

Paswani-Abote: Child care costs are a nightmare for single moms

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EXCERPTS

There has been vast progress toward the emancipation and inclusion of women in the workforce. In almost every sector, women are breaking barriers — they are heading big conglomerates and leading in politics.

While this success inspires other women, there's another kind of struggle that women — precisely, single working or studying mothers — continue to face in Canada: child care.

While my children were still in Zimbabwe, pending our reunion in Canada, I spent two years as a “free” woman. By this, I mean I was able to go about my business without worrying about dropping and picking up children before and after work.

Everyone kept telling me how this dynamic would change drastically once the children joined me. How, I wondered, thinking, what could mar the reunion of a mother and her children? A mother in pursuit of her professional development and advancement.

Back home, I had a full-time nanny and house help in my employ. I also relied on my mother, whom I called on several occasions when I needed to travel with work or journalism training, which took me as far as Malaysia, the Netherlands, London and South Africa.

All my supports were in check, so whenever an opportunity arose that needed me to travel off the continent, it was always a no-brainer and I'd be packing in an instant.

Now, as a lone parent working one full-time job, the idea of getting a second job is not feasible, because the children still need to be in care while you are at job No. 2. It defeats the purpose of trying to create a financial cushion.

Having a kindergartner and elementary scholars means full-time care for one and part-time care for the others, since the school does not have a before- and after-school care program.

I am sure some women, and single dads, can relate to this.

Due to high child-care costs, some women have put their career or studies on hold to start families, with the hope of rejoining the workforce once the child or children are old enough to be left alone — although in Alberta, this remains murky, as there is no stipulated age. This compromise should never happen.

According to a chapter authored by Melissa Moyser in *Women in Canada: A gender-based Statistical Report* published on the Statistics Canada website last March, “The absence of a spouse/partner tends to hinder the employment of parents. This is particularly true for

women, who constituted 80.8 per cent of lone parents with a child under the age 18.”

She also asserts that “...The employment rate of mothers generally rises with the age of the youngest child in the household, as the child enters school and matures, such that they are increasingly self-reliant.”

In another chapter, Tamara Hudon states that, “As a group, immigrant women earned less than their Canadian-born counterparts in 2010.”

The Canadian Press reported last month that British Columbia politicians signed a \$153-million agreement that would create 1,370 new infant and toddler spaces. This month, it reported that Ontario’s Liberal government has promised to offer free child care for preschool-age kids starting in 2020.

Last April, Premier Rachel Notley announced a three-year pilot program aimed at alleviating the child care burden by offering \$25 per day child care services for newborns to kindergartners.

While such measures make a huge impact on eligible families, they exclude older children, leaving those parents, like myself, stuck in a quandary.

I have heard on too many occasions utterances from frustrated women questioning the point of going to work, since all you strive to pay with each paycheque are child care costs. How are we, young mothers, expected to rise above this dark cloud?

When, if ever, will we get a break?

Onai Petra Paswani-Abote was born in Zimbabwe, where she worked as a journalist. She now works for Postmedia in Calgary.

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