



The Human Face of Workplace Flexibility

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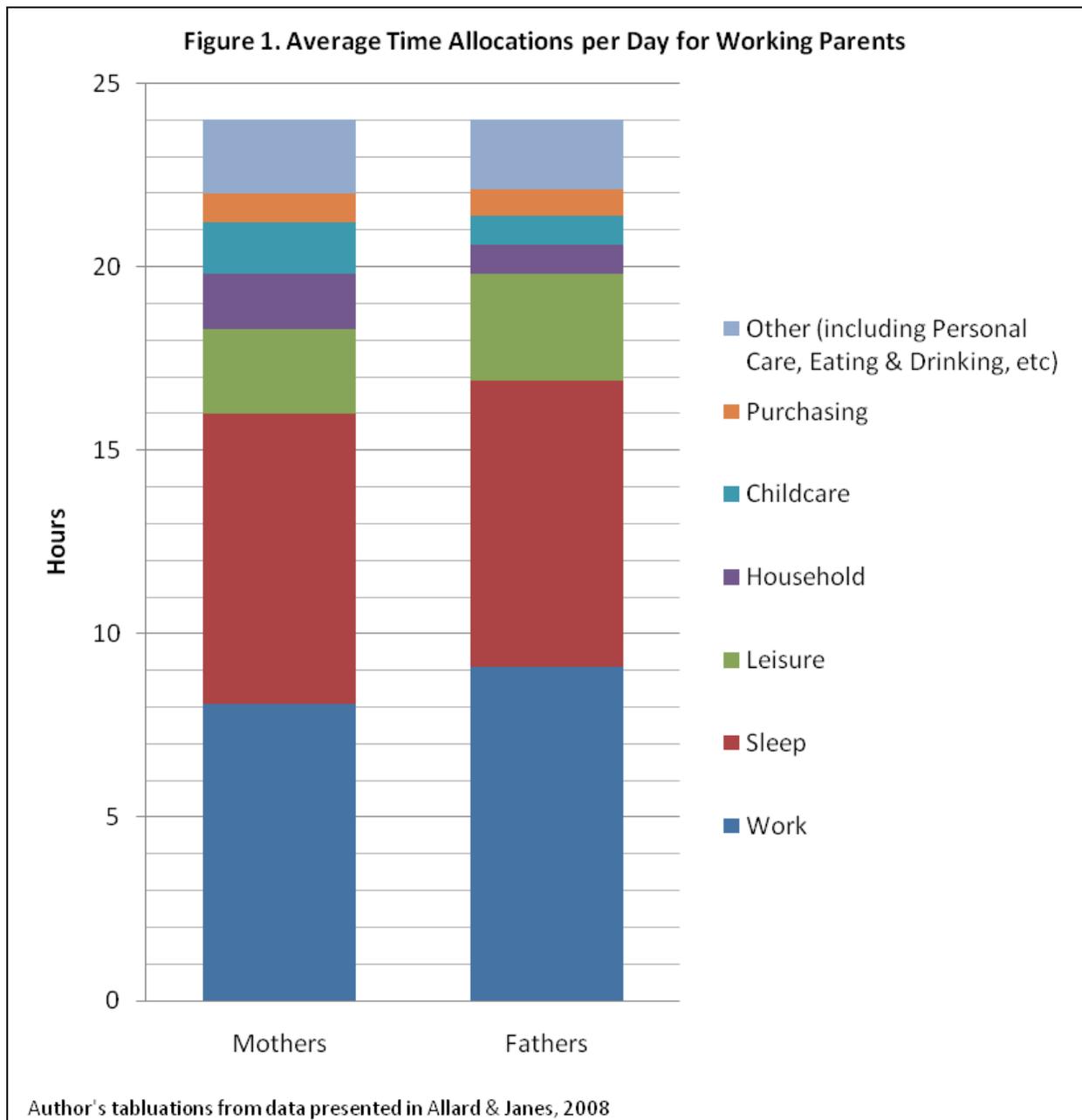
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U.S. families are experiencing serious time constraints as the demands of work and family life are increasingly requiring more attention and involvement. Confronted with workplaces and educational institutions that have rigid schedules governing where and when one has to be at work or school, the predictable and unpredictable nature of daily life is taking a major toll on the emotional well-being of parents and their children. Most working parents have the daily worry of arranging their schedules to accommodate the time needed for work related activities but also the *time* to adequately supervise and be actively engaged in their children's lives (Christensen, Schneider, and Butler, forthcoming).

