

# Lactation Breaks: Employer's Perspective

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# Reason for the study

- Why don't women take lactation breaks?
- The Is/Ought Dilemma
- What is the context in which women are making decisions about lactation breaks?
- If there are barriers to taking lactation breaks even in very supportive environments, there are probably barriers in all working environments.

# Key message

- This is a study of a supportive UK employer. And there are STILL brakes upon the extent of support they are able to offer to mothers who wish to take lactation breaks.
- It is likely that there are barriers to lactation breaks throughout UK employment contexts.
- Manager's attitudes to lactation breaks can change.
- Why is breastfeeding a "risk"?

# Women's Views

- Qualitative and Quantative Evidence
- Area of conflict between health advice and organisational practice. Many women feel marginalised and undervalued. Minority of senior women positive experiences.
- Infant Feeding Survey 2010 shows 56% of working mothers with babies 8-10mo identify work as causing them to cease/reduce Bfing; 14% of mothers are able to express and 8% able to BF at work.

# The study

- Case study: A single employer.
- Supportive policies regarding lactation breaks for women returning from maternity leave.
- 27 detailed interviews with managers to determine their views re lactation breaks
- I wanted to get a profile of a supportive employer, because barriers to LBs there might indicate barriers throughout the UK. (“Deviant Sampling” technique).

# Participant Profile

## Job Role

- 7 participants managed working class/manual staff
- 8 managed middle class staff
- 5 worked in HR
- 7 “snowballed” participants who were identified by managers as having expertise within the organisation, including MD.

## Personal Characteristics

- 22 female and 5 male
- 16 mothers, 4 fathers
- 4 did not disclose their parenting status
- 3 not parents
- 3 had taken LBs themselves, and 2 had BF on premises during Mat Leave.
- 11 had some experience of LBs at “Zargg”

# Themes which are triggered for managers by lactation breaks

- “Themes” and “Counter Themes” – indicating conflict and uncertainty about topic.
- Support for combining lactation and employment
- Concerns about lactation breaks
- Following organisation policy
- Questioning social policy
- Reservations about communication

# Quotes from Managers

- “I’m very pro breastfeeding, I’m very supportive, but I guess the potential issues could be where, you know? We work in an open plan office, nobody has their own desk. There’s nowhere where people can go and close the door, to have twenty minutes or however long to look after their baby or to express. For me, that would be the issue.” (Ella, office manager)
- “It’s just like any other subject, it is something that happens, and you know, I am more than happy to talk about lactation breaks. It is not a problem” (Camilla, Cleaning Manager)

# Quotes from HR

- “If you’re working in the kitchens or you are on your feet quite a lot you will get quite tired. If you were an employer that didn’t want it to happen you could really put barriers in place to prevent it. Yeah, yeah, it could be quite challenging.” (Naomi, HR officer)
- “We have an online HR employment law guide, but it didn’t answer my specific questions. There were a few bits and pieces I glued together in my head. It wasn’t actually in the law specifically, it was just sort of a goodwill gesture. Is that the case? I don’t know.” (Sophie, HR Officer and BF Peer Supporter)

# Quotes from Directors

- “It might be that “Zargg” says you can have lactation breaks, but if your manager doesn’t say so, and their attitude shows it is really inconvenient and gives those kind of signals then I think the person contemplating lactation breaks might feel a little awkward” (Denise, Director)
- “It’s about discussion and negotiation and reasonableness. The minute we lose that and hide behind legislation, we’ve lost the plot I think.” (Simon, Managing Director)

# Manager's understanding of the Law

- It's an HR issue
- When prompted, it's a health and safety issue
- We need goodwill, guidance, and legislation
- “Subconsciously and surreptitiously an unscrupulous manager could put up multiple barriers to stop someone doing it, but yeah, they could and should and deserve to have the absolute pants sued off them for doing it.” (Ricky, Reception Manager)

# What are manager's views re different ways a mother can sustain lactation?

- Continuing lactation out of work hours
- Child on site
- Mother visiting baby
- Expressing breaks
  
- “It would be very nice if “Zargg” had rooms just available for this, but what would the demand be?” (Doris, Welfare Officer)

# What do we learn from this study?

- The study accesses views of managers
- Support for different ways of continuing BF
- Greater understanding of the barriers which women face when taking lactation breaks
- Law, by itself, may not be enough to encourage women to take LBs.
- Better understanding of the gulf between the Is and the Ought on this topic.

# My “advice” to BF supporters

- Managers often supported BF – this is encouraging for women who wish to request lactation breaks.
- Managers are concerned that breastfeeding may be burdensome for employees. Being tired is a H&S issue, and BF mums are protected by law.
- Continue to agitate for a legal right on topic.

# Why don't all new parents get a risk assessment on their return to work?

- Mothers, Fathers, all Surrogate parents, Adoptive parents can all be subject to risks....
- Post natal depression
- Fatigue
- Adjusting to parenthood
- Injuries consequent on birth
- Early cessation of breastfeeding
- These risks can be reduced through supportive employment practices.

# Question for Discussion: Language

## Language I don't Like

- Breast is Best
- Benefits of Breastfeeding
- “If” you want to breastfeed
- “Choice” to breastfeed
- “Formula” feeding
- What is the impact of these languages?

## Language I do Like

- Importance, Significance
- Risk
- React, Response
- Degree of success
- Artificial breastmilk substitute
- Is our language truthful?