

Workplace Flexibility: The Case for Employers, Employees, and Public Policies

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What is Workplace Flexibility?

- Arrangements for alternative time or place of work, for example (when, where, and how work is done)
 - Flexible start and stop times (e.g., start between 8 and 10 am)
 - Work from home one day a week (telecommuting)
 - Compressed work week (4 10-hour days)
- Reduced work hours (compensation negotiated)
 - Part-time employment (e.g., alternative Fridays off)
 - Shared jobs; variable year employment
 - Paid sick leave and vacations days and leaves without pay

Changing Families in the United States

- ❑ **27% of families with children under 18 have a single parent**
- ❑ **40% of children are born to a single parent**
- ❑ **More than 1/3 of Americans today have been, are, or will be in step-families**
- ❑ **Sandwich generation—number of people who are simultaneously caring for children and parents is increasing rapidly**



(Population Reference Bureau, 1996, compiled in Bianchi, S., & Spain, D. *Women, Work, and Family in America*; US Census Bureau, 2008; Jones, 2003)



Changing Workforce

- ❑ In the next decade, it is projected that 85% of the workforce will be working parents
- ❑ The number of working women is now approximately equal to the number of working men.
- ❑ However, men are also part of the changing workforce. In 2006, fathers comprised 6% of single parents. Flexibility is NOT a “woman’s issue.”
- ❑ Americans work more hours than people in any other country in the world, causing sleep deficits, high stress, & illness

Sources: *Marital and Family Characteristics of the Labor Force from the March 1997 Current Population Survey*, Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008; Golden & Altman, 2007

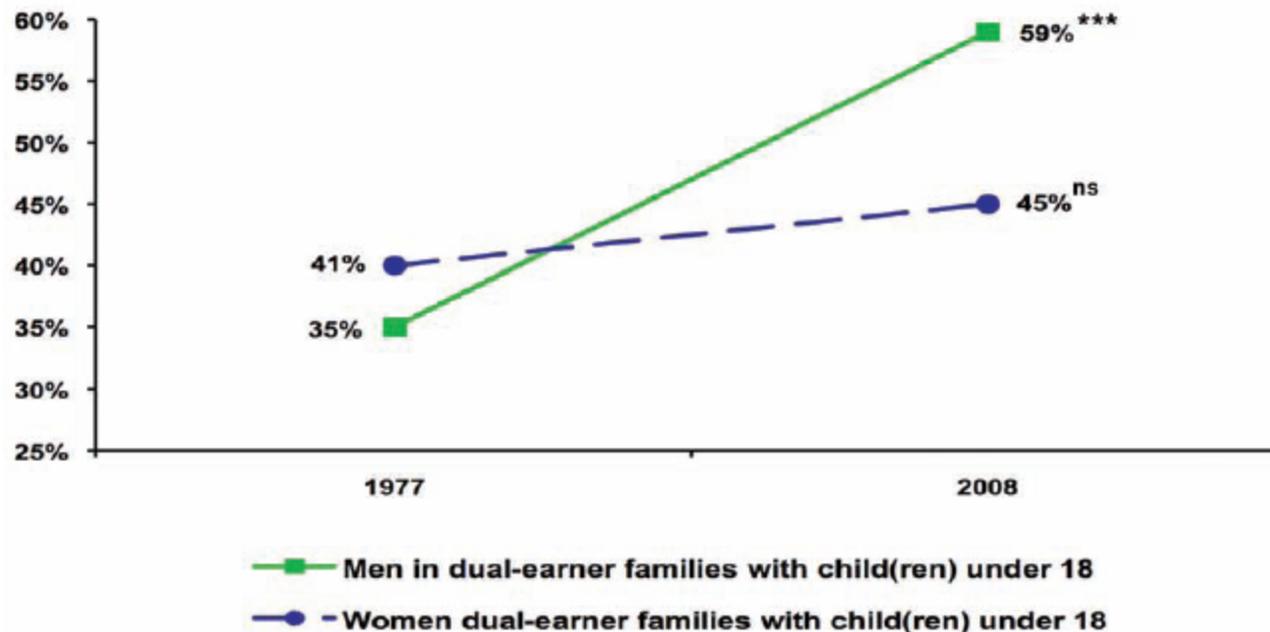
Changing Contexts

- Although most working parents report that they are “squeezed for time,” there are benefits to paid employment for all adults, including enhanced self-esteem and reduced depression, with the greatest gains for those whose families are moved out of poverty by the increased income.
- Few families can afford “luxuries” like health insurance, mortgage payments, and grocery bills on one salary. The two-parent, single wage-earner family is going the way of the do-do bird.



