

**Follow up evidence from Bethany Power (GRC0028) September 2020  
Relating to Second Special Report - The impact of COVID-19 on maternity and  
parental leave: Government Response to the Committee's First Report (HC 770)**

## **Government Response Feedback**

Since the Government's response to the Maternity Petition Campaign on Wednesday 9th September, 6 days late to the 60 day deadline, I and other parents have been finding the response really hard to contend with. This was on the same day of receiving the new national lockdown rules restrictions of the 'rule of 6'. Since then there have been further lockdown restrictions taking place on 22nd September for another 6 months. This is along with full local lockdowns still taking place within the UK. Yet new mothers, parents and babies still face to continue zero government financial and health support. We are thankful for the 'yes' to informal childcare option stated from Matt Hancock dated 21st September, however families not having family or friend support to provide childcare are those who are suffering with no help, left battling to find childcare for their babies, whilst the childcare sector is in crisis!

To have the Government leave us waiting over the deadline, when they promised they would reply by the deadline, I am deeply disappointed and heartbroken by the lack of compassion and economic, technical or organisational (ETO) reasons of reply. The Government have, dismissed not only the Petitions Committee's sensible and evidence-based recommendations but also our own. To give no change to help us through this pandemic has been very hard to deal with, certainly with local lockdowns happening more regularly. I am in shock of the Governments dismissal of response it's even harder when I and other parents are struggling financially, emotionally and physically on the unpaid part of Maternity Leave or Adoption Leave that we are forced into. Many are struggling with the lack of services and I have an inbox of messages from a load of worrying parents to attest for this!

I am extremely surprised to see the Ministers suggest that us new mothers who are forced on unpaid leave of their Maternity, struggling with childcare, fighting redundancy protection as a result of the Government's failure to issue effective guidance should bring an employment tribunal claim against their employer.

For many of us it's too late now. With our full maternity year ending (when forced into the unpaid part already), having to give 8 weeks' notice to our employer to either state that we are coming back or having to resign or ask for further unpaid parental leave. We are all struggling on the unpaid part of our Maternity that wasn't planned, mounting into debt by no fault of our own to survive as we are denied any Government support. For me and for 95% of mothers are still denied Furlough, Universal Credit but also Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) due to the SSP calculations of going back 8 weeks of earnings. Due to SSP calculations it doesn't even help if you are on unpaid Leave. Many mothers would qualify from a GP's recommendation due to still suffering with postpartum issues or diagnosed mental health issues, but you have to end your maternity to go on SSP, this is not an option many are likely to take until maternity runs out as in doing this you would reduce from £151.20 per week to £95.85 per week.

Many mothers have failed to get any perinatal mental health help due to Covid-19 even if they are close to being sectioned voluntary. Maternal Mental Health Alliance, GP's & Health Visitors are experiencing a rise of demand for help, due to the difficulties mothers and parents are facing with lack of maternity and postpartum help, support and implications to lockdowns. For a mother to receive expert perinatal mental health it needs to be done within the first year of postpartum, before you're discharged or referred to an adult mental health team. This is very concerning!

We are continuing onto our 7 month of zero support now, with very little support from our Maternity Care services; Midwife's, Health Visitors and Health Visitor clinics. We are left with no 1-2-1 Health Visitor assessments or help; 1-1 breastfeeding or weaning support. No access to Health Visitor Clinics to weigh our babies and discuss any raising concerns. Instead we are left to ringing our Health Visitor line, to whoever is on duty, finding it hard to reach them or receive a call back in 24 hours. Ringing 111 is the same process, waiting a very long time to have the line answered and then waiting hours to receive a call back. Health Visitors are having difficulty to assess each new family for any alarming issues such as; mental health issues, abuse or neglect.

Following on from the difficulty of having to continue on unpaid maternity leave, pressures of returning back to work and with childcare difficulty, I had one mum contact me telling me her story. She was forced to return to work due to income, mother and baby completely not ready, taking risks of childcare arrangements, to then 15 minutes into her job she has been told she is being made redundant. This is the reality of our situation! Discrimination! Finding it hard now to even put clothes on our new babies back and feed our family whilst trying to keep humane and a roof over our heads.

