

Employment Strategies for Managing Work-Family Fit

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Common Ground? Families & Employers

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Common Ground?

Families & Employers

website: www.rtc.pdx.edu/pgProjCommon.php

Project Goals:

- ❖ To understand and describe how parents' employment is affected when caring for a child with a mental health disorder.
- ❖ To identify strategies used by parents to manage employment and family responsibilities,
- ❖ To identify workplace practices and policies that support employees who are caring for children with special mental health needs.

Major Research Questions

- ❖ What do parents who are caring for children with serious emotional or behavioral disorders identify as workplace supports and barriers to obtaining and maintaining adequate employment?
- ❖ What developmental and mental health status events occur with the child who has a serious emotional or behavioral disorder that precipitate adjustments in the family's employment situation?

Major Research Questions

- ❖ What are the employment characteristics from parents' perspectives that maximize work/family fit for employed parents of children with serious emotional or behavioral disorders?
- ❖ What are employment policies and practices from employers' perspectives that are responsive to needs of families with children who have serious emotional or behavioral disorders?

What We Know From Prior Research

- ❖ Parents of children with emotional and behavioral disabilities experience a significant lack of community-based services and resources necessary to support joining work and family in a balanced way.
- ❖ Parents seek flexibility mainly through employment adjustments due to restricted options in child care and school-based resources.
- ❖ Child care for children with emotional or behavioral disorders is largely unavailable, unaffordable, or of lower quality.

Today's Agenda

- ❖ Frame the challenges to employment experienced by caregivers based on results of the *Parent Employment Experiences Survey*
- ❖ Stimulate your thinking about where your experience matches or does not match with other parents
- ❖ Present employment strategies supplied by parents on the survey that enabled them to better manage their work and family life
- ❖ Provide guidelines to help with managing employment and family responsibilities while caring for a child with an emotional or behavioral disability

Parent Employment Experiences Survey

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

Participant Eligibility

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

Participant Characteristics

N=349

- ❖ 322 women (94%)
- ❖ 83% European-American, 10% African-American
- ❖ Average 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% partnered, 39% single
- ❖ 80% biological parent, 13% adoptive parent
- ❖ 95% caring for child 7 days per week
- ❖ 766 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

Defining the Problem:

Caregiving and the Effects on Employment

Parents caring for children with mental health disabilities experience unique challenges to integrating employment and family responsibilities.

Study participants:

- ❖ 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 serious emotional or behavioral disorder

Work-Family Fit: What is it?

- ❖ The degree to which an employed parent realizes the various components of her or his adaptive strategy for dealing with the boundary between work and family (Barnett, 1998).
- ❖ Fit is a **process**: the decisions and tasks undertaken to achieve fit; and an **outcome**: the degree to which the parent establishes integration, albeit temporary, in his or her employment and family responsibilities (Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie, 2002).
- ❖ Fit is dynamic and fluid, changing in reaction to child crisis, family demands, job demands, and availability and accessibility of family support resources.

