



Employment:
What Parents Say About Their
Work-Related Experiences

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Common Ground? Families & Employers

Building on Family Strengths Conference

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Research Context

- Approximately 10% of the workforce care for children with special needs (Fernandez, 1990).
- Parents of children with emotional and behavioral disabilities report a dearth of community resources and supports available to help balance work & family demands (Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie, 2002).
- A lack of community supports, such as child care & education, force parents to seek flexibility to accommodate their child's needs through employment adjustments (Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie).
- Workplace structure (culture, size, and sector) is the strongest predictor of the use of family friendly benefits (Secret, 2000).

Key Concepts

- Work/Life Fit
- Flexibility
- Family-Friendly Workplace

Work/Life Fit

- The degree to which an employed parent realizes the various components of her or his adaptive strategy for dealing with the interface between work and family (Barnett, 1998).
- Fit is both a process: the decisions and tasks undertaken to achieve fit; and an outcome: the degree to which the parent establishes fit in his or her work-life (Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie, 2002).

Work-Family Flexibility

- Flexibility is the latitude to to adapt working times and place to respond to family needs (Lewis, Kagan, & Heaton, 2000).
- Each family seeks a fit in their work-life through flexibility in some part of the work/family/child care system (Emlen, 1997).
- Parents of children with disabilities may be reluctant to ask for flexibility (Lewis, Kagan, & Heaton, 2000) and attitudes of line managers are instrumental in the implementation of flexibility (formal or informal) in the workplace (Lewis, 1997).

Family-Friendly Workplace

A family friendly workplace is one that acknowledges and responds to the work and family responsibilities of its employees. There are four interrelated components:

- ☞ Benefits, policies, programs
- ☞ Workplace culture and climate
- ☞ Workplace relationships
- ☞ Work process, systems, and structures that sustain family friendly practices

(Pitt-Catsouphe, 2002)

Research Questions:

Work/Life Fit

- Are parental disclosure of child's mental health status to supervisor and perceived supervisor support related to work-life fit?
- Are parental disclosure of child's mental health status to co-worker and perceived co-worker support related to work-life fit?

Research Questions:

Work-Family Flexibility

- Are parental disclosure of child's mental health status to supervisor and perceived supervisor support related to flexibility?
- Are parental disclosure of child's mental health status to co-worker and perceived co-worker support related to flexibility?

Research Questions: *Family-Friendly Workplace*

- Are supervisor support, coworker support and flexibility related to perceived family friendliness?

Method

Parent Employment Experiences Survey

- Web-based survey
- 30 questions (quantitative & qualitative)
- Participant recruitment through national family support organizations, two national conferences, & RTC National Advisory Committee members

Participant Eligibility

- Self-identified parents of children with emotional or behavioral disorders
- Currently caring for their child in the home
- Employed, seeking employment, or unemployed by choice to care for their child with emotional or behavioral disorder

Participant Characteristics

N=349

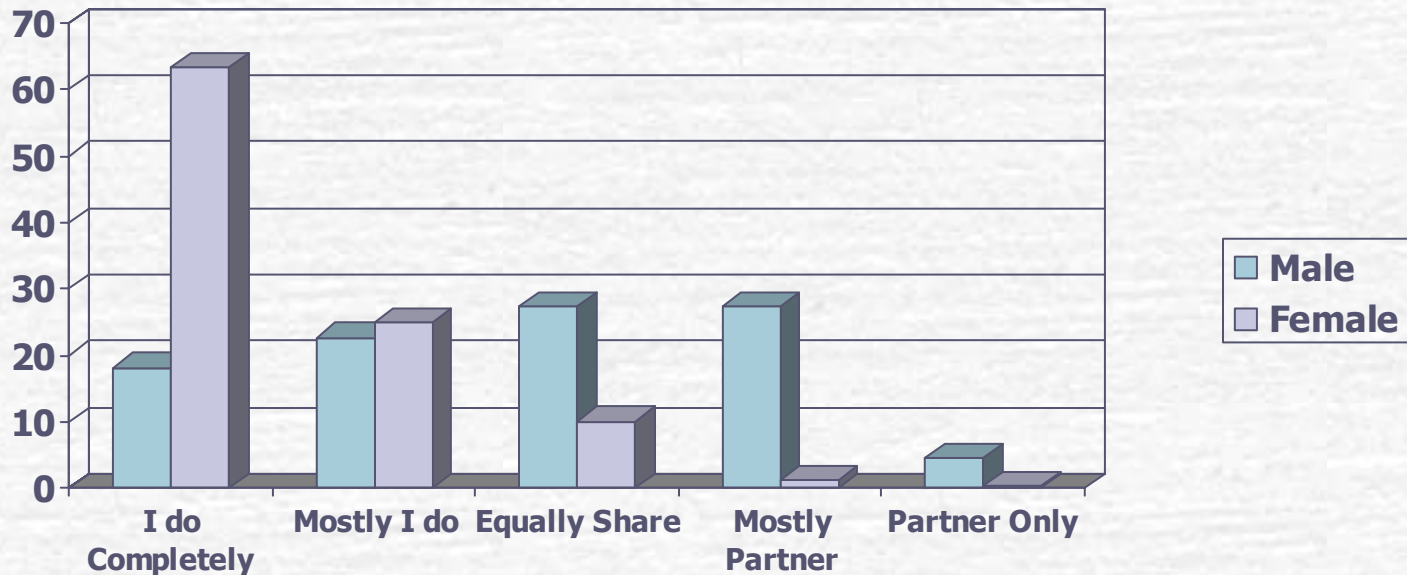
- 322 women (94%)
- 83% European-American, 10% African-American
- Mean age = 42.93, range 22-73
- Education: 34% "some college", 25% "college degree", 27% "graduate study or degree"
- 60% full time, 21% part-time, 19% unemployed
- 40% professional/technical, 16% executive/managerial, 12% administrative support
- Median income range = \$30,000-34,999

