

Maternity Leaves and Their Effects on Careers and Career Development

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<p>This thesis studies the diverse maternity leave systems comparing Finland to the U.S. More specifically this thesis showcases the effects that maternity leaves have on women's careers and career development. This thesis study was conducted for the commissioning organization called Mothers in Business MiB ry.</p> <p>The research methods of this thesis include a survey and field-based research. The preliminary data of the study is based on qualitative analysis of a survey offered to the members of Mothers in Business Ry. The secondary data is based on qualitative analysis of appropriate secondary sources.</p> <p>This thesis topic is relevant to the people who study or are part of women's careers and career development especially in the field of business. Academically, from the perspective of Human Resource Management this thesis covers matters such as how to attract, retain and motivate talented mothers.</p> <p>The second chapter includes theories and models about women in workplaces and the effects they have on careers and career development from transitioning to motherhood. The various long-lasting effects are proven to begin from the announcement of women's pregnancies.</p> <p>As the result of the countries' maternity leave systems, mothers have somewhat different concerns regarding their careers and career development. The unfortunate fact in the U.S is that paid maternity leaves are not covered inclusively by the law, contrary to Finland. Despite the U.S being one of the most developed country in the world it lacks a mother's basic right to spend time with her newborn and take time to recover in terms of health, before returning to work. Finnish mothers' concerns often link to the so-called gaps in their CV. Since the Finnish mothers benefit of financial security during their maternity leaves, they use the time of maternity leave to reach their personal and professional goals. American mothers with the right to maternity leave are more concerned of their financial and health situations.</p>	
Keywords Maternity leave, paid leave, career, career development, workplace retention	

Dedicated to my mother

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1 Introduction

This field-based survey research is a bachelor's thesis commissioned by Mothers in Business MiB ry. The purpose of this thesis is to introduce the Finnish system on maternity leaves, compare it to the system of the United States of America (US). Finally, the thesis showcases the effects that maternity leaves have on women's careers and career development.

At first, introduction provides the background and the international aspect of this thesis. Next, the introduction presents the case organization, research question and demarcation of this thesis. Additionally, the key concepts are reviewed at the end of introduction.

1.1 Background and International Aspect

This thesis is a field-based survey research on maternity leaves and their effects on women's careers and career development. The research is conducted around the maternity leaves' lengths and pays in Finland, and afterwards the system is compared to the US' system. It might come as a surprise to some readers that the US is one of few countries in the world where paid maternal leave is not secured by law. Having a paid maternal leave in the US is rather an exception. De facto, parental leave is not covered at all in the US federal law. There are only three states: California, New York and Rhode Island with an implementation of a paid family leave program. Additionally, there are five states: California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island which have secured a temporary disability leave. (Bird et al 2017). In Finland, and many developing countries even, the maternity leaves are paid and they are secured by law.

This thesis includes analysis of the answers of a survey shared with the members of Mothers in Business MiB Ry (MiB) based in Finland. Additionally, the situation for mothers in the US is introduced through previous studies. The fact is that Finnish and US systems on maternity leaves are almost fully contrary to one another. As much as a quarter of employed American mothers take less than a two-week maternity leave after giving birth according to several studies. While in Finland there are many mothers who go on a maternity leave which can last up to three years when combined with parental leave and child care leave.

To the employing companies, especially American companies, maternity leaves bring costs. However, from a Human Resource Management point of view from, companies should see flexibility and paid leaves as a competitive advantage and set importance to

attracting the 'once' talented mothers back to working life rather than losing the talent they once invested in. Here are to mention some globally successful companies such as Twitter or Google. Several studies show that new mothers have a hard time coming back to business because they feel they are not welcomed back. According to Bonnier Corporation in 2017 some of the best companies for mothers to work in were Accenture, LEGO and Adobe Systems. (Bonnier Corporation 2017).

There are many international companies which despite the national laws have invested in attracting and retaining mothers to their workforce. Not only that, they aim to bring more women into leadership roles.

For instance, these international companies are succeeding in providing flexible hours, possibility to work from home, advancement programs, career counselling and even backup childcare. What is interesting is that many of these international mother-supportive companies are in predominantly male industries.

1.2 Case Organization

Mothers in Business MiB Ry (MiB) is an organization dedicated to mothers or pregnant women, women who are currently on their maternity leave or mothers who have returned to working life. The organization was founded in 2015 in Espoo and currently has over 4000 active members, together with 250 voluntary women. The organisation's main strategy is to become a national network for career-oriented mothers and a valued social influencer. (MiB 2018.)

In 2018 MiB is active in 9 cities around Finland. The largest cities are Helsinki, Turku and Tampere. Additionally, the organization is active in Oulu, Vaasa, Rovaniemi, Kuopio, Jyväskylä, Päijät-Häme. In 2019 Kymenlaakso will be a new addition to MiB's family. (Mothers in Business MiB Ry 2018, 23.)

MiB's aim is to support mothers in their careers and career development when they are on their maternity leaves or have returned to working life. MiB ry organises for instance events, lectures, forums, company visits and workshops. (Murtoniemi 2016). The main and most visible part of MiB is organizing events. In the events the mothers of MiB have an opportunity to develop their professional skills, get support in balancing working life with family life, get information on how to enhance their wellbeing and get the opportunity for peer support a chance to network. (Mothers in Business MiB Ry 2018, 9.)

The members of MiB ry consist of women who are mostly 30-39 years old. Most of the women are already mothers because only 1 percent of the members is expecting a first child. Typically, the mothers of MiB have graduated in economic science, administration, law or engineering. 43 percent of the members work in a full-time job. To be more specific, 47 percent of the mothers work as specialists or experts in their fields, 5 percent are in leading or managing roles in their work and 5 percent of the mothers are entrepreneurs. (Mothers in Business MiB Ry 2018, 5.)

MiB ry is mainly funded by the membership fees and by The Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA) between years 2017 and 2019. In 2018 the membership fee was 30 euros. Generally, the mothers of MiB voluntarily organize the different events. Additionally, MiB has hired three employees to take care of the administrative tasks, co-ordinate the voluntary work and develop the organization. (Mothers in Business MiB ry 2018, 19.)

1.3 Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to provide any companies or people interested in women's studies and careers with an overview of today's maternity leave systems in Finland and the US, and showcase how companies can affect mothers' careers, career development and life in general.

The research question (RQ) can be worded as: How do maternity leaves affect women's careers and career development in Finland and the US?

RQ is divided into investigative questions (IQ) as follows:

IQ 1. How many mothers return to work after their planned maternity leaves end?

IQ 2. What are the reasons behind not returning to work after maternity leave?

IQ 3. Why and how do employers attract mothers back to working life?

Table 1 below presents the theoretical framework, research methods and results chapters for investigative questions 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative Question	Theoretical Framework* (chapter)	Research Methods	Results (chapter)
IQ 1. How many mothers return to work after their planned maternity leaves end?	2.1	Data collected from Finnish and American reports together with the survey results from MiB mothers.	4.2
IQ 2. What are the reasons behind not returning to work after maternity leave?	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.3.1, 2.3.2	Survey and previous official studies.	4.3
IQ 3. Why and how do employers attract mothers back to working life after their planned maternity leaves?	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4	Survey and previous official studies.	4.4

1.4 Demarkation

This thesis studies and compares maternity leave systems in Finland with the US. The cornerstone and outcome will be the theories and the actual reality on how maternity leaves affect women's careers and their career development in today's working life.

In addition to the comparison between the two countries, the thesis will cover data on some international and global companies which have put an effort to, and even designed return-to-work programs specifically to mothers in order to support their career development. The fact is that there are many mothers who decide to not return to their current workplaces when their maternity leaves end. Thus, this thesis will include some figures of the amount and reasons to mothers not returning to working life.

In order to stay in the frame of the thesis' research question, there are some matters which I will not include in the thesis. As this thesis is done from the viewpoint of international business, when comparing the countries' systems the focus will still be strongly on business, not on political or social factors. The core idea is to find out the impacts of maternity leaves on women's careers and their career development. The idea of this thesis is not to cover the working life inequalities between genders. Furthermore, this thesis will not concentrate on employers' financial costs of maternity leaves.

