

The Unpaid Work of Caring for Young Children: Ideas for Long-term and Short-term Change

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In spite of the impact of second-wave feminism, mothers continue to carry out most of the work involved in caring for young children in Australia. For many, the demands of mothering, its intensity and lack of support for doing it come as a shock (Maushart 1997). After the initial shock, the extent of the impact on women's lives gradually becomes clearer. Both the scholarly literature and ordinary mother's conversations point up the need for many changes, including an identification of the situation of mothers of young children as feminism's unfinished business (Grimshaw 2002). In this article, I report on my research, which I see as part of the renewed contemporary interest in refreshing the feminist agenda for change.

The impetus for the research came from my own attempt at feminist praxis combining caring for a young child with full-time employment in the 1990s. Experiencing the crippling double shift inspired me to undertake a research project with the aim of contributing to egalitarian social change and improving the lives of mothers who might attempt this praxis in the future. The research falls within the tradition of critical social research (Crotty 1998), with a clear political intention to challenge oppression and contribute to emancipatory change.

My research brought together bodies of literature and streams of thought that are not often seen together, making it conceptually complex. I drew on contemporary critical social theory, ideas from alternative economics about the economic value of unpaid work, sociological research into time use, and feminist critiques of the ideology of motherhood and the institution of the family. The research design involved applying Iris Marion Young's theory of oppression to the situation of mothers of young children, and bringing this material together with empirical evidence on paid and unpaid work.

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This theoretical work led to the fieldwork, which involved interviewing eight high-profile Australian social commentators whose public statements were consistent with the theoretical framework of the study.¹ I summarised their ideas for change, and took those ideas to focus groups of mothers of young children for discussion and comment. I conducted twelve focus groups, with forty-two participants. Participants were recruited in ways designed to maximise the diversity of participants. A networking approach was used for recruiting participants. As I discussed my research with a range of people whom I met in my everyday life, a number of them offered to organise focus groups. Each focus group consisted of people known to the organiser. I knew only one of the group participants (in addition to the organisers). I had wanted to ensure that the recruitment procedure gave the research access to networks outside my own circle. Working with the ideas for change and identified barriers to change, together with the reactions from the focus-group participants, I then returned to the theoretical material including critical feminist and alternative economics, and developed principles for change that could inform a long-term agenda for transformational change.

I begin by discussing Australia's policy climate for mothers of young children, and present a brief overview of Australian feminist activism in relation to mothering. I then scan research on mothers' paid and unpaid work and makes links with material on oppression and social change. I then report on my research interviews and focus groups, while the final section draws this material together with the literature to present three principles for transformational change. Throughout this paper, I refer to 'mothers' rather than 'parents' or 'caregivers'. This is because mothers carry out the vast bulk of the work of caring for young children in Australia. It does not imply acceptance that mothers are best suited to or should be doing this work.

Overview of Australia's policy climate

In Australia at the beginning of the twenty first century, both Labor and Liberal Parties have policies offering support to people who have responsibility for children. Both parties promote paid employment as the approved way for individuals and families to obtain necessary economic resources, but at the same time support the idea that parents of young children

should be able to choose to care for them at home. Both support the provision of high quality affordable childcare to enable parents to undertake paid employment, and offer all families except the very wealthy some financial assistance with the costs of raising children. Both parties draw on the idea that families should be able to choose how they arrange or balance their employment and family responsibilities. They both emphasize the importance of employment for sole parents, making commitments to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of childcare, but at the same time maintaining the availability of income support in order that sole parents with children under school age can choose to care for them at home.

On the surface, it seems that the social policies of the Howard Coalition government and those of the Opposition support the diversity of Australian families with young children by providing a policy environment that makes it possible for parents not only to survive, but also to choose a lifestyle that suits themselves. This policy environment owes much to the influence of Australian feminists (Lake 1999). Their achievements have included change at the political level of government policy and legislation with equal employment and anti-discrimination legislation. Changes at the community level have included the establishment of services such as childcare. Changes at the personal level mean that most Australian women and men have moved beyond the gender stereotypes of the 1950s and 60s in their beliefs, values and aspirations (Bittman & Pixley 1997; Probert 2001).

Despite the obvious gains and the gender-neutral rhetoric of public policy, there is a sense that 'progress towards gender equality appears to have stalled in Australia' (Probert 2001: 1). Probert (2001:1) argued that 'effective policy development has run aground on submerged ideas about motherhood and domesticity, and a failure to sustain the family as a serious object of social policy'.

