

## DETERMINANTS OF RETURN TO WORK AFTER MATERNITY LEAVE IN RUSSIA: A DISCOURSE PERSPECTIVE

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This paper aims to identify the determinants of return to work after maternity leave in Russia. Can an organisation influence employees' decision about withdrawal from the market after leave arrangement, or does it fully depend on the contextual and personal characteristics of the employee, as assumed by the discourses of merit and choice? Logistic regression analysis helps to answer the raised questions, referring to responses of 721 mothers with previous working experience. The research revealed that employers indeed can improve inclusion of employees with childcare commitments, fostering their return after the maternity leave. Despite high regional diversity of Russian population, contextual specificity barely influences the decision of employees regarding their returning to work with the same employer, similarly to their level of education, firms' equity or amount of children. Among personal characteristics, income was found to play an important role in return decisions, as well as the age of the smallest child. The paper contributes to the debates on the fluidity of gender and work identity as well as organizational control over the identity work.

*Keywords:* childcare commitments, maternity leave, work system, Russia.

*JEL:* J21, J24, J53

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<https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu18.2020.304>

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, many practical and research publications report that higher work groups' gender diversity represents value for business. N. Ellemers and F. Rink summarized the following benefits [Ellemers, Rink, 2016]. Firstly, equitable gender representation indicates social justice and equal employment opportunities. Secondly, gender diversity correlates with innovations and innovative performance, especially in cases of high representation of women in leadership positions. Thirdly, a diverse work team is able "to cater for a larger variety of clients, offers a broader range of products, and has the potential to build more community credibility" [Ellemers, Rink, 2016, p. 49]. Additionally, gender diversity helps in building a problem-solving capacity and thus can contribute to the solution of human problems [Hennessey, Amabile, 1998].

Nevertheless, such predictions are not always supported by observations. For example, diversity management often implies positive discrimination [Shore, Cleveland, Sanchez, 2018], like quoting particular positions for women in boards of directors, which might negatively affect firm performance. A. I. Cabrera-Fernández, R. Martínez-Jiménez and M. J. Hernández-Ortiz illustrated four possible reasons explaining this phenomenon [Cabrera-Fernández, Martínez-Jiménez, Hernández-Ortiz, 2016]. Firstly, diversity by itself might worsen group dynamic, increase conflicts, turnover and reduce team cohesion, labour productivity and motivation, because it is harder to cooperate for people with different background. Secondly, such appointees face hostile attitude from the team, as they were selected not because of their merits, but appointed by an external normative power. Thirdly, women more often turn down risky operations, which naturally leads to lower profits. Fourthly, stakeholders in particular countries often respond negatively to the women's appointment to the board of directors. As a result, women appointed to specific

positions face more additional challenges than women selected without evidence of positive discrimination. Besides, feeling different from others can undermine life satisfaction and self-esteem, so employees either tend to adapt to majority, ruining the value of diversity or leave the organization looking for other workplaces [Ellemers, Rink, 2016].

The most salient reason for such controversy between predictions and actual results is that diversity without inclusion may often be problematic for organizations. According to recent gender studies, gender is a cultural frame that shapes both employees' and employers' corresponding preassumptions [Zdravomyslova, Temkina, 2015]. One of the explanations is connected to the phenomenon of childcare commitments considered through perspectives of work-family balance or conflict. Particularly, the work-family border theory highlights the "spillover" and the "compensation" effects: work and family spheres are interrelated, therefore, emotions, experiences, behaviour, beliefs in each of these spheres might influence each other in a positive or negative way [Clark, 2000]. Combining these two perspectives shows that certain cultural frames might cause positive effect, the other — negative.

Inclusion-related initiatives are able to reshape such frames by addressing employees' identity work through readjusting managerially inspired discourses [Alvesson, Willmott, 2002]. This is viewed as a new way of organizational normative control: organizations were disillusioned regarding the possibility of managing employees' behaviour directly and started learning how to manage employees' hopes, fears, and aspirations indirectly [Alvesson, Willmott, 2002]. According to epy social identity theory [Stets, Burke, 2000], such inclusion-related initiatives aim at a voluntary enhancement of organizations' work environments in order to influence roles with which employees are identified [Walsh, Gordon, 2008]. L. M. Shore, J. N. Cleveland and D. Sanchez summarized differentiation between diversity and inclusion-related prac-

tices in the following way: diversity management practices aim to increase share of representatives of a marginalized group, while inclusion practices result in improving access to decision-making, resources, and upward mobility opportunities for these individuals [Shore, Cleveland, Sanchez, 2018].

However, the motivation behind such extra efforts is not obvious for many firms, mostly due to the discourses of merit and choice that are prevalent among decision making personnel. These are gender-biased suggestions that women with childcare commitments can compete for jobs and promotion on the “same basis” as men and childless women, therefore, withdrawal from the labour market is an employee’s personal choice, not a result of poor inclusion [Broadbridge, Simpson, 2011]. Current research adds Russian perspective to the existing debates by analysing the most evident example of such discourses’ futility — returning to work after maternity leave. It answers the questions: can an organisation influence employees’ decision about withdrawal from the market after their leave, or does it fully depend on the contextual and personal characteristics of the employee, as assumed by the discourses of merit and choice? We answer these questions using the survey data of 721 mothers from Russian major cities. Originality of the paper lies in the analysis of contextual specificity in relation to the problem of gender and labor identity. In Russia, gender-related studies are highly marginalized and autonomized from the main-stream research [Zdravomyslova, Temkina, 2014].

