WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY, PARENTING, AND STIGMA

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Work and the fabric of family life

Traditionally, families have adapted their schedules to the needs of the workplace, but today that attitude is undergoing radical revision, according to one recent study. Socioeconomic forces have disrupted traditional home life, creating special concerns about childcare arrangements. And these concerns have fueled employee expectations regarding work policies and benefits that are responsive to family needs.

Based on interviews with some 2,000 respondents, the study was conducted by Louis Harris and Associates and is the fourth in a series of reports on the American family sponsored by General Mills. Entitled Families at Work: Stresses and Strains, the survey was shaped in part by two significant changes that have taken place during the last decade: (1) The number of women in the workforce has risen dramatically. In fact, nearly one-half of all married women now work outside the home. And (2), the number of one-parent families—for the most part, headed by women—has also risen sharply. Families headed by women now account for 8.5 million, or about 15 percent of the families in the United States.

The survey found that among most respondents identified as feminists and many identified as working women, a majority believe that the negative effects on family life caused by two working parents are outweighed by the benefits, which they said include greater financial security, more personal fulfillment for the working women, and increased self-reliance among the children of such parents.

However, almost twice as many of the respondents identified as family members feel that the effect of both parents working outside the home has been negative (52 percent) than feel it has been positive (25 percent) for families. A large majority of all respondents—excepting those identified as feminists—said that “when both parents are working, children are more likely to get into trouble,” the report stated.

The survey emphasized the strong interrelationship between childrearing and work. Fully 50 percent of the parents surveyed said that their work has had an effect on their decisions regarding how they should raise their children. 21 percent said their work affected their decision as to when they should start their families, and 7 percent said work considerations influenced their decision whether to have children or not.

Further, the study found that in 35 percent of American households where there are children at home, parents now supplement their own care with other childcare arrangements. Nearly half of these households have other family members helping to care for their children, and 23 percent use paid help in the home. In addition, nearly 20 percent make use of day care centers.

Although American family members favor virtually any form of help for working parents, they are most enthusiastic about flexibility in the schedules of working parents. According to the report, eighty-five percent of the family members surveyed feel it would be a good thing for families if “employers made it easier for working parents to arrange their jobs and careers around their children.” Among those respondents identified as human resource executives and union leaders, majorities of 86 and 87 percent, respectively, agreed. Those identified as family traditionalists agreed by a margin of 75 percent, and 94 percent of the feminists wanted to see an increase in flexible, family-oriented scheduling.

Specific measures to increase flexibility in work scheduling that won support from a majority of all respondents include: job sharing, flexible working hours (both flextime and flexweek), and a four-day workweek that could involve either longer hours each day or one day a week spent working at home.

What drives the salesforce?

Why do people choose careers in sales? Psychologists have long wondered about the motivations behind choosing such ego-punishing work—work that entails operating alone in hostile territory that is pitted with rejection. Sales managers who need to find “the right people” are equally interested in what drives salespeople because they want to know what kind of incentives will motivate them.

According to Larry McMahon, a senior marketing specialist with the Irish Management Institute in Dublin, the
Interviews with 2,000 Americans

“Although American family members favor virtually any form of help for working parents, they are most enthusiastic about flexibility in the schedules of working parents. According to the report, 85% of the family members surveyed feel it would be a good thing for families if ‘employers made it easier for working parents to arrange their jobs and careers around their children.’”
32 Years Later…

* 71-75% of employees report not having enough time for their children

* 27% of employers offer flextime to all or most employees

* % of parents reporting work-family conflict has risen:
  * 41% to 47% for women
  * 35% to 60% for men

- Families & Work Institute studies, 2008-12
Flexibility Stigma

Why is change so slow?

- Why do employees – especially men – report so much need & desire for flexible work arrangements, but so few – especially men – actually exercise these options?

- 27-49% of employees believe using flexibility could jeopardize their careers (F&WI)

- Most employees use informal “hidden” forms of flexibility, as if it’s shameful or stigmatized
Signs of Stigma

- Acts of disrespect that convey to receiver a lack of standing and respect in their environment
  - E.g., ignoring, exclusion, derogation, harassment
Stigmatizing Treatment

* Directed at employees who violate or threaten (often unspoken) values, norms, and identities
  * Sexual harassment of uppity women
  * Not man enough harassment against men
  * General mistreatment (ignoring, derogation, manipulation)

* Reinforces norms, values, and identities

* Everyday acts of treatment = the current we swim in, can move us along or keep us back, redirect us
Flexibility and Caregiving: Uniquely Stigmatizing for Men?