One aspect of ongoing gender inequity in Australia is the way that women continue to carry out the vast bulk of unpaid work involved in caring for young children, and to suffer the resulting short-term and long-term economic disadvantage. This economic disadvantage involves loss of earnings in the short term, as the vast majority of women have interrupted and/or reduced labour market earning while they have young children. The long-term economic disadvantage flows from a combination of factors: labour market segmentation; career interruption; the tendency for women with dependent children to take part-time and casual employment; the temptation to put convenience ahead of seniority and recognition; and the compounding effects of seeing a male partner's earning as primary. Single mothers are very likely to live in poverty, and divorcing women are likely to be worse off financially than their ex-partners (Bittman & Pixley 1997; O'Connor et al. 1999; Wolcott & Glezer 1995).

Overview of Australian feminist activism

Attempting to improve mothers' lives has pre-occupied generations of Australian feminist activists. Post-suffrage feminists campaigned long and hard for rights for mothers, including economic rights in the form of motherhood endowment. In the end, among other gains, they achieved child endowment. These campaigners accepted women's traditional gender roles, with 'difference' from men as a basis for their claims (Lake 1999).

Second-wave feminism challenged gender roles and emphasised claims based on equality with men (Lake 1999). Whereas some earlier feminists conducted a 'wages for housework' campaign, second-wave feminists including Ann Oakley (1974) rejected the role of 'housewife'. They developed an agenda of access to education and employment, equal pay, childcare and an end to gender discrimination (Lake 1999). While a review of feminist writing of the time reveals diverse views, at least in the popular consciousness, second-wave feminism encouraged women to transcend the limitations of motherhood, seeking fulfillment and economic independence in labour market participation (Everingham 1994).

Australian feminist historian Marilyn Lake shows that neither arguments based on women's difference from men nor those based on sameness / equality have served women well, and she suggests a synthesis may provide a way forward. The emerging international Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) demonstrates the high level of interest in a new wave of feminist research and publication, with many presenters at a recent conference clearly working on developing this type of synthesis (ARM 2004). My work is part of this development of a contemporary feminist agenda that is more than simply a reiteration of the second-wave feminist agenda. This reformulated agenda builds on what we have learned from living out the gains of second-wave feminism. It acknowledges the diversity of women in a new way; reconceptualises power and agency, taking account of postmodern theory; and is contextual, drawing on a cultural and individual consciousness that incorporates the increased gender equality achieved by first-wave and second-wave feminism.

Research findings on mothers' paid and unpaid work

The unsatisfactory conditions of life for Australian mothers of young children have been well documented (for example Bittman & Pixley 2000, 1997; Baxter 1998; Brennan 1998; Bryson 2000, 1996, 1995; Cox 1999; Everingham 1994; Gilding 1994; Goodnow & Bowes 1994; Ironmonger 2001; McDonald 2001, 2000; O'Connor et al 1999; Pocock 2000; Probert & Murphy 2001; Reiger 2000, 1991; Ryan & Conlan

1989; Shaver 2001, 1998; Thomson 2000; Wolcott & Glezer 1995). While many aspects of the social conditions for raising young children are of interest, my focus is on the economic aspects, particularly mothers' unpaid work.

Time-use surveys for example show that Australian mothers of young children work very long hours of unpaid work. Bittman and Pixley (1997) found that Australian mothers of infants undertook 60-90hrs of unpaid work weekly. This is much more than what Australians consider a normal working week. Bittman & Pixley (1997), Gilding (1994) and Ironmonger (2001) have carried out extensive research into time use, finding significant gender differences in paid and unpaid work. Australian women and men perform about the same total amount of work, but men are much more likely than women to be paid for their work. Children have a big impact on women's paid and unpaid work, but little impact on men's paid and unpaid work. Bittman (1995) also found that when women take on paid employment there is very little change in their unpaid work @ a reduction of about 5 hours per week for a woman employed full time. If women took on employment, the unpaid work did not disappear, nor did their partners share it equally. This indicates that mothers' unpaid work is not a case of the work expanding into the time available, and helps to explain the patterns of mothers' labour market participation.

Labour force statistics (ABS 2000) indicate that women's labour market participation drops with child bearing, and then gradually increases with the age of their youngest child. This is understandable when viewed alongside Bittman and Pixley's (1997) finding that women's hours of unpaid work rise with the arrival of children, then decrease gradually with children's ages. Mothers clearly bear the economic costs of loss of income in the years when their time and energy are taken up with the care of young children. Gray and Chapman (2001) estimated that women with one child lose 37% of their total lifetime earnings, and those with more children lose more.

