


# Walking the Tightrope of Child Care



**The Precariousness of Work-Life  
Fit and Flexibility for Employed  
Parents of Children with  
Emotional or Behavioral  
Disorders**

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# Research Context

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- ❑ One in eight school-aged children have some type of disability (McNeil, 1997), and approximately 10% of the workforce care for children with special needs (Fernandez, 1990).
- ❑ Parents of children with emotional and behavioral disabilities experience a serious lack of community-based services and resources necessary to support joining work and family in a meaningful way.
- ❑ Parents seek flexibility mainly through employment because of restricted choices in child care and education.
- ❑ Child care for children with emotional or behavioral disorders is largely unavailable, unaffordable, or of lower quality, making it difficult for parents to sustain employment, necessitating major adjustments in parents' work lives.

# Theoretical Concepts

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- Work/Family Fit
- Work/Family Flexibility
- Inclusive Child Care

# Work/Family Fit

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- The degree to which an employed parent realizes the various components of his or her 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

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- Each family seeks a fit in their work-life through flexibility in some part of the work/family/child care system (Emlen, 1997).
- Flexibility in work schedule, child care, transportation, use of vacation or sick leave, or other work benefits assist all parents in negotiating their work-life.
- Finding and maintaining child care is difficult for parents caring for children with emotional and behavioral disabilities, so flexibility comes from work and/or family.

# Inclusive Child Care

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The delivery of comprehensive services to children with emotional and behavioral challenges in settings that have children without these challenges, and the participation of all children in the same activities, with variations in the activities for those children whose needs dictate the adaptation (See Kontos, Moore, & Georgetti, 1998).

# Research Questions

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- ❑ What is the profile of episodes of child care used by families of children having emotional or behavioral disorders?
- ❑ What is the relationship of satisfaction with child care to gender, and presence or absence of emotional or behavioral disorders?
- ❑ Do satisfaction with child care, difficulty making child care arrangements, work-family fit, and family flexibility predict parent reports of stress and of limiting work hours due to child care considerations?

# Method: Participants

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- Participants included self-identified parents of children with emotional or behavioral disorders recruited through parent support networks and national conferences.
- Potential participants returned willingness forms and were contacted by research assistants to determine eligibility.

# Participant Eligibility

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- Primary caregiver of child between 6 and 18 currently living in the home with an emotional or behavioral disorder.
- Employed at least 30 hours per week in a paid position.
- Of 87 potential participants, 14 were not eligible, and 11 were not reachable by phone to be screened for eligibility.

# Data Collection Procedures

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- ❑ Interviews scheduled with 62 family members after receiving informed consent
- ❑ Participants interviewed by phone for 60 to 90 minutes and received \$15.00 stipend.
- ❑ Participants mailed response options packet prior to interview.
- ❑ Two participants eliminated from analysis because they were not primary caregivers.

# Participant Characteristics

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- 57 women and 3 men.
- 84% European American, 5% African American, 5% Hispanic.
- Mean age = 42.7 years.
- Education: 48.3% “Some College”.
- Median income range = \$30,000-39,999.
- Mean hours employed per week = 40.7.
- 59% reported that child care limited the number of hours they were able to work

# Method: Instruments

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- Support for Working Caregivers Interview Schedule.
- Work-Family Fit Scale
- Child Care Measures
- Domain Flexibility Measures
- Family Stress Measures

# Support for Working Caregivers Interview Schedule

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- Quantitative and qualitative data on employment, family responsibilities, child care arrangements, child's mental health, and child's educational experiences.
- Incorporates items from Dependent Care Survey (Emlen & Koren, 1994).

# Work-Family Fit Scale

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- 20-item scale designed for the Support for Working Caregivers Project.
- 4-point rating scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”
- Sample items:
  - “I have taken a job with fewer demands due to my child’s special needs.”
  - “I manage my work schedule based on my child’s behavior.”

# Child Care Measures

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- Child care grid:
  - \*Child care for each child living in respondent's home.
  - \*Data collected on 24 hours/day, seven days/week, when caregiver was at work.
  - \*Last full week oldest child was in school, and caregiver was at work.
  - \*Predetermined codes used to indicate location of care and caregiver's relationship to child.
- Child care satisfaction
- Child care difficulty

# Child Care Grid

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Hour	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Weds	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
0100							
0200							
...							
2400							

# Child Care Grid Codes

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Coding: When you were engaged in paid employment who cares for your child?

