

## Maternity Leave and the Rights of Pregnant Women

## إجازة الأمومة وحقوق المرأة الحامل

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## Abstract

This research analyses the existing legal structures and policies for maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women. Comparing the UAE labour sector and country legislation departments in relation to the international policies and laws, this dissertation aims to achieve four main objectives. The first objective is to explore the ways in which the relationship between working mothers and their employers impacts on prenatal mental health conditions. The second objective is to evaluate the impacts of the UAE labour laws on Maternity Leave and Rights of Pregnant Women policies with respect to the international law and policies. The third objective is to evaluate the role the UAE anti-discrimination policies play towards the realisation of pregnant women's rights in the workplace. Finally, the fourth objective is to provide policy recommendations on the best approach for aligning the labour laws with the rights of pregnant women and maternity leave. This research is based on interviews. The sample consists of seven individuals selected from different sectors in the UAE. The data were analysed using content analysis.

Taking into consideration the data collected in this study, the key aspect of the policies and legal structures is the establishment of a sustainable relationship between employers and female employees. Employers must be ready to appreciate the fact that female employees form a critical element in their business success. In this case, they must be ready to give them proper non-discriminatory terms and conditions for maternity leave. Similarly, the UAE authorities and legislature, in particular, must institute relevant legal policies in line with the international policies to ensure that pregnant women are protected from employer' demands and expectations that do not have clear grounds and explanation.

## الملخص باللغة العربية

يحلل هذا البحث الهياكل القانونية وسياسات إجازة الأمومة وحقوق النساء الحوامل. كما يقارن بين قطاع العمل في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة والإدارات التشريعية في البلاد فيما يتعلق بالسياسات والقوانين الدولية، ويهدف هذا البحث إلى تحقيق أربعة أهداف رئيسية. يكمن الهدف الأول في استكشاف السبل التي يمكن بها للعلاقة بين الأمهات العاملات وأرباب العمل أن تؤثر على الصحة النفسية والعقلية في مرحلة ما قبل الولادة. والهدف الثاني هو تقييم الآثار المترتبة على قوانين العمل في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة فيما يتعلق بإجازة الأمومة وسياسات حقوق النساء الحوامل بالاتساق مع القانون والسياسات الدولية. بينما الهدف الثالث هو تقييم الدور الذي تلعبه السياسات المناهضة للتمييز في الإمارات العربية المتحدة في تحقيق حقوق المرأة الحامل في مكان العمل. وأخيراً، يتمثل الهدف الرابع في تقديم توصيات سياسية عن أفضل نهج لمواءمة قوانين العمل مع حقوق النساء الحوامل وإجازة الأمومة. ويستند هذا البحث على المقابلات، وتتكون العينة من سبعة أفراد مختارين من مختلف القطاعات في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. وقد تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام تحليل المحتوى.

مع الأخذ في الاعتبار البيانات التي تم جمعها في هذه الدراسة، تعتبر السياسات والهياكل القانونية حجر الزاوية للعلاقة المستدامة بين أرباب العمل والموظفات. لذا يجب أن يكون أرباب العمل على استعداد لإدراك وتقبل حقيقة أن الموظفات يشكلن عنصراً حاسماً في نجاح أعمالهم. وفي هذه الحالة، يجب أن يكونوا على استعداد لمنحهم شروط وأحكام مناسبة وغير تمييزية فيما يتعلق بإجازة الأمومة. وبالمثل، يتعين على سلطات الإمارات العربية المتحدة والهيئة التشريعية، على وجه الخصوص، أن تصيغ سياسات قانونية ذات صلة بما يتماشى مع السياسات الدولية لضمان حماية النساء الحوامل من مطالب أرباب العمل وتوقعاتهم التي ليس لها أساس أو تفسير واضح.

## **Dedication**

This final dissertation is dedicated to my beloved husband, Yousef Al Zaabi, with gratitude for his support, patience, and stimulus throughout my study and preparation of my thesis. Thank you, Yousef.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction and Background

According to the current Federal Labour Law UAE Article (30), working women are entitled to receive maternity leave with full pay for approximately 45 days (Dagher, Hofferth, & Lee, 2014). In addition, the Bills of Rights in the International Labour Standards states that expectant mothers must be provided with special protection and services against any harm that may be detrimental to their health and that of their infants and an adequate time for giving birth (Sussman, 2009). During pregnancy, women are expected to work fewer hours as compared to other women, who are not pregnant. It is their right to make such choices and decide what kind of work and what duration is appropriate for them. These laws and rights are critical in the labour sector since they develop positive perceptions amongst women. Hence, it increases women's willingness to participate in their organisations' goals, thus ensuring an overall capacity development and gender inclusivity in the UAE. On the contrary, considering the UAE practice in offering maternity leave and observing the rights of pregnant women, companies in the UAE are still lagging behind in comparison to their international counterparts. For instance, a newspaper report published in GulfNews indicates that the discussion of maternity leave and rights of pregnant women is one of the lowest issues on a global level (Maceda, 2015). A phenomenon that has led to the ineffectiveness of the UAE maternity laws is attributed to the fact that women may receive leave with full pay, but they must have been in employment for at least one year with their current employer. This issue affects women's productivity, industrial development, and market attractiveness for female workers and their international inclusion in employment.

Considering other countries, such as Canada and the USA, they offer 24- to 40-week vacations to mothers on maternity leave and free leave for pregnant women (Lazarus, Mayo-Smith, Mainiero, & Spencer, 2007). Research conducted and highlighted by Pesonen (2015) indicated that the rights to maternity leave are critical in different countries. These rights have a significant impact on women and their babies as they allow new mothers to breastfeed their new-borns and also to recover from the physical and mental exhaustion of giving birth.

There have been concerns among medical experts when they agreed on the need to review the paid maternity benefits for women in the UAE. For example, Dr Sausan Abdul Rahman, an obstetrics and gynaecology specialist at the Burjeel Hospital Abu Dhabi, recommended that maternity leaves should be reviewed and extended substantially as opposed to the current recommended duration (Maceda, 2015). Having 45 days off from their work as a minimum to a full recovery of mothers after birth as well as bonding with and providing the required maternal care to their children is the result to strive for (Kruske, Young, Jenkinson, & Catchlove, 2013). Another source where the rights of pregnant women are discussed is also known as the Mercer's 2014 Worldwide Benefits and Employment Guidelines. These guidelines indicate that the majority of the markets are generous enough to offer leave allowances to their female employees. However, the countries like the UAE do not pay much attention to such tasks and the observation of the rights of pregnant women. Taking into consideration the evident challenges and problems the Arab population faces nowadays, the question of the UAE labour laws for maternity leave and pregnant women remains one of the poorest when compared to the developed countries' issues that have to be discussed and improved with the help of the practices that could be taken from the examples demonstrated by the international countries (Heilbrun, Bender, Truong, & Bluth, 2013). Another powerful attempt to discuss the questions of maternity leave was made by Hatch in 2002, who demonstrated that the UAE citizens believed that the majority of female employees in the country were given limited protection against dismissal by their employers as a result of their pregnancies and maternity leave rights. This research study is carried out in order to understand the existing discrepancies between the UAE and international perceptions of the maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women.

### **1.1.1 Scope of the Dissertation**

This project covers the situations inherent to the citizens of the UAE and compares these with the international perspectives that could be found. Therefore, the scope of the project may be the population of the UAE who have to deal with maternity leave either directly or indirectly. In addition, the study also focuses on the practices in international countries regarding their maternity leave conditions and the rights and laws pregnant women may rely on for the purpose of generating plausible recommendations going forward. In the subsequent analysis, the study's scope is the UAE labour sector and the form of care provided to pregnant women in accordance with their stipulated rights. Additionally, to enhance an inclusivity of research,

the opinions of female employees who are going on maternity leave and pregnant women have to be taken into consideration. Qualitative data should be collected in order to clarify women's perceptions of maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women. It is also recommended to use the information taken from several international countries' labour sectors with the help of the available websites in order to understand their approaches to maternity leave formulation and the development of the rights that could protect women in the workplace.

## **1.2 Research Rationale**

### **1.2.1 Theoretical Rationale**

The study focuses on evaluating and analysing maternity leave conditions and the rights pregnant women may have in UAE as compared to the international laws. In this regard, the significance for theory is based on the investigation of the knowledge gap that could be discovered in the existing maternity leave laws and the implementation of the rights of pregnant women. The UAE context and the international government context should be taken into consideration. Such an approach should help to establish traditional practices that are valid and relevant in the existing highly dynamic and transformed labour sector in the UAE that is based on or opposed to the practices developed in other developing countries.

### **1.2.2 Practical Rationale**

The recommendations arising from this study could make positive contributions to the situations modern UAE people have to live in and work under. The proposals may also assist the UAE developers and governments in improving their ratings in regard to maternity leave and pregnant women's rights in their workforce. The identification of specific laws and the portion of help provided to the pregnant women in the international laws can be used as the approaches to retaining them in the workforce and appreciating their work and family roles. The researcher of the study is in a position to determine the distinct approaches that can be adopted. The context of the approaches is to improve the scope of the set performance in the UAE labour sector and eliminate the mistreatment that is often given to pregnant women and those attending maternity services. The similarities with Pesonen's (2015) assertions on the necessity to reduce the risks of mistreatment of pregnant women cannot be neglected. Fair treatment is enhanced by facilitating a transformation in the strategies adopted in recruitment and selection practices by the majority of organisations. Other approaches include setting up good legislation and defining the scope of practice of women in the labour sector. This

research hence focuses on identifying what is the most effective for the UAE female workers and their employers' practices.

### **1.3 Key Aims of the Dissertation**

#### **1.3.1 Overall Aim**

The overall aim of the study is to develop new ways of thinking about maternity leave among the UAE citizens and evaluating the approaches and legal systems that could be instituted by the UAE labour market based on the examples developed by international countries. As such, the primary focus includes evaluating and determining the optional policies and practices for promoting the rights of pregnant women through implementing effective maternity leave policies.

#### **1.3.2 Objectives**

Considering the above-identified research aims, it is asserted that they are tenable and deliverable. Nevertheless, the realisation of the goals requires the specification of how they can be achieved through following specific objectives, which include:

- Exploring the ways in which the relationship between working mothers and their employers impacts the prenatal mental health conditions;
- Evaluating the impacts of the UAE labour laws and the maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women policies with respect to the international law and policies;
- Evaluating the role the UAE anti-discrimination policies may play in the realisation of pregnant women's rights in the workplace; and
- Providing recommendations for aligning the labour laws with the rights of pregnant women and the significance of supportive conditions and maternity leave.

#### **1.3.3 Research Questions**

According to Hatch (2002), the pursuit of a successful research study is determined by the presence of concise and accurate achievable deliverables. In this regard, to ensure positive and specific deliverables, the analysis is based on the development of distinct and specific research questions. The study findings are based on addressing specific questions that are in line with the existing aims and objectives. The specific research questions in this study are as follows:

- What are the ways in which the relationship between working mothers and their employers impacts the development of prenatal mental health conditions?
- What are the impacts of the UAE labour laws on maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women policies with respect to international law and policies?
- What is the role the UAE anti-discrimination policies play in the realisation of pregnant women rights in the workplace?
- What is the optimal recommendation for aligning the labour laws with the rights of pregnant women and supportive maternity leave conditions?

### **1.3.4 Propositions**

- P1: There is an implication of the relationship between the working mothers and their employers on their parental mental health conditions.
- P2: There are the impacts of the UAE labour laws on the maternity leave and rights of pregnant women policies with respect to the international law and policies.
- P3: The anti-discrimination policy does not play any role in the realisation of the pregnant women's rights in their workplaces.
- P4: There are several appropriate recommendations on the best approach for aligning the labour laws with the rights of pregnant women and maternity leave.

## **1.4 Research Methodology**

This study is based on two types of research design: descriptive and analytical. The rationale for this choice of research design is based on the purpose of the study, which is to evaluate the UAE maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women in relation to the international laws. Additionally, a qualitative methodology approach is employed in the study that involves the necessity to collect primary data from the targeted audience through interviews. The study also includes a non-probability approach. A convenience non-probability sampling technique is applied. The audience required for this research study should be selected with regard to their ease of recruitment. It is also not necessary to select subjects that constitute a representative sample of the entire population. Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013) argue that the convenience non-probability technique is fast, inexpensive, and easy to implement, which equally promotes the researcher to use this technique. In regard to the data

collected through the interviews, the qualitative content analysis approach should be used to ensure that there are several properly selected themes that can be analysed in answering the research questions identified previously. According to Kothari (2008), application of the content analysis facilitates the classification and establishment of the themes that act as an illustration of the different meanings of the phenomena. Such activity is defined as an opposition to the application of coding strategy in assigning a word or phrases that summarise a segment of the language-oriented and visual data, which is not helpful in the context of the UAE labour laws only.