The following first section of the paper introduces theoretical background and hypotheses regarding determinants of return to work after maternity leave in Russia. The second section explains the methodology: sample, context and measures for analysis. The third section involves results and discussion of barriers for inclusion and opportunities for possible interventions. The final section of the paper summarizes findings and suggests further directions of research.

## **1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: WHO IS IN CHARGE OF INCLUSION IN RUSSIAN CONTEXT?**

### **1.1. Theoretical framework**

The current research refers to theory of work systems, also known as human resource management systems, for sensemaking of decisions about inclusion. Work system is an integrated approach of human resource management toward the alignment of the human resource functions with the firm strategy [Wei, Lau, 2010], aiming to facilitate corporate competitive advantage [Becker, Huselid, 2006]. The novelty of the current research lays in a discourse perspective on the role of work systems in inclusion, treating work systems as idealised frames of reference for decision makers [Kosheleva, Bordunos, 2018; Bordunos, Kosheleva, 2019], “locked in” on their “path-dependance track” [Dobusch, Kapeller, 2013].

Framing perspective provides ground for conceptualizing, generalizing and differentiating between alternatives in discourses related to human resources. Frames guide people’s decisions and responses to different stimulus [Goffman, 1974; Borah, 2011]. However, they also produce a simplified perception of reality, as they ground mainly on stereotypes. Ellemers explained that stereotypes reflect the general expectations about marginal groups of employees, easing decision making, but overemphasizing differences between these social groups and others, as well as underestimating variations within the group [Ellemers, 2018]. For example, some gender stereotypes are deeply rooted. However, actual differences in behaviour can be explained not only by the gender, but by the social roles and employees’ attitude to them: they affect hormonal regulation, self-regulation, and social regulation [Eagly, Wood, 2013].

Alternative to discourse perspective is a normative suggestion that decisions related to management of human resources could

be illustrated based on the human resource architecture approach [Lepak, Snell, 1999]. It differentiates employees based on the value and uniqueness of their human resources. E. Farndale and J. Paauwe added role of the context in limitations of firms choice among existing work systems [Farndale, Paauwe, 2018]. The current research suggests that such limitations could be overcome with the help of targeted actions, but who may be in charge of them: government, employer or employee?

## 1.2. Role of the government

In Russia, necessity to take on challenges related to inclusion of employees with childcare commitments has been in existence for more than 100 years, since 1917. In 1928, women already accounted for 24% of workers and employees in the national economy [Zavyalova, Kosheleva, 2010]. In 2018, women accounted for 56% of employees, despite the fact that in 2018 53.2% of women above 14 years were not employed [Federal State Statistics Service, 2019].

During Soviet times, childcare commitments were part of social contract “working mother”, created and normalized by government [Zdravomyslova, Temkina, 2015, p. 349]. Government made employment a requirement for men and women. In parallel, women were imputed to intense family-related responsibilities. Such domestic unpaid direct childcare commitments usually required daily actions which draw monetary, physical, intellectual and emotional resources of the parent [Zdravomyslova, Temkina, 2015]. Such two shifts load was too intense for women, shaping assumptions about negative “spillover” effect.

Nowadays, employment and allocating of childcare commitments to mothers legally is not a requirement anymore. Fathers can also claim governmental and organizational support in rearing children. Grandparents and commercial options of childcare are able to reduce women’s load. Nevertheless, dis-

tribution of social roles is still framed by discourses, motivating women to “lean in” into work conditions hardly compatible with childcare commitments; while men struggle in search of how to “lean out” of them in order to devote more time to their children [Gutsell, Remedios, 2016]. Thus, women in Russia still face non-favourable stereotypes, most of each are denied even by women themselves [Zavyalova, Kosheleva, 2010].

Similarly to western cultural frames, marginalisation of women with childcare commitments is explained by the women’s personal choice, not by the unequal work conditions [Broadbridge, Simpson, 2011]. This phenomenon is attributed as “gender fatigue” [Metz, Kulik, 2014] or a “stalled gender revolution” [Scarborough et al., 2018]: in result of a long and controversial history of gender inequity, corresponding marginal groups lost sense and motivation for recognizing the barriers for their prospering in organizations, and for overcoming these challenges. For example, negative stereotypes cause female employees with childcare commitments (compared to childless women) to face “maternity/motherhood penalty”: discrimination in recruitment, promotion, training, remuneration, etc. [Fuller, Cooke, 2018].

Contrary to western cultural frames, widely accepted in western research titles for marginal groups of women as “minority” or “underprivileged social group” [Wilhelm, Joeckel, 2019] do not adequately reflect the actual state in Russia. This is another reason, why value of inclusion practices is undermined.

Soviet period showed futility of two inclusion-related interventions. The first interventions followed assumption that there should be a monopole normative institution that defines and controls gender-related roles. In Soviet times government became such institution. Nowadays organizations in Russia intentionally tend not to become such monopole normative institution that defines and controls social roles. However, previous research showed that they still unwillingly take part in constructing gender through discourse [Ashcraft, Harris, 2014].