- ❑ Parent herself/himself
- ❑ Spouse or partner
- ❑ Relative
- ❑ Brother/sister
- ❑ Monitors self
- ❑ School instructional staff
- ❑ Child care program staff
- ❑ Unique needs staff
- ❑ Job, sports, or club staff
- ❑ Treatment staff

# Child Care Grid Codes

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- Where is the child cared for?
  - Our home
  - Ex-spouse/partner home
  - Workplace
  - Public school
  - Private school
  - Private home (other)
  - Agency/program facility
  - In the community
  - Other

# Domain Flexibility Items Adapted from Emlen & Koren (1984)

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4-point scales measuring flexibility:

- ❑ In work schedule to handle family responsibilities.
- ❑ In family schedule to handle work responsibilities.
- ❑ In child care schedule to handle work responsibilities.
- ❑ In family schedule to handle child care responsibilities.

# Family Stress

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- Family stress measured on a 4-point scale including these items:
  - Health
  - Health of other family members
  - Child care
  - Care for elderly or disabled adult family members
  - Personal or family finances
  - Your job
  - Family relationships, including extended family

# Results

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- Child Characteristics
- Episodes and Patterns of Care (Table 1)
- Satisfaction with Care (Table 2; Figure 1)
- Reported Family Stress (Tables 3 and 4)
- Child Care Arrangements as Limitation on Work Hours (Table 5).

# Characteristics of Children Living at Home (n = 130)

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- Age of children:  
 $M = 12.5, SD = 4.4.$
- 15.9% were children of color
- 68.9% (n = 90) had emotional or behavioral disorders.
- Of the 40 children without challenges, 55% were male
- 86.9% of parents stated that their children's mental health had a substantial impact on their development.
- 63% of parents reported their work hours were affected by their children's mental health.

# Children with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (n = 90)

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- Disorders included: Attention Deficit Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Oppositional-Defiant Disorder, and Depression.
- 67% of the children with mental health disorders were male.
- Age at first recognition of mental health challenges  
M = 5.0, SD = 3.4
- Age when child first received services  
M = 6.8, SD = 3.46
- 63.3% of children with mental health challenges took medications.

# Episodes of Care

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- An **episode of care** took place when the principal caregiver was engaged in paid employment and care was given to a minor child.
- For the 130 children, 1,174 episodes of care took place during the parents' last full work week.
- Mean episodes per day, per child were 1.8; with *M* length = 4.98 hrs., *SD* = 2.94.

# Patterns of Child Care

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- ❑ Child care arrangements varied from day to day and from child to child.
- ❑ Most frequently care was given in their homes (54.3%) or children's public schools (27.4%).
- ❑ Less frequently in homes of others (5.4%) or in child care centers (2.7%).
- ❑ Longest episodes were in private ( $M = 6.88$  hrs.) or public ( $M = 6.48$  hrs.) schools or in parent's workplace ( $M = 6.47$  hrs.)

# Caregivers for Children

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- Family members provided much of the care (35.5%), as did teachers (19%) or specialized staff (12.7%).
- Children were in “self care” 15.8% of the time, with mean duration of 4.63 hours.
- Professional staff, school instructional staff and the working parents give care of the longest duration (>6 hours).
- Other family members gave care of shorter duration, including the other parent, siblings, and other relatives.
- Shortest duration care was given by child care professionals.