### **1.5 Research Ethics**

Hatch (2002) defines research ethics as the list of right principles guiding a research study. All research studies ought to embrace an approach that is in line with the best frameworks for enhancing the research reliability, validity, and acceptability. As for the interview questions, the main ethical issue is to ensure the confidentiality of an interviewee and protect the originality of the information gathered. To mitigate the ethical issues, the research participants' names have to be disclosed and reported in a manner that ensures their anonymity. In addition, a guarantee has to be provided that the data and information collected would only be applied for academic purposes. All these details have to be communicated and agreed to in the consent form provided.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter 2 focuses on providing a critical analysis and evaluation of the current literature. The main point of interest is the existing theories, models, and frameworks that guide the policies and laws on maternity leave and care for pregnant women in the sphere of employment. The chapter is subdivided into two broad sections. The first section describes the policies that are common in different countries. The chosen policies can be theoretically applied by various entities in the labour sector to ensure that they preserve the issues of maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women. In particular, the section discusses different policies and laws that are perceived as the best practices for organisations and introduce the details on the merits of each of them. Such an approach helps to demonstrate the applicability of the policies to the management of maternity leave and preservation of pregnant women's rights. The second section explores the role of different stakeholders in implementing the policies and legal procedures that help to define and explain the rights of the pregnant women and maternity leave issues.

### **2.2 Maternity Leave and Rights of Pregnant Women Policies**

The question of maternity leave and pregnancy in the workplace is a critical human rights aspect of equality and opportunities. It helps to prove that women should not suffer from negative consequences in their workplaces due to their pregnancy but rather use governmental legal support to protect their rights and future possibilities. The investigations by Hay (2014), Sargeant (2014), and Caprioli and Douglass (2008) show that different countries try to institute policies and acts that ensure the prohibition of any form of discrimination that could be related to pregnancy. Oun (2010) explains that the policies on pregnancy and human rights issues provide a clear outline of the responsibilities of employers in relation to maternity leave and pregnancy in their workplaces. Russell and Banks (2011) argue that the policies enhance the existence of opportunities through the creation of respectfulness and inclusivity of the different work environments and offering practical pieces of advice in order to prevent any form of discrimination in relation to those groups of employees that are in need or may be in need of maternity leave. There are a number of challenges that occur because of the necessity to balance work responsibilities and family

obligations, which extend beyond their period of maternity leave and pregnancy. Therefore, the policies provided for female workers are critical for instituting dignity, respect, and accommodations (Dagher et al., 2014).

### **2.2.1 Protection for Pregnancy and Breastfeeding**

Different policies offer different types of protection that could be asked for by pregnant and breastfeeding women in their workplace. The fact that only women possess the basic biological capacity to give birth should not be the grounds for the development of further discriminations or other discontents in the workplace. Pregnancy and gender issues should not be confused with any conditions. For instance, the Canadian pregnancy and breastfeeding policies demand that the right to equal treatment without any form of discrimination should be guaranteed in all workplaces since sex is inclusive of the rights to equal treatment without any form of discrimination and since women have an equal capacity of becoming pregnant (Maceda, 2015).

Pregnancy is an overall process that involves pregnancy starting from conception up to the time when a child is born and is inclusive of the post-delivery period and breastfeeding (Heilbrun et al., 2013). The right for consideration of pregnancy and maternity leave equally covers any discrimination cases that may occur during childbearing age and any other situations when a woman may become pregnant. The point is that the experiences of women may vary considerably. It is hard to predict and prevent the challenges pregnant women may be faced with. Some women feel okay till the end of their pregnancies and give birth to their children without any complications. However, it could happen that a woman is in need of constant observations and medical support during her pregnancy. In such cases, maternity leaves and women rights should be reconsidered. Therefore, maternity leave policies must cover the events arising from miscarriages or stillbirth, any immature abortion that may occur, pregnancy and childbirth complications, and the different conditions that may result from the direct and indirect miscarriages (Heilbrun et al., 2013). The recovery from childbirth and breastfeeding must be considered for women's well-being.

### **2.2.2 Health-Related Absences and Benefit Plans**

The concerns of pregnant women and maternity leave health-related issues are based on the idea of making a woman free from work while still getting the benefits that are all subject to

the existing employment standards, employment insurance legislation, and the overall human rights laws (Kelson, 2013). Prior to the enactment of legislation and policies in this field, there were no provisions that permitted differential types of treatment of health-related problems caused by pregnancies during maternity leave. Nowadays, the main problems and challenges pregnant women may face are included in the current international regulations. According to Kruske et al. (2013), the regulations are created to make sure that all employers promote similar benefits entitlements to their employees, who are pregnant or under maternal leave, to those provided to the employees who have other types of leave. Such laws must be guided by the fact that women may possess different medical and physiological needs that are directly or indirectly related to their pregnancy and childbirth. For instance, the time that is needed for full recovery from childbirth may vary considerably. Lazarus et al. (2007) admit that, in most instances, women demonstrate different responses to their pregnancy and ask for health-related absences that may be assessed and granted on a personal basis. It is, however, a necessity that pregnant employees require leaves for their health-related pregnancy concerns to ensure that they follow their proof-of-claim procedures of the existing employer's benefits plans for the establishment of the health-related absence validities.

The international health policies on pregnant women and maternity leave are oriented to the fact that women may possess diverse health-associated issues based on their pregnancies (Pesonen, 2015). The main problems that force them to be away from work prior and after their pregnancy leave or maternal leave may not be identified in the regulations and policies. Therefore, much depends on employers and their readiness to cooperate with pregnant employees in the future. According to Sussman (2009), such policies demand that women should access health benefits through the already established workplace's sick and disability plans. However, women must continually address their employment standards branches in different countries and ministries of labour since their decisions in taking short- or long-term disabilities leave have significant impacts on their rights to take pregnancy and maternal leaves in the future.

### **2.3 Relationship between Working Mothers and Their Employers Impacts on the Prenatal Mental Health Conditions**

In most cases, pregnancy and maternity leave lead to certain changes in employee–employer relationships and cause some uncertainties and concerns (Brasileiro, Possobon, Carrascoza, Ambrosano, & Moraes, 2010; Buzzanell & Liu, 2005; Cichowski, 2004). Typically, different entities operate with one purpose: to increase their capital gains. Taking such a goal into account and the necessity to identify pregnancy as the reason for leave or absence in the workplace, certain restrictions have to be enacted on the basis of economic interests instead of the needs of individuals or groups of employees. Berger, Hill, and Waldfogel (2005) suggest an idea that the limitations have an impact on both physical and physiological conditions of women and influence different policies in various government entities equally. Previously, different governments allowed gender discrimination in relation to pregnancy and maternity leave (Maceda, 2015). However, today, policies and restrictions developed by various governments aim at eliminating any restrictions on pregnant women unless their employment is hazardous. For example, the American government promotes a number of acts, including equal employment commission, the Equal Pay Act, the Family Medical Leave Act, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, with all of them having their common equivalents in most of the European countries.

Current research observes that the question of the relationships between pregnant or postpartum mothers and their employers is critical since it can create or destroy effective communities. These relations help to comprehend if a woman gets the right to return to her place of work or be fired or eventually need to resign because of different reasons (Brown, Emerson, Falk, & Freedman, 1971). Furthermore, empirical research developed by Baird, Brennan, and Cutcher (2002) demonstrates that a negative employer’s attitude and the climate supported by all people in an organisation may typically create unintended stresses amongst postpartum and pregnant mothers. Taking into account this type of analysis and the findings made by the authors, it may be concluded that there is a need for countries to institute policies that could have a greater capacity for creating a positive direction in employee–employer relationships and the establishment of a gendered sphere in the workplace. When considering modern economic inequalities, women are more likely to live

in poverty as opposed to their male counterparts (Solis, 2009). The inflexibility common among female employees is evident in the limited labour participation of pregnant mothers and those on maternity leave. More specifically, a study developed and highlighted by Bacchus, Mezey, and Bewley (2004) in the UK states that approximately 45% of mothers with children aged 11 and younger have a lower likelihood of being employed as opposed to their male counterparts. Evidently, the same survey introduces that the majority of the recruitment agencies in Europe and other parts of the world are wary of hiring pregnant women or those who are at the most productive child-bearing age. Nevertheless, despite the existence of these data, it is evident that women are continuously becoming a part of the workforce in many countries.

Regarding the Commonwealth countries, it is evident that such issues as women's rights movements, the technological growth, and the existing education and employment opportunities have already promoted the development of positive relationships that could exist between women and their employers. The investigation by Grace, Williams, Stewart, & Franche (2006) proves that approximately 47% of the Commonwealth countries' workforces are made up of women. Today, some countries' laws provide the opportunity for women and men to take 12 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave under the Family Medical Leave Act. Despite the Act assuring women of their job protection, it fails to enhance the existence of economic resources during these 12 weeks when women are under leave and may face certain mental and physical hardships caused by unpredictable postpartum conditions indicated by experienced mothers. Customarily, when employers offer leave after childbirth, female employees typically go on their vacation and sick leave so that they are able to maintain the sustainability of their incomes during their absence and deter the inability to earn money. Sometimes there are the situations when women cannot start working as soon as they give birth to children because of personal problems. Therefore, it is hard to create one common system under which the relations between employers and female workers in the postpartum period may be developed.

However, some researchers are ready to discuss the conditions when women have to work outside their homes. It happens that certain negative effects on their mental health are observed and influence their lives and working abilities considerably. Conversely, Liu and Buzzanell (2004) note that the existence of unfavourable mental health is elicited in an event

where the employment options of women are limited, and the job quality lacks considerably. In the light of such an approach and discovery, a number of studies aim at exploring and identifying the peculiar features of a direct correlation between the level of stress women experience in their jobs and homes and their mental health and well-being (Houston & Marks, 2003; Rossin, 2011; Rossin-Slater, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2013; Siegel, 2006).

Despite the current law that recognises pregnant women as protected citizens and discourages any forms of discrimination, few actions are taken to address the attitudes of employers posturing negatively in an event where women are in need of maternity leave. For example, pregnant working women may develop feelings of being discriminated against, and the same feeling gets worse when women extend their maternity leave. A global commission on equal rights found that approximately 300,000 women lose their jobs annually due to pregnancy, 600,000 women suffered financially, and an overall 400,000 women experienced unfair treatment demonstrated by their superiors (Siegel, 1985). It is evident that it is not necessary for employers to demonstrate their relations with working mothers and lose them without any evident reasons because of the possibility of lawsuits or the necessity to deal with real talent losses and hiring or even training new replacement employees without the appropriate background and awareness of organisational competencies and values.

## **2.4 Impacts of the Labour Laws on Maternity Leave and the Rights of Pregnant Women**

Pregnancy discrimination can occur at any point of the employment relationship, starting from employees' hiring to firing (Guendelman et al., 2009). Taking such possible development of the relations into account, it turns out to be evidently illegal to refuse to hire women because they are pregnant, to assign them duties that are not appropriate because of evident reasons, and to demote them due to their pregnancy. To avoid such events and unpleasant outcomes, certain labour laws are offered in order to govern the conditions under which maternity leaves are offered and the rights of the pregnant women are protected. Additionally, it is necessary to state that any infringement of legislation can lead to legal proceedings against employers. According to empirical research introduced by Nilsson-Wikmar, Holm, Öijerstedt, and Harms-Ringdahl (2005), the policies ensure that in a scenario where a woman is temporarily not in a position to perform her job due to a medical condition elicited by her pregnancy or childbirth, prompt action by the employer ought to be taken. The

action requires that an employer or another leader or manager demonstrates effective work on how to treat all involved parties the same way and avoid the problems with temporarily physically challenged employees. For instance, the majority of the policies underline that it is better to provide women in special conditions with light duties, alternative assignments, paid disability leaves, and other paid leave.

Dagher et al. (2014) investigate the impact of the Australian maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women who face impairments as a result of their pregnancy and clarify the situations when the Act of Parliament is used to protect their rights and support women. Common pregnancy impairments include preeclampsia and gestational diabetes, which are defined as conditions characterised by pregnancy-induced hypertension and protein in the urine of the woman. In such situations, the law makes an employer provide reasonable accommodation, including unplanned leave or specific modifications to help employees perform their duties effectively with a minimum of losses and challenges (Heilbrun et al., 2014). In support of such practice, Kruske et al. (2013) suggest the idea that attorney services in different countries are valuable because they may be used to assist pregnant women in negotiations with their employers, and usage of their packages is a part of a full implementation of the enhanced policy.

