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WHITE PAPER: Balancing Work and Family Life

“A little over four years ago, my wife, Cheryl, and I announced to the world, through our family and friends, that we were expecting our first child. It was truly one of the proudest moments of our lives. Included in that list of friends was my wife’s employer. However, within a week of the ‘good news,’ my wife was terminated from her employment because her boss feared that she might not return from maternity leave.”

(Getting Even: Why Women Don’t Get Paid Like Men—and What to Do About It, Evelyn Murphy, Touchstone, 2005)

Overview

While women have entered the work force in increasing numbers throughout the world in the last few decades, their responsibility for family care has not declined in proportion.¹ Today in many parts of the world, working mothers are part of a two-earner couple with children, and must typically juggle multiple forms of childcare and their work schedule—along with unpaid household responsibilities.² As a result, many working women in industrialized countries are “finding themselves navigating uncertain new terrain between a society that expects women to bear the primary responsibility for caring in the home and one that expects, and increasingly requires, all adults to work for pay.”³

The situation is even more difficult for working women who are single parents. As primary breadwinners and caregivers, they often do not have an “extra” adult to deal with emergencies, such as staying at home with a sick child or taking a child to the doctor.

The stark reality is that women’s personal choices are fraught with inequities and motherhood in many societies entails “substantial economic and personal sacrifices.”⁴ After becoming mothers, women “spend considerably less time at work” in order to care for children and often see no other

¹ Economy Policy Institute. EPI Briefing Paper. *An Economy That Puts Families First*. May 24, 2007, p. 3.
www.iwpr.org/pdf/bp190familyfirst.pdf

² Ibid, p. 1.

³ Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers. New America Foundation. Work & Family Program. *Helping America’s Working Parents: What Can We Learn from Europe and Canada?* November 2004, p. 1.
www.newamerica.net/publications/policy/helping_americas_working_parents

⁴ American Association of University Women. *Behind the Pay Gap*. p. 3.
www.aauw.org/research/behindPayGap.cfm

way of giving their children the care and attention they need other than staying at home.⁵ Yet children whose mothers are “not in paid work are more likely to be poor, while mothers who have interrupted their careers to care for their children are at higher risk of poverty when they are older.”⁶

If working mothers cannot achieve their desired work/family life balance not only is their income curtailed by virtue of working part-time or opting out of the workforce to care for children, but so is the economic development of countries through a reduced labor supply.⁷ Getting family-friendly workplace policies right will help reduce poverty and enhance equity between women and men. In addition, as parenting is also crucial to child development and the shape of future societies, decision makers—those in government and private firms—have many reasons to want to help working mothers—and fathers—find a better work/family balance.⁸

Work-Family Policies in the United States

Work-family reconciliation policies that are common in much of Europe are often criticized in the public rhetoric of the United States for imposing “one size fits all” government programs that restrict parental choice.⁹ Yet, in comparison with most of Europe, and to some extent, Canada, the United States offers less government support for childcare than any other industrialized nation—with U.S. policies failing to protect the role of women as mothers and caretakers.¹⁰ The latest research shows that many U.S. public policies still lag dramatically behind all high-income countries, as well as many middle- and low-income countries.¹¹ At least 168 other countries guarantee leave with income in connection with childbirth.¹² The U.S., however, guarantees no paid leave for mothers in any segment of the workforce, with only four other nations sharing this quality: Lesotho, Liberia, Papua New Guinea and Swaziland.¹³

Because the U.S. has not set a minimum standard for work leave, private employers determine whether and to what extent employees receive paid leave for illness or for parental, vacation or personal time.¹⁴ Even unpaid leave is only required by the U.S. government in businesses with 50 or more employees. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 requires these businesses to provide employees with at least 12 weeks a year of unpaid leave for birth, adoption or personal or family

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ OECD Observer. *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life: A Synthesis of Findings for OECD Countries*. March 2005, p. 9.

www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/1581/Babies_bosses.html

⁷ OECD. *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life: A Synthesis of Findings for OECD Countries*. www.oecd.org/document/45/0,3343,en_2649_33729_39651501_1_1_1_1,00.html

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers. New America Foundation. Work & Family Program. *Helping America's Working Parents: What Can We Learn from Europe and Canada?* November 2004, p. 1. www.newamerica.net/publications/policy/helping_americas_working_parents

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

¹¹ The Project on Global Working Families. *The Work, Family and Equity Index*. p. 1 www.hsph.harvard.edu/globalworkingfamilies/images/report.pdf

¹² Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO. *Professional Women: Vital Statistics, Fact sheet 2008*. www.dpeaflcio.org/programs/factsheets/fs_2008_Professional_Women.htm

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jodie Levin-Epstein. Center for Law and Social Policy. *Responsive Workplaces: The business case for employment that values fairness and families*. March 5, 2007, p. 1. www.clasp.org/publications/responsive_workplaces.pdf

illnesses.¹⁵ Employers must pay health-care coverage during the leave and return employees to their same or equivalent jobs.¹⁶

