REVIEW ARTICLE

Causes and Consequences of Mothers' Workforce Re-entry After Career Breaks: A Systematic Literature Review

Jacob Ting King Soon[1]* iD **, Donna Barclay[2]** iD **, Nivakan Sritharan[3]** iD

[1]Faculty of Business, Design and Arts, Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus, Jalan Simpang Tiga, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
Email: jting@swinburne.edu.my
[2]Faculty of Business, Design and Arts, Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus, Jalan Simpang Tiga, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
Email: dtan@swinburne.edu.my
[3]Faculty of Business, Design and Arts, Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus, Jalan Simpang Tiga, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
Email: nsritharan@swinburne.edu.my

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR (*):
Jacob Ting King Soon
(jting@swinburne.edu.my)

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ABSTRACT

The working conditions of mothers returning to the workforce after a career break have garnered increasing scholarly attention due to their implications for gender equality, workplace inclusivity, and societal well-being. While this area has been widely examined, there remains a need to consolidate existing findings to identify critical knowledge gaps and inform future research. This study presents a systematic literature review on the causes and consequences of mothers' return to work following childbirth or career interruption. Guided by the PRISMA protocol, 42 peer-reviewed articles were selected and analysed through rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure a comprehensive dataset. The review highlights that key factors influencing mothers' return to work include government support, individual motivations such as financial necessity, organisational policies, and individual agency, including career aspirations. The consequences of re-entering the workforce span individual, familial, and societal domains and are often characterised by emotional stress and logistical challenges. This review categorises the multifaceted causes and outcomes associated with maternal workforce reintegration, identifies prevailing research gaps, and proposes directions for future studies. It offers a theoretical contribution to understanding the intersection between working conditions and career re-entry, while also providing policy recommendations aimed at fostering supportive environments for returning mothers.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by synthesizing insights on mothers' workforce re-entry after a career break. This study is one of very few studies which have investigated both causes and consequences using a systematic review. The paper's primary contribution is finding that institutional and individual factors interact dynamically.

1. Introduction

Factors influencing women's return to work after childbirth are multifaceted and interrelated, encompassing childcare accessibility, workplace flexibility, cultural and institutional support, as well as professional considerations (Government of United Kingdom, 2018; International Labour Organization, 2024). When it comes to the availability and quality of childcare services, this can be a critical factor in facilitating mothers' re-entry into the workforce. While workplace-based or extended-hours childcare can be advantageous, its effectiveness depends on alignment with parents' work schedules. Research, such as that by Skouteris et al. (2007), highlights mixed findings regarding the impact of workplace-based childcare compared to external options, underscoring that the quality of childcare often outweighs its location.

Another important factor in transitioning women more seamlessly from child rearing back to the workplace is the availability of flexible work arrangements (FWA), which provide employees with greater autonomy over when, where, or how they work, deviating from traditional schedules. These arrangements offer mutual benefits for employees and employers and are essential for mothers balancing professional and familial responsibilities. In the healthcare sector, for instance, FWAs, such as part-time roles and adaptable shifts, are highly valued. A study by Poh et al. (2022) conducted in Malaysia found that FWAs improved work-life balance and reduced stress among healthcare workers, contributing to higher job satisfaction and better management of personal and professional responsibilities. However, a study by Hokke et al. (2024) in Australia revealed that while FWAs provide health benefits, the reliance on informal arrangements suggests that existing workplace provisions often fail to adequately meet parents' needs for family-related support.

A further factor that underpins the successful re-entry of mothers to workplaces is that the workplace culture be supportive. This significantly influences mothers' return-to-work experiences. Studies, including those from Western Sydney University, highlight the positive impact of collaborative networks and an accommodating attitude toward parenting. Additionally, structured parental leave policies and career planning frameworks contribute to smoother workforce reintegration. In healthcare, a sector with a high proportion of female workers, retaining staff post-maternity leave is vital. Policies that support breastfeeding in the workplace, provide on-site childcare, and offer career mentoring for mothers have been shown to positively influence their decision to return to work. Therefore, this study intend to find answers for the following research questions.

  i.   What are the causes of returning mothers to work?
  ii. What are the consequences of returning mothers to work?

