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ENTRANCE TO BE BOTH MOTHER AND EMPLOYEE: MATERNITY LEAVE  
PROCESS, ORGANIZATIONAL RE-ENTRY, AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN  
TURKEY

Gizem GÜVEN

119630002

ASSOC. PROF. BAŞAK UÇANOK TAN

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Entrance To Be Both Mother And Employee: Maternity Leave Process, Organizational Re-Entry, And Career Development In Turkey

Hem Anne Hem Çalışan Olmaya Giriş: Türkiye’de Doğum İzni Süreci, Organizasyona Yeniden Dönüş ve Kariyer Gelişimi

**Gizem Güven**

119630002

**Tez Danışmanı:** Doç. Dr. Başak Uçanok Tan (İmza): .....  
İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi

**Jüri Üyesi:** Doç. Dr. İdil Işık (İmza): .....  
İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Nevin Kılıç (İmza):.....  
Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf Üniversitesi

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to shed light on women employees' experiences about maternity leave and organizational re-entry after maternity leave and how those experiences affect women employees' career development.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a base for understanding the underlying dynamics of maternity leave and its relationship between organizational re-entry and career development. Organizational re-entry and career development are the most common topics in the literature concerning maternity leave. On the other hand, most of the research in Turkey is based on the examination of legal rights related to maternity leave. The maternity leave process can be considered a new phase for women employees in development and career perspectives because women experience being both a mother and an employee. It is crucial to understand the dynamics of this process based on a career development perspective for organizations to support women employees through Human Resources Policies to improve sustainability.

In this qualitative study, ten white-collar women participants who returned back to work from maternity leave within 2-years in different sectors were interviewed. Overall experiences with maternity leave and its effects on career development are discussed, and three models based on SCCT models are proposed. Practical implications for companies and individuals based on necessities for successful return and factors that ease the adaptation process are introduced.

*Keywords:* Maternity Leave, Organizational Re-Entrance, Career Development of Women Employees, Maternity Leave and Career Development

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma, kadın çalışanların doğum izni ve doğum izni sonrasında organizasyona dönüş ile ilgili deneyimlerini ve bu deneyimlerin kadın çalışanların kariyer gelişimlerini nasıl etkilediğine ışık tutmak amacıyla yapılmıştır.

Sosyal Bilişsel Kariyer Teorisi, doğum izni süreci ve organizasyona yeniden dönüşte deneyimlerin, kariyer gelişimi ile ilişkisini anlamak için bir temel sağlamaktadır. Doğum izni sonrası organizasyona yeniden dönüş ve kariyer gelişimi literatürde en yaygın işlenen konu olmakla beraber Türkiye’de yapılan araştırmaların büyük bir çoğunluğu doğum iznine ilişkin yasal hakların incelenmesine dayanmaktadır. Doğum izni süreci kadın çalışanları için hem anne hem çalışan olmayı deneyimledikleri için kariyer açısından yeni bir dönem olarak değerlendirilebilir. Organizasyonların insan kaynakları politikaları ile kadın çalışanlara yönelik faaliyetlerini geliştirmek için kariyer gelişimi dinamiklerini anlamak büyük önem taşımaktadır.

Bu nitel çalışmada, farklı sektörlerde çalışan ve doğum izninden son iki yıl içerisinde geri dönmüş on kadın katılımcı ile görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Tartışma bölümünde, doğum iznine ilişkin deneyimler ve kariyer gelişimi üzerine etkilerine değinilecektir. Bu etkiler, SCCT modelini esas alarak üç ayrı modelde verilecektir. Doğum izninden başarılı bir dönüş için gereklilikler ve adaptasyon sürecini kolaylaştıran faktörler şirketler ve kişiler için pratik yansımalar olarak paylaşılacaktır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Doğum İzni, Organizasyona Yeniden Dönüş, Kadınların Kariyer Gelişimi, Doğum İzni ve Kariyer Gelişimi

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Women in work is a concept that is increasingly considered in academia. Many companies have taken actions to support women in work based on workforce diversity and sustainability actions. However, there are still many challenges women employees can encounter with gender inequality concepts in their workplace, like glass-ceiling. Federal Glass Ceiling Commission defined the glass-ceiling as “an unseen and reachable barrier that keeps women and minorities rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements.” Maheshwari & Lenka (2022) provide a framework for glass-ceiling effect, which might be a powerful framework for understanding the challenges women can encounter in the workplace according to literature about glass-ceiling. According to Mashwari & Lenka (2022), antecedents of glass ceiling can be defined in four dimensions:

1. Social and cultural factors, including gender role stereotypes and the low status of women in society
2. Personal factors such as educational inequality between men and women, lack of self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-expression
3. Organizational factors such as hostile and benevolent sexism, queen bee syndrome, discrimination in staff practices, horizontal segregation, and lack of role models
4. Political factors include glass ceilings, poor public relations on gender diversity, and poor enforcement of enacted laws.

This framework can provide insight into women’s challenges in the workplace. According to Burke (2006), it might take 400 hundred years for women and men to be equally represented in management and corporate boards based on this current pace of change. On the other hand, even if several women and men adhere egalitarian perspective, society might have norms that

men should take their place in the work and women should take place more in the family domain (Lippe & Lippenyi, 2020). Those societal norms might be some of the factors that underlie work-family conflict. Combining those opinions and traditional gender roles still has a powerful influence on how women and men act in their professional and family lives (Hasqvist, 2016). For example, a study by Mueller (2022) demonstrated that senior executive women encounter inter-role conflict due to both overcommitments with work and at home. Men who do not fit the traditional roles of being a wife and mother are still expected to behave like women (Whitley & Kite). Gedikli (2020) mentioned that dual-earner couples have been low due to the traditional structure in which women are homemakers and men are breadwinners. On the other hand, women continued to have an inconsistent proportion of share housework even when employed, which emphasized the burden of both paid and unpaid work (Kongar & Memiş, 2017).

Whitley & Kite (2010) mentioned that experiences of barriers in the workplace could affect the career development of women. According to Global Gender Gap Report (2022), 68.1 % gender gap closed in 2022; however, at this pace, it will take 132 years to reach full parity. Turkey was listed above in the global gender gap report, and it can be inferred that we need to take specific actions to increase the pace of activities for gender equality in the workplace. On the other hand, Covid-19 has damaged the process. Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries female economic empowerment. More women lost their jobs than men during Covid-19 (PriceWaterhouseCooper, 2021).

As mentioned above, one of the barriers for women in work is societal norms like “women are homemakers,” and the process that acts as a bridge between being both a mother and an employee can be defined as maternity leave. Those societal norms can bring gender inequality in the workplace even if many companies focus on gender equality for organizational success and sustainability. Wiese & Heidemeier (2012) described maternity

leave as a crucial developmental transition for women. Returning to work after maternity leave transforms one from a full-time mother to a working mother (Skafida, 2012). This kind of change can be considered a transition of identity change that might be regarded as a stressful and challenging process. According to Spiteri & Xuereb (2012), developing a new identity during maternity leave can create a dilemma for mothers who want to return to professional life based on intertwined feelings of guilt and desire to return to professional careers or economic necessities. Gokdemirel et al. (2008) found in one-to-one interviews that mothers mentioned that the duration of maternity leave is short, they can't take unpaid leave due to economic reasons, and conditions were unsuitable. They were worried about the care and feeding of the baby when they started to work. On the other, women might not only encounter challenges after maternity leave. Chandler (2021) mentioned that the announcement of pregnancy to managers and colleagues could be stressful and difficult for women to find the right time to announce the pregnancy and understand their reaction. After the pregnancy announcement, excitement signs or a stagnant response from the manager can influence women's perception of perceived supervisor support (Little, Hinojosa & Lynch, 2017).

Another dimension of maternity leave is career development. According to the study by Binaku (2019), women describe their career progress and development in both negative and positive ways. Women who express their career progress positively mentioned that they know what they want from their professional life and what they are looking for in a company. They defined maternity leave as a new perspective on life. On the other hand, women who considered maternity leave negatively impacted their careers mentioned that they feel they need to prove themselves due to the so-called gap. Due to the possibility of postponing promotion and lower salaries than their colleagues, they think they must choose between work hours and child/children. They use the term bad conscience due to a lack of energy to work (Binaku, 2019).

To sum up, maternity leave is a crucial transition for women employees from developmental and career perspectives. It is essential to understand this critical phase for women employees to remove the barriers for women who are trying to handle this transition. However, there needs to be more research on maternity leave and its effects on women employees in Turkey. Primarily, the literature about maternity leave is based on its legal aspects and results of legal issues like duration of maternity leave, breastfeeding, etc. So, this study aims to understand the maternity leave process based on an organizational perspective with semi-structured interviews, which will be conducted with women employees who returned from maternity leave. In the literature, the topics of organizational re-entry and career development based on maternity leave are frequently mentioned. In this study, these two aspects of maternity leave are covered. Adverse effects of maternity leave or taking little notice of the importance of this process can create exhaustion and stress on women employees, which can affect women employees' decision to return to work, decreasing work motivation and employee engagement. The thematic analysis was used as a research method with inductive reasoning to understand shared and unshared experiences of women employees on common ground. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a framework to make sense of underlying factors that affect experiences before maternity leave, organizational re-entry, and career development. SCCT is a specific implementation of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory to understand the formation of career and educational choices, performance, and permanence in career pursuits (Chronister& McWhirter, 2003) and valuable for career development understanding for people who encounter oppression like women who have been confined (Chronister& McWhirter, 2003; Chartrand& Rose, 1996). Overall, this study aims to understand, and maternity leave experiences of women employees, organizational re-entry, and career development.

## **1. Literature Review**

Women in work is a common topic that is considered in both academia and companies. Maternity leave is a process that women experience when they become mothers in work-life.

There needs to be more research in Turkey to understand maternity leave experiences for women employees. Understanding the dynamics and effects of maternity leave for women is crucial, especially for gender equality activities for companies. On the other hand, it is essential to understand the dynamics of pre-maternity leave to understand the effect of the overall process.

### **1.1 Maternity Leave and Organizational Re-Entry**

Returning to work after maternity leave might dramatically change women's lives. It is a significant transition from being a mother to a working mother. Also, it is a phase in which women must alter many dimensions of their lives (Costantini, Warasin, Sartori & Mantovan, 2022). From an organizational perspective, re-entry to the organization after maternity leave can be demonstrated as a new career phase that mothers can feel burdened by multiple roles and demands (Jaeckel, Seiger, Orth, Wiese, 2012). In addition, distress and exhaustion can come up after returning to work with additional new roles, such as being a spouse, employee, and mother. At the same time, women try to sustain their individuality (Spiteri & Xuereb, 2012). Also, those role demands can be aggravated by struggles women encounter in their workplace, like a lack of supportive organizational culture (Kavra & Kramer, 2020). Costantini et al. (2022) conducted research with nurses who returned to work after prolonged maternity leave and their coping strategies. According to the study, the first big challenge is leaving the kids at home, and the primary coping strategy for a successful return is to know that the child is in good hands (Costantini et al., 2022). On the other hand, women in the study mentioned that they feel like novices when they return to work after maternity leave. One of the participants described this feeling of being a novice as riding a bike that they didn't forget how to ride. Still, they must practice remembering it (Costantini et al., 2022). According to Sidle's (2011) decision to re-entrance, the organization is primarily based on women's financial contribution of their spouses to the household. Also, the support women receive from their organization before maternity leave influences women's decisions to re-

enter the organization after maternity leave (Fox & Quinn, 2015). This workplace support by Fox & Quinn (2015) might be a significant factor for a successful return.

The study Costantini, Dickert & Ceschi conducted (2020) aimed to understand the relationship between work-family policies (WFP), work-family conflict, and work-related attitudes within women in management positions who returned to work after maternity leave. According to the study, flexible time management, communication, and psychological support-related policies increase women's affective commitment and work engagement in management positions (Costantini et al., 2020). On the other hand, experiencing workplace social support after maternity leave enables women to increase coping strategies and transfer this support to their colleagues, who can create a virtuous cycle of workplace support (Ma, Wu, Yang & Xiu, 2021). In addition, WFP is also positively related to affective and negatively related to continuance commitment which enables women to focus less on the negative impact of competing role demands after maternity leave and increases work engagement (Costantini et al., 2020).

### **1.1.1 Social Support in the Workplace**

Various forms of support, domestic, practical, and social, can promote the intention of returning to work after maternity leave from a psychological perspective (Houston & Marks, 2003). According to Houston & Marks (2003), a longitudinal study based on post-pregnancy work outcomes emphasized that support influences the decision to return the work. Jaeckel (2012) stated that re-entry to the organization after maternity leave as a new career phase could create struggles to balance work and family demands that can cause psychological distress, work-family conflict, and reduced occupational attainment. Greenberg (2016) mentioned that women employees who return to work might struggle with inadequacy feelings about dealing with both being an employee and a mother, reorganizing life and settling the new situation. Social support, which is perceived within the organization by women employees, can lead to an effective return to work after maternity leave.

### **1.1.2 Supervisor Support**

According to Carluccio, Dal Corso, Falco, and De Carlo's (2020) study, positive supervisors' behavior is positively related to performance and remaining opportunities through work engagement. Also, supervisor behaviors positively impact return management after maternity leave (Carluccio et al., 2020). Supervisors should actively manage return to work after maternity leave and be trained about return-to-work policies, operating and planning a return to work, communicating with returned employees, and caring for team and colleagues (Carluccio et al., 2020). For instance, communication and psychological support, which enable information exchange during pregnancy or maternity leave, have positive impacts (Costantini et al., 2020). Also, Makola (2020) stated that women employees referred support from their colleagues is often minimal or inadequate. However, effective management of return to work between supervisor and employee can create a virtuous cycle of reliance that influence the team level (Townsend, 2016). Carluccio et al. (2020) mentioned that work engagement partially mediated the relationship between positive supervisor behaviors in return to work after maternity leave and job performance. It is essential to understand how positive supervisor behavior is crucial for women employees when they return to work after maternity leave because they often see professional and career development and their achievements reduced or changed after being a mother (Verniers& Vala, 2018).

### **1.1.3 Work-Life Balance and Work-Family Policies**

As mentioned, returning after maternity leave is a crucial phase for women employees for several reasons. According to Kavya& Kramer (2020), new mothers encounter risks to their health and psychological challenges. Still, organizations struggle with providing adequate support to employees that enables them to handle problems after post-maternity. Negiz& Tokmakçı (2011) mentioned that working mothers struggle to balance work and family. Also, women trying to meet social norms of being mothers can accuse of not being

committed to work and sense a lack of productivity (Correll, Benard& Paik, 2007). A sense of obligation to fulfill both being a mother and employee can create a burden for women employees that can cause work-family conflict. Akyol& Arslan (2020) conducted a study with 33 married, working mothers with 0-6 years old children in Turkey to understand problems occurring during motherhood. Most participants said they struggled to balance work-family life (Akyol& Arslan, 2020). It is widely known that work and family conflicts can cause decreased employee health and well-being (Noor, 2003). According to Grzywacz and Smith (2016), after deciding to resolve the dispute between these two domains, it usually ends with work-to-family interference or family-to-work interference. Costantini, Dickert, and Ceschi (2020) mentioned that different forms of conflict occur in organizational outcomes like job dissatisfaction and commitment from wanting to work in an organization to need to work in an organization. On the other hand, affective commitment is also negatively related to work-family interference and work engagement (Good et al., 1998). Organizational commitment can be considered a phenomenon that can increase positive impacts on the work environment, such as employee retention, job performance, and employee motivation (Dordevic et al., 2022). Mehta& Mehta (2013) employees who actively engage in the company act more productively and stay loyal to the company, which can lead to organizational productivity and make them more profitable. According to the study by Costantini et al. (2020), communication, psychological support, and flexible time management positively impact affective commitment, and the availability of those policies can turn positive employee attitudes.

#### **1.1.3.1 Flexible Time Management or Working Patterns.**

Flexible working hours or patterns promote a sense of control that can manage maternity leave (Costantini et al., 2020). On the other hand, it provides spending more time with family and improvement the health conditions of employees like mental health, sleeps quality, etc. (Bhalla, 2016). Galea& Di Rijk (2014) conducted a study on 15 employees based

on the effects of flexible working hours and work-life balance and analyzed the result with thematic analysis. The study indicated that flexible working hours are crucial for employees who carry family responsibilities, which is an inevitable factor in pursuing a career (Galea& De Rijk, 2014). Wang& Walumbwa (2007) demonstrated that providing flexible working policies is not enough solely; companies also need to offer relaxed working culture to facilitate the practice. However, respondents of Galea& De Rijk's (2014) study respondents need to benefit from flexible working hours more due to suspicious culture or discouragement from leaders. Akyol and Arslan (2020) study found that flexible working patterns are one of the crucial institutional support mechanisms. Pas, Peters, Eisinga, Doorewaard, and Janssen (2011) emphasized the importance of family-friendly policies for integrating work-family life, and Ridgeway& Correll (2004) mentioned that perceptions about performance and talent could be negatively affected by the maternal status of women employees and working mothers need more flexible time.

#### **1.1.3.2 Child Care Support**

Kossek and Nichol (1992) emphasized the importance of childcare support's positive impacts on employees who do not have family support and its positive effects on attitudes toward managing work and childcare responsibilities. On-site childcare benefits can free employees from their worries about childcare and enable them to focus on their work in a favorable climate (Kossek& Nichol, 1992). On the other hand, employees who do not have a family buffer and benefit from off-site support struggle with childcare problems and absenteeism (Kossek& Nichol, 1992). Hein& Cassirer (2010) emphasized that employees feel more satisfied through on-site childcare because it enables them to react in emergencies. According to Akyol and Arslan's (2020) study, participants emphasized that institutional support mechanisms are insufficient in organizations and that daycare centers are necessary for the workplace. Also, on-site childcare promotes convenience and security. Mothers with newborns can work and nurse their children during the day, which can increase the return rate of mothers after maternity leave (Hein& Cassirer, 2010). However, it is crucial to

consider employee frustration that can be occurred due to inequality to prove childcare support (Kossek& Nichol, 1992).

### **1.1.3.3 Family Leave Policies.**

Maternity leave is related to birth available for mothers, but parental leave refers to longer leaves that enable both parents to take care of their children at home (Misra& Budig, 2011). Parental leave policies provide employment protection for employees who want to take off work to care for their children (Thevenon& Solaz, 2013). This policy absence can cause women employees to withdraw from the workforce (Misra& Budig, 2011). According to Morgan& Zippel (2003), extended parental leave can cause alienation from the workforce for women and reinforce traditional gender divisions. So, it is crucial to balance the duration of parental leave because if it is too short, risks might occur to the mother and child's well-being, or an extended period can cause risks to career, especially for women who are considered primary users of parental entitlements (Thevenon& Solaz, 2013). Some Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries provide specific parental entitlements to promote gender equality (Thevenon& Solaz, 2013). Besides maternity and paternity leave, two types of parental leave have been identified which are parental leave refers to employment-protected leave as an additional factor after specific maternity and paternity leave for the absence of employed parents and home care leave, or child or child raisin leave, which refers to employment protected leaves to enable parents to provide care until the child is two or three years old (OECD, 2022). However, home care leave is usually unpaid, and a minority of OECD countries apply for home care leave (OECD, 2022). In Turkey, women employees who work under SSI can take maternity leave 16 weeks of paid and up six more months of unpaid maternity leave (Çarkoğlu, Kafesçioğlu& Mitrani, 2012). Even if this policy can be considered better than some European countries, there are still problematic issues like economic struggles with unpaid maternity leave or lack of support policies.