We cannot see it, or touch it, yet we all are keenly aware when an hour passes. How we spend our time provides a window into the priorities and activities of our daily lives. Time diary studies, such as the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) and the National Survey of Parents (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006), provide robust estimates of the amount of time spent, and where and what activities working parents engage in when at work, at home, and with their children. However, these studies do not contain information regarding how parents feel when: being asked to work overtime, missing their children's sports events, or managing household tasks like cooking or cleaning. Examining not only the amount of time spent on activities but the subjective experiences of how it feels when engaged in such activities, can provide a deep understanding of why the structures of workplaces are increasingly incompatible with the changing dynamics of working families. This paper shows the importance of workplace flexibility and why it should become a standard for work, especially for working families.

Why We Need to Care about Time

Recent U.S. estimates indicate that employed fathers and mothers spend, on average, approximately 64 hours per week on paid and unpaid work combined (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006). Professional workers tend to spend more time at work, and estimates suggest that mothers and fathers in managerial positions are each working over 40 hours a week (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). Looking specifically at mothers and fathers who work full-time, as shown in Figure 1, we find that mothers spend on average eight hours per day on work whereas fathers spend about nine hours (Allard and Janes, 2008). Mothers spend less time in leisure than fathers (2.3 hours per day versus 2.9 hours per day).

