

Maternity protection at work: practices, obstacles, resources.

The implementation of existing legal provisions (Federal Labour Law, Ordinance on the Protection of Maternity) aimed at protecting the health of pregnant workers or new mothers and their children contains flaws, both in the employment field and in the health care system. These flaws cannot merely be attributed to a lack of information; rather, they seem to stem from the contradictory requirements of employment and of maternity protection that lead protagonists to fail to apply some legal provisions, or to develop prevention practices that lie outside legal guidelines.

The project, conducted by a multidisciplinary team (psychologist, midwife and occupational health physician) has the goal of providing an overview of the current implementation of legal provisions for maternity protection in two employment sectors (health care and food production), as well as by gynecologists and midwives in French-speaking Switzerland. It seeks to identify the obstacles and the resources that have an impact on the implementation of these provisions, and aims at evaluating the perceptions of women workers themselves. Data collection will be comprised of three facets:

1. Questionnaires for gynecologists, midwives and employers.
2. Case studies in 6 to 8 enterprises including interviews with women workers, human resources managers, occupational health physicians and workplace security specialists.
3. Focus groups with labour inspectors, occupational physicians and occupational hygienists.

This study will contribute to increasing knowledge and to provide concrete information on health protection practices for workers facing professional risks, as well as on work and maternity conciliation in Switzerland. Its results should promote improvements in maternity protection measures as well as in professional practices.

Research team

Isabelle Probst, main applicant, HESAV

Peggy Krief, other applicant, IST

Brigitta Danuser, other applicant,
IST, UNIL

Maria-Pia Politis Mercier,
senior scientific collaborator, HESAV

Alessia Zellweger, PhD student,
HESAV, IST, UNIL

Michela Zenoni, scientific collaborator,
HESAV, IST

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