

Get 'family friendly,' or recession will last longer [CA] ^[1]

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Source: Ottawa Citizen

Format: Article

Publication Date: 22 Jan 2009

AVAILABILITY
See text below.

EXCERPTS

Canada may not pull out of an economic slump unless governments and employers deal with the crushing workloads that are forcing a growing number of Canadians to delay or have fewer children, says a leading expert in balancing work and family life.

Linda Duxbury, a business professor at Carleton University's Sprott School of Business, delivered her sixth and final report on work-life balance yesterday with the warning that the federal government's stimulus package should include policies that support working families to get the economy rolling again.

She argued policy-makers must recognize that heavy workloads and their interference on family life are key reasons for Canada's declining birth rate and labour force. They need to develop strategies, policies and interventions to help stem this work-life "tsunami."

"We're going to hire all these construction workers to build roads, which we need; but what about support for elder care and child care?" she said in an interview.

...

Her previous 2001 study found 60 per cent of working Canadians cannot balance the demands of their family and work, and it's typically work, not family, that takes priority -- a trend she predicts will only get worse as Canadians face the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression.

One in four work more than 50 hours a week -- compared to one in 10 in 1991 -- and all indications are those working hours will rise as the economy worsens. One in four also said work interferes with their family responsibilities.

But the survey found that half of Canadians coped with the growing stress and workload of their jobs by delaying or not having children. Canadians haven't been producing the 2.1 children per family needed to repopulate the country since 1971, and Ms. Duxbury argues that the demands of work -- and bosses' expectations that work comes first -- are a chief reason.

The only way to boost Canada's fertility rates are by creating "family-friendly" work cultures backed by social policies that help families manage, such as better day care and support for elder care.

Ms. Duxbury pointed to Quebec, which boasts some of the best family-friendly policies in the country and has the highest birth rate.

...

[Duxbury] said these issues raise "disturbing" questions about Canadians' values.

"Why is caring for our seniors and children causing so much strain? Why are Canadian men and women forgoing having families or reducing the number of children they have? Is that the Canada we want? Are we a culture of work or family?" she said.

- reprinted from The Ottawa Citizen

Region: Canada ^[2]

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