In light of the information above, organizational re-entry is a process that can be defined as a new career phase that might be challenging for women due to added new roles. Also, work-family policies and perceived organizational support can be significant factors in creating coping strategies to build an organization's support cycle and a successful return after maternity leave. However, it is crucial to apply those policies and organizational support within the organization equally and alter the duration to prevent alienation from a career. Even if these actions promote positive effects for employees, they can also create gender inequality. On the other hand, policies like on-site childcare can promote blurred lines between family and work for employees (Hoobler, 2007).

## **1.2 Maternity Leave and Career Development**

According to Career Development Institute (2017), "Career development is a life-long process for individuals of managing learning, work, and transitions to move forward and participate effectively in work and society." On the other hand, to manage the career development process, individuals need to acquire new skills for employability, career progress, and resilience for a career change. Also, these career management skills enable individuals to do networking, develop a positive and resilient mindset and learn about themselves (Career Development Institute, 2017). In the guidance of this definition, maternity leave can be considered a new phase for career development because women employees might need to adapt themselves to their combination of new roles, can acquire new skills, and might need to be resilient due to this significant change in their lives.

Women who returned from maternity leave to the workforce are mostly perceived as less updated and having deteriorated skills (PriceWaterhouseCooper, 2016) which might inhibit their career development. On the other hand, coworkers might feel angry when they are forced to cover the absence of employees on maternity leave, and most leaders have not found an effective solution to cover this absence (Kavya& Kramer, 2020). On the other hand, feeling alienated from the organization during maternity leave can make the transition more

challenging. Due to those circumstances, women employees can associate maternity leave with an incline in their careers (Kavya& Cramer, 2020). According to Sullivan (1999), four main reasons existing career theories do not apply to women due to gender inequalities (McDougall, 2010, p.5). Understanding women's careers are passing through having a holistic perspective on the nature of work (O'Neil, Hopkins& Bilimoria, 2008). According to the study of Connor and Wright (2013), most women had to trade off their careers for their families and reduce their career progression and ambition. In the literature, studies mentioned both positive and negative aspects of maternity leave on career development. However, the negative outcomes of maternity leave outweigh the positive outcomes (McDougall, 2010; Matlin, 1996).

According to a study conducted by Binaku (2019), demotion of position postponed promotion, and the feeling of obligation that women need to prove their skills after maternity leave, especially in a male-dominated workforce, can be considered negative effects of maternity leave. In addition, the lack of flexible working arrangements also increases the negative effects of maternity leave on a career. In the study by Binaku (2019), mothers mentioned that they must choose between their children and work hours and put effort into balancing these two aspects of their lives. Also, Maxwell, Connolly, and Laoire (2018) researched the hidden toll of maternity leave on female academics. They found an acute perception that women who return from maternity leave need to compensate for their absence after maternity leave. In addition, women who received more support than they provided in the workforce after maternity leave reported low self-efficacy in the study conducted by Jaeckel (2011). As mentioned above, in the research conducted by Costantini et al. (2022), nurses who return to work on prolonged maternity leave feeling of being novices about their job can be considered as a negative factor that might affect women employees' careers.

Another perspective in the literature, maternity leave also has positive impacts on women employees' careers. In McDougall's (2010) study, participants mentioned that they

gained positive skills like multi-tasking due to their responsibilities during maternity leave and a sense of control of their lives. In the study of Costantini et al. (2022), participants also mentioned that they return to their work with improved soft skills like self-awareness and a different, broader mindset. Those positive experiences related to maternity leave mostly are the women employees who experience flexible working arrangements, family-supportive policies, and receive support from their supervisors. However, as inferred from the review above, the negative impacts outweigh the positive outcomes of maternity leave. In the light of the literature, maternity leave policies and family-supportive policies after maternity leave can be essential in increasing the positive effects of maternity leave.

### **1.3 Social Cognitive Career Development Theory**

Social cognitive career development theory (SCCT) emphasizes the interaction of people and the environment that can influence the formation of individuals' careers and academic interests and the effects of these interactions on actions, goals, and choices (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). The learning theory of career counseling (LCTT) endorses individuals' unique learning experiences and temperamental factors that affect career development (Hutchison & Niles, 2016, p.287; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Four factors influence career decision-making:

1. *Genetic endowment* consists of intrinsic factors like gender, race, and environmental factors that can affect the existence of *special abilities* and unique talents.
2. *Environmental conditions and cultural, economic, social, and political events* can lead one's career path. Factors like employment laws, geographic location, and family tradition can create a perimeter for developing career identity.
3. *Instrumental learning experiences* emphasize the effects of antecedents mentioned above on behaviors and consequences. Still, *associative learning* occurs when harmful or positive stimulators affect a neutral stance toward learning experiences, such as a chance that can affect one's career decision.

4. *Task approach skills* have a reciprocal relationship with one's career development that can affect both career development and career decision outcomes (Hutchison& Niles, 2016, p.287; Mitchell& Krumboltz, 1996).

Hutchison& Niles (2016) mentioned that these four factors influence individuals' beliefs about themselves and the world. Social Cognitive Theory acknowledges both Bandura's social cognitive theory and Krumboltz's theory of LCCT (Hutchison& Niles, 2016, p.287; Mitchell& Krumboltz, 1996). SCCT acknowledges Bandura's (1986) triadic reciprocal model to frame the complex relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and performance goals in the career development process (Hutchison& Niles, 2016). The social cognitive theory emphasizes that behavior, environment, and cognition are crucial elements for development (Santrock, 2013, p.26). Bandura (1986) emphasizes that cognitive processes have essential links with the environment and behavior, which create a triadic reciprocal model based on the reciprocal relationship between person/cognition, environment, and behavior. Also, Bandura (1986) highlights that self-efficacy can be defined as the belief that one's capacity to execute behaviors and produce specific performance attainments. According to Bandura (1986), personal performance achievements, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states are primary sources through which self-efficacy is acquired and modified. These beliefs are at the center of personal agency and are pervasive (Lent, Brown& Hackett, 1994). So, self-efficacy leads individuals to determine their choices, environments, level of effort, persistence and thought patterns when they encounter impediments (Lent, Brown& Hackett, 1994). On the other hand, SCCT acknowledges genetic endowment, special abilities, and environmental conditions on career decision-making like LCCT (Lent, Brown& Hackett, 1994). However, there are salient differences between SCCT and LCCT. One of the differences that led to SCCT will be used in this study; the primary concern of LCCT is choice behavior, while SCCT focuses on the interlocking process of interest development, choice, and performance (Lent, Brown& Hackett, 1994). So, SCCT will provide a more comprehensive framework to

understand the maternity leave process' effects on women employees before maternity leave, their return to the organization after maternity leave, and their career development.

Briefly, SCCT is a theory that links the aspects of career development based on the formation of career and academic activities, selection of career and academic choice, performance, and persistence in educational and occupational pursuits (Lent, Brown& Hackett, 1996). SCCT framed basic models based on social cognitive theory, emphasizing self-referent thinking to guide human motivation and behavior (Lent, Brown& Hackett, 1994). SCCT framework includes social cognitive mechanisms relevant to career development: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goal representations (Lent, Brown& Hackett, 1994). Three interlocking models for extending the social cognitive theory to career development were framed in SCCT: interest development, career choice, and performance.

### **1.3.1 Model of Interest Development**

Lent, Brown& Hackett (2002) emphasized that vocational interests are a standard fixture in career psychology. Lent et al. (1994) defined the model of interests as how sociocognitive mechanisms determine fundamental career interests and how those interests promote career-related activity involvement and skill acquisition. Over childhood and adolescence, individuals are exposed to or observe certain career-related activities and reinforced to achieve satisfactory performance with chosen tasks and form their sense of self-efficacy based on those experiences (Lent et al., 1994). The model of interest emphasizes self-efficacy, and outcome expectations include individuals' interests. Those interests lead to forming intentions/goals for activity involvement, then developing activity selection and practices, in turn, occur performance attainments. Briefly, the model of interest emphasizes that people form their durable interests when they see themselves as competent and produce valuable outcomes (Bandura, 1986; Lent, Larkin& Brown, 1989, Lent, Brown& Hackett, 2002). In reverse, individuals tend to avoid developing interests when self-efficacy is weak

or expect neutral or negative outcomes (Lent et al., 2002). On the other hand, there are other interlocking relationships during interest formation, self-efficacy partly leads to the formation of outcome expectations, and those outcome expectations can influence activity goals and indirectly influences interests (Lent et al., 1994). Also, individuals can develop plans based on their activity involvement controlled by interests and partly rewards that can lead to activity choices (Lent et al., 1994). Lastly, self-efficacy perceptions like outcome expectation directly influence activity goals and choices, which can help individuals form their interpretation, organization, and application of their skills; it also contributes to performance accomplishments (Lent et a., 1994). SCCT acknowledges that this process is constant throughout the lifespan, leading individuals to develop characteristic patterns of career interests (Lent et al., 2002). The SCCT interest model has emphasized individuals' self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations and acknowledges that individuals develop academic and career interests when they think they can perform well in them and achieve desirable outcomes (Lent et al., 2002).

**Values and Aptitudes.** According to Lent et al. (1994), interactions and observation of the environment, cultural and religious institutions, and media sources can occur in the formation of values and personal standards, which form their outcome expectations for achieving desirable outcomes based on those values. Also, abilities and values affect vocational interests, but in SCCT, their effects on interests are funneled through self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 2002). Lent et al. (2002) emphasized that abilities form self-efficacy beliefs that turn outcome expectations and interests instead of directly affecting interest.

**Person and Contextual Influences.** Lent et al. (2002) mentioned that social cognitive variables do not solely function in forming interest or other vocational outcomes; there are several important factors (gender, race-ethnicity, physical health, genetic endowment, and socioeconomic conditions) that are related to social cognitive variables in

the career development process. SCCT acknowledges gender and race's effects on career development from a social constructivist perspective, which emphasizes intertwined features of a person's socially constructed world, not only the biological properties of the person (Hackett & Lent, 1992). In SCCT, the effects of gender and ethnicity on interest, choice, and performance are considered as managed through differential learning experiences that self-efficacy and outcome expectation (Lent et al., 2002).

### **1.3.2 Model of Career Choice**

The model of career choice in SCCT emphasizes the diverse person, context, and learning influences on choice behavior (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2002). According to Lent et al. (2002), the relationship between the career of interest and choice model provides developmental continuity between vocational interests and career-relevant choice. As mentioned in a model of interest development, self-efficacy and outcome beliefs can shape individuals' interests. Those interests can form a choice of goals and actions relevant to a career (Lent et al., 1994). Performance and experiences about achievements can be created by choice actions that can affect the efficacy and outcome percepts (Lent et al., 1994). Also, outcome expectations can shape the choice of goals and activities; then, perceived outcomes are valued, leading to adopting specific career goals and actions (Lent et al., 1994). On the other hand, self-efficacy also plays a role in outcome expectations and interest, which influence goals, activities, and performance attainments (Lent et al., 1994). According to Locke & Latham (1990), various types of goals can be occurred based on intensity and commitment that can affect the determination or attachment to the goal (Lent et al., 1994). According to Lent et al. (1994), a high level of dedication to goals can promote choice behaviors than more tentative goals. SCCT emphasizes that personal goals influence the intermediate link between interests and actions; it also identifies self-efficacy and outcome expectations as forming interest patterns and co-determinants of choice (Lent et al., 2002). Lastly, career choice goals and actions might be influenced by self-efficacy and outcome

expectation which may provide a supplementary path to understanding that individuals need to compromise their interests in selecting a vocational path (Lent et al., 2002).

**Contextual Influences.** SCCT also emphasizes the individuals' perception of the environment that affects career behavior (Lent et al., 2002). SCCT provides two subgroups of contextual influences, which are more distal that lead to the formation of cognitions and interests like opportunities for skill development, cultural and gender role socialization, and proximal influences that crucially affect choice behavior like emotional and financial support in selecting an option, job availability and sociostructurally barriers (Lent et al., 2002). Individuals in positive environmental conditions are expected to welcome processes more readily. Certain environmental conditions can exert direct and robust effects on the choice formation and implementation, like glass-ceiling obstacles or cultural practices (Lent et al., 2002).

### **1.3.3 Model of Performance**

The model of career choice emphasizes that performance attainments are affected by individuals' goals which can promote mobilization and sustaining task-related actions (Lent et al., 1994). The model of performance highlighted the relationship between self-efficacy, outcome expectations, performance goals, and task attainment level (Lent et al., 1994). According to the performance, self-efficacy, and outcome model, expectations can form performance to achieve goals or subgoals, affecting performance attainment (Lent et al., 1994). In the process, performance attainment level occurs past performance/ability, which can influence self-efficacy and outcome expectation (Lent et al., 1994). The ability that can be assessed by achievement, aptitude, or past performance evaluation can directly or indirectly impact performance due to its potential influence on self-efficacy and outcome expectation (Lent et al., 2002). So, the level of performance goals is affected by self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 2002). According to SCCT, there is a feedback loop between performance attainments and behavior that successful experiences provide the

development of abilities. In turn, self-efficacy and outcome expectation within a dynamic cycle and contextual influences also significantly affect individuals' learning experiences and performance conditions (Lent et al., 2002).

#### **1.4 Organizational Re-Entry, Career Development, and SCCT**

In the light of the information above, organizational re-entry can be considered a new career phase for women employees. So, successful organization re-entrance after maternity leave can lead to positive outcomes of maternity leave. Most maternity leave applications are based on employee relations, employment conditions, and legal rights like breastfeeding but less on career management (Nowak, Naude & Thomas, 2012). Organizational re-entry is a critical transition point in the career and earning potential. According to Connor & Wright (2013), most women decide to stay in their professional careers or reduce their career ambition and progress (Nowak, Naude & Thomas, 2012). Feeling of guilt and doubt about being both a good mother and employee can be a factor in the decision to organize re-entry (Millward, 2006). Buzzanell & Liu (2007) mentioned that one of the critical factors for organizational re-entry after maternity leave is the support received by peers and supervisors. A successful return to the organization is a precondition for women to sustain and develop their careers.

The study by Nowak et al. (2012), conducted among health professionals, demonstrated that the second major theme after support in the organization, accessing training and development activities significant factor for successful organizational re-entry and career of women. According to the study by Lezhava (2021), which is conducted in Ireland, flexible working arrangements that reflect life paths can be helpful in achieving significant career development through better work-life balance. On the other hand, work stress, an inflexible working environment, and a lack of organizational support policies can negatively affect career development (Lezhava, 2021). According to Houston & Mark (2003), organizational support, management, and planning of maternity leave can be

influential factors in the decision to organizational re-enter and career progression. Lastly, providing equal opportunities in organizations for parental leave can eliminate the stigmatization of maternity leave about career progress (Lezhava, 2021). Returning from maternity leave is a new career phase that includes a significant transition for women. Lack of organizational support, policies, and maternity leave management can influence the decision to return and career progression. It might be helpful to understand how organizational re-entry and career-related each other might be critical to inhibiting the negative effects of maternity leave on women's career progression. Based on the literature, work-family policies and social support positively influence women employees after maternity leave based on work engagement and affective commitment.

In the light of the information above, women employees' career development based on interests, choice, and performance can be influenced by effective return management and policies. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) emphasized in the career interest's development model that performance attainments like goal fulfillment and skill development impact sources of self-efficacy and outcome expectations which can create interests then, intentions/goals for activity involvement, and activity selection/practices. Insufficient return to work management can be a negative source for women employees' self-efficacy and outcome expectations, enabling them to alter their career interests. On the other hand, effective return management after maternity leave can also be a positive source for women employees. As mentioned before, most women had to trade off their careers for their families and reduce their career progression and ambition (Connor & Wright, 2013). In addition, women employees often see professional and career development and their achievement reduced or changed after becoming a mother (Verniers & Vala, 2018). Proving efficient return management can enable women to sustain their performance attainments and career interests based on the model of interests.

Another model which SCCT provides is the model of career choice. According to Lent et al. (1994), performance domains and attainments can be a source of learning experiences that can influence self-efficacy and outcome expectations that can alter interests. An effective return to management can increase or help sustain women employees' performance attainments, creating positive learning experiences as a source of self-efficacy and outcome expectations. So, their interests, choice of goals, and actions can be influenced positively after returning to work from maternity leave.

Lastly, Lent et al.'s (1994) model of performance emphasizes that performance attainment can influence the ability and past performance, which can be a source of self-efficacy and outcome expectations that lead to performance goals/subgoals that affect performance attainment levels. Also, self-efficacy influences performance attainment levels according to SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). Carluccio et al. (2020) mentioned that positive supervisor support is positively related to performance and work engagement after returning to work from maternity leave. Also, as discussed above, providing work-family policies can enable employees to balance their work and family domain, increasing affective commitment and employee performance.

### **1.5 The Objectives of the Study**

This thesis aims to understand women employees' experiences with the maternity leave process and provide an understanding of the relationship between the maternity leave process and career development before and after organizational re-entry. Collecting individual experiences of women offers insights into maternity leave and career development while women in work are still a common topic for academia and companies. The purposes of writing a thesis are to

- a.** Demonstrate the effects of the overall maternity leave process on women employees
- b.** Increase awareness about the potential drawback of maternity leave on women employees

**c. Provide potential actions for companies to prevent drawbacks due to maternity leave**

Research about the legal side of maternity leave is more common in literature, and companies might overlook the effects of maternity leave due to its complexity. It might damage the environment for gender equality in business. The reason why the qualitative research method is used in this study is to understand this process thoroughly.

**1.6 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis can be described as a method for identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set and enabling to make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences by making sense of descriptions and commonalities (Braun& Clarke, 2014, p.57). Thematic analysis is a method for the analysis of textual material to emphasize significant themes to be found in it (Howitt& Cramer, 2011, p.331-332). Thematic analysis can be described as a method for identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set and enabling to make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences by making sense of descriptions and commonalities (Braun& Clarke, 2014, p.57). Braun& Clarke's (2006) systematic approach to thematic analysis will be used in the study. Six aspects of Braun& Clarke's (2006) approach are

- a.** familiarization with the data
- b.** initial coding generation
- c.** searching for themes based on initial coding
- d.** review of the themes
- e.** theme definition and labeling
- f.** report writing

Understanding shared and unshared experiences of women employees on common ground, the thematic analysis will be used as a research method with inductive reasoning.

### **1.7 The Importance of Study**

Though there is limited research on the effects of maternity leave on women employees and their careers, even if women in work considering in both academia and companies, this study can provide insight into the overall experiences of women employees in Turkey. Before, during, and after maternity leave, women employees mainly alter their lives because there are still perceptions that women are homemakers and men are breadwinners. Men employees have five days for paternity leave legally, and this legal policy might support that idea.

Even if companies try to deal with gender inequality concepts, the maternity leave process is an overlooked concept in business life. This study examines how women struggle to balance their lives right after maternity leave and experience different emotions and situations before and during maternity leave.

