

New York Times: ‘Too Generous’ Family Policies Cause Discrimination Against Women

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The New York Times’ vision of women in the workplace. (Anna Parini)

Familiar, frustrating construction from today’s New York Times ([5/26/15](#)):

It turns out that generous maternity leave and flexible rules on part-time work can make it harder for women to be promoted — or even hired at all.

That’s one way to put it, and the article, by “Women at Work” columnist Claire Cain Miller, puts it that way repeatedly. Women are paid less in Chile as a “result” of the law that requires employers to provide childcare for working mothers. Maternity leave measures “have meant that” European women are less likely to achieve powerful positions at work. Policies intended to mitigate the penalty women pay for their traditional “dual burden,” the Times says, “end up discouraging employers from hiring women in the first place.”

The workplace repression of women is described as the “unintended” impact of family-friendly policies. Sure, such impacts weren’t intended by the policies’ drafters, but that makes it sound as though there were no conscious human beings behind decisions to pay working mothers less or not to hire women. It isn’t the policies that “make it harder” for women, but the male-centric management structure’s unwillingness to integrate those policies into the way work is done. Why not say that?

The Times suggests it might be better if employers didn’t have to pay for policies that make it possible for caregivers to earn a living, or maybe they should be “generous but not too generous.”

Finally, it floats the idea that making family-supportive measures gender-neutral might alleviate some of employers’ punitive responses. This at least starts to broach some of the societal questions—like the idea of making workplaces that support family and community life, rather than the other way around—that, in a better world, might form the starting point for such an article.

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