

More moms get back on the job

CARLY WEEKS

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OTTAWA — Kerri Corturillo wasn't prepared for the set of new challenges waiting for her when she returned to work after maternity leave: childcare costs, no more after-work socializing, and major anxiety about balancing career goals with family life.

But four years later, and on her second maternity leave, Ms. Corturillo, who lives in Markham, Ont., says she is looking forward to returning to her job and has no plans to leave the work force.

"I see myself working full-time as long as I can," said Ms. Corturillo, who has a four-year-old daughter and six-month-old son.

She's part of a growing contingent of new Canadian mothers who are returning to work and remaining in their jobs as their children grow, according to a Statistics Canada report released yesterday.



Kerry Corturillo of Markham, Ont., will be going back to work at the end of May. She has been home looking after six-month-old Jacob and Emily, 4. (*Tory Zimmerman for The Globe and Mail*)

The study examined the impact of childbirth on women's careers from 1983 to 2004 focusing on mothers aged 20 to 39.

While the rate of mothers in the work force is traditionally lower than women without children, an increasing number are returning to work after childbirth.

In 1984, the employment rate of new mothers during the first year after giving birth was 84 per cent. That number reached a peak of 91 per cent in 1999 and was at 88 per cent by 2000.

Mothers are also less likely now to leave the work force several years after having children than they were 20 years ago.

About 8 per cent of mothers who had children in the mid- to late-1980s quit their jobs during the first three years after having children.

But since 2000, that number has dipped to less than 6 per cent.

The main force driving the increase of working mothers in Canada is that many companies have started to realize it's in their best interest to draw experienced and skilled new moms back into the office.

"I think that's a very strong trend in Corporate Canada - focusing on retaining talented working mothers," said Lisa Martin, who is founder and president of Briefcase Moms, a Vancouver firm that helps organizations accommodate women who have had children.

Women giving birth since 2000 returned to their previous earning level more quickly than new moms in the early 1980s, the report says.

In the mid-1980s, women who had given birth five years earlier could expect to earn only slightly more than they did before having children. However, by the mid-1990s, mothers were generally earning 10 per cent more five years after childbirth.

But despite the gains made in the past two decades, the report highlights the fact that new mothers still face an uphill battle when looking to advance their careers post-childbirth.

"Both long- and short-term employment rates of mothers were consistently lower than those of other women," the report says.

Women who recently gave birth also had less job mobility.

They were more likely to remain with an employer than those without children, according to the report.

For Ms. Corturillo, director of strategic projects with Ceridian Canada, a human-resources firm, flexibility is the key that has allowed her to remain in the work force.

In retaining her previous salary and working from home, she considered herself fortunate.

"It's a total balancing act," she said.

"The flexibility is the best part, but just being able to choose when to be flexible is also the key piece there," she added.

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