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35, 38, 39, 40, 41

Paid Work and Family Responsibilities Submission
Sex Discrimination Unit
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001



ywca australia

By email: familyresponsibilities@humanrights.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Please accept YWCA Australia's submission to the HREOC Inquiry on Paid Work and Family Responsibilities.

YWCA Australia provides services to over a quarter of a million women, men and children at over 100 sites in all States and Territories across regional, rural and metropolitan Australia. Our programs concentrate on building strong and resilient communities and assisting all people in Australia to reach their potential.

While YWCAs work with all members of the community, we have a particular focus on working for and with young women and fostering young women's leadership and participation. This includes how young women make choices about their mental, physical, emotional and financial wellbeing.

The experience of YWCA clients, members and volunteers around the country reflect the findings of the HREOC *Striking the Balance* discussion paper – that women are far too often trying to 'do it all', men are not sure how to do parts of 'it all' and it causes stress, tension and guilt in families, workplaces and communities. It is in this vein that we welcome HREOC's interest in this important matter.

The need to effectively juggle the demands of paid work, family and volunteer obligations has been a long term struggle for many women: for some it is a matter of financial necessity, for others it is a desire to be both a successful professional, and a mother, partner, sister and daughter. YWCAs in Australia have worked with women throughout this spectrum as clients of our services, volunteers, and board members. Having worked with women in Australia for over 125 years, we are well placed not only to comment on the experiences of women, but also offer practical solutions that lead to positive changes for all people in Australia.

YWCA Australia recognises that it is impossible to comprehensively cover all the factors that impact on how women attempt to strike balance

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in their lives. As such, we have focused on just a few issues that impact on women, particularly young women. These are social obligations, how workplaces can be more family friendly, and the role governments and employers can play in assisting Australians to strike a balance between paid work and family responsibilities.

YWCA Australia would welcome the opportunity to provide further information to the submission, particularly about the programs we provide. Please contact Carol Scholes, National General Secretary on 02 6230 5150 for any further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Low". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'R'.

Robin Low
National President
YWCA Australia

Do women's and men's different paid and unpaid work obligations affect their economic outcomes, health, relationships and life chances?

"The pressure to give up my career and have kids now before I'm 'too old' is intense. My parents and my partner's parents were disappointed when I said my good news was that I got a promotion, not that I was pregnant. As more of my friends are having babies, they exclude me too because they think I just don't understand what it's like to be a mum."

28 year old woman putting off getting pregnant until she can afford to buy a house.

The experience of YWCAs in Australia shows that while many girls and young women grow up believing that men and women are in principle 'equal', it is when paid work and family responsibilities collide that women first recognise that we have not progressed as far towards equality as first thought, and that the family and caring obligations of her mother's and grandmother's generations are quickly, and unexpectedly, becoming her own.

YWCA Australia identifies these differences in social expectations for women and men as a key factor dictating women's lives. Many young women members of the YWCA feel the pressure to have children is coming from all directions, including the Federal Government with their once off Baby Payment incentive.

Increasingly, research indicates that the cost of having a child is climbing, with women with higher levels of education losing relatively more in income than less educated women as a result of child birth.¹ Young women making decisions about having children or when to start a family do so aware that the cost of raising children is high and that their lives will be impacted by reduced life-time earnings.² Rising household debt, patchy paid maternity leave provisions and the significant rise in real estate prices making home ownership further out of the reach of many young people³ compounds this financial disadvantage.

¹ Hudson global Resources & Human Capital Solutions/Joesphine Palermo, *Breaking the cultural Mould: The Key to Women's Career Success*, November 2004, p3.

Richard Percival & Ann Harding National Centre for Social and Economic Modeling, *The Costs of Children in Australia*, National Centre for Social and Economic Modeling, presented to the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, 2003, p1. Office of the Status of Women, *Women in Australia 2004*, Commonwealth Government, Canberra, 2004, p54.

² HREOC, *A time to value – proposal for a national paid maternity leave scheme*, HREOC, Sydney, 2002, p15-16.

