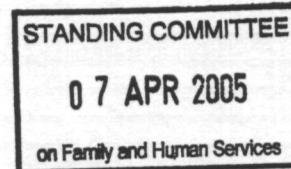




THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

April 7, 2005

Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
The Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP (Chair)
"Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family"
fhs.reps@aph.gov.au



Dear Madam Chairperson and Committee Members:

We wish to thank the Committee and its members for the opportunity of making this submission. We wish the Committee well in making its final report to Cabinet.

The recommendations we have submitted are based upon our analysis of data, only a portion of which we have included in this submission.

As the Committee contemplates the various submissions it receives in response to its **"Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family"**, and in particular as it considers the 'recommendations' it will make, may we respectfully suggest that it give serious consideration to the following.

- **Background Data on Family Breakdown/Fertility Rate/Mothers in the Workforce and Lone Mothers/Welfare Ratios**

A. Family Breakdown and Children

There are now more than 1.1 million divorced adults in Australia. In 2003-4, 47,379 Australians filed for divorce. This is an increase of 40% over the 2002-3 figure of 33,730.¹

50,000 Australian Children have their world turned upside down each year through divorce.²

As many as 1 in 4 Australian children may be growing up without a father in the home.

In 2001, 25% of children experienced parental breakdown by the age of 15. In 1946 the figure was 7%.

In 2001, 72% of children were born to married parents. In 1946 it was 98%.

In 2001, 16% of children were born to defacto couples. In 1946 it was 0%.

In 2001, 18% of children were living with their mother, due to separation. In 1985 it was 9%.³

Only 28% of Australian families now have a sole-male breadwinner.⁴

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B. Fertility Rate

The current fertility rate of 1.73 children per woman is significantly below the required replacement rate of 2.1.⁵

The major reason given by women for not wanting children: "Lack of recognition, by the community, for the work mothers do."⁶

The number of women aged 20-24 having children has halved over the last two decades as young women delay getting married. The median age for women getting married is now 27.⁷

Since 1986 there has been no drop in the 85% of married women willing to give birth. These women still have at least one child between the ages of 35-39. **It would seem that the greatest encouragement for women to have children is still marriage.**

C. Mothers in the Workforce and Lone Mothers

Forty-six percent of mothers whose youngest child is 0-4 years **are already in the workforce.**⁸

The ratio of women workers to the total female adult population reached a record 53.6% in January 2005, compared with just 39.8% when the bureau commenced keeping monthly employment figures in 1978. By contrast, the ratio of male workers to the total male population has slipped from 75.1 to 68.2%.⁹

Of the 10.7% of Australian families that have a lone parent, 83.3% are lone mothers.¹⁰

Single mothers constitute the highest growth in the jobless category.¹¹

D. Welfare Ratios

In 1965 only 3 in every 100 working-age adults depended on welfare payments as their main sole source of income. By the year 2004 that figure had climbed to 16 in every 100 working-age adults.

In the 1960s there were 22 people in work to support each working age person living on welfare benefits. In 2004 there were only 5 people in work for each person living on welfare.

Household economy is becoming increasingly dependent upon welfare.¹²

Should this trend continue, then future governments could struggle to retain the confidence of the electorate when faced with the obvious but unpopular policies necessary to cope with such a situation.

Recommendations:

"Making it easy for parents who so wish to return to the work force" will not be in the nation's longer-term economic or social best interest.

Based upon the above data it is not unreasonable to believe that the majority of parents that will be drawn back into the work force will be mothers of young children. The financial benefit to the family may be minimal, the biggest winners being the child-care industry and the taxation office.

It is hard to see how the children and the family are advantaged by this approach.

If the Committee's focus is to be solely upon the short term economic 'benefits' then ultimately as a nation we could be headed for an increase in family breakdowns and an inevitable worsening social environment, exacerbated by an even poorer (less than 1.73) fertility rate, which in the longer term could mean a potentially weaker economic climate and an increasing worker to welfare recipient ratio.

The government is responsible to pursue a sound economic agenda for the prosperity of present and future generations; however, it is also responsible to understand not only the direction in which it is moving, but also the destination of that direction, not only in economic, but also in social terms.

The cost of taking mothers out of the home will be too high a price for individual children, families, the community and ultimately the nation to pay.

“We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.”¹³

- **Is the Price of Prosperity Too High? Australia's growing economy may be proportional to the declining strength of bedrock institutions such as the family.**

While we are becoming a nation of asset-rich people, we are ceasing to value the things that MONEY CANNOT BUY. As a nation we are experiencing increased anti-social behavior and poor life-style choices. For example:

A. Sexual Assault

In 2004, NSW Rape Crisis Centre received 11,000 calls. The ABS estimates that only 20% of rapes are reported. This means that in NSW alone, the number of sexual assaults may be as high as 60,000 every year.¹⁴

14% of females and 3% of males had experienced rape or sexual assault.

