

Few workers make use of family benefits [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Employees' use of family-friendly benefits is not as widespread as one would think considering growing concerns about the stresses involved in juggling the demands of work and home life, a new study suggests.

The study, sponsored by the Institute for Research on Public Policy in Montreal, found what co-author Ana Ferrer describes as a surprisingly low uptake by employees of such benefits as employer-provided child care.

It found, for example, that only two per cent of employees used employer-provided child care, elder care or referral services where they were available. The study's findings are based on an analysis of data from Statistics Canada's 1999-2002 Workplace and Employee Survey.

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Ms. Ferrer, an adjunct professor in the economics department at the University of Calgary, suggested the low uptake could be because employer-provided child care does not meet the employees' needs. It may be expensive compared to other available care, she said. Or it may be limited to pre-schoolers, providing no benefit to employees with school-age children.

On top of that, she said, the study found most employees at firms that offered child care had no children, or children too old to benefit.

The findings point to the need for employers to take another look at what benefits they are providing, she said. More important, she added, they suggest there is a lot of room for governments to get more involved in the provision of benefits to help parents achieve a better work-life balance.

"Public policy can assist in the resolution of work-family conflict through a variety of programs, including funded extended parental leave and convenient and affordable child care arrangements," the report said.

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- reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

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