

A QUARTER OF PREGNANT NHS WORKERS ARE STILL WORKING WITH PATIENTS WHO COULD HAVE COVID19 DESPITE THEM BEING CLASSED AS VULNERABLE

24% of pregnant NHS workers feel unsafe, rising to 31% for BAME pregnant NHS workers

Date Tuesday 28th April 2020: New research from Pregnant Then Screwed from 2150 pregnant workers, has found that 25% of pregnant NHS workers are putting themselves and their babies at risk by not adhering to social distancing while 24% of Pregnant NHS workers feel unsafe. This figure rises to 31% for BAME pregnant NHS workers.

Of the pregnant women surveyed, 8% are worried about their safety - rising to 13% for BAME pregnant women - and a further 8% have been suspended from work on the wrong terms, a potential breach of their employment rights.

This research comes in the wake of the tragic news that three pregnant women have now died. Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong, a 28-year-old nurse with no underlying health issues died from Covid-19 when she was 8 months pregnant. Salina Shaw and Fozia Hanif also died from the virus just a few days after their babies were delivered by emergency C-section. All three were women of colour. This research also showed that pregnant women of colour are more likely to be working in environments they deem as unsafe (13% for BAME pregnant women compared to 8% for white pregnant women).

A pregnant Midwife explains, "I feel like a guinea pig. I feel unsafe and unheard. Ironic that I work in a maternity unit and people are not concerned with my health, the risks or my unborn baby."

Employment law states that pregnant women must be able to socially distance at work during this pandemic and if that isn't possible then they must be suspended on full pay. However thousands of pregnant workers have been forced to take statutory sick pay when they are not

sick, have been told to start their maternity leave early or have been suspended with no pay at all. Thousands more continue to work in environments where they cannot socially distance.

One paramedic explains, "My mental health has been severely affected by the continuous arguments with management not protecting me because I am not vulnerable under 28 weeks pregnant. I am constantly at less than 2m distance from frontline colleagues, we share the same rooms, kitchen and toilet facilities. I have been threatened with forced sick pay, unpaid leave, have been refused to furlough. I have been refused because there are no laptops left. I have also been threatened with a disciplinary. I have zero support."

Joeli Brearley, Founder of Pregnant Then Screwed said: *"Our research with pregnant women shows that there is still a huge amount of confusion about what employers should be doing during this crisis. Pregnant women were placed in the vulnerable category on the 16th March. The Government has advised that all pregnant women must be "particularly stringent" when adhering to social distancing measures; but when asked whether pregnant women should be going to work they seem unable to give a clear answer. If the Government continues to ignore pregnant workers we run the risk of another pregnant woman dying."*

Of the pregnant NHS workers who are still treating patients, 26% are more than 28 weeks pregnant. The current evidence shows that vertical transmission - where a mother passes the virus to the baby in utero - is 'probable' while the RCOG guidance states that if infected with Covid-19 in the final trimester of pregnancy a woman is 'more likely to become seriously unwell', and this 'may lead to preterm birth of their baby'.

Brearley continues, *"We know that BAME people are more likely to die or end up in ICU than their white counterparts. Carol Cooper, head of equality, diversity and human rights at Birmingham Community Hospital, has said that BAME medics 'feel targeted' to work on covid wards. Our research has shown that BAME pregnant women are more likely to be working in environments they feel are unsafe. This is particularly concerning because the three pregnant women who have died are all BAME."*

“It is not only crucial that all pregnant women are enabled to socially distance at work but it is also imperative that if pregnant workers are suspended then they are suspended on full pay, otherwise employers are breaking the law.”

-ENDS-

For further press information or case studies from Pregnant Then Screwed please contact: celia@pregnantthenscrewed.com or call: 07756525004.

Full research findings (survey was completed in April 2020, by 2150 pregnant workers and 490 pregnant NHS workers).

- 8% of all pregnant women are working in environments they deem as unsafe
- 13% of BAME pregnant women are working in environments they deem as unsafe
- 8.3% of all pregnant women who are not working have been suspended on incorrect terms (forced to take SSP, are not being paid, told to start mat leave early or told to take annual leave).
- This increases to 10.6% for BAME women.
- 25% of pregnant NHS workers are coming into contact with people who could have Covid19. Therefore one in four pregnant NHS workers are not following the Government’s advice for pregnant people to ‘stringently adhere to social distancing’.
- 24% say they are worried about their safety - this is an improvement from the last time PTS did this survey when that figure was 34%.
- That figure shoots up to 31% for BAME pregnant NHS workers.

Notes to Editor:

About Pregnant Then Screwed (www.pregnantthenscrewed.com)

A UK charity which seeks to end the motherhood penalty.

We protect, support and promote the rights of mothers who suffer the effects of systemic, cultural, and institutional discrimination through our various schemes and activities, including:

- A free legal advice service, a website where women post their stories of discrimination anonymously, lobbying the Government for legislative change, and a mentor scheme that supports women who are considering legal action against their employer.