On the other hand, organizations can use this research to understand the maternity leave experiences of women and provide supporting mechanisms toward this process to maintain their gender equality and sustainability activities.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 Participants**

Participants of this study are white-collar women employees who returned from maternity leave within 2-years in different sectors. Ten women employees participate in the study. Before interviews, their consent for participating study and voice recordings. The data was gathered from the researcher and participants' networks.

Participants' average age is 33.5 (SD=4.4783, min=27, max=38). Participants are business professionals from different sectors, and most work in male-dominated sectors. Mostly mothers-in-law and participants' mothers are actively involved in baby care. Only three of the participant were in a managerial role in their company, and only four took unpaid maternity leave. None of the participants expressed their spouse in baby care.

**Table 2.1 Participants' Demographics**

Participants (N=10)	Age	Marital Status	# of Kids	Having Non-Paid Maternity Leave	Level of Position	Work Experience (Year)	Sector	Level of Education	Support for Baby-Care
1	38	Married	2	No	Managerial	12	Automotive	Master's Degree	Babysitter/Mother
2	31	Married	1	Yes	Specialist/Senior Specialist	7	Energy	Graduate	Mother
3	29	Married	2	No	Specialist/Senior Specialist	7	Energy	Graduate	Mother
4	29	Married	1	Yes	Specialist/Senior Specialist	3	Energy	Graduate	Mother in Law
5	40	Married	2	No	Managerial	17	Construction	Graduate	Babysitter
6	32	Married	1	Yes	Specialist/Senior Specialist	10	Service Industry	Master's Degree	Mother/Father in Law
7	37	Married	2	Yes	Managerial	15	Energy	Graduate	Babysitter/Mother in Law
8	27	Married	1	No	Specialist/Senior Specialist	6	Construction	Master's Degree	Babysitter
9	35	Married	1	No	Specialist/Senior Specialist	11	Automotive	Graduate	Mother in Law
10	37	Married	1	No	Officer	13	Health Services	High School Graduate	Mother

## **2.2 Interview Protocol**

The in-depth interviews were completed with nine open-ended semi-structured questions and ten demographic questions. (Appendix 1). After the first interview, feedback received from the first participant and questions about career development was divided into three dimensions which precisely determine the effects of maternity leave based on career interest, choice, and performance.

## **2.3 Procedure**

The interviews were completed using an online platform Microsoft Teams, with voice recordings. Interviews were conducted in Turkish (Appendix 2). After all coding processes were completed, themes, codes, and interviews were translated into English.

## **2.4 Data Analysis**

MAXQDA 2022 version was used in coding, and there are seven master themes with 210 subcodes. Analysis was completed right after each interview, and then master themes were created based on shared experiences. Also, coding each interview separately provides an understanding of the distinctions between experiences based on women's life dynamics.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

#### 3.1 The Definition of Maternity Leave

Participants defined maternity leave from career and personal life perspectives. From a career perspective, maternity leave definitions are negative. Participants define maternity leave as a career break that they need to compensate for this break after maternity leave and the challenge of dual identity as mother and employee, which creates drawbacks in business life. Participants who define maternity leave negatively are women who have just returned from maternity leave and women in managerial roles.

“Even if you’re ready to be both mother and the employee, your living conditions will not allow you to do that. In Turkey, mothers are the primary caregivers; you need to outweigh your mother’s identity over your employee’s identity. I was working at home after maternity leave, and while my baby was crying, I had to quit meetings and couldn’t focus effectively on work. In maternity leave, you experience this intensively, and it was hard to drop that identity after maternity leave.”

“Whatever everyone says, work-life is men’s world, and there are many challenges not also in Turkey but also in Europe, etc. So, in that kind of world and with other challenges based on gender, you need to give a break to your career, and men don’t have to do it. Everything is changing so fast in our time, so business life has its dynamics, and you need to pause to work for four months. So, isn’t it normal to destroy your career? It is a dilemma for me; I am talking like that right now, but I returned from maternity leave without any extension, and I still feel guilty that I didn’t spend more time with my baby.”

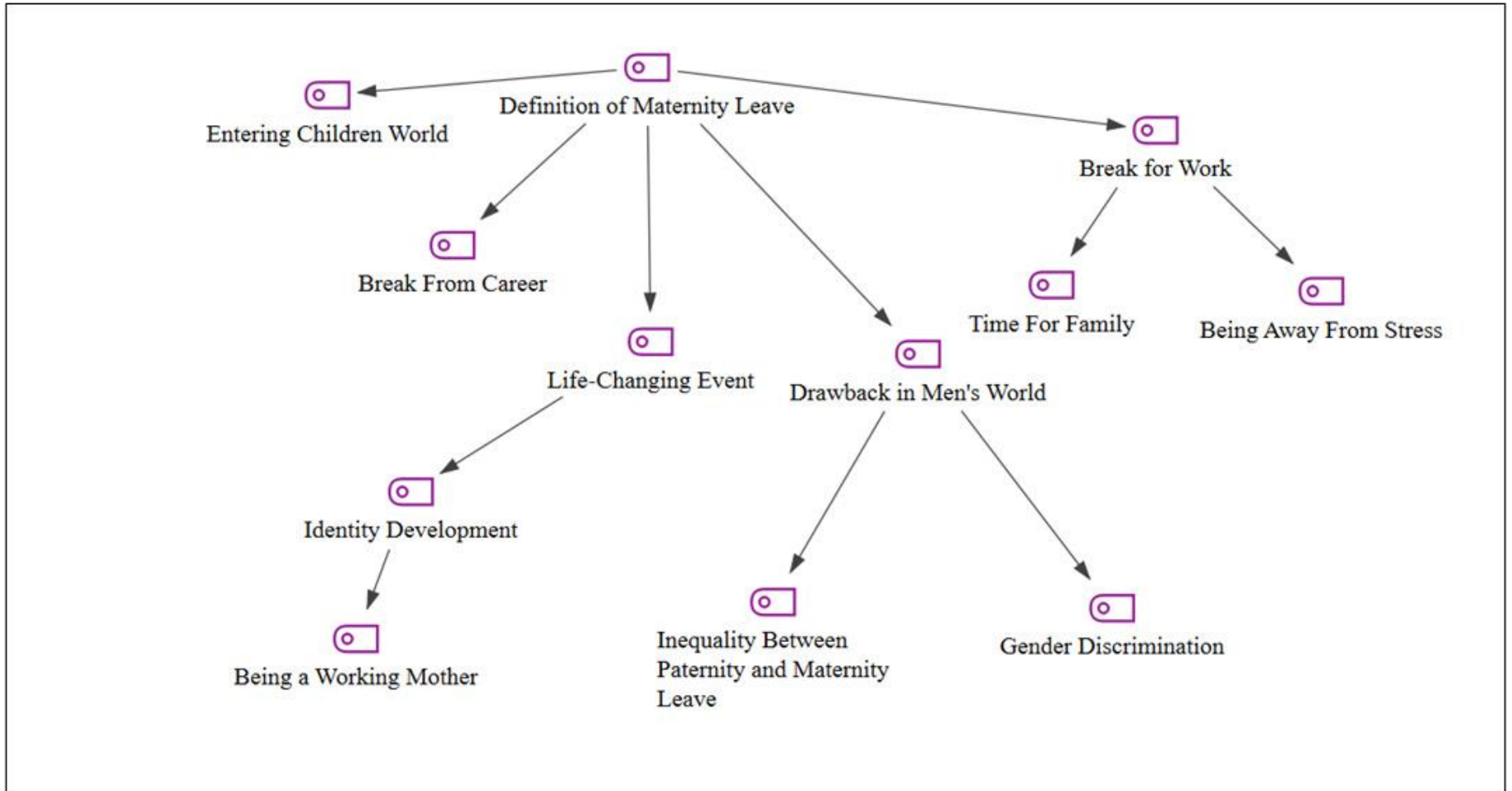
On the other hand, participants who define maternity leave positively do not define maternity leave, not as a career break; they define maternity leave as a break from work stress and challenges that they enjoy and a life-changing event not only in their career but also in

many aspects of their lives are affected this event and not outweigh their career within life-changing event series. In reverse, it has been an average of 1 year since the participants who defined maternity leave positively started to work from maternity leave.

“I enjoy maternity leave because I free myself from all my responsibilities and focus only on my baby. For example, you unconsciously think about working on annual leave, and sometimes you can’t enjoy your annual leave when you think workload after your return. Maternity leave allows you to spend time with your baby, and everyone knows that you can’t work during maternity leave, but some people can call you to ask you something in your annual leave.”

“It was a totally a full-time mother experience for me. Baby’s growing so fast, and if you are decided to work after maternity leave, you have only four months to be with your baby without dynamics of business- life because you need to divide yourself into two when you start to work.”

Figure 3.1 Code Map for the theme “Definition of Maternity Leave



### **3.2 Pre-Maternity Leave Experiences- Announcement of Pregnancy**

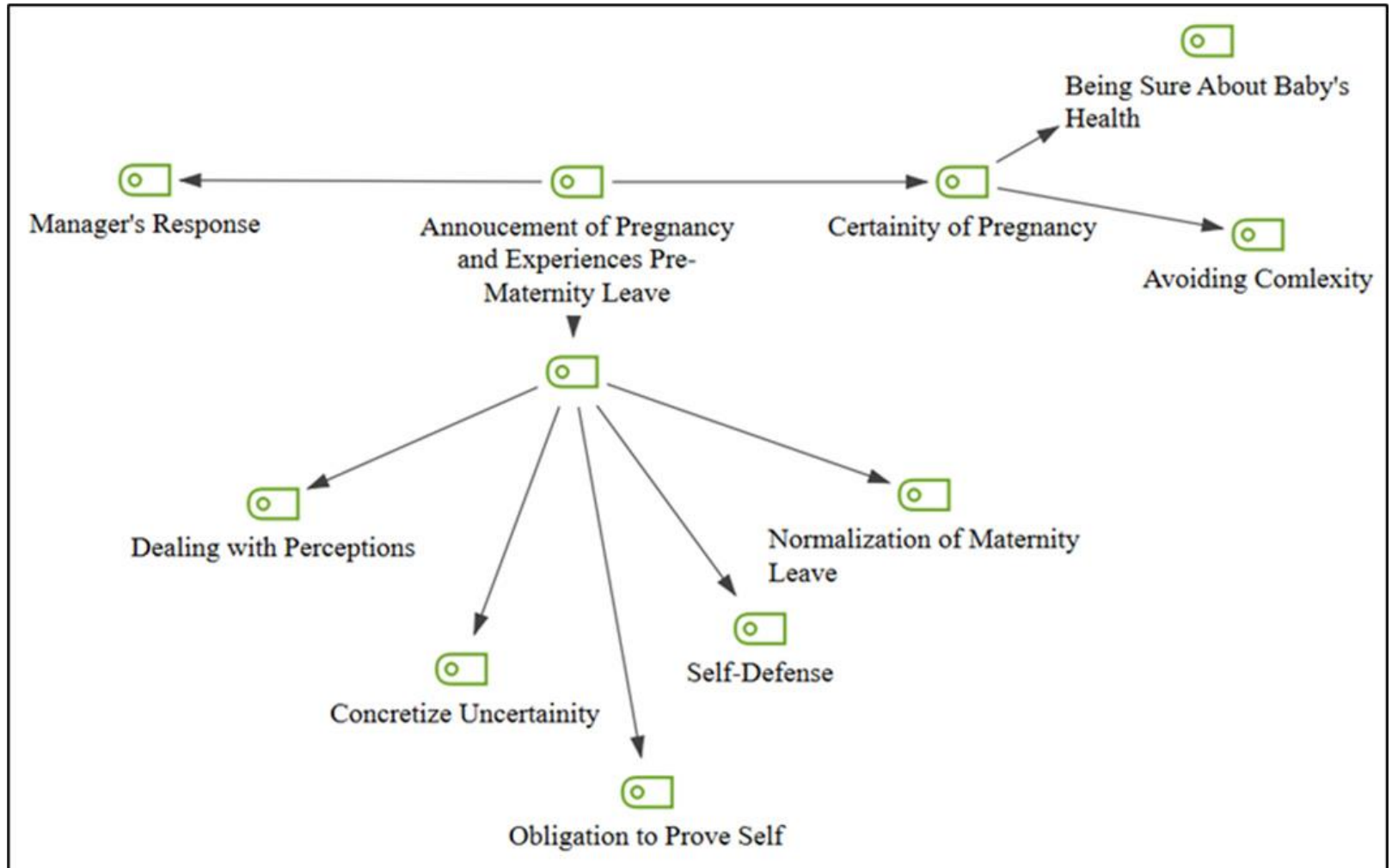
Pre-maternity leave experiences refer to experiences focused on before and after the announcement of pregnancy in the organization. In this study, the information about the pregnancy is a first step that participants start to experience maternity leave before taking the leave based on responses from the organizational level. Participants mostly waited three months to announce their pregnancy to their colleagues and manager for two reasons: to avoid complexity in the organization due to pregnancy and at least four months of absence and to ensure the baby's health. Sources of complexity that can occur due to pregnancy are level of position, work intensity, and lack of workforce. Women working with these three sources did not want to enter that complexity before their pregnancy was specific or try to delay it with the late announcement.

“I waited three months for the pregnancy to be finalized. Once it was finalized, I explained it to my manager and my team. I did not announce my pregnancy to the whole organization for a long time. I told my other colleagues just before birth remote was beneficial; no one saw me pregnant. I was managing the service center at that time, and we were serving outside, and I did not explain it so that the customer would not hear and think there would be a loss there.”

“I found out that I was pregnant one month after being promoted to a new position. We were trying to build a new organizational structure, and I had different responsibilities and processes under my control. I feel very stressed because they gave me this responsibility and I had to say that I'm pregnant and will be away from work. Also, there will tell a huge workforce gap while I'm on maternity leave because, as I said, there was a new organizational structuring process. Maybe, I had to talk about my pregnancy right after I found out, but I was not brave enough to tell, so I decided to be sure about my pregnancy and tell my manager.”

The importance of HR Support through the overall maternity leave process is mentioned in other sections. In addition, participants mentioned that they receive no support from Human Resources Department. Some participants said that they only informed the HR department before they took leave.

### 3.2 Code Map for the Theme “Pre-Maternity Leave Experiences- Announcement of Pregnancy.”



### **3.2.1 Pre-Maternity Leave Experiences- Manager's Response**

After the announcement of the pregnancy, the manager's response and its effects were emphasized by the participants. The manager's response was divided into negative and positive in this study. The state of sharing the happiness of pregnancy was the most mentioned factor among the managers' reactions. Facial expressions and tone of voice were critical to understanding whether their managers shared the happiness of pregnancy.

“I observed an immediate change on my manager's face while telling him I was pregnant. I can describe his emotional state. First, he felt shocked because we were in the middle of a critical project. After he overcame his shock, he immediately started planning the rest of the project, and it was clear in his voice that he was worried. Then, he realized that I was not getting involved in the conversation and only listening to him; he realized that I was frustrated and congrats me.”

The position level of women employees in this study did not affect the managers' response. However, managers' experience with maternity leave impacts their response. Receiving positive and negative reactions from managers depends on managers' experiences directly or indirectly (men managers who experience maternity leave process from their wives) through maternity leave and work intensity of position. Managers' direct or indirect experiences can build empathy toward pregnancy and shape their responses based on those experiences. Also, the lack of workforce for workload will hand over from women taking maternity leave shape managers' response toward pregnancy.

“I didn't worry about how I tell my pregnancy to my manager because she experienced this process before me, and I know that she didn't give me any response but positive. As I expected, she congratulated me with a smiling face after I told her. She didn't talk about work; we only talked about how it feels to be pregnant, and we had a friendly conversation.”

“When I found out I was pregnant, I started to think about how works proceed, whom I hand over work before taking maternity leave, etc. So, I have already created pressure on myself without anyone's reaction. After I told my manager I was pregnant, I started to mention my handover process plans and that I would not extend my maternity leave. I could provide support during maternity leave if needed. He stopped me and congrats on my pregnancy and asked genuine questions about it. I didn't realize the burden on my shoulders before his response. His child was born one month ago, and his wife is working. Probably, he understood my feelings.”

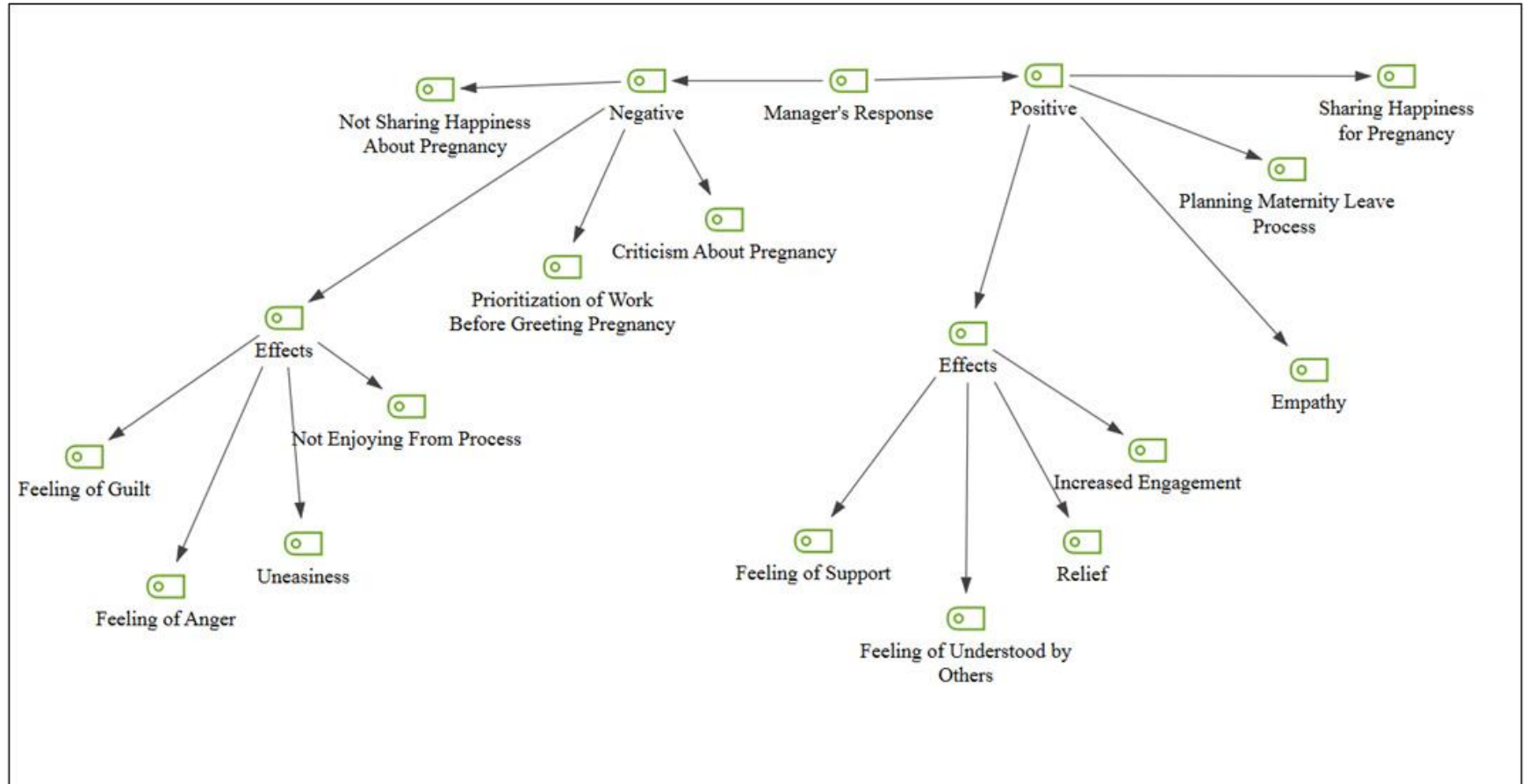
In addition to sharing the happiness of pregnancy, empathy and a supportive way of planning maternity leave are considered positive responses of managers. Planning the maternity leave process is beneficial because planning the process before maternity leave makes women feel more secure and know what to expect step by step in the process. However, as mentioned above, the planning time is crucial, allowing the person to interpret this planning negatively or positively. It is important not to dive into planning right after the pregnancy announcement. These positive reactions of managers allow participants to feel supported and understood by others, relief, and increased engagement.