Regarding the analysis and evaluation of the literature above, it is possible to admit that the existence of different policies and legal procedures against pregnancy discrimination cannot be neglected. It is usually based on the fact that a person with certain challenges caused by pregnancy cannot be treated differently or defined in a different category without any evident reason compared to other employees. Many modern employers and employees use the existing statutory rights as being reasonable and easily facilitated issues developed by different governments. It is evident from the above analysis that pregnancy and maternity leave in a large number of countries have to be defined as a protected occurrence and clearly stipulated under the Equality Act of 2010, which is practised globally. Such legislation is critical to prohibit discrimination in terms of pregnancy and maternity, which is inclusive for treating a woman in a less favourable manner when she is breastfeeding. As summarised by Lazarus et al. (2007), unlawful discrimination is inclusive of female employees being dismissed, redundant in their workplaces, and denied a promotion. Some women include the

denial of their rights in returning to the same jobs, having some of their responsibilities taken away, and a decrease in their salaries due to their pregnancy or maternity leave.

## **2.5 Benefits of the Anti-Discrimination Maternity Leave Policies and the Rights of Pregnant Women**

In order to understand the existing global situation and its relation to the conditions under which pregnant women have to work or ask for leave, there is a need to evaluate the maternity protection databases of countries' national legislation. Brasileiro et al. (2010) explain that the database is currently inclusive of a detailed analysis of the information on the maternity protection laws in approximately 100 countries. The implementation of the policies is oriented on the provision of maternity leave, related types of leave, resources benefits, medication benefits, and the protection of women's health (Pesonen, 2015). The comparison of the national legal provisions is critical due to the existing broad variety of national systems. In this case, the representatives of some countries could rely on the constitutional arrangements, which include the federal systems with no single national standard due to the nature of the legislation developed in different states, provinces, and cantons in regards to the rules and requirements established by local authorities.

Countries offer different conditions and rates that may be used by women who want to take their statutory maternity leave and learn how to use the approach to distribute it before and after childbirth (Baird et al., 2002). Some countries give significant flexibility over the situations of when and how maternity leave can be taken. According to Kruske et al. (2013), in these countries, the legislation leaves distinct gaps for women to make their decisions on how to distribute their allocated leave. Such possibility of flexible leave is prompted by the fact that discrimination against women on the basis of their pregnancy still occurs in relation to the termination of their employment and accessing their employment. Liu and Buzzanell (2004) inform that such disparities and differences create the need to define measures and enhance the safeguarding of employment opportunities for pregnant employees. Such steps could ensure that discrimination based on stipulated requirements for maternity leave and the possibility of actual prosecution is not a problem or an issue for unfair discussions and treatments. During different centuries, a number of policies were consistently set to ensure the existence of protection against any form of external interference. Taking into account maternity leave conventions, there is also a consistent need for ensuring the protection of the

employment of pregnant women and their maternity leave (Bacchus et al., 2004). Considering the convention statutes, it is evident that the dismissal of women who may be absent from their work during their maternity leave should be monitored and, when iniquitous, prevented. The laws also cover the extension of leave that may be necessitated by illness arising from pregnancy and the need for confinement. For example, Convention No. 183 may be used as a demonstration of the governmental impact on pregnant employees and the possibility to promote a continuation of the period of protection against any form of dismissal to be inclusive of the overall period of pregnancy, maternity leave, and additional periods that may follow any woman who returns to work under the conditions that are defined by the existing national laws or regulations.

There are also many traditional anti-discrimination policies and legislations with the help of which the existence of protection was offered to employed women but failed due to certain factors regarding employment opportunities. Grace et al. (2006) describe this phenomenon as a critical concern and the need for equality of the opportunities available to men and women in their jobs. Houston and Marks (2003) explain such difficult issues as motherhood and parental responsibilities, which are linked as those with a strong impact on the image of women in the workplace. Employers need to be aware of these images and values as well as their potential influences on the criteria assessed and discussed during the process of selection of employees for different posts. Employers should ensure that they do not reject candidates simply because they are of child-bearing age. In other words, the abilities and skills of potential female employees should not be rejected, misunderstood, or neglected just because a worker may become a parent soon. Lazarus et al. (2007) point out that such social groups where the heaviest burden of the family responsibilities play an important role should not be deprived of opportunities. It is necessary to develop the conditions under which all employees may ask for leave and explain their absence because of personal issues without focusing on organisational issues and the changes that may be observed in the work of a company. It may happen that certain changes and unpredictable outcomes may lead to financial problems and burdens for women during maternity leave or absence. However, the same challenges may be inherent to men who have to ask for leave because of their problems and personal situations. A study by Rossin (2011) demonstrates that across all regions, different countries have already established and enacted legislation that prohibited any form of discrimination on the basis of sex. However, it is hard to find the studies where the

comparison of different strategies to enhance the protection of the workers in different countries is perfectly given. For example, there are the countries in which the governments provide a solid portion of protection for all employees in issues concerning access to employment, recruitment, promotion, change of job positions, dismissal of employees, and retirement. Buzzanell and Liu (2005) explain that some countries include specific provisions that could be used in order to solve any form of discrimination over maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women and find alternatives and appropriate solutions.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

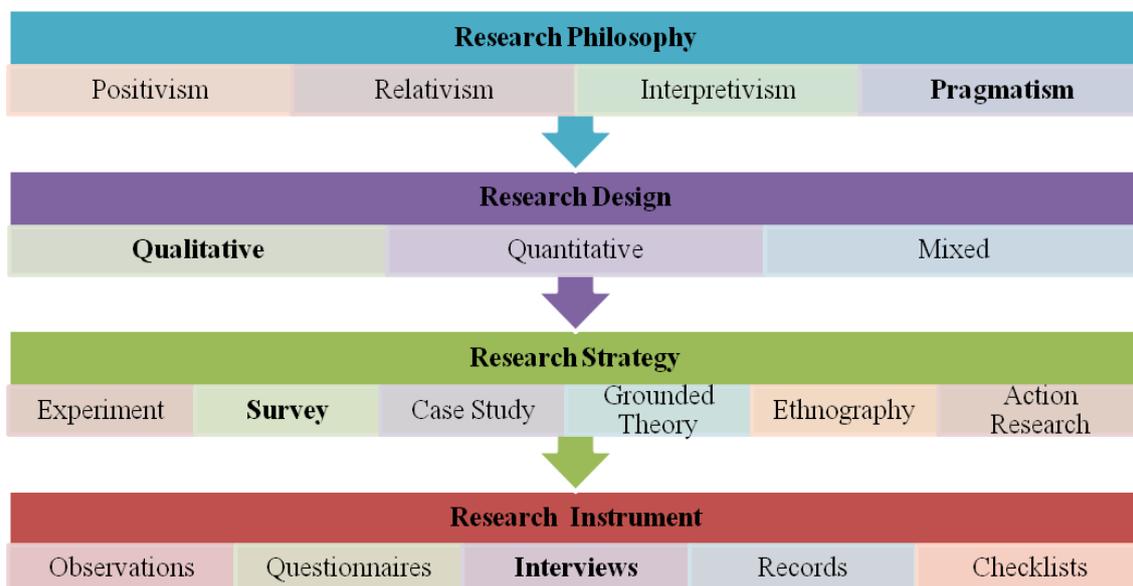
The chapter has provided a critical evaluation of the best practices, policies, and legislation examples that are used in different regions and countries where the questions of maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women were discussed. The analysis shows that different policies focused on the efficiency of the existing policies and the acts on maternity leave and expectant mothers' rights. The implementation of these policies and practices reveals the diverse approaches that may be adopted by different labour sectors to ensure that pregnant women and women on maternity leave are not discriminated against. The literature review is employed as a guiding framework for the dissertation's data collection and analysis. The next chapter is devoted to research methods and the details that help to comprehend the main idea of the chosen research design and the steps taken to collect and analyse the data.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The selection of research approaches significantly impacts the results and quality of any research study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Taking this importance into account, it is necessary to understand that the researcher should not only select the most effective research design in order to produce a successful research study but also to provide the explanations of why the decisions are made and what expectations are inherent to the project. This chapter presents a description of the methods that can be used to collect data and explain the value of the findings made to answer the research questions. The chapter is divided into seven sections, where the first section presents the research philosophy used in the study and its influence on the choices made by the researcher. Other sections of this chapter include the description of the research design, strategies, instruments, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and ethical issues. In the following Table 1, the way a research method was chosen is given.

**Table 1: How to Choose a Research Instrument**



### 3.2 Research Philosophy

This research is based on a pragmatic approach. Pragmatism research philosophy includes the idea that concepts may be relevant only if they are able to support action. There are many different ways in which to interpret the data and use it to explain the goals. Pragmatism is the

possibility of combining positivist and interpretivist positions in order to answer research questions. On the one hand, the objectives of this research introduce a combination of two types of information: stated facts and social constructs. On the other hand, the study objective of the role performed by the UAE anti-discrimination rules towards the realisation of pregnant women's rights in their workplaces is a central objective, the importance of which is proved by the necessity to involve primary and secondary sources of data. Men and women have equal rights despite the existing perceptions, approval, or disapproval of research participants. Such an idea is a fundamental study assumption developed in the paper. This research study discusses the impacts of women's rights and maternity leave in the UAE labour sector and relies on the social constructs articulated in this context. In regards to the literature analysis and evaluations, this study requires an adoption of combined interpretive and positivist research philosophies. The application of a pragmatic research philosophy is identified as the most appropriate approach to achieve the purpose.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This research adopts a qualitative research design where the process of data collection and analysis is mainly based on the logic and the judgements of the researcher (Babbie, 2011). The study objectives include such processes as the evaluation of the impacts of maternity leave and pregnant women's rights in UAE in relation to the existing international laws, impacts on the labour sector, and the productivity of the employees. Following these objectives, the responses have to express differing opinions and viewpoints. Hence, the judgement of the researcher on the reporting and the interpretation of the responses is critical in order to facilitate the development of an informed analysis and a clear conclusion. As such, to make an informed analysis and achieve a conceptual knowledge and understanding of the problem, some of the most viable and relevant responses have to be deeply considered and reported in more detail in the dissertation.

### **3.4 Research Strategy**

This research study is based on a qualitative interview strategy. A survey approach is also applicable for this research study since it supports the collection of quantitative data (Bergh & Ketchen, 2009). Additionally, the process of collecting data from either a small or large number of respondents is flexible and effective. One of the study objectives is to explore the relationship between working mothers and their employers and the implications for prenatal

mental and health conditions. The chosen survey strategy could help to combine the answers from a representative sample of people. The respondents could have been selected from the UAE labour sector in order to clarify if there are some differences between past and contemporary issues and achievements. However, in this dissertation a small scale interview study of women living and working in the UAE was the chosen research approach.

### **3.5 The Choice of the Research Instrument**

The selection of research instruments is an important step in any research process because it defines the ways the data should be collected (Bastos, Duquia, Gonzalez-Chica, Mesa, & Bonamigo, 2014). Research instrument is a term that is used to cover the idea of a measurement device that could help a researcher to develop a project. There are many types of instruments available to modern researchers: surveys, tests, questionnaires, etc. In this study, a researcher-completed instrument, an interview, is chosen. Interviews are used to find out what the current improvements and changes in the field of maternity leave and women's rights in the UAE workplace are. Well-formulated interview questions help to ensure that the investigator obtains detailed information on the topic. The interviews contain semi-structured questions. All participants should be provided with guarantees and confidence during interviews. Athanasiou, Debas and Darzi (2010) recommend that semi-structured interview questions are applied uniformly. In addition, the choice of questions should ensure that all research goals and questions are taken into consideration, and the role of the interviewees is crucial to obtaining significant, reliable and effective information.

### **3.6 Sampling**

A non-probability approach is used in the study to gather enough qualitative data and use it to answer the already identified research questions. Non-probability sampling is based on the idea that not all potential participants can have equal chances to be selected for the study. Specifically, a convenience non-probability sampling technique is applied. Such an approach is used when participants are selected in regards to their availability. The audience required for this research study is chosen on the basis of their ease of recruitment and awareness of the main terms defined in research. Gratton and Jones (2004) argue that the convenience non-probability technique is fast, inexpensive, and easy to use. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to use this approach in order to save time and derive the most effective answers. The choice of sampling method also helps to reduce any cost that could be incurred in

procuring a sample needed for the study. However, the main disadvantage of such sampling is its low credibility. The researcher has to be careful and attentive while investigating the answers and using the theoretical part of the project.

In this study, 50 people were invited as participants. Their experiences, personal attitudes to the problem, and readiness to cooperate with a researcher were the main inclusive criteria. The main advantage of the chosen sampling technique is the possibility to choose the participants the researcher is able to communicate easily with.

