

# 'A generation of burned out, disillusioned mothers': Juggling career and kids has never been harder, says new documentary <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Motherload, a documentary on work-life balance will be aired on CBC-TV's Doc Zone, Thursday Jan. 9 at 9 p.m. Watch trailer [online](#).

<sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS:

Ottawa lawyer Emilie Taman went back to work in the fall of 2012 after having her third child, she thought her career might finally resume "full throttle."

Instead, she ended up with a bottle in one hand, a Blackberry in the other, stretched beyond her limit. The nanny gave notice, the family was stricken with endless bouts of strep throat and her daughter needed surgery.

"I just kind of had, basically, a meltdown," Taman says, recalling how she ended up taking several months off work in early 2013. "I thought, I just can't go on like this. It's so stressful to be letting people down at work, and it's incredibly stressful to feel like you're not there for your family when they need you.

"For women today, who had the expectation that they could sort of have it all, the rude awakening is how difficult it is to make it work."

Taman is one of the women featured in *Motherload*, a compelling CBC-TV documentary about the ever-elusive balance between career and family. "From single moms to CEOs, a generation of burned out, disillusioned mothers are waking up and smelling the coffee," says the film. "Forget about having it all, they're doing it all."

Everyone is working longer hours, women still do more of the housework and childcare, and the expectations on mothers have never been higher, the film says.

Taman says she didn't expect that juggling career and kids would be difficult. After all, she's following the footsteps of her mom, Louise Arbour, a former Supreme Court justice who also earned fame as the chief prosecutor for war crimes tribunals in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Arbour had three children while pursuing a demanding career. And made it look easy, laughs Taman. When Taman was young, her mother was a law professor in Toronto who made it home every night for supper, although she worked in the evenings. But the family also escaped to a cottage on weekends, with no cellphones or computers to keep work ever-present.

Taman works as a prosecutor for the federal government. Her spouse, Michael Spratt, is a defence attorney, a route she also considered in law school. But Taman became pregnant while finishing her clerkship at the Supreme Court of Canada and she continued working with the federal government, a job she likes and which offers regular hours and benefits.

Both are very involved in running the household and taking care of the children. When he had a murder trial in L'Orignal last year, Spratt would be up at 6 a.m. to help with the kids before starting on the hour-long drive. He'd be back home for the supper-story-bedtime routine, then work late into the night.

They know their life is relatively privileged, and most times things run smoothly.

But if there's a wrinkle - a sick kid, a call from school - Taman usually handles it, as she has more flexibility. And she's the one who organizes the day-care spots and buys the sunscreen, says Spratt.

"I didn't expect it would be quite as challenging," says Taman in an interview at their comfortable brick house in Old Ottawa South. "The three kids were your idea," jokes Spratt.

Expectations can be crushing for women of Taman's generation. They're smart, educated and assume they will have a great career. Many also feel pressure to arrange activities and playdates with the intensity of a CEO.

"Wow, Mandarin lessons for the two-year-old. And what about an art class?" says Washington Post reporter Brigid Schulte in the documentary, describing how women get sucked into the super-mom ethic.

In fact, working mothers today spend more time with their kids than stay-at-home mothers did in the 1960s. That was the most shocking statistic uncovered in the making of *Motherload*, said Cornelia Principe, the film's producer, director and writer, in a phone interview.

The film was partly inspired by her own experiences balancing career and motherhood after she had a child five years ago. Principe was also curious about the flood of women in their 40s, just when they should be at the peak of careers, who "hit a wall" and stall out.

"Women feel like they are failing, because we grew up in a generation where we were strong, independent women. ... What happened to being the strong woman out there, equal to any man? I think we still emotionally feel that way, but we also realize something's got to give. You have two people doing three jobs."

Schulte can relate - the journalist was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize in 2008, and describes her career as a speeding train. She was terrified she'd be left on the tracks if she hopped off. Add the pressures of two kids, and Schulte would only sleep four or five hours a night, trying to jam it all in.

"I work like a man, like my father did," she says in the film. "Then I have my mother, as my role model as being a mother, that's all she did. I kind of had these two lives that I was trying to smooch into one, and I didn't know how to do it."

She's writing a book about the time pressure on modern families called *Overwhelmed*.

And it's not just women with demanding professional jobs who struggle. Windsor's Cathy Zagaglioni is shown in the film taking on a third job - baking cookies - to earn enough money so her child can take piano lessons. The single mother is exhausted and stressed. Her ex-husband lost his factory job and has not worked since. "He never recovered." She receives no child support. "These shoulders, they can't handle much more. I'm at my limit."

Things won't change while long work hours and inflexible schedules are the norm, says Joan Williams, a professor of law at the University of California and an expert on workplace bias against mothers.

Many companies consider the ideal worker to be someone who works continually for 40 years, and is available pretty much all the time, Williams says in the film.

But mothers have this "little hangup" - they like to see their children when they are awake, she says.

The trends aren't encouraging, the film says. Average working hours have risen from 41 hours a week two decades ago to 47 hours a week now, with 60 per cent of workers adding another seven hours at home, since computers and cellphones ensure the work never stops.

But Principe says she is "cautiously hopeful."

Men are becoming more involved as parents, and starting to feel the same work-life pressures.

Spratt, for example, says he feels conflicted, too.

"People may not know about dads who love their family and love their work," he says in the film. "It's really hard when I'm working late, I feel like I could be doing more at home. And then when I'm at home with the kids, in the back of my mind it's always that I could be at work, there's more things that I could be doing."

Spratt took a paternity leave for their first child, but government benefits meant it made more sense for Taman to take leaves for the other two children.

Having more men take paternity leave is one key to change, says Principe. It not only helps them bond with children, but will help move the debate out of the realm of "women's issues."

"It's a good thing that we redefine what it is to be a woman, and what it is to be a man," says Principe. "And to be a woman is not necessarily to be the supermom, and to be the man is not necessarily to be the breadwinner. That those roles can be shared in a positive way. To me that's what the film is about, taking the issue out of just being a mommy thing."

-reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[4]</sup>

work-life balance <sup>[5]</sup>

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**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/01/%E2%80%98generation-burned-out-disillusioned-mothers%E2%80%99-juggling-career-and>

**Links**

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/01/%E2%80%98generation-burned-out-disillusioned-mothers%E2%80%99-juggling-career-and> [2] <https://www.cbc.ca/mediacentre/doc-zone.html> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4]

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