

OPINION

Freyd, J.J. (1989) We all benefit from quality child care. *The Register-Guard* (Eugene, Oregon, city newspaper) March 16, 1989. p 15A. [Similar versions published in the *Oregon Daily Emerald*, May 5, 1989, pp 2-3; and in the *The Stanford University Campus Report*, October 25, 1989, p 6.]

We all benefit from quality child care

By JENNIFER FREYD

I HAVE A JOB. I have a baby. I do not have adequate child care. I am an American woman.

I am a fortunate American woman because my baby is healthy and happy. I am fortunate because I have a terrific job with scheduling flexibility and job security. I am fortunate because I live very close to my workplace and can accomplish many job tasks at home. I am fortunate because I can afford a variety of child care solutions, including paying for care in my home. I am fortunate because I have a husband who helps care for our baby. Despite all this, the child care problems I face are tremendously draining: I day dream about quitting a job I love. If I feel this way, I can only shudder when I imagine how most working mothers feel.

What are these child care problems that even a fortunate woman faces? Although I pay higher than average wages for a care-giver in my home, I cannot compete with wages paid by almost any other sort of employer; thus, I lose care-givers when higher paying job opportunities become available. A child care center may provide more stability; however, there is no facility offering quality care for infants close enough to my workplace to make nursing feasible. Some parents in my situation have been especially lucky in finding a longterm and affordable care-giver. But if the wage is affordable to most parents, whether they hire an alien without a work visa or a care-giver dependent on her spouse's income, the care-giver must be paid at poverty level. This is still true, although sometimes to a lesser degree, when we use most day care homes and centers; the care-givers subsidize child care in this country.

For most mothers my problems may sound like luxuries, as affordable child care options are typically limited to group situations in pri-

vate homes that often do not meet minimum safety or quality standards. Nursing is almost always abandoned by working mothers because of location and scheduling constraints. Many mothers, even in our community, are faced with the choice of either leaving their child each day in a situation that is not safe or emotionally healthy, or quitting their job and living on welfare. What kind of choice is that? What kind of society are we living in?

Despite much publicity about this problem, the United States continues to lag behind all industrialized nations, except for South Africa, on support for working parents. This is manifest not just in lack of economic support for child care but in parental leave policies; in-

ments in the status of women. These forces operate on two fronts: acceptance of appallingly low salaries for child care workers (women doing "women's work"), and a fundamental lack of support for working women. The fact is that a great number of working women have to struggle with the daily dilemma between ensuring care for their children and meeting their work responsibilities and ambitions. Women do not have equal opportunity under these conditions.

The bitter irony is that even ignoring social equity for women and children, there is still good reason to provide acceptable child care. Why? Because the very lack of child care undercuts our nation's economic health. It in-

have been involved with an effort to respond to the child care problem for staff at one of Eugene's largest employers, the University of Oregon. A survey completed on campus last year demonstrated strong staff support for accessible, quality child care on campus (some child care is available for students, but not employees). A group of us have worked on a university committee to research the child care needs of staff and suggest solutions. We have suggested on-site care. We have requested modest university support to allow plans to progress. We were fortunate to find a donor willing to provide a substantial challenge grant in order to raise funds to build a child care facility. However, the university has not acted on our proposals, and is not taking advantage of our donor's pledge.

One action that members of the community can take is to write to the vice president for administration (with a copy to the Childcare Study Committee), voicing concern about this issue. The UO, with its size, resources and educational mission has the social responsibility to respond to the child care problem. In behaving responsibly, the university will do itself a favor by improving the status of women and parents and their children. This will affect job productivity, absenteeism rates and the ability to retain and recruit faculty and staff. If the university plans well, on-site, quality child care will be accessible to university staff at all pay scales, thereby contributing to the goal of equal opportunity for women. If the university acts responsibly, it will provide a model of quality child care our children and our society desperately need.

Jennifer Freyd is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Oregon. She submitted this guest column on behalf of the Child Care Action Group, a newly formed organization of university employees.

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most European countries new parents have extensive paid leaves required by law. These societies realize that the costs of covering paid leaves and providing quality child care are far less, in the long run, than the societal costs imposed by inadequate care for babies and children.

Why is our country so backward? At first I believed it was just misguided values and bad economic decisions made in the past. But my experiences this year have led me to a much darker analysis of the situation: The slow progress of child care solutions in this country is a direct result of forces that oppose improve-

ment. It interferes with the availability and productivity of a large part of the work force. Other industrialized nations spread the child care costs over government, employer and working parents to avoid the immediate and long-term costs of inadequate child care. Even without much governmental support, numerous studies have shown that employer-sponsored child care improves staff productivity, reduces absenteeism, increases hiring opportunities, decreases staff departures, and is thus economically advantageous to large employers.

Most of us cannot solve the national problem. We can only start locally. For 18 months I

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Poor U.S. child care policies 'an affirmative action issue'

By JENNIFER J. FREYD

I have a job. I have a baby. I do not have adequate child care. I am an American woman.

