

I'm writing as a young (25 year old) woman who may or may not decide to have children at some point. Maybe it's considered passe these days, but I am concerned about the lack of females at the top levels of pretty much every area of work I can think of, including traditionally female areas such as school education. It certainly seems to me that one issue at the root of this is the idea that women have primary responsibility for child-rearing. Unless and until parenting comes to be seen as an equal responsibility of both mothers and fathers, I believe it is unlikely that gender disparities in positions of power in our society will be substantially affected. I also believe that parenting is an extremely important and undoubtedly fulfilling thing to do, and that both men and children would benefit if it was the norm for men to share care equally.

Thus, I was concerned to hear in the media that this Commission has heard proposals for parental leave provisions that are different for men and women. I strongly oppose such measures. I am aware that my own view that parenting should be equally shared is not held by all Australians, and I certainly don't think it's the role of government to be imposing my view on others. I'm also aware of research which has found that where men do have access to family-friendly provisions, they are less likely than women to take them up, and this will undoubtedly be the case with parental leave also. However, this is no justification for actually institutionalising inequality. In my opinion, any recommendations arising from this inquiry should be gender-neutral so as to allow individuals and families to make their own choices about the care and work arrangements that work best for them. Men should have the same opportunity as women to take time off to be with their new child, and government should avoid legislation which reinforces the unequal responsibility for care-giving which disadvantages women in other arenas of life.