According to “A Woman’s Nation,” a 2009 study by Maria Shriver and the Center for American Progress, America’s workplace policies have not kept pace with demographic changes in the workplace.¹⁷ That report believes that the Family and Medical Leave Act must be expanded so that all workers receive paid sick days to properly care for themselves and their families.¹⁸

In October 2009, the U.S. Congress recognized the importance of employers and employees working together to achieve more balance between work and family by declaring October to be National Work and Family Month.¹⁹ The renewed endorsement by Congress coincided with the sixth anniversary of National Work & Family Month, a national educational campaign led by alliance for Work-Life Progress, an affiliate of WorldatWork, to raise awareness among employers about the value of work-life effectiveness as a business imperative.²⁰

Issues for Working Mothers

Working mothers in the paid work force confront a variety of problems and challenges that may include:

Economic recession. The ongoing global economic downturn that began in 2007 has impacted all countries and populations. Especially impacted, however, have been female heads of households, mothers who are solely responsible for maintaining the economy security of their families. Nearly one million single moms in the U.S. are out of work and their families are suffering.²¹ “Today’s family cannot afford to have either parent out of work, much less a single mother who is the sole breadwinner of the household,” according to a report by the U.S. Joint Economic Committee, “Women in the Recession: Working Mothers Face High Rates of Unemployment.”²² In addition, as more families, both dual earner couples and single mother families, are increasingly relying on the earnings of women, greater attention needs to be made to pay equity.

While women are losing jobs during the current downturn, men are also losing work in certain male-dominated industries. This has produced an interesting result in role swaps that many couples never expected. Many out-of-work fathers are forced today to dramatically alter their lives that involve spending long hours with their children.²³ Research by social scientists dating back to the recession of

¹⁵ Reference for Business. *Work-Life Balance*.

www.referenceforbusiness.com/management/Tr-Z/Work-Life-Balance.html

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Adam Zimmerman. American Association of University Women. *A Woman’s Nation Requires Work-Life Balance*. October 19, 2009.

<http://blog-aauw.org/2009/10/19/a-womans-nation-requires-work-life-balance/>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ WorldatWork. *U.S. Senate and House Declare October National Work & Family Month*. October 19, 2009. <http://www.worldatwork.org/waw/adimComment?id=35129>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ U.S. Joint Economic Committee. *JEC Reports Reveals Recession’s Devastating Impact on Working Mothers*. May 23, 2009. <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/economy-a-budget/25410-jec-report-reveals-recessions-devastating-impact-on-working-mothers-rep-carolyn-maloney>

²² Ibid.

²³ Sarah Kershaw. The New York Times. *Mister Moms (by Way of Fortune 500)*. April 22, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/23/fashion/23dads.html?pagewanted=2&r=2&ref=fashion>

1981 shows that men who spend time with their children while unemployed tend to make family time a greater priority when they do go back to work.²⁴

The economic crisis also has impacted families all over Europe. In early 2010, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe encouraged member states to reconcile “work and family life by promoting family-friendly workplaces for women and men, provide flexible working arrangements, suitable forms of parental leave and other types of care that are necessary.”²⁵

Lack of professional advancement. Working mothers who cut back their employment to part-time work often lose opportunities for promotions as well as benefits, such as health insurance.²⁶ In addition, working mothers are “hired later, fired earlier, paid less and promoted more slowly than women or men without children.”²⁷ Research shows that if a woman includes any information on her resume indicating she has children, she has a tougher time getting a job than women who don’t have children.²⁸

Researchers at Cornell University confirmed this in an experiment, creating hypothetical job seekers with strong resumes. Results found that mothers in the U.S. looking for employment were less likely to be hired, offered lower salaries and faced a perception that they would be less committed to a job than fathers or women without children. The study also discovered that U.S. companies opted to hire 84 percent of women without children, compared to only 47 percent of mothers.²⁹

Wage penalties. Salary discrimination is a central issue facing working mothers, not only when hired, but when inflexible work environments force them from their jobs.³⁰ Working mothers in the United States, who as women earn 77 cents to the dollar men earn anyway, are penalized even more when they put their careers on hold. Degreed professional women in the U.S. who spend less than one year out of the workforce saw their salaries set back 11 percent, while an absence of three or more years set them back 37 percent.³¹ In addition, the previously-mentioned Cornell study pointed to wage discrimination, with employers offering mothers \$11,000 less in starting salary on average than women without children.³²

Financial considerations. These include the cost of childcare arrangements, problems with continuity of health insurance coverage when a mother opts out of the workforce to care for her child, and loss of income related to missed work. One report indicates that working mothers in the U.S. miss an average of 17 days of work per year due to children’s healthcare needs.³³

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Parliamentary Assembly. *Investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis*. January 19, 2010.