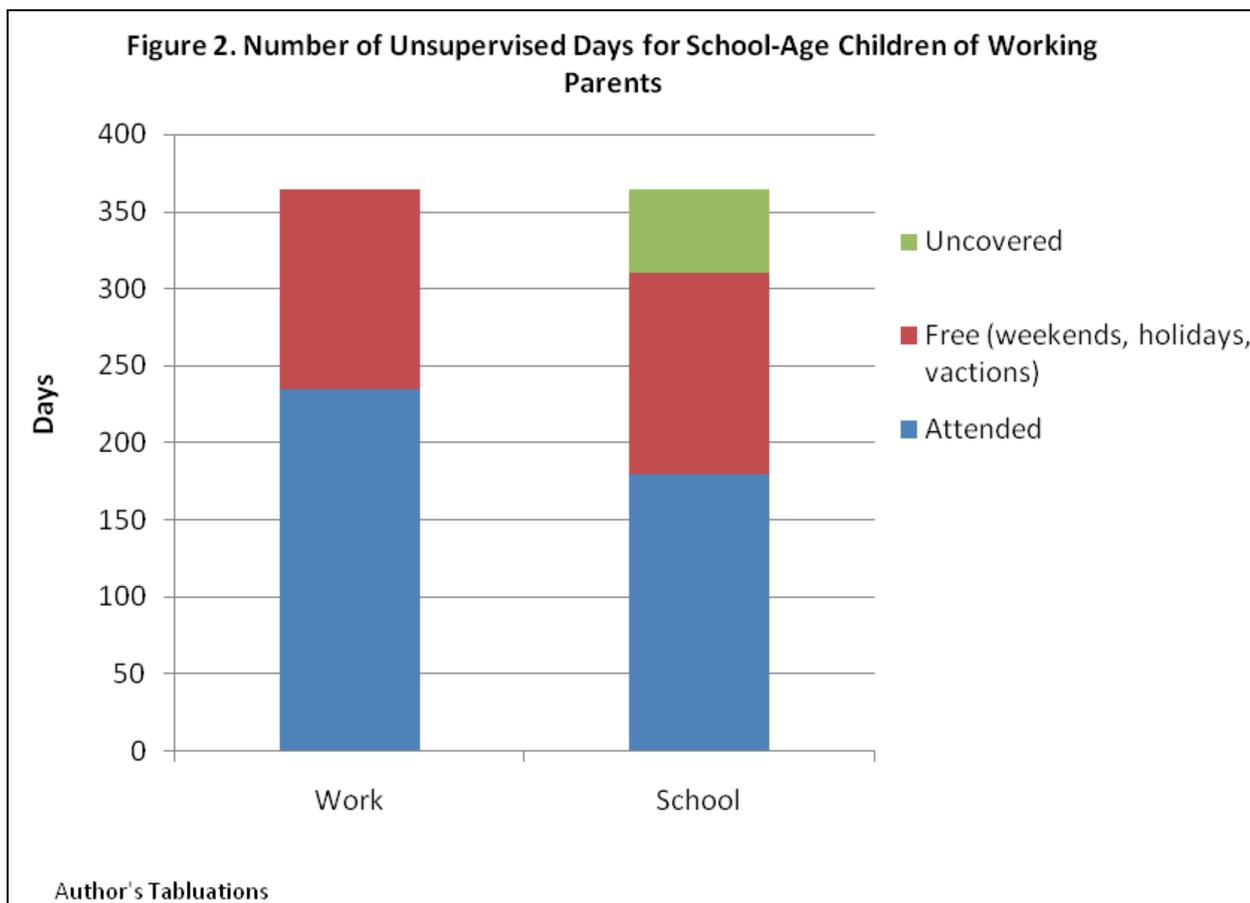


Mothers continue to spend more time in activities that are gender specific. Even though mothers tend to work less than fathers, they allocate more time to household management and child care (2.9 hours per day versus 1.6 hours per day). With the responsibilities of work, home, and child care, it is not surprising that most surveys find that both working mothers and mothers who are unemployed would prefer to work part-time (Schneider and Waite, 2005). Studies show that mothers working full-time are concerned that their careers will be damaged by partaking in part-time work, or jobs that offer flexible working arrangements.

Figure 1 shows the hours spent in a typical day for a working mother and father but what it does not indicate is how these daily work hours correspond to the hours that their children need child care. Children too young to be enrolled in regular school need care the entire time their parents are at work. However, we rarely consider the hours outside of the regular school day that working parents of school-age children are responsible for child care.

School days are shorter than the average work day, and children are in school for fewer days than parents working full-time are at the workplace. What this means is that working parents need to find adequate care to supervise those times when they cannot attend to their children’s basic needs. Such supervision tasks do not even consider those times when parents would like to allocate additional time directly related to their children’s well being such as helping with homework, attending school events, or taking time out of a busy day to talk about friends, schools, and relationships.

Few of us think about how the length of the school year and school day conflict with working parents’ schedules. Most states require that children spend a minimum of 180 days in school, however several states require less than 175 days (NCES, 2008). This means that parents have at least 185 days when they have to manage their children’s care, some of which occur over the weekend. If parents’ jobs do not occur over the weekend, they still are responsible for at least 81 week days during the year when their children are not scheduled to be in school. Most full-time jobs allow for two weeks of vacation and some personal days; taking these times into account, there are approximately 55 days per year that parents are responsible for their children’s care when they have to work (see Figure 2).



This 55 day estimate does not include the days when there are parent teacher conferences, school holidays such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Day or other times when schools are closed unexpectedly.

Breaking down days into hours, the number of hours children are in school is approximately 6.5 hours each weekday (NCES, 2008) leaving approximately seven hours of supervision, excluding sleep and personal care. A full-time working parent spends approximately eight hours at the job, and slightly less than an hour to and from work each day (Reschovsky, 2004). This means that, at a minimum, there are two and a half hours that parents on an average



school day cannot cover the direct care of their children. It does not take too much imagination to understand why working parents, in the struggle to meet work and family commitments, report feeling stressed, emotionally and psychologically drained, and in danger of burn-out (Schneider and Waite, 2005).

The pressure and responsibility of direct supervision seem overwhelming from simply a strategic planning perspective, but parenting today is much more than supervision. Most parents desire to enhance their children's academic performance and emotional and social well-being (Schneider and Waite, 2005). Being directly involved in their children's education has become a norm of behavior that parents, especially those in the middle class, are anxious to fulfill. The popular media has helped to create a standard of "good parenting" that emphasizes the importance and negative consequences if parents fail to help with homework; arrange for extracurricular activities, summer camps, and academic programs; hire tutors and coaches; and be instantaneously accessible via phone or text messaging. For adolescents there is the added parental responsibility of assisting in the college selection and admission process which requires time, effort, and resources including college visits. Navigating the U.S. educational system, by selecting the best schools, right teachers, and recognizing the consequences of mediocre test score performance are normative among middle class parents. The familiar phrase of helicopter parents hovering over the lives of their children now applies not only to college students but to all children.

The time required to supervise children and be involved in their educational careers often collides with parents' work schedules. Being able to help with homework, be active in school, and troubleshoot academic problems requires time which is in short supply for many parents who work long hours and have little or no flexibility to alter their schedules so they can be available when their children are at home. The inflexibility of work and school schedules is a pressure that working parents feel on a daily basis. These emotional experiences affect worker health and productivity and family life.