### **3.7 Data Collection Process**

The data collection process is based on the type of data and instruments chosen (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In this regard, the proposed study intended to collect primary data through the application of interviews. The first step in the data collection involved the identification of the sample base of this study. It included a total of five expert participants. The participants had to be interviewed on an appropriate day and at a time compatible with their work routines and approvals. Such requirements make it important that the researcher discusses the specificities of the research beforehand. It is necessary to contact interviewees far before the actual date of communication, discuss the conditions that are favourable for the participants, explain what kind of information should be gathered, and inform the participants about the possible outcomes of such a conversation. Besides, it is also important to set the dates when the participants are ready to cooperate. It is unethical to force people to participate, but offering alternatives and explaining that their participation is crucial for the study is acceptable. Finally, the researcher should make all necessary preparations before the day of the interview. First, the supplementary material, including pens and papers, should be used. Second, the things that make the audio taping possible should be determined and tested. The participants have to be informed that all their words and answers will be taped to provide the researcher with the possibility to investigate the data thoroughly. On the scheduled day, the researcher visits the participants' places of work and interviews them. This activity should take about three days for all of them to be interviewed in total. The interviewer has to record all their responses in an interview script, which can be applied for further analysis. Finally, the study data findings should be analysed using a qualitative content analysis method to make sure that all views and accounts of the respective interviewees may be employed to contribute to the study findings and conclusions.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

To analyse the data collected through interviews, the qualitative content analysis approach is offered in order to ensure that all research questions previously identified may be systematically investigated. According to Yin (2013), the application of the content analysis facilitates the processes of classification and establishment of the themes that illustrate different meanings of the phenomena. In contrast to the application of a coding strategy in assigning, a word or phrase to summarise a segment of the language-oriented and visual data, it was decided that this would not be necessary given the known background context of the UAE labour laws. The first step in the data analysis is to transcribe the information obtained during the interviews. It is possible to use the respective research assistants, who may help the researcher to transcribe the audiotaped discussions into a transcript document that can be easily analysed. In addition, the classification of all the related data sets is required as the second step of the data analysis process. This study aims at evaluating the most common and unique responses in the interview study findings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015). As soon as the answers are transcribed, it is necessary to re-read them and underline the most interesting points. In addition, it is expected to use an automatic search function and clarify if there are words and ideas that are similar in several answers. For example, it is possible to calculate the number of “YES”, “NO”, and “NOT EXACTLY” answers in order to use them in answering the main research question of the project.

### **3.9 Ethical Issues**

According to Tracy (2013), research ethics includes a number of guiding principles that may be applied in any study. This study faces different ethical issues that are common in the research studies that are based on primary data collection. The main ethical issue encountered in this study is the infringement of privacy through the sourcing of information without the approval of the participants. In order to mitigate this problem, the participants may obtain the authority from their organisations’ human resource departments in addition to the researcher, who has to gain permission from the individuals involved in the study. Moreover, this study provides an opportunity for interviewees to withdraw from the research. Consequently, the interviews should be based on their willingness to participate, and all requests to withdraw have to be considered (Oliver, 2010). The second ethical issue to be faced in this research study is the possibility to misuse the obtained information for reasons that stray from academic purposes. In this regard, for the purpose of mitigating these challenges, the

researcher provided a statement of ethical and research intent and attached it to the interview question script. This helps to declare that all the information provided by the participants would only be used for academic purposes. Moreover, the participants remain anonymous and are not identified in the study in order to reduce any negative consequences, such as victimisation.

### 3.10 Interviewees’ Backgrounds

Interview respondents were divided into seven categories and one individual each was selected for the study. In this case, the basis for their inclusion in the sample was based on their experiences and understanding of the UAE issues, the international maternity laws, and the rights of pregnant women in their workplaces. Also, the role of the participants in demanding a better treatment of women in the UAE workplace regardless of their pregnancy was considered. It was necessary to investigate the extent that the idea of providing women under maternity leave with ample care and resources was effective and working. The use of such criteria ensured that the selected respondents were not only familiar with the bill of rights in the international labour standards but also had an equal capacity of being conversant and knowledgeable of their impacts on the productivity of the female employees and the on-going relationships between female employees and their employers in the UAE labour market. Table 2 below provides a summary of the backgrounds of the seven interviewees in the study. Also, it introduces the main inclusion criteria based on the experiences of the participants in the UAE labour sector and maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women.

**Table 2: The Interview Participants’ Backgrounds**

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Code Identifier</b>	<b>Experience and Reasons for Inclusion</b>
1	A	Psychologists who have handled more than 100 pregnant women and assisted in their maternity care. It is possible to understand parental mental health conditions.
2	B	Human resource coordinators with experience of over five years with handling pregnant and seeking maternity care women.

3	C	UAE and international maternal law and policies experts who worked for different organisations and civil society activist groups with five years of experience.
4	D	Women who have given birth five times and in different working environments.
5	E	UAE legislature employees who are able to handle the anti-discrimination laws and their applicability in the UAE labour sector.
6	F	The UAE labour sector activists fighting for UAE inclusivity of both women and men in the labour sector during the last five years. It is possible to cite more than 50 cases against employees.
7	G	Private multinational employers who have been working for ten years as leaders. It is possible to gather the experiences in employing pregnant women and the women who are going to take maternity leave.

Many people were eager to cooperate with the researcher in order to clarify the conditions under which pregnant women could ask for help and the peculiarities of the health and psychological concerns that may be related to the relations expectant female employees develop with their employers. All their ideas were transcribed and introduced in the discussions given below.

### **3.11 Summary of Chapter**

This research study is carried out with the main aim of completing a review that has the capacity to evaluate the approaches and legal systems instituted by the UAE market labour sector. As such, the primary focus will be the extent to which the reviews can be helpful for promoting pregnant women's rights through a sufficient maternity leave policy. To achieve this aim, this study employed a pragmatic research philosophy. According to the pragmatic research philosophy, the researcher is not tied to any particular set of methods but is free to select a mix of methods that are believed to ensure the most desirable outcomes to be attained. Data is gathered with the help of semi-structured interviews. Consequently, a

content analysis of the interview data should be employed. Ethical issues considered by the researcher also include obtaining permission from different participants before holding the interviews.

## **Chapter 4: Data Findings, Analysis, and Interpretation**

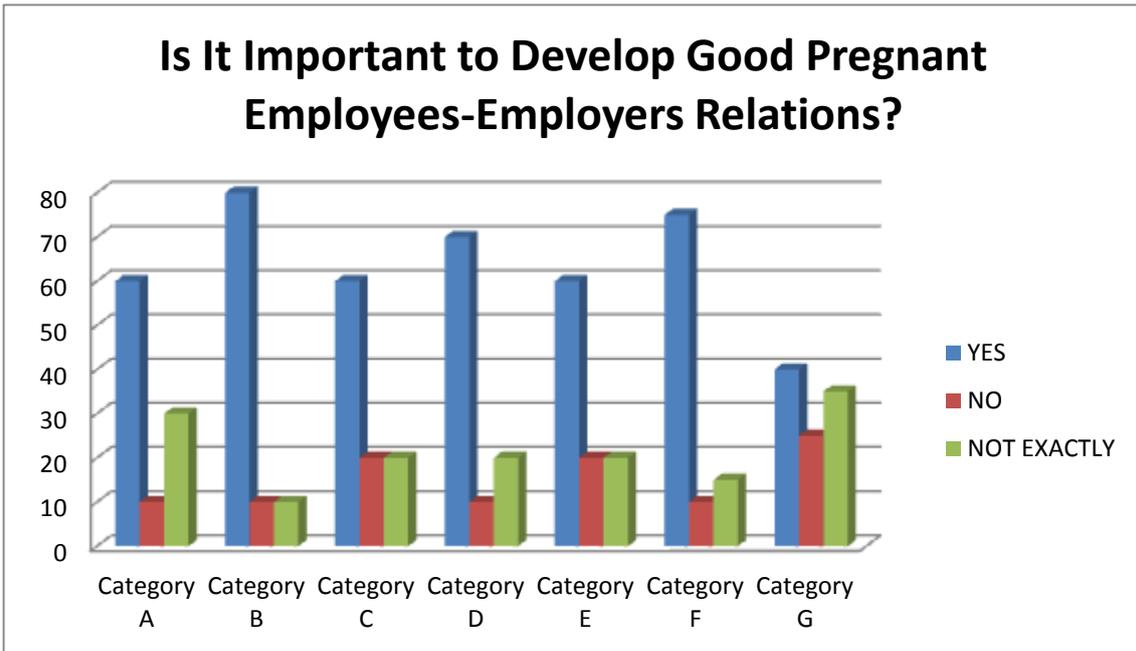
### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter 4 presents a systematic analysis of the data and reports gathered during the study of pregnant women's rights in the workplace. As described in Chapter 3 of this thesis, it was expected that the data should be collected using interviews with different people. For the sake of enhancing the clarity of the interview research, different sub-sections should be utilised. They include the background of the respondents, the possible impact of working mothers and their employers on prenatal mental health conditions, the existing impacts of the UAE labour laws on maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women, and the role of the UAE anti-discrimination issues in the harmonisation of pregnant women's rights and maternity leave in the workplace.

### **4.2 Working Mothers and Their Employers' Relationship Impact on Prenatal Mental Health Conditions**

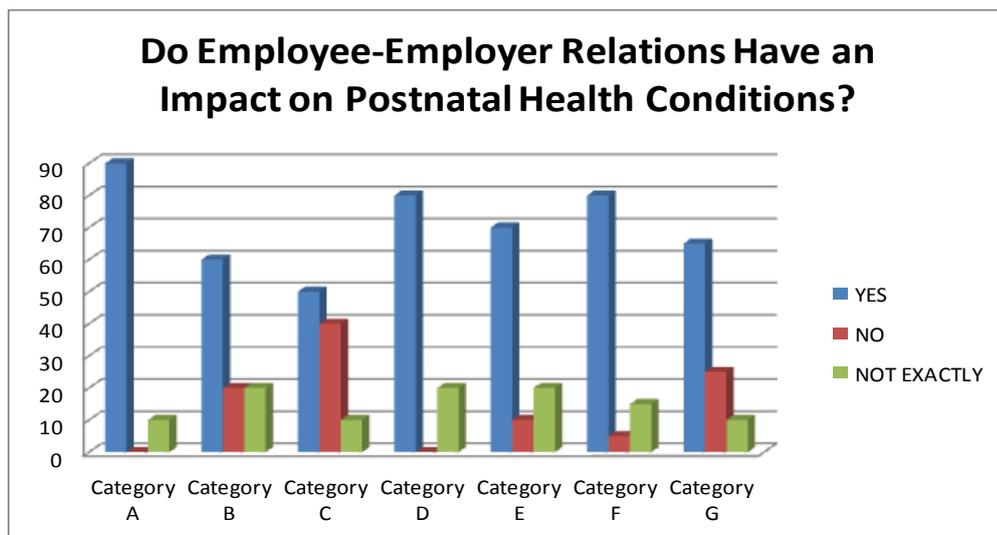
The first research question and objective for the dissertation is based on the common topic: the relationship between pregnant women and their employers. In addition to this issue, any legal procedures that may be applied to the cases have to be mentioned in order to enhance the understanding of the topic. The findings of the interviewees from groups D and A were analysed first. The respondents were the women, who gave birth in five different workplaces, and the psychologists, who investigated the peculiarities of that research question. The rationale for the selection was based on the fact that the participants were experienced enough to achieve the required purpose and find the explanations to the questions.

One of the respondents in D said, "Employers normally develop a negative attitude towards their pregnant employees in regard to their productivity and the importance of their work to their entities." In Figure 1, the results of the answers obtained from the participants (in regards to their categories determined earlier) about the importance of the development of good relations between employees and employers are given in brief:



**Figure 1: Good Employees-Employers Relations**

The second question was on the most common implications of the relationship between the interviewee and the employer and the postnatal mental health conditions. It was discovered that women suffered because of a bad relationship in all five of these workplaces. Women contended that they had to seek the services of a therapist, which helped them a lot. The participants' answers were not in complete agreement. Still, in Figure 2, it is evident that there is a certain impact of the relations between employers and employees on the health conditions.



**Figure 2: Professional Relations and Health Conditions**

The first respondent stated, *“During my four pregnancies, I had to seek the services of a psychologist, who could end up walking with me in all the stages of my giving birth. However, the fifth pregnancy was the hardest one since I was admitted to maternity and experienced fear of losing a child due to the difficulty and challenges in the workplaces.”*

The second respondent stated, *“Definitely yes. In all the times I was pregnant, I developed weird feelings of neglect, which was elicited by the experience I got from my three employers out of the five people I worked for.”*

These questions may be defined as the main evidence of the existence of the implications of the mental health conditions pregnant women have to deal with due to a bad relationship developed in their workplaces.

One of the interviewees in D explained, *“It is wrong to believe that relationships have no impact on the well-being of pregnant women.”* The above-mentioned responses indicate that the relationship between employees and their employers in the UAE organisations is not harmonious and characterised by a positive attitude. In most instances, the employers tend to downplay the role of women employees in ensuring that they attain their goals.