³ 2002 National Pay Equity Submission, *Valuing Parenting – Options for Paid Maternity Leave*

Women are also acutely aware that they still bear a double burden in paid and unpaid work⁴, and while the gap between men and women unpaid work has narrowed this is mostly due to decreases in women's time on tasks, rather than increases in men's contributions to unpaid household labour.⁵ If young women raise these considerations as a reason for why they are delaying or deciding not to have children, they are sometimes classified as selfish, materialistic or unwomanly, and their choice is rarely supported.

Young women also fear that having children will limit their career progression⁶. Women's experiences in the workplace is that taking time off to care for children or parents, working part time, or being unwilling to travel or work overtime often negatively impacts on their career prospects. Regardless of whether this is accurate, prominent women role models who successfully and happily balance work and family responsibilities, particularly with young children, remain the surprising exception rather than the rule.

⁴ ABS, Time Use 1997

⁵ Michael Bittman, Sonia Hoffmann and Denise Thompson, *Men's uptake of family-friendly employment provisions*, Policy Research Paper Number 22, FaCS, Canberra, 2004.

⁶ Our Rights, Our Voices: the National Community Report Card on Women's Human Rights in Australia, Women's Rights Action Network Australia, 2005

The social expectation of women giving birth and then staying home to care for children is reinforced through pay inequity. As long as women continue to earn on average less than men⁷, the pressure on women to give up paid employment in exchange for unpaid caring obligations will continue. This ongoing gender inequity in pay rates also limits the life choices of men to undertake non-traditional roles because families cannot afford to lose the larger part of a double income.

Case Study: The GirlSavvy Program

The YWCA provides various programs around the country that critique and explore the usual expectations placed on women, including programs that encourage girls and young women to proactively take control of their financial position. GirlSavvy is a program presented by the NSW Office for Women in partnership with the YWCA of NSW, Guides NSW and Business and Professional Women NSW. Sponsored by the Commonwealth Bank Foundation, GirlSavvy aims to inspire young women 14-18 to think about the range of work options available to them including business and non traditional roles, and to also consider the personal advantages of achieving work/family balance and job satisfaction. It communicates to young women the benefits of being financially independent and the positive impact such independence has on life choices.

GirlSavvy provides participants a one day opportunity to work with local business and professional women mentors on a series of innovative activities. The workshops take place at a venue outside of the school environment and encourage a business conference atmosphere. Feedback from the workshops is consistently positive, as it provides a valuable and inspirational insight into a variety of future options for girls.

Paid work obligations could also be made clearer through simple Human Resource practices, including clear articulation of job descriptions and working hours. Flexibility to work from home could also be enshrined in agreements, and benefits such as overtime, leave entitlements and minimum wages guaranteed and protected in legislation. Some human resource practices to protect work life balance are at risk under foreshadowed changes to the Australia's industrial relations system.

⁷ Pay Equity – 20 years of Change and Continuity. Gillian Whitehouse, University of Queensland
http://www.hreoc.gov.au/sex_discrimination/20thanniversary/women_work_equity/speeches/whitehouse.html

YWCA Australia would refer HREOC to the recent NATSEM research⁸ to explain in detail the potential negative impacts on the work life balance choices available to single mothers and people with disability under the Federal Government's proposed welfare to work initiative.

To address the inequity in expectations between men and women, YWCA Australia encourages HREOC to recommend measures that go beyond mere gender mainstreaming to seeking gender equitable outcomes and creating an environment of social change where men and women play equal roles in paid and unpaid work. This includes providing education and incentives to men to spend more time on their family, and less on work. These could include:

- Promotion of work and family balance through community and workplace health, well being, family and nutrition programs;
- Provision of training and community education programs educating men on their roles and responsibilities as caregivers and legal guardians of children;
- Expanded minimum standards for paternity leave, including for adopted children;
- Paid dependant care for staff expected to attend out-of-hour meetings or training; and
- Promoting role models and best practice.