2. Methodology

2.1. Identification

This study is a systematic literature review that employed key procedures from systematic review methodology, following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and rigor. After selecting initial keywords, related terms were identified using dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopedias, and previous research. All relevant terms were then used to create search phrases specifically for the Scopus, Taylors and Francis, and Spring Link

databases (Table 1). In the first phase of the systematic review, 4,065 papers related to the research aim were successfully retrieved from these databases (see Table 2).

Table 1: The Search String

| Article Database	The Search Strings
Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY(("mothers returning to work" OR "career break" OR "return to workforce" OR "working mothers" OR "career reentry" OR "employment gap" OR "career transition") ("mothers returning to work" OR "career break" OR "return to workforce" OR "working mothers" OR "career reentry" OR "employment gap" OR "career transition")) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE,"ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Female") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Working Mother") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Employment") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Mothers") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Mother") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Breast Feeding") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Women, Working") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Working Mothers") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Pregnancy") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Women") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Female Worker") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Womens Employment") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Motherhood") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Maternal Welfare")) AND AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE,"final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE,"English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (OA,"all"))) Date of Access: 25.01.2025
Taylor and Francis	[[All: "working mothers"] OR [All: "career transition"] OR [All: "career break"]] AND [[All: "organizational policies"] OR [All: "workplace culture"] OR [All: "flexible work"] OR [All: "work-life balance"]] AND [Article Type: Article] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/2020 TO 12/31/2024)] Date of Access: 25.01.2025
Spring Link	("mothers returning to work" OR "career reentry" OR "career transition") AND ("organizational support" OR "workplace culture" OR "flexible work") AND ("Australasia" OR "Australia" OR "New Zealand") Date of Access: 25.01.2025

The screening process assesses potentially relevant research items to determine their alignment with the predefined research questions. Ultimately, 42 articles proceeded to the final stage, where study-specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of Articles Being Reviewed and Excluded

Stages	One	Two	Three	Four
Number of Article being Reviewed	4,065 (3,578 + 461+26)	3,797	1,185	42
Number of Article being Excluded	268 (266+2+0)	2,612 (2,177+421+14)	1,143 (1,130+5+8)	NA

Research papers were prioritized as they are the primary source of actionable insights. Consequently, reviews, meta-syntheses, meta-analyses, books, book series, chapters, and conference proceedings were excluded from the study (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Selection Criterion in Searching Articles
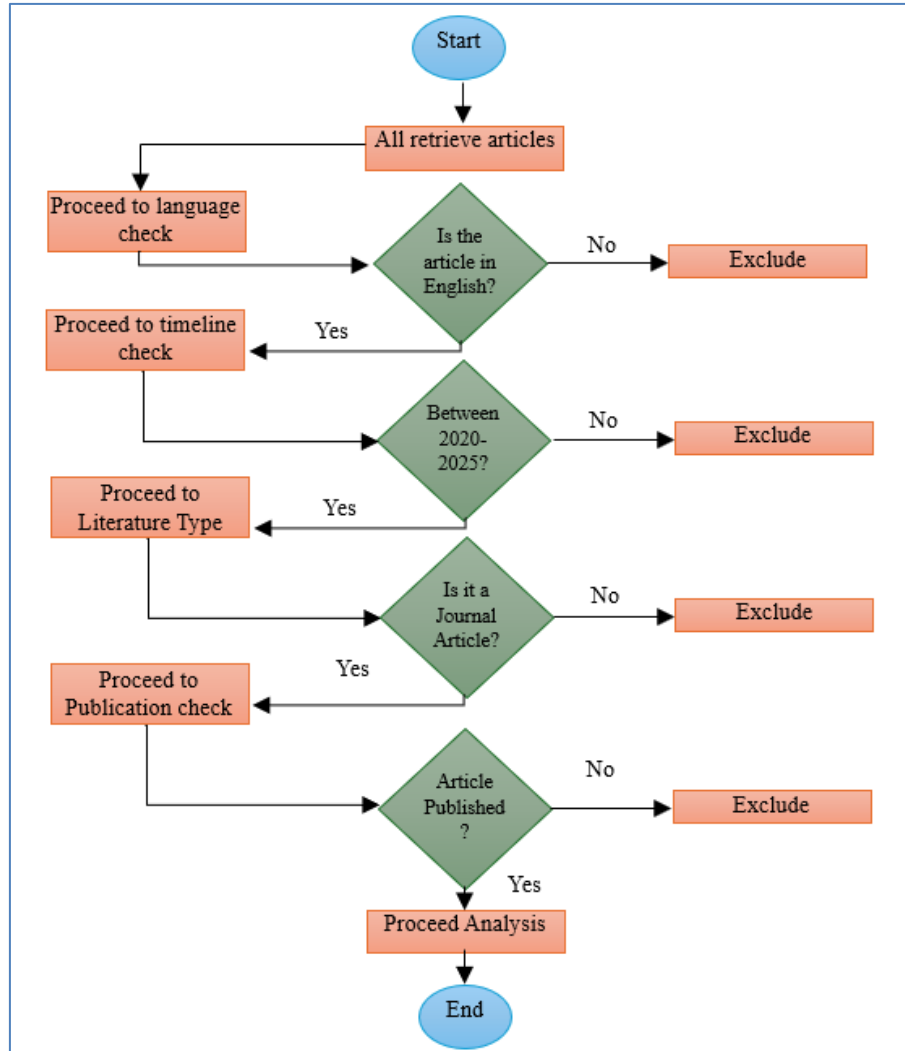
2.2. Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria

