

## **Work and Family Life**

### **Gitanjali Prasad**

The father has an enviable job. So does the mother. Big paycheck, attractive perks, and a highflying lifestyle. The children go to the city's best schools, so what could possibly be wrong with the new corporate utopia. Nothing if you're lucky and have kids who can take the pressure parents in high stress jobs pass on to the home. Plenty, if you're not so lucky and have children who feel neglected and resentful of getting "quality time" at their parents' convenience rather than when they need it.

Research in both the US and the UK show conclusively that today's high pressure jobs where parents not only work longer hours, but also work more intensively, leaves them too tired to do much more than watch TV when they return home. Ellen Galinsky, President of the Families and Work Institute, USA, says that children cherish the mundane routine of family life rather than expensive gifts or grand vacations.

In the UK, the government is sufficiently concerned to launch a massive programme, Supporting Families, which seeks to identify ways in which government can help families including perhaps giving fathers leave at times at which their children are under stress at school. And there are statistics to show that the children of fathers who are less involved in the family do less well academically.

Turning one's attention closer to home, one discovers that the first fall out of a dual career family is that the child is likely to begin school earlier than usual. In the absence of good childcare facilities, and with reliable domestic help becoming increasingly scarce, many kids start school at one and a half years of age. On the plus side, they are at least under some adult supervision; however, a definite minus is that because many such play schools are run by people with no training in childcare, children as young as two and a half are "taught" to read and write, do number work, and learn nursery rhymes, and more. This, pushing of a child before he is ready could lead to lifelong problems fear child psychologists.

Many children are just not ready to either be separated from the parent or to handle formal learning. Since our classrooms are routinely overcrowded with a teacher-student ratio of 1:50 or more, it is understood that parents will help children with homework, and more especially with extra-curricular activities and projects.

Children whose parents are too busy to assist are often victimised by teachers who are unable or unwilling to take the additional load. In families where both the father and the mother have jobs which involve touring, it may not be possible for either parent to be present at important milestones in a child's school life such as Parent's day, sports day, or the school concert.

To teachers, and sometimes to the child, this is proof positive that the child is not very high on the parents' list of priorities. Parents, who are busy negotiating the tightrope that balancing ordinary life turns out to be, are frustrated by what they see as the school's lack of understanding of their predicament. They are resentful that the school does not understand that they often fall short by the school's standards because of their greater dependence on say, a maid to meet the school bus, or to take care of a child when he is sick.

Sometimes, the school going child undergoes so much pressure and stress, that he not only falls behind with school work, but becomes a "trouble maker" in school often prompting a mother to give up her job. It's unfortunate, really that this is, so many parents have to go in for such a solution, because many teachers are positive about the pride today's child has in the achievements of a working mother. One thing is clear. With the working environment as it is currently structured, no one can have it all.

(Gitanjali Prasad is a free lance writer who has been writing on the family for over 15 years.

She also studied the pressures of work on family life as a Press Fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge.)

## **HOME**

### **Other Articles on Family Life**

- [Work longer,Tempers Shorter](#)
- [Matter of Choice](#)
- [Balancing Act](#)
- [Youth Time](#)
- [The Life After](#)
- [The Spouse Trail](#)
- [The Parent Trap](#)
- [Coping With Fatherhood](#)
- [Motherhood:Is It For Everyone](#)

Copyright ♦ 2002 Gitanjali Prasad