Any discussion that characterises mothers' loss of income as a lifestyle choice implies that women, particularly single mothers, could just as easily choose full-time employment.

However, the time use data and the experiences of many women including myself show that formal childcare does not replace the unpaid work of caring for young children. The amount of unpaid work required to care for a baby or young child in 'full-time' care, means that mothers' labour is not readily available for labour market earning.

It could be argued that Australia has a safety net of social security benefits to assist people who cannot earn a living. However, this defines mothers of young children as 'not working' when many people believe they are undertaking some of the most important and difficult work in the society. Why do mothers keep doing this work? Many mothers say they

simply did not realise what it would be like. Once they have their children, there is no way out. Mostly, mothers love their children and would not dream of not caring for them. They are trapped in compulsory altruism.

A powerful ideology of motherhood and the institution of motherhood constrain mothers from challenging social arrangements (Reiger 1991; Wearing 1984; Rich 1976). Guilt, blame and moral judgments lurk in the culture and are internalised by many women (Wolf 2001; Maushart 1997). These pressures act on women in a similar way to that described by Naomi Wolf in relation to beauty (Wolf 1991). Striving to live up to an unattainable ideal consumes women's energy that might otherwise be used to challenge prevailing social conditions. Williams (2000) refers to an ideology of domesticity. Probert (2001) identifies an ideologically based gender system. These ideologies of motherhood and domesticity exert pressure on women to be always available to their children, to believe that mother-care is best for children and to be self-sacrificing. The experience of mothering, valued by many people, must be distinguished from the oppressive ideology of motherhood that exerts considerable influence in the community.

Caring for young children could be considered an expensive hobby, except that, unlike hobbies, it produces a public benefit at the expense of individual mothers. According to Bittman & Pixley (1997), within orthodox economic theory, 'public goods' are provisions like street lighting and public playgrounds that cannot be supplied to one person without automatically becoming available to all, and their individual users cannot be made to pay for them. The birth and raising of children produces a public benefit by ensuring the future of the society. Employers rely on being able to employ functioning adults. All of the elderly rely on other people's children to keep the society functioning. As Bittman and Pixley (1997:197-8) state:

Parents pay directly for the costs of children, and mothers pay in foregone earnings and in effort (however enjoyable). Mothers in particular have received virtually no economic benefits from this heavy investment. More precisely many women have been doomed to poverty for making this provision in modern societies.

Australia's arrangements for the care of young children amounts to exploitation, as defined by Mullaly (1997:146 following Iris Marion Young 1990):

Exploitation refers to those social processes whereby the dominant group is able to accumulate and maintain status, power, and assets from the energy and labour expended by subordinate groups.

Feminist critical social theorist Iris Marion Young (1990) identifies exploitation as one of six forms of oppression, along with marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and

violence. She states that oppressed groups usually experience more than one of these forms of oppression. The unpaid work of caring for young children consumes the labour and energy of mothers, producing a public benefit at the expense of individual mothers (Bittman & Pixley 1997; Folbre 1994).

The research literature identifies an ideology of motherhood (Reiger 1991; Wearing 1984), and an ideologically driven gender system (Probert 2001; Williams 2000) as barriers to change. In this situation of policy impasse (Probert 2001), we need a coherent agenda for change that draws on ideas about transformational change. In addition, a coherent agenda would include a long-term agenda and a short-term agenda.

Galper (1975) distinguished between social reform and transformational social change. 'Reformism seeks change and improvement within the boundaries of what is' (Galper 1975: 76). He argued that much social change effort was wasted in the long run because while it might improve the position of one group relative to others, it did nothing about the social conditions that caused the problems of both groups in the first place. Transformational change efforts on the other hand are aimed at institutions, ideologies and culture, to bring about change in the larger systems and structures under which we live our lives. Galper (1975) suggests that almost all change happens gradually, and the difference lies in the extent that changes challenge oppressive structures and ideologies rather than whether they are large or small.

Charles (2000) emphasises the need for a long-term agenda for change as well as a short-term agenda. In order to achieve long-term transformational change that is cultural and structural, it is important to understand how short-term changes fit into the longer-term agenda. A coherent agenda rests on principles and philosophies underpinning particular ideas for change, ensuring that the gains of the 'short agenda' contribute to the aims of the 'long agenda'. In my view a coherent agenda for change in Australia's social conditions for care of young children would rest on an analysis that draws on critical social theory and feminist theory. It would also include a vision for a better future while aiming for lasting, transformational change. Finally, it would establish a short term agenda and a long term agenda that are consistent with each other.

