

RESEARCH
PAPER
No.15



EMPLOYED MOTHERS

BALANCING WORK AND
FAMILY LIFE

Catherine Lee
Linda Duxbury
Christopher Higgins



CANADIAN CENTRE
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Catherine Lee
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Canadian Centre for
Management Development
October 1994

Canada

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A WORD FROM CCMD

One of the most pressing issues facing today's labour force — and working mothers in particular — is the stress associated with balancing the demands of the workplace and the family. With significant numbers of women with dependent children entering the work force each year, the traditional models for dividing work and family responsibilities are rapidly disappearing. This situation poses challenges for women as they struggle to cope with the demands of their jobs and their families, for men who find themselves assuming greater responsibilities within their families, and for employers who are now being called upon to provide the resources and flexible arrangements needed to help their employees deal with the often conflicting demands on their time.

This study, which was prepared for the Canadian Centre for Management Development by Professors Catherine Lee, Linda Duxbury and Christopher Higgins, is based on interviews with 300 mothers who are employed within the federal public service in the National Capital Region. It examines the strategies used by mothers to manage the responsibilities of work and family, and evaluates and tabulates their responses to questions about the way they allocate their time, the division of responsibilities within their families, the resources currently available to them, and the resources they feel they need to achieve a better balance between their work and family responsibilities.

The study concludes with several recommendations aimed at encouraging employers to devise policies which will increase work-location and work-time flexibility and to introduce programs which will educate their employees, the employees' supervisors and senior managers on work and family issues.

The publication of this paper reflects CCMD's commitment to the support and development of research which examines the diversity of the contemporary work force and explores the many challenges facing today's managers in both the public and private sectors.

Ole Ingstrup
Principal

Ralph Heintzman
Vice-Principal, Research

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the results of a study based on interviews with 300 working mothers who are employed within the federal public service in the National Capital Region. The main objective of the study was to examine the ways in which working mothers cope with the demands of work and family. Resources were considered in terms of:

- 1) individual resources: the individual strategies that women use to help them cope.
- 2) family resources: the ways that spouses contribute to the task of balancing work and family.
- 3) employer resources: the characteristics of the work environment that facilitate coping with work and family.
- 4) community resources: resources outside both work and family that facilitate coping with work and family.

Employed mothers participated in a semi-structured telephone interview that was tape-recorded and subsequently scored by trained coders. The sample was divided according to the participant's job type (career versus earner), marital status

(married versus single), and life-cycle stage (age of youngest dependent child: 0-5, 6-13, and 14-18).

The majority of the employed mothers in this sample reported that they do not have enough time to accomplish all they have to do each day. They reported spending most of their time in work, home chores and child care and consequently did not have enough time for leisure activities.

It is striking that these findings were obtained from women who reported lower than average levels of perceived stress. This suggests that the findings represent the opinions of employed mothers who are coping well with the demands of work and family. Thus, the results may present an unrepresentatively positive picture of how women cope with conflicting work and family demands. Nevertheless, almost 60 percent of the sample have considered quitting their jobs.

Employed mothers reported that they cope with the demands of work and family by setting priorities, by lowering the standards they would like to maintain at home, by dividing responsibilities within their families, and by being organized.

On the whole, respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the division of responsibilities in their families. Most of them described their husbands as helping them to balance work and family by completing household chores, by being involved in child care and by being sensitive to family needs. However, some women commented that it would be helpful if their husbands were more sensitive to family needs, were to do more chores, and were to participate more fully in child care. In essence, they wanted their husbands to take more responsibility for home and family-related activities.

Approximately 50 percent of the sample reported that the task of balancing work and family had become easier in the last year, about a quarter reported that it had become more difficult, and a quarter reported that it had remained the same. Among those who reported that it had become easier, the most frequent reason cited was that their children had grown older. Among those who reported that it had become more difficult, the most frequent reasons were related to difficulties at work (e.g., job stress).