<http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc10/EDOC12103.pdf>

²⁶ Answers. Working Mothers. www.answers.com/topic/working-mother?cat=biz-fin

²⁷ Diane Gerdeman. PatriotLedger.com. *Moms face bias in the workplace*. May 6, 2008.

www.patriotledger.com/news/x299932456/Moms-face-bias-in-the-workplace

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Daniel Aloï. Cornell University News Service. *Mothers face disadvantages in getting hired*. August 4, 2005. www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Aug05/soc.mothers.dea.html

³⁰ Christian Zappone. CNNMoney.com. *Moms rise up, fight for workplace rights*. January 11, 2007. http://money.cnn.com/2007/01/11/pf/moms_rising/index.htm

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Answers.com. *Working Mother*. www.answers.com/topic/working-mother?cat=biz-fin

In fact, millions of workers in the United States go to their jobs sick, or are unable to take care of an ill family member because they do not have paid sick leave.³⁴ For many working mothers, staying home to take care of an ill child or recover from their own illness means losing a day's wages or even jeopardizing their jobs. Children whose parents do not have paid sick leave are more likely to be sent to school with an illness, raising the likelihood that it will spread to others. In addition, these children are more likely to receive delayed treatment, resulting in worsened health outcomes. Therefore, not providing working mothers with paid sick leave is detrimental not only to their own health, but to their children's and the public.³⁵ The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) mentioned earlier, however, does provide sick leave with specific criteria.

During the H1N1 flu in 2009, almost 26 million employed Americans age 18 and over were infected, with nearly 8 million employees taking no time off from work while infected.³⁶ The data suggest that only two-thirds of private sector employees took time away from work when infected with H1N1, despite advice to stay home. "Workers without paid sick days must choose whether to go to work sick or lose pay, a choice many can't afford to make," according to a briefing paper by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.³⁷

Logistical problems. Working mothers must coordinate details of their day, including use of the family car, arranging one's hours at work, picking up and dropping off children at daycare, dealing with a sick child, and scheduling time away from work to take children to doctor's appointments.³⁸ For many families, these issues are exacerbated once school starts with shorter school days, school vacations and school closings. When childcare isn't available, women must find alternative arrangements. In poorer nations, this most impacts girls—who are at risk of being kept out of school to care for younger siblings and undertake household work. Evidence from Peru, for example, shows that because of an increase in female employment in that country, girls must stay at home so their mothers can work, thereby spending more time dedicated to household activities.³⁹ Logistical problems also affect nursing mothers who return to work while still breastfeeding. They often find little or no support, or arrangements, for expressing and storing breast milk during the working day.⁴⁰

Health issues. In addition, when working mothers are out "out of balance," they experience more stress and fatigue and tend to be absent from work more often due to these reasons.⁴¹ Worried about issues at home, they have less focus at work, and while at home are more distracted because work matters weigh on their minds. "The end result is that neither situation is healthy or productive" and is a lose-lose situation for employees, their families and their employers.⁴²

Tax/benefit systems. Tax/benefit systems also greatly impact working parents, especially working mothers. For example, "a system that taxes the income of the family unit will tax the second earner,

³⁴ Institute for Women's Policy Research. *Fact Sheet: Paid Sick Days Improve Public Health by Reducing the Spread of Disease*. February 2006. www.iwpr.org/pdf/B250.pdf

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Institute for Women's Policy Research. *Lack of Paid Sick Days Allowed N1H1 to Spread in the Workplace*. February 2010. <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B284sickatwork.pdf>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Answers.com. *Working Mother*. www.answers.com/topic/working-mother?cat=biz-fin

³⁹ UNICEF. *State of the World's Children 2007: Latin America and Caribbean edition*. p. 20. www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07_tacro.pdf

⁴⁰ Answers.com. *Working Mother*. www.answers.com/topic/working-mother?cat=biz-fin

⁴¹ Human Resources and Social Development. Canada. *Creating a Family-Friendly Workplace (Culture Change)*. www.hrsdc.gc.ca

⁴² Ibid.

often the mother, at the same rate as the father, even though her earnings are usually lower.”⁴³ In many countries, including the United States, these tax and benefit provisions discourage mothers from engaging in paid work, or working more hours.⁴⁴

On August 10, 2005, the only day she could register her two kids for school for the upcoming academic year and sign them up for an after-school program, Vickie Underwood left work at the end of her regular 8-hour shift at an Atlanta-area printing plant, politely refusing her boss’s demand that she remain for three hours of “mandatory overtime.” Despite 20 years of service for the company, including dozens of previous mandatory overtime shifts and an unblemished work record, she was fired.

(Family Values at Work: It’s About Time)

http://www.9to5.org/display_story.php?id=31

Family-Friendly Workplaces

Today, many working mothers struggle with finding family-friendly workplaces that help them reconcile work and family life. Family-friendly workplaces are those where the employer recognizes the family responsibilities of employees and accepts that such responsibilities can have an impact on employees’ working lives. It tries to “facilitate reconciliation between work and family responsibilities for its staff and to make them feel supported in balancing their work and outside work commitments.”⁴⁵

Policies and programs that can achieve this balance include family leaves, breastfeeding arrangements, childcare and daycare, and flexible working arrangements.