1.5 Key Concepts

Human resource management (HRM)

HRM is the bundle of policies, programs and plans which organizations adopt with the objective of making full use of the people they employ. (Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2013, 1).

Career development

“Career development is a unique and lifelong process for each individual of managing learning, work, and transitions in order to move forward and participate effectively in work and society”. (Career Development Institute 2017, 1).

Talent retention

“Employee retention is a process in which the employees are encouraged to remain with the organization for the maximum period of time or until the completion of the project” (Sandhya and Kumar 2011, 1).

Maternity leave

In Finland, maternity leave is a period leave during which she can receive a maternity, special maternity or parental allowance. It is under the Employment Contracts Act and is 105 week days. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2018) In addition to maternity leave, mothers can add parental leave and childcare leave to take care of the child until the child turns three years old. (KELA 2018.)

In the US, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year to certain employees and under specific conditions. Some of the conditions are: working for the same employer at least 12 months, working at least 1250 hours over the past 12 months, and working at a location where the company employs at least 50 people within 75 miles of the employee's home. (U.S. Department of Labor 2018.)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory

Abraham Harold Maslow (1954) introduced a theory with five hierarchical needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization needs. When the first needs (physiological needs) have been satisfied, comes the feeling for the second needs to satisfy, and so forth. (Nyameh 2013, 41-42.)

2 Maternity Leave Theories

The main difference between the maternity leave systems in the US and Finland is that Finland secures every mother's maternity leave and benefits are offered to the mother and the child.

Contrary to Finland, the US has the Family and Medical Leave Act which secures a maximum 12 weeks unpaid leave in an exclusive way. Not all mothers are privileged to a maternity leave. (Business Insider 2017.)

2.1 Return-to-Work Rates of Mothers

According to a study conducted in Finland by the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA), flexibility amongst the companies, the financial situation and the level of education affect mothers' decision making for returning to work. The KELA's study only covered 50% of all the women who gave birth in years 1999-2000. (Räsänen 2016.)

The results show that of women who worked at least 21 months prior to maternity leave 15% return to work after 9 months of paid maternity leave, while 94% return to work when the first child turns 3 years old. On the other hand, the return rate is 6% by 9 months from the birth of first child amongst those women who had worked less than 21 months or none before the paid maternity leave is, and 59% by the time the child turns 3 years old. Additionally, the study reveals that 20 % of all the first-time mothers decide to take another maternity leave for a second child right at the end of the first maternity leave. (Räsänen 2016.)

The US family leave policy fails to offer families the support that they need which is the reason to the difficulty in balancing work-life to motherhood. According to Rossin-Slater et al. (2011) there are only 12 percent of employees in the US who have access to paid family leave. What is more, the US is the only developed country that does not offer paid maternity leave. Contrary to the other countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), mothers are offered an average of ca. 17 weeks of paid maternity leave. Consequently, in comparison with mothers from the other OECD countries, the new mothers in the US return to work much earlier than other mothers. Studies show that close to one-fourth of American mothers return to work in less than two weeks after giving birth. Additionally, one-third of American mothers return to work three months after giving birth. (Krause & Fetsch 2016, 6.) For instance, from 2005 to 2007 70% of women in US returned to work within 12 months of their first birth, according to US Census Data (2011).

2.2 Long-Lasting Effects Since Childbirth

Childbirth is a turning point in women's careers and career development. Putting the career on hold when it is time to give birth can have long-lasting effects on women's earnings and labour force participation. With motherhood mothers adapt their work according to their increased responsibilities. All mothers take a break at childbirth and it can last days to months after. The duration of the break widely depends on the parental leave support and childcare systems of the countries. (OECD 2017, 170.)

In every OECD country women are less likely to be in paid work than men. However, the gender gaps in employment have been decreasing with different causes. For instance, there is a rising economic need for women to work – in single and couple households. The gender stereotypes and expectations are transforming, and public policies of combining childcare with paid work are increasingly better. (OECD 2017, 142.)

Women are more likely than men to interrupt their careers to care for family, work part-time or be discriminated at work, according to OECD. (OECD 2017, 144), The OECD's study shows that there is a gender gap in the employment rate between women and men who are childless, and it is around 5 percentage points across the OECD countries. The gap becomes almost 23 percentage points when comparing women and men with at least one child under the age of 14 years. (OECD 2017, 146.) The gender gap is the greatest among the mothers with low levels of education. The mothers are not attracted to return to work due to low wages, but it is also difficult to balance careers with childcare thus the father is often the one who becomes the provider. (OECD 2017, 147.) When combining mothers' low wages with childcare fees it becomes easier to choose to stay at home (OECD 2017, 146).

Additionally, career interruptions or earlier retirement affect negatively women's pensions. Amongst the pension receivers in years 2013 and 2014 in most of the OECD countries there was a gender pension gap that ranged from 10 to 40 percent. What also affects negatively women's pensions is that women are mostly occupied in less-paid jobs or that they only work part-time. (OECD 2017, 172)

2.3 Theoretical Models Proving Negative Effects

According to a theoretical and empirical review by Sabat et al. mothers and pregnant women encounter negative effects at the workplace due to prescriptive and descriptive

stereotypes that mothers commit more to their children and less to their career. The review enumerates four theoretical models which explain this phenomenon. The models are: stigma theory, stereotype content model, social role theory and role congruity theory. However, Sabat et al. argue that there is not yet an existent theory that conclude how organizations and individuals can improve their reactions. (Sabat et al. 2016, 27)

According to R. J. Burke (2013,30) there are a number of obstacles for women to have a successful career. Some of these obstacles are for instance discrimination, difficulties in working long hours, unwillingness to relocate, bigger responsibility for home and family, and working in male dominated organizational cultures.

2.3.1 Stigma Theory and Stereotype Content Model

Based on stigma theory, working mothers are discriminated because mother's identities are stigmatized within the workplace environment. According to Goffman (1963) a stigma is a characteristic that is underrated within a social context. (Sabat et al. 2016, 11.)

According to Fiske et al's (2002) stereotype content model, stereotypes exist in two different dimensions – warmth and competence. When woman professionals become mothers they will be viewed as either homemakers or female professionals. Homemakers are high in the warmth dimension and low in competence. In contrast female professionals are high in the competence dimension but low in the warmth dimension. Competence is defined by status, while warmth is defined by competition. (Ridgeway & Correll 2004, 60.) According to the status characteristics theory by Berger et al. (1977), due to the social status of mothers' role mothers have detrimental positions. Thus competence is less perceived. (Ridgeway & Correll 2004, 683-700.) As a result, the theory proves that when women become mothers they trade perceived competence for perceived warmth (Cuddy et al. 2004).

2.3.2 Social Role and Role Congruity Theories

Eagly's (1987, 1997) social role theory is a theory that explains the different treatment towards the sexes in case of parenthood. Social role theory argues that people have their beliefs about sexes, and these beliefs have been developed while observing the men's and women's roles throughout history. In U.S and many other countries, men perform occupational roles and women perform the domestic roles (Shelton 1992). As a result, when women try to enter high-status positions they are often discouraged. On the contrary, men are encouraged to enter those positions since they are the providers of their families. (Eagly and Karau 2002, 123-174.)

In role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau 2002, 109) there are two entire opposites: a good mother and an ideal worker. Thus, there is a perception according to which one cannot be successful in both roles. Additionally, according to this theory when a woman becomes a mother her commitment to work will eventually decrease (Ridgeway and Correll 2004, 60).

2.4 What Attracts Mothers to Return to Working Life

As the war for talent is rapidly increasing there are more and more companies taking steps towards the support of women's career success and development. Additionally, more and more women are discussing the matter of how, why and whether to integrate the family life with work. (Burke 2006, 233.)

