

The difficulty of balancing work and family, and disincentives towards starting families, is that such disincentives are exacerbated by calls for paid maternity leave.

Calls for paid maternity leave reinforce the stereotype that it is the role of women to stay at home to look after children: the "barefoot-and-pregnant-in-the-kitchen" image. The increasing participation of women in the workforce, and decreasing rates of pregnancy, indicate that there is a decreasing desire within society to live up to such a stereotype.

By contrast what is required are moves to make it easier for men to take on more parenting/household responsibilities, rather than expecting it to be the role of women. To this end, rather than singlemindedly pursuing maternity leave, society should instead be pursuing paternity leave, or at the very least parental leave, to enable men to remain at home in child-rearing roles while women return to the workforce.

From: Anthony Clark 

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