

Women denied maternity leave [CA-PE] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A new study shows Ottawa's maternity leave program is of no benefit to many women in P.E.I., and across Atlantic Canada.

Ottawa increased eligibility to new parents three years ago. Under the new rules new mothers or fathers can take up to 50 weeks of parental leave. But the Women's Network of P.E.I. study says it is difficult or impossible for seasonal, self-employed, and part-time workers to access these benefits.

Surprisingly, the study showed that men were more likely to take advantage of the benefit than women. That's because many women don't work enough hours to qualify for the program, which is run through Employment Insurance. Self-employed women can't qualify at all.

Federal government employees come out well in the system. The government tops up their EI benefits so that they receive full salary. Those relying only on the EI benefits must get by on 55 per cent of their salary.

The study found women returning to work as early as three weeks after they give birth, because they just can't afford to stay home. The Women's Network feels if the program is to be universal all parents should have access to the same benefits. In the end, they argue, it's the children who suffer most.

McCardle says the program tends to discriminate against the lower income women who need it most. The Women's Network will be presenting the results of its study to the federal government. The government is already having to think about its use of the EI system to fund maternity leave, following a Quebec Court of Appeal decision that says the program is unconstitutional.

- reprinted from CBC Prince Edward Island

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