Because of the focus on ideas for change, my research design included gathering ideas for change from social commentators who had given a great deal of thought to the issues, and mothers of young children with the actual experience of carrying out this unpaid work. I worked with this material, bringing these ideas together with the literature to develop principles for change and suggested items for a coherent agenda for change.

Findings and interviews

The social commentators I spoke with first identified causes and sustainers of the exploitation of the unpaid work of mothers of young children. They offered a wide ranging set of views and ideas. At the risk of offering a too bald summary Lois Bryson emphasised the way the institutions of the labour market, the welfare state, and the family combine to produce and reproduce women's inequality to the point of impasse, with no clear and obvious agenda that would be effective in achieving equality. Belinda Probert's research shows that women are finding it very difficult to manage work and family and she links this with the moral and judgmental divisions among women. She sees these divisions as a barrier to getting better policy, because even among feminists there is no consensus on the issues. Eva Cox believes that current models of child rearing propose an unrealistic role for mothers, and a restricted range of experiences for children. Institutional arrangements place responsibility for children with individual parents rather than the community, and the ideology of motherhood delegates that responsibility to mothers. Michael Bittman claims that responsibility for unpaid work acts as a barrier to women's labour market participation. He has concluded that full-time employment puts women in the strongest position, both in terms of limiting their excessive unpaid work, and in securing their economic independence. Duncan Ironmonger strongly criticises the lack of public attention to the unpaid childcare carried out by parents, seeing this as part of distorted attention to the market leg of the economy at the expense of the household leg. Peter McDonald describes Australia's system of supports to families raising children as fundamentally flawed, and calls for a national work and family review to propose and cost a coherent system of policies. He links low fertility with Australia's lack of gender equity in families. Pamela Bone states that mothers resent being expected to do the two jobs, and they become frustrated with men who are willing to 'help' rather than taking equal responsibility for children and household work. Carmen Lawrence believes that problems lie in the areas of wages, childcare, working conditions, and inadequate financial and community-based supports.

The interviewees were also asked to identify pathways towards change. Their ideas included challenging and changing the dominant ideas about what is economic activity. They also wanted to challenge the dominant ideas about what is good for children and what can be expected of mothers. They spoke of the need to change the gender inequities embedded in our social structures and practices at many levels. They identified developing holistic, integrated approaches for example involving industrial relations and social security rather than fragmented approaches that fail to acknowledge the interconnectedness of states, markets and families. They all saw the value in initiating a broad-ranging inquiry.

Their specific suggestions for change included policies such as paid maternity and paternity leave, improved children's services, better education and training opportunities for mothers, employment conditions and practices that allow for family responsibilities and improved wages for work that has traditionally been carried out by women. Among the many barriers to change they pointed to conservatism in politics, the media, business and the community, as well as the lack of women in leadership in those arenas. They pointed to the child-free lobby, the ideology of motherhood and the moral and judgmental divisions among women on issues to do with care of young children. They also pointed to the effect of the infrequency of collection of time-use statistics. The interviewees indicated the need for further research. Some suggested much more investment in statistical monitoring of the household economy, and more frequent collection of time-use data. Others suggested a broad-ranging inquiry to consider overseas policies and possibilities for Australia, and extensive community consultation regarding strategies for change.

Focus group responses to interviewees' ideas for change

The focus-group participants brought their lived experience of caring for young children to the research. They responded to the high-profile commentators' ideas for change, and added some of their own.

Regarding paid maternity leave; most focus group participants were unaware of arrangements outside of their own former workplaces. Those who did not get paid maternity leave were amazed that others did not, and those who did get it were amazed that not everyone could. The participants were in favour of paid maternity and paternity leave, and emphasised that it should be available to all.

They agreed with the provision of free or low cost, high quality child care for any purpose. In addition, they stated that mothers often need support including intensive live-in services for mothers and babies when they are depressed and overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Overall, they saw the need for extensive changes and improvements to services for mothers and their babies and young children.