For the purpose of understanding the assertions provided by D, it is necessary to consider the participants' situation. Unlike D, whose experiences were based on the possibility of working for five different organisations and leaders during five pregnancy periods, the interviewees from group A served more than 100 pregnant women from different organisations and helped them to recover from the consequences of the poor relationship developed with employers.

Thus, the first interviewee pointed out, *“I had to deal with many women in the past, and every woman complained about the lack of a good relationship between the employer and employees. Besides, there are the differences that cause distinct impacts on individual well-being. But, on the bottom line, I have established that all bad relationships were elicited by the lack of precise structures and policies that dictated how the employers should handle their pregnant employees or those on maternity leave.”*

The second interviewee asserted, “A considerable number of the handled cases involved pregnant women with a bad experience in their workplaces. They ranged from the bad conditions for the maternity leave and lack of follow-up on their rights.” To support this assertion, one of the participants in group A stated, “For instance, one day, I had an opportunity to cooperate with employees from organisations where services provision, manufacturing, and processing were offered. They told me that a bad relationship was created due to the employers’ inability to recognise that women needed to take rest during such periods from time to time.”

In addition, the communication with different representatives suggested that banking, insurance, and financial institutions had some negative impacts on the relations between the employer and employees.

The answers of people from different categories help to clarify that certain financial challenges occur when women declare their pregnancies and their intentions to take maternity leave. Figure 3 contains a brief evaluation of the answers given.



**Figure 3: Financial Issues of Pregnant Employees**

“All the employees I treated informed that the employers fail to take care of them financially and mentally once they are on a maternity leave until they come back to their respective

*duties.*” The psychologist indicated that the majority of the clients from different industries were offered different therapies since there was a lack of a precise categorisation of the most effective relationship that should be in place in organisations. When A was asked about the implication of the negative relationship to the mental health of women, he noted, “*The many women face such problems as personal traumas, slow healing processes, negative attitudes to men, convulsions, and, in some cases, negative perceptions on their well-being.*”

Commonly from the four respondents, physical and physiological impacts on women were recognised. According to respondent A, “*The implication of negative relationships in the workplace leads to losing earlier a sense of neglect as opposed to men and non-pregnant women.*” In this case, he stated, “*Although the implications vary, the common aspect is that they have a major impact on their mental health, which, to some extent, may impact on the health of the child.*”

The above-mentioned findings provide evidence for the study propositions that a bad relationship between the employer and pregnant female employees may affect mental health conditions through different and distinct influences. The findings also demonstrate the need of harnessing the introduction of policies and laws in order to control the plight of pregnant women in the workplace, their productivity levels, and even their mortality rates. In this regard, based on the evaluated responses, it is evident that none of the UAE organisations has developed clear and elaborate systems in order to ensure that employers may positively appreciate their roles and impacts on pregnant women, who are a significant part of their organisations and society.

Evidence for the study propositions that a bad relationship between employers and pregnant women affects their mental health through the different patterns of consequences and deteriorating work circumstances may be gathered. Today, none of the UAE organisations considered in this empirical study have developed clear and elaborate systems for ensuring that employers positively appreciate the required role behaviours and actions to make a positive impact in their organisations. Thus, the UAE labour sector needs to enact strategic laws and policies that will guarantee positive treatment of pregnant women that is similar to their male counterparts and women who are not pregnant. Commonly for the four

interviewees, bad relationships elicited both physical and physiological impacts on the women.

In the following Table 3, the examples of answers and questions of the interviews are given to introduce the basis used for research.

**Table 3: Interviews Extracts**

Question	Answer
Does the relationship between an employee and an employer impact on their mental health?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. Employers tend to develop a negative attitude against their employees impacting to the progress of the organisation, impacting on their mental health.</li> <li>• To some extent yes. It is evident that the relationship between an employer and an employee influences the latter behaviours both in the workplace and their normal life, hence it can easily impact on their mental health.</li> <li>• Yes, it impacts, and it is the source of their success.</li> <li>• Not really, an employee should be a servant to an employer.</li> <li>• Yes, and it is the only way to bridge any gap between employers and employees.</li> </ul>
Have you ever been faced with any mental problems after giving birth associated with harsh workplace conditions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. In all my pregnancy periods, I had to seek the services of a psychologist. In one of the occasions, I risked losing my baby due to the harsh conditions in my workplace.</li> <li>• Definitely yes. In all the times I was pregnant, I developed weird feelings of neglect, which was elicited by the experience I got from my three employers</li> </ul>

	<p>out of the five I worked for.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, but there were other employers who treated me well.</li> <li>• Yes, it was a real stress.</li> <li>• Yes, in some cases, I suffered from depression.</li> <li>• Somehow yes, but I managed to control its effects.</li> </ul>
<p>Among all the pregnant women you have cooperated with, were there any patients who suffered from postnatal complications due to bad relationships with their employers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes; 40% of the women I have worked with in the past suffered from postnatal complications as a result of a harsh working environment.</li> <li>• Yes. A considerable number of the cases involved pregnant women's bad experiences in their workplaces. They ranged from the bad conditions because of maternity leave and the lack of follow-up on their rights.</li> <li>• Not all; some women suffered from other complications.</li> <li>• Yes, a major percent declared the challenges. Still, it was hard to delineate the facts from assumptions.</li> <li>• To some extent yes. Still, the cases and situations were not always related directly to the case.</li> </ul>
<p>Does poor a relationship between an employer and an employee cause any complications? If yes, describe the common complications you have noted among such women.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitely yes. Many women face traumas, slow healing processes, negative attitudes to men, convulsions, and negative perceptions on their well-being.</li> <li>• Partly yes. Workplace complications have been a common factor among the majority of clients. Despite some of them</li> </ul>

	<p>complaining of their relatives' and friends' mistreatment, it is evident that bad relationships in the workplace impacted them a lot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To some extent, yes. However, sometimes the laxity of employees was taken into consideration.</li> <li>• It varies. The impacts are different and widely ranged.</li> <li>• Yes. The perceptions of the employees cannot be neglected.</li> <li>• Not really; in some cases, the complications are caused by family issues, not working conditions.</li> </ul>
<p>Are there any negative impacts of bad relationships between an employer and employee to the child's well-being?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It depends. Although the implications vary, the common aspect is that they have a major impact on their mental health, which, to some extent, may impact on the health of the child.</li> <li>• Definitely yes. To some extent, the issues affect the normal development and growth of the unborn child.</li> <li>• Yes. Child well-being depends on the health conditions of the mother.</li> <li>• Yes, and to a great extent.</li> <li>• Not really; the implications may vary from other different conditions.</li> </ul>

### **4.3 UAE Labour Laws Impact and Maternity Leave and the Rights of Pregnant Women Policies with Respect to the International Law and Policies**

To ensure a balanced approach, the responses of two different participant groups, C and F, were selected. In this analysis, the study contained two questions. In the first phase, C and F interviewees were selected, while B and G were used for the second phase of the interpretation of the interviews.

First, the analysis aimed at evaluating the perceptions and experiences of the participants on the effectiveness of the existing policies and laws and their benefits for women in the workplace.

One of the interviewees in F noted, *“I think that among all the numerous engagements I have been involved with, the idea of fighting for effective laws and policies for pregnant women in their workplaces was one of the fascinating tasks; 80% of the policies and laws have been of much benefit to pregnant women and those attending maternity leave.”*

The other interviewee said, *“Despite having a minimum implementation, the policies and laws play a large role in ensuring that the maternity leave conditions are moderate, and rights of pregnant women should be observed.”*

The assertions presented by F on the effectiveness of the policies and laws according to which it was possible to advocate their institutions and implement them as a means to improve communication with pregnant women and women seeking maternity care were further affirmed by C. Interviewees in C possessed over five years of experience as experts in maternity leave policies and pregnancy rights of the UAE working people in different organisations and as activists in civil society.

C continued, *“Honestly speaking, I have seen a major transition in the past five years. The transitions were connected with the approaches adopted by the employers to ensure that their women employees had the best maternity leave and pregnancy conditions.”* He further added,

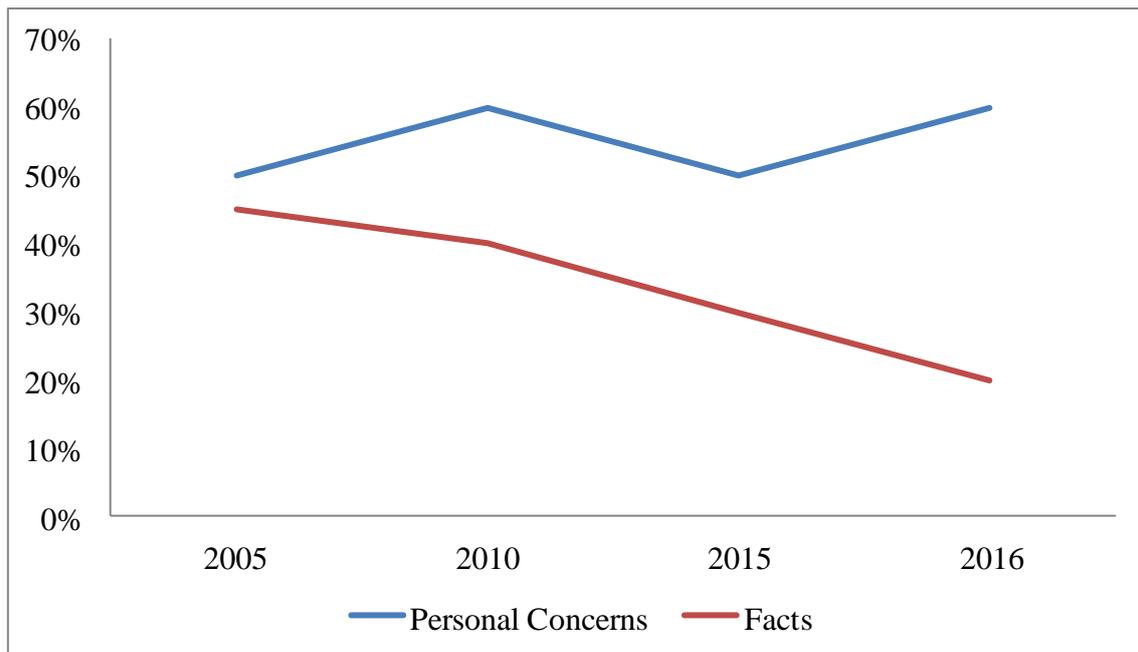
*“The changes are orchestrated by the existence of strict legal and policy frameworks established by the UAE legislature and labour sector activist groups.”*

The second C respondent stated, *“Despite the fact that a lot of things have been changed in the past, there are still numerous loopholes in the actualisation of the policies within the context of UAE.”*

In this case, C demonstrated that a rapid shift in the impacts of the laws and policies and employers’ approach to handling employees’ maternity leave and pregnancy rights does exist. This is one of the possible and the most effective ways to ensure the sustainability of women’s roles in the labour sector.

The second question focused on the investigation of whether the interviewees, especially the human resource coordinator and the private employer B and G, perceived that the current UAE workplace laws and policies were sustainable enough to ensure that pregnant women were decently and respectfully treated in their workplaces. B, with his five years of experience coordinating human resources of organisations, noted that despite the UAE moving in the right direction in the context of handling pregnant women and those on maternity leave, a lot of issues continued to be poorly implemented. In this context, B argued that a lot of efforts and needs were made to ensure that the laws and policies were properly formulated and that their proper enactment should be carried out with goodwill from both sides, employees’ and employers’.

In Figure 4, the situation that describes the evaluation of the personal attitudes to the problem of pregnant employees in organisations and the facts on the basis of the answers of the experts and coordinators is developed. In different years, the statements have different ratings. It illustrates that that people’s expectations and true actions vary considerably and have no mutual points in common. The percentage shows that changes that were occurring during the last several years.



**Figure 4: Pregnant Employees Issues in Organisations**

In other words, it is possible to say that people’s concerns about the necessity to provide pregnant women with special working conditions during their pregnancies and after giving birth did not change dramatically during the last 10 years. However, the facts show that the same topic is not legally supported. Besides, its value has been dramatically decreased during the last 10 years.

The answers of several respondents could also be used to clarify personal attitudes of people to such questions as the value of maternity leave in the workplace and the necessity to develop new policies on such issues as the development of working relations between employers and their pregnant employees.

More contentious, G posited, “*No, the laws and policies are nothing, and there is no impact to be observed.*” The second one pointed out, “*The laws and policies are the best options to rely on. However, the main problem is their slow and defunct implementation that is organised by the relevant authorities.*” G claimed that the majority of women employees are highly affected by threats of dismissal, redundancy in their workplaces, and failure of being accorded promotions in an appropriate length of time. This perspective assumes that the policies and laws are founded more on the thinking by technocrats on the best approach to handling this group of employees and do not take enough account of real-life organisation settings. Instead, G argued that more effort and needs should be placed on the implementation

phase to ensure that all employees and employers abide by the terms and conditions stipulated therein and check if the policies and legal structures formulated in UAE are successful.

