

Fewer Canadian mothers work than those in many rich countries

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EXCERPTS

A newly released internal federal analysis found fewer Canadian mothers - especially those with young children - participate in the job market compared to moms in many wealthy countries.

"If you ask me, it's a crisis," said Alisa Fulshtinsky, of Toronto Mommies, a Facebook page with members from across the GTA. "(Mothers) are looking at a choice between going back to work and staying with your child, since daycares are far from available or affordable."

"This is the most educated group of women in human history, in one of the best countries in the world, and they're pulling out of work because of daycare. It's ridiculous."

The Finance Department briefing note was prepared after last year's election campaign, during which the Liberals vowed to draw up a national framework on early learning and child care.

The Trudeau government's first spring budget committed \$500 million in 2017-18 toward the framework's creation.

The Liberals have promised their initiative would avoid a "one-size-fits-all" national program, and instead consider the approaches used by different jurisdictions across Canada to address their respective child-care needs.

Based on 2013 data, the employment rate for "prime-aged" Canadian women - between 25 to 54 years old - with kids younger than 15 years old was 75 per cent, placing Canada ninth among fellow member countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, a prominent Paris-based think tank.

"Canadian women with children are less involved in the labour market than women in many OECD countries," said the partially redacted briefing note, obtained by The Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act. "In particular, prime-aged Canadian women with young children (aged less than six years) stand out as a group."

The document found that the participation rate of women in Canada with young children was connected to several factors, including education, spouse's income, labour market conditions, tax rates, child benefits and the availability of affordable child care.

Fulshtinsky has a 4-year-old son who is in full-time care and pays \$1,000 a month for a program in Richmond Hill, a price she feels is "pretty lucky and the cheapest fee out of all my friends" paying upwards of \$1,300.

She's steadfast about one point: "(Women) need daycare to go back to work. You need to make way above the average salary to cover child care."

Fulshtinsky considers the gold standard of child care services to be found in Europe, where companies work with governments to create spaces on site at the workplace. "Why don't we have more of that (here)?" she asked.

The federal document said that maternal labour force participation was, in most cases, lower in provinces with higher child care costs. It showed evidence that jurisdictions with lower-cost child care, such as Quebec, has helped lift the workforce participation rates of women.

Shona Mills, a mother of five, is currently working as an intern at the Child Care Resource and Research Unit. When her two eldest daughters were young, she was in the culinary industry, but since there was no child care available in the evenings when she worked, it became increasingly difficult for her to maintain a job in that field.

"I was using family (for babysitting), whoever I could find," she told the Star. To offset costs, she started her own unregulated child care out of her home for a few years. She's also placed - and pulled - her kids out of centres of questionable quality.

Today, her eldest kids are in school. She's been on a waiting list for months now to place her 20-month-old. Her twins, who will turn 1 years old this August, will finally start full-time at a child care centre in the fall.

"It's outrageous. It makes it extremely difficult living, trying to raise a family," she said. "(Precarious child care) has absolutely affected my work life - I changed careers because of it... When women leave (the workforce) for several years, it really does stem from child care."

The internal federal analysis notes that it's difficult to quantify the link between low-cost child care and labour-force participation because of other variables like the design of the subsidy and the availability of daycare spaces.

It said generating a boost in the labour-force supply by expanding low-cost daycare would depend on factors such as operating hours, quality of services and convenience of location.

Amanda Bassin is a working mother and a stay-at-home parent, who is a job coach for other moms that are re-entering the workforce.

"It's difficult for two reasons: the cost and availability of child care," she told the Star. The other challenges she sees are with the confidence of women who have been out of the workforce for some time, and job opportunities that actually cover the costs of living and child care.

"It's too bad, because in the end, the kids get the short end of the stick."

-reprinted from The Toronto Star

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