The second intervention followed assumption that the government might ease the problem of combining work and childcare commitments by forcing employers to grant equal rights and provide young parents with additional support. However, past researches gave opposing results [Zavyalova, Kosheleva, 2010]. For example, in Russia, managers did not consider women as candidates for “male” positions, even though these positions were not mentioned in the legal list of the 456 forbidden positions for women [Fedorenko, 2019]; and firms provided up to 40% less salary compared to men with the same qualifications and amount of work performed [Zavyalova, Kosheleva, 2010].

One of the main problems faced by employers in Russia is firms’ obligation to grant young mothers leave before and after childbirth for up to 1 179 days. Medical institutions could initiate the maternity leave even earlier in case of a necessity. This obligation might occur unexpectedly for an employer, which is especially problematic in case of rare and unique employees. However, employees have the opportunity to shorten this period and return earlier, either to flexible or full-time working schedule.

Summing up, government causes positive discrimination of women with childcare commitments, e.g. guaranteeing a long leave, which might lower retention rate of such women. The most widely accepted reason for women’s withdrawal from the market is their personal choice and lack of efforts for staying with the same employer.

### 1.3. Role of employers

Although, employers have limited or no control over the family life of employees, they cannot ignore it. Furthermore, as was mentioned in the introduction, organizations also have no direct control over employees’ behaviour at work. However, they can influence managerially inspired discourses, learning how to manage employees’ hopes, fears, and aspirations indirectly [Alvesson, Willmott,

2002; Ashcraft, Harris, 2014], shifting from salient diversity practices to silent inclusion initiatives [Bordunos, 2019].

Russian environment legitimized the frame suitable for employees with human resources of low uniqueness, but high value, also known as high-performance work system [Kosheleva, Bordunos, 2018]. [Lepak, Snell, 1999] highlighted that this approach is suitable for job-based employees, valued for their productivity-based human resources. Key characteristics of this approach are standardized job requirements, relying on external pool of candidates, reducing labour costs, centralized decision-making, high level of regulation and control, little interdependence between employees, narrowed requirements to external candidates, as well as little training for hired employees [Lepak et al., 2006].

This work system implies directive leadership style, requires high power and authority, usually associated with masculinity. It suits merit-based approach [Bordunos, 2019] and it is highly criticized by the contemporary gender research state [Kumra, 2014]. Among key meritocratic principles are objectivity, fairness, reward for hard work, ownership over own progression [Kumra, 2014]. It implies that the job gets the most suitable candidate. However, as was revealed later, instead of valuing human capital, meritocracy rather depended on social capital — political behaviour, and became a means of justifying the status quo [Sealy, 2010].

As summarized by [Thomas, Ely, 1996], such perspective, entitled by them as “discrimination-and-fairness paradigm” creates a situation when the stuff is diverse, but the work is not. By adding variance to the action plan, diversity irritates management as it interferes in a smooth work process or pulls an organization away from its original track. Thus, the key change agents here are leaders truly inspired by fairness of equal treatment, who are able to push this vision through their top-down directives [Thomas, Ely, 1996].

Inclusion-related initiatives are especially valuable in such context, as employees

with childcare commitments usually face non-favourable conditions to negotiate their needs due to such characteristics of the work system as unification of workplaces, centralized decision-making, downward communication, low autonomy and personal hesitation for upbringing related initiatives. It assumes that organizations are partly in charge of the retention rate of employees after their parental leave and gives foundation for the next hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1.* Employers' efforts are positively related to employees' return to work after their maternity leave.

#### 1.4. Role of employees and context

High-performance work system was legitimized in 1980 in the Anglo-Saxon context. "West" was influenced by the economic liberalism. All initiatives, related to gender, focused on overt discrimination, "tokenism" and bias resulting from orientation on majority, excluding or ignoring interests and attributes of marginal representatives [Shore et al., 2009]. Burke summarized several examples of what posed reputational risks for employees with childcare commitments [Burke, 2014]. Such employees had difficulties with traveling, less interest in international assignments, large career breaks due to parental and maternity or paternity leaves, as well as lower interest and capability for after-work socializing or long-working hours due to their larger load with the housekeeping, nursing and other family commitments. As a result, this marginal group faced strong prejudgments and negative treatment — unequal opportunities and bullying, such as giving employees unreasonable deadlines, unbearable workloads, meaningless tasks or behaviours such as insults, gossip and rumours, persistent criticism, intimidation and unpleasant jokes [Verheij, Groeneveld, Kuyper, 2017]. Thus, general concern of the inclusion-oriented initiatives was neutralizing negative treatment, mostly towards working mothers during their prenatal period or caring for an

infant, who were often treated as a "minority" or an "underprivileged social group" [Wilhelm, Joeckel, 2019].