Family Characteristics

- Partner status: 61% married/partnered, 39% divorced/single
- 80% biological parent, 13% adoptive parent
- 95% caring for child 7 days per week
- 772 total children
- Mean number per family= 2.2
- Mean age of total children=12.46
- 60% of total children have serious emotional or behavioral disorder
 - 27% girls, Mean age= 13.1
 - 73% boys, Mean age=12.51

Child Care

Who takes responsibility?



Caregiving Responsibilities and Effect on Employment

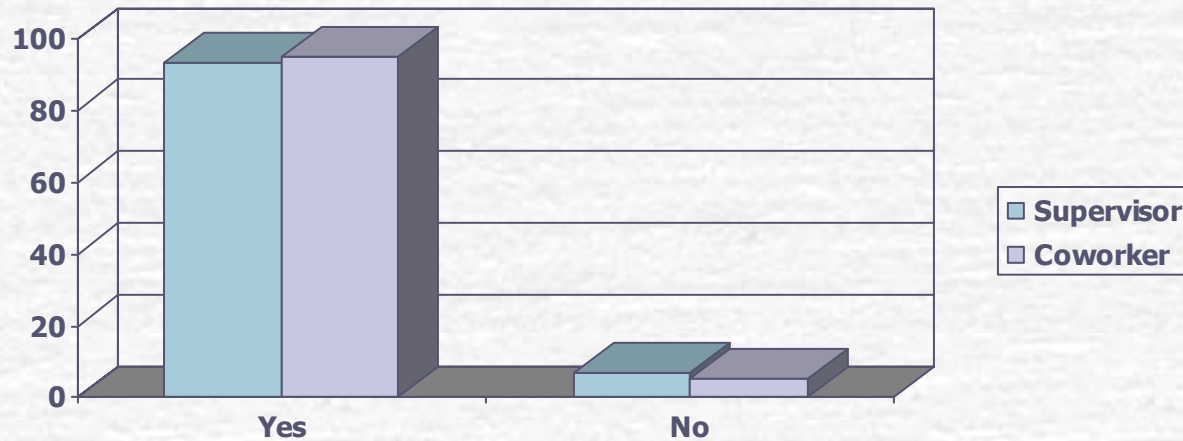
- 17% currently unemployed to care for child with serious emotional or behavioral disorder
- 11% unable to find work due to caregiving responsibilities for child with serious emotional or behavioral disorder
- 27% (of total) have had employment terminated because of work disruptions due to care responsibilities
- 48% (of total) have quit work to care for child with a serious emotional or behavioral disorder

Overall Fit, Flexibility, & Family-Friendliness

- ☛ “How satisfied are you with your ability to meet BOTH work demands and family responsibilities?”
-25% “extremely dissatisfied” -42% “dissatisfied”
- ☛ “How much flexibility do you have in your work schedule to handle family responsibilities?”
-49% “some flexibility” -38% “a lot of flexibility”
- ☛ “How would you rate the family-friendliness of your current employer?”
-42% “excellent” -31% “good”

