



House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Family and Human Services: Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family.

Terms of Reference:

1. the financial, career and social disincentives to starting families;

The financial impacts on starting a family are enormous and a government wanting to encourage a population increase would need to consider policy measures that supported the entire family unit, including relatives that act as carers, in this regard. The current system of family allowance is not only inadequate financially for the average to just-less-than-average family income, but the system of estimation is also an imperfect arrangement causing anxieties for families regarding the accuracy of their estimates. We have found this especially so when for whatever reason we have not had fixed regular incomes, which is often the case when the primary care giver begins to return to work, usually on a part time or casual basis.

Career disincentives are implicit in the removal of a carer from the workforce and the interruption this can bring to a career. Although the skills one can gain from parenting are often an asset- time management, prioritising, negotiation to name a few- parenting is rarely regarded as truly valuable for professional development. Re-entering the workforce can be difficult as the primary carer has the added burden of trying to catch up with professional developments.

Socially parenting can be very isolating especially in the first twelve months when the child's care needs are greatest. As a first time parent I was ill prepared for the social hiatus parenting created. Prior to giving birth I always regarded the swapping of parenting and babies stories as "mindless chatter". Once I had experienced the isolation of parenting, I was significantly more understanding of the desire to connect with an adult on any level.

2. making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce;

Obviously child care is a major issue as are flexible working conditions for both parents.

There is also the need to provide the opportunity for slow reintroduction into the work force and for professional 'catch up' with changing practices in the workplace.

Single parents are especially vulnerable to pressure to return to work while aiming to provide a balanced family life. Being a single parent usually means that there is less capacity for flexibility in childcare arrangements.

3. the impact of taxation and other matters on families in the choices they make in balancing work and family life.

One of the impacts of current taxation rates upon a choice our family has made has been in regard to working a second job. The current taxation rate for second jobs has meant we choose not to work second jobs because the financial gain is so little that we are unable to justify the extra stress on the family in terms of time apart over the opportunities the extra income would allow us. For example, if the extra income was such that it would contribute meaningfully to the expense of a trip to somewhere that would contribute to our children's education, and after all family holidays are a rare opportunity to share in the education of your children, the time away from the family while earning the income would be offset by the value of the experience able to be afforded.