This punishment simply comes down to having a baby in a pandemic! If we had our babies in 2018 we would have had our Maternity Leave as it should be, we would have had our baby's already in childcare and we would have perhaps been furloughed to spend more time with our children on 80% pay. Most of us would not be excluded from any CJRS. We would be at less of a risk of losing our jobs and going into debt. We would be surviving the pandemic like the rest of the UK.

Some households have had the fathers on furlough on 80% pay, this could be a positive for some households, but for many a 20% loss of household earnings on top of the mothers Statutory Maternity Pay is another hit. Making many households suffer more financially. Same goes to those who are Self-Employed and have lost on business revenue. Some fathers have also been made redundant, making further extreme issues, whilst a mother in on maternity leave. Some Fathers have been totally excluded from any CJRS due to being Vulnerable, New Starter, New Business, PAYE freelancer, LTD Director etc...

I would like to share some Maternity Stories of today's date 21st September 2020, detailing some differences of maternity leave from a few areas;

1. Myself, 'Bethany Power' New Mother from Kent; Detailing the full impact of my maternity leave.
2. 'Charlotte Lala Hamshere-Maylon' New Mother from Kent; detailing her struggles with twins, mentally, physically and financially.

3. 'Bethan Jones' New Single Mother from Tamworth; detailing the struggles of lack of maternity health care services and difficulties returning to work.
4. 'Hayley Palmer' New Mum from Dorset; detailing the struggles to get perinatal care.
5. 'Melisa Shirley' New Mother from Wales; detailing her struggles of giving birth to a premature baby in Lockdown.
6. 'Laura Watson' New Mother from Cookstown, Northern Ireland; detailing her struggles of giving birth to a baby in Lockdown.
7. 'Hann Walklett' New Mum from Wolverhampton; detailing her employment redundancy whilst on maternity leave.
8. 'Adoptive Parents' from North West; detailing the struggles of their adoption leave support.

I really do hope the petition debate dated Monday 5th October at Westminster Hall happens, with our Government doing the right thing by doing a U-turn before it's crucially too late, to help our new generation, new mothers and parents dated from Autumn last year 2019 - Present. I really do fear for us new parents and our babies in the next 6 months!

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1. **Myself, 'Bethany Power' New Mother from Kent;** Detailing the full impact of my maternity leave.

*"I'm age 29, married and live in Kent and recently had our first child - a boy who arrived in late November 2019.*

*I was employed throughout my pregnancy mainly as a zero hour's contractor working approx. 40 hours per week delivering rehabilitation services and support in the health and leisure industry. My job is very hands on and people-driven. It is not the type of role that can be done from home. I worked right up until 37 weeks pregnant. I was doing hands-on mobilisation and sometimes lifting up to 20kg weights a few times a day at my own consent. However, as a zero hours contractor I needed to work as much as possible in order to build up sufficient qualifying hours for Maternity Leave Pay and to have a pot of savings to allow me to take time off on Maternity Leave. It would have had a huge financial impact on our household if I'd been deemed unable to work my role.*

*My Labour in hospital was long and traumatic, resulting with lots of interventions and being rushed to theatre. We stayed in hospital for 3 nights and I wasn't ready to be discharged, but the hospital needed the bed. Our baby was later diagnosed with jaundice, terrible colic and reflux, and found to have positional talipes to the left foot. I was suffering with PTSD and the midwife and health visitor held a debrief in [February], however due to the onset of Covid-19 the recommended interventions were not able to be delivered. As a result my PTSD has still not been actively treated even though I am almost 10 months postpartum. I was referred to a gynaecologist at 12 weeks postpartum and was found to have two forms of prolapses and nerve damage. My baby has also missed out on referred baby massage and osteopath for his positional talipes and cranial therapy from the interventions from birth. My baby has been rushed to hospital twice for very bad reflux implications.*