During the third stage, referred to as the eligibility evaluation, a total of 1,185 articles were gathered. At this stage, the research team carefully examined the titles and content of each article to verify their compliance with the inclusion criteria and relevance to the study's objectives. Following this assessment, 42 articles advanced to the fourth stage for a more detailed review (see Table 2).

2.3. Data Abstraction and Analysis

This study utilised an integrative analysis to review and synthesise various research designs as part of its assessment methodology. The primary objective was to identify relevant topics and subtopics. The theme development process began with data collection, during which the researchers examined key studies on returning mothers and their working pattern. The methodologies and findings of these studies were

systematically analysed. The lead author worked closely with co-authors to extract themes from the collected data, maintaining a log to document observations, insights, uncertainties, and other relevant reflections that supported data interpretation. To ensure consistency in theme development, the authors compared their analyses and resolved any discrepancies through discussion and consensus. Additionally, two experts specialising in the women workforce and their current behaviour reviewed the findings to validate the identified challenges. This expert review process strengthened the credibility of the sub-themes by ensuring their relevance, clarity, and adequacy. Based on expert feedback, the authors adjusted where necessary.

3. Results

3.1. Causes of Mothers Returning to the Workplace after having Children

The causes that influence mothers' return to work after childbirth suggest that important factors include the role of government support, individual motivations (such as, financial reason), organisational policies and individual agency (for example, career aspirations). Each of these will be considered in turn below.

3.1.1. Government Support

In the article "The Impact of Paid Parental Leave on Labor Supply and Employment Outcomes in Australia", Broadway et al. (2020) evaluated Australia's Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme, introduced in 2011, on maternal employment. Using statistical analysis of administrative and survey data, the study identifies several key outcomes. Firstly, labour force participation following the introduction of PPL modestly increased maternal labour force attachment, particularly for those returning within 6–12 months postpartum. Secondly, the PPL scheme had a positive impact on job continuity and improved the likelihood of mothers resuming work with their pre-childbirth employer, thus reducing employer turnover. Next, with respect to socioeconomic impact of PPL, it was found that lower-income and less-educated mothers benefited the most, suggesting that PPL has the potential to address workforce inequalities. However, when it comes to working hours, PPL had minimal effect on post-return working hours, indicating a persistence of part-time patterns.

The authors argued that PPL has been significant in supporting maternal employment and job retention while also suggesting the need for further research on its long-term career impacts.

3.1.2. Individual Factors

The decision to re-enter the workforce after a career break is shaped by a complex interplay of individual drivers, such as financial necessity, career aspirations, and self-identity alongside broader societal and institutional influences. To begin with, financial necessity often emerges as a primary motivator, especially for women from lower-income backgrounds, as it provides a pathway to economic stability (Qian et al., 2023; Ingenfeld, 2021). In addition, career aspirations and the desire to maintain a professional identity play significant roles. Many women aim to reclaim their pre-childbirth roles or explore new opportunities for personal and professional growth (Kaushiva & Joshi, 2020; Noon & Nieuwerburgh, 2020).