The need for more respect for mothers of young children was a major theme running through the focus groups. As well as cultural and interpersonal aspects of respect, the participants wanted more recognition of their unpaid work. They agreed that more statistics should be collected, and particularly wanted the census to acknowledge their work as work. Pleased surprise greeted the suggestions that unpaid work should attract Workcover, sick leave, and superannuation in similar ways to paid work. There was a strong reaction in every focus

group to the idea of sick leave for mothers. This is probably the most urgently needed strategy to assist mothers of young children. Many of the participants recounted episodes of illness that went on for weeks because they had to keep working (at caring for their young children) while sick. One of the participants spoke of crying and begging her husband to stay home from work, but he said he could not do that because they were busy at work. Others spoke of being able to manage because their husbands took time off work or their mothers came to stay, or they went to stay with their mothers, or they guiltily called on friends who were already overloaded with caring for their own children, as recounted in the following interchange between two women who were good friends. Both were mothers of young twins:

'Valerie': When my twins were 6 months old I was so sick. I had mastitis so badly I could not even drag myself to the doctor. I lay on the couch and threw them [the babies] biscuits until John came home, and I could not move. I was just dying. I was so ill I had to be taken to the doctor. It has only happened once, but there was nothing. You know, no one you could call on, nothing you could do. Or the day you had your bad back. You had to ring me, mother of twins round the corner to come.

'Deborah': I said, 'I can't get up off the floor, can you come up.'

'Valerie': My two kids are in their high chairs and husband's 45 minutes away. And so I bundled all mine in and came round. But there are those times that are just [helpless hand gesture], and there's no support system. There's no, I mean if you're sick at work then someone will drive you home and put you to bed. If you're sick at home, forget it.

'Deborah': You're gone.

Participants supported the ideas of providing support, education and training to assist mothers to re-enter employment, and encouraging mothers to maintain attachment to employment, even if minimal. They emphasised the need for lots of variety in the provisions and supports because of the diversity of women's situations. They agreed that it is important to be able at some time to get into or back into well-paid work, with recognition for the skills gained while caring for young children.

Employment conditions and practices clearly impinged on the participants, both in terms of their own and their partners' ability to go home on time, take time off for sick children, and vary start and finish times. The participants wanted change in the direction of more work-based childcare, men to share responsibility and men's workplaces to offer flexibility and to expect men to take some responsibility for their children.

'Frances' spoke about the importance of having very young children close by, and of the symbolic value of having childcare offered by an employer:

I worked at the Sheraton in Sydney, a brand new one at Mascot Airport, and we had a crèche and it was brilliant. It was on the second level, really secure and [one of my co-workers had her baby there] and she was allowed to go up and breast feed and things like that which was good ...They had really good meals. It was just so much more relaxing and it encouraged everyone, well not to have a child but if they were to have a child it wasn't really expensive. I think it was just as cheap as everywhere else you could go and they had child subsidy and things like that, which was good but the best thing was it was offered to us.

Participants were very keen on increasing fathers' involvement in unpaid work, taking time out of employment, reducing hours and taking sick child leave.

When I began drawing together the literature, the interviews and the focus groups three principles for transformational change emerged from the research in the literature and the work with the interviewees and focus groups. They were (i) challenging the public/private divide, (ii) treating women as individuals and (iii) developing a gendered model of citizenship.

Transformational change in the situation of mothers of young children must challenge the fiction of the public/private divide, by emphasising that caring for young children is work (however lovingly performed) with economic value, and that this work produces a public benefit at the expense of individual mothers. This analysis rejects any essentialising association of women with the domestic. It maintains an emphasis on both women and men as participants in domestic activities, paid employment, and community life. While rejecting the idea of separate public and private spheres, this analysis retains a commitment to a value of privacy in personal areas of life (Lister 1997; Young 1990).

Peter McDonald argues that to improve gender equity for women who become mothers, public policy must treat them as individuals rather than gendered family members. Similarly, Bettina Cass (1995) draws attention to the Australian welfare state's treatment of heterosexual couples as the unit of income- and assets-testing for benefits. Sole parent pensioners lose their pensions if they start (heterosexual) cohabiting. Women's eligibility for income support and Child Care Benefit is means-tested on the combined incomes of themselves and male partners. It is this treatment as gendered (patriarchal) family members that McDonald seeks to reverse, rather than promoting a competitive, acquisitive individualism. Being treated as autonomous or independent citizens can co-exist with the expectation that people will act in cooperative and collective ways. As Carole Pateman (1989:203, cited in Cass 1995) states:

[F]ully democratic citizens would be both autonomous and interdependent, they are autonomous when each enjoys the means to be an active citizen, but they are interdependent when the welfare of each is the collective responsibility of all citizens.

This concept of fully democratic citizenship emphasises autonomous (individual) access to the means to be an active citizen and the economic resources to sustain life and participate in the community. Australia's present social arrangements deny this autonomous access to the vast majority of mothers of young children.

