

Productivity Commission Inquiry into maternity leave and payment Dr L E Georgeson

When considering this important matter it is imperative to give due consideration to the needs of:

1. the newborn child
 - providing the best way of ensuring the child's good health, future character and values
2. the mother
 - maintaining her emotional, mental and physical health
 - allowing time for the mother to bond with the baby to maximize the infant's health and welfare through breastfeeding as long as possible, ideally beyond 9 months
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 - reducing stress and allowing the mother the opportunity to function at her best in looking after her family whether they be older children, husband or extended family
 - allowing the mother to fulfil roles which assist society through voluntary work
 - allowing a full time mother to access casual child care at a nominal cost when she needs to do something by herself
3. the employer
 - acknowledging the rights of the employer to expect a 'full day's work for a full day's pay'
4. social services
 - non working mothers would alleviate to some extent the need for the Government to supply and maintain aged care facilities including nursing homes as well as child care facilities and subsidies

The aims and objectives of the Australian Government as expressed in the terms of reference (attachment B) are admirable and this submission expands on these desires.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

I acknowledge the role of wife and mother can be a difficult one. It has been a role that has often been denigrated to a 'lesser' occupation whereas it is my belief that this important role provides the very foundation of a family unit. I regard the family to be the basis of a successful society.

Matters of concern relate to the fact that many women are feeling that they must return to the workplace in order to cope with the financial demands on the family unit. An early return to full time work often provides a stressed situation which automatically cancels a mother's breastfeed status and does not allow sufficient time for maternal and infant bonding. Resultant bottle feeding is acknowledged as being a poor substitute to breastfeeding. There are no winners all round. I wonder how much money remains to fulfil the objectives of going to work in the first place eg. the need for a second car, paid help for some household tasks. Are social pressures undermining a homemaker's instinct?

Women may be driven back to their jobs early because they feel that their jobs are insecure if they spend too much time away from the workplace. Conversely, if women are away for a longer period of time, and come back to work, this puts the person who has been relieving them out of a job. Many women feel that this is an unjust situation and may push them to work earlier than they would have wanted.

Our current divorce rate is also a matter of concern. I believe that our current divorce rate, approaching 50 per cent is largely attributable to the stress experienced in the family unit. The children in these families often feel neglected and respond to the stress by becoming unruly and antisocial.

A recent trend to 'beat the biological clock', after delaying having children till the mid 30's is posing significant problems.

'Acquiring' children through surrogacy, sperm donation, one night stands etc complicate and often cloud the waters. It is my belief that it is not the most desirable way to bring a child, into the world let alone raise this child, nor is it always successful. It is extremely difficult for a single parent to provide a balanced lifestyle that will benefit the child. It is my belief that each child ideally needs a male and female parent.

To maintain Australia's population our social obligation to attain at least 2.1 children per family is imperative. We need more in fact to deliver growth in our society to cope with the demands of the future. At the present time we have less than 1.7 children per family - if we get to 1.5 per family and it is almost impossible to recover the population decline.

A rich country such as ours which needs a larger population should encourage and assist larger families.

PROPOSALS

I propose that a '**homemaker's allowance**' be paid to the woman who stays at home to look after her family and children in recognition of her contribution to our society. It is the woman's choice.

My suggestion is to pay these women an amount equal to the unemployment benefit because by leaving the workforce the mother makes a position available for an unemployed person. Financially this should balance out.

This scheme would allow:

- the homemaker to have the dignity of a paid worker
- the opportunity of having healthy happy and well adjusted children in society
- the mother to look after her family

I reiterate that the choice is then up to the mother if she so wishes to stay a home as a homemaker.

The future of our country is best served through the creation of happy family units. Proactive government policies in this area should assist in this endeavour.