According to Burke there are types of work experiences that are proven to have a link to women's career satisfaction and advancement. Burke lists four types of work experiences such as: particular work experiences, developmental jobs, developmental relationships and alternative work arrangements.

Particular work experiences include support and encouragement from the company. Women feel accepted because there is no tension deriving from being a woman. There is access to training and there are opportunities to career development.

Developmental jobs include for instance receiving feedback, challenge, setting flexible goals and having greater responsibilities. Developmental relationships mean for instance mentoring and socializing.

Alternative work arrangements are referred to as employer adjustments in this thesis. According to Burke these are for instance flexible working hours, teleworking, a compressed work week or smaller work loads. (Burke & Cooper 2013, 31.)

Additionally, Burke and Cooper list matters that would increase the retention of women in companies. Companies have to acknowledge the loss of women and determine the scale and costs of the loss. Companies have to decide the reasons to loss of women and compare the reasons for women to the reasons for the loss of men. They have to understand the potential difference in the career paths of women and men. Companies have to recognize and choose the role of the organization's structure, organizational culture and systems in this process. Finally, companies have to introduce changes that tackle the causes of these losses. (Burke & Cooper 2013, 31.)

3 Research Design and Data

The target of this thesis is to understand how mothers are impacted by maternity leaves in their careers and career development. The objective of this thesis is to determine what attracts and retains mothers in the working life. This chapter introduces the data that has been collected by the survey dedicated to MiB mothers and other secondary data.

3.1 Research Methods

Figure 1 below presents the research methods of my thesis. There is one research phase in this thesis. It focuses on the data sources which are a) the mothers of the MiB and b) the secondary data. The secondary data includes for instance articles, reports, statistics or theories. This thesis is a field based survey research. The empirical part answers the three IQs and the thesis includes statistical analysis of numerical data and qualitative analysis of open questions.

In IQ 1. is studied how many women return to work, which raises the question which is more important – why women choose not to return to their employers or working life in general. The reasons are covered in IQ 2. Thereafter, IQ 3. discovers how employers attract mothers back to working life.

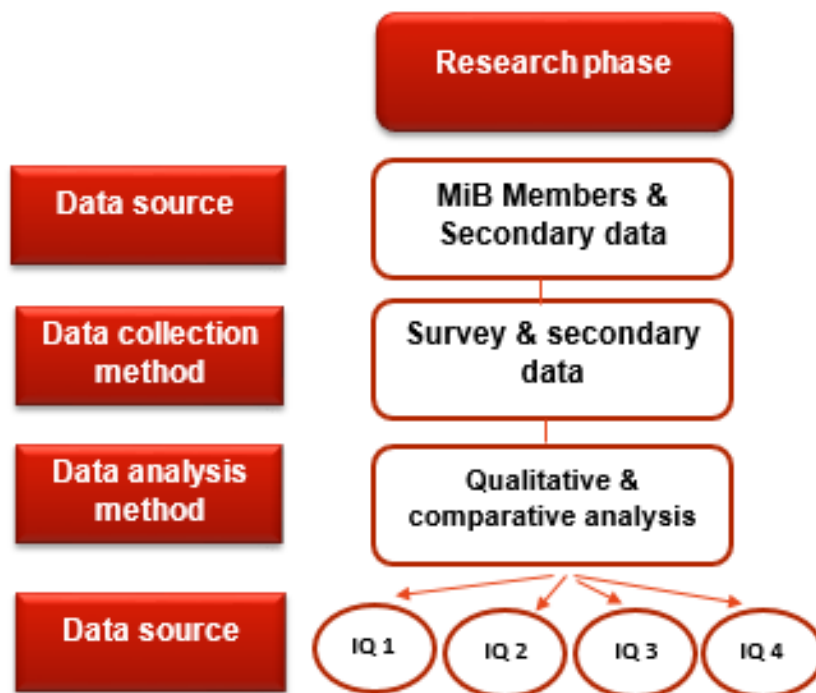


Figure 1. Research methods

The data analysis methods of this thesis include qualitative and comparative analysis of the data that has been collected. Finland and the US have their own maternity leave systems which are both separately analysed through qualitative means. Thereafter the two countries are analysed comparatively.

The women of MiB work in a variety of industries from business to legal services healthcare or information technology. The job positions vary also across the organizational structures. The age of the respondents ranges from 25 to 54 years.

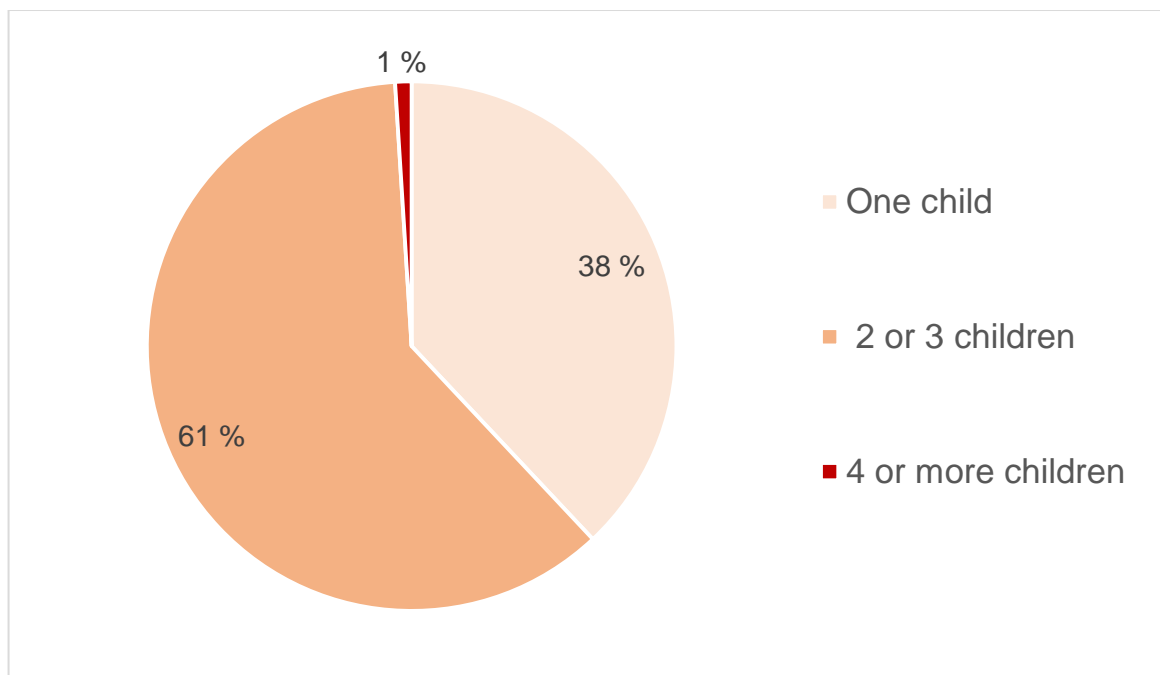


Figure 2. The amount of children of the mothers of MiB

Of all the MiB women who answered to the survey: the majority of women have 2 to 3 children. More specifically and referring to figure 2. above: ca. 61 percent of the women have 2 to 3 children, ca. 38 percent have one child, and less than 1 percent have 4 or more children.

3.2 Data collection and Data Analysis Methods

The data collection methods are a) a survey and b) secondary data collection. The survey was sent to the mothers of MiB on two different occasions. I designed the survey in Webropol for the members of MiB which I first sent through an e-mail to a Board Member of MiB who is responsible for the developmental tasks in MiB. MiB was interested in the

idea of my thesis. Consequently, they recommended to become the commissioning organization of the thesis. Afterwards, the survey was shared in the beginning of June 2018 through the MiB newsletter and the MiB's official Facebook site. The survey was closed in August 2018 and it gathered a total of 136 respondents.

Additionally, I collected secondary data which was mainly on purpose to cover the American mothers and the American system of maternity leaves. There is also secondary data covering Finnish maternity leave system.

The data of this thesis is analyzed through qualitative methods mainly. The comparative analysis methods are used to showcase the differences of maternity leaves between the two countries' maternity leaves and effects on women's careers and career development.

