

Moms are getting jobbed in interviews

Study finds lower pay, less chance of being hired

By Tannette Johnson-Elie

Moms, you might want to take off your wedding ring before going on your next job interview.

Oh, and try not to talk about your children, no matter how proud you might be of little Quentin or Suzy.

A groundbreaking study by Cornell University researchers found that outing yourself as a mom can make it difficult to get and keep a job.

“Getting a Job: Is there a Motherhood Penalty?” found that women with children are less likely to get hired, are paid less than equally qualified fathers or women without children and are viewed as less competent.

Laura Gramling Perez, 36, a mother of two young daughters and a litigator and shareholder at Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren in Milwaukee, has had to fight such biases in the legal profession.

“I’ve encountered some situations where people have presumed that I’m not as serious or that there are certain meetings that I can’t get to because of my kids,” says Gramling Perez, who works a reduced schedule. “Women have to figure out how to work with colleagues and bosses who aren’t going to disadvantage them. I’ve been pretty lucky that most of my colleagues and senior people I report to treat me very well.”

Shelley J. Correll, an associate professor of sociology at Cornell, and Stephen Benard, a Cornell graduate student and researcher, tested their hypothesis by creating fictitious jobseekers and having 192 undergrads evaluate them as candidates for a position as marketing director.

They created two applicant profiles, both with the same qualifications - one a mother of two and the other a married woman without children.

The students were much more inclined to hire the childless women than the moms - 84% to 47%.

As well, mothers were viewed as significantly less promotable and less likely to be recommended for management than the non-mothers.

Fathers were offered significantly higher salaries than men without children, while mothers, on average, were offered \$11,000 less than women without children. Fathers were seen as more stable and significantly more committed to their jobs than mothers.

This provides more evidence of the bias that plagues women in their careers, and it might help explain why women are woefully underrepresented in the upper ranks of many major U.S. companies.

“It’s an antiquated stereotype that’s still rearing its ugly head,” says Belle Rose Ragins, a professor in the School of Business at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Some moms, of course, do get ahead. I’m the mother of boys ages 9 and 13, and I consider that I’m blessed with an employer that gets it when it comes to work-family balance at a time when many organizations still remain light years behind.

A flexible work arrangement that permits me to telecommute from home has enabled me to juggle work and family demands without feeling guilty about putting one ahead of the other.

But even flexible work arrangements go against the cultural view of a good mother. A good mom, that view dictates, directs her time and emotional energy toward her children without limit, while a good worker is always there for her employer, the study says.

“Those ideas are so ingrained in our culture that people rely on them as short cuts when making decisions without being aware of it,” says Benard, the researcher at Cornell, which is based in Ithaca, N.Y.

David Lewis, president of OperationsInc., a human resources consulting firm based in Stamford, Conn., sees work-life balance as the No. 1 workplace issue.

“Employers try to protect the level of productivity in their respective businesses by ensuring that all employees are 110 percent dedicated and available to be at the office as needed,” Lewis says. “Sick kids, school closings and school vacations all work against this goal when that employee is the primary caregiver.”

The study pinpointed the “ideal worker” as one who is willing to “drop everything at a moment’s notice” for a new work demand, devote enormous hours to face-time at work and work late nights and weekends, the study says.

While more companies are offering work-family programs such as maternity leave and flexible work arrangements, many workplaces are unkind to moms.

“There are a lot of mothers who demonstrate pride in their work - all the employer may see is that the employee isn’t

CHANGING CORPORATE CULTURES

Until things change, working mothers have to work around the barriers they encounter in the workplace. Here are some survival strategies for them and ideas for bosses on how to change their corporate cultures.

For working mothers:

▫ Look for family friendly workplaces. Firms with benefits like onsite day care or flextime might be less likely to discriminate.

▫ When applying for a job, avoid mentioning children on your resume. For example, don’t advertise that you are active in your child’s school’s parent-teacher association.

▫ On the job, avoid doing things in the workplace that call attention to the fact that you are a mother. For example, don’t advertise it if you need to leave work early to pick up a sick child at school.

For employers:

▫ Discriminating against mothers is costly: Making hiring decisions on the basis of anything other than an applicant’s qualifications - like motherhood - means passing up productive workers.

▫ Increase transparency in the hiring process. Make sure employees making hiring decisions can explain why they accepted or rejected an applicant. Often people do not realize they are discriminating until they stop and think about it.

▫ Increase accountability in the hiring process by periodically reviewing hiring decisions to ensure that they are being made fairly.

here again because of a sick child,” Lewis says. “This has an impact on what progression a mother is going to see in terms of her career.”

The key is for employers to structure their work demands with the understanding that people may have family commitments or other obligations outside of the job and to view work-family issues as strategically as they look at their core business, Lewis says.

Work-life programs might not be a panacea, but there’s enough research indicating that businesses that offer them have advantages in recruiting and retaining workers and that their employees are more loyal and productive.

It’s really common sense: People are likely to be more committed to their jobs, regardless of whether they have kids, if they know that the company has got their back.