Nevertheless, barriers persist that hinder successful workforce reintegration. For instance, the lack of re-skilling opportunities and unsupportive workplace cultures represent significant challenges. Studies indicate that policies such as mentorship programs, career identity reinforcement initiatives, and structured career resumption pathways can be beneficial. However, they often fail to address skill development gaps, particularly for women who have been out of the workforce for extended periods (Singh & Vanka, 2020; Kaushiva & Joshi, 2020). Moreover, education and skills act as critical enablers, fostering confidence and agency while empowering women to navigate workforce re-entry effectively (Wassink & Hagan, 2020; Singh & Vanka, 2020).

At the same time, societal and cultural norms often position women as primary caregivers, creating significant challenges in balancing family responsibilities with professional aspirations. For example, in many South Asian societies, cultural expectations require women to leave their jobs after childbirth. These ingrained gender roles create obstacles to re-entering the workforce (Kaushiva & Joshi, 2020; Singh & Vanka, 2020). Therefore, the interplay between financial necessity and career aspirations highlights the multidimensional nature of workforce re-entry. It indicates not only personal factors but also the socio-economic and cultural contexts that shape women's decisions.

3.1.3. Institutional and organisational factors

Institutional and organisational factors also play a pivotal role in shaping women's re-entry decisions, particularly through the implementation of family-friendly workplace policies. For instance, initiatives such as flexitime, maternity leave support, and professional development opportunities significantly boost women's confidence in balancing work and family responsibilities (Lott, 2020; Clarkson & Hind, 2024). However, the effectiveness of these policies often depends on broader national-level frameworks. In Germany, for example, the introduction of parental leave and expanded childcare has reduced reliance on organizational policies like flextime, highlighting the need for a comprehensive and integrated policy approach (Lott, 2020). On the other hand, regional variations in policy support create stark differences in women's re-entry experiences. Countries like Germany, with robust parental leave policies and subsidized childcare, provide greater support for mothers balancing work and family life. In contrast, regions with limited support, such as many parts of South Asia, impose significant barriers to workforce re-entry after childbirth (Kaushiva & Joshi, 2020).

Additionally, shared caregiving responsibilities within families, particularly through male partners' involvement in childcare and flexible work arrangements—further facilitate women's employment re-entry, whether part-time or full-time (Buchler & Lutz, 2021; Hondralis & Kleinert, 2021). Nevertheless, achieving full-time re-entry often requires external support beyond familial contributions (Buchler & Lutz, 2021). Despite these advancements, organizational support mechanisms frequently fall short in addressing the need for targeted re-skilling or providing the emotional and psychological support essential for managing the dual pressures of caregiving and career (Costantini et al., 2021; Kaushiva & Joshi, 2020). Furthermore, societal perceptions of working mothers—especially during early child-rearing stages—can either stigmatize or support their return to work, depending on cultural attitudes (Costantini et al., 2021).

Crucially, workplace culture influences women's decisions to re-enter the workforce. Organizational policies that acknowledge career penalties, such as the gendered division of labour and professional setbacks, can significantly ease this transition. Similarly, policies that promote flexibility for men—such as reduced working hours or schedule autonomy—indirectly facilitate women's re-entry by enabling shared caregiving responsibilities (Buchler & Lutz, 2021). These findings suggest that while organizational support is essential, it becomes most effective when complemented by broader societal and policy reforms.

Nonetheless, a lack of awareness about maternity support and inconsistencies in organizational policies can undermine these efforts (Wassink & Hagan, 2020; Noon & Nieuwerburgh, 2020). Peer networks, community support, and employer practices also shape women's re-entry decisions. Support from family, friends, and colleagues can empower mothers to return to work, but societal expectations regarding family-career balance often create emotional dilemmas, leaving many women feeling isolated or conflicted (Noon & Nieuwerburgh, 2020). Notably, institutional reforms and tailored workplace strategies are particularly effective in addressing barriers to workforce re-entry, especially for women in male-dominated industries or those grappling with childcare challenges and job segregation (Bächmann et al., 2020; Costantini et al., 2021).