M.-C. Wilks analysed how institutional environment, particularly national gender imaginary [Wilks, 2019], predefined institutional legitimacy [Suchman, 1995] of inclusive practices. The most relevant for the chosen context is imaginary of parents-caretakers, who in conflict between family and work select family. Job-based employment motivates individuals' interest in wages, rather than in career or occupational status. Thus, employees see their job mostly as a way of earning valued returns or rewards to support their families and/or pursue other interests, hobby or call [Walsh, Gordon, 2008]. Institutionalized gender hierarchy, gender roles and "maternal gatekeeping" might provoke hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes and motivate parents, mostly women, to perceive family work as a source of power, control and self-esteem, especially in cases where work-related roles are not satisfying [Gaunt, Pinho, 2018]. Thus, for employees with childcare commitments, their new social role — parenting, becomes more relevant than membership in their occupations or organizations [Shore, Cleveland, Sanchez, 2018], lowering motivation for better performance or leading to a voluntary withdrawal from the labour market. The key reason for high retention rate under such conditions is financial income, which partly depends on household income and expenditure [Davey, Murrells, Robinson, 2005]. It leads to a such hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2.* Employees' income is negatively related to employees' return to work after their maternity leave.

Vlasblom and Schipper highlighted that the benefits of working are related to the human capital of the woman, traditionally assessed as the level of education [Vlasblom, Schipper, 2006]. The first reason is that the higher is her educational level, the higher her potential income will be. The second reason is that individuals with higher human capital may require more expensive childcare.

The third reason is that it is a very competitive environment, especially in large cities. The Global Gender Gap Report of 2018 ranked Russia as top in education (enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education), in economic participation and opportunity among professional and technical workers. Advancement of women to leadership roles also gained high scores — 0.65 on 0–1 scale. Thus, employees in many industries taking career breaks for maternity leave, especially those who return to work part-time, are at a disadvantage in terms of career progression [Davey, Murrells, Robinson, 2005]. It leads to two assumptions: that withdrawal from the labor market at childbirth is more common for less-educated women; and that large cities create the need to stay more competitive, motivating return. Thus, the following hypotheses can be formulated.

*Hypothesis 3.* Employees' level of education is positively related to employees' return to work after their maternity leave.

*Hypothesis 4.* City population is positively related to employees' return to work after their maternity leave.

Additional reasons for withdrawal can be associated with the number of children and their age. Traditionally women refer to government support with childcare facilities after their children reach 2 years old. However, a situation where the labor market will no longer compensate for the increased costs on children care might occur. Thus, even if women with lower level of education decide to keep working when their first child is born, the second child might change their decision [Vlasblom, Schipper, 2006]. In 2018, the average length of single life in Russia was 24.4 years, while the mean age of women at birth of first child — 29. The average number of children was comparatively low — only 1.75 [Federal State Statistics Service, 2019]. Nevertheless, the tendency to stay at home for a longer period might be higher if the woman wants another child, and might want to return when the family has reached its preferred size costs [Vlasblom, Schipper, 2006]. Thus, it partially depends on the wom-

en's age. Although, this is problematic due to perceived depreciation of human capital and increased search costs [Vlasblom, Schipper, 2006].

*Hypothesis 5.* Amount of children is negatively related to employees' return to work after maternity leave.

*Hypothesis 6.* Presence of children younger than 2 years old is negatively related to employees' return to work after maternity leave.

*Hypothesis 7.* Women's age is positively related to employees' return to work after maternity leave.

Finally, western inclusion-related initiatives were inspired by the acknowledgment that most jobs were initially created by men and for men, assuming delegation of child caring to their relatives, who were initially excluded from the labour market. When the situation changed, the need to combine work with childcare commitments by a big share of employees started causing discomfort for employers and colleagues, customers, partners and employees themselves. Russia has different history — work conditions were already created with childcare commitments in mind.

*Hypothesis 8.* Employment by Russian companies is positively related to employees' return to work after their maternity leave.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Sample and context

The data for the current research was collected within the period September 2018 — October 2019. The questionnaire was spread online through social networks of Selfmama audience. Selfmama is an educational project for urban women with childcare commitments. It aims to help those who are in search of balance, new development prospects, useful knowledge and networking, as well as those in need of inspiration and support. It organizes learning events both offline and

online, like conferences, internships, webinars, master-classes, etc. Most projects are open to a wide audience. Additionally, it supervises a self-initiated community of like-minded mothers, assuming membership fee.

The questionnaire was filled in by 950 respondents, however, after the preliminary data cleaning, 721 responses were taken into consideration. The Table 1 provides information about the sample structure. All participants are women with children, who live in a large Russian city with over 1 mln population. All of them experienced maternity leave and had work experience prior to or during the leave. Omitted observations did not correspond to any of the mentioned criteria.

## 2.2. Measures

Income was coded as an ordinal variable. The question asked respondents to mark

goods that they can afford to buy: the property, car or large home appliances (scored as 3); food and clothes, but not expensive goods (2); just food, although, not in a sufficient quantity (1).

High education was coded as a nominal variable (0 — no, 1 — yes). Among employees with high education, 21.36% of respondents have already received two and more higher education diplomas. Nevertheless, their answers were combined with the other respondents having one high education diploma. Another 2% of respondents had completed only 3 years of high education; however, they are yet to graduate, so their answers were combined with those of employees without high education.

