

Do we value the work of Cork's 30,000 stay-at-home parents?



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IN 1990, Canadian supermodel Linda Evangelista commented that she wouldn't even wake up for less than €10,000 a day.

Evangelista was later often misquoted as saying she wouldn't get out of bed for less than €10,000 a day, but that's neither here nor there. The point being, to put it bluntly, that she expected €10,000 a day for basically putting on some nice clothes and walking around.

Society clearly places a very high premium on tall, beautiful, sexy women who are prepared to be photographed in gorgeous clothes.

However nearly 30 years on, a surprisingly large number of people indicated to researchers that they believe €20,000 to €30,000 a year was a fair salary for a stay-at-home mum, making it abundantly clear that society doesn't put much of a premium on those who get up, put on their clothes and run a home.

Although there are a few more men doing it these days, home-makers are still mostly female, who not only get up each morning and dress themselves (!), but clean the house, prepare the meals, feed, change and care for the babies and non-school-going children, do the school runs and the trips to after-school activities, manage the laundry, help with homework and monitor juvenile computer screen-time (and that's only for starters.)

Basically all the invisible work that nobody really thinks about — or talks about — but which is fundamental for the wheels of the labour market, schools and society in general, to keep turning efficiently.

Yet this study found that almost a third of people felt that if they were to hire someone to do the home-maker job, a salary of between €20,000 and €30,000 would be fair. Okaaaaaay.

Hmmm — your average crèche payments for one baby for the full working week will cost you, let's say, on average around €250 to €300. That's about €12,000 a year or more. And then, let's say you have to arrange for after-school care for another, school-going child, it's €5 an hour, or about €50 a week, which

works out at €2,400 for one child. To get somebody to spend a full day once a week cleaning your house once a week will cost €70 to €80 or on or

about €4,000 a year.

A full-time chef for the family to take care of meals, shopping and cooking etc, would, I'd guesstimate, going from published pay scales, set you back an average of about €26,000 a year.

Now you're up to about €44,000 and you still haven't looked after who is going to drive the kids to their various activities, sports or extracurricular classes, the management of the family laundry (and ironing), the gardening or, even, getting someone in to wash the windows once or twice a year...

Even the Central Statistics Office's estimate of the financial value of a stay-at-home parent — at about €45,000 — may quite possibly, come in a bit low. So the €20,000 to €30,000 estimate of an appropriate annual salary for someone to run the home, is way off the mark.

Why is this so? Because housework is necessary but not prestigious. Changing a nappy and feeding a baby or entertaining a toddler all day, is not generally perceived as high-status or even enviable work. Peeling spuds and cooking for a family is not viewed as particularly prestigious work either — along with any of the other household chores. Which, of course, is why people respond with such a low guesstimate for a stay-at-home parent's hypothetical salary.

However, the stunning irony of all of this is that once you actually start buying in this labour — in terms of childcare, meal preparation, household cleaning or laundry — you'll pay through the nose for it.

The findings of the study, published during the week by insurance protection specialist Royal London, found that while just under a third of people presumed the yearly value of work done by stay-at-home parents to be within the €20,000 to €30,000 range, and about a quarter put it at €30,000 to €40,000, a comparative cost-analysis carried out by the company showed that the average pay for the job could be around €42,000.

Amazingly, six per cent of people surveyed felt the work carried out by stay-at-home parents was worth under €10,000 a year. It's roughly estimated that there are around 30,000 stay-at-home parents in County Cork.

Royal London considered the duties of a stay-at-home parent and researched the cost of replacing the 'jobs' they do for the family and in the home. Tasks included some of the 'top jobs' parents carry out on a weekly basis such as cooking, cleaning, driving children to their various activities and so on, and the average work-place costs associated with

these duties. And when they put it all together — childminder, cleaner, cook, teaching assistant, taxi-driver, gardener, they valued the work of the

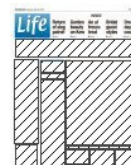
stay-at-home parent at around €800 a week or just over €42,000 a year. Is it any surprise that, given the low financial value placed on their work compared to the enormously high levels of disingenuous lip service paid to them, the number of stay-at-home parents in this country is falling rapidly? Between 2006 and 2016 it fell from 533,000 to around 455,000 according to the Central Statistics Office.

Home-making is a job that starts anytime from about 7am or earlier if

the baby wakes up, and which goes on til at least 7pm when the baby goes to bed if not later than that — and that's a conservative estimate.

You probably won't have an official boss or supervisor looking over your shoulder all the time, but if the dinner isn't ready on time each day or the school lunches aren't made or shirts aren't ironed or the baby isn't fed or the uniforms aren't washed, dried, aired and back on the hangers in time for Monday morning you'll hear about it. Sure who'd do it?

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VALUED: A survey reported that most people value work done by stay-at-home parents to be worth €20,000 to €30,000. Picture: PA