Employed mothers reported that their employers provide several benefits that help them to balance the demands of work and family. These benefits related to the

provision of work-time and work-location flexibility, as well as the provision of services that help mothers arrange alternate care for their children.

In general, employed mothers in career positions were more likely than those in earner positions to report having flexibility in the workplace which enabled them to fulfil the demands of their family. In addition to formal benefits, a number of employed mothers mentioned that having supervisors who are understanding of their work and family demands is critical. Without such understanding, these women noted that they would feel uncomfortable in making use of the benefits to which they were formally entitled.

Almost two-thirds of those interviewed stated that they had considered quitting their jobs. Factors that affected thoughts of exiting the work force included: not having enough time to be with children, job pressures, and the stresses of trying to accomplish everything.

It is clear that working mothers cannot be considered a homogeneous group: in fact, there are considerable differences, one distinguishing factor being the type of job held. Career mothers report receiving more benefits than do earner women — they perceive their work situation as being more flexible. Not surprisingly, earner women report higher levels of perceived stress. Another distinguishing factor is the age of the youngest child at home. The stresses of balancing work and family are most pronounced for mothers who have children aged thirteen and younger. Almost one-third of mothers of preschoolers believe that on-site day-care and day-care subsidies would help in balancing work and family. Many mothers reported that over time the task of balancing work and family becomes easier — as children become more independent, and as mothers develop effective routines.

The findings presented here indicate that even among women who are coping relatively well with the demands of work and family, a large proportion actively consider leaving their job. The data clearly show that employed mothers face considerable time pressures in attempting to fulfil their work and family roles. In response, they have developed personal strategies for dealing with the competing demands of work and family. Although these mothers appreciate the steps that employers have begun to take towards helping them to balance work and family demands, more initiatives from their employers could be forthcoming.

Several specific recommendations are proposed. The first is for employers to provide work-time and work-location flexibility. A number of strategies may

facilitate such arrangements, including flexible schedules, part-time work, work at home and job sharing. Education is also very important. Human resource departments should attempt to educate their employees on ways to cope with work and family. Time management courses or seminars on coping with stress are two ways in which this could be accomplished. Our final recommendation is to educate senior management on the issues of work and family. It is clear from the results of this study that formal policies alone are insufficient to ensure that employed mothers are able to satisfy the dual demands of work and family. Without the understanding of their supervisors, many employed mothers do not feel comfortable in making use of family-related policies. Management must be made more sensitive to this issue.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>A Word from CCMD</i>	i
<i>Executive Summary</i>	iii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Independent Variables	2
Objectives	3
II. METHOD	5
The Sample	5
Telephone Interview	6
Procedure	7
Confidentiality	8

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	9
Sample and Analysis Technique.....	9
Time Management	10
Levels of Stress	12
Individual Coping	13
The Role of the Spouse	15
The Role of the Employer.....	18
Stability and Change in Work-Family Conflict.....	21
Selective Exiting	23
IV. CONCLUSIONS	27
V. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	31
<i>Bibliography</i>	35

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Sample Composition	10
Table 2	Do you feel there are enough hours in the day to accomplish everything you have to do?	10
Table 3	Where does all the time go?	11
Table 4	What gets left out?	11
Table 5	If you had an extra hour each day, how would you spend it?	12
Table 6	Responses to the perceived stress scale	13
Table 7	How do you cope?	14
Table 8	What else could help you cope?	15
Table 9	What <i>does</i> your spouse do that helps you balance work and family?	16
Table 10	What else <i>could</i> your spouse do to help you balance work and family?	16