Subjective Experiences of Working Families

Research shows that measures of work-family conflict have increased over the last thirty years (Nomaguchi, 2009). Even though many parents work over 50 hours a week and enjoy what they do, they also feel stress from the combination of work and family responsibilities, leading some to seek new jobs that can relieve the strains associated with work/ life conflicts (Moen and Huang, 2010). Role overload and time deprivation are particularly acute problems that many employed parents cope with on a daily basis. Whether working in a white collar job or in a low-wage one, employed parents often experience anxiety and guilt as they face the obligations of work and family.

Research has consistently shown a negative relationship between work-family conflict and health and well being (Allen et al., 2000; Bellavia and Frone, 2005). Working parents, in trying to meet work and family commitments, report feeling stressed, and emotionally drained, – feelings that have implications for individuals' health and productivity (Offer and Schneider 2010). For example, an estimated one-third of the workforce experiences employee stress about their children's after school time, leading to decreased productivity and increased absenteeism that can add up to \$1,984 in costs per employee per year (Barnett and Gareis, 2006; McGuire, Kenny, and Brashler, 2006).

Recognizing the relationship between long hours of work and well-being, analyses of subjective dimensions of time use can produce rich understandings of how mothers, fathers, and children are feeling throughout the day, revealing varying levels of positive and negative subjective emotions in different social contexts. Several studies funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation have examined these issues using a wide range of methodologies. One of these is the 500 Family Study, an analysis of the work-life balance among U.S. middle-class families, 200 of which have kindergarten-

age children and 300 of which have adolescents (Schneider and Waite, 2005). The average family in this sample is a dual-career, married couple with children.

The majority of these families are employed in management positions such as account executives; however there are also teachers, librarians, and nurses in the sample. Given the type of jobs these families hold it is not unexpected that they work long hours, on average more than 45 hours per week. As Jacobs and Gerson (2004) show, the largest increase in work hours over the last three decades has been among those highly educated and skilled. These high numbers of hours at work are likely related to the increasing number of professional women now in the labor force (Williams and Boushey, 2010).

Several methods were used to examine the family and work experiences of the parents and children in the 500 Family Study, including surveys, in-depth interviews, and time diaries. These data collection methods were designed to be complementary and together provide detailed information about work, marriage, child care, parent supervision, allocation of household tasks, and psychological well-being. In addition, several items from national studies were included, enabling comparisons of findings from this study to those with larger representative samples.

One unique aspect of the 500 Family Study was the use of the Experience Sampling Method (ESM). Developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues (Hektner, Schmidt, and Csikszentmihalyi, 2007) the ESM, like traditional time diaries, examines how individuals spend their time, who they are with, and what activities they are engaged in. However, the ESM also provides detailed information on the individuals' subjective interpretations of their experiences at particular moments over the course of a day and week. Obtaining repeated measures of positive and negative emotions over time makes it possible to estimate an individual's overall subjective emotion, as well as identifying those instances when that emotion, like stress, anger, or happiness increases or decreases (for further information on the study design and methods, see Hoogstra, 2005). Another advantage of the ESM is its ability to assess how individual family members subjectively experience time spent alone and with others, including co-workers, spouse, and children.

Emotions experienced while working during the day, in the evenings, and on weekends are real, not a response to a laboratory-simulated event. ESM emotions capture more than the single global assessment elicited by a survey item, which asks for example, "how stressed do you feel at work?" By examining how one feels throughout a day, it is possible to determine differences in the levels of stress experienced when at work from those at home. This is especially relevant for working mothers, who studies show are often responsible not only for the actual housework but the mental labor of planning, organizing, and managing family life.

How individuals feel and react to specific situations are often viewed as being dispositional, genetic, or personality dependent, rather than being influenced by the situations they are in or whom they are with. Males and females are often thought to have different emotions, which are often assumed to be the consequence of gender. Certainly there are gender differences; however, there are also internal variations in daily experiences, and these occur both within individuals and across situations. Since the 500 Family Study involves both parents and children, it is possible to match ESM data from each family member and determine not only what a mother was doing and thinking, but also what her spouse and children were doing at the same time and how each felt about their activities. Thus the ESM provides an opportunity to examine how mom feels while getting dinner ready and helping with homework, how her adolescent feels doing homework and talking to her, and concurrently, how dad feels while driving home from work and listening to the news. This example is not happenstance for it is the case that dads continue to work longer days. However, mothers are now also working longer hours and carrying a greater emotional burden, as they return from work to the demands of the household.