Criticism about pregnancy is mainly related to the time of the pregnancy based on the tenure in the organization. Also, criticism about pregnancy creates emotions of anger and leads women to set an invisible barrier toward their managers. On the other hand, another negative response that participants received from their managers, in addition to not sharing the happiness of pregnancy, is prioritization work before greeting pregnancy.

“I got pregnant within my first year in my current company. After my announcement, I heard that our top-level manager said ‘Yeni başladığı yerde böyle iş olur mu ya?’ Nobody has the authority to judge my pregnancy, my decision, and my-the life. I felt upset while I was telling my manager. Even if he thinks like that, he should keep her thoughts to himself.”

A negative response toward the manager leads the feeling of anger, uneasiness, and guilt, and one of the participants defined these adverse reactions as “pregnancy is a joyful event; however, these circumstances prevent the joy in the process.”

Figure 3.2.1 Code Map for theme “Manager’s Response”



### **3.2.2 Pre-Maternity Leave Experiences – Dealing With Perceptions**

Although the effects of lived experiences have different results, certain behaviors occur in both types of experiences—emotions and experiences formed by managers' responses. However, participants exhibit common behaviors regardless of whether their experience is positive or negative. Dealing with perceptions is a common experience women encounter after announcing their pregnancy. Perceptions about the duration of maternity leave, effects of being a mother, and capabilities after being a mother. Self-defense, trying to normalize maternity leave, concretizing uncertainty, and late-night work are common methods that women use to eliminate these perceptions.

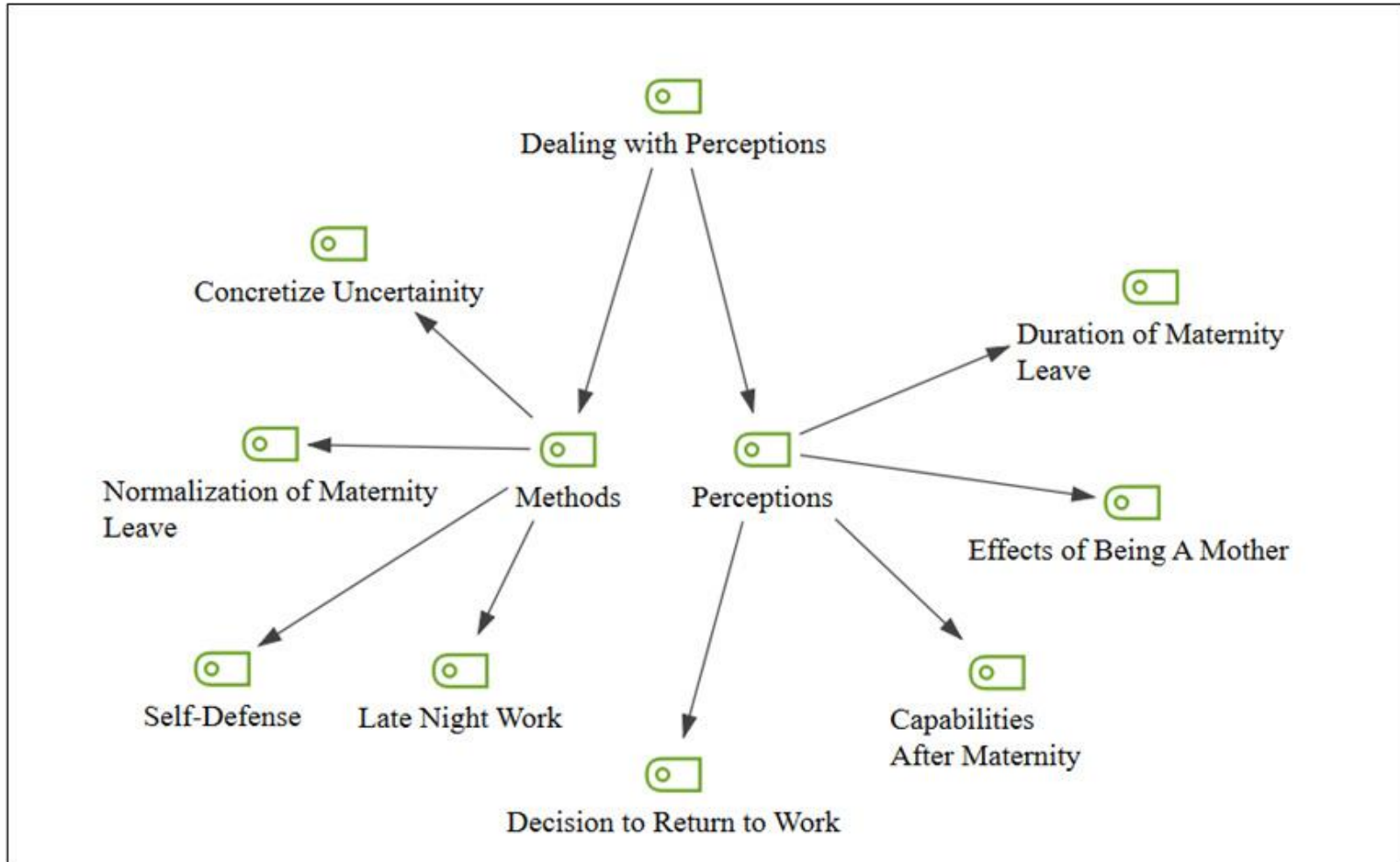
One of the expected behavior is self-defense. Whether participants experience positive or negative, they declare that they will return to work right after their legal maternity leave without extension to buffer against negative conditions like perceptions about maternity leave. Also, normalization of maternity leave like she can be available for questions and support during maternity leave to a relief person who hands over the process and prove herself.

Also, women try to concretize the uncertainties of maternity leave and look for a source of information from women who experience maternity leave in organizations. This behavior is shown by participants who did not experience maternity leave and waited for their first child. So, sources of uncertainty are primarily based on the nature of the entrance to motherhood and its effects.

“I think the obscurity is part of this process. I listen to experiences about life with a child; being a working mother, you don't know exactly how it will affect you, your life, and your career. So, you're searching for an answer to avoid this obscurity, but it's impossible without experiencing it.”

As mentioned above, the colleagues' responses did not come to the forefront in announcing the pregnancy. Still, the participants stated that they were exposed to certain perceptions about the pregnancy, especially by those who work closely with and know them. One participant mentioned, "These perceptions can be both implicit and explicit. Sometimes it comes with a joke, sometimes with a direct question about your plans after our baby is born."

### 3.2.2 Code Map for Theme “Dealing with Perceptions”



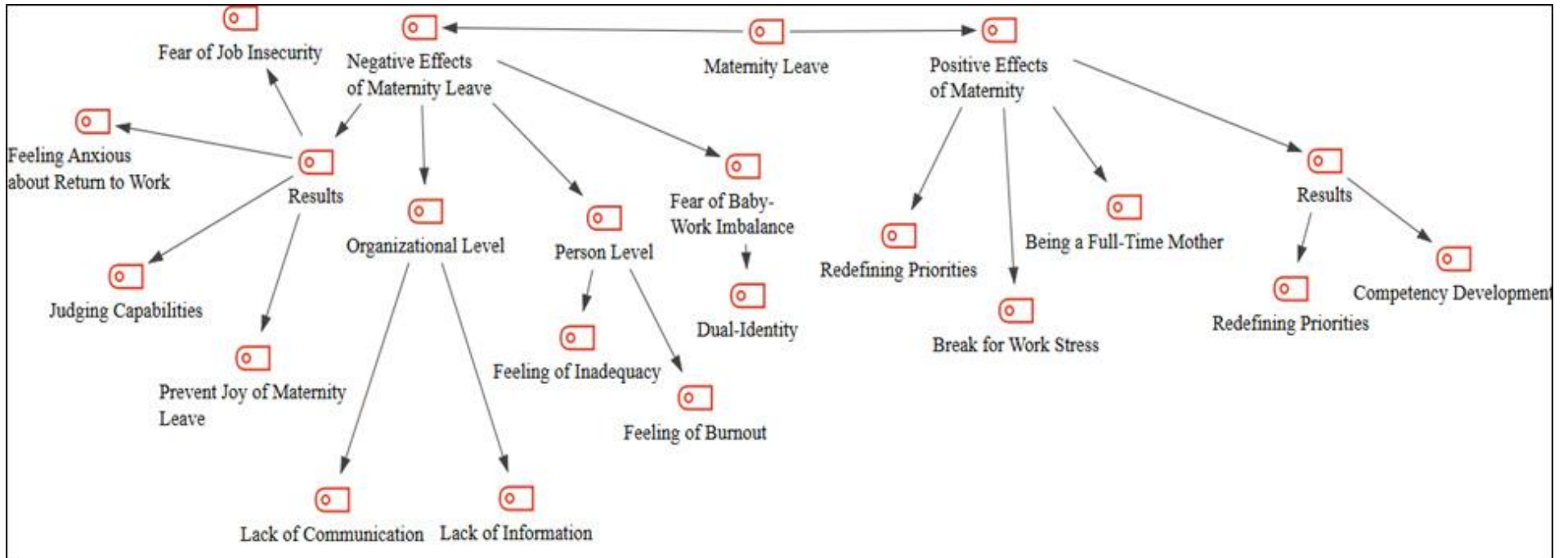
### **3.3 Maternity Leave Experiences**

In this study, the maternity leave process refers to a period from the first day of maternity leave to the last day. Experiences are divided into positive and negative experiences. The negative effects of maternity leave are divided into personal and organizational levels, but the results of negative experiences are the same. However, participants who mentioned the positive impact of maternity leave also experienced negative effects, especially “Feeling of Burnout” which is the most common negative effect among participants who experienced positive results.

“It was a different experience because I saw a different version of me as a mother, and I forgot everything I knew.”

“It is hard to define this process. It was both the most beautiful and, at the same time, the most frustrating event that women can encounter in their lifetime.

Figure 3.3 Code Map for Theme “Maternity Leave Experiences”



### **3.3.1 Negative Effects of Maternity Leave & Results**

The negative effects of maternity leave are divided into organizational and personal. However, fear of “Baby-Work Imbalance” is not categorized under organizational or personal level. Sources of baby-work imbalance both consist of personal and organizational negative effects. Also, the baby-work imbalance is one of the fundamentals of maternity leave that affects participants.

At the organizational level, lack of communication, such as being away from daily conversation with colleagues and decreased or no phone calls during maternity leave, affects socialization. Also need for more information at the organizational level, like colleagues’ actions, managers’ thoughts, and changes in the organization causing easiness.

“I was only focusing on the baby during maternity leave, and I’m socially active in my company. So, in this process, you miss little conversations, like harmless gossip, in the company, and it feels like it’s not going to be the same for a while when I turned.”

“When my manager resigned, I was on maternity leave, and nobody told me about this situation or called me after that. I’ve learned from one of my friends in different departments. You miss some organizational changes when you’re away from the company, but this decision directly affected me. This feels like I’m not valuable.”

In-person level, the imbalance between expectations before maternity leave and the reality of maternity leave focusing only on the baby and fear of being a working mother (dual-identity) cause feelings of inadequacy and burnout. Some of the participants mentioned that they thought they could follow critical issues about work while they were on maternity leave, and when they couldn’t, it created a feeling of inadequacy. Also, focusing only on the baby and not allocating time for the husband, housework, and personal care increases burnout, and they start to think, “How is it going to be with work?”

“Before I took the leave, I told my colleagues and manager that I would follow critical calls and help them. However, I experienced that it was impossible because I couldn’t sleep enough and, in a routine, organize everything for my baby, try to understand him and get used to my new life. So, it was impossible to follow work. Then I felt inadequate because I was forced to decrease my expectations of myself.”

“I didn’t even allocate time for myself. When I looked in the mirror, I couldn’t recognize myself. I looked tired and spent all my energy on my baby, and I didn’t know how to handle this intense tempo when I started working. I’ve started to judge myself because I couldn’t take care even myself.”

These negative effects lead to judging capabilities about self, criticizing to return to work, increasing anxiety, and preventing the joy of maternity leave. Also, lack of information and communication leads to the fear of job insecurity due to uncertainties and thoughts about her.

“My manager hired another person to take on my responsibilities. Of course, I want that person to have that chance to prove herself, but it also creates uneasiness due to thinking, is she better than me, or will they give her my responsibilities even when I return?”

“All of these increase the level of joy. Having a baby is a fantastic event, but with all these complex feelings, the joy started to decrease.”

“I have an intense working schedule in my normal routine. It was impossible to maintain this intensity with having a child. We organized that intensity because we had to, but I thought seriously about changing my job or giving a break from work until my baby gets one year old.”

### **3.3.1.1 Fear of Baby- Work Imbalance**

In this study, fear of baby-work balance refers to work-family balance. In this study, family-work balance is considered a baby-work balance due to the o participants' point of view.

“It’s not the reason for the work-family situation. It’s because of the baby- the work situation. For example, I have breastfed my baby whenever she wants, and it’s not a thing I could balance with my work. I couldn’t wait until the meeting was over with my baby. So, I’m saying it’s a baby-work balance.”

“Babies dependent on the things you gave them. They can’t express themselves; you can’t tell them to wait, or dinner will be ready soon, and it was hard to balance understanding the baby’s demands and demands that come from work.”

The effects of conflict between baby-work balance or trying to balance these two factors are mentioned in further sections. During maternity leave, direct impacts of this baby-work balance are not observed, leading to the question of how it is possible to balance these two factors, increasing the fear of baby-work imbalance.

### **3.3.2 Positive Effects of Maternity Leave & Results**

Maternity leave also gives participants a break from the stress of work life. The work-life concept can be demanding and stressful for individuals. On the other hand, during maternity leave, a participant mentioned that for the working woman, it might be the only period for being a mother without additional responsibilities. Also, focusing only on a baby and being away from work stress can lead to redefining priorities. Participants mentioned that all intensity and stress at work could cause them to prioritize work before themselves and their spouses. Maternity leave also provides time for spending time with self and building a bond with a spouse. Also, a participant mentioned that expectations from the company had been changed during maternity leave.

“Being a mother changed my perspective because I do not want to miss a little moment when my child grows up. Now, I have other things in my life that I put first. Before maternity leave, I can work anytime when it’s needed. Previously, I tried to hold a cup even if I felt tired during this process; I’ve learned that I should put the cup on the table, get some rest and then continue to hold it.”

“It’s a real break. You do not need to think anything about work. Sometimes this felt me anxious but at the end of the day. I felt less stressed and arranged my time and activities only for my baby. If I can go back that period, I would probably extend the duration of my maternity leave.”

### **3.4 Decision of Return to Work**

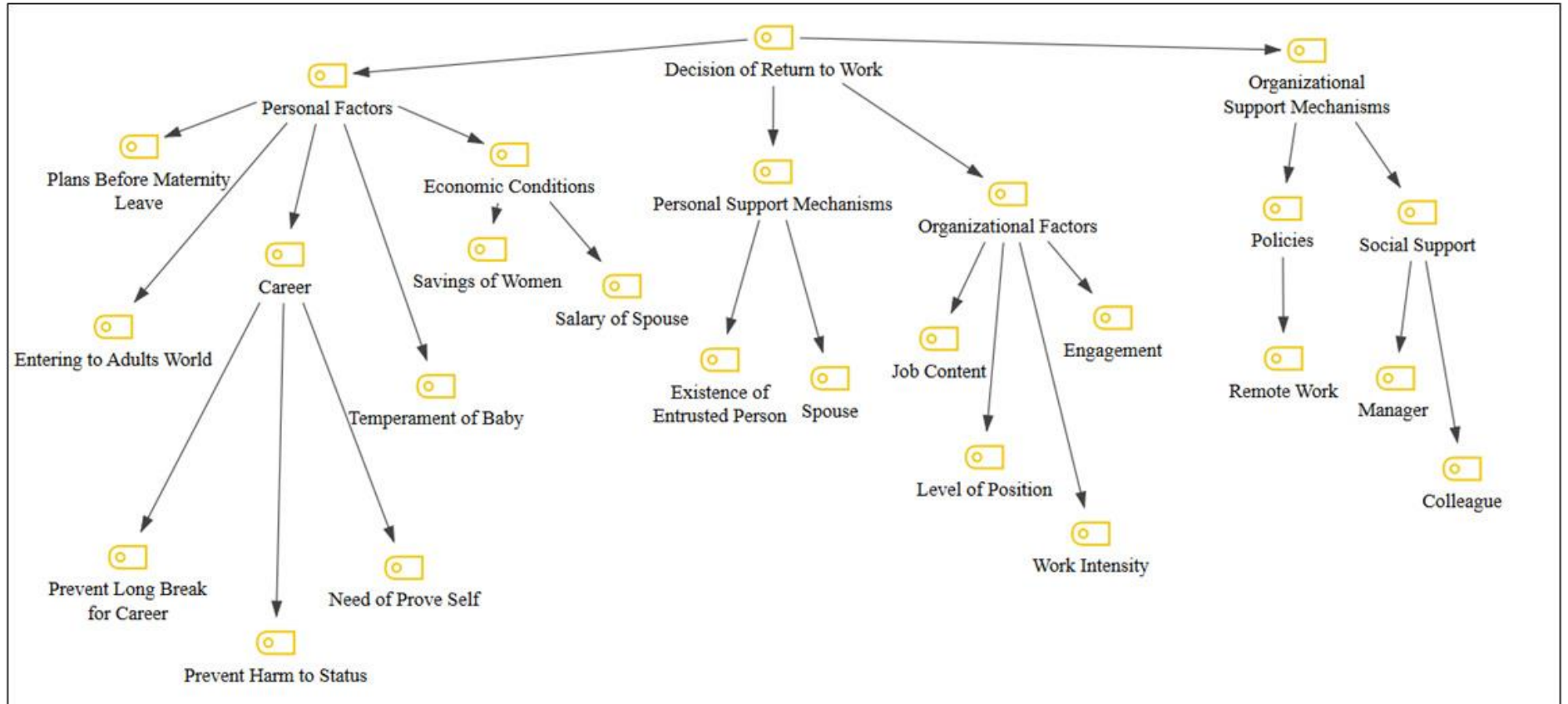
The decision to return to the same or different work depends on personal and organizational factors. Each participant mentioned that they started maternity leave with the idea of returning to the same position and determined the duration of maternity leave in their mind. However, experiences with maternity leave and organizational factors affect those two ideas when deciding to return to the same or different work. Two participants changed their companies after maternity leave due to their work- intensity. Both participants mentioned that their salary was raised, but one of them decreased her position, and the other started the same position.