Table 11	How satisfied are you with the division of responsibilities in your family?	17
Table 12	Compared to you, how much flexibility does your spouse have in his job?	17
Table 13	For those whose spouse has <i>more</i> flexibility: How does this affect the task of balancing work and family?	18
Table 14	For those whose spouse has <i>less</i> flexibility: How does this affect the task of balancing work and family?	18
Table 15	What <i>does</i> your employer do to help you balance work and family?	19
Table 16	What <i>could</i> your employer do to help you balance work and family?	20
Table 17	How have things changed since last year?	21
Table 18	For those who reported that things have become easier: What has made things easier?	22
Table 19	For those who reported that things have become harder: What has made things harder?	22
Table 20	Have you ever thought of quitting your job?	23
Table 21	For those who had thought of quitting: Why?	24
Table 22	What would make you think of quitting?	25

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I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there have been dramatic changes in the composition of the Canadian labour force. Whereas in the 1950s, 70 percent of all North American households were made up of a working father, a homemaker mother and one or more children (Pleck, 1985), by 1985 fewer than 10 percent of the population lived in this “classic 1950s style family” (BNA, 1986; Hessing, 1988).

The most striking change in work-force composition is the increasing number of employed women with dependent children. Whereas in 1976, 34.9 percent of mothers with preschool-age children and 49 percent of mothers with children aged 6-15 were in the labour force, by 1988, 62.2 percent of mothers of preschoolers and 73 percent of mothers of school-aged children were employed (Statistics Canada, 1990).

One major consequence of this change in work-force demographics is that the old models of coordinating work and family life have become inappropriate for a majority of the labour force (Lee & Kanungo, 1984). Society can no longer operate under the “myth of separate worlds” (Kanter, 1977) assuming that work and family are independent entities. That is, there is no longer the option of a gendered division of labour among partners when it comes to the organization of work and family. Women are increasingly facing the demands of both their jobs and their families. Men are assuming greater responsibilities within their families and are experiencing a shift in their priorities away from work (Pleck, 1985; Michelson, 1983). Employers of the

1990s will be hard pressed to find an employee who does not share at least some responsibility for the care of one or more dependents.

In recent years, researchers have begun to focus attention on the challenges workers face in attempting to balance work and family responsibilities (e.g., Greenhaus, Bedeian, & Mossholder, 1987; Jackson, Zedeck & Summers, 1985). One major consequence of the inability to balance competing roles is an increase in work-family conflict. Such conflict often occurs when the domains of work and family are mutually incompatible in some respects (Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connelly, 1983). Previous research in this area suggests that effective performance of one role (work or family) may interfere with performance of the other role (family or work), because the investment of time, energy and emotion in one role leaves little resources for the other role (Greenhaus et al., 1987). For example, the time demands and inflexibility of a work schedule may restrict an employee's ability to engage in his/her roles as a spouse and parent.

The stresses of work-family conflict have been found to be associated with many negative consequences, including decreased productivity, tardiness, absenteeism, turnover, poor morale, reduced life satisfaction and poorer mental health (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985; Pleck, 1985; Pleck, Staines & Lang, 1980; Portner, 1983; Voydanoff, 1989). Clearly, work-family conflict is an important concern for both employers and employees.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The needs and resources of working mothers are not homogeneous. Consequently, three independent variables were considered in this analysis. They were:

- 1) job status (career, earner);
- 2) marital status (married, single parent); and
- 3) life-cycle stage (youngest child 5 years of age or less; youngest child between 6 and 13; youngest child older than 13 and younger than 19).

These independent variables are discussed below.

Research in this area has been criticized for its failure to distinguish among different groups of workers (Christensen & Staines, 1990). One important work characteristic that needs to be addressed is the type of job the employee performs. Those employees who are in "career" positions (those in professions and in managerial positions) may cope with work-family conflict in a different manner than those in "earner" positions (clerical or administrative). Whereas the career employee may be more committed to his or her job and experience greater work demands, he or she may also have more resources to cope with the conflict between the two roles. Career employees often have more autonomous work positions that permit greater flexibility and have more financial resources to pay others to perform some of their family role responsibilities. The earner employee, on the other hand, is often in a less challenging job with fewer work demands. Such positions, however, often are paid at a lower rate and offer less flexibility.