Time and Well-being

The National Survey of Parents shows that married couples in 2000 spent nearly 130 hours a week on market and nonmarket work combined, an approximately 10-hour increase since the mid-1960s (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006). This does not include mental tasks such as organizing activities, planning events, and coordinating schedules (Darrah, Freeman, and English-Lueck, 2007; Devault, 1999). Time and energy consuming, yet often taken for granted, mental tasks can be thought of as the control panel that navigates the schedule for juggling work and family demands. Parent involvement for school age children has become a schedulers' dilemma of organizing and shuffling transportation for play dates, team practices, arts and music lessons, and tutoring sessions (Ochs, Shohet, Campos, and Beck, 2010). Working parents frequently complain about not being able to spend enough time with their children and spouse (Milkie et al., 2004; Roxburgh, 2006) and often wish to work less (Clarkberg and Moen, 2001; Galinsky, Kim, and Bond, 2001; Gray et al., 2004; Reynolds, 2005). Jacobs and Gerson (2004), for example, estimate a 10-hour gap between the number of hours parents of young children wished they could and actually work.

Coping with Limited Time

Work overload and time constraints are widely found to be deleterious to parents' sense of well-being (Galinsky et al., 2005; Roxburgh, 2004). Working parents report high levels of work-family conflict, particularly when they work long hours (Golden and Wiens-Tuers, 2006; Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Moen and Yu, 2000; Voydanoff, 2004). More recently, using data from two national surveys Nomaguchi (2009) found that employed parents increasingly feel that they do not have enough time to get things done at their jobs. This heightened sense of time pressure is significantly associated with the increase in the report of work-family conflict since the 1970s.

Overall, perceptions of time deprivation and a sense of overworking have encouraged working families to set new priorities and develop coping strategies to manage their lives. Some families have turned to purchasing services in the market, such as child care, takeout meals, and cleaning services (Bianchi et al., 2000; Stuenkel, 2005). Others have changed the amount of time they are willing to devote to cooking, cleaning house, or participating in leisure activities to maximize time with their children (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006). Multitasking, doing multiple things at once, constitutes yet another mechanism working families use to cope with the pressures of the "time squeeze."

Multitasking

Undertaking several activities at once is often viewed as a way for parents to get more accomplished in less time. Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006) report that multitasking almost doubled for working parents between 1975 and 2000. Results from their time diary study show that the number of multitasking hours per week increased from 42 to 81 for married mothers and from 40 to 78 for married fathers. With the increase in cell phone and texting use, one might expect that these numbers would increase substantially. There is some evidence from the recent Pew studies to suggest that, at least among adolescents and their parents, the number of times a day they are contacting each other has increased dramatically within the last three years.

Notwithstanding that working parents seem more likely to multitask today than in the past, how they feel when engaged in such activities is less understood. Most time-diary studies include information about respondents' main activity (i.e., primary activity) only; few ask respondents to record both their main activity and any other activity they might be engaged in at the same time (i.e., secondary activity). When time studies do include secondary activities they tend to focus on broad domains, such as child care (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006; Craig, 2006; Ironmonger, 2004; Zick and Bryant, 1996), leisure (Bittman and Wajcman, 2000), and housework (Lee and Waite, 2005; Williams and

Donath, 1994). Using these types of categories presents a somewhat limited view of multitasking and makes it difficult to identify the roles that multitasking may be playing in the everyday lives of contemporary working families.

One exception is recent work by Offer and Schneider (2010) that relied on ESM data from the 500 Family Study. Results showed that working parents multitask slightly more than half of their waking time. Some of this time is during leisure activities and when commuting. When such periods of time are excluded, multitasking as it relates to work and home activities occurs a little less than a third of the time that parents are awake. Mothers multitask more than fathers at home, fathers multitask more than mothers at work; both multitask more at home than at work. When at work, fathers are more likely to be engaged in two work-related activities; this combination is less likely for mothers.

Multitasking at home is more likely to occur in the presence of children, and, not unexpectedly, when mothers multitask at home they are substantially more likely than fathers to do so in order to be with their children. Multitasking reaches its peak in the early evening hours around seven o'clock. Other peak moments occur in the early morning (around eight a.m.) when the family is getting ready for work and school, and at four p.m. when school ends and children need to be transported to their afternoon activities.

