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## Employer discrimination shame revealed in new survey

Unions say a shocking new survey proves more regulation is required to protect families as employers cannot be trusted not to discriminate.

The Australian Human Rights Commission report, 'National Review on Discrimination Related to Pregnancy, Parental Leave and Return to Work' found discrimination around pregnancy and return to work is much worse than previously thought.

ACTU Secretary, Dave Oliver, said, "It is a national disgrace that one in two women experience discrimination and one third don't return to work because of employer attitudes."

"The ACTU called for this inquiry because unions are getting increased rates of complaints from members."

Examples include:

- A supermarket worker whose requests to have heavy lifting duties changed due to her complex pregnancy were ignored and she ended up being hospitalised, her daughter was born 6 weeks premature and suffers asthma and insufficiently developed lungs.
- A pregnant bakery assistant who had to scrub thick grime off the floor on her hands and knees, move machinery and heavy sacks of flour on slippery floors went into labour at 32 weeks. Her baby nearly died and had to spend time in intensive care.
- Countless women who were told their position was no longer available while they were on maternity leave.

"This survey reinforces just how big of a problem employer attitudes are for families who want to stay in the workforce and have a family.

"Women are forced to take pay cuts, miss out on opportunities, are on the receiving end of criticism and forced into unsafe situations, all because they are pregnant or asking for flexibility to care for dependants."

"Over a quarter of men also experience negative effects if they decide to help with caring duties.

"We need urgent amendments to the Fair Work Act so that employers are legally obliged to seriously consider an employee's requests for flexible arrangements.

"Employees should have the right to appeal to the Fair Work Commission if an employer unreasonably refuses a request.

"It's time Australian laws and regulations protected workers from employers who shamelessly discriminate.

"The Government must ensure workplace laws don't make life harder for families and support unscrupulous employers."

Mr Oliver said the Abbott Government was attempting to implement policies that would worsen workplace discrimination.

"They want to introduce individual agreements which would give employers even more power over their workers and would no doubt result in women being forced to trade off pay and conditions," he said.

**Media contact: Carla De Campo, 0410 579 575 and Eleni Hale 0418 793 885**