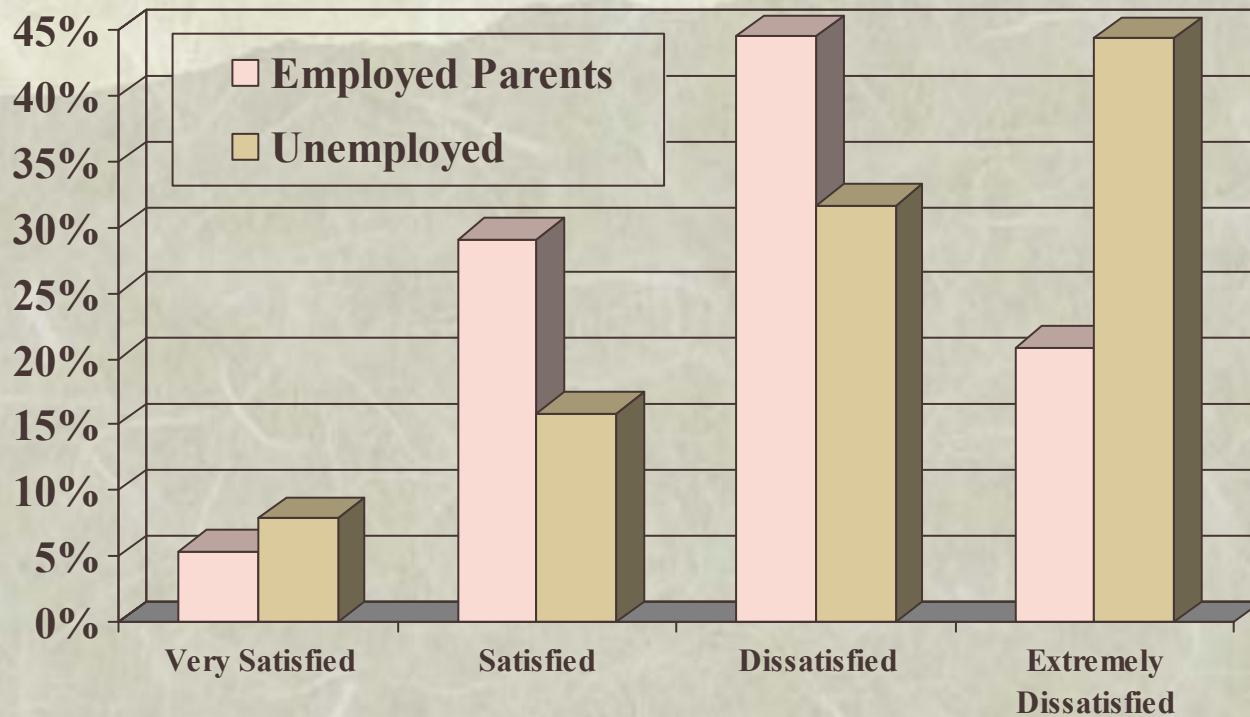
Rate YOUR Work-Family Fit

- ❖ How satisfied are you with your ability to manage both work and family responsibilities?
 - Very Satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Dissatisfied
 - Extremely Dissatisfied

Participant Ratings of Work-Family Fit

- ❖ We asked, “How satisfied are you with your ability to meet both work and family responsibilities?”
- ❖ Overwhelmingly parents in the sample reported *dissatisfaction* with the degree of work-family fit.
- ❖ 67% dissatisfied, 33% satisfied

Work-Family Fit Ratings: Employed & Unemployed Compared



April's Story

- ❖ Brief biography
- ❖ Involvement in Project Common Ground
- ❖ Work-life challenges

Work-Family Fit Strategies

Work-family fit strategies are ideas, plans, actions, resources, services, programs, or policies that when utilized by parents improve their ability to meet employment and family responsibilities; therefore enhancing satisfaction with multiple roles in the family, workplace, and community.

Employment Strategies To Increase Work-Family Fit

Participants were asked: “What strategies have you used to find and keep employment while you are caring for a child with emotional or behavioral disorders?”

Four major employment strategies identified:

- 1) Finding a job in a family-friendly workplace
- 2) Restructuring of employment
- 3) Disclosure in the workplace about child’s mental health status
- 4) Reciprocity and negotiation

Strategy: Finding A 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, and programs
- Workplace culture and climate
- Workplace relationships
- Work processes, systems, and structures that sustain family-friendly practices

(Pitt-Catsoupes, 2002)

What Parents Say About Finding Family Friendly Workplaces

- ❖ “The strategy that 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. Also, at the airline I don’t feel stigmatized.”
- ❖ Another parent explains, “Having been in retail for the majority of my career, I mentally kept track of those companies that pay the best and offer the best benefits for the fewest hours.”

Guidelines for Finding a Family Friendly Workplace

- ❖ Do your homework. Learn about “family-friendly” policies and programs.
- ❖ Ask family members, friends, other parents about their experiences with family friendly workplaces.
- ❖ Make a list of what you need from a workplace that will help you fit job and family responsibilities together.

Strategy: Restructuring of Employment

Faced with inflexibility of job demands and schedules and lack of child care resources, parents frequently must alter their employment or leave the workforce completely. Gaining job flexibility is a central focus in the restructuring strategy.

Restructuring strategies include:

- ❖ Relocation to another community to enhance job opportunities, child care options, or school programs
- ❖ Shift in career focus or type of employment, including self-employment
- ❖ Reduce number of hours employed, full-time to part-time
- ❖ Reschedule when and/or where hours are worked, including: flex-schedule, telecommuting, job sharing

What Parents Say About Employment Restructuring

- ❖ One parent's comments, "I have had to leave a 12 month full-time job and take a lower paying position at school to be able to get his hours."
- ❖ Many parents are forced to alter their careers altogether. This parent states, "My current strategy has been to quit my job and go back to school for medical transcription so I will increase my odds of being able to have a much more flexible employment situation."
- ❖ Another parent shares, "I work in a less demanding job. I work less hours than I otherwise would...at a job that allows me to choose which days I will work."

Guidelines for Restructuring Your Employment

- ❖ List all the different options you may have for scheduling job hours: e.g. full time, part-time, change in start and ending times, job sharing, day, evening, weekday, weekend.
- ❖ List type of employment options: e.g. seasonal, self-employment.
- ❖ List all the ways you can reduce stress and increase availability for family matters: e.g. lateral move into a position with less demanding tasks, delay a promotion, self-employment.

Strategy: Disclosure in the Workplace about Child's Mental Health Status

- ❖ Disclosure is very individual and personal. Only the parent knows the scope of the family situation and the job situation.
- ❖ A parent's decision about whether or not to tell the supervisor or coworkers about a child's mental health disability is complicated and has associated risks and benefits.
- ❖ Benefits from disclosing may include increased support, improved work-family fit, increased use of benefits.
- ❖ Costs from disclosing may include: stigmatization, job insecurity, or job loss.
- ❖ Disclosure may be made by choice or by necessity.