In addition, consultation is the key to ensuring that the passed policies and laws were tailored to the objective and real needs common to all stakeholders. The above arguments are in line with the previous review highlighted in Lazarus et al. (2007) and Kruske et al. (2013). Taking the information gathered into account, the reviews demonstrated that the success of the policies and laws was based on all involved parties that provided reasonable accommodation for other people’s expectations. Thus, the above-given findings help to support the study objective’s proposition that the existing UAE workplaces’ maternity leave policies, laws, and pregnant women’s rights should be defined as insufficient and unsustainable.

The investigations introduced by Kruske et al. (2013) show that there are several types of maternity care stakeholders, whose opinions and impacts cannot be neglected. In addition to this investigation, the results of the interviews show that mothers, as the most interested stakeholders of the case, try to focus on three main aspects of maternity care in order to make sure that the futures of their children are safe. In the following Table 4, the results of the possible role of stakeholders on the maternity leave issues are introduced. Kruske et al. (2013) mention that such issues as decision-making processes, mothers’ autonomy, and legal responsibilities are crucial for bringing up children and promoting social comfort and balance. Therefore, these points have been chosen for the analysis as the main criteria for consideration. The answers of the participants help to define which aspects are crucial for stakeholders, and the ticks given in the table show which areas different people may be interested in regarding the answers of the interviewees and the theoretical aspects introduced by Kruske et al. (2013).

**Table 4: Stakeholders’ Role**

<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Decision-Making Process</b>	<b>Autonomy of Future Mothers</b>	<b>Legal Accommodations</b>
<b>Mothers</b>	✓	✓	
<b>Care Providers</b>	✓		

<b>Policy Makers</b>		✓	✓
<b>Insurers</b>		✓	✓
<b>Clinicians</b>	✓		

G perceived the policies and legislation as separate autonomous processes that were distinct from the real relationship between employees and employers. In this case, G meant that the UAE laws and policies for caring for pregnant women and those seeking maternity care did not take into account the real organisation and UAE market environment.

**Table 5: Questions and Answers in the Survey**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
Do the UAE policies play any role in regard to ensuring the existence of good maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women as compared to the international laws and policies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. I think that out of the numerous engagements, I have been involved in fighting for effective laws and policies among the pregnant women in their workplaces; 80% of policies and laws have been of much benefit to pregnant women and those attending maternity leave.</li> <li>• Yes. Despite having a minimum implementation, the policies and laws play a large role in ensuring that maternity leave conditions are moderate and the rights of the pregnant women could be observed.</li> <li>• Yes. They form the epitome of the success of maternity leave.</li> <li>• It depends since the laws are rarely implemented.</li> <li>• Yes, but the implications can only be felt in big organisations.</li> <li>• Partly yes. However, the major problem is in</li> </ul>

	<p>the implementation stage.</p>
<p>Are there any changes needed for the current UAE laws and policies to be covered with regard to maternity leave and rights of pregnant women?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not really. Honestly speaking, I have seen a major transition on the approaches adopted by the employers to ensure that their women employees have the best maternity leave and pregnancy, in the past five years.</li> <li>• Not at all. Implementation of the existing ones is the key.</li> <li>• Yes. They need to incorporate small organisations.</li> <li>• Yes. Despite the fact that a lot of changes have been observed in the past, there are still numerous loopholes in the actualisation of the policies in the context of the UAE.</li> <li>• To some extent, yes. The major issue is implementing the current ones.</li> <li>• Yes. The laws must be there and implemented fully.</li> </ul>
<p>Is it true that since the laws and policies covering the maternity leave and rights of pregnant women were instituted, a lot of changes in terms of the services were observed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. The laws and policies are nothing, and there is no impact observed.</li> <li>• Yes. Everything is not the way it was 20 years ago.</li> <li>• I am not sure. Changes are individual to organisations.</li> <li>• Yes. Today women are better protected from any mistreatment.</li> <li>• Yes. The laws and policies are the best</li> </ul>

	<p>options to rely on. However, the major problem is their slow and defunct implementation by the relevant authorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. But there are more changes that need to be made.</li> </ul>
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#### **4.4 Anti-Discrimination Benefits on the Maternity Leave Policies and the Rights of Pregnant Women**

The responses given by E and D become a helpful guide in this research study and discussion. The selection of E is based on the fact that he was experienced in handling the anti-discrimination policies both locally and internationally. The selection of D was prompted by the experience of the same employee in different work environments. As an employee of the legislature tasked with assessing the applicability of the anti-discrimination policies and ensuring that they were in line with the UAE workplace environment, G offered the ideas in line with the interests of her employer. Taking such a solution into account, the respondent posted, *“In my individual views, I can confidently assert to the roles of the anti-discrimination policies in enhancing a proper care of women on maternity leave and the observations of the rights pregnant women have in the workplaces.”*

The second respondent argued, *“In fact, in some instances, I footed all my maternal bills, and duties were lost during that time.”* It is evident that there is a specific role of the anti-discrimination policies in improving the integration and harmonisation of the needs of the UAE women in their workplaces. The arguments presented by E can be directly linked to several theoretical ideas elaborated by Baird et al. (2002) and Liu and Buzzanell (2004). These authors asserted that in the international forum, distinct anti-discrimination laws prohibited any discrimination in terms of gender, sexual orientation, and age. The theoretical framework presented by the authors equally indicated that a clear impact associated with the existence of anti-discrimination policies existed. However, the effectiveness of the anti-discrimination policies must be a coordinated practice with all stakeholders being actively involved. In this case, considering the author’s explanations, the UAE anti-discrimination policies need to be altered to ensure that they are more inclusive, which is lacking in the legislation in its current form.

Having actively worked in different UAE companies while pregnant five times, D was found to be in a strong position for offering a general overview of the UAE workplace through her encounters and experiences received in the course of her working and interaction with different employers. D stated, *“In the organisations I worked at during my pregnancy, only the last company showed its willingness to help me go through my pregnancy and maternity leave. As a matter of fact, the companies that gave maternity leave ended up not paying me for the days I was off work.”* When asked by the interviewer on the specific benefits in her last job assisted by the anti-discrimination laws, she stated, *“In some instances, they provided me with day-time hours to relax off-duty.”* In addition, in her last employment, she claimed, *“The employer granted me with half-payment in my entire maternity leave.”*

In this regard, the interviewee stated that the anti-discrimination policies were not only advantageous for ensuring the wellness of employees but were also aimed at improving the relationship between an employee and employer. This assertion can be related to the previous literature review and arguments, for instance, those developed by Buzzanell and Liu (2005) and Rossin (2011). These authors argued that in countries where the anti-discrimination policies were embraced, protection for all of their employees on concerns about access to employment, recruitment, promotion, changing their job positions, employee dismissal, and retirement cases, among other working environment conditions, was promoted. However, other countries included the specific provisions of any form of discrimination for their maternity leave and rights of pregnant women. However, E was quick to observe that the anti-discrimination policies and laws cannot work independently but can only work jointly with other policies and laws.

Question	Answer
Are there any benefits received from the anti-discrimination policies that have been passed in the UAE legislature?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. In my individual view, I can confidently assert to the roles of the anti-discrimination policies in enhancing a proper care of women on maternity leave and the observations of the rights of pregnant women in the workplaces.</li> <li>• Not really. Despite the rightful credit that should be given to the UAE anti-discrimination policies, the truth is their slow</li> </ul>

	<p>implementation and a consequent lack of follow-up that is negatively impacting on their implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. However, it is only possible to observe in big organisations.</li> <li>• I am not sure. It is a two-way scenario with positive and negative outcomes.</li> <li>• It depends on an organisation and its possibilities.</li> </ul>
<p>Have the existence of anti-discrimination policies helped you somehow during your pregnancy in different placements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never. As a matter of fact, the companies that gave me maternity leave ended up not paying me for the days I was off work.</li> <li>• No. I asked for help from the authorities, but they remained unresponsive.</li> <li>• Yes. However, I believe that in the future, things might be better than they are at the moment.</li> <li>• Not really. In fact, in some cases, I footed all my maternal bills and even lost my duties during that time.</li> <li>• Never! That period was my hardest as I was not rewarded by the organisation the same as I worked hard for them.</li> <li>• No. In fact, I had to ask outside sources for help.</li> </ul>

#### 4.5 Summary of Chapter

This chapter 4 focused on providing the details on the data, findings, analysis, and subsequent interpretations. This chapter concludes that the three identified study objectives promote the improvements in the UAE workplace and its policies to ensure the rights of pregnant women and women on maternity leave. Certain problems and shortages have been identified, and their solutions should become the best recommendations. The next chapter makes

conclusions and provides plausible recommendations for policy makers, employers, and female employees.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

According to Hay (2014), research may be designed and conducted in a private setting. The primary purpose of research should be based on building a public knowledge base. As such, the findings obtained from the study are supposed to be for public consumption and hence synthesised through a discussion. Taking such conclusions into account, this discussion chapter of the dissertation focuses on the reflections of the findings with the aim of helping the reader to understand the significance and the implication of the overall project. As a follow-up of the introduction section in this paper, this section persuades on the importance of carrying out this research. In order to ensure that the target of this dissertation is achieved, this discussion segment is divided into several sections. First, a discussion of the exploration of the propositions is provided with a clear focus on the results and implications of the propositions studied. Particularly, this section expounds on the most important and scientifically meaningful results of the study. The second section focuses on the analysis of the existing discussions about the relationship between the results as compared to the existing literature and the theories of research. In particular, the provided literature review in this dissertation shall be linked to the results presented in the findings section of the investigation. Thirdly, the implication of the methodology adopted in this research should be evaluated, and the relevance of the research methods and their implications are identified. Fourthly, in order to develop a momentum from this research, a discussion of the consequences for the future practice or future research should be identified. Despite the success associated with this research, it is a fact that there are certain limitations associated with research. They will be expounded in detail in the fifth section. The last part will be the summary and the limitations of research and the introduction of the next chapter of the dissertation.

### **5.2 Discussion of the Results of the Propositions**

#### **5.2.1 Working Mothers and Their Employers' Relationship Impact on the Prenatal Mental Health Conditions**

The first strategic study objective was the evaluation of the implications of the relationships between the pregnant women and their employers on prenatal mental health conditions. The rationale for this study objective was to explore whether the pregnant women's impact on

their prenatal mental health conditions was similar to what is claimed in the current literature on the parental leave and rights of pregnant women. In the evaluation of this study objective, the study established a proposition that the relationship between pregnant women and those on maternity leave with their employers has a significant impact on their prenatal and postnatal mental health conditions.

This proposition was supported in so far as the interviewed individuals revealed the existence of an association between their relationship with their employer and their ability to concentrate on their work and responsibilities. As a matter of fact, the interviewed employees moved to different occupations due to the existence of a worsening relationship with their employers.

The accounts given by the participants indicate that the relationship between employees and their employers in UAE organisations that they are familiar with is not harmonious and is characterised by a negative attitude. In most cases, firms tend to play the role performed by female employees to ensure that they attain their goals. The reviews on the implications of the relationship between pregnant women and their employers indicate that despite the fact that there are different implications for these relationships, the underlying guiding theories and principles remain the same. It is apparent that once women get to know that they are pregnant, the previous type of relationship with their employers concerning their economic interests, productivity, and possible interactions changes significantly and for the worse. Typically, considering the series of interviews conducted with employees and a therapist in the UAE, it is suggested that a major disconnect between the employees and employers in the UAE labour sector is the main reason for poorly developed relations.

### **5.2.1 UAE Labour Laws Impact and Maternity Leave and the Rights of Pregnant Women Policies on the International Law and Policies**

To understand the importance and relevance of the second proposition defined in this study, it is important to underline the second objective and connect it with the findings achieved. The second study objective focuses on the evaluation of the impacts of the existing UAE labour laws on maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women based on the international laws and policies. The rationale for this study objective was to investigate and establish the rate at which the laws and policies in the UAE ensured that pregnant women receive the required

portion of the support that is defined by such documents as maternity leave. In addition, the way in which female employees are treated during their pregnancies should also be taken into consideration. The overall goal of this study objective was the clarification of whether the UAE policies on maternity leave and rights of pregnant women are sufficient in the harmonisation of workplace practices. Alternatively, if the phenomena are non-existent, this would provide an empirical basis for the argument to introduce new policies and practices. The proposition that was developed in this study addresses the fact that the existing laws and policies in the UAE labour sector are not enough to provide women with a chance and to avoid mistreatment caused by their pregnancy or need to seek maternity leave.