Work-Life Conflict has Increased Over the Last 30 Years, Especially for Men

Figure 15: Percentage of fathers and mothers in dual-earner couples reporting work-life conflict (1977–2008)



U.S. Department of Labor, Quality of Employment Survey, 1977

Families and Work Institute, National Study of the Changing Workforce, 2008

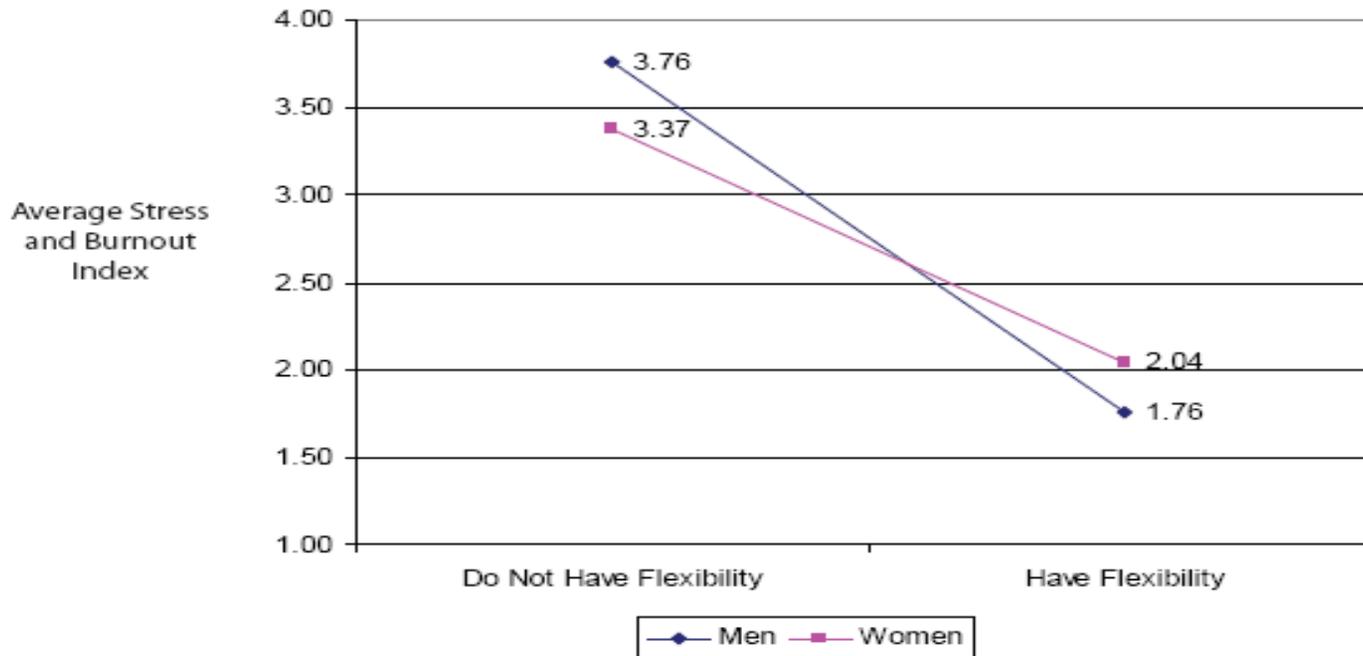
Recommendations To Align The World Of Work With The Realities Of Contemporary Family Life

- We need new models of work-life interaction that work in real life. We need work policies that we can use to manage our work and family obligations without having to choose between the two.

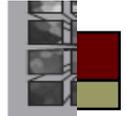


Workplace Flexibility Reduces Stress

Average Stress and Burnout Index for Low Wage Employees by Their Perceived Flexibility



Corporate Voices for Working Families, Workplace Flexibility for Lower Wage Workers, 2006



How time-flexible work policies can reduce stress, improve health, and save money

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Summary

Data from the US National Study of the Changing Workforce (a nationally representative sample of working adults) were used to test the hypothesis that employees with time-flexible work policies reported less stress, higher levels of commitment to their employer, and reduced costs to the organization because of fewer absences, fewer days late, and fewer missed deadlines. The model provides persuasive findings for the hypothesized relationship and offers important suggestions to employers who can translate reduced illness into savings and increased commitment into better employees. Contrary to expectations, there were no gender differences in how employees responded to flexible work policies, showing that gender-neutral work policies make financial sense. By showing that time-flexible work policies provide employer benefits, we can hasten the change to a new worker model—one that is family and employer friendly. The business case for family-friendly work policies may prove to be the best tool we have in changing how we live and work. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key Words

return-on-investment; flexible-time policies; health-costs; job commitment; stress-work model

