

# Absenteeism and Work-Family Fit: The Invisible Ten Percent

Work Stress and Health:  
New Challenges in a Changing Workplace  
American Psychological Association  
March 20-22, 2003, Toronto  
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Supported by:

National Institute on Disability and  
Rehabilitation Research (grant # H133B990025),  
United States Department of Education, and the

Center for Mental Health Services,  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services  
Administration.

# Research Questions

- Is the mental health status of the child related to the difficulty of finding child care arrangements?
- Is leaving work early predicted by the children's mental health, calls interrupting work, and hours spent dealing with children's behavior?
- Do work/family fit, family flexibility, and child care difficulties predict work absenteeism on the part of the principal caregiver?

# Participant Recruitment

- 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

- 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

- 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.

# Instruments

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

# Support for Working Caregivers Interview Schedule

- 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

- 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.”

# Participant Characteristics

- 57 women and 3 men.
- 84% European American, 5% African American, 5% Hispanic.
- Mean age = 42.7 years;  $SD = 10.0$ .
- Education: 48.3% “Some College”.
- Median income range = \$30,000-39,999.
- Commuting time—one way:  $M = 27.3$  minutes,  $SD = 3.49$ .

# Participant Work Characteristics

- Hours employed per week:  $M = 40.7$ ,  $SD = 9.1$ .
- 51.7% had jobs that let them sometimes work at home ( $M = 12.1$ ,  $SD = 2.57$  hours per week).
- Only 49.2% worked standard, full-time schedules; 40.7% had flexible hours.
- 59% reported that child care limited the number of hours they were able to work

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

- 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)

- 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 disorders took medications.

# Results Question 1: Relation of Child's Mental Health to Difficulty of Finding Child Care

- Parent ratings of their child's current mental health:  $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 2.36$  on 10-point scale.
- Child care was difficult to find:  $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.52$  on 6-point scale.
- Caregiver ratings of child's mental health were inversely related to difficulty in finding child care:  $r = -.286$ ,  $p < .05$ .

## Results Question 2: Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Parents Leaving Work Early due to Child's Behavior, Past 4 Weeks (n = 60).

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Calls at Work About Child	.228	.043	.553*
School/ Phone Hours	-.075	.026	.306**
Child's Mental Health Status	.130	.068	.165

Note:  $F(3, 55) = 26.70$   $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .593$  for model;

\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Results Question 3: Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Days Absent from Work, Past Three Months (n = 60).

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Child Care Difficulty	.460	.403	.172
Work-Family Fit	-2.844	1.089	-.452*
Family Flexibility	-.005	.810	-.001
Mgmt. Support for Child Care	-.769	.334	-.344**

Note:  $F(4, 48) = 3.65, p < .01, R^2 = .233; *p < .01, **p < .05.$

# Conclusions

- Employees cut their work day short if they must deal with children's problems during their scheduled work hours.
- Parents caring for children with emotional or behavioral disorders need additional family supports from child-serving organizations, like school and outside school care.

# Conclusions

- Absenteeism is predicted by level of work/family fit and by management practices.
- More flexibility and accommodation on the part of employers may contribute to work/family fit.