

Keys within everyone's reach



Work-family balance: an essential key for equality

One of the main keys to equality for women is work-family balance. In 2014, it is no longer acceptable that women compromise their health, career and economic independence because a genuine policy of work-family balance is slow in coming.

In Québec, we have been discussing and reflecting on this social issue for nearly 20 years. Work-family balance is mentioned in political parties' electoral platforms, but no government policy on the subject has been tabled to date.

Yet in the document *Vers une politique gouvernementale sur la conciliation travail-famille* published by the *Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille* in 2004, we find:

Work-family balance is more than a personal responsibility – it is a collective responsibility. Given that families constitute an economic and social asset for our society, they must be supported by the community.



It's time to take action and walk the talk!

Women are in the workforce to stay

Sixty per cent (60%) of women aged 15 and over are active in the labour market¹. In 2012, they made up 47.3% of the active population, almost on a par with men². Women aren't ready to give up their hard-won right to work. In other words, women on the labour market are here to stay!

A battle that concerns us all

All working women, whether unionized or not, know the harsh realities of balancing work and family. Sooner or later, all of us – mothers working or studying while raising young children, natural caregivers looking after aging parents or other loved ones with declining independence – face the challenge of juggling our work schedules to try to balance our family responsibilities with our work.

This is all the more true as the labour market undergoes changes that intensify conflicts between family obligations and work obligations: accelerated work pace, proliferation of atypical work, more precarious jobs, more overtime, etc.

Measures to facilitate work-family balance are practically non-existent in the *Labour Standards Act*, which sets minimum working conditions for non-unionized workers. The situation isn't much better for unionized workers, as hardly any collective agreements provide a work-family balance plan³.

¹ Conseil du statut de la femme, *Portrait des Québécoises en 8 temps*, Édition 2013, p. 13.

² *Loc. cit.*

³ Ministère du Travail, *Portrait statistique des conventions collectives analysées au Québec*, 2011.





Inaction costs far too much

The costs associated with the physical and psychological repercussions of conflictual work-family demands for working women and men are evaluated at more than \$14 billion annually in Canada. Government inaction could thus be estimated at costing Québec taxpayers close to \$3.5 billion a year⁴.

The costs related to absenteeism associated with this same reality can be estimated at close to a billion dollars annually in Québec alone⁵.

Over and above these financial considerations, the consequences are even more serious for women. Some researchers have demonstrated that women tend to withdraw from work for a relatively lengthy period of time for the benefit of family life⁶. Such a decision in the face of a lack of alternatives is fraught with drawbacks: professional de-skilling, loss of income, missed opportunities for promotion, and ultimately, poorer retirement conditions.

It is difficult in this context to really claim equality. The latter will only be possible when women succeed in balancing work and family without sacrificing either one.



A battle we're going to win

The battles women waged to win pay equity or obtain our Québec Parental Insurance Plan were long and arduous, but together we succeeded.

There is no reason why the outcome of our battle for measures to improve work-family balance would be any different, if we show the same perseverance and tenacity in asserting our demands.

**Work-family balance:
another battle to wage,
another battle to win!**



⁴ Presentation by Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay to the Intersyndicale des femmes, September 2013.
⁵ Estimate based on an assessment by Duxbury and Higgins (2003) concerning the fact that absenteeism linked to problems of work-family balance could cost Canada \$5.5 billion.
⁶ Marie-Ève Surprenant, *Jeunes couples en quête d'égalité*, Éditions Sisyph, Montréal, 2009, 126 pages.

Intersyndicale des femmes



Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux (APTS)
Centrale des syndicats démocratiques (CSD)
Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ)
Fédération autonome de l'enseignement (FAE)
Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé (FIQ)
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Guénette