

# Should Parents Be Paid?

There is increased discussion of [how hard it is becoming](#) to simply raise children. With the world's fertility rate converging towards [just 1.7 children per woman](#), something is not right – especially because studies show that women would like to have more children but say that they are incapable of doing so for one reason or another.

Is it time for parenthood to become a paid “profession” just so parents can claim it back as meaningful work, and actually afford to raise their own children? Demographer, Lyman Stone, [thinks so](#). And with several American Democratic presidential candidates now proposing it, *The New York Times* recently discussed the question too, citing a 1976 poster which campaigns for “wages for housework.”

While I agree that all of our everyday tasks can be recognized as “work” to some extent, the militant text of that particular poster, with its points including “we want wages for every smile,” struck me as abhorrent at a gut level. Is motherhood not beautiful because it is a free gift, a sacrifice, and born of love?

The fact that parenthood must become part of the labor market to be recognized to be making an actual contribution to society is a reflection of a society enslaved to the labor market. A recent MercatorNet [article](#) by Carolyn Moynihan nailed the problem as “workism.” She writes:

*Sociologist W Bradford Wilcox and colleagues recently identified ‘workism’ as the probable cause of ultra-low fertility in places like South Korea and Japan where long hours of face time at the office are still standard. They called for a [change of work culture](#) that would allow all workers the hours and flexibility to devote more time and attention to family life. They called this ‘familism.’*

It could also be argued that if the state explicitly pays for it, the state gets a say in how it is done. However, many countries do now have some form of family tax credit which simply recognizes the expenses of bringing up children, and does make economic sense in a society which relies on well-brought-up future citizens. In "[Stay-at-Home Parents Work Hard. Should They Be Paid?](#)" Claire Cain Miller writes:

*Now, several Democratic presidential candidates are proposing that parents who stay home to care for children are paid, too. It's a twist on typical family policies – like paid leave, subsidized child care or the right to work part-time – all of which make it easier for parents to have jobs outside the home. Instead, this proposal would make it easier for them not to...*

*The question is: What do we mean by work?' Andrew Yang said on The Daily last month, and gave as an example his wife, who stays home with their sons. 'I know my wife is working harder than I am, and I'm running for president. And right now, the market values her work at zero. So we have to think bigger about what we mean by work and value.'*

Of the 95 comments currently on *The New York Times'* discussion of this topic on its learning network, the most recent one is this:

*I do believe that stay at home parents should be paid. The idea that they don't contribute anything to society is completely wrong – one or both parents being available during their child's early years will create a happier and more promising future for them.*

*This society is one that relies almost wholly on money, which brings in the idea that if someone is not performing traditional work, they are useless because they aren't earning money, when without them the country would be in disarray. People who don't have a job because of their child*

*might not be able to provide for anyone in their family without an amendment to this system.*

Food for thought. However, this sort of measure is surely a band-aid on a society already going wrong somewhere in its approach to work and family values. We have somehow reached a place where people are undervalued in their roles as homemakers and parents (no matter what other work they may or may not do alongside those core and vital roles), and are seemingly so much more valued in the labor market. We have an economic and social system which makes it hard (both economically and socially) to be a stay-at-home parent and support a family on just one income.

One thing is certain: society pays anyway if it doesn't support the family because it heavily relies on there being a supply of functional, socially-able, educated people to fill the labor market and pay taxes in the years to come.

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