

The erosion of government supports and the introduction of user fees throughout the 1990s has placed renewed time pressures and financial constraints on Canadian families and meant that, for the most part, families have had to fend for themselves when trying to adapt to the changes noted in Section 2 (Scott, 2000). Cutbacks in community services such as childcare have exacerbated the problems faced by working families (Scott, 2000). While the marketplace expanded to meet the void left by the withdrawal of public services, the evidence would suggest that market solutions are often not ideal when it comes to things like child care or elder care. Concerns with for-profit solutions to work-life problems include worries about the quality of care and the costs of these supports to the end user (costs which may make it difficult for all but the most financially advantaged households to take advantage of them) (Scott, 2000). Greater details with respect to the government's changing role with respect to dependent care are given below.

Dependent Care

People cannot come to work (or, if at work, focus on the tasks at hand) unless their dependents are properly cared for. The main stresses associated with dependent care include finding it (high quality care is hard to find) and paying for it (i.e. expenses associated with dependent care puts many families under financial strain). Work by Duxbury and Higgins (1998) found that the following dimensions of dependent care were particularly problematic for Canadians: cost of care and the need to provide emergency care (this was particularly problematic for those living in smaller rural communities that did not have the same supply of services as larger cities).

Lack of quality dependent care is the critical issue for many families (Scott, 2000). Good child care and elder care remain very difficult to find in Canada. The data indicate that while the demand for childcare services has increase substantially throughout the decade the supply has not kept pace, particularly for licensed spaces for infants and school aged children (Scott, 2000). The cost of available care is also an issue especially for families who do not qualify for subsidies and cannot find or afford licenced care to cover their working hours (CCSD, 1998).

Furthermore, work by the Canadian Home Care Association (CHCA) (1998) indicates that the growing population of seniors also poses significant challenges for families. The CHCA found, for example, that many Canadians are worried that Canada's health care system and existing community supports are not enough to care for our population of seniors. They also determined that recent cutbacks in home care and the loss of many long term and acute care hospital beds have shifted the responsibility for care onto the family (Scott, 2000). While Canada has one of the highest rates of institutionalization of the elderly among industrialized countries, for every person with a severe disability who has been institutionalized, three remain outside (Beaujot, 1991). Long term care facilities are becoming overloaded and waiting lists for beds (particularly subsidized beds) in long term care facilities are the rule rather than the exception (Scott, 2000).

3.0 Quantifying the Challenge

To what extent is work-life balance an challenge for Canadians and Canadian employers? The answer to this questions can be inferred by looking at changes in work-life balance and employee mental health over time. The data presented in this section comes from research done by Duxbury and Higgins in 1991 and 2001. Documentation on the 1990-92 study are