Family Leave Policies. Family leave policies allow employees to take time off from work to care for their families, deal with an emergency, or recuperate from a serious illness with a guaranteed job when they return.⁴⁶ Job- and benefit-protected family leaves for working parents include maternity (birth or adoption), paternity, parental, child-rearing, care for an ill child, time to accompany a child to school for the first time or to visit a child’s school, and personal leaves.⁴⁷

Family leave programs vary substantially from country to country, but many provide generous maternity, paternity or parental leave during the first year after the birth or adoption of a child.⁴⁸ This leave is typically funded through some combination of national sickness, maternity and other social insurance funds.⁴⁹ The role of fathers is also key. In an increasing number of OECD countries, fathers

⁴³OECD Observer. *Babies and bosses*. March 2005, p.10

www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/1581/Babies_bosses.html

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ International Labor Organization. *The family friendly workplace*. Information sheet no. WF-3, p. 1.

www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/pdf/infosheets/wf-3.pdf

⁴⁶ Sloan Work and Family Research Network. Glossary. *Family Leave, Definitions of*.

<http://wfnetwork.bc.edu>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers. New America Foundation. Work & Family Program. *Helping America’s Working Parents: What Can We Learn from Europe and Canada?* November 2004, p. 4.

www.newamerica.net/publications/policy/helping_americas_working_parents

⁴⁹ Ibid.

can take paternity leave and/or are eligible to share parental leave with mothers, as policy is trying to get more fathers engaged in providing personal care for their children.⁵⁰

- **Maternity Leave.** Maternity leave is a job-protected leave from employment for employed women at the time they are due to give birth and following childbirth (or adoption in some countries).⁵¹ The International Labor Organization created the first global standard in 1919 aimed at protecting working women before and after childbirth: the Maternity Protection Convention.⁵² The standard was revised in 1952 and now calls for a minimum 12-week leave, although a 14-week leave is recommended.⁵³

Currently, 119 countries meet the ILO standard of 12 weeks with 62 of those countries providing for 14 weeks or more.⁵⁴ Most developed countries provide for between two and six months' maternity leave, paid at 80-100 percent of the women's previous earnings.⁵⁵ Maternity leave is generally funded through a contributory social security or social insurance policy, paid by employees and employers with government contributions.⁵⁶ Brazil offers working women 120 days of maternity leave paid at 100 percent; Chile, 18 weeks at 100 percent; Peru, 90 days at 100 percent; and Japan, 14 weeks paid at 60 percent.⁵⁷ In developing countries, maternity leave is most commonly two to four months paid at 60 to 100 percent of previous earnings.⁵⁸

In February, 2009, a massive extension of maternity leave across Europe was voted for by the Women's Rights Committee of the European Parliament to make it compulsory for employers to pay mothers for a minimum of 20 weeks on full pay.⁵⁹

- **Parental Leave.** While maternity leave with employment protection has been widespread in OECD countries for many years, parental leave is a more recent development.⁶⁰ Parental leave has often been defined as being leave in addition to maternity/paternity leave to allow parents to take care of an infant or young child.⁶¹

Parental leaves are "gender-neutral, job-protected leaves from employment that usually follow maternity leaves and permit either men or women to share the leave or choose which

⁵⁰ OECD Observer. *Babies and bosses*. March 2005, p.10

www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/1581/Babies_bosses.html

⁵¹ Sloan Work and Family Research Network. Glossary. *Maternity Leave, Definitions of*. <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu>

⁵² International Labor Organization. *More than 120 Nations Provide Paid Maternity Leave*. www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Press_releases/lang-en/WCMS_008009/index.htm

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ APESMA Professional Women's Network. *Paid maternity leave entitlements around the world*. April 2001. www.apesma.asn.au/women/articles/paid_maternity_leave_june_01.asp

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Sloan Work and Family Research Network. Glossary. *Parental Leave, Definitions of*. <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ David Charter. Timesonline. *EU plans longer maternity leave*. February 24, 2010. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article7038796.ece>

⁶⁰ OECD. *Balancing Work and Family Life; Helping Parents into Paid Employment*. 2001. Chapter 4, p. 145. www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/12/2079435.pdf

⁶¹ Sloan Work and Family Research Network. Glossary. *Parental Leave, Definitions of*. <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu>

of them will use it.”⁶² Recently, in some countries, some portion of the parental leave is reserved for fathers on a “use-it-or-lose-it” basis, to create an incentive for fathers to play a more active parenting role.⁶³

In most Western countries, parental leave is available for those who have worked for their current employer for a certain period of time.⁶⁴ Sweden is one country that provides generous parental leave: all working parents are entitled to 18 months paid leave per child, the cost being shared between employer and state.⁶⁵ In 2000, parental leave was greatly expanded in Canada from 10 weeks to 35 weeks, divided as desired between two parents. This is in addition to 15 weeks maternity leave, giving a total possible period of 50 weeks paid leave for a mother.⁶⁶

In Great Britain, legislation was introduced earlier in 2010 to give parents more choice and flexibility in how they use maternity and paternity leave. New fathers could take advantage of additional paternity leave and pay during the second six months of the child’s life, if the mother wished to return to work with maternity leave outstanding. This would enable parents to share a period of paid leave between them, giving families greater flexibility in how they choose to look after their children.⁶⁷