*I have been fully isolated at home with my baby with zero support since lockdown began. My husband is a key worker so has been working constantly through this time, leaving myself and our baby at home for long periods. My days are long and without respite. Neither I, nor my baby have been able to have the normal treatment for health issues due to lockdown. He is almost 10 months old but has only been socialised with me and his Dad. We've been unable to have any routine health checks for him, no health visitor or midwife support, no support with breastfeeding or weaning, no checks for me on my mental or physical health. The lack of these services have been very tough on me mentally and physically. Feeling like I am failing my baby! The last time he was weighed was 3rd March. It is the same story I hear from all new mothers during Covid-19. The only exception has been to allow vaccinations. Meanwhile I'm told my babies upcoming 9-12 months assessment will be done virtually. It is not clear why safe socially distanced care for infants and mothers cannot yet be provided, or via clinics at the children's centres. No adequate communication or reasons are given to us as new mothers.*

*It has been the opposite of everything I had imagined and hoped for from a maternity leave. I have been consumed by fear and anxiety and worries about my baby's health. I'm scared to leave the house even on short daily walks. I have been unable to safely travel around anywhere even once restrictions were relaxed due to lack of sanitary baby changing or feeding facilities being provided anywhere and the worry of long queues. Lockdown restrictions have now been tightened making everything harder again with no support.*

*It transpires I need to surgery to help with my pain and discomfort and attention to a tear where that needs immediate and urgent treatment. If it weren't for lockdown, this would have been diagnosed and treated months ago, instead I have lived with ongoing pain and now have to face surgery.*

*Due to Covid I haven't need able to use my medical exemption certificate to get dental care that is needed in pregnancy and postpartum.*

*So with all that as background, I turn to the issue of maternity. At the start of lockdown, I had taken 15 weeks of entitlement. As at today's date, I am 43 weeks into my maternity leave. That is 190 days without any health or financial support or even acknowledgement from our government. SMP only continues for 39 weeks so I have been forced into a period of Leave with no more paid leave available.*

*I was due to return to work on 26th August, which would be 39 weeks of leave. I would have liked to take the full year of 52 weeks but knew from the beginning we wouldn't be able to afford that part of unpaid leave to due to my wage being necessary for us to meet all households bills including our mortgage and council tax. Our baby was booked into a nursery being built at my workplace, however due to Covid-19 this facility is not opening. I have spent months trying to source an alternative nursery place, however due to ratio restrictions and long waiting lists, it's impossible. Childminders are unable to take small babies as it affects the ratio for pre-school children. Both sets of mine and my husband's fathers are deceased, my husband's Mum is ill with terminal lung cancer with 4-24 months to live, whilst my Mum is disabled needing care herself, both of our own grandparents are deceased. We have no friends and family to help with childcare, so I am left unable to meet my*

*start date with my employer until a place comes available at a nursery which I have been told will be well into the autumn at the earliest.*

*When furloughing was introduced I was told by my employer my Occupational Maternity Leave that I get for as an employee benefit for some part of my leave, could be forced onto furloughed wage. Gladly this didn't happen as I was on the last few weeks of my Occupational Maternity Pay, and already on the lower level of this employment benefit of enhanced Maternity Pay. But it did shock me, I worked hard in my Maternity Leave qualifying period and once our Leave was confirmed and calculated I had my payment plan.*

*On 9th June the government issued guidelines saying that new mums could be furloughed but this is not applicable to me in my situation because it is said that there is work available for me to do. It makes no sense. From the Government, an employer acts as the furlough gatekeeper under the rules. They are not legally able to deny furlough to Lisa who has a 5 year old, but is allowed to deny furlough to me with a 8 month on the basis that "there is still work I could do." Many New Mums are faced with this situation - denied furloughing or because they are Key workers, Self Employed or the company have never furloughed any other employer before. If we were able to be furloughed, we have to end our Maternity Leave. Making me and other Mums vulnerable of no more maternity leave protection.*

*Although my employer is supportive with me extending my maternity leave, I'm now forced into unpaid leave, trying to negotiate a date with my employer but not yet having confirmed childcare to allow me to return even in a flexible working basis. To be honest I am currently not really in a fit state to return to work, mentally or physically, and I also have to have the surgery soon. It's an impossible situation to manage whilst needing to give 8 weeks' notice to my employer.*

