The main reasons women are staying home, according to two reports: a weak labor market and inflexible work policies.

By MARILYN GARNDER
The Christian Science Monitor

When New York Times reporter Lisa Belkin coined the phrase "the opt-out revolution" in 2003 as a description of a subset exodus of mothers from the work-force, her article sparked a media flurry. Other journalists rushed to find their own examples of women heading home for family reasons.

But don't think of it as a trend. Much of the talk about women's work-force drop-out is coming from a myth, two studies report.

"Women are not increasing-ly dropping out of the labor force because of their kids," says Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a journalism professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. "It's a fluid myth that has been repeated over and over, and it was largely because of a weak labor market. Men's labor force losses doubled during this time period."

Higher job losses in the recession of the early 1990s had the effect of making it appear that women -- and especially women with children -- were opting out of employment," Buhle says. "Yet mothers today are only half as likely to leave the work force because of their children as they were in 1984, she adds."

"Most mothers do not opt out," says JoAnn Williams, director of the Center for Workforce Law at the University of California, Hastings. They are pushed out by workplace inflexibility, the lack of support, and a workplace bias against mothers. "In one recent survey, 86 percent of women cited obstacles such as no possibil-ites as a key reason behind their decisions," Williams is co-author of a report released last week, "Opt Out or Pushed Out?: How the Press Covers Work/Family Conflicts." The study found that age of these issues typically focuses on highly educated women who account for just 8 percent of domestic workers. But as the now famous "opt-out" story, for example, profiled eight women who were graduates of Harvard Business School. Such articles also give the impression that women's departure from work is a mat-ter of choice.

The few profiles portray do not feature workers like Michelle Lee of Norfolk, Va. She has never heard the term "opt out." And she never intended to leave her job as an administrative assistant at a pharmaceutical company. But when she needed time off to take care of her three sons and various appointments for chronic con-ditions, her boss was unbridling.

I was willing to come in earlier, do more work, and leave my desk to make up the time," Lee says. "They gave me an ultimatum: I could not miss any more days. I told them it would be better for me to resign right now."

Eileen Bravo, former execu-tive director of NOW, National Association of Working Women, describes the chal-lenge many workers face, "Low-wage women don't have the option of opting out," she says. "We have the problem that being a good family mem-ber won't cost you your job."

Asked what would have enabled her to keep her job, Lee says and signs, "Flexibili-ty, just my flexibility." I'm not a pitiful person.

"Opting out" also hardly describes Jennifer Marx's decision from a Seattle radio station. Three weeks ago, Marx, the mother of a 5-month-old son, was laid off from her job as a producer due to her pregnancy. Now, as she looks for another job, she finds comparable flexibility.

"I was in an incredible situa-tion where my boss told me, 'I don't care when you're here as long as you get your job done.'"

Yet Williams cautions that stories like these can lead to "deskilling," a downward trend in which women who are driven out of the labor force into less paid jobs by inflexible workplaces.

"Misportrayal of professional women cheerfully dropping out with very little discussion about how women are getting back in misleads younger women into thinking that they have options that don't exist," Williams says.

Gillian Pomerantz of Baltimore has rare flexibility to work from home once a week to see her children. "It has been my tremendous privilege to help launch the Cardinal Agriculture & Technology Park."

Founded in 1973 by Richard and Gail Flugel, and given throughout the evening to view the work of hundreds of local artists.

The cost is $30 for members, $35 for nonmembers. Non-members may join at the door and apply the $15 toward membership. For reservations, visit www.awc-unc.org.

Robbins joins Lamar Outdoor

50B-A BRISTOL - Ryan Robbins of South Bristol has joined Lamar Outdoor in Rochester, and will be in charge of sales and marketing in Ontario, Seneca and Wayne counties.

Robbins is a SUNY Geneseo graduate of the Jones School of business and is currently pursuing a master's degree in marketing and leadership at Rochester Institute of Tech-nology and Saunders College of Business.

Badger Machine becomes certified

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

MINNEAPOLIS - Badger Machine of Rochester has been named a woman-owned business since 1969 and is recog-nized by the Women's Busi-ness Enterprise National Council. The company is also registered with the FDA as a medical device contract manu-facturer.

Robbins explains Lamar Outdoor

SUSANNE'S FITNESS

How you can save on energy bills this winter

Dr. Michael Shull, pro-fessor of anatomy, bio-logic and imaging. A research scientist since 1990 and is recog-nized by the FDA as a medical device contract manu-facturer.

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GALLRY: WHIRLPOOL GALAXY

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One of the most energy-inefficient appliances in your home is your furnace. To cut your winter heating bill, you need to be aware of the following heating tips.

Fretting over utility bills? A growing number of companies are looking to transform your worries into their profits.

From magnetic lids that cover vents to seal off drafts, to methods that can cut how much electricity a given appliance is pulling out of the grid, homeowners can turn to a number of tips, many of them at a price less than the cost of a restaurant dinner, to fight rising energy bills.

An energized household agrees that swapping out incandescent bulbs for more efficient substitu-tes is an economical choice.

The technology of fluores-cents has improved the quality of their light, and the price of the bulbs has decreased."

A compact fluorescent bulb may cost less than $4. That bulb can replace a 100-watt incandescent with one that burns four times as much power. The energy saving means the replaced bulb typically pays for itself in less than a year.

Other products that get you green are heating or fire-place vents to help increase air flow, and tarps and bags that seal attic stairs -- often an over-looked area -- for an insula-tion system. Many caps and gaskets for att-ic stalks cover sell for $12, and are intended to be placed over the window and the appliance being checked for power cons-umption, sells for less than $30.

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Fessenfeld, executive director of the Cardinal Agriculture & Technology Park, announced his resignation from the research park effective Jan. 1, 2007. He has accepted a new position as executive director of the Fred L. Emerson Foundation Inc., located in Canandaigua.

It has been my tremendous privilege to help launch the Cardinal Agriculture & Technology Park," Fessenfeld said. "The Technology Park is well-positioned to become a significant contributor to our region's economy and a unique venue for food and agriculture enterprises to gain competitive advantages by working closely with Cornell University."

Fessenfeld has been elected to a seat on the CAFTP board of directors, which will allow him to contribute to a seat on the CAFTP board of directors.

Walmart cuts prices in N.Y.

NEW YORK - Walmart stepped up its discounting last Friday in advance of the holiday season, announcing deep price cuts on almost 100 electronics that focused on high-definition TVs, cell phones and digital cameras.

The news came a day after the world's largest retailer announced disappointing October sales and Black Friday November outlook.

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