4 Results and Discussion

Chapter 4 introduces the results and discussion of this thesis. The results are presented according to the IQs.

4.1 Mothers and Their Right to Maternity Leaves

What we here in Finland may take for granted is the maternity leave that allows mothers not only to spend time with their newborns but also take time to heal physically, emotionally and spiritually. To learn more about the Finnish mother's time of maternity leaves and returning to work I have sent a survey to the members of Mothers in Business Ry. In response I have collected some interesting answers for the investigative questions.

How mothers percept their situation after maternity leaves varies as much as employers' perceptions of mothers' capabilities and efficiency after maternity leaves. The responses are surprisingly motivating. One anonymous attorney cited in the MiB survey: "Work feels really easy after having survived with children at home." Nevertheless, the responses show that there are still to this day companies which act negatively towards women since the beginning of their pregnancy announcement.

The US is one of only eight countries in the World without a national law covering paid maternity leave for mothers. Consequently, it is in the employers' hands to create family-friendly policies and offer paid maternity leaves.

4.2 Mothers Who Return to Working Life

To cover investigative question 1. which focused in the rates of mothers returning to working life after maternity leaves, in the MiB survey mothers are asked how many times they have returned to work after their maternity leave(s). The structure of the survey questions do not directly cover the IQ1 because not all mothers have the same prerequisites. The figure 3. below shows that 16 percent of the MiB mothers have changed their job after every maternity leave. In other words, these mothers quit or changed their employer after each of their maternity leaves. 54 percent of the respondents have returned to work once and 29 percent of the respondents have returned to work 2 to 3 times. One percent of the respondents have returned to work 4 times or more.

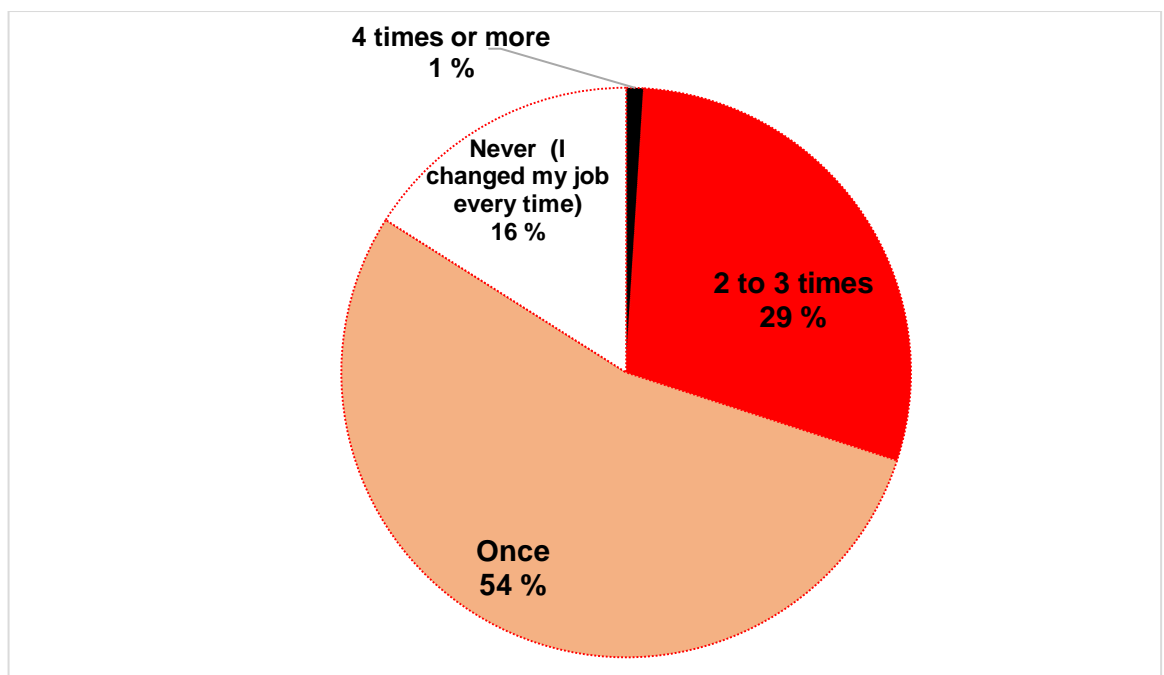


Figure 3. Return to work by MiB mothers

In the US, mothers' right to paid leave or any leave and amount of leave affect the return-rates to working life. For instance if women do not have the right to paid maternity leave, they are more likely to quit their jobs during pregnancy.

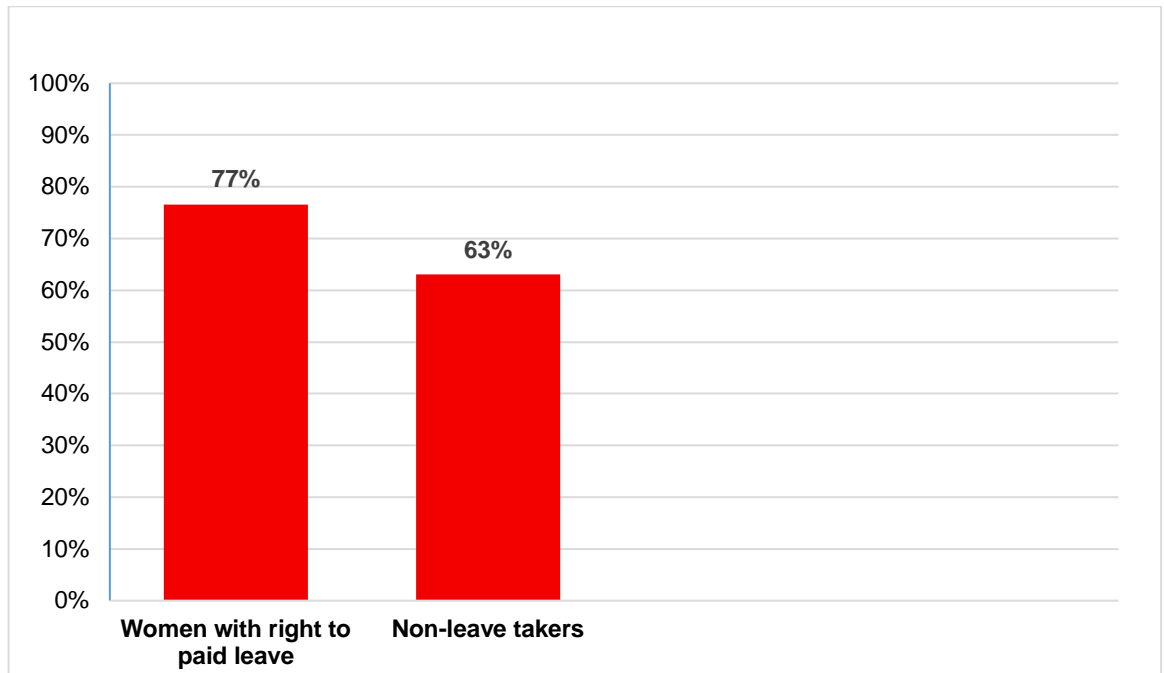


Figure 4. Likelihood of American mothers returning to working life

Additionally, the women with a right to paid maternity leave are more likely to return to working life than the non-leave-takers. Referring to figure 4. the likelihood of mothers returning to work 9 to 12 months postpartum is 63 percent if mothers do not take any leave and ca. 77 percent if mothers take paid leaves. (Houser & Vartanian 2012, 7.)

4.3 Mothers' Reasons for not Returning to Working Life

Addressing the IQ2 which focused in reasons for mothers not returning to working life, MiB mothers give their answers from a rather positive perspective. Mothers say that maternity leaves were a break from work and their own self. Maternity leaves give mothers a new drive or a completely new perspective. Some of the mothers begin new academic studies or they simply decide to find a company where the culture is closer to their new roles as mothers.