*I am unable to apply for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) due to the SSP calculations of going back 8 weeks of earnings. That doesn't even help if your unpaid leave. I would certainly qualify from a GP's recommendation due to still suffering with postpartum issues and PTSD. But in order to go on SSP I have to end my Maternity state to my employer of returning to then on my return date tell them I want to go on sick leave. This would then go on my employment record and potential leave me vulnerable for my job. It would only make sense to end my Maternity when the £151.20 per week runs out as SSP is £95.85 per week.*

*I have been denied Universal Credit because my husband is working on a gross salary of £32k. We are going to have to borrow money to survive and pay our household bills. I worked very hard to be where I am in my career by never taking a gap year and by doing a degree and masters in Sports Therapy & Rehabilitation back in 2014. I have paid my taxes consistently for 13 years, even working in part time jobs when I was studying.*

*Maternity Leave is never a holiday but this is not the maternity leave that any new mother should ever have to have suffered. We have not been given adequate health care, nor had the opportunity to socialise our babies, nor able to enjoy time with our child during this time. I have been isolated and alone and scared at a time of my life that I can never get back with my baby. This is why I feel so passionately that the*

*government should recognise us and extend the maternity leave period (and pay) to recompense us for the time we have lost. I feel forgotten and cast aside by the government especially by the failure to include me fairly in the Job Retention Schemes or to put in place rules to require employers to be able to treat us fairly alongside other parents who were allowed to be furloughed. I am Excluded. This is simply down to timing of when we have given birth to our babies and being on maternity leave at that time. If I had already returned to work, with already having a childcare in place by the time lockdown began, it is likely that I would be in a better place, have been able to be furloughed and be at home with my baby again whilst being financially supported. Instead, I have been left struggling, now placed onto unpaid leave, unable to agree a return to work date with my employer, and unable to access childcare.*

*Although this isn't me currently, many mums are faced with employment discriminations being made redundant or forced to resign, paying back their enhanced occupational maternity leave pay.*

*Although I'm 43 weeks into my maternity, forced into unpaid leave. If the Government said yes to the paid extension (backdated and continued) and yes to the report recommendations it would really help support me and my baby to financially tick by with protected leave. A maternity redundancy extension would help me feel less victimised of redundancy when I am at my most vulnerable. The extra paid maternity time would help support my baby to have more time to develop and build social skills lacked by full lockdown, giving him a better start in life of introduction to the world before I return to work. It would help aid more time to get the therapy my baby is needing. It would help give me more time to get the NHS care needed for my postpartum recovery. It will help me being seen by my dentist under my maternity exemption, as I haven't been able to yet."*

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**2. 'Charlotte Lala Hamshere-Maylon' New Mother from Kent;** detailing her struggles with twins, mentally, physically and financially.

*"I'm age 31, I delivered my twin boys Harry & Jack in November 2019 naturally. Half an hour apart. I was taken to theatre following this for removal of placenta from Harry's placenta which did not come out complete.*

*I was fine to begin with, we got home after 5 days in hospital and started getting into a routine as much as is possible with newborn twins and a 5 year old. Over the following weeks my mood changed dramatically. I couldn't control the crying, the constant state of fear and the pains. I brushed it off as the baby blues twice over. I was still healing from delivery. I attended my outpatient consultant appointment in early December, after voicing my ongoing concerns to the health visitors and he begrudgingly arranged a scan for me. The appointment came through for the end of January. I attended this to be told I still had placenta in my uterus causing ongoing bleeding, clots and pain.*

*I ended up with an infection in my uterus. Back in hospital separated from my children for 2 days for antibiotics with a view to remove the remaining tissue. This didn't happen. They sent me home. It continued, more antibiotics, more scans, more*

*being told I'm too much of a risk to put me under anaesthetic because of the clots in my lungs caused by my pregnancy, I insisted on a removal under local anaesthetic. This did not happen until the end of February. 16 weeks after delivering my babies, being unable to go anywhere, being unable to physically push their pram. Being unable to be their mother to the best of my ability. UNABLE.*

