to be protected from exposure to hazardous material, dangerous work, and heavy workloads. After delivery, women need time to recover and support to enable them to exclusively breastfeed

their babies for about six months. However, employers tend to be reluctant to provide paid maternity leave because they claim it is costly.

To genuinely promote the health and welfare of mothers and children it is necessary to have comprehensive legislation and imaginative policies, which jointly consider maternity and child care services. Pregnancy, childbirth, lactation and infant feeding and childcare facilities are all part of the working mother's life. Hence there is a need to evolve a holistic approach to protecting working mothers and their children from the beginning of pregnancy till the child goes to school. Such an approach must take into consideration the special needs of working women, particularly in developing countries, where they have few options and are most exploited.

Maternity protection measures should include the following:

- ◆ Paid maternity leave for all women, in both the formal and informal sectors.
- ◆ Protection of pregnant women in the workplace from long hours of work, heavy workloads, exposure to hazardous materials, or dangerous situations.
- ◆ Prohibition of discrimination in employment against women of childbearing age on grounds of pregnancy or leave of absence for childbirth or child rearing.
- ◆ Nursing breaks when women return to work.
- ◆ Paternity leave so fathers can share the responsibility of childcare. This also reduces discrimination against hiring women.

Creating Mother-Friendly Workplaces

The aims of the Mother-Friendly Workplaces Initiative are to help employers and employees work together to find creative ways of supporting breastfeeding mothers in the

Who is working woman?

All women may be considered working women. At home they are engaged in such strenuous chores as cooking, cleaning, laundering, and childcare. In rural areas women's work extends further to the fields and endless farm activities, including heavy physical work like fetching water and fuel. Despite contributing so much at home, women are not considered to be working. Women's work at home is viewed as a "labor of love" and not counted as real work. Society views real work as only that which generates income. Only a woman who works outside her home and is paid for it is acknowledged as a "working woman". Terms such as working women or women workers usually allude to only women in paid employment. All women, however, are entitled to protection and support during pregnancy and postnatal. They should be relieved of heavy and dangerous workloads and guaranteed personal security, including food and shelter.

workplace. There is no one solution for all workplaces, each one has to adapt ideas to its own situation. There are three essential requirements to ensure that every mother, regardless of whether she is formally employed or not, can combine breastfeeding and work successfully. These requirements are:

Time:

- ◆ Provide at least four months paid maternity leave (with an ideal of six months) that begins after the baby is born and with options such as longer maternity leave with partial pay.
- ◆ Offer flexible work hours for breastfeeding women such as part time schedules, longer lunch breaks, and job sharing.
- ◆ Provide breastfeeding breaks of at least an hour a day.

Space / proximity:

- ◆ Support infant and childcare at or near the workplace.
- ◆ Provide a clean, comfortable and private area for mothers to breastfeed or express milk.
- ◆ Keep work environment clean and safe from hazardous wastes and chemicals.

The needs of pregnant and breastfeeding workers

- ◆ Safe work conditions during pregnancy.
- ◆ Job security with protection against dismissal and guarantee of job reinstatement.
- ◆ Medical care and adequate rest to prevent complications of pregnancy.
- ◆ Safe conditions and medical care during delivery and post-partum period.
- ◆ Sufficient rest to fully recover and adequate support to fully breastfeed.
- ◆ Financial benefits followed by job reinstatement with retraining and re-adaptation if necessary.

THINK!

What are the Government, employers and families doing to fulfil these needs?

Support:

- ◆ Inform workers and unions about maternity benefits.
- ◆ Ensure full job security for mothers.
- ◆ Encourage positive attitude about breastfeeding among co-workers and management.
- ◆ Encourage supportive women in unions or workers groups who can help mothers combine breastfeeding and work.

Benefits for employers:

Many employers have recognized the value of satisfied employees. It is in the employer's interest to provide working mothers with better working conditions. Happy workers result in increased productivity.

A working mother will be happier if she had longer maternity leave to recuperate from childbirth and spend more time with her baby. She will feel reassured and satisfied if she has been able to breastfeed, knowing she has given her baby the best start in life. Her breastfed baby will be emotionally well adjusted and have fewer health problems, leaving her free of worry and tension and able to concentrate on her work.

Employers benefit through costs savings and a better company image;

- ◆ Reduced staff turnover and loss of skilled workers after the birth of a child.
- ◆ Reduced sick time/ personal leave for breastfeeding women because their infants are more resistant to illness.
- ◆ Lower health care costs associated with healthier, breastfed infants.
- ◆ Higher job productivity, employee satisfaction and morale.
- ◆ Added recruitment incentive for women.
- ◆ Enhanced reputation as a company concerned for the welfare of its employees and their families.
- ◆ A healthier workforce for the future.