How can Australian workplaces be more family friendly?

"I think more men would be willing to play an active caring role if they were confident that there would be no ramifications at work. For example, if my husband takes time off when the kids are sick, his boss ignores him completely the day he returns to work, and his work mates give him lip about being 'whipped' at home."

30 year old YWCA staff member

A number of suggestions have been made to bring about a more family friendly work place. The feedback from our clients and members, and on our own experience as a significant service provider in the community highlighted three main issues: Child care, paid maternity leave, and cultural change in the workplace.

⁸ NATSEM, "The Distributional Impact of the Proposed Welfare-to-Work Reforms Upon Sole Parents" Canberra, August 2005, and "The Distributional Impact of the Welfare-to-Work Reforms Upon Australians with Disabilities, Canberra September 2005. www.natsem.canberra.edu.au/news.jsp

- Providing or subsidising appropriate childcare

“The cost of child care is so high that it eats away most of my pay. Sometimes I think what’s the point of working? I don’t have much extra money, so I might as well spend more time with my child.”

27 year old single parent working part time and studying full time

Recent research shows that the cost of childcare has increased,⁹ is often difficult to access,¹⁰ and lacks the flexibility that many parents need to accommodate part-time or shift-work, school holidays, or study timetables. This echoes the YWCAs experience as a significant childcare provider. Many centres have a waiting list, and our clients often tell of struggling to find quality care, in an appropriate location, at a desired time and of an affordable price. For example, few childcare centres reliably offer occasional care, or open after 6pm. This limits the options for flexible childcare, essential for casual or temporary staff with irregular hours, or for students whose class timetable changes from term to term.

The formal childcare system requires greater flexibility to assist parents return to paid work. This could begin with increasing the number of occasional care places available. The National Association of Community Based Children’s Services has recommended that childcare accessibility could be improved through the establishment of one childcare centre with a full range of services and age groups for every 800 children under 5 years of age.¹¹ YWCA Australia considers that priority should be given to community owned and operated centres, as these are usually more responsive to the needs of parents and the local community.

- Paid Maternity Leave

“I would love to have six months paid maternity leave”.

32 year old who has delayed having her first child due to financial constraints

Australians should be able to choose to have a child and not feel pressured to give up their income or indeed, their employment. A government funded maternity payment could address disadvantage and

⁹ Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 2003, *Australia’s Welfare 2003*, Canberra: AIHW, p246.

¹⁰ ACTU, *Submission to AIRC Work and Family Test Case*, 2004, p84.

¹¹

http://www.cccinc.org.au/childrenfirst/pdf/policy_papers/NACBCS%20%20NATIONAL%20POLICY.pdf

inequality in the workforce and at home by providing financial support to women. Consideration must also be given here to allowing flexibility within this leave to be taken by fathers and adoptive parents.

Incentives to date such as the once off \$3000 Baby Care Payment do provide badly needed relief to new parents, but unfortunately, it does not represent income replacement and makes little impact on ongoing costs such as health care, appropriate accommodation, childcare and education. Providing long term financial support for women with children requires a more holistic approach by government, businesses and the community. Further, we would encourage the Government to increase the Baby Care Payment to meet the minimum weekly wage, and encourage the Government to meet international standards in maternity entitlements¹².

- Broadening the definition of family and family responsibilities to recognise the diversity of families in contemporary Australia

“I cared for my kids as well as my mother in law until she passed away. It was tiring. Sometimes, it took all my strength just not to cry from exhaustion.”

47 year old woman with two teenaged children

Broadening the definition of family and family responsibilities could lead to badly needed flexibility in accessing carer’s leave, particularly for women. Demographic compression is increasingly leading to what is known as the ‘sandwich generation’, with women not only responsible for raising children but increasingly also responsible for caring for ageing parents. The sandwich generation may currently represent as many as 1 in 5 working Australians¹³. Flexibility can also be extended to grandparents or guardians who are primary care givers.