*I took my babies out one time between 29th February and 23rd March. No more health visitor to check in on me, no one to check my children. I was referred to the mental health team in February, I had my first appointment last week (16th September). I have been diagnosed with PND, PNA and PTSD. My GP prescribed medications to help keep me sane until my appointments started happening. All of which will be over the phone. How am I supposed to speak about things over the phone with 2 babies who need attending to? How am I supposed to speak openly about what's going on in my head with my now 6 year old hearing his mother try and explain a feeling she doesn't understand, and relive a trauma that gives her flashbacks, panic attacks and nightmares. The thought of going to a hospital makes me feel physically sick, makes me shake and sweat. I have now been told I require further surgery to fix a posterior and anterior prolapse. I knew this was the case, and have put off speaking to my doctor about it knowing they will send me to a hospital. I just hope that in the time between now and a February appointment will equip me with the strength to walk back into the hospital who got my care so wrong.*

*My babies barely know their family. They don't recognise their grandparents in the way they should. They see them mainly through a screen. They have not been to the classes I took my first child to, no baby massage, no baby Yoga and no twin parent groups allowed. Not that I could go as I couldn't do the activities when no one else is allowed within 2 meters of us. Ever tried doing baby massage on 2 babies at once? Ever tried carrying 2 babies in their car seats to the car to take their older sibling to school without being allowed to have someone help you? Not an easy task for a fit person, let alone someone with severe physical and mental health troubles.*

*This is without the financial strain this has caused. My husband was furloughed. What's that I hear you say? "You should be happy that you had your husband at home to spend time with his wife and children, he wouldn't have gotten that time otherwise. You should be grateful!" Oh yes, I'm incredibly grateful. But let's look at the bigger picture, only my husband's income to live on, with 3 children, full rent to pay, bills all over the place and debts up to our eyeballs. What's that I hear you say? "Don't have children if you can't afford them!" We budgeted and planned for 2 children in total. Fate planned 3 for us. BIG SUPRISE. Planned pregnancy yes, planned twins.....no! We waited 5 years between children for financial reasons, and now here we are drowning in debt.*

*I face the prospect of returning to work at the end of October, I cannot be furloughed. Ironically, I work for the NHS. Considered an essential worker. Expected to return to work and provide exemplary care for our patients and the trust. Where was mine?*

*I explored taking legal action against the hospital for their clear negligence, only to be told that they do not believe I have a case as the pathology lab reported the retained placenta as 'necrotic tissue.' Imagine that! Where do they think it came from exactly? It was written all over the scan reports, consultant reports that it was placental remains. But no, I have no case."*

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3. **'Bethan Jones' New Single Mother from Tamworth;** detailing the struggles of lack of maternity health care services and difficulties returning to work.

*"I'm age 31, I gave birth via C-section in late November to a baby boy. Birth was traumatic and caused an infection that meant I suffered with recovery early on.*

*It was apparent that I was suffering with Post-natal depression and anxiety due to the struggles I was facing with my son. This was made worse further by my sons Father leaving me for another woman when my son was 8 weeks old making me now a single parent.*

*Baby classes became my lifeline and for 6 weeks they were a reason for me to leave the house and socialise with mummy friends I had met at the local children's centre.*

*Lockdown hit when my son was 3 months old and as a single parent forced to move house during a pandemic to then face enormous stress of how would I return to work without childcare that I had planned and had set up since early pregnancy. For months I struggled with making the decision to extend my maternity leave as I would be unable to return to work on 26th August as originally planned. I had never planned on financially affording to enter the unpaid portion of maternity leave let alone be solely responsible for a mortgage and all outgoings a child needs.*

*I was finally able to secure part time childcare and now plan on returning to work 8 weeks later on 12th October using 27 day's annual leave to cover the 2 days a week I cannot work due to childcare limitations with social distancing. This is set to be reviewed by my childminder and employer at Christmas.*

*I have family support however both my mother and sister have worked full time throughout the pandemic so I have been left alone 5 days a week to suffer with my PND and PNA.*

*This led me to join in with the campaign for maternity extension. I am exhausted, emotionally and physically beaten with almost 7 months of zero support from our Government. I don't know if I'll even be able to afford full time childcare if my job becomes in jeopardy due to COVID-19 as redundancies are happening daily in my workplace despite having key-worker status and a career I've worked hard at to build for 7.5 years.*

*Although I am 43 weeks into my maternity, on unpaid leave, set to return to work on week 46 and receive pay on week 48. An extension to maternity leave will allow me to financially aided via a backdated amount of SMP for unpaid weeks of leave, an extension will also bring me the much needed financial aid to have the non-emergency dental treatment I have been unable to have since pre lockdown and finally an extension to redundancy protection will ease my concerns for my job security allowing me further financial security as a single parent learning to balance being a working mum."*

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4. **'Hayley Palmer' New Mum from Dorset;** detailing the struggles to get perinatal care.

