

From: Karleen Gribble [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 22 April 2005 9:26 PM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family

22/4/05

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] NSW [REDACTED]
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Dear House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services ,

I realise that the closing date for submissions for this inquiry has closed but I hope that you might be willing to accept a later submission. I only discovered that this enquiry was underway in the last few days.

My name is Karleen Gribble. I am mother of 2 children, an 11 year old son born to me and a 6 year old daughter adopted 3 years ago. I gave birth to my son as a PhD student in 1994. I was very thankful that one of my supervisors at this time was also a mother (who had completed her PhD with teenage children) and so I had great support and understanding as I successfully completed my PhD. It was interesting that this particular academic had a collection of post-graduate students who were mothers. I believe that this is because she understood their situations and was able to provide a supportive environment that enabled them to continue their research. It was an interesting situation giving birth as a PhD student. Initially the research office stated that I would have to give up my scholarship because I wished to continue my studies part-time, however, they worked this out eventually. However, they were unaware that I was entitled to paid maternity leave (I discovered this accidentally myself too late, just as I was about to graduate). I was also dismayed to discover that while the stipend of full time students on a scholarship was non-taxable, the stipend of students enrolled part-time was not. I do not know if this situation has changed but if it has not it is an anomaly that should be changed. I believe this is a form of discrimination against mothers and the disabled who are by far the majority of part-time students on scholarships. I was extremely successful in my PhD research which resulted in 4 papers published in international journals with myself being the primary or only author. I felt that conducting research as a PhD student was a great job for a mother because I had flexible hours and could work when it suited me.

However, once I completed my PhD it was a different story. Part-time post-docs just don't exist. Part time research work just doesn't exist. It was just impossible for me to find work that would enable me to balance work and family. Academics are notorious for the huge number of hours they work. I was not prepared to play that game and sacrifice my family.

I have found a way to continue my research. I have an honorary position at a Sydney University. They give me an academic address and library rights. I actively conduct research using my own resources and am successful in publishing papers. My research is in the area of relactation/induced lactation. My advice on this subject is sought by health care professionals and mothers from Australia and all over the world. I speak at several professional conferences a year. I am a successful researcher.

However, I don't get paid for this work. University and external grants may supply funds for the expenses associated with research but they do not pay a salary for the investigator and even applying for such grants is problematic because most require that the applicant be employed by the university at 0.5 or greater (another form of discrimination??). It costs me probably \$2-3000 a year for me to participate in my profession. I am very very lucky that my husband is supportive of me. I love my children but it is important to me that I continue to have the opportunity for stimulating employ and to contribute to the community and he understands this.

However, this is not without cost. My husband is an ambulance paramedic who works hard at his job but needs a second job in order that we can pay our bills. He landscapes on his days off. We have a mortgage and are owner building our first home (we can't afford to pay someone to build it). My husband is under considerable pressure at times and sometimes the financial situation and the need for him to work so much is a source of discord between us. He looks at the guys he works with whose wives are nurses and can earn good money working a flexible shift or two a week and wishes the same for us. However, that's just not possible. The only work I could get that could fit around his shifts and the children's needs (the children are home educated, we save the state and federal govts a fortune!) would be something like stacking shelves in a supermarket. I've seriously considered doing this but the down side is that the pay is not very good (not as good as my husband makes landscaping) and it would take away time from my research so I probably would have to give that up. At this point in time we'll continue as we are. One day it will get better.

I think that lots of women find themselves in a situation like myself....in between a rock and a hard place, having to choose between their children and working in their field and whichever the choice having pressure on their relationship with their partner as a result. I think that this situation could be changed but we do need things like affirmative action so that women have superiors who understand the pressures of being a mother and an employee. We need part-time work to be recognised as productive (in my opinion you get much more value from a part-time employee than a full time one in many situations). We need unpaid work to be valued more highly! We need society to recognise that it is possible to have children in the workplace in some circumstances. We need a more child friendly society. I did not really believe that sexism existed until becoming a mother

changed my mind. We have institutional sexism that makes it a struggle for mothers everyday. I've described a number of examples of institutional sexism that impacts mothers in this submission. Unless these barriers are removed life will continue to be difficult for mothers and fewer women will decide to have children.

As to financial disincentives to having children....we're saving to be able to adopt our next child..... A spare \$25 000 is difficult to come up with.

Regards

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Mum to Dale and Ling