- **Pregnancy leave.** Pregnancy leave is different than maternity leave. Pregnancy leave is medical leave that is provided in connection with a pregnancy-related disability, either before or after the birth of a baby.⁶⁸ Companies in the United States with 15 or more employees are subject to the federal Pregnancy Discrimination Act, part of the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Act provides that women affected by pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions must be treated the same as other applicants and employees on the basis of their ability or inability to work.⁶⁹ The law protects women against being fired, being refused a job or being denied a promotion merely because they are pregnant.
- **Child rearing leave.** Child rearing leaves from employment were developed in some countries as a supplement to maternity leaves or as a variation on parental leaves. This benefit is longer than maternity leaves and paid at a much lower level, and is often described as a kind of “mother’s wage.” The cash benefit may be the equivalent of the government subsidy for out-of-home early childhood care—and is used either to supplement income while one parent is at home or to purchase private care.⁷⁰

Childcare/Day Care. Today, the employment of more mothers with young children requires that parents use outside childcare services. The term “childcare” is used to describe the care provided to a

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ The Department of Business Innovation & Skills. *New Help for Parents*. January 28, 2010. <http://nds.coi.gov.uk/clientmicrosite/content/Detail.aspx?ReleaseID=410677&NewsAreaID=2&ClientID=431>

⁶⁸ Business Owner’s Toolkit. *Pregnancy/Parental Leave*. www.toolkit.com/small_business_guide/sbg.aspx?nid=P05_4402

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Columbia University. The Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth and Family Policies. *Mother’s Day: More than Candy and Flowers, Working Parents Need Paid Time-Off*. Spring 2002. www.childpolicyintl.org/issuebrief/issuebrief5.htm

child by someone other than a parent or guardian.⁷¹ Care can be provided in a licensed childcare center, by a licensed family care provider, or by an informal caregiver.⁷²

In many countries, good childcare provisions exist, but they are not always affordable and may not suit working hours.⁷³ In the United States, good childcare can be hard to find, leaving parents to create a patchwork of caregivers during working hours.⁷⁴ Concern about childcare has grown, not only in the United States, which offers few provisions for working mothers, but also in OECD countries—reflecting a demand for “quality childcare of a sort which facilitates the social and educational development of young children.”⁷⁵

Under Sweden’s “leisure-time care” program, children receive before- and after school care until age 12, with sliding scale fees. In Mexico, childcare is a constitutional right, with insured mothers who are employed and employed persons who have legal custody of children entitled to free employer-provided day care until children reach age 4.⁷⁶ Japan provides non-government approved day care centers, as well as government approved day care centers for children up to 6 years of age and nursery school for 3 to 6 years. All governmentally approved day care centers receive subsidies from national, local and municipal governments.⁷⁷

Like leave benefits, early childhood education and day care services in European countries are financed largely by the government.⁷⁸ Care for very young children, and preschool children is partially funded through parental co-payments that cover an average of 18 percent of costs.⁷⁹ Because co-payments are scaled to family income, lower-income families typically pay nothing, while more affluent families pay no more than 10 to 15 percent of their income.⁸⁰

In the United States, childcare is overwhelmingly “private in both provision and financing.”⁸¹ In the middle 1990s, the U.S. government spent about \$550 per child under school age on childcare assistance through subsidies and public preschool programs.⁸² “Unfortunately, the U.S. gets what it pays for. Minimally-regulated, private childcare arrangements provide uneven and generally low-quality care.”⁸³ Today in the U.S., 48 percent of employed families with children under 13 pay for

⁷¹ Labor Project for Working Families. *What is Child Care?*

www.working-families.org/familyfriendly/childcare.html

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ OECD Observer. *Babies and bosses*. March 2005, p.11

www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/1581/Babies_bosses.html

⁷⁴ Labor Project for Working Families. *Quick Facts*.

www.working-families.org/familyfriendly/childcare_quickfacts.html

⁷⁵ OECD. *Childcare in OECD Countries*. Chapter 5, p. 123

www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/35/4343133.pdf

⁷⁶ Working Mother Magazine. *Focus on the 100 Best—Global Snapshot*.

www.workingmother.com/web?service=direct/1/ViewArticlePage/dlinkFullArticle&sp=49&sp=94

⁷⁷ Nobuko Nagase. Ochanomizu University, Tokyo. *Balancing Work and Family in Japan: Inertia and a Need for Change*.

www.asiapacificresearch.ca/caprn/cjsp_project/japan.pdf

⁷⁸ Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers. New America Foundation. Work & Family Program. *Helping America’s Working Parents: What Can We Learn from Europe and Canada?* November 2004, p. 1.

www.newamerica.net/publications/policy/helping_americas_working_parents

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.10

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.11

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

childcare, with low-income families spending 14 percent of their earnings on childcare while families at or below the poverty line pay, on average, 18 percent.⁸⁴

An attempt to help working mothers with childcare has come as a result of President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.⁸⁵ The Act helps low-income parents obtain the childcare they need and helps children get the early learning they need to succeed. The Act includes block grants for child care and development and for Title I education programs, among others.⁸⁶

The availability of affordable, quality childcare outside the home increases the probability that women will enter the labor force.⁸⁷ A study conducted in poor areas in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, found that access to public childcare facilities is the main factor in enabling mothers to work outside the home, in full- or part-time employment.⁸⁸ As more mothers are able to work, they are able to raise their families' income and living standards.⁸⁹