*"I'm a mum, age 30, with a 7 month old baby. I'm married with 3 older children, and this is my 4th Maternity leave. My daughter was born just before lockdown, however I have server mental health issues which were greatly impacted due to the current pandemic. All my mental health support went from weekly / daily home visits to telephone support. I have not been able to access the correct support or therapy, which has had a huge impact on both me and my daughter, and my older children. I'm still only receiving telephone appointments for the mental health and perinatal mental health team, both of which want me to be admitted into a mother and baby unit. By the time I get to receive the correct therapy through the perinatal team my baby will be over a year old and I will be discharged from them meaning I won't be able to get the right therapy needed.*

*Myself and my daughter would benefit from the 3 month extension, and yes to the government recommendations because I would hopefully be able to receive the correct treatment and support which would benefit myself and my baby, and I would be able to work on and create the bond that we currently don't have due to my poor mental health and being unwell and not being able to access the right treatment."*

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5. **'Melisa Shirley' New Mother from Wales;** detailing her struggles of giving birth to a premature baby in Lockdown.

*"I'm a new mum, age 29, from Wales with a 5 month old baby born 13th April 2020. This is my 5th maternity leave. My last my son was premature so spent 8 weeks in hospital.*

*My youngest son was born at 25 weeks old, so spent the last 5 months in hospital, finally getting home on the 13th September.*

*I went into hospital on the 8th April due to bleeding and got kept in. On the 12th April my waters went, as I had a temperature I was put on the isolation ward for possible Covid. As I was declining very fast it was decided I had to move to a hospital with an ICU.*

*When I got moved to the hospital with the ICU as I was suspected Covid they said I had to go alone, all while telling me my son would die!*

*I went to the other hospital alone but when I got there I asked them to call my husband and give him an update and the midwife said he's on his way, they tried inducing me but it didn't work and I needed an emergency C-section. Luckily he was able to stay, but he met the baby and then had to leave.*

*I didn't have Covid, I had sepsis and a Staphylococcal infection.*

*I then didn't get to see anyone again until 3 weeks later as I needed IV antibiotics 6 hourly.*

*I and my husband met our son together for the second time at 5 months and that was only for surgery. The next time this happened was when our baby was discharged home.*

*Maternity services have been ok... but only because I was in hospital for so long and my midwife was also my midwife from my second.*

*The only let down for me is I've been waiting since he was 3 weeks old for my birthing debrief. This has a massive toll on my mental health.*

*Due to lockdown I spent a month in hospital alone with no visitors watching my baby fight for his life then spent another 4 months at his bedside willing him to be ok. Now he is home and we are looking like another local down after areas close by have gone into lockdown. Not only have I already lost 5 months of time with him I now feel like I'm losing extra time with him as we are stuck inside unable to do anything.*

*We would certainly benefit with the 3 month extension to help me and my baby."*

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6. **'Laura Watson' New Mother from** Cookstown, Northern Ireland; detailing her struggles of giving birth to a premature baby in Lockdown.