“I did not plan to extend the duration of maternity leave. However, I felt my baby wasn’t ready to be separated. He is a hard child; his sleep period destroyed us, and he usually cried like he was in pain. We took him to the doctor because we did not know what he had but nothing about his physical. So, I took non-paid maternity leave for two months because I was not ready to leave him too.”

“I’ve questioned whether I should change my job or not. I have a tense working routine in my company, but there are many dynamics that I need to consider. I didn’t put

myself in a series of changes, I've earned my place in my company and believed that they could pander to my whims, and If I change my job, I should prove myself again. After considering all these issues, I returned to the same company.”

Figure 3.4 Code Map for Theme “Decision to Return to Work”



### **3.4.1 Effects of Personal Factors on Decision to Return Work**

Being a full-time mother, as mentioned above, is one of the positive effects of maternity leave. However, that entrance to a child's world can be exhausting for women due to lack of socialization; putting personal time/care aside are two sources of exhaustion and affect the decision to return to work.

“On the one hand, I thought it would be good to get away from home. Of course, you want to do everything for your baby, but when you are constantly taking care of him, there is a great need to stop and take a breath. On the way to the office, you turn on music in the service, stay by yourself, or open and read a book, so you take time for yourself. You can have a coffee with your friend when you go to work. All of these are important at the decision stage but working at a normal pace is critical here.”

Plans which were structured before maternity leave also affect the decision period. Those plans consist of a handover process, which is planned mutually with the manager. Participants mentioned that it decreases the uncertainty of things that can happen after returning to work. Also, plans that participants do by themselves, like thinking about how they can arrange responsibilities at home and work, also help them to calm themselves when they feel the burden of being a working mother.

“I've never thought I won't work after my baby is born because I know I wouldn't be happy if I did that. So, rather than quitting work, I think about arranging my order.”

“My manager and I made a draft plan about my return to the organization. As I mentioned, she experienced maternity leave processes, so I was lucky. I think she knew what I needed, and I knew what kind of working order I would have.”

Developmental psychologists define temperament as characteristics and patterns of behaviors that make an infant unique regarding their daily responses (Fox, 1998). Participants expressed their participants as hard or easy children. In this study, all participants are

working. So, in this study, the baby's temperament affects the duration of maternity leave. Also, the career perspectives of women affect the decision to return to work. A need to prove self, prevent an extended break from a career, and harm to status depends on the position level that affects the decision to return to work, especially to the same organization. Lastly, economic conditions affect both duration of maternity leave. The spouse or family savings salary can provide the confidence to extend maternity leave and take non-paid maternity leave.

### **3.4.2 Effects of Organizational Factors on Decision to Return Work**

Organizational factors affect the decision to return same or different company. Mainly level of position has led to a return to the same organization. Participants who are in a managerial role or one step back to an administrative role expressed that they've worked hard to earn that role or are close to reaching that role to abandon their company.

"I worked hard to get to the position I am currently working in. That's why I think I must work hard to stay there. I work at a hectic pace but never thought about a job change due to maternity leave until I had proven myself in this position."

"My organization had plans for me before maternity leave, like promotion. So, I didn't want to miss that opportunity."

### **3.4.3 Personal Support Mechanisms**

Some participants mentioned that without personal support mechanisms, they might decide to give a career break or not go back to work. One of the critical support mechanisms in personal life is the existence of an entrusted person who takes care of the child.

"I decided to return because my mother was with me during the maternity leave process, and my mother would look after my child after I returned to work. So, I knew I would have peace of mind on my way back to work. In this process, we agreed with a

babysitter to support my mother at home, so I could leave my mother with the baby without worrying if she would get tired.”

“We agreed with the babysitter a week before I returned to work. So, there was a feeling of suffocation before returning to work.”

On the other hand, spouse support is about something other than support in childcare activities. Fear of baby-work imbalance led women to think not to return. However, psychological support in this process from a spouse affects the decision to work.

“I felt I couldn’t leave my baby and start working. The duration of maternity leave is not enough. However, due to economic conditions, I couldn’t take non-paid maternity leave because we had a lot of expenses and debts, so my husband and I had to work. My spouse relieved me that we can make plans for spending maximum time with our baby, and he said he believes I can handle this process. His positive perspective influenced me, I think.”

#### **3.4.4 Organizational Support Mechanisms**

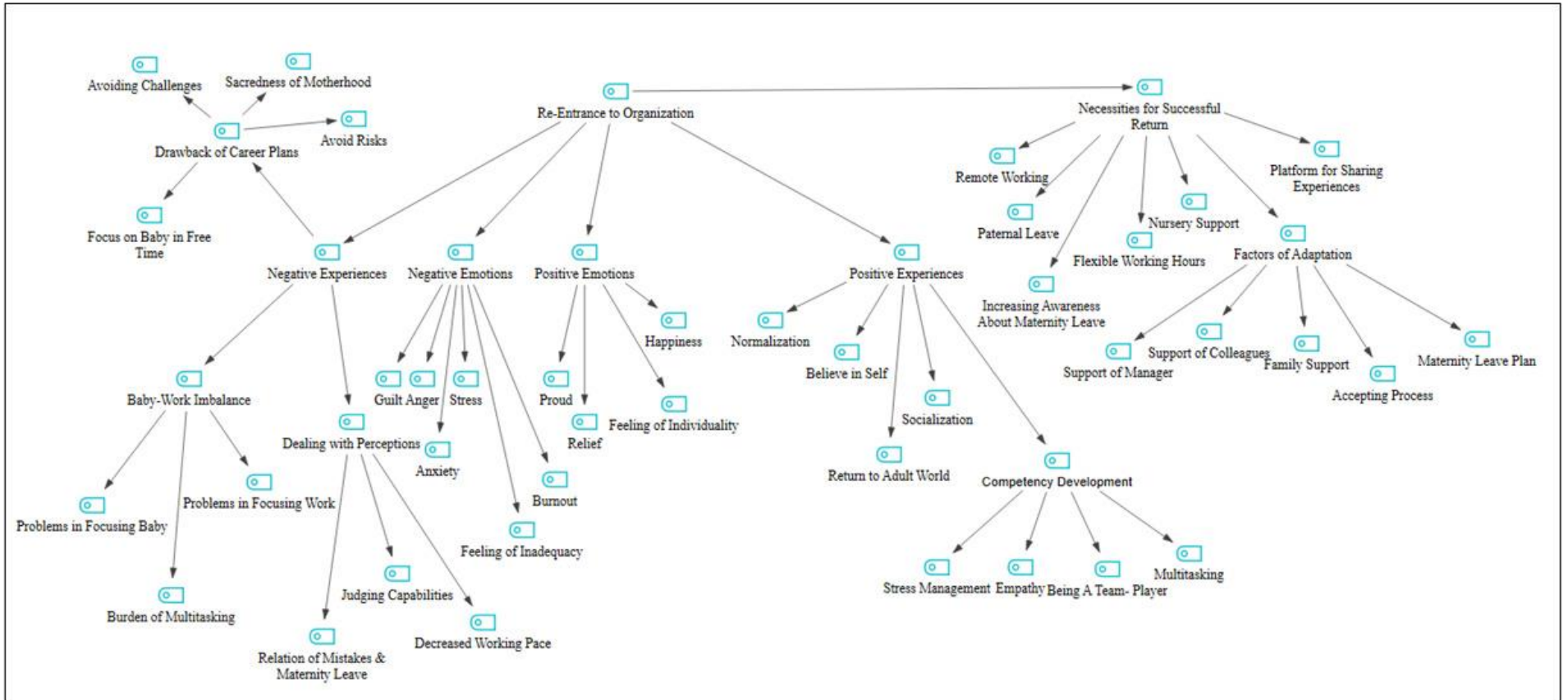
Organizational support mechanisms are divided into two categories: colleague support and manager support—managers’ response influences participants in the announcement of a pregnancy. However, those two support mechanisms’ effects weren’t observed during the decision process. Both support mechanisms influence feelings but not the decision itself. However, both support mechanisms have influenced participants after they return to the organization.

“In the decision process, I had other issues I needed to consider before my manager. He didn’t respond satisfactorily to my pregnancy, but during the pre-maternity period, I didn’t see any visible behavior based on his response. So, it caused a little bit of fear when I returned to work, but I did not think about his actions in my decision period.

### **3.5 Re-Entrance to Organization**

Re-Entrance to the organization is a critical phase for this study. There is a difference between participants' experiences based on their children's age. Participants whose children are under one year old have dominantly negative experiences about a return to the organization. Participants whose children above one-year-old both experience negative and positive experiences depend on the experience type. Baby-work imbalance is a fundamental source of negative experiences. However, women who experience positive aside of return to the organization also emphasized that they struggle to balance baby and work. On the other hand, competency development is the expected positive effect of maternity leave due to motherhood.

### 3.5 Code Map for Theme “Re-Entrance to Organization.”



### 3.5.1 Negative Experiences

Baby-work imbalance is the common negative effect that participants experience when they return to the organization. One common factor affecting maternity leave in return to the organization is dealing with perceptions. Questions often manifested perceptions of others regarding the maternity leave process. After returning to the organization, these perceptions began to show themselves in the behavioral dimension.

“Frankly, I did not experience any adaptation process after maternity leave. Since my manager left while I was on leave, my manager changed when I returned, and I had to go through all the work quickly. I remember getting feedback like, “Women usually disperse when they return from maternity leave, but we didn’t encounter that with you; congratulations.” Although it seems like positive feedback, I was disturbed by the perception that would have occurred after maternity leave if I hadn’t jumped into work quickly.”

“Shortly after I returned from maternity leave, my manager assigned a different teammate to a job I would normally have to do. Normally, it was a supplier company out of town that I had to go to visit. When I talked about this situation, he told me he thought it would be difficult for me to go because the supplier was out of town. I certainly don’t think he did it maliciously, but I was disappointed that he didn’t give me any information or at least ask me out of courtesy.”

“I prepared a report with my colleague to send to our manager. It was a report full of analysis, so my colleague and I checked each other’s calculations to prevent mistakes. Also, our data source was unclear, so it opened the way to wrong calculations. When we were done with the control, she asked me if I was sleep deprived. I also caught many of her mistakes. There’s nothing wrong with that, but it felt weird that she was asking me that when I wasn’t asking her about that. More precisely, we faced these mistakes before I had my baby. I don’t know; maybe it’s just my sensitivity.”

### **3.5.1.1 Baby- Work Imbalance**

Baby-work balance is one of the fundamental sources of negative effects of the return to the organization. In this study, all participants mentioned about baby- work balance. As discussed above, baby-work balance refers to work-life balance in this study. It is called baby-work balance because participants expect or experience that when the baby gets older, it becomes easier to handle that balance. The root and a common cause of baby-work balance is the burden of multi-tasking, which can be referred to as dual-identity in literature, problems in balancing to put effort into baby or work. On the other hand, the age of babies is another source of baby-work imbalance. Predominantly, participants mentioned that due to the duration of maternity leave, they had to leave their babies while they depended on them too much; many participants gave examples of the breastfeeding process.

This imbalance creates negative feelings among participants. The most common negative feeling is guilt against babies or individuals in the workplace. Also, the feeling of inadequacy is one of the common feelings that participants mentioned. The feeling of inadequacy also represents itself during the maternity leave process due to being a working mom. Even responsibilities of work did not exist during maternity leave. However, work duties gave their place to be first caregivers and homemakers.

“It is very consuming that individuals around you in the workplace suddenly expect to take over the business from where you left off as soon as possible. So, you were trying to meet that expectation, but you are shunning your child while you were trying to do that. So, spending time with your baby creates guilt because you were hindering the work, or you were trying to meet workplace expectations, and it creates another level of guilt against your child.”

“When I returned to maternity leave, it was a process with disappointments, and I had a negative mood. I said to myself that I had to quit my job because I could not spare enough time for the child when I needed to spend more time on work, but I had perceptions that I

was stealing from my baby's time. After months filled with remorse, you calm yourself down a little bit. I told myself it was okay to accept it like this because it would be like this for a while. I felt I had left my child when he was very young. The gap I feared in my career was too short for spending time with my baby.

“In our company, we didn't have a lactation room. So, after lactating in the restroom, I wrapped them with napkins and put them in the fridge in the common kitchen area. I work in a male-dominated place. I was wrapping napkins into bottles so they wouldn't see them and ask what it was. However, what a normal process. Later, when the state made the lactation room compulsory, a separate area was created. Before this was done, even lactation was difficult. You must come to the office, but you also must do this, but there is no place where you can be comfortable.”

“I could not breastfeed my child very soon after I started work; my breast milk started to dwindle and eventually stopped. I don't know why; maybe it's job stress, but this process affected me psychologically. I was stubborn that I would breastfeed for a while, but eventually, I gave up.”

“When you become a manager, I think your responsibilities become a little more complex. You work at a busy pace during the day, and you want to spend time with your baby when you come home because you get used to the baby on maternity leave and even though it makes you feel better to go back to work, you always have the thought that I wish I could extend the process a little longer. On the other hand, one of your team members needs you in the evening and calls you, but you spend time with your child and cannot spare time for them. If you support him, you steal your child's time. This time you experience an even more folded guilt.”

### **3.5.1.2 Drawbacks in Career Plans**

The effects of maternity leave on career development are mentioned in section 3.6. In this part, the impact of the baby-work imbalance and societal factors on career plans were mentioned by participants. One of the participants said that the sacredness of motherhood in our culture makes the participant feel that she needs to be perfect in being a mother. This kind of stereotype, like men are breadwinners and women are homemakers, can create a burden for

### **3.5.2 Positive Experiences**

As mentioned above, during the maternity leave process, one of the negative effects is a lack of communication, which causes a decrease in socialization. Returning to work is a way to enter the adult world again and increase socialization. Also, normalization of life with challenges positively affects participants because it increases self-belief. After all, participants feel that they have started to adapt to those challenges and gain the same energy inside of them.

“Of course, there was a positive side as well. Here is my perspective, after you take that break, you get used to this process, and the order continues as before. You somehow balance things out, proving you can achieve something, which motivates you.”

“If you love your job and commitment is high to your company, you miss the job. It feels so good to go to the office; you hear something different from a child crying 24/7. It creates a moment of breathing. For example, I love Mondays. We spend 48 hours on the weekend with our baby; when I go to the office, the normalization process starts again.

In the negative effects of maternity leave, participants do not mention competencies. So, competency development is a positive effect on all participants, even if they have negative experiences throughout the process. However, the competencies that participants mentioned in the interviews were primarily based on the nature of motherhood, not only the

maternity process itself. Multitasking and being more empathic are two common competencies women expressed gaining through the maternity leave process.

“With motherhood, your sense of empathy develops, and it works a lot. That's why I always think that it has a positive effect on me. I started to be able to control the things I used to say with a sharp tongue.”

### **3.5.3 Factors Facilitating Adaptation in Re-Entrance Process**

At a personal level, family support is the most common answer to increase adaptation in returning to work. Substantially, family support is based on caregiving which refers to grandmothers, not spouses. Also, it is observed that women prefer their mothers to take care of their babies because they expressed that they feel more comfortable and do not feel that they create a burden for them. So, they can go to work without a question mark in their mind which makes the adaptation process more accessible.

“My husband's schedule was hectic, but my mother was always with me during this process. He always took care of my baby while I was working. I was relieved to have someone to entrust my baby to my mother.”

“First two months after I returned to the organization, my mother-in-law took care of our children. For sure, I was thrilled to entrust my baby to her. My mother lives in a different city. When she came to see my baby, I felt more relaxed. Not because I don't trust my mother-in-law but because I can tell anything to my mom, like how I do things for my baby, what she should be careful about, etc. I don't feel that comfortable with my mother-in-law.”

After returning to the organization, support from managers and colleagues positively impacts the adaptation process. Direct managers especially have a crucial influence in the adaptation process because participants evaluate them as the first direct contact in assessing performance and providing or arranging organizational sources for women's needs.

“As I mentioned earlier, I have a supportive manager because he could make empathy with me due to her wife’s experiences with maternity leave. He did not want me to dive into jobs just after I returned to the company. During the first week, he spent time with me to explain the changes in work, organization, and organize hand over the process with a soft transition.”

“Being supported by the company, your colleagues, and from your manager enables you to adapt to these new dynamics quickly. I was lucky with the people I was working with. During this period, I could easily quit the meetings and take care of my baby while working at home. My managers try to provide flexibility in my working arrangements, and my teammates respect that schedule. It was a comfortable process for me.”

Some participants mentioned that they agreed with the process to increase the level of adaptation. They said they accept the challenges of this return process and try to ease themselves that this kind of challenge is typical and wait until the baby is grown. However, even though this idea is leading the adaptation, the underlying mechanism is decreasing expectations from self which can influence the career development of women. This situation is detailed under the maternity leave and career development section.

Hybrid- remote working is one of the essentials of adaptation during this process. There was only one participant who worked thoroughly- remotely in this study. It is not providing a comparison chance with other participants, but a participant mentioned that she would prefer hybrid- working. She changed her job after she returned from maternity leave due to job intensity. However, she said that sometimes she feels a lack of socialization and burnout are inevitable with being only with a child 24/7. The rest of the participants emphasized the importance of hybrid- working because they can spend time with their babies at home and care for them when needed. Also, due to the order of the baby, hybrid- working provides them a space to not go to the office when they feel less energetic or want to stay home with the baby.

Another dimension is planning for the overall process of maternity leave. Participants emphasized that the overall maternity leave process is a series of uncertain events. They are planning the handover process, sharing information during maternity leave, and focusing on the working schedule after maternity leave provides certain aspects to participants that can clarify this uncertainty.

Lastly, participants did not mention HR Support in the return process. When it asked participants, it was revealed that HR did not play an active role in the return process. The role of HR is defined as “a department that needed to be informed due to legal issues.” like un- paid leave, answering legal questions, and no further for those activities. It might be useful to emphasize the role of HR in this section. In section 3.5.3.1, most of the necessities are related to HR actions, and those necessities are not only about legal issues. Most of them are about people-centered activities, and HR is the critical department for employee engagement, welfare, talent management, workplace safety, and other essential topics related to employees.

### **3.5.3.1 Necessities for Successful Organizational Re-Entrance**

Participants defined successful return to the organization with necessities that suffered from lack of those necessities or experienced their positive effects during maternity leave. Most of the participants emphasized the importance of extending the duration of paternal leave. Some participants mentioned that they feel the burden of newborns, and their spouses only participate in this process in the evenings after they leave work. On the other hand, some participants related the duration of the paternity leave process as a negative factor for women’s career road. Almost all participants mentioned that raising organizational awareness of maternity leave is a crucial and fundamental factor that can ease the maternity leave process for a woman.

“I couldn’t receive support from my husband in the overall process. I’m not blaming him because he had to work in the same routine and tried to do her best when he came home. He felt exhausted and couldn’t provide his energy to baby care.”

