

has exacerbated work life balance issues for many workers who have, for the most part, been left on their own to cope with the new realities of the workplace.

2.3 Government Forces:

The role of the government in Canadian's lives has also changed over the past decade. While the work-life needs of Canadian families has increased throughout the 90s, the scope of government activity in this area has narrowed substantially during this same time period. Scott (2000) notes the following examples:

- Governments across Canada have tackled financial deficits throughout the 1990s. As a result, government spending on important supports for families have eroded.
- Funding for key community supports such as childcare and home care has not kept pace with the demands for these services. Increasingly, such services are being offered on a cost recovery basis.
- Spending on income support programs such as Employment Insurance (EI) and social assistance has also declined. This has, in turn, negatively impacted the financial security of many Canadian families.
- Average transfer payments from federal to provincial governments have declined since 1994. To compensate for this decrease many governments have restricted program eligibility and benefit levels (Statistic Canada, June 1998).

Scott (2000) also notes that throughout the 1990s there was a significant rollback in two key leave programs in Canada (maternity and parental leave) with eligibility and program benefits being tightened year after year. These changes culminated in 1996 with the introduction of Employment Insurance (EI) which, among other things, increased the minimum number of hours needed to qualify for EI benefits (including maternity and parental leave provisions) from 300 to 700. As a result:

- the percentage of unemployed workers who are covered by EI has dropped precipitously, falling from 74% of the unemployed in 1989 to 36% by 1997 (CLC, 1998b), and
- maternity claims fell by 7.3% between 1996 and 1997 (CLC, 1998a).

The introduction of the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1996 (a block grant for federal contributions to provincial health, welfare and post-secondary education systems) is another example of a government action that has negatively affected work-life balance. Historically the federal government has provided funding to community services through cost sharing agreements and equalization payments to the provinces. While it is the responsibility of provincial governments to plan for, fund, establish standards for and regulate community services, federal funds have ensured a relatively consistent range of services in each province. When the federal government introduced the CHST they not only changed the form of the funding, they also reduced the cash proportion of the transfer. This, in turn, prompted rollbacks in service provision at the provincial level. Overall, these two actions (i.e. block grant and reduced funding), when taken in concert, have resulted in a tremendous variation in the availability and affordability of community supports and services: services which have traditionally made it easier for employees to balance work and family. While the federal government took steps in the 1999 budget to restore health funding to 1995 levels, no funding was allocated to programs for Canadians in need of family support (i.e. home care).