

# Seattle Post-Intelligencer

[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/362567\\_optin10.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/362567_optin10.html)



Cecilia Phillips, 3, shows her mom, Lorraine Lewis Phillips, a tulip Friday at Bright Horizons child care center. Phillips was picking up her children after a day at the office. The attorney works at Keller Rohrback in Seattle. (Andy Rogers / P-I)

## The myth of the stay-at-home mom

### Many can't or won't leave jobs

*Last updated May 9, 2008 11:54 p.m. PT*

By **PAUL NYHAN**  
P-I REPORTER

The media buzzed in recent years with reports of mothers opting out of the work force to raise their children. It turns out the revolution among mothers has been canceled -- and maybe never even started.

There is not a widespread trend of working moms trading paychecks for play dates, several economists report. In fact, the percentage of moms in the daily grind had been rising since the 1960s, before leveling off in recent years, they said.

Instead, as families celebrate the nation's 94th Mother's Day on Sunday, they are coping with a different set of trends -- a rising number of two-career families, growing cost of living, sagging home prices, mounting hours at work and a looming recession.

While mothers struggle to strike a balance in these shifting economic sands, anecdotal evidence is popping up around Seattle that a few bosses are noticing. There is a roving nanny at one Ballard mortgage brokerage, a moms support group at a downtown law firm and paid paternity leave at Microsoft Corp. While these changes are far from the rule, most are relatively new.

These new work-family tools reflect that 65 percent of mothers with preschoolers worked in 2006, up from 30 percent in 1970, according to a Stanford University study. Buried deeper in the data is that 71 percent of all moms were in the labor force that year, according to Labor Department data.

"Consistently what the data says is that women are not opting out," said Amy Richards, author of "Opting In: Having a Child Without Losing Yourself."

For some mothers, opting out or in is not even a true debate.

Lorraine Lewis Phillips never seriously considered leaving the courthouse life after having her first daughter three years ago or her second in August. The Seattle-based litigator loves her job too much and craves the mental stimulation of work. Money, of course, was a factor, though it wasn't at the top of her list.

Yet to make it work, the 40-year-old had to tweak her schedule and ambition. Her workday often resumes at 9 p.m., when she logs in from her North Seattle home after tucking her daughters into bed.

She also sleeps about six hours a night, now works 50 hours a week, not 70 hours, and her self-employed husband typically picks up and drops off the children at child care.

She also makes sure she doesn't book business trip flights until after her girls finish swimming lessons.

Phillips realizes she may pay a price for all this: a longer climb up the corporate ladder.

"I don't believe I'm sabotaging myself. I do think it will take longer than it would have ... but that's OK with me," Phillips said. "I am not sure it is balance, but things are working."

To help lawyer-moms strike a semblance of work-family balance and keep moving up, Phillips co-founded MAMAS (Mother Attorneys Mentoring Association of Seattle) in late 2006.

Once a month, the mothers gather for a brown-bag lunch, and discussions range from summer camps to life coaching.

Over in Ballard, Salmon Bay Community Lending keeps a mobile nanny on the payroll. She is on call during the day to care for children of all six women who anchor the business.

"She is part of the team," says Ruby Grynberg, who founded the all-female mortgage brokerage three years ago. "I certainly don't know anyone else who has a similar situation."

Mobile nannies are far from the norm, though. Pro-family changes are coming slowly to the Seattle work scene, according to family advocates.

"What we are seeing is an increase in businesses who are offering flexible work options, and who are offering options for both parents to work and parent," said Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, the Seattle-area based leader of the parents-rights group Moms Rising. "We are seeing a very slow but steady increase."

But, the gap between the demands of work and home in 2008 remains wide, far wider for those sitting on the bottom and in the middle of the wage scale, according to Virginia Rutter, a senior fellow with Council on Contemporary Families.

They have less money for child care and often face meager benefits at work.

In another twist, older moms are more likely to keep working after having children than younger moms, according to an analysis of federal data by former Bureau of Labor Statistics economist Charlotte Yee.

In 2004, 67 percent of moms age 30 to 44 were in the labor force after having their first child, compared with 56 percent of moms in the 20 to 24 age range.

With moms remaining firmly at work, the looming recession is casting a longer shadow over the American family. Nearly 70 percent of women cited financial strain as a bigger problem for the nation's families than divorce, in a survey of more than 3,000 women by NBC Universal and Meredith Corp. released in April.

As moms and dads search for balance during the economic downturn, "Opting In's" Richards has advice about getting flexibility at work.

"Ask for it," Richards says.

## **ON THE WEB**

For more news about parenting issues and to discuss this story, visit [momseattle.com](http://momseattle.com).

---

*P-I reporter Paul Nyhan can be reached at 206-448-8145 or [paulnyhan@seattlepi.com](mailto:paulnyhan@seattlepi.com). Read the Seattle P-I's parenting blog, *Working Dad*, at [blog.seattlepi.com/family](http://blog.seattlepi.com/family).*

© 1998-2008 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*