When multitasking at home, both mothers and fathers typically engage in two housework-related activities, although mothers are more likely to be engaged in multiple housework-related activities than fathers. When at home, work tasks are rarely reported as the primary activity while multitasking for either mothers or fathers. However, parents, especially those who report high levels of stress, are more likely to report working alone in the evenings when at home.

Both mothers and fathers report feeling very productive when multitasking, although mothers are more likely to report this than fathers. Multitasking helps mothers get things done but it comes with an emotional cost that appears to be gender-related. Among mothers, multitasking is associated with more negative affect (e.g., higher levels of being frustrated, irritated, and stressed). Mothers are also more likely to report negative feelings about work and family when multitasking.¹ That said, mothers reported positive scores regarding the relationship between multitasking and being with children. As Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006) find, when mothers are engaged in some household task they are likely to have their children take part in a leisure activity, like eating a snack, or playing a game at the same time. This allows mothers to spend more time with their children while accomplishing a task and at the same time involving children in activities that they are likely to find pleasurable.

Being at Work

The 500 Family Study was conducted during 2002 and 2003, before the recent economic slowdown. However even in the best of economic times, working families were coping with issues of job security, health care, and other benefit packages that they perceived as perhaps unsustainable. Over a third of the 500 families experienced a job change, job loss, shift in job status from full-time to part-time, or attempts to re-enter the labor force during the two year period. There is a sense of job and career instability that is expressed not only by the parents but their children as well. When examining the hours and commitment to their jobs, results identify a subset of the parents who are “unconditional workers,” willing to work long hours even though they feel emotionally compromised.

Why are They Working?

When both parents work, some of the primary extrinsic reasons for doing so are salary and benefits (Buchmueller and Valetta, 1998, 1996). In the 500 Family Study, one area of concentration was why mothers working full-time stay in their jobs given that most would prefer to work part-time. To understand why women work full-time (over thirty-five



hours a week), specific attention was placed on the perceived value of benefits since health care and retirement plans are rarely available to those who work part-time. Conducting a series of multivariate analyses, results showed that mothers who were working long hours at their jobs were often motivated to do so to qualify for job benefits such as health insurance, paid absences, and retirement plans (see Martinez, 2005). Benefits were shown to be more important than salary when examining why mothers were working full-time. Among participants in the 500 Family Study, women working full-time jobs were concerned that one health care plan was not sufficient for their families. Mothers and fathers worried that if they had only one health care plan it tended to provide inadequate coverage for spouses and children and would prove inadequate if one partner were laid off or terminated from their job for long periods of time.ⁱⁱ

Working at Work

One typical comment of employees is that they feel much of what they do at their jobs is not related to the actual jobs for which they were hired. How do people spend their time at work, how do they feel about it, and how is it different from when they are at home? Sexton (2005), using survey and ESM data from the 500 Family Study and information from the *Occupational Handbook*, separated primary and secondary tasks among fourteen of the most common jobs held by parents. Time spent at work was then classified in one of four categories: primary work, work-related, preparation to work, and personal care. Analyses show that on average, half of the workday is spent on work-related activities and a fourth of the day is spent on work preparation and personal tasks. Only one quarter of the work day is actually spent on core activities related to one's occupation, confirming to some extent the idea that little time spent at work is on primary tasks (this does not vary by gender or occupation).

When mothers and fathers are involved in primary activities they feel more engaged and satisfied than when spending time on work-related tasks or preparing to work. The more time people spend doing primary work, the more satisfied they are with their jobs and the less likely they are to bring negative feelings home, even if their jobs are complex and demanding. For many of these parents, work provides a challenging and interesting environment not found elsewhere, but home offers emotional benefits not found in the workplace. Parents employed in occupations that allow them some autonomy and flexibility are more engaged at work and at home. These findings suggest that the emotional effects at work and at home are complex and not necessarily consistent across contexts. Perhaps engagement in work tasks is essential to increasing both positive feelings and subsequent job satisfaction but is not a requirement for feeling positive at home. Sexton found that parents (especially fathers) feel more relaxed at home, but feel much more engaged when at work. These findings suggest that sources of worker dissatisfaction may be associated with the type of work they perform, the control they exercise in their jobs, and their general outlook.