Breastfeeding Policies. As more women enter the workforce in greater numbers, special support is needed to assist working mothers in being able to breastfeed. Research shows, however, that going back to work is one of the biggest barriers in continuing to breastfeed. Challenges for working mothers who want to breastfeed include lack of break time, or inadequate facilities for pumping and storing human milk.⁹⁰

Breastfeeding is a right of mothers and is a fundamental component in assuring a child's right to food, health and care.⁹¹ Exclusive breastfeeding for six months is crucial for the health of mothers and infants worldwide. Breastfeeding protects babies from diarrhea and acute respiratory infections and stimulates immune systems.⁹² If every baby were exclusively breastfed from birth for six months, an estimated 1.3 million additional lives would be saved and millions more enhanced each year.⁹³ In addition, women who breastfeed have lower incidences breast and ovarian cancer.⁹⁴

At least 107 countries protect working women's right to breastfeed. One hour or more per day is provided in 100 of the countries guaranteeing the right to breastfeed.⁹⁵ In at least 73 of these the

⁸⁴Labor Project for Working Families. *Quick Facts*.

www.working-families.org/familyfriendly/childcare_quickfacts.html

⁸⁵ National Women's Law Center. *How the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Addresses Women's Needs*. February 13, 2009.

<http://www.nwlc.org/details.cfm?id=3431§ion=child+and+family+support>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ UNICEF. *State of the World's Children 2007: Latin America and Caribbean edition*. p. 20.

www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07_tacro.pdf

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 20

⁸⁹ Economy Policy Institute. EPI Briefing Paper. *An Economy That Puts Families First*. May 24, 2007, p. 3.

www.iwpr.org/pdf/bp190familyfirst.pdf

⁹⁰ Business Backs Breastfeeding. A program of Abbott in partnership with Working Mother Media. *A Flexible Workplace Program for Breastfeeding Mothers*. p. 3.

www.abbottnutrition.com/resources/en-US/news_and_media/media_center/businesspercent20backpercent20breastfeeding.pdf

⁹¹ UNICEF. *Nutrition: Infant and Young Child Feeding and Care*

www.unicef.org/nutrition/index_breastfeeding.html

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ M. Sara Rosenthal, Ph.D., WebMd. *Breastfeeding in the Workplace*.

www.webmed.com/content/Article/87/99614.htm

⁹⁵ Ibid.

breaks are paid.⁹⁶ The U.S. does not guarantee the right to breastfeed, even though breastfeeding is proven to reduce infant mortality.

All employers should be encouraged to have a written policy about the promotion and protection of breastfeeding in the workplace.⁹⁷ Some employers may choose to offer their employees the options of working part-time or telecommuting for the first four to six months when lactation is most time-intensive.⁹⁸ In addition, workplaces should provide a private room for either expressing milk or nursing a baby; a comfortable chair; electrical outlet and small table for breast pumps; access to a sink to wash hands and equipment; small, secure refrigerator for milk storage; protected breaks every three hours for pumping; and non-harassment policy for breastfeeding mothers.⁹⁹

Companies that adopt breastfeeding support programs create a win-win situation, including: cost savings of up to \$4 for every \$1 invested in breastfeeding support; less illness among breastfed children of employees; reduced absenteeism to care for ill children; lower healthcare costs (an average of \$400 per baby over the first year); improved employee productivity; and higher morale and greater company loyalty.¹⁰⁰

Flexible Work Arrangements. Providing opportunities for flexible work arrangements—such as flextime, compressed workweek, part-time, job share and telecommuting—can create a more productive and effective work environment and help workers, especially mothers, to experience less stress than those without such arrangements.¹⁰¹

Nearly 80 percent of employees said they would like to have more flexible work options and would use them if there were no negative consequences at work.¹⁰² Despite that high percentage, flexible work schedules are available to less than one-third of workers in the United States.¹⁰³ In addition, with the increasing numbers of women and mothers in the workforce, less than one-quarter (22 percent) report that their work schedule suits their child care needs.¹⁰⁴

This situation, however, has been changing due to the current economic recession. A new study released in 2009 by the Families and Work Institute found that in the face of the recession, and a time of cost cutting, the overwhelming majority of U.S. employers (94%) are maintaining or increasing their workplace flexibility programs.¹⁰⁵ In fact, a quarter of employers (26%) specifically are using

⁹⁶ The Project on Global Working Families. *The Work, Family and Equity Index*. p. 3.

www.hsph.harvard.edu/globalworkingfamilies/images/report.pdf

⁹⁷ American Academy of Family Physicians. *Breastfeeding Position Paper*.

www.aafp.org/online/en/home/policy/policies/b/breastfeedingpositionpaper.html

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Business Backs Breastfeeding: A program of Abbott in partnership with Working Mother Media.. *A Flexible Workplace Program for Breastfeeding Mothers*. p. 3.

www.abbottnutrition.com/resources/en-US/news_and_media/media_center/businesspercent20backpercent20breastfeeding.pdf

¹⁰¹ Georgetown University Law Center. *Workplace Flexibility 2010. Meeting the Needs of Today's Families: The Role of Workplace Flexibility*. p. 7.

www.workplaceflexibility2010.org

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ellen Galinsky, James T. Bond. Families and Work Institute. *The Impact of the Recession on Employers*. p. 1. July 23, 2009.