“I felt all the burden of responsibilities of my baby in overall maternity leave. However, my husband felt a different burden because he left our baby when the baby was seven days old. He usually called me 6- times of day to ask what the baby was doing or baby was okay. I think he was trying to make up for the time that he was away from the baby, and he was trying to support me.”

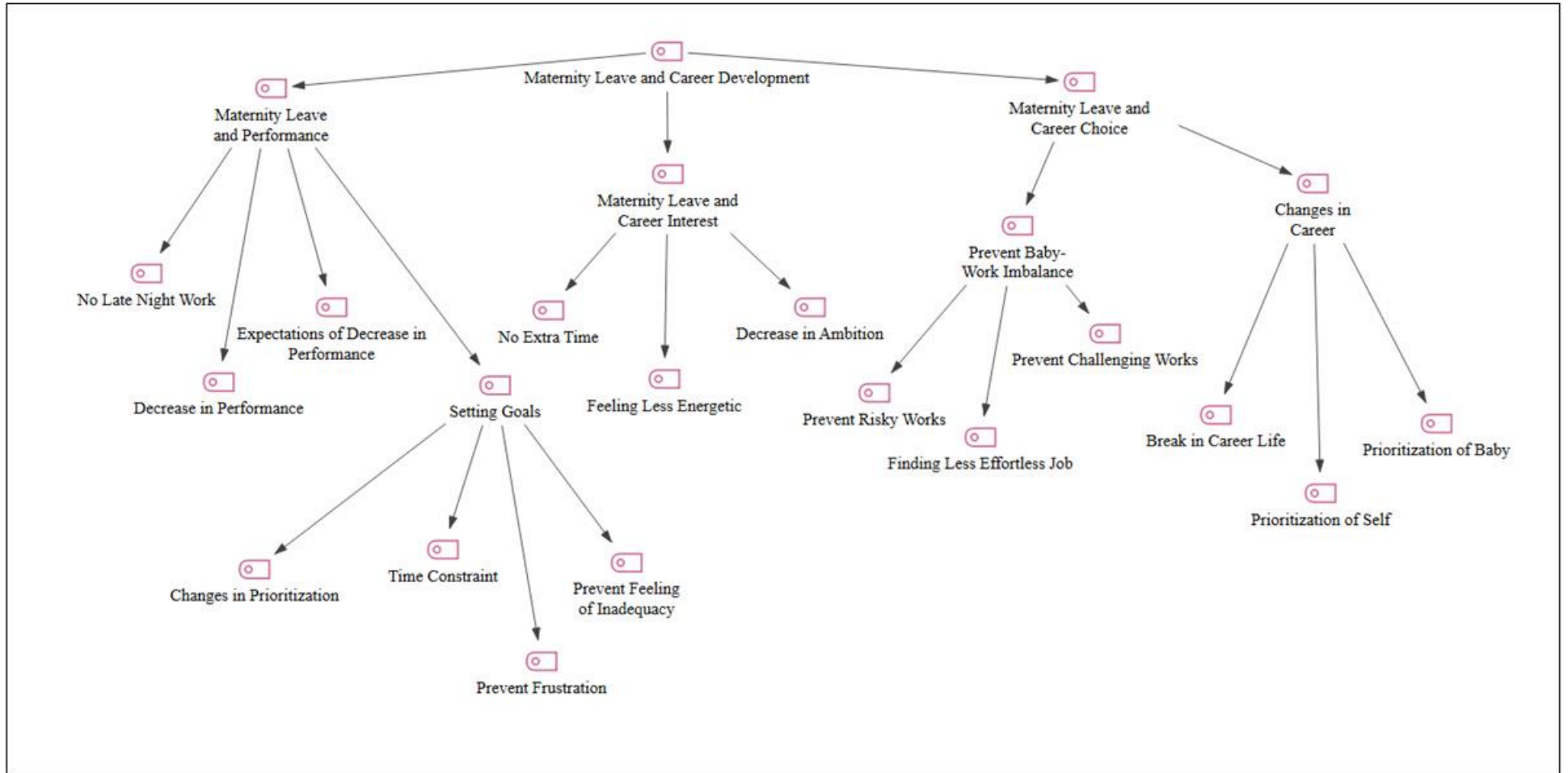
“In Turkey, paternity leave duration is not enough. Besides the burden of babies’ caring responsibilities, women's career is also affected. Whatever everyone says, work-life is men’s world, and there are many challenges not also in Turkey but also in Europe, etc. So, in that kind of world and with other challenges based on gender, you need to give a break to your career, and men don’t have to do.”

### **3.6 Maternity Leave and Career Development**

Career development in this study consists of three dimensions of Social Cognitive Career Theory emphasized: career interest, choice, and performance. Baby-work imbalance is the fundamental source that leads to changes in career development. Even if women have positive experiences in the overall maternity leave process, they declare negative changes in their career development. However, women with positive experiences in the general maternity leave process related these changes with personal factors like prioritization of self and baby. Women with negative experiences in maternity leave related these changes in their careers to organizational factors like work intensity and lack of organizational support. On the other hand, competency development is one of the positive effects of maternity leave after organizational re-entry. However, women did not mention competency development when they evaluated the career development process and maternity leave. One of the reasons

competency development was not assessed within career development is that women need to observe specific positive outcomes of competency development based on their career goals.

### 3.6 Code Map for Theme “Maternity Leave and Career Development.”



### **3.6.1 Maternity Leave and Career Interest**

SCCT's career interest model emphasizes that self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations shape career interests, leading individuals to express interest in specific career pursuits that lead to desired results (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). In this study, maternity leave did not lead women to change their interest to a particular career option. Women continue to be interested in their career field, but their interest in improving themselves is decreasing. They feel less energetic and can't spare extra time to improve themselves in their area, and their ambition to improve themselves in their career is decreased.

According to the interest model, career interest affects individuals' intentions for activity involvement, leading to activity selection and practice (Lent et al., 1994). The responsibilities of a baby create a burden for women, and they can't balance these burdens with the demands of their work. Those changes in career interest led to women's intention to participate in activity selection, like participating in training that can develop their improvements in specific career areas and pursuits.

"I'm still interested in the same field but don't do much for it; I can't find the energy to do it myself. That's why I'm currently doing the necessities of my job, but I can't be interested or desire more."

"I love my job, so I love the career area that I'm in. I can't do more to advance in this area for now. I didn't completely change my goals, but I had to give myself time to achieve them."

"I'm doing what I must do right now. Business life is very dynamic; you need to constantly improve and learn new things, but I don't feel energetic enough to do this right now. I was thinking about what I could do more. Now, I must think about the time that I need to spend as much before going to training. I wouldn't have had to think about such a thing before because if I wanted, I could go to training all day and do the work I had to do in the

evening. Frankly, I don't have such a chance now. The company's point of view on this issue is also critical. They can't offer me anything to achieve this balance because work must be done while I am trying to improve myself. While doing all this, you need to take care of your baby. Since you can't do all of them, you do the job's necessities to provide this balance, you take care of your child at home, but you cannot add an extra parameter to this dynamic for self-development.”

### **3.6.2 Maternity Leave and Career Choice**

SCCT's model of career choice emphasizes that individuals' career interests affect their career choices and the actions they take to apply these choices (Lent et al., 1994). As mentioned above, women's career interests change based on self-improvement. Their career choice in certain areas also changed. In this, career choices came to the fore with the choices made in the same career field. Most of the women in this study stated that there is a difference in their preferences in the area they are in, rather than choosing a new field with their experiences before and after maternity leave. Fundamentals that shape career choices are changes in career perspective and efforts to prevent baby-work imbalance. As mentioned above, individuals with positive experiences in the overall maternity process emphasized that their career perspective changed, and so did their career interests which affected career choice. On the other hand, women with negative experiences on maternity leave, like lack of support from the organization, their career interests, and choices, are affected negatively due to baby-work imbalance.

“After returning from maternity leave, I came across many opportunities, but I did not have the courage. Although it will be a good step in my career, I don't have time to get a new job and spend extra effort. Even in my current workplace, I find it difficult to balance work and childcare, so it does not seem possible to do this in a brand-new work environment.”

“I am not looking for difference or change in my career right now. I act more cautiously; for example, I want to start a new job, but first I calculate the time it will take from me, then I decide whether I want to take that job or not.”

“I said to myself that I have a capacity. For example, there is training that I want to take, but I am not going to any of them right now. If I get an education, I want to focus on it and research it afterward. When I do this, I feel guilty for not having time for my child. I must also admit that you spend so much time with the child during the maternity leave period, or I managed it that way; I think that being around him so many causes you to forget yourself and your goals after a while. This affects your choices and goals after maternity leave. This has caused me to suspend the choices I have made for my career and the things I want and need to do while going to them.”

“From the moment I found out I was pregnant, I knew I had to change my job after returning. I knew that my career path was obvious at my previous job; much investment was made for my development, but I was expected to continue at the same pace right after I returned from maternity leave; I knew this would happen. There was some logic in the organization that the more you give, the more you get. Before maternity leave, I worked non-stop, but this is not a sustainable order with your child. After returning to work, I moved on to a job requiring less effort and could keep my order a little easier. I plan to continue my goals after my baby is a little older, but they are frozen for me now.”

“In this process, I learned how valuable it is to spend time with myself and my baby. That's why I think about the time I should give myself and my baby before I make my choices. If this time hinders us, I'd rather not.”

### **3.6.3 Maternity Leave and Performance**

SCCT's model of task performance emphasizes that occupational performance is affected by self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and performance goals (Lent et al., 1994).

In this study, women's perceptions about performance have changed due to maternity leave. As mentioned earlier in this study, women started to fear about baby- work imbalance during maternity leave, and feeling of inadequacy and guilt showed themselves both during and after maternity leave. Most of the women in the study expressed a decrease in their performance when they compared pre and after-maternity leave due to a lack of time for extra- work and no late-night work, which led to decreased performance. On the other hand, some of the mentioned others' expectations and self-expectations about a decrease in performance also affect the level of performance.

Women expressed that their performance goals change due to the prioritization of the baby before work and time constraints also, women try to prevent the feeling of inadequacy and frustration due to fear of setting high goals and not achieving them in their current life balances. According to SCCT's model of performance, performance attainment level shapes ability and provides a past performance experience that affects self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994). Also, self-efficacy and outcome expectations shape performance goals and subgoals with dual effect because self-efficacy thought also affects outcome expectations. In the end, performance goals and subgoals shape the performance attainment level.

“Everyone expects your performance to change after maternity leave. At the beginning of the interview, I mentioned that you are dealing with the perceptions of others from the beginning of maternity leave. These perceptions and seeing that you can't allocate time as before automatically reduce your performance.”

“It goes like this; if you come back from maternity leave and can't establish a baby-work balance, there is a perception that these things happen because you can't manage your personal life. Second, you have a baby at home to take care of. Under normal conditions, you work in such a disorderly manner, but that's not the case anymore; I can't turn on the computer in the evenings anymore. The work must be finished when I come home because there is a

baby at home. You're already tired when you come home. You are meeting the needs of the baby with that tiredness. After that, you can't tell; let's work a little. No matter how determined you are at your old pace, you can't work. It somehow throws us back in the world we try to exist in because you can't perform as you want in your already difficult business life.”

“I had to change my expectations about myself, but I accepted these changes. One of the most beautiful things this process has added to me is that you can make peace with yourself and the difficulties you are going through; the baby teaches you this. I don't push myself right now; I don't set high goals because I know that when I try to do it, I will fail and feel inadequate. When my baby is a little older, I will be able to make more aggressive moves and set harder targets for myself, but now is not the right time.”

### **3. 7 Career Development and Organizational Re-Entrance**

In this study, career development and organizational re-entry are related. However, pre and during maternity leave experiences are also related to career development. In this study, baby work-imbalance is one of the root causes of negative experiences due to maternity leave. It shows itself before and during maternity leave as a fear of baby-work imbalance, leading to a feeling of inadequacy and frustration. After organizational re-entrance, fear of baby-work imbalance became concrete to women. Negative experiences and lack of support mechanisms increase this imbalance and negatively affect the career development of women. Women emphasized the importance of support mechanisms that need to be provided by organizations and factors that ease the adaptation process. Those mechanisms provide a safe space for women who struggle with the adverse effect of maternity leave and increase their belief in themselves for success.

“Change and struggle due to maternity leave are inevitable—your whole life changes with this process. However, receiving support in this process and feeling understood by

others and the organization is critical. This support lets you believe that everything will be normal, and you will return to things you want to achieve.”

“The more the organization supports us means less interruption in career, I think. Therefore, the more both company and family support you, the more you can do what you want with a little lost time.”

Critical necessities for successful return that women emphasized are raising awareness toward maternity leave and remote and flexible working. The maternity leave process is a process where women experience many changes at the same time. The managers and employees in the organization must be informed about the situations that women may experience to provide a supportive environment for female employees returning from maternity leave. On the other hand, flexible working hours and remote- work provide women the freedom to alter their schedule of work or caring activities so that they can feel more focused on their baby or their work.

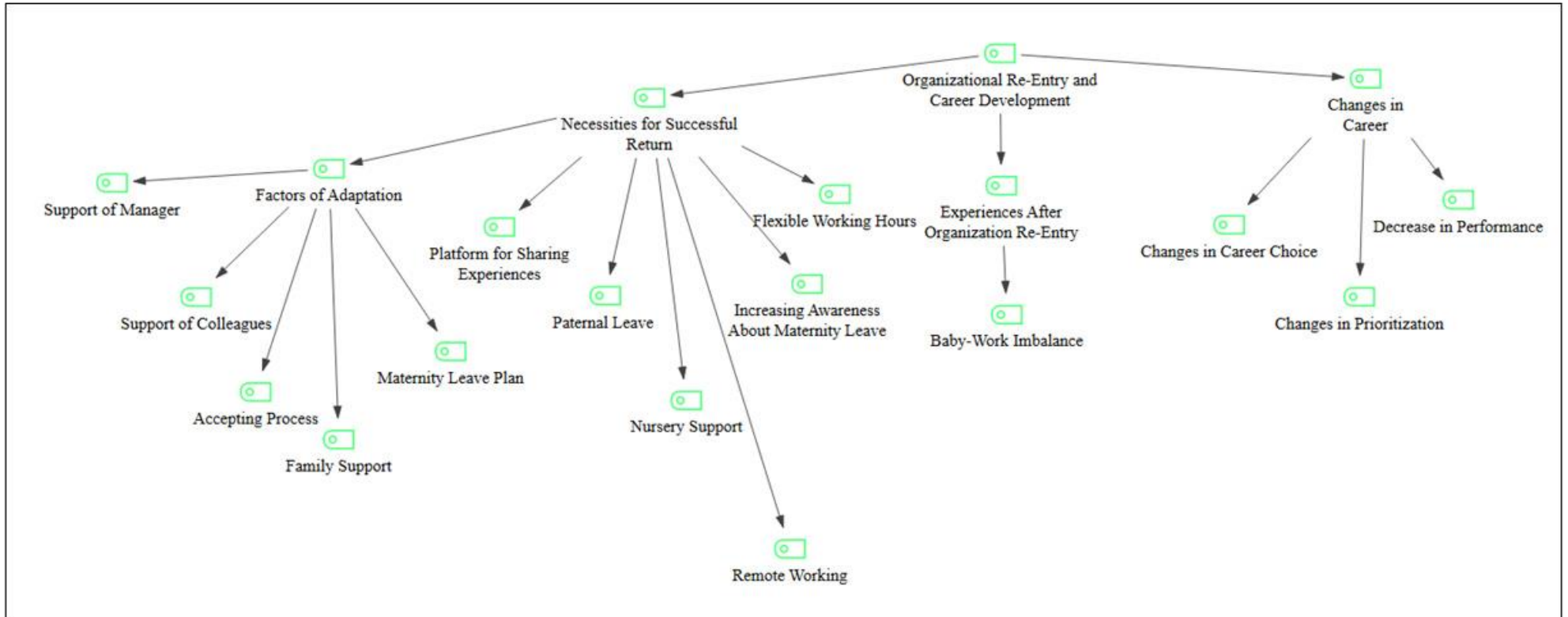
“Employees should be informed about the maternity leave process. This is essential, especially in getting support from colleagues and managers. People who have never experienced this process may not be aware of it. The simplest example, the puerperium period, I think, is a process that varies for everyone, and you experience the effects of even this when you first return to the organization. You can react differently. If my colleagues and manager were not conscious of this process, I would not have been able to get through this process so easily.”

“Remote work is critical in this process. Sometimes you are in such a state that you do not even have the energy to prepare to go to the office. When you stay at home and work at such times, at least people don't see that tiredness, or you don't have to spend extra energy.”

“My manager and colleagues supported me in setting my working hours. Our company did not have such an application. Both my manager and my teammates supported me. At least I was working when I could focus and do good work in that time.”

Managers’ support and colleague support, especially colleague support who work closely in this process, also have a crucial effect on women. Receiving support from these parties increases self-belief and eases adaptation.

### 3.7 Code Map for Theme “Career Development and Organizational Re-Entry”



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION**

In this study, overall experiences of the maternity leave process were examined. Also, the effects of the maternity leave process on women's career development are enlightened in this study. The maternity leave process can be considered a life-changing event for women employees because women who return to work after maternity leave experience being both mothers and employees. So, they need to adapt their brand-new dual identity in this process. Women employees shared their negative and positive experiences based on the maternity leave process from the pregnancy announcement to return to the organization. Experiences before and during the maternity leave process also impact the career development of women employees. However, experiences after organizational re-entry significantly affect the career development of women employees. This part discusses the definition of maternity leave, experiences before and during maternity leave, the decision to return to work, and re-entrance to the organization after maternity leave. Organizational re-entrance after maternity leave significantly impacts career development because women experience the effects of being both mothers and employees. Experiences before and during maternity leave primarily affect the decision to return to the same or another organization.

As a beginning, a description of maternity leave based on participants' experiences provides a perspective to understand the general concept. Participants of this study describe maternity leave as "A life-changing event for women that provides entrance to a children's world and break for a career that can cause a drawback in Men's World." In this definition, it is understood that women considered maternity leave a drawback in their career, and visible or invisible barriers against them come to the surface through the "Men's World" concept. Mothers are considered primary caregivers, and fathers are considered breadwinners. Those social roles lead women to think that maternity leave is a drawback in their careers because they need to have a break to take care of their babies, while men do not have to do that.

Maternity leave is a process that provides women time to spend with their babies and take care of them. However, men do not have equal rights based on paternity leave. There are still societal norms like women must take their place in the family and men must take their place in work domains (Lippe& Lippenyi, 2020). As mentioned in the literature, even 68.1% gender gap closed in 2022; reaching the full parity will take 132 years at this pace (Global Gender Gap Report, 2022). In these circumstances, women employees consider maternity leave a concept that negatively affects their careers due to gender inequality. On the other hand, a common positive description of maternity leave is that it is a life-changing experience based on motherhood's positive effects and uniqueness.