Tips for successfully combining work and breastfeeding:

Returning to paid work need not mean switching from breastfeeding to bottlefeeding. With a supportive family and workplace, working mothers can continue to exclusively breastfeed their babies at or near the work site or by expressing their breastmilk.

There are a few tips for successfully combining work and breastfeeding:

- ◆ Take as much leave as possible after birth.
- ◆ Take extra food and drink to maintain your health. Your diet should be well balanced and include lots of locally available vegetables, fruits, carbohydrates, iron rich foods and fluids.
- ◆ Make sure breastfeeding is well established before returning to work.



- ◆ If you are away from your baby for a several hours, express breastmilk several times a day, and have your infant's caregiver feed it to the baby with a cup. The use of bottle or pacifiers discourages babies from breastfeeding.
- ◆ Make sure the person who cares for your baby understands and supports breastfeeding.
- ◆ Practice expressing breastmilk before returning to work. Expressing breastmilk by hand is easy with practice and convenient for most women. Expressed breastmilk keeps well at room temperature for 10 or more hours.

- ◆ Have family members and friends provide extra help while you are breastfeeding.
- ◆ Breastfeed in a comfortable chair or while lying down so you can rest at the same time.
- ◆ If you are separated from your baby for long hours during the day, breastfeed more at night.
- ◆ If you have flexible work hours, going an hour late, extending your lunch break, or leaving an hour early can be helpful.
- ◆ Form a support group with other working women who breastfeed, or attend a mother support group in your community.
- ◆ Delay your next pregnancy until you are ready to breastfeed another child.

Action ideas for Mother-Friendly Workplaces

Working women:

- ◆ Raise the issue of breastfeeding at your trade union, women's group, or community organization.
- ◆ Form a mothers support group at your workplace to exchange practical information on breastfeeding techniques and management or join an existing mother support group.

Employers:

- ◆ Create Mother-Friendly Workplaces, providing time, space and support for breastfeeding mothers.
- ◆ Weigh the direct and indirect advantages of innovative child care solutions versus their immediate costs.

Unions and workers groups

- ◆ Develop cooperative childcare programs at work. Ensure that childcare staff is supportive of and knowledgeable about breastfeeding.
- ◆ Demand a clean working environment, safe from occupational hazards (e.g. chemicals, radiation), especially for breastfeeding mothers.
- ◆ Lobby for adequate paid maternity leave, breastfeeding breaks, and family programs that include pre-natal education about breastfeeding. Demonstrate that Mother-Friendly Workplaces are beneficial to all women, and all workers.
- ◆ Create alliances with international labor federations and people's organizations to support the rights of breastfeeding workers.

Health care workers:

- ◆ Inform working women about the advantages of exclusive breastfeeding and the dangers of bottle feeding.
- ◆ Offer practical advice on combining work and breastfeeding to employers and working women.
- ◆ Ensure that hospitals and clinics are Mother-Friendly Workplaces.
- ◆ Provide family planning methods that support breastfeeding.
- ◆ Promote Lactational Ammenorrhea Method as a safe and reliable means of child spacing, not methods that interfere with breastfeeding.
- ◆ Help employed mothers realize that they can breastfeed without having to resort to commercial products.

Women's Groups and Policy Making:

- ◆ Lobby the government to support childcare and maternity leave costs.
- ◆ Determine whether existing maternity legislation is implemented, and whether it applies to all women workers.
- ◆ Encourage women in development projects to include compatibility with breastfeeding as a consideration in planning income-generating projects.
- ◆ Link breastfeeding rights to campaigns of human rights; gender equity and child survival.
- ◆ Increase public awareness that breastfeeding is environmentally friendly.
- ◆ Use World Breastfeeding Week (August 1-7) to attract media attention to this issue.
- ◆ Prepare a press release and fact sheets on the problems of working women and breastfeeding for the media, especially women's magazines.

The new ILO Maternity Protection Convention:

The ILO in June 2000 adapted a revised Maternity Protection Convention which requires ratifying governments to provide a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave (6 weeks must be taken as postnatal leave). It recognizes breastfeeding breaks as a women's right and that they may be combined to shorten the workday. It stipulates that women can not be fired because they are breastfeeding. The Convention covers all women who have an employer.

For more information or assistance in making your workplace more Mother-Friendly please contact:



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