3.1.4. Individual agency and Self-determination

Individual agency and self-determination are equally critical in overcoming structural and societal barriers. For example, women in higher-income brackets often benefit from increased geographical mobility and access to fast-growing firms, while less-educated mothers continue to face persistent wage penalties due to gendered job segregation (Qian et al., 2023; Milewski & Brehm, 2023). This disparity not only affects mothers' immediate ability to return to work but also impacts their long-term career trajectories. Women actively mobilize their resources, such as education and skills to secure better opportunities and negotiate their roles in the labour market (Laffers & Schmidpeter, 2021; Ingenfeld, 2021). However, the intersection of limited policies with societal factors, such as income and education, exacerbates the challenges faced by disadvantaged mothers (Ingenfeld, 2021; Milewski & Brehm, 2023).

Despite these efforts, uneven re-entry outcomes persist across demographics. Women aiming for senior roles or positions in sectors like IT or the built environment face pronounced barriers, as technical skills and career progression are crucial in these fields (Gumy et al., 2022; Clarkson & Hind, 2024). Consequently, some women experience attrition, further compounding workforce re-entry challenges. Nonetheless, supportive workplace policies, such as flexible hours and part-time options can mitigate these barriers, enabling more women to return to the workforce (Bächmann et al., 2020). Ultimately, societal and cultural norms, combined with regional differences in policy support, continue to shape the pathways for women's successful workforce re-entry.

3.2. Consequences of Mothers Returning to the Workplace after having Children

3.2.1. Impact on Women's Professional Growth and Career Trajectories

Re-entering the workforce has many-sided effects on women's professional growth and career trajectories. These are often influenced by identity tensions, societal expectations, and structural barriers. Women returning after maternity leave frequently face

challenges in balancing professional and caregiving roles, leading to identity conflicts and difficult career decisions (Cross, 2024; Berger et al., 2020; Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2023). For some, the transition back to work creates opportunities to reactivate their professional identities and realign career goals, especially when supported by organisational policies, diversity strategies, and workplace assistance (Freeney et al., 2024; Das et al., 2024). However, barriers such as deskilling, job instability, and workplace culture can significantly deter women's professional advancement and limit leadership opportunities (Allen et al., 2024; Prickett, 2020).

The duration of maternity leave plays a pivotal role in shaping women's career trajectories. Shorter leave following birth and child rearing has been shown to improve labour market participation and wages (Makay, 2023). Conversely, prolonged leave can exacerbate career disruptions, leading to challenges in job performance, reduced readiness to return, or the choice of intensive parenting roles that delay re-entry into full-time work (Kerrane et al., 2022; Falletta et al., 2020). In specific fields such as technology or STEM, women may face additional pressures, including the imposter phenomenon, resource reduction, and unmet career expectations, which further complicate their professional reintegration and growth (Singh & Vanka, 2024; Varma & Sivarajan, 2024).

Studies have shown that supportive workplace environments, including supervisory guidance, emotional reassurance, and role models, have been identified as key enablers for women to overcome re-entry challenges and manage their professional aspirations with organisational opportunities (Costantini, 2022; Carluccio et al., 2020). Additionally, sectors like teaching offer a relatively accessible path for re-entry, providing stability and a greater likelihood of career continuation for women (Elsayed & Roch, 2021). Ultimately, women's re-entry into the workforce is a dynamic process influenced by individual circumstances, societal ideologies, and systemic supports, emphasising the need for policies and practices that foster inclusive and sustainable professional trajectories.

3.2.2. Psychosocial Effects

The psychosocial effects of workforce re-entry on returning women are complex, involving identity conflicts, emotional challenges, and mental health vulnerabilities. First-time mothers experience significant identity work as they navigate changes in personal, role, and collective identity (Cross, 2024). The tension between societal ideals of motherhood and professional expectations often amplifies emotional stress, guilt, and self-doubt, impacting their well-being and self-perception (Berger et al., 2020; Kerrane et al., 2022). This liminal state necessitates ongoing adjustments as women manage evolving roles and expectations while grappling with identity loss and uncertainty (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2023). These psychosocial effects are further intensified when re-entry is accompanied by challenges such as workplace attitudes, resource depletion, and work-home conflict, which require effective coping strategies to recover personal resources (Allen et al., 2024; Varma & Sivarajan, 2024).