In this context, they proposed that the majority of the policies and laws have already had their enactment increased in response to activism, which has been critical for improving the ways employers handle the employment conditions of pregnant women, especially regarding the responsibilities assigned and the payments made when women are on maternity leave. In addition to the existence of inconsistencies across the jurisdictions where the laws are in effect, policy makers have opted to implement the policies in phases. Still, this fact may limit their capacity to harmonise the conditions across the workplaces. In practice, in some countries where strong policies and laws have been already enhanced, pregnant women are fairly treated. Women on maternity leave are given stipends to ensure that they are financially stable during that period of their leave. As was mentioned earlier by Nilsson-Wikmar et al. (2005), in countries with effective policies and laws, people ensure that even if a woman is temporarily not in a position to perform her job due to medical conditions elicited by pregnancy or childbirth, prompt action by the employer ought to be taken. The action required is that the employer or another covered entity works on treating all the involved parties the same way the temporarily physically challenged employees would be treated. However, such a situation cannot be achieved under the current UAE system, which lacks a clear emphasis on the right jurisdiction of the policies, the laws, and the scope of their implementation. Therefore, the limitations of their impacts on the labour sector could be observed.

All respondents who were targeted by this research had a clear understanding of the impacts of the existing policies to the women's sustainability in their workplaces. Despite the existence of the policies, the implementation has not been effective to ensure a complete

harmonisation of the interests of the women seeking maternity leave and their employers. According to Buzzanell and Liu (2005) and Rossin (2011), the international laws and policies limit the extent to which organisations exploit their female employees who believe in their ability to use maternity leave and believe in the implementation of the rights of pregnant women. In other countries, in contrast to the UAE establishment, maternity leave is often fully paid. It is a norm for pregnant women to be accorded this kind of maternal leave. One of the interviewees claimed that the majority of female employees are highly affected by the threats of dismissal, redundancy in their workplaces, and failure of being accorded promotion in an appropriate amount of time. The policies and laws are founded on mere thinking by the technocrats on the best approach in handling this group of employees and not in real life organisations' settings. Instead, several of the interviewees argued that more efforts and needs were recognised to be put in the implementation phase to ensure that all employees and employers abide by the terms and conditions stipulated therein and to use the policies and legal structures formulated in the UAE. Also, an effective consultation is the key to ensuring that the policies and laws passed are tailored to objectively reflect the real needs common to all stakeholders.

As a matter of fact, in some countries, the primary concern is the lack of a comprehensive utilisation of paternal or maternal leave granted to a father and a mother of a newborn. Taking this fact into account, the study should be defined as effective since it can help in recommending best practice in the UAE when compared to international standards of practice. A substantial indication of the interviews and review of the literature is that there is a need to improve the UAE approaches to maternity care and the rights of pregnant women to ensure harmonisation of the real benefits, as well as benefits to all stakeholders. People understand that pregnant employees should strive for their rights and any protection that could be offered by the government.

### **5.3 Anti-Discrimination Benefits on the Maternity Leave Policies and the Rights of Pregnant Women**

A majority of the interviewees indicated that there is a need for comprehensive implementation and institution of the anti-discrimination policies in the UAE. The same ideas could be supported with the help of legal experts that have a good international legal practice. The major issue in the UAE region is not the lack of anti-discrimination policies and laws but

the failure of the authorities to enhance the legislation. According to the third study objective, it was necessary to evaluate the benefits of the anti-discrimination policies that were common in the UAE and different international countries. The primary focus of this study objective was the establishment of the progress and the identification of the values of the general policies and laws in the UAE and other international countries. Such activity includes the determination of whether the anti-discrimination policies promote any consistent progress in ensuring sustainability and solutions to the current mistreatment of pregnant women and women on maternity leave or not. Moreover, the objective was intended to identify the prospective value areas of anti-discrimination laws that could be enhanced to ensure a shift of the focus from employees to an employer that failed to eradicate discrimination in entities. The proposition states that a significant impact of the current anti-discrimination policies rests on how employers develop a positive relationship with pregnant employees and those interested in taking maternity leave in the UAE labour sector.

The theoretical framework chosen for the study indicates that a clear impact associated with the existence of anti-discrimination policies could exist. It is equally in line with the information gained from the interviews. However, the effectiveness of the anti-discrimination policies must be a coordinated practice with all the stakeholders being actively involved. In this case, considering the explanations of the participants and the evaluation of the available material, the UAE anti-discrimination policies need to be altered to ensure inclusiveness. However, such a possibility remains weak in its current form. This study is based on the necessity to provide plausible recommendations on the improvement of the prospects of maternity leave and the implementation of the rights of pregnant women. There is reasonable indication from the interview data that there is a need to improve the UAE approaches on the maternal care and rights of pregnant women to ensure harmonisation of real benefits, and benefits to all the stakeholders, cannot be neglected.

## **5.4 Relationships of the Results to Previous Theory and Research**

### **5.4.1 Impacts of the Relationship between Working Mothers and Their Employers under the Prenatal Mental Health Conditions**

The initial results indicated that the relationships between pregnant women and their employers play a significant role in ensuring the existence of positive effects of prenatal

health conditions. Additionally, the lack of plausible legal structures that define the type of the relationship between an employee and employers can easily lead to the development of such psychological disorders as depression and anxiety among pregnant woman. Hay (2014) explains that there is a certain standard of the desirable level of care that ought to be strategically stipulated in the legal structures. Evidently, the findings of Hay (2014) prove that the professional support and other interventions may be part of a stipulated practice performed by the stakeholders in organisations under certain conditions when women cannot control their behaviour or have to deal with tasks that could influence their well-being. In support of this dissertation study, the findings of Sargeant (2014) could be used to prove that perinatal loss is a psychological trauma as well that can influence the physical and emotional development of a female worker. The connection was defined with the help of numerous studies carried out to explore the impacts of the prenatal mental healthcare complications and the role of legal structures in mitigating the occurrences of the mental health issues.

Contrarily, Caprioli and Douglass (2008) pointed out that positive employee–employer relationships may help pregnant women gain more experience of healthy self-esteem, increased social support, and a stable financial assistance that could be offered by their employers and provided after giving birth. The investigation developed by Russell and Banks (2011) is another attempt to demonstrate how the HR department must think of their pregnant employees or the possibility of their employees having babies. The solution offered by Russell and Banks (2011) is based on the opportunity for employees to visit maternity care establishments and get to know more about the conditions under which they may continue working and asking for additional financial help or health care. There are also many other practices that could be considered as alternatives. They include the development of a favourable maternity leave package to ensure that a new mother is extensively educated on different risks, symptoms, and treatment of mental disorders.

According to Dagher et al. (2014), maternity leave and pregnancy in the workplace ought to be a critical human rights condition that must be characterised by the sense of equality in regard to the opportunities. There is no excuse that can be offered to orchestrate the discrimination of women in the workplace due to their pregnancy state. Heilbrun et al. (2013) prove that approximately 300,000 women, who worked at different organisations, ended up losing their jobs annually as a result of pregnancy. Additionally, more than 600,000 women

ended up suffering financially, and more than 400,000 women faced unfair treatment and handling by their bosses (Heilbrun et al., 2013). In this case, the inability to develop appropriate relations with pregnant employees or working mothers remains to be a serious problem that costs a lot to organisations. As a rule, such organisations have to deal with various cases of tribunal, the possibility of talent migration, and the necessity to search for new people, spend costs on new human resources, and training people in regards to the policies of a company. Therefore, the enactment of the policies in the business environment is a major challenge many companies in the UAE have to deal with in a short period of time in order not to lose the existing obtained results and improve the conditions under which people have to work.

#### **5.4.2 Impacts of the UAE Labour Laws and Policies on Maternity Leave and the Rights of Pregnant Women with Respect to the International Law and Policies**

This study and the interviews with different stakeholders in the UAE sector show that different categories of policies and laws that usually dictate an employee's maternity leave and the rights of the pregnant women that have been developed in the region still face a number of problems, challenges, and misunderstandings. The UAE justice system elicits broad impacts on all aspects of human life, starting from the millions of work contracts to the court battles (Maceda, 2015). However, it becomes clear that women have little protection under the labour law against the cases of firing due to their pregnancy. In support of this analogy, lawyer Rebecca Ford (2010) demonstrates that a limited provision exists in the labour law in order to deal with the conditions under which women could ask for maternity leave and any subsequent post-maternity illness. Additionally, there is no specific provision that protects pregnant women before the period when maternity leave could be used and approved. As a rule, the overall well-being of working future mothers may be put at risk. Considering the findings obtained from the consultant and employee interviewees in this study, it is evident that there is a need for an overhaul of the different policies and laws used in dictating on parental leave and the rights of pregnant women. The need for these changes is based on the inconsistencies of the UAE labour laws and policies as compared to the international countries practices where the law is used to dictate on the best practice to the patient and comprehensively implemented in totality.

A report published by Maceda (2015), which is one of the major media outlets in the world, shows that the UAE maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women are the two topics that were deteriorating with time and ranked as poorly developed issues on the international level. The findings introduced by Lazarus et al. (2007) help to clarify that when it comes to supporting working mothers and considering their interests, a number of UAE companies continue to lag behind. For example, the period given to women to breastfeed is short due to short maternity leave, which lasts barely one month. In addition, the compensation given to women during their maternity leave is usually not enough to take care of all their expenses. In comparison to the international countries and the practices supported there, employees are usually entitled to full compensation for all the days they fail to attend their duties due to maternity leave or pregnancy. As a matter of fact, Sussman (2009) underlines that there is a rising trend in the UAE with some employers re-thinking the pre-awarded maternity benefits and going above the set statutory requirements on their individual expenses. Though such an approach is not common in most countries since the labour departments in these countries have clearly established the requirements that ought to be implemented by all the employers, failing which legal proceedings should be taken against the employer, it cannot be neglected and has to be taken into consideration while developing the recommendations for the UAE labour sector.

The study findings also explain that the commitment of employees after the maternity period is dependent on the care provided by their employers and the level of care and understanding they can rely on. For example, the ideas developed by Buzzanell and Liu (2005) help to reveal that many women are in need of a consistent bonding with their newborns as such relation subsequently determines their capacity to carry out their duties. Taking into account the above analysis, it is evident that this study is important as it helps to create the recommendations that may be defined as best practice in order to ensure suitable laws and rights in the UAE labour sector and includes all stakeholders' expectations.

#### **5.4.3 Roles Performed by the UAE Anti-Discrimination Policies towards the Realisation of Pregnant Women's Rights in the Workplace**

The study findings show that the UAE government has made certain attempts to promote the importance of anti-discrimination policies and limit the extent to which pregnant women and those seeking maternity leave are discriminated. Berger et al. (2005) point out that different

types of anti-discrimination policies are important as they guide the practice of employers on the best conduct to their employees. In many instances, the implementation of anti-discrimination policies has been a major challenge that has been ignored by the majority of the entities in the UAE. According to research carried out and highlighted by Baird et al. (2002), anti-discrimination policies work to limit the termination of the pregnant women's employment and the assessment of their employment during and after the pregnancy period. In this regard, any anti-discrimination policy must be tailored in a way that all the stakeholders in the labour sector are not discriminated against in any way on the basis of their normal life occurrences.

The interview participants identified that a certain disconnect between the workplaces might exist due to external interferences that lead to the ineffectiveness of anti-discrimination policies and laws. The external interferences fail to incorporate the international convention that stipulates the conditions of ensuring the protection of employed pregnant women. The UAE anti-discrimination policies have been found to cover the right for employment, but they failed to incorporate the need for free time during a busy working schedule at an entity. In this case, the UAE policies are still defined as traditional anti-discrimination policies and legislation that has to be improved with the help of restructuring and considering the experiences of the same sectors in different countries. Therefore, this research study is important as it determines the extent that the UAE anti-discrimination policies need to be restructured or changed to be consistent with international standards and laws. Such a decision helps to ensure that there is no external interference that may limit the extent to which employees receive proper maternity leave and an effective mitigation of any form of discrimination in the workplace.

## **5.5 Methodological Implications**

This research study is based on a qualitative methodology where interviews were used to collect the data which was subsequently content analysed. The use of this methodology ensures that the selected interviewees were not only familiar with the bill of rights in the international labour standards but had an equal capacity of being conversant and knowledgeable on their impacts on the productivity of female employees and the existing connection between female employees and employers in the UAE labour sector. However, in future studies, the researchers can apply a convergent methodology using a combined

approach. Such an approach may be developed with the help of several activities. First, the identification of the important segments of the relevant sections of the interview script from the relevant sections of the initial explanatory model should occur. Then, the rationale of these recommendations should be proved effective for breaking down the interview transcripts into distinct statements with useful meanings and the formation of individualised concept maps that could guide on the best approach for distinguishing the relevance of the different laws and policies in the management of maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women. Nevertheless, the analysis approach used in this research is suitable as it provided the useful connections that aim at critiquing and refining the different anti-discrimination policies in the UAE labour sector in the context of the international countries. Notably, due to the concentrated nature of the problem-solving processes, the method used in this research is a useful exploratory approach adopted to ensure all implicit conceptions of maternity leave and pregnant women's rights and to highlight the problems that may concern pregnant women and all other stakeholders.