Traditionally, women's advocacy for change has been based on either equality (sameness) with men or on difference from men, particularly in relation to childbearing and caring responsibilities. Some contemporary feminists argue for a gendered citizenship that emphasises women's equality with men AND acknowledges biological differences in relation to pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding (Reiger 2000; Williams 2000; Okin 1997; Gordon 1990). This perspective values women's reproductive experience without essentialising women, or subscribing to the dominant ideology of motherhood, or accepting that care-giving work is properly the responsibility of women.

Cass (1995) and other feminist authors criticise structures and institutions predicated on the ideal citizen of liberal theory and an able-bodied male, unencumbered by domestic responsibilities (Reiger 2000; Williams 2000; Fraser 1989; Lister 1997; Pateman 1988; Sassoon 1987). They argue for changes to institutions to make them more inclusive of women, but not at the cost of institutionalising women's responsibility for household and caring work, as happens with 'family friendly' provisions aimed at women. Cass (1995) argues that a reconceptualized citizenship for both women and men must include expectations of taking responsibility for dependant care.

The concept of gendered citizenship implies women's right to participate in society's institutions that have previously excluded them, but at the same time reserving the right to work for change in those institutions. This fits well with Charles' (2000) idea of a long agenda and a short agenda and the idea of a coherent agenda for change whereby the long-term agenda identifies the oppressions embedded in a situation and envision transformational change that overcomes the oppressions. Within this framework, the short agenda draws on the same analysis of the situation and includes a range of challenges to the identified oppressions. Because these small changes challenge the identified oppressions rather than simply improving the situation of one group relative to another, they contribute to the long term agenda.

Long-term agenda

Based on relevant literature, the research interviews and the focus group discussions, I propose the following items for a long-term agenda for transformational change.

1. Duncan Ironmonger's call to change what is considered as economic activity and to include in all matters of law, politics, policy and practice the consideration of the whole of the economy, including the market economy, the household economy and the environment.
2. A change in the status of caring for young children from 'doing nothing', 'not working' or 'caring' to recognition as real work with value for the whole community.
3. Changes in the organization of market work and family work to encourage women and men to participate equally in both, and in political and community life.
4. Changes to the gender system that prescribes 'proper' and different roles and behaviors for women and men. This gender system includes ideologies and dominant discourses of motherhood and the family.

In their interviews for this research, both Peter McDonald and Carmen Lawrence suggested a broad-ranging public inquiry into Australia's social arrangements for caring for young children. If it could be conducted within the framework of the long agenda items identified above, it could establish a short agenda of specific changes. The suggested inquiry would be carried out by a panel with a range of expertise and should examine provisions in other countries particularly Scandinavian countries including Finland and consult academic research and opinion already published in this country. Such an inquiry could also provide proactive processes for community participation in the inquiry, including extensive community consultations; and make recommendations across portfolio areas.

Short term agenda

Pending such an inquiry, the following items are important aspects of a short term agenda for change.

1. Twelve months paid maternity leave for mothers, and twelve months paid paternity leave for fathers.
2. High quality, flexible, free or very low cost childcare available for all babies and children. Parents would use this for any purpose, including having a regular break from caring work, respite when children or parents are sick, fitness, leisure or artistic pursuits.
3. Arrangements for mothers who wish to return to employment soon after a birth to ensure that they can obtain suitable, flexible care for their babies, and have sufficient income left to sustain life.

4. Generous family allowances to assist with the costs of raising children. These allowances NOT to be means tested because of the way that means-testing provides disincentives for mothers to return to the labour market.
5. Much improved supports for parents caring for young children, for example information services, household assistance, drop-in centres with diverse programs including supervised children's activities, user participation in developing leisure, artistic and educational activities for parents, cooperative meal preparation, and other activities, as determined by the participating parents.
6. Physical infrastructure improvements including secure housing for families with young children, safe, accessible playgrounds, and accessible, affordable public transport.
7. Excellent universal Out of School Hours programs including school holiday care.
8. Flexible education and training opportunities for mothers of young children to facilitate future labour market earning.
9. Industrial relations legislation introducing employment conditions that allow both female and male employees the flexibility required for caring responsibilities.
10. Employer pressure to work unpaid overtime should be treated in the same way as sexual harassment in the workplace.

Social conditions for the care of young children in Australia are oppressive because they exploit the labour of women. There is widespread dissatisfaction with these conditions, but no clear agreed agenda for transformational change. My research reported in this article explored ideas for change, developed suggested principles for change, and proposed a long-term agenda and short-term strategies for change.

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Notes

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