

‘My wife’s continued presence for months means that she still has the Midas touch’

Ndubuisi, a small business owner, could only take two weeks’ paternity – and feels the effects over a year later



Ndubuisi Uchea is a 33-year-old dad in London who owns his own insight and content agency (a small business, of which he is an employee). When his first child was born in September 2023, he took two weeks’ statutory paternity leave and one week of annual leave to support his wife. He says the short time he had off still impacts him and his family today.

When I started looking around the internet for what support there was for new dads who are small business owners, I found that my only option was to take the two weeks of statutory paternity leave I'm entitled to as an employee of the business. It was an abysmally small amount of time, so I decided I'd also take a week of annual leave when our son was born.

I worked up until the day my wife went into labour. I would have loved to have been there in the days leading up to her labour, to support her and get the house adequately ready for our baby's arrival.

During and after the birth, there were some complications. My wife had an infection, and our son had jaundice and tongue tie. It meant that we were in the hospital for three full days following the birth.

When I brought the two of them home, I had a little over two weeks to be with them before returning to work.

During those weeks, we had lots of family and friends around to help with the baby and my wife's recovery. Those first couple of weeks are often filled with people who want to see the baby. But after the 'newness' wore off, people didn't necessarily come around as frequently. And that coincided with the time that I had to return to work. So only two weeks after giving birth, my wife was effectively left on her own to care for her own body and that of our new baby.

The time I had at home with our son wasn't enough, both from the perspective of settling into life as a father and playing an adequate role in supporting my wife. Beyond that time, and still to this day, I made sure that I put him to sleep as many nights as possible, and whilst that's the reality, on the odd occasion that he's extremely unsettled, my wife's continued presence with him for months, means that she has the Midas touch - sometimes only Mum can soothe him.

A lot can be spoken about adequate time to bond with the child, but more than anything, what I found, and still find the hardest about going back to work after such a short amount of time was not being able to support my wife. We are still dealing with the consequences of the impact of me not being around more to support my wife during that first year.

I remember being exhausted during those early months. As a business owner, my job is intense. I'd come home so tired and then would do what I could to support my wife, who'd been with the baby all day. It was a lot and often not enough.

Looking back, if I could have had more financial support from the government to be off work longer than only two weeks, it would have had

a huge impact on my partner, on our relationship, and on my ability to set clear boundaries between work and being with our son.

My brother works for a company that has a generous parental leave policy. He's only just gone back to work full time, after having been back and forth in work for the last ten months. He had something like two weeks in the beginning, four weeks in the middle, and four weeks towards the end of the baby's first year. That's the kind of policy that should be in place for dads - acknowledging that parenthood lasts beyond the first fortnight.

In those early days, it's about supporting the recovery of the birthing parent. But then throughout that first year, if we were to have more time off, we'd get to be involved in the most important bonding months of a child's life and the numerous changes they go through.

Everyone lauds being your own boss, but the realities it comes with, especially when you have a child - I wouldn't wish on anyone. More needs to be done.