<http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/Recession2009.pdf>

flexible workplace options – from reduced work weeks to telecommuting – to minimize the needs for layoffs.¹⁰⁶

Flexible work options can include a variety of schedules, such as:¹⁰⁷

- **Flextime:** Employees choose starting and ending hours, but usually must be at work during a core period when all employees are present.
- **Flexible week:** A variation on the standard workday and workweek, such as fewer but longer days or shorter days in a six-day week.
- **Work-at-home or Telecommuting:** Some or all work done at a location other than the regular worksite, usually at an employee's home.
- **Flexible Reduced-Time:** These options involve fewer hours than full time and can affect salary, benefits and career advancement to varying degrees. These can include job-sharing, where two people share or divide the responsibilities of one full-time job, and part-time work, the most familiar to employers and most sought after by employees among the reduced-hours options.
- **Part-time work.** Part-time work is the preferred form of employment among many mothers of young children in a large number of OECD countries, even though working part-time generally offers lower earnings and career prospects than full-time work.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the growth of part-time work in many countries has been “significant and steady in the past 10 years and its availability has resulted in greater female labor participation rates with women making up the majority of the world's part-time workers—between 60 percent and 90 percent.”¹⁰⁹ In the European Union, 83 percent of part-time workers are women.¹¹⁰ Part-time work for women, however, is one of the main factors predicting the wage gap between men and women with women over-represented in part-time positions that are mostly low paid.¹¹¹

Flexible Options Work

Overall, flexible work options have been shown to benefit families and businesses. They allow working mothers to be more involved in their children's education and care, and have been shown to increase worker productivity and decrease costs to businesses.¹¹² Many employers who offer workplace flexibility say these practices improve their bottom line with lower health-care costs, higher rates of worker retention, and fewer employee absences.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Catalyst. Info Brief. *Flexible Working Arrangements*. www.catalystwomen.org

¹⁰⁸ OECD. *Balancing Work and Family Life; Helping Parents into Paid Employment*. 2001. Chapter 4, p. 145. www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/12/2079435.pdf

¹⁰⁹ International Labor Organization. *Equality at Work: Tackling the Challenge*, 2007. www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm

¹¹⁰ International Labor Organization. *Facts on women at work*. www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_067595.pdf

¹¹¹ International Trade Union Confederation. *The Global Gender Pay Gap*. February 2008, p. 48. www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/gap-1.pdf

¹¹² Georgetown University Law Center. *Workplace Flexibility 2010. Meeting the Needs of Today's Families: The Role of Workplace Flexibility*. p. 7. www.workplaceflexibility2010.org

¹¹³ Jodie Levin-Epstein. Center for Law and Social Policy. *Responsive Workplaces: The business case for employment that values fairness and families*. March 5, 2007, p. 4. www.clasp.org/publications/responsive_workplaces.pdf

In fact, flexible work arrangements and time-flexible policies have often been cited as mechanisms that successfully reduce unplanned absences from work.¹¹⁴ In one study, 63 percent of workers using flexible work arrangements said they were absent less often as a result of their flexible work schedule.¹¹⁵ Reducing unscheduled absences is particularly important to businesses given the high cost. In 2005, 2.5 percent of organizations reported that absenteeism was a problem in their organization, costing around \$660 per employee.¹¹⁶ For some large employers, absenteeism resulted in a loss of more than \$1 million per year.¹¹⁷

In addition, governments have an important role in fostering responsive workplaces for employees of all incomes, and should partner with businesses to make flexible scheduling commonplace and foster other family-friendly supports.¹¹⁸ In the absence of supportive public programs and regulations, working mothers are struggling to craft private solutions that reconcile work and family responsibilities.¹¹⁹

Conclusions

Even as women enter the labor force in increasing numbers throughout the world, they still undertake the majority of unpaid housework and childcare. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult for working mothers to reconcile employment and family responsibilities, particularly where no social supports—such as quality affordable childcare or extended family members willing to look after children—are available.¹²⁰

Mothers cannot be expected to enter paid employment in sufficiently large numbers, without appropriate financial incentives to encourage them to do so and unless they can ensure adequate care for their children.¹²¹ The skills of women are increasingly needed for national economies to grow and therefore it behooves governments to increase the employment rates of mothers.