- Femininity stigma ("not man enough")
  - Typically woman’s work
  - Men supposedly incompetent at (and uninterested in) caregiving – if competent, not a man?

- Men expected to put work first
  - Masculinity = being a provider, work devotion
  - Identity tied up with work performance & success

- Men who take leave are suspected of abusing it and/or expected to keep working, be “on call”
Evaluations of Employee Work Performance & Gender Performance

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caregiving</th>
<th>Male Employee</th>
<th>Female Employee</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>No children</td>
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Work Performance Mistreatment

- No Children
- Low Caregiving
- High Caregiving

Man
Woman
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Gender Performance Mistreatment

![Bar graph showing gender performance mistreatment across different caregiving scenarios.](image)

- **No Children**
  - Men: High
  - Women: Low

- **Low Caregiving**
  - Men: Low
  - Women: Low

- **High Caregiving**
  - Men: High
  - Women: Low

Legend:
- Blue: Man
- Red: Woman
Study 1: Not Man Enough Harassment

- 232 unionized employees
- Five medium-sized workplaces (50-150 employees)
- 33% men
- 51% children at home
  - 48% of women, 52% of men
- Modal income $55,000-$70,000 (today)
- Modal age 40-49 years old
Measures

* Sex (male, female)
* Children at home (yes, no)
* Caregiving per week (high, low)
* Not man enough harassment in past two years
  1. Made you feel like you were not tough enough (e.g. assertive, strong, or ambitious enough) for the job
  2. Made you feel you needed to act more tough and aggressive to be respected
  3. Made it necessary for you to sacrifice family or personal time to be respected at work
  4. Made fun of you for being soft-spoken or shy
* Controls: Tenure, education, ethnicity
Not Man Enough Harassment

![Bar chart showing harassment rates for men and women with different caregiving situations.](chart.png)

- **No Children**: Men = , Women =
- **Low Caregiving**: Men = , Women =
- **High Caregiving**: Men = , Women =

Legend:
- Blue: Man
- Red: Woman
Gender Performance Mistreatment

![Bar chart showing gender performance mistreatment by caregiving level and children status.]

- **No Children**: Man (higher) and Woman (lower)
- **Low Caregiving**: Man (lower) and Woman (higher)
- **High Caregiving**: Man (higher) and Woman (lower)

Legend:
- **Blue**: Man
- **Red**: Woman
Study 2: General Mistreatment

- 451 Public Service Employees
- One large organization (>7,000)
- 81% men
- 91% children at home
  - 77% of women, 94% of men
- Average age 46.55
- Average organizational tenure 23 years
- Average salary $90,000
Measures

- Sex (male, female)
- Children at home (yes, no)
- Caregiving hours per week (high, low)
- General mistreatment in past year
  - Ignoring & exclusion
  - Insults, slander, humiliation
  - Bribes, pressure, threats
- Controls: Tenure, education, ethnicity
Gender Performance Mistreatment

- No Children
- Low Caregiving
- High Caregiving

- Man
- Woman
Conclusions

- Men are mistreated when they do relatively more caregiving in the home.
- Women are subjected to mistreatment when they do relatively little or no caregiving in the home.
- Stigmatizing treatment based on gender performance.
- Pulls men away from caregiving, pushes women into it.
What can be done?

- Recognize and admit the problem
- **Teasing men about their masculinity**
  - "Oh, that’s when you were on your MAT leave."
  - "Hey, where are your boobs?"
  - "His wife ‘wears the pants’ in his house, if you know what I mean."
- **Paternalistic/benevolently sexist behavior toward mothers**
  - "Let me get that – you’ve got kids to get home to."
  - "You’re such a good mom, putting your kids first."
  - "I’d have given you that assignment, but it requires a lot of travel."
- **Hostile sexism toward nontraditional women**
  - "She doesn’t have kids because she’s too selfish/cold to be a mom."
  - "She hardly sees her kids. How can she live with herself?"
  - "She’s outsourced raising her kids."

- Environments that are socially hostile to employees based on their gender performance are sex discriminatory
What can be done?

- Support men who work flexibly & take leave (& women who don’t)
  - Organizational leaders are salient examples

- Focus on work performance (results), not gender performance (face time, family roles)

- Do not assume employee work preferences for them based on their family situations
  - Openly discuss what will work for their goals

- Be wary of implicit bias in assumptions and employee evaluations