

\$22B plan would help 'Generation Squeeze': UBC prof ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

He calls them "Generation Squeeze."

They're today's parents, squeezed for time, money and services like child care.

They're forced into a vicious cycle, working longer hours in trying to provide the best life they can for their children, and spending less time at home in the process.

And it begs an important question, said University of British Columbia professor Paul Kershaw. "Does Canada still work for all generations?"

According to a report produced last year by Kershaw and colleague Lynell Anderson, the simple answer is no.

Kershaw is bringing his findings to communities across Canada. On Tuesday, he spoke at the YMCA Ontario Early Years Centre in Waterloo.

Since the 1970s, household incomes for young couples in Ontario have only risen about \$5,000 after adjusting for inflation, he said, even as the proportion of young women contributing income has gone up about 40 per cent.

At the same time, housing costs have gone up about 70 per cent. Child care can cost around \$40 per day - for those that can access it, given there's only enough regulated child care and kindergarten spaces for about 35 per cent of Ontario children under age six.

Canada used to be a leader in investing in social policy, Kershaw said, calling it "a proud tradition."

But he feels that very little has been done in recent years, especially when it comes to young families.

Kershaw said it's time for Canadians to adopt what he calls a New Deal for Families.

His plan would see policy changes that would allow new mothers and fathers to stay at home with their babies for at least 18 months, provide quality child care for no more than \$10 per day, and introduce more flexible work schedules that would allow people to work fewer hours each week.

"Just think what parents could do with an extra five hours per week," Kershaw said.

He estimated the plan would cost Canada \$22 billion annually - about one-sixth of what's spent on medical care - but would generate returns through lower health care and education costs, reductions in poverty and crime, and extra tax revenue from those retained in the labour market.

Following his talk, audience members discussed the ideas in small roundtable groups.

As host of the event, YMCAs of Cambridge & Kitchener-Waterloo CEO John Haddock said his organization and its counterparts across Canada are interested in taking more of a social advocacy role on important issues.

"The health of children and families is certainly core to who we are," he said.

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