Sexton's ESM results were confirmed with another analysis of the 500 Family Study data that included biomarkers.ⁱⁱⁱ Using cortisol samples obtained from family members, Adam (2005) finds that parents experience greater feelings of productivity and higher levels of involvement (both mothers and fathers) and enjoyment (mothers only, fathers experience more enjoyment at home) when they are at work. Results show that momentary stresses of parents' daily working lives are related to small increases in cortisol. These results are worrisome, particularly if such momentary reactivity is sustained over time, as prolonged exposure to increased cortisol levels has been shown to have harmful long-term effects on health (see Adam et al., 2010).

Being At Home

There are emotional benefits that occur at work that are not necessarily duplicated at home. Being at home is a different emotional experience than being at work, and it varies by gender. Time spent at home with family is positive for mothers and fathers, although fathers experience more positive affect and emotional benefit from being at home

than their wives (Koh, 2005). When at work fathers feel significantly lower levels of positive affect and greater negative affect than when they are at home or in public places. Mothers on the other hand, report similar levels of positive affect at work and at home. What is not consistent between mothers and fathers are their subjective experiences when in public places (such as shopping centers). When mothers are in public they experience greater positive emotions, feeling strong and proud, and reporting higher intrinsic motivation than when at home. It may be that public locations provide an opportunity for working mothers to get away from the demanding tasks of home and work (Koh, 2005).

It is not difficult to understand why mothers would find time alone a positive experience. As discussed, when at work they are working long hours and when at home they are multitasking, most often taking care of their children and doing housework. Although fathers are doing more housework than they did twenty years ago, they still do less than their spouses. Housework is a source of negative affect among all family members. For mothers, fathers, and adolescents, when engaged in housework alone their positive affect is significantly lower (and negative affect is significantly higher) than when they are engaged in other types of activities such as watching television. Positive feelings regarding housework however, increase when all family members engage in it together. Being together as a family is one of those rare remedies for relieving stress, especially among mothers who work long hours.

Being with Children

Even though both parents are working, mothers still shoulder many parenting responsibilities, including dealing with the problems their teenage children encounter on a day-to-day basis (i.e., emotional transfer). Examining the emotional transfer between parents and adolescents, Matjasko and Feldman (2005) find, as did Larson and Richards (1994), that mothers were more in-tune with their adolescents' emotions than were fathers. Fathers may be spending more time with their adolescents as reported in the time studies (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006), but they are not necessarily interacting with them.

Fathers returning home from work generally report increases in happiness; sometimes however, they return from work angry. When fathers return home angry, it has less of a negative effect on adolescents' mood than when mothers return from work angry. Adolescents are more likely to report feeling angry when their mothers return from work angry than when their fathers do so. What is particularly interesting about these findings is that the biological (cortisol) and ESM findings reinforce each other, suggesting that adolescents, both girls and boys, are more likely to have emotional responses similar to their mothers than their fathers.

One "gendered" explanation for these findings may be that when dads return from the office angry, adolescents may see this emotion as a genuine response to the importance teenagers place on the fathers' work roles. When mothers return home angry, adolescents may feel that such emotions have less valence and what is of primary concern is their care and emotional well-being. There is some evidence which supports this conclusion. When examining talk at the dinner table, adolescents indicate that mothers are more likely to focus on negative experiences at work whereas dads are less likely to do so. Kalil, Levine, and Ziol-Guest (2005) show that boys and girls place greater value on the occupations of their fathers, few desiring to have occupations like their mothers even when their occupations are of higher prestige and income than the fathers'. Regardless of the type of occupation, fathers are seen as having the jobs most desirable for the adolescents to pursue as adults.

Being with Parents

As other researchers have shown, adolescents in the 500 Family Study expect to be part of a dual-full-time earner family. Expectations about the need to work full-time in order to maintain a reasonable life style are not just a parental concern; such views are also held by their children. Adolescents expect to work when they become adults. However in assessing their parents' roles in handling work and family conflict, they report differing views regarding how their

mothers and fathers are handling their work responsibilities. Adolescents hold their mothers responsible for managing the household. When mothers work at home, their adolescents express considerable dissatisfaction which is consistent with the view that adolescents expect their mothers to take care of their daily needs. With respect to fathers, adolescents are not accepting of when their fathers have to work long hours or work-related obligations interfere with their presence at extracurricular activities such as sports games. The idea that fathers are working out of necessity rather than choice appears to be an outdated perception. Long work hours of fathers are not excusable any more so than that of mothers. Adolescents believe that their economic needs, including the costs of postsecondary education, are a family expense that require the wages of both parents (Marchena, 2005).