Contrary to the common belief that mothers spend their whole maternity leave nursing their babies and fully taking over the stay-at-home role, mothers advance during their maternity leaves. They begin new hobbies, they socialize in different events and they even finish doctoral degrees during maternity leaves.

Unfortunately, most of the mothers of MiB are forced to find a new job because their employer at the time do not suit their new lifestyle because of the lack of a family-friendly or-

ganizational culture. In some industries. For instance in maritime industry, it is almost impossible to offer flexible working hours. However, in some companies the workplace simply does not attract mothers back to work in terms of salary, temporary nature of work or even demotion of position during maternity leave.

A minority of the mothers decide to stay at home and devote their time to their children until they turn three years old. That is the maximum period of paid maternity leave combined with the parental and childcare leave. Few mothers mention that if their partner has an economically stable job they will not bother to return fast to work.

For the American women, the main reason behind not returning to working life is the high public childcare costs. Additionally, women choose not to return to working life because of the non-friendly family culture. As a result, competitiveness between companies to offer parental leave rights and differentiate from other companies is increasing. The companies are shifting more and more towards including parental leave into their policies. An interesting fact is that the change occurs in unexpected industries such as the US Department of Defense or technological companies. (Bird et al 2017.)

4.4 Factors Attracting Mothers Back to Working Life

Covering the IQ 3. are presented the factors attracting mothers back to working life. In the MiB survey the mothers were asked to write down what sort of adjustments their employers offered to attract them to return back to work. The options can be seen below in figure 2: flexible working hours, possibility to work remotely, possibility to work part-time and other adjustments.

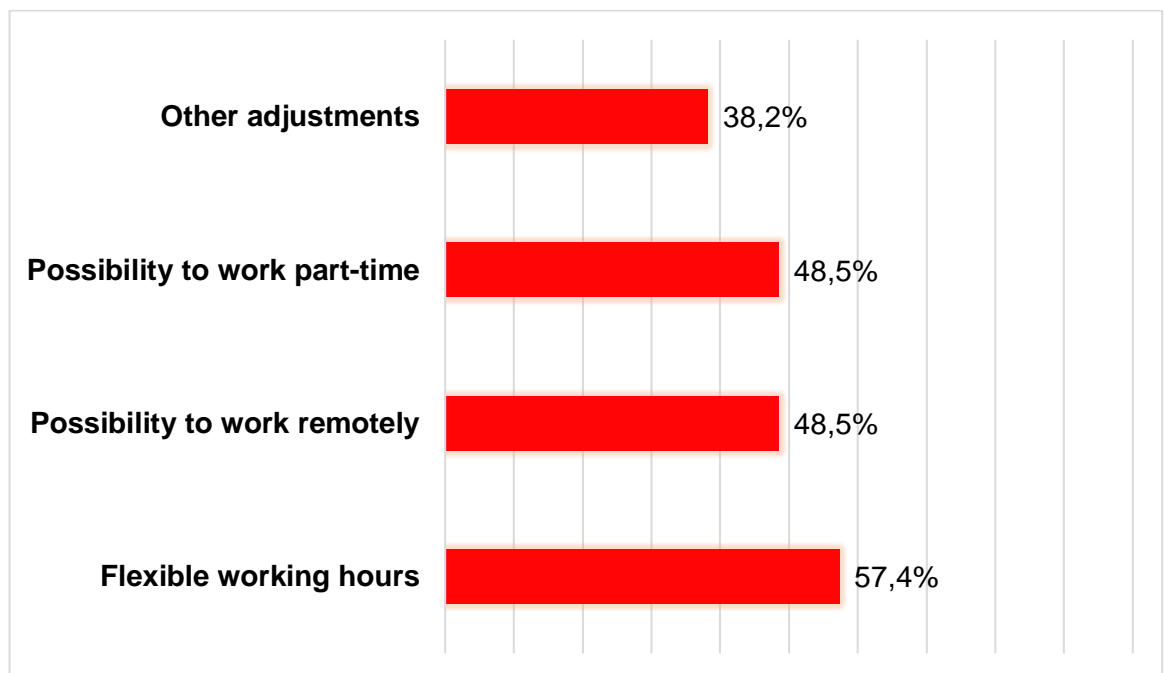


Figure 2. Adjustments offered to mothers of MiB

The most offered adjustment to mothers were flexible working hours. Around 57% of the respondents were offered flexible working hours to return to work. Around 49% of the respondents were offered the possibility to work remotely and again around 49% were offered the possibility to work part-time.

Surprisingly, in the midst of the respondents as much as 22 percent answer that they have not been offered any sort of adjustments anytime during their careers. Additionally, the respondents have the opportunity to mention any other adjustments that are not listed in the survey. These other adjustments include for instance, childcare offered by the employer, possibility to delegate work to co-workers, flexibility from the employer to employee to arrange own work or working hours, offer to finish PhD thesis, career development discussions before or after the leave, or possibility to take the child to work if there occurs a need to.

In the US the right to paid parental leave affects women's choice of an employer. According to a survey conducted by Deloitte, 77 percent of employees with the right to paid parental leave have chosen their employer solely because of the benefit to paid parental leave. (Bird et al 2017.)

The American mothers are attracted to return to work in various ways: assistance in child care, traditional flextime, occasional telecommuting, control over breaks, gradual return after childbirth or adoption and time off during the work day for personal needs. According to the study smaller employers are usually more flexible. The small companies consist of 50 to 99 employees. (Weisberg & Galinsky 2014, 7.)

5 Conclusion

The final chapter includes the key results and conclusion of this thesis. Also, this chapter introduces the recommendations to the commissioning organization and the validity, reliability and risks of the study. At the end, there are some suggestions for further research and the reflection on my learning process.

5.1 Key results

Answering to the RQ in chapter 1.4 of this thesis, what is similar to the mothers of both nations is that there are indications that prove the theories and models which were included in chapter 2 of this thesis to be correct. Consequently, there are the positive and negative effects of maternity leaves listed as the conclusion of this thesis. First, the three IQs are separately covered.

5.1.1 Mothers Who Decide to Return to Working Life

As a conclusion to IQ 1., MiB mothers have used or are using their maternity leaves to understand their professional values. It is obvious that after maternity leaves mothers can change – not only physically but also, emotionally and professionally. During the maternity leaves mothers use the time to understand what they look for in a company which is common to the 16 percent of the mothers who changed their job every time.

In the US there are states that offer paid maternity leaves to some mothers. In the majority of the states however there is no right to paid maternity leave or there is no possibility to take a maternity leave because of for instance the lack of job protection and insufficient financial savings.

In chapter 2.1, according to the KELA's study 94 percent of the mothers return to work when the first child turns three, however it covered only 50 percent of the Finnish women who gave birth in years 1999 to 2000. Again, in chapter 2.1 it is stated that 70 percent of American women return to work 12 months postpartum according to US Census Data.

This thesis does not offer exact quantitative information on how many mothers return to working life in Finland or in the US. However, comparing the theory and research of the two countries the length or the amount of maternity leaves have a link to the decision-making of returning to either the same employer or working life in general.

5.1.2 Why Mothers Are Pushed Out of the Working Life

Concluding IQ 2. the reason that unites the two countries is the company culture which is not family-friendly. A company with family-friendly culture offers paid maternal or parental leave, it is not exclusive of for instance adopting parents and offers different adjustments according to a parent's needs.

Another important reason is that taking maternity leaves directly affects mothers' career or career development. According to MiB survey answers and secondary data, when mothers decide to return to work they often face prejudice in the work environment towards their abilities. Additionally, they often find themselves in different, lower, positions. Consequently, they either find a new workplace or exit the working life to for instance care for the child or begin new studies.

5.1.3 What Pulls Mothers Back to Working Life

As a conclusion to IQ 3. What attracts mothers back to working life, it is safe to say that in both countries, mothers seek for flexibility after maternity leaves. This is the case especially when children are babies or they are very young. As family life cannot always be lived by plans, mothers also need flexibility in planning their working hours or possibility to occasionally work from home.