33% of females and 20% of males personally knew of people who had been raped or sexually abused.

14% of females and 7% of males said a boyfriend/girlfriend had tried to force them into sex.

6% of females and 5% of males said a boyfriend/girlfriend had ACTUALLY forced them into sex.¹⁵

B. Teen Self-abuse

More than 1 in 20 teenagers deliberately harm themselves. A survey of 3757 Queensland high school students showed that females were 7 times more likely to harm themselves than males.

The main cause of this behavior is attributed to similar behavior by friends and family members.¹⁶

C. Alcohol and Tobacco Consumption among Children

Parents are the most common source of alcohol, especially for 12-15 year olds. 20% of males and 17% of females aged 14-17 are regular weekly drinkers. Thirty-three percent of 14-17 year olds have put themselves at risk of alcohol-related harm at least once in the past twelve months.¹⁷

More than 70% of teenagers between 14-19 years admit to drinking. More than one in every three of these young people admits to consuming dangerous levels of alcohol.¹⁸

Forty-four percent of 12-year-olds and almost 60% of 13-year-olds had drunk alcohol in the past twelve months. Regular drinking by girls aged 12-15 years has risen since 1999. Smoking among 12-year-old girls is on the rise.¹⁹

A well-known retail giant sells approximately 2.3 billion cigarettes each year. Based on the minimal estimate of 5.5 minutes of life lost per cigarette smoked, then this retailer can be said to be responsible for 24,000 years of Australian lives lost each year.

Using estimates of the US Surgeon-General's report on smoking, the consumption of 2.3 billion cigarettes could account for 1600 deaths in Australia each year.²⁰

New South Wales' poorest families would save \$60 per week if they could quit smoking. The next poorest would save \$85 per week.²¹

D. Illicit Drug Use

Pre-teen drug use is on the increase. Nine percent of students smoked pot during the month of September 2004.²²

E. Gambling

In 2004, \$15.3 billion was LOST by Australian gamblers.²³

F. The Sexualisation of Our Children's Social World

Experts say that figures released as part of an ongoing study clearly indicate that the social world of young Australians is sexualised before they reach their teen years.²⁴

G. Domestic Violence

The greatest cause of health problems among young and middle-aged women in Australia, domestic violence, inflicts more damage than smoking or obesity. Physical and sexual abuse leads to more illness and kills more women under 45 than any other recognized health risk.

Depression, anxiety, suicide attempts and chronic pain are among the many health problems faced by women exposed to violence. Mental illness is the greatest health problem faced by abused women, accounting for 60% of the burden of disease caused by domestic violence.²⁵

Note: Children witness up to 90% of male-to-female domestic violence and are themselves 15 times more likely than the national average to be exposed to neglect and abuse.²⁶

More than 250,000 Australian children live in homes affected by domestic violence. **The total annual cost to the economy is around \$8.1 billion.**²⁷

H. Diminishing Parenting Skills

Fifty-two percent of parents of children aged 0-5 years, where at least one parent was working, reported that balancing work and family had a “*medium to high negative impact*” on their ability to be a good parent.²⁸

“Parenting has become a cause of huge anxiety. Many appear not to know how to interact with their children anymore...”

“A year ago, the Australian Childhood Foundation published research that showed that parents were suffering a huge lack of confidence in their parenting skills – across all socio-economic groups. Three out of four didn’t find that parenting ‘came naturally’ to them...”

“Parents will routinely distract a child with sweets, toys, ballet classes, anything rather than spend time talking to him or her...”

“...play is a crucial part of early years development...”

“It’s just that parents don’t see it (play) as part of their job anymore. Hence the endless round of ferrying children to classes...”

“...too many children are left to vegetate in front of the TV or computer screen...”

“Once at school, teachers are complaining that it is they who have to instill discipline and good manners in children who should have been taught these most basic of parenting lessons at home...”²⁹

I. Four Out of Five Australian Families No Longer Eat Dinner Together

Medical experts say that this practice puts children’s health at risk as it encourages bad eating habits. Australian child psychologist John Irvine says that dinners are an important part of a child’s development for learning and communication with people of all ages.

2.7 million parents blame work commitments.³⁰

Families that eat meals together regularly may help teenagers improve their school grades and prevent them from using drugs. The more meals a family eats together, the less likely teenagers are to suffer from depression and attempt suicide.

Family meal times offer routine and consistency, and provide an opportunity to socialize with children and teach them about communication skills, manners, nutrition and good eating habits.³¹

Recommendations:

“The impact of...*other matters* on families in the choices they make in balancing work and family life” need very careful consideration by the Committee.