City population was also coded as nominal variable (1 — Moscow, 0 — other). Thus, answers of employees who lived in the largest Russian city Moscow (34.26%) were com-

Table 1

Sample structure ( $n = 721$ )

Observation	Frequency	Percentage	Variable code	
Age of employee	25–30	174	24.13	1
	31–35	307	42.58	1
	36–40	191	26.49	0
	41–45	49	6.80	0
City	Moscow	247	34.26	1
Company before leave	Russian	567	78.64	1
Education level	High education	700	97.09	1
Income	High	381	52.84	3
	Moderate	299	41.47	2
	Low	41	5.69	1
Age of the smallest child	Below 2 years	422	58.53	1
				1
Amount of children	1	389	53.95	1
	2	260	36.06	0
	3	60	8.32	0
	Above 3	12	1.66	0

pared with answers of the employees from the rest observed cities. The number of children was coded as the nominal variable (1 — one child, 0 — more children). The reference group for the age of the smallest child was defined by the traditional age for the full-time kindergarden — after 2 years old. A total of 58.53% of mothers had at least one child below 2 years of age.

We used the reported fact of return after maternity leave as a dependent variable. C. Hakim calculated that approximately 20% of women with childcare commitments were home-centered, 20% were work-centered and 60% were adaptive [Hakim, 2000]. Current sample corresponds to these expectations by the share of work-centered women: 19.56% of respondents planned to come back to full-time work. However, the share of employees who did not want to return to work is smaller — 7.77% (Table 2). This is not as much

a drawback of the data collection method, but also a specificity of the Russian context in general.

As evident from the Table 2, employees choose not only between return to the same employer, changing position or staying at home. Long maternity leave is a proper time for many employees to become entrepreneurs or self-employed.

Among 34.12% of employees with positive intentions about their return, 68.70% employees made this decision in the first year of the maternity leave; another 19.92% — in the second, while 11.38% decided at their last year.

A total of 4% of employees returned to work almost immediately; another 8.32% of employees returned within the first year. Despite the intentions, only 29.68% of employees returned to the same employer, including those which did not plan to return.

Table 2

Intentions to come back versus actual return

Observation		Frequency	Percentage	Variable code
Intentions after the leave	Come back to the same organization	246	34.12	1
	Change employer	223	30.93	0
	Do not work	56	7.77	0
	Become entrepreneur	80	11.10	0
	Become self-employed	116	16.09	0
Return	Came back to the same organization	214	29.68	1
	Changed employer	126	17.48	0
	Did not work/on leave/studied	287	39.81	0
	Became entrepreneur	22	3.05	0
	Became self-employed	72	9.99	0

In fact, the correlation between intentions to come back to the same employer and actual return was only 0.371 ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Employers' efforts were assessed with the help of two questions resulted in two ordinal variables. Firstly, respondents marked if their employer kept contact with them during the maternity leave. The highest scores (3) gained positive answers about initiating communication with their employer. For example, employer invited for corporate events, contacted for solving work-related questions or invited to the office in order to arrange allowance payment. The medium score (2) gained all neutral answers. For example, when employee worked independently from colleagues or was self-employed, or when employee was the person who initiated the contact with employer or colleagues; or if company sent news by e-mail. Here are examples of negative answers, scored as 1: employers either did not get in touch with employees during their leave, or they called in order to initiate the dismissal. According to the Labour Law, in most cases, the dismissal should be a voluntary consent of employee, so the call for a dismissal did not necessarily end with the employees' withdrawal.

Secondly, respondents were asked to mark their employer's involvement to their return. The highest scores (3) gained confirmations that employer initiated discussion about adapting the work schedule and provided the expected conditions. Medium scores (2) gained neutral answers that the discussion has occurred; however, employer was unable to meet up with the desired conditions. Also, if the employee was self-dependent and did not require additional agreements or if there was no need in such discussion, the return was a neutral event for employers. Similar to if employers did not initiate the discussion, but employees themselves raised this question. All negative answers were scored as 1. For example, when the position was reduced, or the company was not operating anymore, or when the return was negatively surprising for employers because of high staff turnover, etc.

The correlation matrix (Table 3) includes additional information about variables: mean, standard deviation and VIF value testing multicollinearity.

Correlation analysis did not show significant spearman correlation between return of employees after their maternal leave and their city, level of education, firms' equity or amount of children. The absence of correlation of return with the location (city) could be explained with the general sample structure — all women are from cities with competitive labour markets. Role of level of education can be considered as a specificity of Russian context. Only recently did some industries begin the implementation of legal working standards. Traditionally, there is a big gap between knowledge provided by high education and practical requirements, so many companies developed their own training programs to cover this gap. A contrary situation could also occur: employees with high academic qualification could occupy positions that did not require it, because of higher pool of educated candidates and lower pool of positions were it is necessary. Number of children also had different effects on the desire and ability to return after maternity leave, partially, because of exceptional involvement of the government in providing cheap access to childcare facilities.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: BARRIERS FOR INCLUSION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS**

A binary logistic regression was performed to ascertain the role of employer and family characteristics in the likelihood that employees will return to work after their maternity leave. The logistic regression model was statistically significant,  $\text{Chi}^2 = 94.522$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Hosmer and Lemeshow test also confirmed model significance ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 9.175$ ,  $p = 0.328$ ).