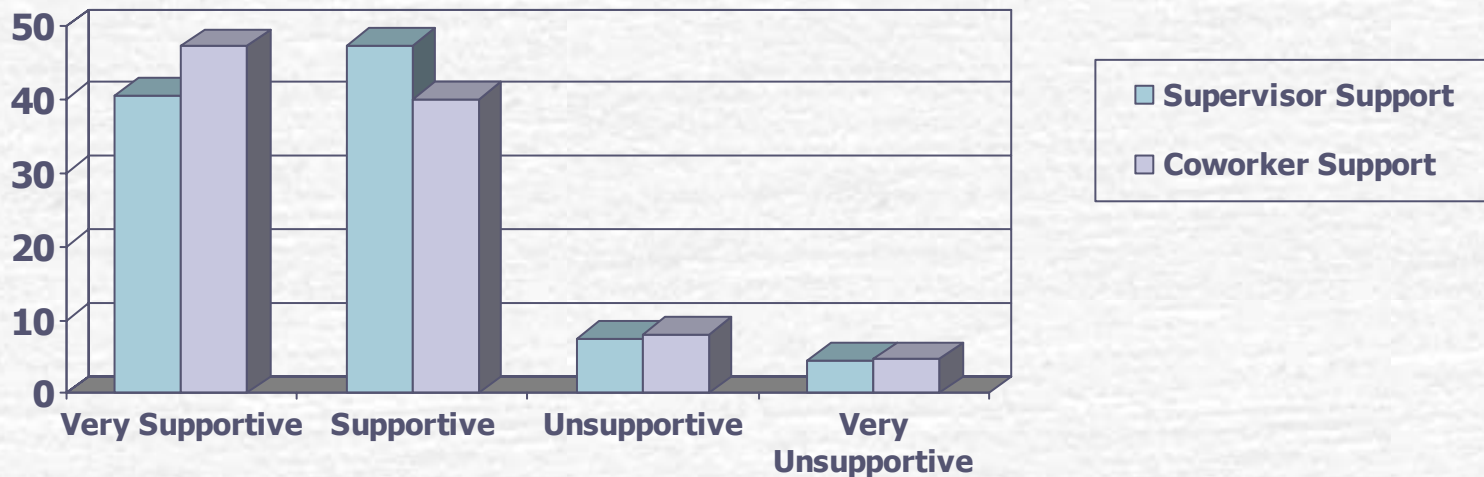
Child Mental Health Status Workplace Disclosure

Supervisors and Coworkers



Perceived Workplace Support

Supervisors and Coworkers



Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Work/Life Fit

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Supervisor Support	.199	.081	.191*
Supervisor Disclosure	.418	.351	.084
Coworker Disclosure	-.383	.426	-.063
Coworker Support	.226	.079	.226**

Note: $F = 8.407$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .137$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

What Parents Say About Work/Life Fit

- The majority of the sample's parents report dissatisfaction with their current work/life fit. One parent characterizes the difficulties,

"The incredible amount of appointments necessary for a child who experiences mental illness. [It is] difficult to keep up with all the scheduled appointments plus if he has problems at school and suspensions, adding more meeting with school personnel."

- Some parents are finding ways to bridge work and family needs. Another parent comments,

"I have tried to be open and honest with my supervisor to assure them I can handle my job and family responsibilities and will work overtime if I have to. I also offer to help co-workers in [hopes that] they can help when I need it."

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Flexibility

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Supervisor Support	.422	.059	.496*
Supervisor Disclosure	-2.855	.258	-.007
Coworker Disclosure	-.350	.313	-.070
Coworker Support	6.124	.058	.075

Note: $F = 23.243$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .305$, * $p < .001$

What Parents Say About Flexibility

- Parents report that supervisors are the key brokers of flexibility in the workplace.

One parent notes, "I had an established working relationship with my supervisor and the management of the firm. It is a give and take relationship with flexibility and understanding during times of crisis and when things even out, I attempt to give back 150%."

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Employer Family Friendliness

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Supervisor Support	.684	.072	.551**
Flexibility	.249	.075	.174**
Coworker Support	.198	.063	.166*

Note: $F = 101.306$ $p < .001$, $R^2 = .588$; * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$

What Parents Say About Family Friendliness

- Supervisor support, coworker support and flexibility are the essential ingredients of family friendly employers.

One parent explains, "The strategy I now have is to find an employer who is family friendly. I work for an airline and it provides me with great flexibility. I am able to trade shifts with other people to accommodate my needs. I also communicate more with my supervisor."

Summary / Discussion

Disclosure and Perceived Support

- ❏ Unexpected finding of high levels of disclosure and perceived support.
- ❏ Disclosure of child's mental health status to supervisor and co-workers appears to be a pre-condition for perceived support.
- ❏ Over time parents learn how and when to disclose in order find a employment with necessary support and flexibility.

Summary and Discussion

Work/Life Fit

- Despite high levels of perceived support, high levels of disclosure and a family friendly workplace, the majority of parents reported dissatisfaction with work/life fit.
- Sample bias.
- The parents could be at a mid-point of adaptation managing work-life while caring for a child with emotional and behavioral disorders.
- Support from the workplace while necessary to work/life fit, is not sufficient.

Summary and Discussion

Flexibility and Family-Friendly Workplace

- The supervisor-parent (employee) relationship is the crucial factor in the flexibility decisions.
- Flexibility is a reciprocal process negotiated within the dyad with costs and benefits to the parent.
- A workplace is perceived as family-friendly when the the work-family boundary is permeable and support is available from the supervisor and coworkers.

Future Research

- Diverse sampling of parents, including: 1) ethnic and cultural variability, 2) employment sectors, 3) socio-economic levels, 4) age range of children
- Case study method to learn more about the process parents undertake to adapt and manage work/life responsibilities over time.
- Focused research on how to find and sustain employment.

Future Research

- What constitutes support from/in the workplace?
- Closer examination of factors associated with disclosure & how support is negotiated with supervisors and co-workers.
- Role of community in expanding the net of support for parents. “The community context (resources and demands) may be a factor that both assists or detracts from the efforts of workplaces, families, and individuals to support or find work-family fit.”
(Voydanoff, 2002)