## **5.6 Implications of Current Research for Practice or Future Research**

This research study has identified a number of areas requiring further investigation. Clearly, it is important to conduct primary and secondary data collection. This small scale interview study is limited in so far as it remains unclear whether the participants provided the right answers, or the answers may be based on personal experiences only without the possibility to check the credibility of the facts. In this regard, in future research, there is a need to apply diverse research instruments in an integrated research design. A mixed method may promote the usage of such methods as interviews and questionnaires with the same people. Through such methods, the chances to obtain reliable data may be improved through the application of diverse research instruments. Instead of focusing on the UAE labour sector only, future research may focus on countries from the GCC region. In addition, the organisation selected for the study should be multisectoral, with the ability to cooperate with different stakeholder groups, including the government, society, and private sector. Further, a broad range of interviewees and questionnaire respondents may increase the worth of future research considerably. Finally, the possibility to consult a broad range of secondary materials plays an important role and becomes a critical step in an in-depth analysis of the impacts of maternity leave policies and the rights of pregnant women.

## **5.7 Limitations of the Research**

This research study has successfully met all of the objectives established at the outset, however, the current work is characterised by some weaknesses connected with the sampling technique. The study adopted convenience random sampling. As such, the application of this sampling approach exposes research to a myriad of risks of using a non-representative sample, since the interviewees' participation in the research was on the basis of their availability and willingness to be a part of the project rather than their representativeness and actual relation to the entire population. In this regard, the study argues that the future studies ought to adopt a different sampling approach in order to ensure the collection of a representative sample. For instance, the judgment sampling approach may be adopted so that the researcher chooses to use the samples based on the overall population characteristics and their diversities. Similarly, the future obtained findings ought to be compared effectively with the study analysis in evidencing the similarities of the variances orchestrated by the differences in the applied sampling techniques.

## **5.8 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter has evaluated the research findings obtained from the previous chapter and provides a detailed discussion of the material gathered during the investigation. This chapter has ensured that the research propositions were discussed in relation to the results obtained from the interviews' analysis section. More specifically, this study has been carried out through reflecting on the overall picture of the results and through discussion in a sequence that is similar to the presentation of the results section. Also, through the application of the literature review presented in the second chapter of this research, the demonstration of the relationship between the results to the previous literature and the current findings has helped to analyse the evidence for and against the propositions. This chapter combines the main findings reported in the literature review with the findings of the study and reveals that the chosen topic has to be discussed from different perspectives. The contradictions with previous research and the expectations of future research in the context of this study have also been discussed. In addition, this chapter has provided a clear indication of its significance and implications. It has discussed the limitations of the methodology used and made recommendations for best practice in future research. It has been identified that the methodology adopted in research is effective, but changes need to be made to ensure the reliability of the data collected. Lastly, the limitations of this research have been noted, and

the best approach to their mitigation has been recommended as well. The major limitation proposed is the approach used in the data collection and analysis.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter offers a summary and conclusions of the findings of this study with regard to the approaches and legal systems established in the UAE labour sector for maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women that are suitable for academics, employers, government, and women. The researcher also provides various recommendations for improving the existing legal systems and ensuring pregnant women in their workplaces are supportively treated by their employers in the entire labour sector. The recommendations are based on the current state of affairs defined in the country at the moment of research and may be offered to academics and future researchers in order to investigate the alternatives and the improvements that could be made on the topic. However, female employees and employers could also use the ideas in order to clarify their options and think about the opportunities that may be used to change the situation.

### **6.2 Summary of the Key Findings of Research**

#### **6.2.1 Working Mothers and Parental Health Outcomes**

The relationship between a pregnant woman and her employer plays a significant role in determining whether she shall suffer a prenatal mental health condition or not. In any event where women are accorded fair treatment by their employers, the negative cases of prenatal mental health conditions can often be averted. Additionally, suitable legal structures that dictate the treatment of women during the prenatal period exist. Therefore, the cases of women's mental health complications can be reduced. Moreover, it has been supported by the analysis that women are more likely to develop depression and anxiety during the period of pregnancy and one year after giving birth, which can contribute to the mental health complications. Ideally, motherhood gives a woman the role that helps her to comprehend how the idea of raising a child is crucial in her life. In this regard, the process alters the perception of society of woman as a mother and her entire workplace and hence can lead to her taking more than the already existing leave options and procedures for job security. The employer should provide her with significant opportunities and the possibility to make social and personal adjustments, which are all necessary to cope with the situation she is in. Moreover, it

can be noted that institution of relevant policies that dictate the terms and conditions of the maternity leave and how women are handled during the entire pregnancy period are critical.

### **6.2.2 The Government Role in UAE Labour Laws on Maternity Leave**

In the UAE labour sector, different categories of policies and laws exist. They dictate the conditions under which employees may ask for maternity leave and protect their rights in regards to the situations they have to work under. In this regard, there is a code of conduct relevant to the international laws that the employers are supposed to act upon in relation to pregnant employees. Additionally, the UAE laws and policies vary in the private sector and the public sector, and the working conditions or policies that are set up by individual companies vary as well. Nevertheless, when comparing the practices in the UAE in regard to their approach to treating expectant women, it is a fact that they rate below the majority of the international countries. The duration of employees' statutory paid maternity leave in the country is approximately 45 days, which is about six weeks, while in other countries, they offer up to 40 weeks. From the analysis of the information presented by the consultants and employees, it is evident that there is a need for an overhaul of the policies and laws that dictate parental leave and the rights of pregnant women. Moreover, in the UAE, the majority of maternity leaves and pregnancy allowances are funded by the employee. This is contrary to the international countries' practices, where the maternity benefits and costs of pregnancy are financed by the governments and taxes from the social security funds. From the analysis of such information, the fact that there is a common trend for employers to rethink the current maternity benefits and initiate the programs that fulfil the statutory requirements cannot be ignored any longer.

The legal structures have certain impacts on women's mental and physical health. The progressive commitment of a female employee after the maternity period is dependent on how employers treat women during that period. It is vital for a woman to develop a consistent bond with her new-born child for a longer period after birth since the child needs quality care, feeding, and a certain portion of attention from his or her mother. The findings of this research provided evidence on how efficient legal structures can cover the rights and expectations of employers, employees, and children.

### **6.2.3 Academics' and Employers' Implications of the Maternity Rights in the Workplace**

Anti-discrimination policies are the approaches adopted by the UAE government to limit the extent of discrimination through the policies tailored to the needs of pregnant women and those seeking maternity leave. An unfortunate consequence of anti-discrimination policies is that they often obscure the nature of the existing employee–employer relationship and create anxiety and confusion. Typically, most companies operate with the sole purpose of increasing their market dominance and profitability. In these contexts, some employers tend to discriminate against women whom they perceive as being economically unviable and hence lacking the capacity to increase their capital growth and economic gains. The anti-discrimination policies are set in a potential conflict between firms' economic interests and the need of equalisation of employment practices for pregnant women.

The UAE government has played a significant role in challenging discrimination that is based on pregnancy. As such, this study has identified that there is a need for the government to set more stringent anti-discrimination policies that could provide international standards and guidelines on how employers should accommodate their employees. Moreover, there ought to be strict sanctions and penalties against employers who fail to implement the policies in their organisations. The laws that offer protection to all women against any form of discrimination against them in the workplace are common today in the UAE. Still, the same topic was not of the same importance in previous years. The success of international policies and laws in mitigating the extent of discrimination against pregnant women has been prompted by the idea that pregnancy is like any other form of disability, and thus the equality against discrimination must be granted. The majority of the interviewees suggested that a similar approach to the international best practice should be replicated in the UAE legal framework.

### **6.3 Recommendation on the Best Approach in Aligning the Labour Laws with the Rights of Pregnant Women and Maternity Leave**

Based on the analysis, it is evident that the existing legal structures in the UAE labour sector regarding maternity leave and rights of pregnant women are insufficient. This is particularly apparent when compared to existing international legal policies. This section offers a list of recommendations through which the UAE labour sector can increase the effectiveness of how

organisations and employers deal with pregnant women and their terms and conditions of maternity leave.

### **6.3.1 Recommendations to Women Employees and Employers**

As it has been pointed out earlier, the existence of a cordial relationship between women and their employers is critical to mitigating the occurrence of prenatal mental health complications. The optimisation of the party's relationship can be facilitated within the confines of the existing legal procedures. However, the current relationship between employees and employers is not sustainable. One of the best ways for improving these relations is the attention to the role of the federal government and the possibility to issue the policies with the help of all employees and employers, who may be trained on relevant topics such as sexual harassment, inappropriate behaviour, or poorly developed communication. Apart from the education strategy, several alternative approaches are available through which the relationship between employers and pregnant women can be improved in order to reduce the likelihood of the occurrence of prenatal mental health conditions. This recommendation can only be implemented through a coordinated involvement between policy makers and the entire set of stakeholders in the labour sector. The overall coordination among all the involved parties can take approximately eight months for their comprehensive implementation.

Training employers with the aim of understanding and incorporating the transformational style of leadership as they implement their supervisory approach could elicit major changes in the workplace. Previous research on the transformational leadership style in entities has proved to be effective in enhancing the reshaping and changing of the overall organisation culture. Employers have to feel responsible for enhancing the success of pregnant women and accept it as their core responsibility to ensure that their relationship is appealing to all stakeholders. Through this social development, the cases of prenatal mental health complications can be mitigated significantly. Lastly, considering the policies and laws relating to mothers, their comprehensive implementation may elicit many benefits. Such a situation can be attributed to the fact that employees are not burdened in seeking solutions to improve employee–employer relationships. It should be the responsibility of all employers to guarantee the existence of a favourable environment for mothers during the entire period of pregnancy. If possible, off-hours can be granted to women to help them recuperate from

different challenges associated with the period of pregnancy. Owing to the extent of bureaucracy associated with the passage of legislation in the UAE region, this process can take up to approximately two years to be constituted as full laws suitable for subsequent implementation.

### **6.3.2 Recommendations to Government and Academics**

Currently, there are policies and laws that have been enacted in the UAE with the aim of ensuring maximal care for pregnant women and better maternity leave terms and conditions. In most countries, the responsibility for maternity pay is divided among employers, government entities, and insurance companies. Still, it is not the case in the UAE context. The solution to the lack of sustainability of the UAE laws and policies should be handled both in the implementation and design stages, when the policies may affect the parties responsible for the payment of maternity leave. In this regard, such an arrangement would ensure that the employers are able to manage maternity leave and pregnancy-related work requirements without going through much financial distress and many challenges. Additionally, in big industrial countries, maternity benefits, which include paid leave prior to and after childbirth, reinstatement rights, and the permitted nursing breaks from their normal work environments, are guaranteed to employees through the national legislation. The entire process of incorporating the legal structures to ensure the institution of these rights may take approximately three years.

On the contrary, as evidenced in the research analysis and findings, in the UAE context, such practices and decisions are solely made by employers. Any changes in the UAE policies and laws should include the prescription of the benefits derived from a national perspective respecting women's participation as essential in the workforce and supporting their special ability to bring forth life. Furthermore, while it is appropriate to augment the different frameworks applied by policymakers in the development of the improved exercise of women's rights in the workplace, it is also important to evaluate individual biases and discriminatory attitudes of policymakers and employers in order to enhance the subsequent implementation of positive policies for anti-discrimination.

Currently, the existing anti-discrimination laws are insufficient and inflexible for establishing a flexible work environment in the UAE. Employers and supervisors may find it appropriate

to support postpartum mothers and explain that they maintain their work roles as stipulated in the anti-discrimination laws and policies. In this way, they could go beyond just when they implement the policies in their organisations and facilitate the changes of the entire organisation culture of anti-discrimination issues.

#### **6.4 Summary of Chapter**

In summary, this chapter has evaluated the approaches and legal systems instituted by the UAE market labour sector. It has argued that the promotion of pregnant women's rights through effective maternity leave policies and practices may occur under certain circumstances. This chapter introduces two recommendations that can be adopted in the UAE labour sector. First is the improvement of the relationships between female employees and their employers. This recommendation is based on the fact that inconsistent relationships between employers and employees lead to prenatal mental health complications that have to be avoided. The second recommendation includes the improvement of the labour laws and policies with respect to the international laws and policies. Several suggestions have been provided on the best approach that can be adopted to ensure that the UAE labour sector laws and policies are in line with international policies.

In general, this dissertation has studied the current state of affairs that pregnant women have to face within their workplaces. It has sought to clarify the main challenges and concerns of female employees. Interviews with different people show that the UAE labour sector has already achieved certain developments and improvements. Still, the overall picture is not as effective as was initially expected. Therefore, it is important that new changes, evaluations, and suggestions are discussed to help women remain confident of their career opportunities and learn how to develop more effective relations with their employers.

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