

BMA Women and the value of professionals who are also mothers

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Topics

[BMA Review](#) [BMA Women](#)

“Pregnant women think.” That’s the answer that Chico Müssnich, one of BMA Advogados’ founding partners, gave to Leslie Rose in 1997, when she was invited to join the firm as a legal language consultant. She was pregnant with her second daughter. “It made a real impression on me, that willingness to see me, not as a pregnant woman, but as a professional who had something to contribute to firm. It was something that impressed me at the time and I think that BMA still has that approach, that attitude of really looking at a person to see what contribution they can make,” Leslie explains with pride.

Marina Maciel, one of BMA’s Environmental and Climate Change lawyers, was promoted after her second daughter was born in 2022. “I sensed a big change between my first and second pregnancies – I felt much more supported. I think the firm is coming to see that having children benefits society; it’s not just a personal project,” she says.

Camilla Paoletti is another example of professional growth after motherhood. She became a partner of the firm’s Competition practice during her second pregnancy, in 2109. “When women go on maternity leave, their lives should be seen as a film, not a snapshot. Pregnancy, going on maternity leave, and then returning to work is not always an easy process. We still pay a price for our choice professionally, but I see an evolution in the firm’s policies,” she comments.

The price is high in a work market where inequality and salary disparity increase for women after they have children. In fact, this is one of the issues investigated by Claudia Goldin, winner of the 2023 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, who published the first comprehensive study of women’s earnings and their presence in the labor force over time.

Goldin’s study showed that with the industrial revolution, the workplace ceased to be the home, which drastically reduced women’s participation in the labor force. According to Goldin, the arrival of a woman’s first child represents a setback in her professional life, increasing salary inequality between genders. Goldin’s work showed that women’s participation in the labor force decreases after childbirth in all 134 countries studied. The gap in South America is greater than in Asia or Africa, where women can take up to 10 years to recover professional growth after the arrival of their first child.

At BMA, some initiatives have been directed to lowering the hurdles that professionals face on becoming mothers. The firm offers an extended maternity leave of six months, and its offices in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have lactation rooms. In addition, all women professionals are eligible for daycare assistance, and there is no deduction from their bonus during maternity leave.

“We are working on internal policies to ensure that maternity does not have a

negative impact on women's careers," emphasizes Vivian Casanova, one of BMA's tax partners, a member of the BMA Women committee, and a mother of two. "The firm now has policies to support women when they return from maternity leave, and help them re-establish themselves in the work environment," adds Camilla, who is also a member of the committee.

Change does not happen overnight, but the firm has endeavored to support its women professionals in the difficult mission of balancing their multiple functions and tasks. Roundtables, opportunities to exchange experiences, and the women mentorship program are some of the spaces created by BMA Women that encourage conversations on how to reconcile motherhood and professional growth. Currently, 57% of the firm's professionals are women; of these, 29% are mothers, and 25% of those mothers are partners.

"The firm's leadership has come to realize that motherhood should not delay professional development. Despite the difficulties, we are working to address these issues and make BMA Women part of the support network for these women, so that the qualities they develop on becoming mothers can also contribute to their professional development," stresses Vivian.

Resilience, less centralization and a greater ability to delegate, improved conflict resolution, and increased task efficiency are some of the skills that are honed by motherhood and valued in the business world, especially in leadership positions. "You become more empathetic at work, better able to understand the difficulties that people face and to see that your team will also be your support network," Vivian adds.

"I have a soft spot for BMA because of the opportunity it gave me to do interesting work and start a new career. My case is not typical, but I am here today because of the firm's openness and its recognition of my professional ability," recalls Leslie fondly.

>>> *Article written by Mariana Brugger for BMA Mulher.*

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