We would suggest that real work/family ‘balance’ is not simply a matter of getting parents’ schedules effectively coordinated, or simply by having enough child care places, or even by government subsidy of child care. The arithmetic of work/family balance is much more dependent upon commitment to marriage and family values than it is to slick timetabling and efficient ‘handovers’.

Employers can, and perhaps must make a significant contribution. They have placed unusually high demands for availability and flexibility upon their employees. We have allowed our employer organizations to successfully deregulate our lives without seeking appropriate ‘compensation’. (See attached “Navigating a Successful Course”.)

It is entirely likely that over the past four decades in particular, we (society) have been sold some questionable ‘values’ by various self-serving interest groups, that in reality are proving (at great cost to us all) to be little more than ‘mutton dressed up as lamb’.

Consumerism, individualism and social engineering may have taken us down a costly road that is difficult from which to return. Fortunately, not impossible!

When a man and woman have entered into a family relationship (we would say, preferably through marriage), each having a commitment to give 100% to the partnership by way of love, mutual respect, trust, consideration, patience, understanding and a realization that the roles of a mother and father are complementary yet different, this couple will find that their ability to discover ways to balance the demands of work and family will flow from their commitment to the success of their marriage and sustained by the environment that they have created in their home, however modest that home might be.

Is it possible that early intervention can be assisted through the education system? If these matters (Work/Family Balance) are of such vital importance, then they should be included in our secondary education curriculum as mandatory study in high school.

To be positive, the value of a good education would only be enhanced if it were to be supplemented by curriculum that better prepared our greatest national asset, our youth, to successfully navigate life.

We have an outstanding Federal Minister for Education and Training. Why not put it to him?

We would encourage the Committee to employ its best efforts to find ways to assist Australians to make family choices based upon true principles.

We have included two publications for your reference:

1. **“The Family - A Proclamation to the World”** - A statement on the Family by The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

2. "Navigating a Successful Course" - This brief document contains some of the work on 'Harmonising Work and Family' by Graeme Russell, Dr E Jeffrey Hill and Dr John M R Covey.

Endnotes:

- ¹ *Federal Magistrates Court of Australia Annual Report and ABS Family Only Characteristics Survey*
- ² *Editorial Sunday Telegraph, August 1, 2004*
- ³ *2001 Australian Survey of 7,700 Households – Household Income & Labor Dynamics*
- ⁴ *Editorial Sydney Morning Herald, August 5, 2004*
- ⁵ *FHS Website Data*
- ⁶ *Monash University Report: Researcher Dr Maryanne Dever. Sun Herald, September 26, 2004*
- ⁷ *ABS 2002*
- ⁸ *Daily Telegraph, April 24, 2004*
- ⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald, February 11, 2005*
- ¹⁰ *Australian Institute of Family Studies. Daily Telegraph, November 24, 2004*
- ¹¹ *Independent Study by the Inquirer*
- ¹² *"Australia's Welfare Habit and How to Kick It," author Peter Saunders*
- ¹³ *"The Family – A Proclamation to the World," see attachment*
- ¹⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald, November 21, 2004*
- ¹⁵ *A University of WA Crime Research Centre Report of 1999-2000, a survey of 5000 Australians between the ages of 12 and 20 years.*
- ¹⁶ *Survey – Australian Institute for Suicide and Prevention at Griffith University, published in the Medical Journal of Australia August 2, 2004*
- ¹⁷ *Parenting Influences on Adolescent Alcohol Use – various studies reported in the Sydney Morning Herald December 15, 2004*
- ¹⁸ *Report by Wendy Loxley, Associate Professor, Curtin University*
- ¹⁹ *Study by NSW Health and Cancer Council of 6000 students, Sunday Telegraph, October 31, 2004*
- ²⁰ *Craig Dalton, MD – Lecture, University of Newcastle*
- ²¹ *Macquarie University Research*
- ²² *Study by NSW Health and Cancer Council of 6000 students, Sunday Telegraph, October 31, 2004*
- ²³ *Daily Telegraph, July 9, 2004*
- ²⁴ *Family Planning Victoria and the Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Women's Hospital - Sydney Morning Herald, October 10, 2004*
- ²⁵ *Study, Victoria Health, Dr Rob – Australian, June 16, 2004*
- ²⁶ *Adrienne Burgess, International Fatherhood Consultant – Australian, September 10, 2004*
- ²⁷ *Access Economics*
- ²⁸ *Government Report prepared by the Centre for Community Health*
- ²⁹ *Amanda Woodard, Sydney Morning Herald, February 23, 2005*
- ³⁰ *Sunday Telegraph, May 2, 2004*
- ³¹ *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, USA, August 2004 Study*

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