The University Of Western Australia provides a good example of this change in approach to families¹⁴. The UWA defines of family responsibilities as “covering a wide range of relationships and structures which may include one or more of the following: blood, marriage, affinity, adoption and dependency. This definition is broad, reflecting the diversity of society. It includes care for older people, people with disabilities, children, partners and responsibilities associated with extended families”.

¹² Article 6 of ILO Convention 183 requires that any maternity payment should be not being less than 2/3 of a woman's regular income

¹³ http://www.workplaceohs.com.au/nocookie/articles/work_family.htm

¹⁴

http://www.equity.uwa.edu.au/welcome/resources/policies/guide_to_work_and_family_policy

Any discussion of family and work life balance must also recognize the needs of sole parents who are not only one of the most poverty prone groups in our society, but also typically face the challenge of earning sufficient income and finding child care without the support of a partner.

What do you think should be the role of government, employers and families in promoting fair divisions of unpaid and paid work between women and men?

"We need to teach male & female children how to do household chores. This supports everyone. It will teach kids to set realistic expectations and also to negotiate with other family members."

Married YWCA member in her 60s who is also a grandmother.

Government, employers and families all have a significant role to play in striking a better work life balance in Australia. Most sectors of the community are taking some steps to help families balance paid work and family responsibilities, but more can be done. The role that family members can play in making divisions of paid and unpaid work more equitable have been dealt with previously, so this section deals with the government and employer roles.

YWCA Australia applauds government and business led initiatives that reward best practice in work- life balance such as the annual *National Work and Family Awards*, and various web sites and pamphlets which model best practice for work life balance in workplaces. We would recommend HREOC encourage further development of resources for healthier and more equitable communities, such as material that supports women to negotiate a better balance in their homes lives with domestic chores, and that supports men to develop their domestic skills.

YWCA Australia also welcomes the announcement that unpaid work in the home will be calculated in the next Census and we view this as one more step towards true equality.

The Federal Government does have a has a role in doing more to ensure that the 1990 ratification of the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 156, Workers with Family Responsibilities, be given effect in all workplaces. The Convention provides that parties to it should make it an aim of national policy to enable workers with family responsibilities to engage in employment without being subject to discrimination, and as far as possible without conflict between their employment and their family responsibilities. Additionally, removal of

the Australian Government's reservation against the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women on Paid Maternity Leave and introduction of a more supportive government funded paid maternity leave system that brings Australian entitlements in line with equivalent OECD standards would also assist in promoting equity between men and women.

Case Study: YWCAs leading the way as a responsible employer

YWCAs are leading by example in the area of promoting work life balance for our own employees. YWCAs are significant employers, and recognize the value in retaining staff and becoming an employer of choice in a competitive workplace market. For example, the new YWCA of Canberra Certified Agreement is an excellent example of management and staff working together for a positive outcome for all involved. Under this, staff are eligible for benefits including salary packaging; a retention bonus of either cash or access to additional leave; bundling different forms of leave; introduction of 14 weeks of paid parental leave for primary carers and formalisation of study leave access.

Since the implementation of the agreement, the YWCA of Canberra has been approached by other community-based organisations to provide information on how the positive outcomes were achieved. The YWCA of Canberra has shared their positive experience with others to support future viability of the sector, particularly in relation to making working life, work environment and organisational culture more enjoyable, pleasant and productive for all staff.

Other suggestions to make workplaces more family friendly could include:

- Provision of a pool of financial support for child care for periods where staff are required to attend conferences, interstate or intrastate travel or out of hours work¹⁵
- Support for transition to work after caring
- Scheduling of work events to support family responsibilities, no very early morning or late afternoon meetings, and organising work events where families can also participate
- Workplace based childcare

¹⁵ The Oxfam Certified Agreement provides a pool of up to \$500 per annum for staff attending approved training or conferences

- Work supported arrangements for transport of children between school to and before and after school care
- Work supported arrangements for school holiday care
- Breastfeeding and parenting rooms