I am a fortunate American woman because my baby and his pre-school brother are healthy and happy. I am fortunate because I have a faculty position in a research university, a position that offers me great satisfaction, scheduling flexibility, and the security of tenure. I am fortunate because I live very close to campus and can accomplish many job tasks at home. I am fortunate because I can afford a variety of child care arrangements including paying for care in my home. I am fortunate because I have a husband who helps care for the children.

Despite all this, the child care problems I face, especially in making arrangements for the infant, are tremendously draining: I day dream about quitting a job I love. If I feel this way, I can only shudder when I imagine how much worse most working mothers feel.

These were my thoughts last spring, in Eugene, Ore., my permanent residence and workplace (I'm on the faculty at the University of Oregon.) This year my immediate experience with child care is very different; both of my children are receiving high quality care at the Children's Center of the Stanford Community (CCSC). CCSC is on campus; my husband works on campus; and I'm a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, also on campus.

With the children happy, well cared for and nearby, I am strikingly more productive at work than I have been in recent years. For sure, the Center for Advanced Study deserves lots of credit for my increased work productivity, but the positive difference I am experiencing this year is greatly magnified by the peace of mind I can finally enjoy, knowing that my children are receiving quality care.

I applaud Stanford for its support of child care. I am sure that the employees and students with young children who are able to take advantage of the quality care offered on campus profit greatly. These parents, unlike most working parents I know, have the "luxury" of going to work without spending enormous amounts of time and energy worrying about their children's well-being during the day. The increased morale and productivity these parents experience, in turn, benefits Stanford, as it should.

But Stanford needs to do more. Only a small and lucky fraction of employees and students with young children can afford to take advantage of the quality child care offered on campus. At CCSC, a parents' co-operative, we pay close to \$700 a month for the infant and more than \$450 a month for his pre-school brother, for fulltime care.

VIEWPOINT

Jennifer Freyd is a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, is on leave from the University of Oregon, where she is associate professor of psychology. Freyd and her husband J.Q. Johnson have two young children

These costs may be lower than some of the child care available off campus, but they are still well beyond what most employees can afford, never mind what most students or single parents can afford. Except for minimal subsidy from Stanford (the land the facility sits on is provided rent-free), the costs in providing care are covered by the parents, as fees and as co-operative work hours.

Indeed, to the extent that there is subsidy for quality child care in our country, it is typically the care givers themselves who subsidize the industry, by accepting wages that are less than they would be in any other job requiring comparable skills and with comparable responsibilities.

Affordable child care options, especially for infants, are usually limited to group situations in private homes that often do not meet minimum safety or quality standards. Working mothers almost always give up nursing because of location and scheduling constraints. Many mothers, even in university and college communities, are faced with the choice of either leaving their children each day in a situation that is not safe or emotionally healthy, or quitting their jobs to be dependent on a husband or on welfare. What kind of choice is that? What kind of society are we living in?

Despite much publicity about this problem, the United States continues to lag behind all industrialized nations, except South Africa, on support for working parents. This is manifest not just in lack of economic support for child care but in parental leave policies. In most European countries new parents have extensive paid leaves required by law. These societies realize that the costs of paid leaves and quality child care are far less, in the long run, than the societal costs of inadequate care for babies and children.

Why is our country so backward? At first I believed it was just misguided values and bad economic decisions of the past. But my experiences this year have led me to a much darker analysis: The slow progress of child care solutions in this country is a direct result of forces that oppose improvements in the status of women.

These forces operate on two fronts: acceptance of appallingly low salaries for child care workers (women doing "women's work"), and a fundamental lack of support for working women. The fact is that a great number of working women have to struggle with the daily dilemma of assuring care for their children or meeting their work responsibilities

and ambitions. Under these conditions, women do not have equal opportunity.

Some may doubt that child care is an affirmative action issue. After all, not all women are mothers, and some fathers may be affected by the availability of child care. Yet the complex combination of biological and social differences in parental roles leads to many more women than men whose work productivity is affected by the accessibility and quality of child care. And when the work productivity of a large number of women is compromised, it follows that their potential for promotion and advancement is compromised. That fact alone makes child care an affirmative action issue.

I have also become aware of a situation that, at the least, gives the appearance of discrimination. Many women, especially untenured faculty members, are afraid to even inquire about child care for fear of being classified as less serious about their work than colleagues who do not have, or do not call attention to family responsibilities. Thus, not only is the lack of child care affecting women's status, but the very topic seems to carry a risk for those who broach it. More than once I have been identified as "the child care person" in contexts in which my academic credentials would surely have been more appropriate.

The bitter irony is that even ignoring social equity for women and children, there is still good reason to provide quality child care. Its very lack undercuts our nation's economic health. It interferes with the availability and productivity of a large part of the workforce.