The maternity leave process starts with the announcement of the pregnancy in the organization. A pregnancy announcement is challenging due to finding the right time for the announcement and trying to understand individuals' reactions (Chandler, 2021). Before announcing the pregnancy, most women wait approximately 3 to 3,5 months to ensure their babies' health and avoid the complexity of the pregnancy in the organization. Complexity based on pregnancy is related to the level of women's position, work intensity, and lack of workforce. Women do not want to encounter complexities due to their lack of four months absence. Especially women in managerial positions and women who work at a high pace mostly think this announcement of four months absence will create negative emotions within colleagues, managers, and stakeholders that they are working with. Also, they try to postulate perceptions of other individuals based on the duration of their maternity leave. After they decided to announce their pregnancy, managers' responses had significant effects on women employees. Managers' reactions to pregnancy significantly impact women employees, especially in perceived supervisor support (Little, Hinojosa& Lynch, 2017). Carluccio et al. (2020) emphasized that positive supervisor behavior positively impacts performance funneled by work engagement. This positive behavior from supervisors who are conscious about maternity leave can care for the team and colleagues (Carluccio et al., 2020). Women employees mostly do not receive or mention support from their colleagues during the

maternity leave process (Makola, 2020). However, supervisors can create a virtuous cycle of reliance within their teams (Townsend, 2016). Same as in the literature, women emphasized the reactions of their managers about their pregnancy but did not mention the effects of their colleagues' reactions due to their pregnancy. The negative responses from managers are not sharing happiness about pregnancy, criticizing pregnancy, and prioritization of work by managers before pregnancy are common negative responses that participants mentioned. On the other hand, participants emphasized that they could understand this reaction through words and even their managers' facial expressions. These negative responses create the feeling of guilt, anger, and uneasiness within women employees and prevent them from enjoying the process. These negative responses and their effects can damage the virtuous cycle of reliance within the team and the reliance on women employees. On the other hand, positive reactions like sharing the happiness of maternity leave, receiving empathy, and planning the maternity leave process increase women employees' reliance. They feel supported, understood, relieved, and engaged with their organizations and managers. After the pregnancy announcement, dealing with these perceptions is one of the common challenges for women employees. Colleagues and managers mostly have negative perceptions about the duration of maternity leave, doubts about the effects of being a mother and capabilities after being a mother, and their decision to not return to work. These perceptions could provide a source for women's self-efficacy because they might start to doubt themselves even if they did not experience maternity leave yet. The common method to deal with perceptions is trying to normalize maternity leave. Women tend to declare that they can work during maternity leave, and they defend themselves by saying that they can work during maternity leave or that they will immediately return to maternity leave without any extension. As mentioned, supervisor support can create a virtuous cycle of reliance within teams. Hence, it is also helpful for dealing with perceptions of women or eliminating these perceptions against women and preventing the damage of self-efficacy expectations of women about themselves.

During maternity leave experiences, women expressed both positive and negative experiences about maternity leave. The negative effects of maternity leave are divided into two categories which are organizational and personal level negative effects. Lack of communication and information affect the socialization of women employees who dived into the children's world. They miss little conversation with colleagues and being socially active. Communication and psychological support during maternity leave positively impact women employees' engagement because they feel cared for and supported (Costantini et al., 2020). Lack of communication and information during maternity leave also makes women fear job insecurity because they do not know what is happening in their workplace, what their managers think about them and what their colleagues do, etc. So, they started to fear whether their seats were still spared for them. Baby-work imbalance is one of the fundamental concepts in this study. At the personal level, baby-work imbalance comes to the surface as fear of baby-work imbalance during maternity leave. Akyol& Arslan's (2020) study emphasized that most women struggle to balance work-family life, and deciding to resolve this balance mostly ends with work-family interference or family-work interference. In this study, work-family balance gave its place to baby-work imbalance. Women started to fear this imbalance due to dual-identity responsibilities. Re-entrance to the organization after maternity leave is a new career phase for women employees; they can feel the burden of multiple roles and demands (Jaeckel et al., 2012). However, women started to think about managing their dual identities when they began to work during maternity leave. One reason to fear this dual identity is a conflict between expectations before maternity leave and real experiences during maternity leave. Most women plan to follow their work, support their colleagues and managers when needed, and return to work after the legal duration of maternity leave ends. This creates feelings of inadequacy and burnout because they cannot spare themselves time, only focus on their baby, and fear how it will be with work. So, they started to feel anxious about returning to work, judging their capabilities to manage both parts of their lives. All these negative results also prevent them from enjoying maternity leave and

being with their baby. Even though the negative effects outweigh the positive impact of paternity leave, women in this study mentioned that the maternity leave process is a break from work stress and allows them to redefine their priorities and be a mother without any interference from work. The results of these positive effects are competency development and redefining priorities. According to Binaku's (2019) study, women express that they know what they want from their professional life and what they are looking for in a company when they consider career development and maternity leave, and they defined maternity leave as a new perspective on life. In this study, redefining priorities is not only related to career development; women emphasized that they redefined their priorities when considering their career life. On the other hand, competency development is the common positive result of maternity leave that women mentioned in this study is competency development due to maternity leave. McDougall's (2010) research and Costantini et al.'s (2022) study emphasized competency development due to maternity leave, like multitasking, self-awareness, and a broader mindset. In this study, women express that they gain stress management skills, empathy, and multitasking.

The decision to return to work after maternity leave is a crucial topic for women employees. In this study, all participants returned to work, but two returned to work in different companies due to their work intensity in previous companies. Factors and support mechanisms are divided into two categories personal and organizational. One common personal factor affecting the decision to return to work is planning to return before taking leave. Most women said they did not consider quitting their job after maternity leave. On the other hand, returning to the adult world is another personal factor that affects the decision to return to work. Lack of information and communication leads to decreased socialization due to maternity leave, and women's social activities are reduced to the responsibilities of their babies. So, going back to social life with work is another common personal factor in the decision to return to work. Also, women do not want to prevent long breaks in their careers, and women in managerial positions wish to avoid harm to their status in employment and

want to prove that they are capable of being both mothers and employees. Economic conditions are another factor in deciding the duration of maternity leave or the decision to return to work. Spouses' salaries and family savings lead women to extend maternity leave duration with non-paid maternity leave. According to Gökdemirel's (2008) study, women find the duration of maternity leave short and cannot take unpaid leave due to their economic conditions. Also, babies' temperament is another significant factor, especially in determining the duration of maternity leave. Women who have hard-child did not have the courage to return to work at the end of the legal maternity leave period. Organizational factors that affect women's decision to return to work are job content, level of position, work intensity, and engagement. Two participants decide to change their work due to their work intensity and to balance the demands of both their babies and work. On the other hand, women mentioned that their engagement with their organization and job content has a crucial impact on their decisions. The position level also affects the decision to return to work at an organizational level. Women who think their organization has plans for their career or if they are one step back to a managerial role lead them to start working in the same organization and motivate them. Personal and organizational support mechanisms also significantly impact the decision to return to work. Kavra& Kramer (2020) emphasized the importance of supportive organizational culture to prevent the effects of multiple role demands on women employees. The organizational support mechanisms also affect women's decision to return to work, which is crucial for successful re-entrance (Fox& Quinn, 2015). Social support from colleagues and managers are essential to return decision. Especially experiences before taking leave with colleagues and managers provide a base for women to consider what they can encounter when they return to the organization. Fox& Quinn (2015) emphasized that the support women receive from their organization before maternity leave affects the decision to re-enter the organization. Women who received positive responses from their managers' when their pregnancy announcement feel that they will be supported when they return. As mentioned previously, colleagues' responses do not have a crucial impact on women

employees. However, dealing with the perceptions of others leads women to evaluate their organization's culture when they decide to return to work. Women who do not feel supported by their managers due to their negative response to the pregnancy evaluate their organization's policies in their decision-to-return process. The most common policies women assessed in the decision process are remote work policies. Women emphasized the benefits of remote working in their decision process because they feel they will be more capable of managing their work and, at the same time, taking care of their babies while they are at home. In personal support mechanisms, same as the literature, the existence of the entrusted person is one of the significant personal support mechanisms in the decision to return to work. One of the biggest challenges is leaving the kids and going to work after maternity leave, and the best coping strategy is to know that child is in good hands (Costantini et al., 2022). In this study, the entrusted person is primarily women's mothers for caring activities of the baby. One of the crucial results is that spouses' support impacts the decision to return to work. However, women do not consider that support for caring activities. Spouses provide psychological support to women employees about their ability to manage babies and work.

Returning to work after maternity leave can be a transition process from being a mother to a working mother; they need to alter many dimensions of their lives (Costantini et al., 2022). Especially experiences after organizational re-entrance have a significant impact on career development. The negative experiences of organizational re-entrance outweigh the positive experiences of it. Positive experiences are mainly related to socialization and returning to the adult world again. Women emphasized caring for something different from the baby and could spare time for themselves. On the other hand, they apply the new competencies they gained during maternity leave, such as stress management, empathy, and multi-tasking, leading them to be team players. These positive experiences make women feel happy and relieved and feel their individuality. However, as mentioned, negative experiences outweigh positive experiences. Even for those who experience their return process positively, their negative experiences outweigh their positive experiences. After the pregnancy

announcement, women employees deal with other individuals' perceptions about maternity leave. After re-entrance, those perceptions come to the surface with questions and actions. Judging women's capabilities, making relations of mistakes with maternity leave, and criticism about decreased work pace are common perceptions that women encounter. Women who return from maternity leave are mostly considered as they returned with deteriorated skills (PriceWaterhouseCooper, 2016). Maxwell, Connolly, and Laoire (2018) found an acute perception that women who return from maternity leave must compensate for their absence after maternity leave. So, these perceptions of others make women feel obligated to prove their skills and capabilities. The most common negative experience in organizational re-entrance is baby-work imbalance. All participants mentioned the negative effects of baby-work imbalance. Women must fulfill multiple roles as partners, employees, and mothers while sustaining their individuality, and these additional roles create distress and exhaustion (Spiteri & Xuereb, 2012). Women employees can struggle to balance work and family (Negiz & Tokmakçı, 2011). Also, they feel obligated to fulfill the demands of both mothers and employees, creating a burden for women and causing work-family conflict (Correll et al., 2007). Women struggle to fulfill the demands of being mothers and employees. Women cannot focus on both babies and work simultaneously, which creates a feeling of inadequacy because they need to compensate for the time and effort when they focus on babies or work. When women focus only baby or work, feeling of guilt come to the surface because they cannot put their total effort baby or work. Also, women trying to meet social norms of being mothers can accuse of not being committed to work and sense a lack of productivity (Correll et al., 2007). Participants mentioned the sacredness of motherhood in Turkish culture. They emphasized that mothers need to be perfect and cannot make mistakes. So, they put their total effort into the baby and did not spare enough time to work as past. They spare their free time for their baby after work and avoid challenges and risks to prevent extra time for work. These circumstances lead to drawbacks of career plans that women emphasize because they cannot spare time and put total effort into work. These negative experiences and the inability to

fulfill the demands make women feel inadequate, exhausted, stressed, and guilty. Women expressed the necessities of a successful return to an organization: remote working, extended paternal leave duration, nursery support, flexible working hours, increasing awareness about maternity leave in organizations, and platforms for sharing experiences. Besides remote working, women did not experience these necessities. However, they emphasized the importance of these necessities for adaptation. Women who have positive experiences after organizational re-entrance have flexible time management opportunities but not their company provide this opportunity to them. Their managers and colleagues enable them to manage their time flexibly, and managers provide them with this flexibility. Flexible time management is significant for women who return from maternity leave because it gives a sense of control to manage the demands of work and family (Costantini et al., 2020). Also, it provides a source for balancing work and family (Galea& De Rijk, 2014). On the other hand, increasing awareness is significant that women emphasize easing the adaptation. Women emphasized that postpartum continued when they returned to work. Their emotions and reactions might not be familiar to colleagues or managers who do not experience or observe maternity leave. Hence, they emphasized that it is crucial to inform the organization about maternity leave and women's experiences to increase their awareness of this process. Raising awareness about the maternity leave process can increase the support and empathy for women returning from maternity leave and increase the workplace support women experience. Workplace social support after maternity leave leads women to create coping strategies and transfer this support to their colleagues so a virtuous cycle of workplace support can be created (Ma, Wu, Yang& Xiu, 2021).

## **4.1 Maternity Leave and Career Development**

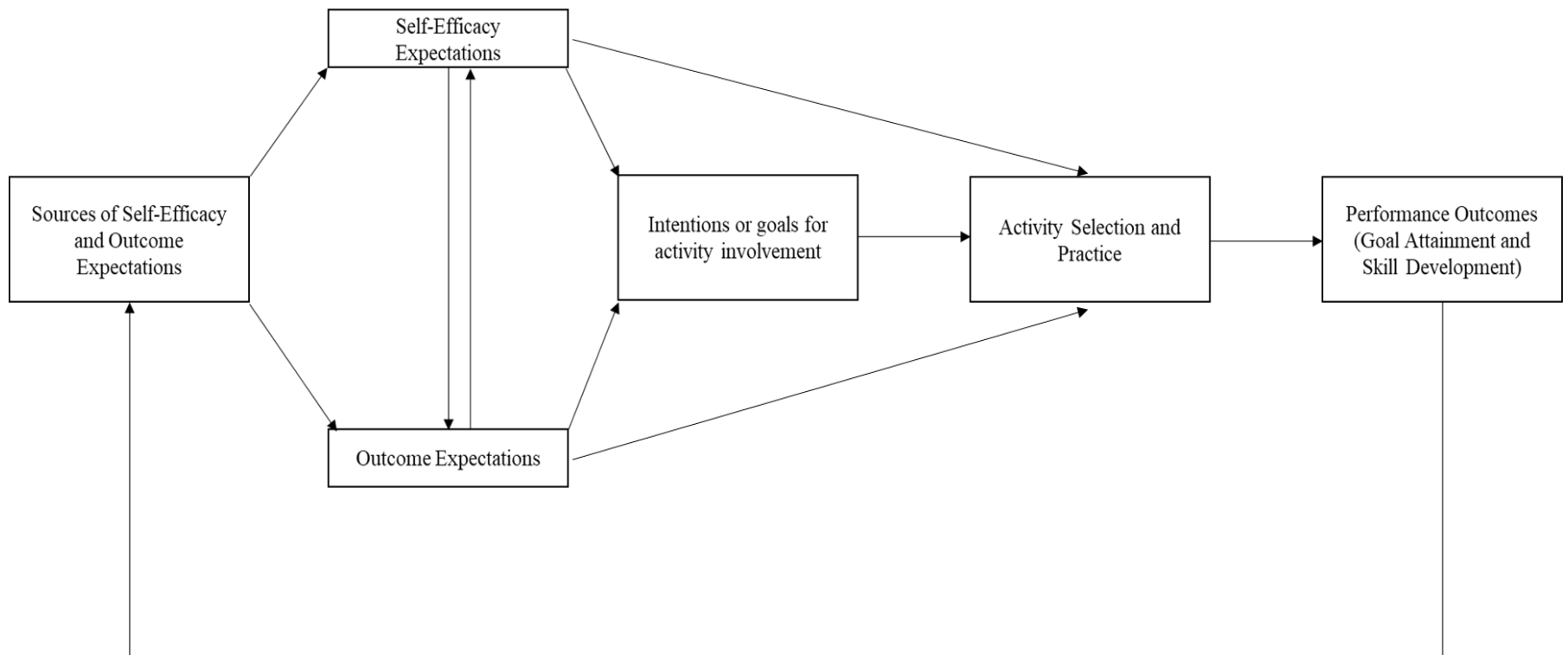
After these maternity leave experiences, the relationship between maternity leave and career development was examined. Career development is one of the topics commonly related to maternity leave because maternity leave and re-entrance to the organization can be considered a critical transition for women and career phase that they need to alter many dimensions of their lives. To understand the relationship between maternity leave and career development, SCCT's three models for career development are used. Most of the parameters in this relationship are related to experiences after organizational re-entrance. Three models of SCCT, career interest, career choice, and performance, applied to maternity leave and career development relationships. While the model of career interest and choice is revised according to maternity leave experiences, the model of performance clearly explains how maternity leave influences women's performance levels.

### **4.1.1 Maternity Leave and Career-Related Activity Involvement**

According to the career interest model of SCCT, experiential and cognitive factors influence career-related interests, and these interest shape choice behavior and skill acquisition (Lent et al., 1994). Self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations shape career interests, leading individuals to express interest in specific career pursuits that lead to desired results (Lent et al., 1994). Self-efficacy influences the outcome expectation of an individual, and these two concepts shape the career interest of individuals (Lent et al., 1994). Interests also affect the intentions or goals for activity involvement which influence the activity selection and performance outcomes like goal attainment and skill development (Lent et al., 1994). Self-efficacy expectations also directly influence performance outcomes, and those performance outcomes provide a source for self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994). In this study, maternity leave did not lead women to change their interests to a particular career area. Women continue to be interested in their career field, but their interest in improving themselves is decreasing. They feel less energetic and cannot spare extra time

to improve themselves in their area, and their ambition to improve themselves in their career is decreased. Feeling of inadequacy, guilt, and stress due to multiple role demands creates a source of self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Women drop their expectations of themselves because they want to prevent these negative feelings about themselves. In SCCT's interest model, self-efficacy expectations influence the outcome expectations in one way. However, in this study, outcome expectations also influence self-efficacy expectations. Women decreased their outcome expectations and reduced their ambition for their goals and activity involvement, so this reduction also negatively affected their expectations of self-efficacy. So, SCCT's model of interest was revised. Interest was removed from the model because, due to multiple role demands, women intended to involve in activities that required less effort and time and choose their activities based on this intention and their goal attainments changed compared to before maternity leave. However, their interest is not changed in their career areas. They cannot spare enough time for skill development. Also, outcome expectations and self-efficacy expectations influence the selection and practice of activities because women do not want to experience negative feelings due to their selection, like feelings of inadequacy and guilt. So, the model of interest of SCCT changed in this study as a career-related activity involvement, Figure 4.1.1.