Regardless of the different systems in the two countries what pulls mothers back to working life is similar. 22 percent of MiB mothers mentioned that they had never been offered any kind of adjustments during their careers which is inexplicable because there are numerous ways of adjustments.

5.2 Conclusion

Mothers have less probability to be promoted, in average they receive lower salaries, they have slower career tracks and face subconscious negative prejudice regarding their abilities (Krause & Fetsch 2016, 9).

When the respondents of MiB were asked if their maternity leaves affect their career, more women decided that maternity leaves affected their careers negatively than positively. Unfortunately, only about 20% answered that their maternity leaves had positive effects on their careers. 35% of the respondents chose negative effects as their answer. The majority of the respondents, 45%, abstained.

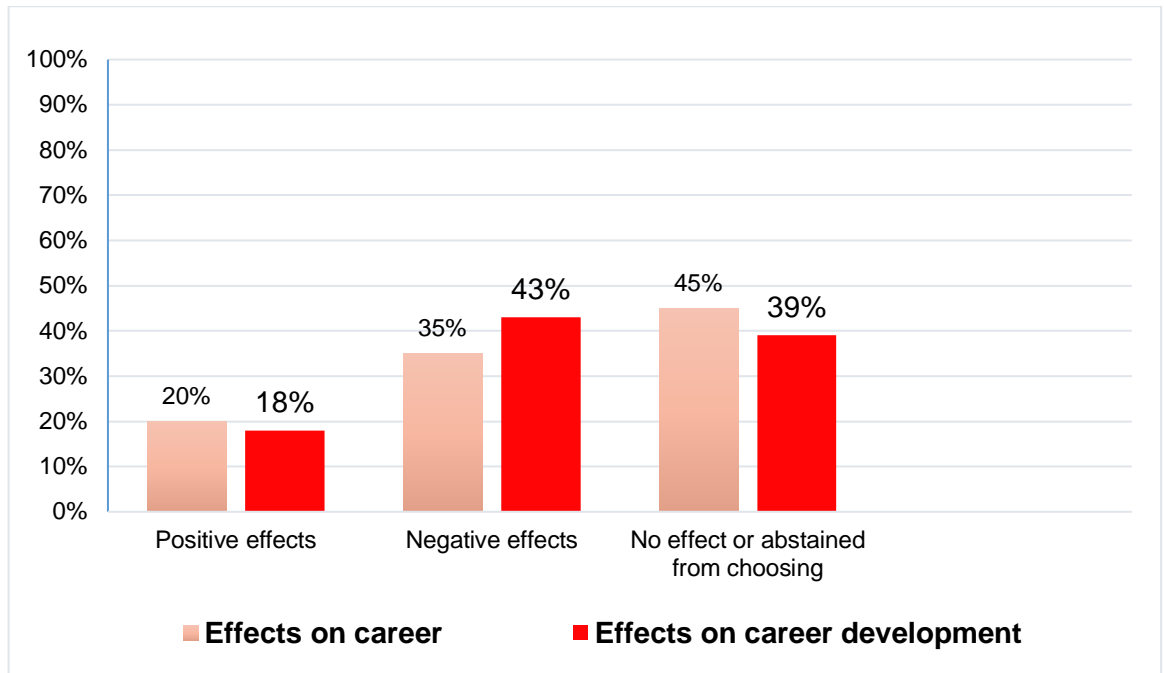


Figure 3. Effects on career and career development

5.2.1 Maternity Leaves Affect Positively Career and Career Development

In terms of the RQ: *How do maternity leaves affect women's careers and career development in Finland and the US?*

"Work feels really easy after having survived with children at home", Attorney X answered to her MiB survey's 11th question.

The MiB respondents were asked to list positive effects that maternity leaves have had on their careers and career development. Consequently, most of the respondents came up with various answers.

One effect that is mostly brought up by the mothers is that the time of maternity leaves offers in some terms a break from everything and everyone to balance and sort out their personal needs together with their professional needs.

The time off gives a new perspective and in some cases it motivates to even begin new studies. Some women have decided to use the time of maternity leaves to expand their social circle through new hobbies or voluntary work.

In the US, when mothers have the right to unpaid leave, it is usually the advantaged women who are most affected by the maternity leaves since they are the ones who can

afford unpaid time off work. On the other hand, where women have the right to paid leave, the inequality reduces because disadvantaged mothers can also afford maternity leave. (Rossin-Slater et al 2011, 4.)

Often, in states where paid leave is secured by law mothers are not aware of their rights. Even if as in the case of California where the state secures a certain period of paid leave, the mothers do not go on leave because they are afraid of the consequences that paid leave might have on their careers. (Rossin-Slater et al 2011, 5.)

When leaves are longer, especially if they are paid, there are more positive effects for the entire families. For instance, if maternity leaves are extended from six to 12 weeks new mothers' depressive symptoms reduce by 11 percent to 15 percent. Additionally, where fathers have the right to paternal leave, mothers are indicated to have more support from their spouses. (Weisberg and Galinsky 2014, 9.)

There are implications that employee engagement, morale, and productivity increase with mothers that have the right to paid maternity leave. After examining more than 1500 companies the results show that employee morale increases in more than 80 percent of the companies and employee productivity increases in more 70 percent of the companies. (BCG 2017.)

5.2.2 Maternity Leaves Affect Negatively Career and Career Development

The mothers of MiB were asked to list at least three negative effects of maternity leaves on career and career development. The answers can be put in three groups:

- A. Facts
- B. Uncertainties
- C. Assumptions

Most of the women listed three negative effects, facts (A), they had in reality because of their maternity leaves. The most commonly mentioned effect was the so-called gap on the CV. The common belief is that a gap in a CV does not look good when seeking for a job. Thus, respondents argue that a membership and activeness in MiB is an effective way to compensate the gap on the CV that derived from the duration of a maternity leave.

Additionally, in group A, women mention facts such as demotion of position and withdrawal or a postponing of promotion that took place despite it being planned before taking the maternity leave. Finally, when returning to work the respondents say that especially in male-driven industries such as IT there is a stigma and pressure to constantly having to prove their professional abilities are still existent despite the new role as a mother. The

stigmatization begins at the time a new mother announces her pregnancy at the workplace. Additionally, when returning back the respondents notice that they get lower salaries than their colleagues who have used the time towards their careers.

What is often mentioned as a fact is that respondents have to choose between working hours or children. There is little possibility for the respondents to work on those shifts that they would initially want to. Other negative effects of maternity leaves include opportunity to flexibility at work, especially if the children are small. Additionally, when children tend to be bad sleepers mothers do not feel to have the right amount of energy for work. Finally, the respondents use the term of constant bad conscience because they are constantly putting effort to balance between work and children.

In group B, the respondents mention their uncertainties that they have had as negative effects. For instance, they feel uncertain when staying away from work for a long period. Other insecurities are for instance returning to a lower position after the maternity leave or not having a place to return to at all.

In the last group of negative effects respondents list some of their assumptions. Some respondents were thinking if they would get promoted if they were still working.

In the US where most of the employed mothers do not have access to paid parental leave they have no other option than taking short leaves. The short leaves are under six weeks. The negative effect is that either mothers return to work exhausted and stressed, not ready to perform or they decide to quit. (Weisberg and Galinsky 2014, 8.)

To distribute these results to a wider audience and on the request of the commissioning organization I wrote an article titled *Työpaikan perheystävällisyys ja joustot edesauttavat äitien töihinpaluuta* which was published in Mothers in Business Ry's official homepage on 13th March 2019. The full text can be found in appendix 3 (Binaku-Hajrullahu 2019).

5.3 Recommendations

This chapter includes the recommendations of the thesis. First, the recommendations cover a parental leave reform which is the MiB's ideal parental leave system. Next the recommendations cover reasons why MiB ry should become international.

5.3.1 Parental Leave Reform Designed by MiB

MiB wants to introduce a reform of the parental leave system to companies and the government. The reform's initial base is equality. This reform eases the problems that have been studied through the RQ and IQs of this thesis. It is important for companies to create family-friendly organisational cultures and point out that parental leaves are to be equally shared between the two parents.