Other industrialized nations spread the child care costs among government, employer, and working parents to avoid the immediate and long-term costs of inadequate child care. Numerous studies have shown that, even without much government support, employer-sponsored child care improves staff productivity, reduces absenteeism, increases hiring opportunities, decreases staff departures, and is thus economically advantageous to large employers.

Universities and colleges should be leaders in overcoming the child care crisis. Stanford, with its size, resources and educational mission, has the social responsibility to respond more fully to the child care problem. In behaving responsibly, Stanford will do itself a favor by improving the status of women and parents, which will affect job productivity, absenteeism, and the ability to retain and recruit faculty and staff.

With additional and economically wise subsidy, quality child care will be accessible to parents at all pay scales. Stanford has the ability and the responsibility to provide a model of quality child care our children and our society desperately needs.

Forum

Affordable child care options an affirmative action issue

By Jennifer J. Freyd

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I am a fortunate American woman because my baby and his pre-school brother are healthy and happy. I am fortunate because I have a faculty position in a research university, a position that offers me great satisfaction, scheduling flexibility and the security of tenure. I am

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fortunate because I live very close to campus and can accomplish many job tasks at home. I am fortunate because I can afford a variety of child care solutions, including paying for child care in my home. I am fortunate that I have a husband who helps care for the children.

Despite all this, the child care problems I face, especially in making arrangements for the infant, are tremendously draining; I daydream about quitting a job I love. If I feel this way, I can only shudder when I imagine how much worse most working mothers must feel.

What are these child care problems even a fortunate woman faces?

Although I pay higher-than-average wages for a caregiver in my home, I cannot compete with wages paid by almost any other sort of employer. Whenever a higher paying job comes along, I lose a caregiver.

A quality child care center might provide more stability, but there is none close enough to my office to make nursing feasible.

Some parents in my situation have been especially lucky in finding a long-term affordable caregiver. But if the wage is affordable to most parents, that means poverty-level pay for the caregiver.

This is still true, although sometimes to a lesser degree, in most day care homes and centers. Caregivers subsidize child care in this country.

For most mothers, my problems sound like luxuries. Affordable child care options, especially for infants, are usually limited to group situations in private homes that often do not meet minimum safety or quality standards.

Working mothers almost always give up nursing because of location and scheduling constraints. Many mothers, even in university and college communities, are faced with the choice of either leaving their children each day in a

situation that is not safe or emotionally healthy, or quitting their jobs to be dependent on a husband or on welfare.

What kind of choice is that? What kind of society are we living in?

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In most European countries, new parents have extensive paid leaves required by law. These societies realize that the cost of paid leaves and quality child care are far less, in the long run, than the societal costs of inadequate care for babies and children.

Why is our country so backward? At first, I believed it was just misguided values and bad economic decisions in the past. But my experiences this year have led me to a much darker analysis: The slow progress of child care solutions in this country is a direct result of forces that oppose improvements in the status of women, and this includes powers at universities and colleges.

These forces operate on two fronts: acceptance of appallingly low salaries for child care workers (because women are doing "women's work") and a fundamental lack of support for working women. The fact is that great numbers of working women have to struggle with the daily dilemma of assuring care for their children or meeting their work responsibilities and ambitions. Under these conditions, women do not have equal opportunity.

Some may doubt that child care is an Affirmative Action issue. After all, not all women are mothers, and some fathers may be affected by the availability of child care.

Yet the complex combination of biological and social differences in parental roles leads to many more women than men whose work productivity is affected by the accessibility and quality of child care. And when the work productivity of a large number of women is compromised, it follows that their potential for promotion and advancement is compromised. That fact alone makes child care an affirmative action issue.

I also have become aware of a situation that, at the least, has the appearance of discrimination. Many women, especially untenured faculty members, are afraid to even inquire about child care for fear of being classified as less serious about their work than colleagues

who do not have young children or do not call attention to family responsibilities.

Thus, not only is the lack of child care affecting women's status, but the very topic seems to carry a risk for those who broach it. More than once I have been identified as "the child care person."

The bitter irony is that, even ignoring social equity for women and children, there is still good reason to provide quality child care. Its very lack undercuts our nation's economic health. It interferes with the availability and productivity of a large part of the workforce.

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Universities and colleges should be leaders in overcoming the child care crisis. If your institution does not have adequate child care for its employees, consider initiating or helping an effort to develop a child care facility.

Universities and colleges, with their size, resources and educational mission, have the social responsibility to respond to the child care problem. In behaving responsibly, the institutions will do themselves a favor by improving the status of women, which will affect job productivity, absenteeism and the ability to retain and recruit faculty and staff.

With proper safeguards and parental approval, a child care facility may even be valuable to researchers studying children, a bonus for institutions with relevant research interests. If planned well, on-site, quality child care will be accessible to faculty and staff at all pay scales, thereby contributing to the goal of equal opportunity for women.

Jennifer Freyd is an associate psychology professor and a member of the University Child Care Study Committee.