

Why a spouse can't grouse

Is a wife worth £204 a week? Dr Jon Garvey applies his own pay review.

SEE that some insurance company has put a value of £204 a week on your average wife's labours. This is based on what you'd have to pay out if she snuffed it or ran off with the encyclopaedia salesman.

Cooking, cleaning, chauffeuring, nannying; it all adds up. I suppose you'd have to pay the same rate as an electric blanket costs to warm the bed. As long as she wasn't the sort you have to turn off when you get in. Ho, ho, chortle, chortle.

Seriously, though, it makes you think. Supposing you had to pay your wife at those rates. You'd be broke in a month. There would be all sorts of extras in our case as well. I'd have to pay her as a kennelmaid, for looking after the dog while I'm out, and as a literary critic for telling me what rubbish my articles are . . . it doesn't bear thinking about.

And the figure doesn't include those very special roles she takes on by virtue of being a doctor's wife. For example, she has to answer the phone when I'm on call.

I wonder how much British Telecom charges for that? And would National Healthserv pay for it? It would be more than the Post Office charges, in fact, since she's having to give advice as well.

That's a professional service — 'I should put butter on it, dear, until the doctor comes back from gol... from his urgent housecall'.

Then, of course, she's acting as my personal secretary and assistant—I would never remember anything if she didn't have it written down in her diary. That's good for another thousand a year. There'd have to be extra, as well, if she started helping out on the practice administration like some wives do.

What else? She's my own personal psychotherapist, too.



That would be £15 a session, three days a week, reassuring me that it wasn't my fault Mrs Weaselnout died, and if it was, then she wouldn't have lasted long anyway.

How much should you get paid for breeding children as experimental animals? Well, the Government pays only about £25 as maternity grant, doesn't it, so it can't be that much. Yes, I suppose identical twins *are* worth more — you can use them in experiments on clones.

Apart from that, a wife's an extremely effective public relations agent, going round being 'the doctor's wife' at parish meetings and so forth. She's even a newsagent — most of the reading material in the waiting-room comes from our wives, with the exception of my "Melody Maker" and the senior partner's "Beano".

Let's see. If we tot that lot up on the calculator... well, as a very rough approximation, and not taking into account income tax, national insurance and so on, I estimate I should be paying my wife somewhere in the order of £37,640. Hell's bells—quick, put in for your divorce now, Jon, while you can still afford it!

But just a minute. This thing ought to cut both ways. I'm not exactly idle when I'm at home, either. I do most of the driving, *and* the car maintenance as well.

You can become a millionaire by mending cars alone. And who has to dig the Essex clay so that she can pop in her begonias, or

whatever they are? And *I* grow the vegetables, so that'll have to be paid for.

Building work, tiling, decorating, plumbing... doing the plumbing saves her £100 an hour, and the job gets done properly. Eventually.

Childminding while she's out riding. Private tutoring — it's not every three-year-old who's been taught the difference between a pine-marten and a polecat.

Cordon bleu cuisine—well, at Christmas. The list goes on and on.

What would be a reasonable remuneration for that lot? I'll just tot up the various rates . . . press button B, and I make it roughly £48,000. Aha! She actually ends up owing *me* about £204 a week!

Perhaps we should forget it, and just keep our joint bank account, as we always have done. That way there's nowt for either of us.

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