Table 3

Correlation matrix

Variable	Mean (std. dev.)	VIF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Return	0.30 (0.46)										
Connect	1.97 (0.92)	1.06	0.187**								
Care	1.97 (0.70)	1.05	0.286**	0.190**							
Income	2.47 (0.60)	1.07	0.123**	0.124**	0.090*						
Education	0.97 (0.17)	1.01	0.023	0.021	0.005	0.015					
Location in Moscow	0.72 (0.45)	1.06	0.051	0.024	0.056	0.160**	0.075*				
Amount of children	0.54 (0.50)	1.05	0.037	0.008	0.008	-0.087*	-0.011	-0.034			
Age of children	0.59 (0.49)	1.05	-0.104**	-0.015	0.032	0.049	-0.012	-0.089*	-0.083*		
Mothers' age	0.67 (0.47)	1.07	-0.080*	-0.054	-0.014	-0.022	-0.070	-0.076*	0.174**	0.140**	
Russian firm	0.81 (0.39)	1.03	-0.011	-0.001	-0.023	-0.125**	-0.020	-0.128**	-0.026	0.026	0.043

Note: \*\* and \* indicate significance at 1 and 5% level respectively.

The model explained 17.4% (Nagelkerke R2) of the variance in employees' intentions of returning to the same employer and correctly classified 73.9% of cases (Tables 4–5). According to expectations, staying in touch with employees with childcare commitments during their leave (increased chances of return by 1.341 times) and showing care about their return (expected increase of returns by 2.372 times) are good predictors of actual return by employees to work. Despite the privilege of flexible working hours provided by many employers and guarded by the government, women still preferred to stay at home until their children reach 3 years. However, employer's concern about their return had higher predictive power than children age (increase of returns only by 1.690

times). Income indeed had high effect; however, the relationship was different to the hypothesized one: the higher the level of income, the more chances were that employee would return (increase of returns by 1.515 times). The following part of the research explores these findings in more details.

Similarly to correlation analysis, the regression analysis also did not show significant relation between return of employees after their maternal leave, their city, level of education, firms' equity or amount of children.

The research revealed that for the selected sample, the most influential role in the return of employees among the assessed factors was employer's care regarding their return. These findings support the Hypothesis 1. In such way they illustrate suitability of sug-

Table 4

Classification table

		Predicted		Share of correct predictions, %
		No	Yes	
Observed	No	459	47	90.7
	Yes	141	74	34.4
Total		600	121	73.9

Table 5

Variables in the equation

Variable	$\beta$	Std. error	Wald	Exp( $\beta$ )	95% Confidence intervals for Exp( $\beta$ )	
					Lower	Upper
Connect	0.294**	0.096	9.286	1.341	1.110	1.620
Care	0.864**	0.132	43.004	2.372	1.832	3.070
Income	0.415**	0.157	6.952	1.515	1.112	2.062
Education	0.128	0.539	0.057	0.879	0.306	2.532
Location in Moscow	0.043	0.203	0.045	0.958	0.643	1.427
Amount of children	0.195	0.181	1.164	0.823	0.577	1.173
Age of children	-0.525**	0.180	8.520	1.690	1.188	2.403
Mother's age	-0.314	0.188	2.796	1.368	0.947	1.976
Russian firm	0.083	0.225	0.136	0.921	0.592	1.430
Constant	-4.492**	0.528	72.314	0.011		

Note: \*\* and \* indicate significance at 1 and 5% level respectively.

gestion that organizations are able to manage employees' behavior indirectly by shaping appropriate discourse and influencing employees' identity work [Stets, Burke, 2000; Alvesson, Willmott, 2002; Walsh, Gordon, 2008].

According to Lepak and Snell, firms might differentiate between employees — whom

to care about and for whom to show neutral or non-welcoming attitude [Lepak, Snell, 2002]. The role of income in the return supports this guess. Employees might gain higher income because of their uniqueness and value for employers. It implies that such employees in Russia meet less organizational barriers with returns.

The most suitable frame for their management and inclusion was generalized as high-commitment work system [Kosheleva, Bordunos, 2018], matching imaginary of parents-activists [Wilks, 2019] and requiring empowerment [Kabeer, 1999] for inclusion. Firstly, it implies access to resources and ability for future claims of extra materials, and rights to choose among alternatives. Secondly, it refers to agency — participation in decision-making, negotiation, deception and manipulation, relying on personal life-choices. Thirdly, it anchors in achievements — well-being outcomes. Prügl mentioned similar basic conditions for empowerment: equal opportunities and rights, equal endowments and resources, and voice and agency [Prügl, 2017]. High-commitment work systems are legitimate on the west; however, they are still new for the Russian environment. This might explain the variance in impact of Russian and foreign companies, sense making reasons behind rejecting some of the hypothesized relationships. This suggestion assumes that inclusion-related problems for this category of employees can hardly be detected through a quantitative research, as it is related to unseen daily positive and negative micro-behaviors that reinforce inclusion and exclusion; positive micro-affirmations and negative micro-inequities — unconscious acts that result over time in inclusion or exclusion, as well as incivility in organizations and disrespect [Cortina, 2008].

The current research also revealed high saturation of the labour market by employees with childcare commitments, who have high entrepreneurial spirit: intentions to become entrepreneur and self-employed shared 27.19%; actual realization of intentions — 14.04% (Table 2). Such employees also have fewer issues with returns, because they have alternative self-dependant options. However, employers greatly value their uniqueness and social capital that also improves firms' access to the niche markets [Thomas, Ely, 1996]. Thus, employ-

ers are much more motivated to explore opportunities regarding their retention.