# Overall Profile of Care

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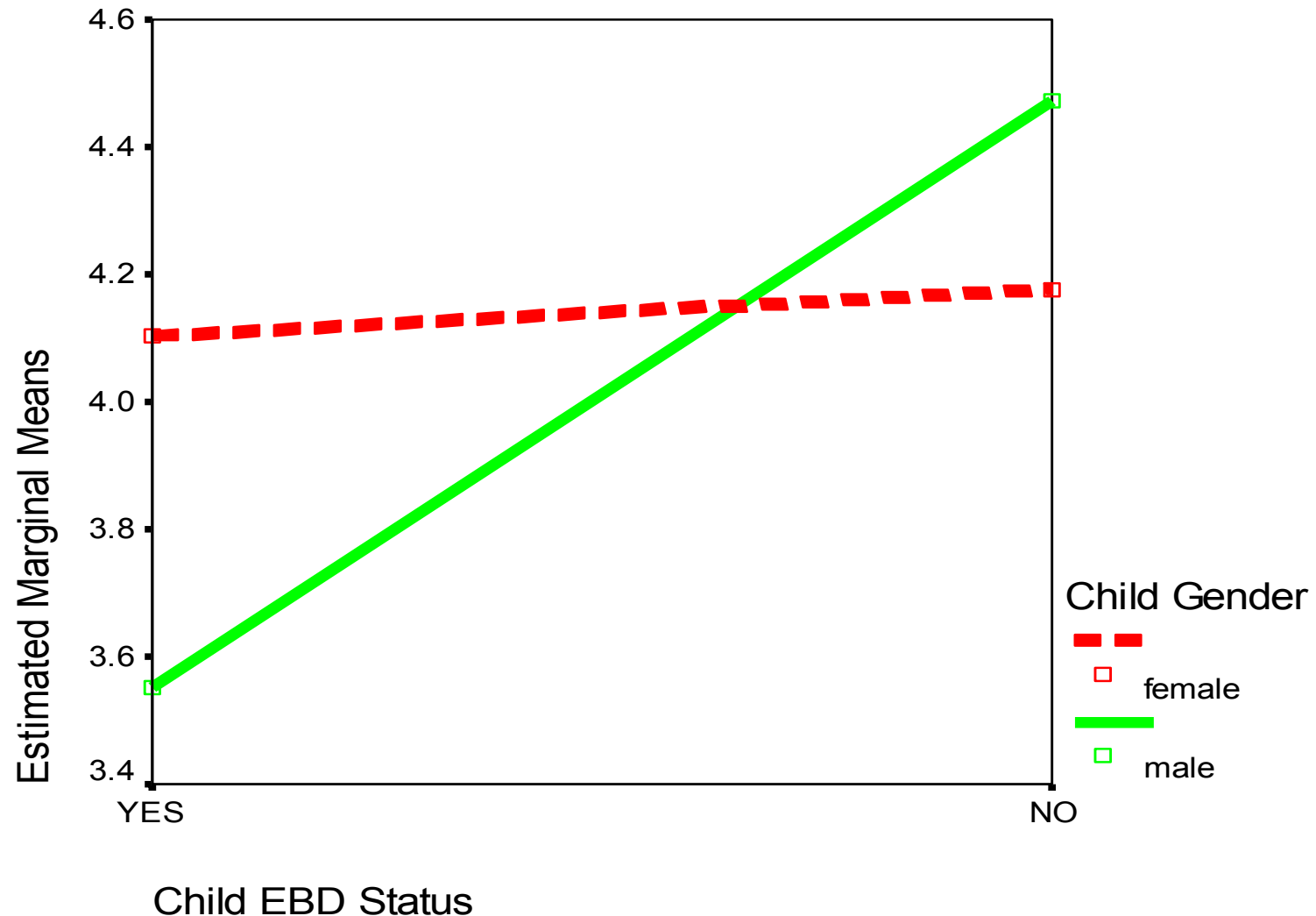
- Most frequent profile was child in school for 6 hours, with about 4 hours additional care from other parent.
- Very infrequent use of professional child care providers and facilities.
- Frequent use of self-care even with rather serious mental health challenges.

# Satisfaction with Care Differed by Sex and by Mental Health Status

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- Analysis of variance with between subjects factors of **age** and **child mental health status** (EBD vs. no EBD) and **satisfaction with care** as dependent was significant
- $F(3, 119) = 5.78, p < .001$ .
- A significant main effect was found for **mental health status**  $F(1, 119) = 6.67, p < .01$ ; but not for gender.

**Figure 1. Child care satisfaction as a function of child gender and of presence or absence of an emotional or behavioral disorder ( $n = 130$ )**



# Prediction of Reported Family Stress

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- Reported family stress levels were high,  $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = .6$  on 4 point scale.
- Total family stress was significantly correlated ( $p < .01$ ) with
  - Work family fit ( $r = -.48$ )
  - Family flexibility ( $r = -.36$ )
  - Child care difficulty ( $r = -.42$ )
- Total family stress was not related to child care satisfaction.

# Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Mean Family Stress Ratings (n = 60).

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Work-family fit	-1.284	.629	-.303*
Family flexibility	-.524	.492	-.144
Child care difficulty	.554	.297	.270
Satisfaction w/ child care	.324	.311	.141

Note:  $F(4, 55) = 5.819, p < .001, R^2 = .297$  for model.

# Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Child Care Arrangements Limiting Work Hours (N = 60).

Variable	Logistic Coefficients	SE	Wald $\chi^2$	Exp (B)
Work-family fit	1.817**	.801	5.140	6.150
Family flexibility	-.223	.535	.173	.800
Child care difficulty	-.826*	.312	3.081	.579
Satisfaction w/ child care	-.312	.358	5.336	.438

Note:  $df = 4$ , Model  $\chi^2 = 18.513$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .359$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ . Correctly classified 78.3% of Ss.

# Discussion

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- ❑ Child care decisions undertaken by parents are determined by the needs of the child with mental health disabilities.
- ❑ Child care difficulties—frequently experienced by this population of parents, contribute to stress in the family system, and limitations on work hours.
- ❑ A high frequency of care by the parent (a tag team approach), and a low frequency of care by paid child care providers, makes it so parents must make major adjustments in their work lives to care for their child, often limiting work hours or perhaps changing careers altogether.

# Future Research

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- ❑ Additional research is needed to determine if the high frequency of care by parents is a function of the lack of other child care options, such as inclusive child care.
- ❑ The high incidence of self-care among children with mental health disorders in our study points to the need for more research on the differences between self-care among this population and typically developing children.
- ❑ The relationship between the lack of appropriate child care supports, social disadvantages, and academic impairment should also be explored.