

Attention: News Editors

Tilting Precariously Out Of Balance: Increasing Tension Between Work And Family Time

OTTAWA, Jan. 15/CNW Telbec/ - The **Vanier Institute of the Family** today released two reports that paint a troubling picture of the difficulties Canadians are having in striking a good and healthy balance between work and family responsibilities.

“This is not the first time we have focussed on this issue” says **Clarence Lochhead, the Institute’s Executive Director**. “The problems of unhealthy work family balance have been on the radar screen for some time. We know that trying to succeed in the workplace while at the same time meeting family obligations leads to stress. We know it affects our ability to provide essential care to family members at both ends of the age spectrum, and we know the strategies needed to make it better.”

The report, *Work/Family Balance: What do we Really Know?*, is from Jacques Barrette, Professor at the University of Ottawa’s Telfer School of Management. He has extensively reviewed Canadian and international research documenting the fundamental causes of work family conflict and their impact on families and organizations. Prof. Barrette concludes that “despite the discussions and publicity on the practices put forward by numerous organizations, the work/family conflict has progressively worsened in the last 10 years.” Among his findings:

- 44% of Canadians feel that their work has a negative impact on their family as economic, technological, and social changes have profoundly altered the workplace and created conditions that heighten pressure on parents and their families
- Management practices designed to increase productivity and competitiveness can lead to work overload. The internet, cell phones and Blackberries keep people more connected but at the same time allow work to encroach further into family life
- The percentage of parents who have a hard time juggling work and family has steadily risen since 1996 and now sits at between 46% and 61%, according to studies

Dr. Barrette’s work is complemented by a report from well-respected Vanier Institute contributor Roger Sauvé. His research into *Family Life and Work Life: An Uneasy Balance* tracks key employment indicators which underline that family time has suffered at the expense of work time. Sauvé estimates that over the past two decades Canadians are spending about five weeks less each year with their families, due to work-related issues. More people are working overtime, commutes are longer and businesses are constantly reorganizing and restructuring to increase efficiency. Sauvé points out that these and other changes are leading to more employee dissatisfaction, and more days absent due to illness and family reasons; absenteeism which is costing the Canadian economy between \$3 to \$5 billion dollars a year.

Vanier Institute of the Family Executive Director Clarence Lochhead points out that in addition to highlighting the problems, each of these research reports also puts forward solid recommendations for governments, employers and individual Canadians; actions that can be positive steps to restore this necessary balance between work and family life.

Says Lochhead: “Within the context of the current recession, with much focus understandably on the loss of jobs, work-life balance can easily take a back seat to other issues around the corporate board table. However, that would be a mistake.” He added: “The success of our businesses and security of our jobs ultimately depends on a healthy and sustainable relationship between work life and family life. That’s as true in tough economic times as it is in good times.”

For interviews and more information on these reports which are freely available for downloading at www.vifamily.ca

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