

The Real Benefits of Healthy Motherhood

WASHINGTON – Mothers should spend a great of time with their new-born babies in the first 3 years of the baby's life, and especially during the first year. This is not about reasserting traditional societal norms and old-fashioned cultural values regarding the role of women as mothers. This is medical advice to new mothers and fathers regarding the best way to raise healthy children, based on empirical scientific findings.

Why babies need their mothers

The evidence shows, and much research conducted over many years clearly illustrates this, that babies come into the world without a developed central nervous system. A great deal of data demonstrates that close contact with the mother supports a healthy development of the baby's neurological system.

How so? Because women transmit through their milk the hormone *oxytocin*, a critically important neurotransmitter produced by women and not by men. In addition, the oxytocin produced by the mother, (oxytocin is also known as the "love hormone"), contributes to the creation of a special bond between baby and mother. This bond helps the healthy neurological development of the baby.

And no, the day care center, assuming that working mothers have access to one, is not a good substitute for baby-mother bonding during the child's critically important early years.

This is not about "traditional values"

So, here is the thing. The old-fashioned notion, in fact antiquated according to most, that women should be primarily

good mothers and should spend a great of time with their babies, while embraced by those who support the “restoration” of traditional values and traditional families, has in fact true scientific backing.

Of course, depending on the slant you put on this new medical research, this scientific finding could lead to very counterproductive advice to women:

“Based on science, it is clear that, if you want to have healthy children, you should devote yourself entirely to them. This means that you should give up any plans to have a full-time job and a real career. You cannot have both”.

How do we reconcile work and motherhood?

Well, it does not have to be this way.

Still, it will be difficult to reconcile the need to have mothers spend a great of time with their new-born babies, (a lot of time in the first 9 months to a year, and then still quite a bit of time, until they reach age three), and the legitimate desire (in many cases it is a basic financial need) shared by millions of women all over the world to work and have fulfilling careers.

it is very clear, especially here in America, that working women who have children are already penalized by a system that in most cases does not even recognize the need for a few weeks of maternal leave for new mothers. If employers are not even willing to give a few weeks of leave, how can you possibly expect that they will give an entire year, possibly three?

The employers will argue that they could not possibly sustain the cost of keeping on payroll women who stay at home taking care of their babies, not just for a few months, but up to three years.

It is a societal issue

Well, this is where a public education campaign has to come into play. It is complicated to convey the right message; but it is possible. Here is the thing. As a society, do we care about the proper neurological and psychological development of the new generations? Yes or no?

The sensible answer should be a resounding “Yes”. Well, if so, as responsible members of our society, we must be willing to help cover the costs of extended maternal leave while babies are still in their infancy, and later on flex time for young mothers until the little children reach age three. (This is the age in which according to the findings mentioned above their central nervous system has been formed through the close bonding with their mothers. After age three the need to spend so much time with their mothers is no longer essential for their healthy neurological development).

The price of inaction

Will we ever get there? I hope so. New York psychoanalyst Erica Komisar in a long interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, (October 28-29, 2017), explains the consequences of inaction. She recounts stories described in the medical literature which list the damages that often occur when babies grow up without the precious bond with their mothers in the critical beginnings of their lives.

According to many studies, there is a plethora of psychological pathologies affecting small children who could not benefit from close bonding with their mothers in the early years of their lives, ranging from autism to attention deficit disorder to “social disorders”, and difficulties relating to other children and adults.

According to the science Komisar cites in the interview, all these dysfunctions, sometimes severe, can and should be avoided. We only have to make sure that mothers and new-born babies can develop the special bond described above, thanks to

the “love hormone”.

The burden cannot be placed on mothers

Again, given all this, it would be horribly unfair to place the entire burden of this new and apparently much healthier approach to motherhood on women and their spouses. In most instances, working women simply cannot afford to quit work, not to mention the huge penalty of getting out of the work force, this way missing opportunities for career advancement, salary increases and what not. We should not place women in front of the horrible dilemma of having jobs or children, but not both.

A child centric society

Therefore, it is up to all of us to embrace the concept of a “*child centric society*” , as Ms. Komisar puts it. This is our society. it should be our shared goal to have mostly psychologically healthy babies who will hopefully develop into healthy children, and later on healthy adults.

Think about it. It is not just about the babies and their parents. In fact, it is about all of us. Let’s think about a proper way in which we can allow babies to bond with their mothers, without in any way penalizing women who want and need to work. In the end it is about sharing the cost of extended maternal leave for new mothers. Through a shared social policy effort –let’s not hide from the fact paying women who will stay at home with their babies will cost money– we may be able to find a good solution that will allow working mothers to be away from work, without imposing an unsustainable burden on their employers.