

Motherhood has its price. It's too high, prof says [CA]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Legally and financially speaking, Canadian women pay a price for having kids, and Lorna Turnbull thinks that sucks. Turnbull, an assistant professor with the University of Manitoba's faculty of law and a mother of three, is attempting to redefine "women's equality" to include the care of children, as well as find some practical solutions about how to make that equality happen.

"I came at this as a feminist first of all, and as a mother, well, probably also first of all," she says. "I think feminism could take us further in terms of equality when there are kids in the picture."

Or, as her colleague Andrea O'Reilly, an associate professor of women's studies at York University and director of the Association for Research on Mothering, puts it: "Men aren't penalized for having children, but women are."

In her groundbreaking 2002 book *The Price of Motherhood*, American author Ann Crittenden reported that a couple that decides to have a child forfeits about \$1.3 million in lost potential income. The book also says the wage gap between childless women and mothers is larger than the gap between women and men.

The Canadian situation is not as bad, but not great, says O'Reilly.

"We look pretty good in Canada when we compare ourselves to the United States, but when we compare ourselves to Scandinavian countries we don't look so good anymore," she says.

Sweden, for example, allows longer maternity leaves than we do, and also allows women to reduce their workload without penalty until their children are eight years old, says O'Reilly.

Turnbull says Canada should make similar changes.

In her 2001 book *Double Jeopardy: Motherwork and the Law*, she suggests that Canada pay out longer maternity leaves at a higher wage, introduce universal child care, stabilize the child tax benefit, and have no state regulation over reproduction.

The idea is to recognize mothering as an essential job, and support it as a society, she says.

In September, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada gave Turnbull a \$73,000 grant to study the issue.

With the money, Turnbull hopes to figure out how popular ideas about motherhood influence laws, as well as find practical solutions to updating those laws.

To achieve this, she will comb through almost 90 years of legislation, read 80 years worth of *Chatelaine* magazines to gauge popular opinion on the issue, read as much feminist legal literature as she can, and examine all the "motherhood" cases that have made it to the Supreme Court.

When she's all done, she hopes to have a framework for change.

"I think she's a real pioneer in this," says O'Reilly.

- reprinted from the Winnipeg Sun

Region: Canada^[2]

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