Introduction

Time is a valuable resource for all working adults, but for working parents, the constant sense of time urgency (e.g. getting home from work before the sitter has to leave, getting into work in time for an early meeting) is an on-going stress because

the time demands are often competing (Nelson & Burke, 2002). Yet, despite major changes in the composition of the workforce over the last several decades, especially in the number and percentage of mothers of young children who are working, including the fact that a majority of mothers with children less than 1 year old work outside the home, there have been few societal attempts to realign the world of work with the realities of contemporary life. The school day is still struc-



*Hypothesis: Employees With Control Over
Their Time Will Be Healthier, Happier, and
Better Workers*

- ❑ Increased loyalty to their employer
- ❑ Reduced turnover (Less likely to change employment)
- ❑ “Harder” workers
- ❑ Healthier workers (which should translate into reduced health care costs)



Research Findings:

- Time-flexible work policies (FT/PT and start/stop time flexibility, can work from home, can take time off for sick child, no penalty for use flex options)

Associated with

- Fewer absences from work, fewer days late or left early, better able to meet work deadlines, reduced work-family conflict
- Fewer minor health problems, less stressed, less tired, reduced “burn out”
- More loyal to employer, more likely to work harder than needed, less likely to change employments, and better work-related attitudes



*What Can Employers Do To Reduce Time-Related Stressors for
Their Employees and Enhance Their Profits?*

- ❑ Telecommuting (for some types of jobs)
- ❑ Make it easier to take time off from work so employees can care for family members (children, older adults) and themselves
- ❑ Flexible start and stop times
- ❑ Part-time options (e.g., job sharing)
- ❑ Provide Child/Elder Care
- ❑ Provide sick leave



Making ROI Estimates for Proposed Policy to Encourage Flexibility

- Compute Absences
 - 4% salary costs so \$40,000 = \$1600
 - Reduce cost of absence by 25% = \$400 saved
- Compute cost turnover (% turnover)
 - Include advertising, training, interviewing, unfilled positions, errors by new hires, bad hires, incentives for referrals,
- Compute cost tardies, presenteeism, etc.
- How do employees “see” employer?



Recommendations for Public Policies

Why is work and family the government's business? Everyone has parents, friends, neighbors, who function as family, and everyone, at some time, will need care.

We need sound policies that are consistent with our values and the bottom line. Despite numerous social changes in how we live and work, public policies have not caught up with the contemporary realities of working families.



Recommendations for Public Policies

- *Be Aware of the Complex Linkages Among Work, Education, Wages, and Poverty*
 - Flexible work arrangements allow more parents to remain employed, and thus increase household incomes. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to experience lower academic achievement and higher rates of dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy and childbearing, delinquent behavior, poverty, and welfare dependency. Programs that keep families with children above poverty are fiscally conservative.
(Heymann 2000)
- *Flexible Work Schedules Can Help Working Adults Upgrade Their Work Skills*
 - Flexible work options are especially important for low wage earners, who can work while upgrading job skills.



Recommendations for Public Policies

□ *Provide Paid Family and Medical Leave*

- Families need medical leave policies: Ill family members miss medical appointments, often resulting in increased health care costs, prolonged illness, and ultimately the loss of employment for the caregiver (with unemployment costs and possible welfare costs) and untold stress to an already overstressed family. Seriously ill or injured children recover more quickly and leave the hospital more quickly when parents are permitted to care for them. (George & Hancock, 1993; Taylor & O'Connor, 1989)



Recommendations for Public Policies

□ *Working Families Need Universal Quality
Preschool Programs Near Public Transportation*

- According to the Children's Defense Fund, child care problems often interfere with parents' getting or keeping a job; when families receive financial assistance for child care, they are more likely to work.

"High-quality, educational child care and preschool for low-income children by age 15, reduces special education placements and grade retentions by 50% compared to controls; by age 21, more than doubles the proportion attending four-year college and reduces the percentage of teenage parents by 44%"

(U.S. Department of Education, December 2003, p. iii).



Recommendations for Public Policies

□ *Support After-School Programs*

that meet the multiple goals of increasing physical activity, keeping children safe, improving academic achievement, and relieving parent after school stress.

Align School and Work Calendars

- Students from low-socioeconomic status backgrounds who participate in summer programs do not show the increasing annual gaps in academic achievement relative to their richer peers

*Recognize the Benefits of Combining
Work and Family Roles and the
possibilities of moving from “balance” to
“benefits” for work and family.*

Work and family can offer mutual benefits with positive and reinforcing effects that create win-win situations for families and employers.

