

# Lack of family-friendly workplaces leading to loss of talent, says expert

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Professional women in their 30s are opting out of full-time work at an alarmingly high rate.

Only 38 per cent of Generation X, tertiary qualified [women](#) participating in a long-running University of Melbourne study work full-time, compared to 90 per cent of Generation X, tertiary qualified men.

The findings are among the latest to emerge from Life Patterns, Australia's longest running study of the lives of young people. Professor Johanna Wyn, Director of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education's Youth Research Centre, leads the study. She says Australia's lack of family-friendly workplace policies is to blame for the low participation rates of highly qualified women in the workforce.

“When we started this study in the early 90s, young women who had gained tertiary qualifications were the most likely of any social group to put the highest priority on gaining a [career](#) position.

“If we fast-forward to 2010, the majority of these same women are no longer participating in the workforce. Indeed, full-time employment for women, 13 years after leaving secondary school, is inversely related to level of educational qualifications.

“We have a mis-match between educational and workplace policies. While our young women are encouraged to excel academically, when its time to start a family, there is very little support available from

employers and more traditional attitudes to [gender roles](#) seem to prevail. So unfortunately, we find our workforce losing huge numbers of talented individuals.”

The study shows workplace policies have also taken their toll on the health of Generation X. Comparisons with a similar Canadian study show Australians report much higher levels of poor mental and physical health.

“The newly de-regulated workforce of the 90s meant young Australians were working longer hours with less [job security](#). As a result, the majority were not able to establish long-term partnerships, marry and have children as early as their Canadian counterparts, leading to more stress and less support for the Australians,” explains Professor Wyn.

These latest findings are contained in the new book: *The Making of a Generation: the children of the 1970s in adulthood*, written by Professor Wyn and Professor Lesley Andres from the University of British Columbia.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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