**Figure 4.1.1 Maternity Leave and Career-Related Activity Involvement**



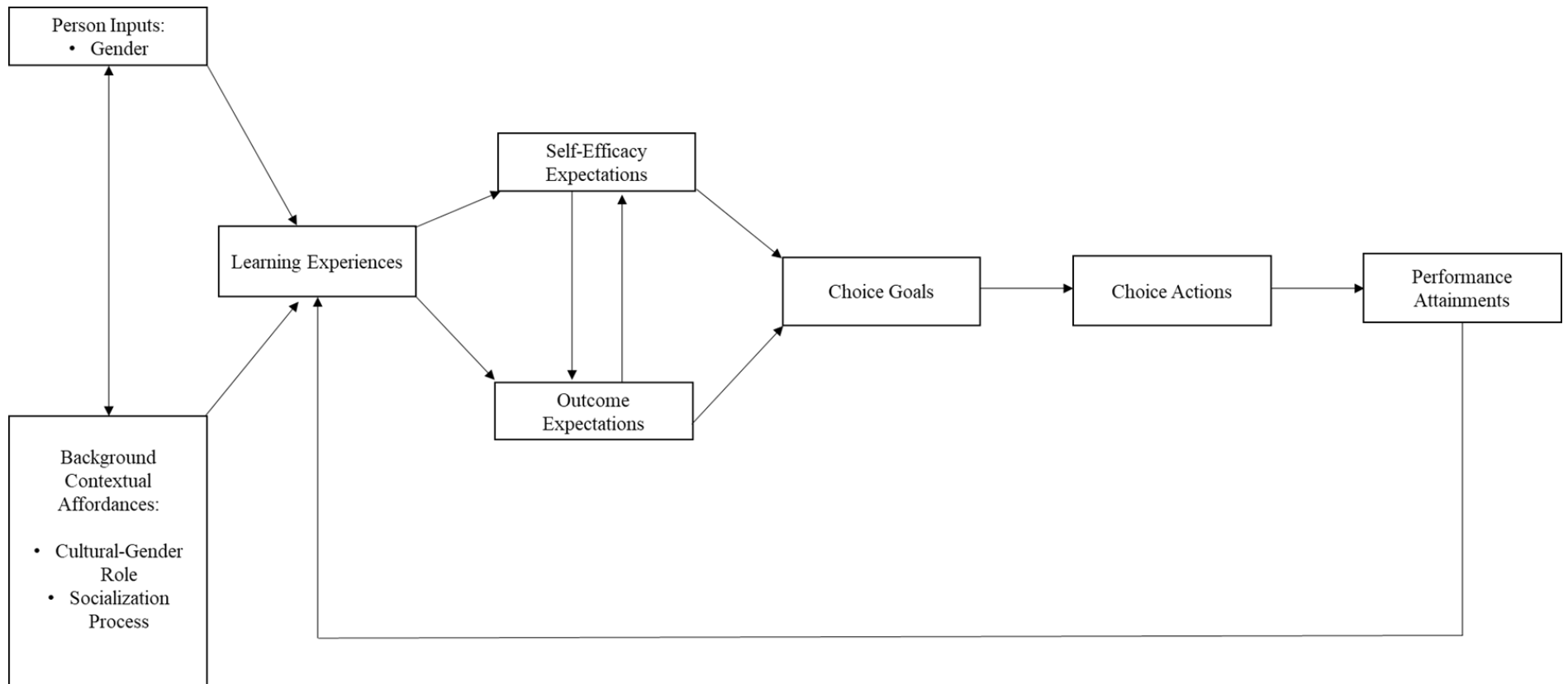
#### **4.1.2 Maternity Leave and Career-Related Choice**

SCCT's model of career choice emphasizes that individuals' career interests affect their career choices and the actions they take to apply these choices (Lent et al., 1994). The model highlights the diverse personal, contextual, and learning experiences that impact choice behavior (Lent et al., 1994). Choice behavior can be divided into three parts according to SCCT, which are an expression of primary choice, actions that implement one's choice, and performance attainments that shape future career behavior (Lent et al., 1994). In SCCT, self-efficacy and outcome expectations lead to shaping career interests and interests serve as tools for choice goals and choice actions which turn performance domains and attainments that influence the learning experiences of individuals (Lent et al., 1994). Also, personal input and background contextual affordances influence each other and separately influence the learning experiences of individuals, which impact self-efficacy expectations and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994). This study revised the model of interest as career-related activity involvement. The model of choice was also revised in this study. Interest is removed from the model, and only gender is included as personal input. Cultural gender-role and socialization processes are only included as background contextual affordances compared to the original model, Figure 4.1.2.

Women encounter the burden of multiple roles due to cultural-gender roles. As participants mentioned, there is a sacredness of motherhood in our culture. This cultural role, like women, are homemakers, automatically becomes a source for their learning experiences. Even if they try to prevent the conflict between mother and employee, it is impossible to balance these two concepts. On the other hand, perceptions of others involve the cultural-gender roles for learning experiences. So, these learning experiences after maternity leave provide a source for self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Women tend to eliminate feelings of inadequacy and guilt due to multiple roles. They tend to choose career development activities based on the time they need to spare, the level of effort, and the

intensity of the job because they spare their free time for their babies. Their self-efficacy expectations and outcome expectations are changed when compared before maternity leave. They believe they cannot put enough effort into improving themselves or doing diverse jobs while caring for their babies. So, they shape their goals and actions of choice, and they change their performance attainments. Their level of performance attainments is decreased to prevent the feeling of guilt and inadequacy due to the imbalance between baby and work.

**Figure 4.1.2 Maternity Leave and Career-Related Choice**

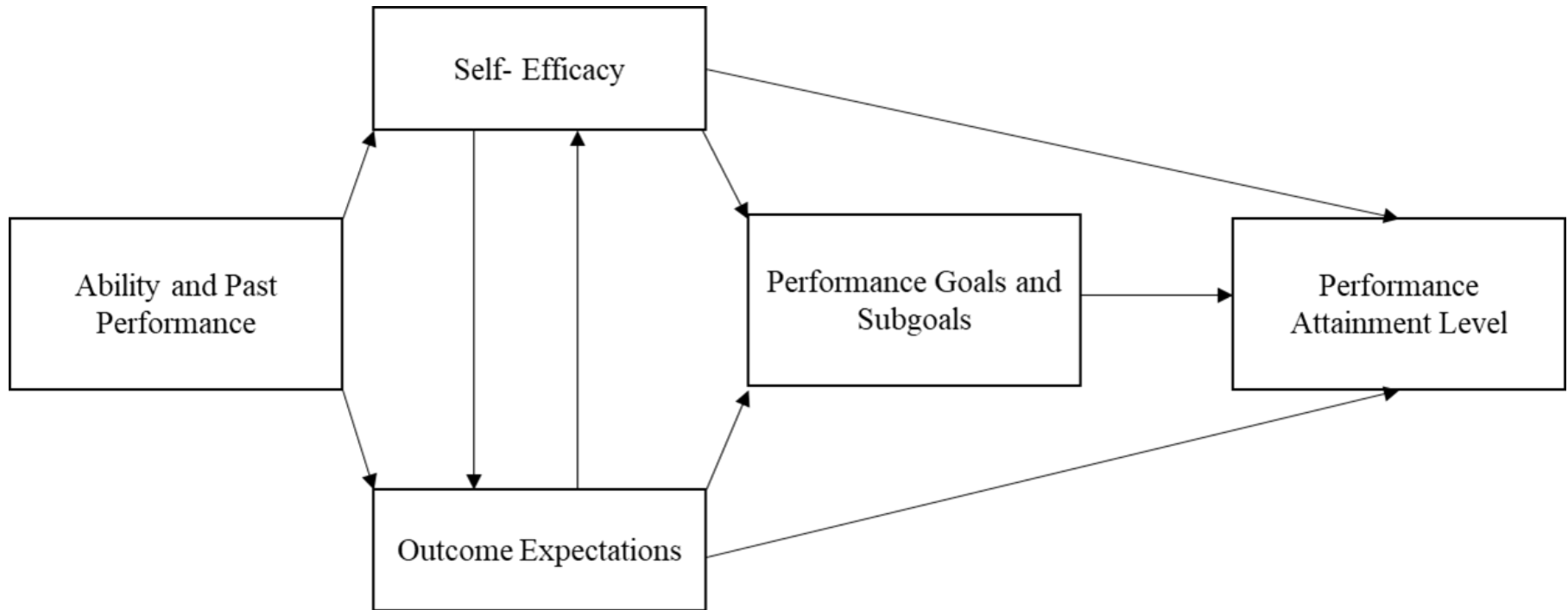


### **4.1.3 Maternity Leave and Performance**

According to SCCT's model of performance, ability, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and performance goals influence academic and occupational performance (Lent et al., 1994). The employment of abilities is significantly influenced by self-efficacy (Lent et al., 1994). When an individual's abilities fail to correspond to requirements in an occupation or their self-efficacy beliefs, they underestimate their current performance capabilities; individuals can be at risk (Lent et al., 1994). As mentioned earlier, baby-work imbalance decreases the women's self-efficacy that they can balance work and baby simultaneously. On the other hand, lack of organizational support is a factor that negatively impacts the self-efficacy of women employees. Women decrease their outcome expectations because they cannot do late-night work and put enough effort to work when compared to their effort before maternity leave. Also, they started to fear baby-work imbalance during maternity leave, and feelings of inadequacy and guilt showed themselves both during and after. Most of the women in the study expressed a decrease in their performance when they compared pre and after-maternity leave due to a lack of time for extra- work and no late-night work, which led to decreased performance. On the other hand, some of the mentioned others' expectations and self-expectations about a decrease in performance also affect the level of performance.

Women expressed that their performance goals change due to the prioritization of the baby before work and time constraints also, women try to prevent the feeling of inadequacy and frustration due to fear of setting high goals and not achieving them in their current life balances. According to SCCT's model of performance, performance attainment level shapes ability and provides a past performance experience that affects self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994). Also, self-efficacy and outcome expectations shape performance goals and subgoals with dual effect because self-efficacy thought also affects outcome expectations. In the end, performance goals and subgoals shape the performance attainment level.

**Figure 4.1.3 Maternity Leave and Performance**



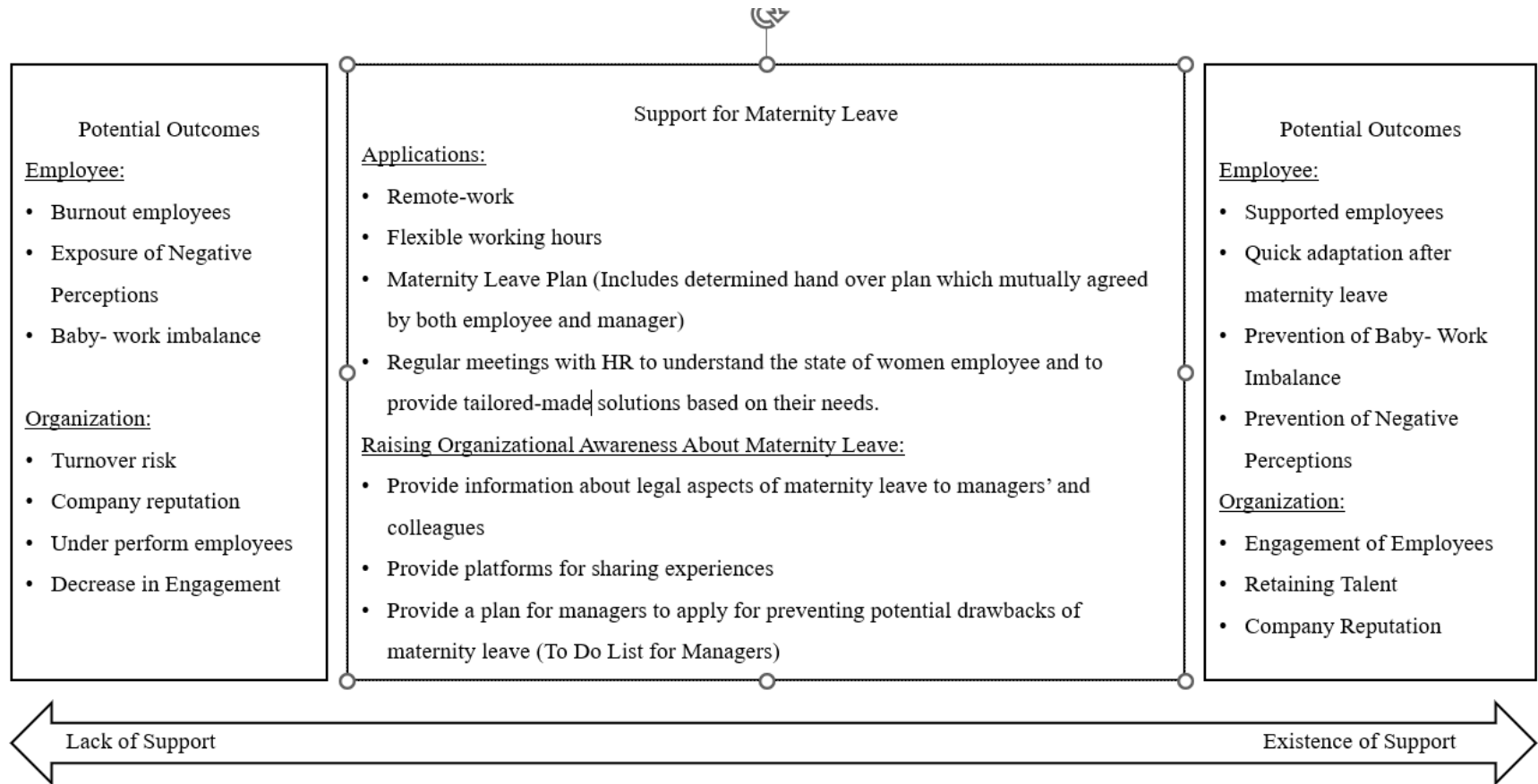
In the light of the SCCT, the model of career interest, choice, and performance are interrelated with each other. In this study, the overall maternity leave process and its relationship with career development can be understood with the dynamics of SCCT. Women who have negative experiences in the maternity leave process, like lack of organizational support, the burden of dual responsibilities, and baby-work imbalance, lead the feeling of inadequacy and guilt, which provides a source of self-efficacy. To prevent these negative feelings, women alter their interests and suspend them, so they make choices in the guidance of those feelings. On the other hand, alterations to balance baby-work create a perception of decreased performance. Women replace their career goals to achieve them, prevent the feeling of inadequacy, and balance the baby-work concept. On the other hand, those who had positive experiences in the overall maternity leave process still mentioned that their career development was negatively affected by maternity leave. However, they expressed fewer negative feelings, like inadequacy and frustration.

#### **4.2 Implication of the Study**

In the overall study, participants expressed the necessity of successful return and factors that ease their adaptation to their new order. However, they did not mention specific HR Support and this process. Some participants said that they only contacted HR in this process to learn about legal issues and inform them. HR has a crucial role in companies to provide implementations and policies to increase engagement, and employees' well-being, to acquire and retain talent. Besides legal issues, women can encounter complicated feelings, situations, and discrimination based on maternity leave, and those negative effects might not appear on the surface. Women in this study emphasized that successful organization re-entrance is helpful for their career development because their careers inevitably changed after maternity leave due to complex feelings and significant changes in their lives. Based on women's experiences and expectations, a model for organizational support for maternity leave can be helpful. However, companies should be careful while they are applying those practical implications. A level of support might be critical for this process because it can also

create an environment that leads to more discrimination due to positive discrimination against women. Providing support mechanisms for men might help prevent this discrimination.

**Figure 4.2 Support for Maternity Leave**



### **4.3 Limitations of the Study**

This study examines the effect of maternity leave on women employees who are actively working. Most of them mentioned the negative impact of maternity leave, such as feelings of inadequacy, baby-work imbalance, and decreased career development due to those circumstances. However, organizations must assess their level of support mechanisms based on maternity leave.

Maternity leave has different impacts on women who do not decide to return to work or take pro-longed maternity leave. On the other hand, participants in this study are working women. In the next stage, a comparison between the effects of maternity leave and roots that affect career development might be included in this study to understand the overall impact of maternity leave for women employees and women who are not working. Also, organizational support mechanisms to prevent this kind of situation for retaining talent can be founded.

### **4.4 Future Studies**

There is not enough research to understand the overall effect of maternity leave and its effects on women's career development. This study can provide a base for general experiences about maternity leave and career development. Women in work and providing gender equality concepts are among the most considered concepts in companies for sustainability and branding. On the other hand, women's career is affected by maternity leave, and without supporting factors, this can lead decrease in gender equality in workplaces.

Also, one of the behaviors that must be the attention is the barrier that women employees put themselves with accepting these negative experiences and outcomes. Even before announcing the pregnancy, women started to feel anxious about the potential drawbacks of maternity leave. So, not only support mechanisms but also company culture might provide a base for these perceptions and reality about potential drawbacks.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

Organizations and HR are responsible for providing an environment of well-being to their employees so they can feel engaged, supported, and comfortable to maintain their success. Maternity leave is not a break or disruption in a career. It is a life-changing event for women employees trying to manage brand-new dual identities. If companies do not provide support to their employees, then it becomes a disruption in careers. Organizations need to support their employees to retain their talents, provide gender equality and attain success with employees' engagement and level of performance. Support in organizations can provide highly engaged employees and create a virtuous cycle of support within employees for maternity leave effects and other organizational factors.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### A- Sociodemographic Questions in Turkish

1. Yaşınız Nedir?
2. Medeni Durumunuz Nedir?
3. Kaç Çocuğunuz Var?
4. Kaç kez doğum iznine çıkıp geri döndünüz?
5. Ücretsiz doğum izninizi kullandınız mı?
6. Doğum izninden kaç ay sonra çalışma hayatına dönüş yaptınız?
7. Çalıştığınız sektör ve alan nedir?
8. Pozisyonunuz Nedir?
9. Kaç Yıldır Çalışıyorsunuz?
10. Çocuğunuzun/Çocuklarınızın bakımında size kimler destek oluyor?
11. Çalıştığınız organizasyonda sözleşme tipiniz nedir: (1) Belirli Süreli Sözleşme (2) Belirsiz Süreli Sözleşme (3) Proje Bazlı/Dış Kaynak Desteği

#### B- Sociodemographic Questions in English

1. What is your age?
2. What is your marital status?
3. How many children do you have?
4. How many times have you been on maternity leave and come back?
5. Did you use your unpaid maternity leave?
6. What is the sector and field you work in?
7. What is your Position?
8. How Many Years Are You Working?
9. Who supports you in the care of your child/children?

10. What is your contract type in the organization you work for: (1) Fixed Term Contract (2) Indefinite Term Contract (3) Project Based/Outsourced Support

## **Appendix 2**

### **A- Interview Questions in Turkish**

1. Doğum izni sürecindeki deneyimlerinizi hamileliğinizi duyurmaktan organizasyona yeniden dönüşünüze kadar anlatabilir misiniz?
2. Doğum izninden sonra çalışma hayatına dönmeye nasıl karar verdiniz? Bu kararınızı neler etkiledi?
3. Kariyer hayatınızı da göz önünde bulundurduğunuzda doğum izni sürecinin sizin için olumlu ve olumsuz yönleri nelerdi?
4. Kariyer tercihleriniz doğum izni süreci sonrasında nasıl etkilendi?
5. Kariyer ilginiz doğum izni süreci sonrasında nasıl etkilendi?
6. Performans hedefleriniz doğum izni süreci sonrasında nasıl etkilendi?
7. Doğum izninden çalışma hayatına dönüş sürecinizdeki deneyimlerinizi aktarır mısınız? Nasıl etkilendiniz?
8. Doğum izninden sonra çalışma hayatına başarılı dönüş sizin için ne ifade ediyor?
9. Çalışma hayatına başarılı dönüş ve kariyer gelişiminin size nasıl bir ilişkisi var?

### **B- Interview Questions in English**

1. Can you tell me about your experiences during the maternity leave process, from announcing your pregnancy to your return to the organization?
2. How did you decide to return to working life after maternity leave? What influenced your decision?
3. Considering your career life, what were the positive and negative aspects of the maternity leave process for you?
4. How were your career choices affected by the maternity leave process?
5. How were your career interests affected by the maternity leave process?
6. How was your performance affected by the maternity leave process?
7. Could you tell us about your experiences in the process of returning from maternity leave to working life? How were you affected?

8. What does a successful return to work life after maternity leave means to you?
9. How do a successful return to work life and career development relate to you?

## **Appendix 3**

### **ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL**

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.