The parental leave reform is an effective way towards diminishing the negative and long-lasting effects that mothers encounter in their careers and career development. The reform will eventually change the attitudes towards the sharing of childcare.

Based on the research findings and theoretical readings during the thesis process mothers often feel that they have difficulty in managing a balance between childcare and career, they face prejudice in the working environment for becoming mothers and they are affected by career interruptions in several ways, such as in wages or retirement.

The next step for MiB is to find the correct channels to affect the organizational and governmental decision makers. For instance, there is a theoretical list in chapter 2.4 created by Burke and Cooper showing that companies need to make some measurements and comparisons for their loss of talent that occurs when mothers do not return to working life. Additionally, it proves that companies need to realize how are women's and men's career paths different. This list needs to be recognized by employers.

When the reform takes place and the effects can be measured, MiB should consider the possibility to find an organization in the US that has similar aims and principles and share the reform there. Another option is to co-operate with American companies and share the idea of the reform with the companies. Currently, MiB is only aiming to work in a national level.

5.3.2 MiB to Operate in the US

To show the significance of MiB operating in the US, I have compiled a SWOT analysis which is in the table below. SWOT is an analysis of an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, its opportunities for growth and improvement, and the threats the external environment presents to its survival (Harrison 2010, 92).

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proof of concept (POC)	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good brand or image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of experience in international operations
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The base of members and volunteers who have knowledge and know-how in different industries • Enlarge the network and offer more variety to the existing members 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different cultures • Different historical background of the maternity leaves • The US law and regulations

Table 2. SWOT analysis for MiB operating in the US

Referring to Table 2. There are strengths and opportunities for MiB to operate in the US. The main point in strengths is the so-called proof of concept. MiB operations are proven to be effective in Finland for instance through different events and the amount of members it withholds. This creates the potential to operate in the US. Additionally, in strengths MiB has created a good image and brand which mothers and employers want to join. One of MiB's opportunities is the knowledge, know-how and expertise of the members and volunteers of MiB that can be used to enter the US and cooperate with American companies. The significant opportunity is to enlarge the network internationally and offer more variety to the existing members.

Contrary to the strengths and opportunities, there are weaknesses and threats in the SWOT analysis. The weaknesses and threats are mainly composed of the US maternity leaves system. An internal weakness of MiB is the lack of experience in operating in an international environment. Threats include for instance the different cultures between Finland and the US – there are different work cultures and different practices regarding for instance organizing events. Additionally, there are different historical backgrounds of the maternity leave systems which can be hard to change. Contrary to Finland, in the US the law and regulations do not facilitate efforts to change maternity leave systems.

5.4 Validity and Reliability of the study

The reliability of my quantitative and qualitative research findings would have changed to a more positive direction if I had a time frame added to the RQ and IQs. Not only that, my research would have been easier and the respondents of the MiB survey would have been clearer with their answers, adding also the validity of the study.

Adding to the validity of the survey answers, there are around 4000 members in MiB of which only 136 members responded. The sample area was not vast enough. The presumption is that this resulted from the inconvenient time that the survey was sent to the

MiB members during the time of summer breaks. There was probably little motivation to volunteer to be part of a survey during a summer break.

5.5 Risks of the Study

The main risk of this thesis is the analysis of qualitative data. For instance, analysing the MiB survey answers which are in a textual form can be incorrect because of how I interpret the answers. Also, mothers who responded to the survey are aged 24-54 and they have had their maternity leaves decades ago, months ago or days ago or they are currently on their maternity leaves. Data can be ephemeral or corruptible, meaning that data can change even if asked by the same people but in different times and the further away we are from events the more possibility there is for inaccuracy. (Walliman 2010, 65).

The respondents of the MiB mothers work in various industries, and as it is also mentioned explicitly by one mother that she works in maritime industry where it is impossible to for instance offer flexible working hours to mothers, the results of Finnish mothers cannot be classified into a specific industry of work.

Additionally, there are over 4000 members in MiB of which only 136 responded to the survey. This equals to represent only ca. 3 percent of the MiB member base. The sample is rather small.

The analysis of American mothers has a somewhat different approach compared to the analysis of Finnish mothers. For the American mothers I have chosen a couple of sources of which I have collected the necessary data. The risk lies in the amount and quality of data, and that I do not have the possibility to confirm my findings such as with the mothers of MiB. If I have any questions regarding the survey answers of the MiB mothers I can easily contact the MiB. This does not apply to the American data.

Last but not least, a risk regarding to the study of this thesis is the incorrect delimitation of the study. The delimitation did not include a time frame. Consequently, for instance when analysing the MiB survey there were difficulties in understanding the real amount of mothers returning to working life.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

The topic of women and mothers in the workforce is a widely discussed topic in an international level. As I have included in this thesis, there are various theories on the effects

that women have from maternity leaves and that they begin already from the announcement of the pregnancy. There are unfortunately obstacles that women face due to historical perceptions and stereotypes regarding gender roles.

Because of the nature of my studies I was intrigued to comprehend and research why do companies not work towards diminishing the loss of talent due to their non-family-friendly culture. Many respondents of the survey had decided to quit their jobs because of the non-family-friendly cultures. Many of those respondents were in high positions, however they decided to quit.

There are many companies which have programmes designed for mothers who return to work. Comparing the maternity leaves, there are obvious challenges in the US system on maternity leave – however companies can use the system for their own advantage and attract mothers to work with their own policies.

Another interesting topic to research is to understand what is the amount of leave that mothers need to return back to work in good emotional and physical condition. Additionally, it would be beneficial for the companies and the mother employees to find tools and ways to engage with mothers during the maternity leaves as well – not to completely exclude them. For instance, there are implications of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory that it plays a significant role in employee satisfaction and performance (Nyameh 2013, 43). According to Nyameh's interpretation of the theory when employees discover that their organization cares about their career development, employees will offer their best work for the organization. (Nyameh 2013) Thus, it is important to showcase that companies care of the mothers' career development even during their inactive periods from work.

5.7 Reflection on My Learning Process

I was mostly surprised of two matters during my thesis process. First of all, I want to thank each and every member of MiB who were kind to answer my survey but were also willing to cooperate and share their contact information in case I had the need for further research during my thesis. Second, I became increasingly interested in the theme of this thesis because there are many theories proving mothers' obstacles and even my own personal feelings I had when I announced my own pregnancy at work.

What I learned especially from the MiB respondents is that contrary to the traditional mother role, the maternity leave time is used for personal and professional achievements as well. Nowadays, mothers can be opening a new business, they take on new roles as

members of different organizations or they even finish their PhDs during their maternity leaves. Often, this is the case in Finland. While in the US it was a surprise that not all mothers are entitled to a paid maternity leave. It is unfortunate because mothers indeed need time to heal and return to work with good energy levels in order to be productive enough. The US' system is as unequal as it could be. However, companies from different industries are understanding that they can attract and retain mothers with family-friendly policies. Additionally, US companies understand that they eventually differentiate from their competitors when offering for instance paid maternity leave.

All in all, the thesis process has been academically and personally challenging. However, against my assumptions the process has been slower. Analysing the MiB survey answers was not as easy as I assumed and choosing the relevant theories took more time than initially expected. Regardless, I am satisfied with the outcome because I gained information that I can use in my future career in HRM and my personal life as a mother. Last but certainly not least, I was happy to share my findings with an organization such as Mothers in Business Ry.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. MiB Survey Form

BASIC INFORMATION

1. What age group do you belong in?
 - a. 18-24
 - b. 25-54
 - c. 55 or over
2. What is your current job position?
3. What industry do you work in?

MATERNITY LEAVES

4. How many children do you have?
5. When were your children born? OR what is the estimated birth year?
6. Please, list when did you take OR plan to take your maternity leaves together with the duration of the maternity leaves?

