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Why are working mothers blamed?

Representing thousands of women's organisations from throughout Europe, we write to you in response to your article "Working mums raise the most unhealthy children" (Irish Independent, September 29).

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) does not wish to question the findings of the researchers at the Institute of Child Health in London, but insists that all scientific research must be viewed in its proper context. In this case, the terms of reference of the research, which only examines the simplistic relationship between mothers' working hours and the eating habits of children of precisely five-years-old, seriously limit the value of its conclusions.

As other commentators have pointed out, one of the study's main weaknesses is that it did not cross-check whether the fathers of the children in question were bearing child-caring responsibilities. According to the authors, this was because "fathers' employment levels had not changed whereas the numbers of working mothers had increased dramatically".

Surely any equality-minded person would have a strong objection to the implied assumption that because men have not left their jobs in droves to become full-time carers they have no impact on the life of children.

This is simplistic, dangerous, and offensive to the many caring and dedicated fathers.

In 2009, it is surely time to recognise that if children of working parents suffer (which is questionable given that the raw data used in the study actually demonstrated precisely the opposite!), this is the joint and equal concern and responsibility of the father and the mother?

Myria Vassiliadou

Secretary General of the EWL

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