Mental health challenges are particularly prominent during re-entry, as women experience heightened stress, anxiety, and depression, often exacerbated by logistical and professional barriers. Poor mental health impacts their overall well-being and their ability to manage the dual demands of work and caregiving effectively (Falletta et al., 2020; Prickett, 2020). Psychological stress related to job instability and resource

depletion can further reduce confidence, adding to emotional strain (Manukure et al., 2024; Singh & Vanka, 2024). However, workplace flexibility and supportive organizational structures, such as leave policies and childcare arrangements, can mitigate these effects and provide emotional relief (Makay, 2023; Costantini, 2022). Reliable childcare and supportive supervisors play a pivotal role in alleviating attachment anxiety and fostering work engagement, contributing to improved psychosocial well-being for returning mothers (Carluccio et al., 2020; Das et al., 2024). Moreover, social and relational factors significantly shape the psychosocial experience of workforce re-entry, helping women rebuild confidence and adapt to their professional roles. Emotional challenges, such as guilt and frustration, are alleviated through workplace support systems, including role models and co-worker assistance, which provide validation and encouragement (Costantini, 2022; Freeney et al., 2024). Supervisory guidance and inclusive workplace practices play a key role in fostering a sense of belonging and mitigating the imposter phenomenon, thereby reducing feelings of inadequacy and anxiety (Singh & Vanka, 2024). Ultimately, successful re-entry depends on systemic support that balances professional reintegration with emotional assurance, helping women manage psychosocial stress and rebuild their professional identities.

3.2.3. Implications on Family Dynamics and Child Development

Women's re-entry into the workforce has significant implications for family dynamics, primarily due to the interplay of reworked identities, logistical challenges, and societal expectations. The identity shifts that mothers experience during re-entry, as they reconcile caregiving with professional roles, influence their interactions with family members (Cross, 2024; Freeney et al., 2024). These changes are further shaped by societal norms, which often perpetuate traditional caregiving expectations, adding to the pressures on women to maintain seamless family roles (Berger et al., 2020; Melin, 2024). Logistical challenges, including fatigue and workplace demands, can strain work-life balance, reducing women's ability to engage effectively with their families (Allen et al., 2024). However, the effective use of resources and support systems can help mitigate these pressures, fostering improved integration between work and family roles (Varma & Sivarajan, 2024).

Workforce re-entry affects family dynamics by influencing caregiving responsibilities and maternal mental health. Stress from resource depletion and work-home conflict can strain familial relationships, stressing the importance of childcare arrangements and organizational support in facilitating transitions (Manukure et al., 2024; Das et al., 2024). Reliable childcare solutions alleviate maternal stress, enabling women to manage dual roles more effectively and positively impacting family interactions (Costantini, 2022). Conversely, job instability and workplace pressures can diminish maternal sensitivity and emotional availability, negatively affecting child development and family harmony (Prickett, 2020; Singh & Vanka, 2024). Workplace support systems that promote maternal well-being have been shown to create a less stressful home environment, fostering healthier family dynamics (Carluccio et al., 2020).

Societal and cultural norms play a crucial role in shaping how women balance work and family responsibilities, influencing the broader family environment. Persistent struggles with identity transitions and societal expectations often lead women to engage in intensive parenting, prioritizing family needs while juggling professional responsibilities (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2023; Kerrane et al., 2022). While shorter paid leave policies can

support economic stability and career advancement, longer leaves may enhance family bonding but delay economic contributions (Makay, 2023). Professions perceived as family-friendly, such as teaching, can provide an effective balance between work and caregiving roles, thereby supporting overall family well-being (Elsayed & Roch, 2021). As a result, women's re-entry into the workforce highlights the importance of systemic and cultural changes to alleviate pressures and ensure a balanced family dynamic.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Women's decisions to return to work are influenced by a combination of economic, societal, and personal factors. Economic stability and the need to contribute to household income are primary drivers, especially for women in dual-income households or those facing financial insecurity. Societal expectations, shaped by evolving gender norms, encourage women to balance professional aspirations with caregiving responsibilities, challenging traditional perceptions of motherhood. Personal fulfilment and the desire to maintain a professional identity also play significant roles, as many women seek intellectual stimulation, career advancement, or validation through work. Workplace policies, such as flexible scheduling, childcare support, and re-entry programs, can further encourage women to rejoin the workforce by alleviating logistical and emotional challenges. Additionally, cultural norms, access to education, and opportunities for professional development empower women to view re-entry as a pathway to independence and personal growth. Overall, women's return to work is multifaceted, reflecting a dynamic interplay of external demands and intrinsic motivations.