RETURNING TO WORK

7. How many times did you return to work after your maternity leave(s)?
 - a. Never (I changed my job every time)
 - b. 1
 - c. 2-3
 - d. 4 or more
8. What were your reasons for not returning to work?
9. Did your maternity leave(s) affect your career?

Maternity leaves affected my career positively.	1	2	3	Maternity leaves affected my career negatively.
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10. Please, mention 3 positive effects maternity leaves have had on your career.
11. Please, mention 3 negative effects maternity leaves have had on your career.
12. Did your maternity leave(s) affect your career development?

Maternity leaves affected my career development positively.	1	2	3	Maternity leaves affected my career development negatively.
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13. Please, mention 2 positive effects maternity leaves have had on your career development?
14. Please, mention 3 negative effects maternity leaves have had on your career development?

EMPLOYER ATTRACTING YOU BACK

15. What sort of adjustments did your employer offer to attract you back to work?
 - a. Flexible working hours
 - b. Possibility to work remotely
 - c. Possibility to work part-time
 - d. Other adjustments
16. What were the other adjustments that attracted you?

COMMENTS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

- 17. Optional: Please leave your contact information if you are willing to be contacted further regarding my thesis.**
- 18. Please leave your comments and thoughts regarding this survey.**

Appendix 2. MiB Blog Post

Työpaikan perheystävällisyys ja joustot edesauttavat äitien töihinpaluuta

Tässä blogissa kerron opinnäytetyöstäni, jonka tein Mothers in Business MiB Ry:lle. Kerron teille lukijoille, mistä sain ideani sekä jaan opinnäytetyöni tärkeimmät tulokset.

Opinnäytetyöni keskittyy erityisesti Suomen perhevapaiden erilaisiin vaikutuksiin naisen uralla ja urakehityksessä. Lisäksi, koska opiskelen kansainvälisellä linjalla henkilöstöhallintoa - vertaan Suomen perhevapaamallia Yhdysvaltojen malliin. Parasta koko opinnäytetyössä oli huomata, että naisten ja äitien tunteisiin ja esim. työyhteisöjen käyttäytymiselle äitejä kohtaan löytyi erilaisia teorioita. Opinnäytetyöni tulokset pohjautuvat MiB:n jäsenille lähetettyyn kyselyyn sekä tutkittuun teoriaan. MiB:n kyselyyn vastasi yhteensä 136 jäsentä.

Idea

Sain ideani opinnäytetyöhöni synnytysosastolla, jonne jouduin opinnoista ja töistä vuodelepoon. Olin saamassa esikoisemme, ja ajattelin että lapsi tulisi joka tapuksessa. Minua harmitti, että jouduin odottamaan synnytystä kaukana kodista. Kaiken lisäksi, minun kurssit olivat vielä kesken ja olin töissä siinä samassa. Synnytyslaukkukin oli vielä pakkaamatta.

Samalla osastolla oli monta muuta naista, joiden urat tai opinnot olivat keskeytyneet. Itseäni pelotti eniten aika, jonka suunnittelin viettäväni esikoisemme kanssa syntymän jälkeen. Ajattelin, että jos pidän liian pitkän äitiysloman en ehkä jaksaisi jatkaa opintojani sen jälkeen. Toisaalta, jos pitäisin liian lyhyen äitiysloman minulla oli suurempi riski masentua. Mietin, että olisiko silloin huono äiti, jos jatkaisin opintojani enkä viettäisi aikaa kotona esikoisemme kanssa.

Etsin netistä tietoa uranaisista ja -äideistä. Onnekseni päädyin MiB:n kotisivuille, josta sain ymmärtää että nainen voi olla hyvä äiti vaikka hän menestyy urallaan samaan aikaan. Seurauksena päätin kirjoittaa opintotyöni perhevapaiden erilaisista vaikutuksista uraan ja urakehitykseen.

Töihinpaluu ja perheystävällisyys

Kyselyn tulosten mukaan, vastanneista äideistä noin 16 prosenttia on vaihtanut työpaikkaansa jokaisen äitiysloman jälkeen. Äitiysloman aikana, moni äiti kokee että hän on muuttunut ihmisenä ja ymmärtää paremmin mikä on itselle tärkeää työyhteisössä. Suurin osa äideistä mainitsee, että työpaikan perheystävällisyys vaikuttaa eniten päätökseen palata työelämään. MiB-kyselyn tulokset näyttävät nimittäin, että vain yksittäiset kyselyyn vastanneet äidit päättävät viettää kolme vuotta kotona lapsensa kanssa, mikä on äitiys- ja vanhempainvapaan sekä hoitovapaan aika yhdistettynä. Lisäksi, työhön-paluun vaikuttavat työn määräaikaisuus sekä työn joustavuus.

Työpaikkojen joustot

Verrattuna Yhdysvaltoihin, Suomessa äitien taloudellinen asema on turvattu tuilla, joita äidit saavat perhevapaiden aikana. Kyselyn tulosten mukaan tämä osaltaan vaikuttaa äitien päätökseen pysyä kotona pienen lapsen kanssa vain yksittäistapauksissa. Tämän lisäksi, äitien päätökseen palata nykyiseen työpaikkaan tai työelämään ylipäänsä vaikuttavat erilaiset joustot, joita työpaikat suovat.

Valitettavasti, jopa 22 % vastaajista ilmoittaa, että heille ei ole ikinä urallaan tarjottu minkäänlaista joustoa. Eniten tarjottu jousto on joustavat työtunnit (57% vastaajista). Toiseksi eniten, tarjotaan mahdollisuutta tehdä etätyötä (49%) ja osa-aikatyötä (49%). Muita joustoja (38%) ovat vastaajien mukaan, esimerkiksi: työnantajan tarjoama lastenhoito, mahdollisuus uudelleenjärjestellä työtehtäviä, työntekijän mahdollisuus vaikuttaa itse työtehtäviin ja työtunteihin. Lisäksi, työnantaja esim. tarjoaa erilaisia kehityskeskusteluja tai mahdollisuuden tuoda lapsi työpaikalle tarvittaessa.

Perhevapaiden erilaiset vaikutukset

Suurin osa vastaajista puhuu perhevapaasta positiivisessa hengessä. Vanhempainvapaan aikana vastaajat kertovat, että perinteisen kotiäidin roolin sijaan aikaa käytetään itsensä kehittämiseen, verkostoitumiseen sekä uuden elämän perspektiivin löytämiseen. Vastaajat mainitsevat ja suosittelevat, että MiB tarjoaa näitä mahdollisuuksia.

OECD:n (2017) tutkimuksen mukaan, OECD:n valtioissa monen naisen uran ja -kehityksen käännekohta on lapsen syntymä. Kun ura keskeytyy, se vaikuttaa esim. naisen palkkaan ja jopa eläkekertymään. Eläkekertymään vaikuttaa myös se, että äidit usein päätyvät tekemään osa-aikatyötä tai heidän työstään maksetaan matalampaa palkkaa. Tutkimus myös näyttää, että äitien ja isien työttömyyden välillä on eroa. Usein äideillä on matalampi palkka joten he jäävät kotiin ja isät hankkivat perheen elannon. Ero on vielä suurempi silloin, kun äideillä on matalampi koulutustaso.

Myös MiB:n kyselyn tuloksista kävi ilmi, että äitejä ei houkuttele lähteä töihin takaisin, jos oma palkka on matala tai puoliso voi hankkia riittävän elannon perheelle. Tässä, verrattuna Yhdysvaltoihin Suomen perhevapaamalli antaa äideille enemmän henkilökohtaista vapautta päättää sopivasta ajankohdasta palata työelämään. Yhdysvalloissa vain 12 prosentilla väestöstä on oikeutta pitää vapaata lapsen syntymän jälkeen.

Kiitokset

Haluan lopettaa kiittäen Mothers in Business MiB Ry:n jäseniä siitä että vastasitte opinnäytetyöni kyselyyn. Ilman teitä opinnäytetyöni olisi ollut vain idea, johon löysin teoriaa. Opinnäytetyöni julkaistaan Theseuksessa maaliskuun lopussa.