*"I'm a mum, age 27, from Cookstown, Northern Ireland with a nearly 6 month old baby, born 30th March. This is my 1st maternity leave. My entire maternity leave has revolved around Covid, the first month was spent panicking about giving birth in lockdown and the rest in isolation with my baby. My final consultant appointment was on the 19th March to discuss induction due to the size of the baby, my partner was not allowed to attend. I was induced on March 29th at 8am my partner was allowed in until 8pm and then kicked out due new restrictions brought in that day, I was in full established labour at that stage. I reached the magically number of 5cm dilated at 1am but my partner was not allowed in until 5am, I am still not sure why. I was making important decisions for baby and myself when not in the right frame of mind. My labour was traumatic as forceps were needed and due to a retained placenta I was rushed to surgery afterwards and numbed from the chest down. When I returned from surgery I had 1 hour with my partner and baby before being sent to postnatal. We said a tearful goodbye and I was left alone, numb and in shock with my newborn baby. The staff were amazing but there wasn't enough of them due to everyone needed additional help due to no partners. I had to listen to my baby crying with no help and unable to pick him up. We were all discharged the next day, I know now I could have benefitted with an extra day in. We returned home to isolation, our midwife appointments were at a centre and at day 10 we were discharged. It would be 2 months before my baby would see any family, and that was outdoors at a 2 metre distance. I would benefit with the 3 month extension and yes to the Government recommendations because of the birth trauma and PND I have suffered, I contacted my GP 8 weeks about it and I am currently waiting for counselling. I work full time and I am expected to leave my baby with someone when he knows nobody. We are no longer allowed indoor visits in Northern Ireland so how do I get him adjusted to people before November? I am scared of a second lockdown when I am due back to work."*

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7. **'Hann Walklett' New Mum from Wolverhamton;** detailing her employment redundancy whilst on maternity leave.

*"I'm a first time mum, I'm age 26. Due to lockdown laws I am not able to have a support bubble as I am not a single parent or single person. My partner works 10-12 hours a day, 6 days a week, he leaves the house at 7am and some days doesn't return till 8:30pm. That means I am on my own, all day every day with my baby girl. No help or adult interaction. I also haven't seen a health visitor since my baby was 12 weeks old, which was when she was last weighed. No contact at all.*

*I got made redundant from my job back in April, I was working as a Sales Representative for my employer for 4.5 years. I am finding it ridiculously difficult to find another job, the only support I am entitled to is new style JSA to help with our bills. It's not enough.*

*All this is taking a massive toll on my mental health. I have days where I can't cope. I go for walks to get out of the house, but after an hour it's back to square one.*

*The only person I can see is my 86 year old Nan, and that's because I am her support bubble. But that is only once a week.*

*What about the new parents who are on their own most of the day but don't qualify for a support bubble? Who's looking after us?*

*Extension of maternity leave would help me aid more time in my current situation for me and my baby to prepare, supporting the care service I would of normally got in my maternity.*

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8. **'Anonymous Adoptive Parents' from North West;** detailing the struggles of their adoption leave support.

*"I and my husband are age 40. We brought our 13 month old daughter home at the end of February after living elsewhere for two weeks whilst on transition period.*

*When you bring a child home for adoption it's suggested that you stay home for at least 10 days to bond as a family without confusing the new addition with extended family. We slowly started visiting in-laws and my parents literally for half an hour at a time but only could do this twice. Each time she clung to me and wouldn't look at them or interact at all.*

*We managed two baby groups and one health visitor visit before lockdown came into place. We'd usually have social worker visits every few weeks to start and then once a month and these have had to be done via zoom. We were hoping to meet with our little girls social worker and ours to sign off so to speak but COVID-19 is making this very difficult.*

*Yes this has been good for us as a family to bond with her however it's been detrimental too as she then really really struggled when my husband returned to work... screaming every night when he returned home and clinging to me and when I*

*say screaming I mean blood curdling screams! She does the same with any medical professionals and she has two fairly major issues which we are now on waiting list for paediatric appointments which could be 8/9 months!!! How crazy when this is a child's life!*

*I've missed out on socialising with other mums and sharing ideas and tips. We've struggled to have children therefore adopting and I loved and cherished my time with our eldest when I was on adoption leave with him and was so excited about having that same special time with her.*

*Due to the difficulty I've decided to extend my original 9 months leave to 11 months so will have no income November and December but hoping the Government extension will come in place. I feel this is so important for her, as times haven't been too easy with her so I'm hoping for some enjoyable time with just her now our biggest is starting school.*

*The rule of 6 is in place and including children in England which is just crazy since they're at school and can go to places like soft play and mix so why can't we meet with family and friends from the same school? Adding more pressure to all of us as families.*

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