Working mothers can ensure adequate resources for their families and stem the rising tide of poverty among women. Not only are workplace and policy changes from governments and private industries required, but cultural changes are needed as well. Gender role expectations about what women should and shouldn't do still exist and play into how and where women work.¹²² The myths and expectations about what women and mothers should be—what a good woman is and isn't, and what a good mom

¹¹⁴ Georgetown University Law Center. Workplace Flexibility 2010. *Meeting the Needs of Today's Families: The Role of Workplace Flexibility*. p. 7. www.workplaceflexibility2010.org

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Jodie Levin-Epstein. Center for Law and Social Policy. *Responsive Workplaces: The business case for employment that values fairness and families*. March 5, 2007, p. 4. www.clasp.org/publications/responsive_workplaces.pdf

¹¹⁹ Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers. New America Foundation. Work & Family Program. *Helping America's Working Parents: What Can We Learn from Europe and Canada?* November 2004, p. 1. www.newamerica.net/publications/policy/helping_americas_working_parents

¹²⁰ UNICEF. *State of the World's Children 2007: Latin America and Caribbean edition*. p. 20. www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07_tacro.pdf

¹²¹ OECD. *Balancing Work and Family Life: Helping Parents into Paid Employment*. 2001. www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/12/2079435.pdf

¹²² National Organization for Women California. *Women in the workplace: Striving for Work/Life Balance*. <http://website.canow.org/she/workplacebreak.php>

is and isn't—permeate society.¹²³ Without cultural attitude changes, working mothers will continue to struggle to balance work and family life responsibilities.

Soroptimist programs

Soroptimist is an international volunteer organization for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world. Clubs undertake a number of different projects to confront realities facing women, both locally and throughout the world. Projects help women on a variety of fronts that impact their working lives, including: providing education and job-skills training, which leads to better employment opportunities; confronting domestic violence in the workplace; and helping women in the wake of natural and man-made disasters. As an organization, Soroptimist supports the following programs:

Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards—The [Women's Opportunity Awards](#) program is Soroptimist's major project. The awards improve the lives of women by giving them the resources they need to upgrade their education, skills and employment prospects. Each year, Soroptimist clubs in 19 countries and territories assist women in overcoming personal difficulties and improving their lives through education and skills training. The women, who provide the primary source of financial support for their families, may use the cash award to offset any costs associated with their efforts to attain higher education, including, books, childcare and transportation. Club recipients become eligible for additional cash awards at other levels of the organization, including three \$10,000 finalist awards.

Many Women's Opportunity Award recipients have overcome enormous obstacles in their quest for a better life, including poverty, domestic violence and substance abuse. Each year, more than \$1 million is disbursed in awards at various levels of the organization, to help women achieve their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families. Since the Women's Opportunity Awards program began in 1972, it is estimated that \$20 million has been disbursed and more than 22,500 women have been assisted.

Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence—This ongoing effort raises awareness about domestic violence as a workplace concern. Soroptimist club members distribute hotline cards containing local contact information for domestic violence shelters and other services. Each year, tens of thousands of domestic violence hotline cards are distributed in workplaces throughout the world. In addition, clubs also hold lectures in their workplaces to draw attention to the issue of domestic violence as a workplace concern; lobby their employers to institute policies and include domestic violence information in their personnel handbooks; and hold seminars for local businesses about the costs associated with domestic violence in the workplace. As working women, Soroptimists understand the importance of reaching out to women in the workplace. As such, Soroptimist developed comprehensive guidelines called the Soroptimist Domestic Violence Workplace Policies. A [white paper](#) on this issue is also available on the website.

Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls—Often the abilities and ambitions of individual Soroptimist clubs exceed their financial resources. The organization introduced the Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls in 1997 to assist with community projects that improve the lives of women and girls. Each year, grants are given to clubs working on projects that help foster economic independence among women and girls. For the 2009-2010 club year, Soroptimist funded \$175,000 in club grants to 33 Soroptimist clubs for new or ongoing projects. Projects have included funding a micro-enterprise artisan project for low-income women, teaching marketable job skills to women with disabilities, and providing services to women who are domestic abuse survivors.

¹²³ Ibid.

Listed below are some examples of grant-funded Soroptimist projects that address the issue of work/family balance by providing women with flexible work options, access to affordable and innovative child care services and by supporting young mothers to continue their education.

Hope Baguio, Philippines

Hub of Hope

In 2008, Soroptimist International of Hope Baguio received a \$10,000 Soroptimist Club Grant to establish a childcare center with a breast milk bank, thus supporting women to return to work and still breast feed their child. This is a neighborhood pilot project developed and managed by Soroptimists.

Ibarra, Ecuador

Promising Future

In 2008, Soroptimist International of Ibarra received an \$8,500 Soroptimist Club Grant. The grant funds are being used to support education and vocational training for teenage mothers. Soroptimists are also serving as mentors for the young mothers.

Salt Lake City, UT, USA

Possibilities

In 2008, Soroptimist International of Salt Lake City received a \$7,000 Soroptimist Club Grant to create a mentoring and education program for teenage mothers. Soroptimists serve as mentors and teach workshops on personal finance, goal setting, and education and career planning.

San Juan, Philippines

Bags for Life

In 2008, Soroptimist International of San Juan received a \$6,000 Soroptimist Club Grant to establish a “work from home” skills training program that provides women, especially those with children, the opportunity to work flexible hours at home. Soroptimists facilitate and manage the program.

Playas de Tijuana, Mexico

Women Working for Their Future

In 2006, Soroptimist International of Playas de Tijuana received a \$10,000 Soroptimist Club Grant. They used this grant to remodel and expand a day care center for the children of low-income women attending school or job training courses. Soroptimist further supported these women by volunteering their time as child care providers.