The Process of Disclosure

Disclosure is a *process* that requires careful consideration of several factors such as:

- ❖ To whom to disclose and how--supervisor, coworkers, human resources
- ❖ Timing of disclosure--during hiring process, when child situation arises
- ❖ Amount and type of information disclosed--nature of disability, behaviors involved, anticipated frequency of interruptions
- ❖ Issues of confidentiality

Participants' Disclosure

- ❖ 83.2% of the sample disclosed their child's mental health status to supervisor
- ❖ 86.2% of the sample disclosed their child's mental health status to coworkers
- ❖ Disclosure of child's mental health status appears to be a precondition for workplace support.
- ❖ Further research is needed to understand when disclosure is made from a position of choice or necessity.

What Parents Say About Disclosure

- ❖ One parent explains, “Honesty with my employer. That has been the main strategy and working very, very hard when life is going well to make up for the times when I have to be out from work.”
- ❖ Another parents notes, “I do try to be up front with selective people about this. Some people I tell about my son’s emotional disorder; to others I just say that my son has a chronic illness that sometimes requires hospitalization.”
- ❖ This parent calls attention to the chance that employers may not understand when she says, “All I’ve been able to do is explain to my employer the reality of my life with an autistic child. Some have understood and others have absolutely not!”

Guidelines for Disclosure

- ❖ Consider the pros and cons of **when** to disclose. Possibilities: Never, during the hiring process, after the job is secured, after a positive performance pattern is established, when you need to response to a non-crisis family matter, when a crisis occurs, never.
- ❖ Consider the pros and cons of **to whom** to tell and why. Possibilities: No one, the immediate supervisor, higher level manager, coworkers, human resource personnel, employee assistance staff.
- ❖ Consider **how much and what type of information** to share. Possibilities: disability, chronic illness, mental health disorder, identity of the diagnosis, behaviors involved, treatments and supports needed, potential impact on job performance, suggested accommodations.
- ❖ Consider issues of **confidentiality**. Don't assume that the information will be held in confidence. Ask.

Strategy: Reciprocity and Negotiation

- ❖ Workplace reciprocity refers to the relational process of mutual exchange between the parent/employee and the immediate supervisor or coworkers resulting in costs and benefits to both the parent and the workplace.
- ❖ Reciprocity involves negotiation and accountability from all persons involved.
- ❖ Reciprocity and negotiation may be formal or informal.

Workplace Reciprocity: Benefits and Costs

- ❖ Potential benefits to the parent/employee
 - better able to fulfill care responsibilities
 - reduced stress
- ❖ Potential costs to the parent/employee
 - overworking to show appreciation for flexibility
 - coworker resentment
- ❖ Potential benefits to workplace
 - higher work productivity from the employee
 - increased commitment and engagement
- ❖ Potential costs to the workplace
 - “backlash” for instituting family friendly practices

What Parents Say About Reciprocity

- ❖ One parent describes reciprocity when she states, “I have been employed in small, family owned businesses that understand the need for parents to be accessible to their kids. They have more flexibility to their positions, especially when you prove how valuable you can be to their business and give 150% when you are there.”
- ❖ Another parent explains the relational process when she says, “It is a give and take relationships with flexibility and understanding during times of crisis and when things even out, I attempt to give back 150%.”
- ❖ With respect to co-workers this parent notes that, “I also offer to help co-workers in hope they can help when I need it.”

Guidelines for Reciprocity Negotiation

- ❖ Be proactive when possible. Discuss with supervisor or coworkers in advance what situations may arise because of your care responsibilities.
- ❖ Find out what options may be available if you need to flex your work schedule.
- ❖ Offer options and suggestions. Don't give up. there are always possibilities.
- ❖ Demonstrate your commitment to the organization and its goals. Follow-through on your agreement.
- ❖ Communicate your appreciation.

Questions/Discussion

- ❖ How do your employment experiences match-up with the information presented today?
- ❖ What employment strategies have you used to increase work-family fit?
- ❖ What information do employers and supervisors need to know about families with children who have mental health disorders?

Stakeholders: Work-Family Fit

- ❖ Finding work-family fit is more than an individual problem that requires change on a variety of system levels.
- ❖ Work-life issues are complex and require a collaborative effort among key stakeholders for successful solutions.
- ❖ Key Stakeholders for dialogue:
 - Parents
 - Employers
 - Service Providers
 - Educators/School System
 - Researchers
 - Policy-makers

Stakeholders: Work-Family Fit

- ❖ What information do service-providers, the school system, researchers and policy-makers need to know in order to support parents managing work and family responsibilities?
- ❖ How can service-providers, the school system, researchers and policy-makers support parents in managing work and family responsibilities?