Understanding Work-Family Conflict

Children need and want their parents to be actively engaged in their lives and are aware when their parents do make themselves available to attend activities or engage with them in important conversations about school, friends, and acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Working parents are also aware of their children's needs and desires yet the pull of the workplace oftentimes places them in untenable positions. In our present economic environment, having two employed parents is a necessity not an option, as some have suggested (Christensen and Schneider, 2010). The costs of running a household and meeting basic family needs require two incomes, notwithstanding the extras of providing funds for extracurricular activities or assisting with costs for college.

Parents are going to continue to work and the stress and pressures of work-family conflict are only likely to increase unless more flexibility options are designed and implemented to meet the needs of today's working parents. Some have suggested redesigning schools so that they are more amendable to the schedule of working parents. Recent polls suggest that parents see this as a very undesirable option, choosing instead that the workplace become more flexible (9% for longer school hours, 51% for more flexible work hours/ schedules, 16% for more paid time off, and 13% for better and/ or more daycare options. [Boushey and Williams, 2010]). Moreover, the costs of undertaking such changes would undoubtedly become prohibitive, especially now that most public educational institutions are facing severe economic constraints.

There are essentially two types of flexibility that can help to meet the needs of today's working parents: flexible work arrangements (FWAs) that allow employees more control over when and where they work on a daily basis; and formal and informal time off policies that allow for short term time off (STO). FWAs include flextime (allowing variability in the start and end times of the work day), compressed work weeks, reduced hours, job sharing, phased retirement, and part year. Some flextime programs also allow for banking hours (i.e., taking extra hours and working longer days so that these hours can be banked for use at another time). Having flexibility to use these banked hours for times when children are not in school due to school schedules or illnesses is one of the options parents prefer for greater workplace flexibility (Bond et al., 2002). STO is typically available in most large firms, and employees are allowed to take a limited number of days off in a year for personal or family reasons, including caring for a sick child, without losing pay or having to use vacation days (Workplace Flexibility 2010, 2010).

Parents need options for caring for their children when school is not in session, and changing the start and end times of work can reduce the stress and pressure of finding appropriate alternative care arrangements. This is especially important in the morning for younger children, who are sometimes left alone to get themselves and their siblings out the door for school. Research shows (Bond and Galinsky, 2006) that changing the start and end times of the workday, whether a formal or informal policy increases job satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

Many companies find that flexibility is cost efficient and have implemented flexibility programs that provide benefits to parents. Some of these options include swapping shifts, taking single-day vacations, and job sharing arrangements. Other options are telecommuting or adjusting schedules to allow employees to make doctor appointments and attend teacher parent conferences. Companies that have engaged in such options have found lower stress and more effective workers (Workplace Flexibility 2010, 2010). Some companies, in our present downturn economy, have combined their needs to cut costs with employee's desire for greater work flexibility, particularly during the summer months. One company, KPMG LLP, an audit, tax, and advisory firm, has implemented a sabbatical program that provides partially paid leaves of four to 12 weeks, where employees receive 20% of their regular salaries during time away with the option to use accrued personal time off hours to offset the pay differential (Families and Work Institute, in press).

While examples such as the above are increasing, only a limited proportion of businesses are engaged in enhancing their workplace flexibility options. A new balance needs to be achieved between work and home for working families. Our social worlds have changed; working families are the human face of the American workplace. Bringing work and family life into a more reasonable alignment requires a new configuration of work that meets the needs of businesses and families. Workplace flexibility is not an option but a critical need of working families and the businesses in which they work.

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ⁱ When a correlation analysis was conducted using the survey measure on work family conflict and multitasking, results showed that mothers were more likely than fathers to report higher levels of work-family conflict with multitasking but the results were not significant. The negative feelings about work and family constructed from items that are more specific, such as feeling guilty about family when at work, had a more robust and significant relationship with increased levels of multitasking.

ⁱⁱ This information is based on interview data which probed motivations for working.

ⁱⁱⁱ More recently researchers have been investigating the complex relationships between social context and biology. The 500 Family Study was specifically interested in examining the activities of mothers, fathers, and children to their stress-sensitive physiological system. Human saliva contains hormones, specifically cortisol that can show increases and decreases in stress-related production into the bloodstream. Taking samples of saliva throughout everyday activities instead of in a laboratory setting can help to identify how individual levels of stress may increase or decrease by the situation.