Entrepreneurial spirit matches specific frame of management and inclusion of employees, known as high-involvement work system [Kosheleva, Bordunos, 2018]. This frame is still new in both contexts — Western and Russian. Apart from challenges related to legitimacy, it is associated with a particular barrier for inclusion, which also are hard to assess, because firms usually are not interested in mechanics — the exact capabilities, cultural specificity of gender differences between employees that led to the expected result [Thomas, Ely, 1996]. Nevertheless, employees with childcare commitments in entrepreneurial job environment often face significant role conflicts regarding allocating time and resources; however, high level of personal resources valuable for high-involvement work system, as optimism, self-efficacy and resilience through their positive effect on adaptability, lead to a preference of entrepreneurial roles over their social roles [Hundera et al., 2019]. Possible interventions here — to redesign traditional workplaces, aiming to balance between employees' work-life needs and workplace effectiveness. It involves not only flexible schedule or ability to work at home, but also raising stress-resistance, for example, through increase of mindfulness of employees — a present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of moment-to-moment experiences, emotions and intentions, instead of automatic behavioral reactions driven by stereotypes and prejudice [Glomb et al., 2011; Phillips, Grandy, 2018]. Additionally, full-time employment results in a bigger self-realization, and thus, leads to a greater satisfaction [Ebbbers, Piper, 2017], and work commitment [Pailhe, Solaz, 2018]. It assumes that such employees might prefer being hired by a company, which provides similar self-employment conditions, ensuring greater than average possibility for a self-realization, shifting away from the “presentism” strategies towards orientation on results. From the research perspective, these inter-

ventions are challenging to explore, because of a fine line between self-employed and employed employees, due to the high autonomy they possess.

While much worse situation face employees with lower salaries and smaller kids, managed according to the lens of high-performance work system. Not only do stereotypes create insurmountable barrier for their return and successful work. The labour market situation also does. They are usually not scarce and could be easily and quickly replaced by a new candidate. Besides, there is misconception that employees on maternal leave often face depreciation of the human capital, amplifying the risk of poverty and social exclusion; moreover, employers tend to treat the length of such leaves as a signal for lower commitment to the labour market and paid work [Vlasblom, Schippers, 2006]. By certain interventions, these negative expectations might be replaced with positive, as women with childcare commitments are capable of demonstrating significant improvement in productivity due to the heightened perceptiveness, greater efficiency, resilience, increased motivation and improved social skills grounded on emotional intelligence; they quickly build relationships with stakeholders with parenting experience [Ellison, 2005; 2017].

Lowered mobility (business trips or reallocation) of employees with childcare commitments is another issue of general concern [Caprile, Vallès, 2010]. Among the reasons researchers recall little access to non-parental childcare or no support from the extended family after reallocation or during the business trips [Röder, Ward, Frese, 2018]. According to values and principles of high-performance work system, such amplified support causes additional costs, which employees should bear themselves. However, Russian environment differs in ties with relatives who are able to provide this support. On the one hand, it eases the task of inclusion. On the other hand, it means that the pool of marginalized employees with childcare commitments is larger. It

includes fathers, grandparents and other relatives.

Another concern related to lowering efforts is expected absenteeism [Gatrell, 2011]. To avoid absenteeism caused by the child's health concerns, employees greatly rely on the informal childcare facilities and institutes: babysitters, nurses, friends or relatives [Brady, 2016] and longer term of breastfeeding, due to its direct effect on the baby's immune system [Ellison, 2005; 2017]. Personal sick leave is another reason for higher absenteeism. Although, parents with childcare commitments often refuse going for such sick leaves, they prefer staying at work despite health concerns [Gatrell, 2011]. This is a result of the additional maternal burden, especially in case of a divorce. In Russia, the ratio between marriages and divorces was 0.68 in 2018. Being present could also be a form of escape from the routinized housekeeping.

One more revealed contextual reason for lowering efforts is toxic environment. Stereotype that women handle crises better, helps to promote high-risk jobs known as a "glass cliff" effect [Bruckmüller et al., 2014]. Additionally, women voluntarily tend to become "toxic handlers"—"healing" managers needed when firms cause emotional pain through nasty supervisors, layoffs and change [Frost, Robinson, 1999]. Even without childcare commitment, toxic handling leads to a burnout psychologically and professionally, especially in a case of chronic toxicity. After enriching employees' identity with childcare commitments, they either require more organizational support or expect organizational changes smoothing toxicity [Frost, Robinson, 1999], as maternity motivates women to escape or minimize stressful situations.

Initiatives related to changes in corporate culture towards higher family-friendliness are the most questionable for the current work system, due to its top priority to maintain the status quo. However, firms might initiate small steps supporting evidence of its family-related commitments, by decreasing bullying or shaming of employees who

try to integrate child-related activities into their work environment. Thus, inclusion of employees with childcare commitments from this third lens might focus on: elimination of negative expectations towards such employees; providing support by sharing additional burden and gaining cost-and-benefit balance, e.g. though helping with formal and informal childcare, or rearranging working schedule of work load; advocating for family-friendly values and traditions; assessing existing employees-related initiatives for objectivity and a source of insights regarding this group of employees. Intentional shift from gender to the actual reason for discrimination — childcare commitments might cause a break through the vicious circle of misconnecting gender differences with the gender, dealing instead with actual obstacles that such employees face. Contemporary conceptualization of gender is defined as a set of social roles or characteristics of personal identity enriched opportunities for interruptions.

