

Submission to the Productivity Commission (PC) Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

Mother of 19 month-old son, working part time, planning to use child care in 2015

September 2014

In discussions and case studies of women, childcare and workforce participation (variously by the PC, think-tanks and in the media), the focus is entirely on women and their childcare role: women either care for children themselves, or they work in order to pay for childcare.

This definition of 'the childcare problem' seems to lack a consideration of the following:

- Tax effectiveness, reduced child care fees and impact on benefits of fathers taking time off work to care for children.
- Future value of increased workforce participation for women (via superannuation, career progression and financial independence)
- Current social value of fathers' participation in the care of young children

I would like to see a broader range of scenarios/calculations included in the PC's current inquiry. Instead of a simple choice between women either working or not working for some number of days per week, why not examine the effects of fathers taking one or more days off per week to care for children, in order to allow a mother to work an extra day. I'd be very interested to see the effects on benefits, tax and childcare rebate/benefit when families (at different pay scales) switch from the father working five days per week and the mother three (with three days of child care), to both mother and father working four days each (with three days of child care). There are, of course, other permutations along similar themes. But putting forward the idea that fathers can look after children is key.

Under the Fair Work act, fathers have equal rights to request and access part time work as mothers. Yet the discussion around childcare rarely considers this as an option. Allowing families to better balance work and child caring responsibilities between both parents is a win-win for all involved: a mother can participate more fully in the workforce, with all the current and future benefits attached (better career progression, increased superannuation, more equal sharing of child care responsibilities); a father shares the burden of paid work more equally, but also shares in the joys and trials of child care; children see both their parents sharing the responsibilities of the home and paid work. Further benefits will arise as working part time becomes normalised across the workforce – for both men and women. Workforce discrimination against carers (mostly women) may even decline when part time work and shared caring responsibilities become the norm.