The consequences of women returning to work extend across individual, familial, and societal dimensions, often marked by emotional and logistical challenges. At the personal level, re-entry can trigger identity conflicts, psychological stress, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, particularly as women navigate work-life integration. Familial implications include shifts in family dynamics, where caregiving roles are redistributed, potentially straining relationships while also fostering resilience and adaptability. For children, maternal employment can influence developmental outcomes, mediated by the quality of childcare and parental involvement. At the societal level, women's workforce participation contributes to economic growth and shifts cultural narratives surrounding gender roles. However, systemic challenges like implicit bias, inadequate workplace support, and persistent gender norms can hinder seamless transitions. Effective childcare solutions, supportive workplaces, and equitable policies are critical for mitigating negative outcomes and enhancing the well-being of working mothers and their families.

The findings of this study emphasise the critical role of workplace support structures such as flexible work policies, re-entry programs, and childcare arrangements in shaping women's decisions to return to work and their subsequent career trajectories (Das et al., 2024; Costantini, 2022). While existing research highlights the short-term benefits of these supports in easing the transition back to work and mitigating stress, there is a significant gap in understanding their long-term impact on women's career advancement, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. For instance, while positive workplace support can alleviate immediate psychosocial challenges (Carluccio et al., 2020), the sustainability of these benefits over time and their influence on career progression remain underexplored. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of such workplace initiatives over extended periods.

Specifically, research could examine whether flexible policies and re-entry programs enable women to achieve parity in leadership roles, maintain work-life balance, and experience sustained well-being. Additionally, there is a need to explore variations in outcomes across industries, socio-economic groups, and cultural settings to identify best practices and tailor interventions effectively. This would provide valuable insights for policymakers and organizations aiming to create inclusive, supportive environments for returning women.

This study highlights the significant psychosocial effects of maternal workforce re-entry on family interactions and including challenges related to balancing caregiving and professional roles, work-home conflict, and emotional stress (Falletta et al., 2020; Freeney et al., 2024; Prickett, 2020). While these findings showcase the interplay between maternal well-being and family dynamics, a notable gap exists in understanding how these impacts vary across diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. For instance, cultural norms influence caregiving expectations and role distribution within families, but the specific mechanisms through which they shape family relationships and child development remain underexplored (Berger et al., 2020; Melin, 2024). Future research should investigate how maternal re-entry affects family dynamics, focusing on cultural values, socio-economic disparities, and variations in childcare access and support systems. Studies should also explore long-term developmental outcomes for children of mothers who re-enter the workforce, comparing families in different societal contexts. Mixed-method approaches, combining longitudinal quantitative data with in-depth qualitative insights, could provide a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics. These insights would inform culturally sensitive policies and interventions to better support working mothers and promote healthier family environments.

This study also highlights the influence of societal attitudes and gender norms on the experiences of working mothers, particularly regarding role expectations and implicit bias in workplace settings (Berger et al., 2020; Melin, 2024). Societal norms often reinforce traditional caregiving roles, creating psychosocial tension for mothers who are balancing professional and familial responsibilities (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2023; Kerrane et al., 2022). Despite recognizing these challenges, the study reveals a gap in understanding the evolution of societal attitudes toward working mothers and how interventions, such as awareness campaigns or organizational training, can reduce implicit bias and promote equitable practices. Future research should focus on tracking changes in societal perceptions of working mothers over time and evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at challenging traditional norms and biases. Studies should examine diverse cultural settings to understand how societal values influence workplace practices and family settings. Additionally, research could explore how workplace policies, such as gender-sensitive re-entry programs and bias mitigation training, contribute to fostering inclusive environments. Employing longitudinal studies and comparative cross-cultural analyses would provide actionable insights to drive systemic changes, enabling workplaces to better support working mothers while challenging entrenched gender norms.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study is a systematic literature review that does not involve human participants. As such, it is exempt from the ethics approval procedures of Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus.

Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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