## CONCLUSION

The current research identifies the determinants of return to work after maternity leave in Russia. Even though working conditions in Russia since the beginning of the 20th century accounted for the needs of employees with childcare commitments, the inclusion of them is still problematic. Only 19.56% of respondents planned returning to full-time work. Not all of them planned to maintain relationship with the same employer. About 7.77% did not want to work anywhere. Despite presumptions and stereotypes, level of education (Hypothesis 3), city (Hypothesis 4), number of children (Hypothesis 5), mother's age (Hypothesis 7) or firms' equity (Hypothesis 8) were not significant predictors of such employees' return. The significant predictor were the employers' caring practices (Hypothesis 1) and the presence of infant children (Hypo-

thesis 6). Positive relationship between high income of employees and their return, opposing Hypothesis 2, allows for assumption that in Russia employees are also diversified [Lepak, Snell, 1999], while most hypotheses were traditionally formulated for dominating in Russia high-performance work system with imaginary of parents-caretakers [Wilks, 2019].

In summary, findings contribute to a search of legitimate options for higher inclusion of employees with childcare commitments, helping firms to achieve better results. It also helps individuals to balance between work- and gender-related identities, reshaped by the parenting.

In many contexts marginalization of women with childcare commitments is denied due to discourses of merit and choice [Broadbridge, Simpson, 2011]. This research joins ongoing discussion about a necessity to reassess fairness of such discourses. Organisations have legitimate opportunity to influence employees' decision about withdrawal from the market after the end of their leave, despite governmental and employees' initial intentions.

The present study needs to be interpreted in light of the limitations of its method. In theory, the research relied on strategic human resource management. It only indirectly referred to sources related to gender-oriented inclusion, work-family conflict, work-life balance, personal well-being or sources related to job resources and demands. Although, these alternative streams might give additional relevant insights. Nevertheless, chosen here perspective differentiates three frames, which shape approaches to employees, explained by uniqueness and value of their human resources [Lepak, Snell, 1999] and according to their entrepreneurial spirit [Thomas, Ely, 1996]. These frames already account for mentioned theories [Bordunos, 2019], and thus, current findings indirectly contribute to these fields of research as well.

Limitations related to the sample and quantitative methods for analysis inspire

further qualitative exploratory research that will be able to provide more empirically justified explanations for the current findings. Thus, the first revealed direction of further analysis refers to qualitative methods, as well as alternative research streams.

Second direction of further research is opportunity for higher engagement of fathers in child caring without harmful consequences for their performance or wellbeing in the context of high-performance work system, which was not on the management agenda in 1980s, when this frame appeared, but it is a topical issue nowadays.

Thirdly, inclusive work environment that encourages a sense of belonging and uniqueness among employees [Shore et al., 2011]

aims to manage a diverse workforce. Yet, there is a limited understanding of how high-performance work system can influence inclusive climate, when for employees a sense of belonging and uniqueness is less important. Another important question is why high-performance work system should influence inclusive climate, if this system shows low interest in the outcomes of diverse employees. Summing up, even though this frame appeared before the consequent two frames, it requires more attention now for two reasons. Firstly, it is still the widely used framework in Russia. Secondly, the key underlying assumptions have changed significantly, requiring reconceptualization of the overall management approach.

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*Initial Submission: May 6, 2020*

*Final Version Accepted: July 31, 2020*

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### **Факторы выхода сотрудников из отпуска по уходу за ребенком в России: дискурсивный подход**

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Во многих странах общество отрицает маргинализацию женщин в связи с обязательствами по уходу за детьми, объясняя снижение их деловой активности их собственным выбором. Цель исследования — выявить обстоятельства, способствующие возвращению российских женщин к профессиональным трудовым обязанностям после длительного отпуска по беременности, родам и уходу за детьми. Может ли работодатель повлиять на решение сотрудника или все действительно зависит только от обстоятельств молодой матери, как принято считать в обществе? Логистический регрессионный анализ анкет, представленных 721 матерью из крупнейших городов России, позволяет ответить на эти вопросы. Результаты исследования указывают на то, что работодатели действительно могут влиять на инклюзию сотрудников с обязательствами по уходу за детьми, повышая вероятность их выхода на работу из длительного отпуска. При этом, несмотря на разнообразие региональных условий, такие контекстуальные факторы, как город проживания, наличие высшего образования, количество детей, занятость в российской или иностранной компании, не имели статистически значимого влияния на принятие сотрудниками решения о выходе на работу. Среди индивидуальных характеристик значимыми оказались доход сотрудника и наличие детей младше двух лет. Результаты исследования дополняют дискуссию об изменчивости гендерной и трудовой ролевой идентичности сотрудников, выявляя возможности организационного контроля над процессами, способствующими достижению продуктивного баланса между ними.

*Ключевые слова:* уход за ребенком, отпуск по уходу за ребенком, системы труда, Россия.

*JEL:* J21, J24, J53.

*For citation:* Bordunos A. K., Kosheleva S. V., Zyryanova A. V. 2020. Determinants of return to work after maternity leave in Russia: A discourse perspective. *Russian Management Journal* **18** (3): 363–382.

*Статья поступила в редакцию  
6 мая 2020 г.  
Принята к публикации  
31 июля 2020 г.*