Another family variable that must be addressed is the employee's marital status. Single and married parents often have different resources in dealing with the demands of work and family and may require different kinds of support in balancing work and family needs (Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985).

Various family characteristics must also be considered in an examination of ways of coping with work-family conflict. For example, among parents, the task of balancing work and family differs according to the life-cycle phase (Christensen & Staines, 1990). This refers to the age of the youngest child in the family. It is well established that parental responsibilities are most intense during the child's preschool years (Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985). During this time, employed parents must make arrangements for the care of their children while they are at work. They must also coordinate their work schedules with those of the caregiver and must make arrangements for alternate care when the child is ill. Parents of young school-age children, on the other hand, must make arrangements for the care of their children outside school hours. Parents of older children (i.e., greater than 12) do not have these problems to as great an extent.

OBJECTIVES

This study was designed to examine the ways that working mothers cope with the demands of work and family. Resources were considered in terms of:

4 / EMPLOYED MOTHERS

- 1) individual resources: the individual strategies that women use to help them cope;
- 2) family resources: the ways that spouses contribute to the task of balancing work and family;
- 3) employer resources: the characteristics of the work environment that facilitate coping with work and family;
- 4) community resources: resources outside both work and family that facilitate coping with work and family.

In addition to examining current resources, the study was also designed to explore the resources that women would like to have at their disposal. Thus, all questions were asked in terms of “What helps you to balance the demands of work and family?” and also “What else could help you balance the demands of work and family?”

This report is divided into five sections. In the second section, the methodology is presented, including a description of the development of the telephone interview and coding system. The third section presents the results, together with a discussion of their meaning. In the fourth section, conclusions are drawn. Finally, policy recommendations are proposed in section V.

II

METHOD

The description of methodology is divided into subsections. In the first subsection, the sample is described. The next subsection provides details on the telephone interview, including details on the interviewers, the coders, the development of the interview and coding scheme, and the training of the interviewers and coders. The procedure of the study and the strategies used to protect confidentiality are described in the next two subsections.

THE SAMPLE

The target population was mothers, with dependent children at home, employed in the public sector in the National Capital Region. Women were categorized according to job type, marital status, and life-cycle phase. Job type was divided into “career” and “earner.” Career employees are those who hold managerial or professional positions, whereas earner employees hold administrative or clerical positions. Marital status distinguished between single mothers and those women with a working spouse. Family life cycle stage refers to the age grouping of the youngest child in the home (preschool: 0-5 years; elementary school-age: 6-13; adolescent: 14-18).

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Data were collected by means of telephone interviews. These tape-recorded interviews followed a semi-structured format which allowed the interviewer to probe and clarify participants' responses. The interview was designed so that the participant would experience it as an informal conversation.

Interviews were conducted by four female assistants. All interviewers were women who had at least an honours degree and previous experience in interviewing. Females were hired so that no male/female gender biases were introduced.

The interview format was constructed by the principal investigators. The interview was pilot-tested on a number of employed mothers and modifications were made based on feedback concerning the comprehensibility of questions, the order of topics, etc. After completion of the first 20 interviews, audiotapes were reviewed by the principal investigators in order to generate a coding scheme of responses. The coding scheme consisted of categories of responses for each question which could be rated as present or absent for each participant. The preliminary coding scheme was then applied to 30 interviews by a coder (coding was conducted by four assistants — one male and three females). In ambiguous cases, the coder was required to record the responses verbatim and to discuss them with one of the principal investigators. Ambiguities were resolved by clarification of decision rules.

Initially, training interviews were conducted by one of the principal investigators in the presence of research assistants. Subsequently, research assistants conducted practice interviews with pilot participants. These interviews were reviewed with the investigator and feedback was given to ensure that interviewers remained neutral and did not inadvertently encourage participants in a certain pattern of responses. The principal investigators monitored the interviewers' progress through weekly meetings, occasional spot-checking of tapes and availability to consult on difficult situations that arose.

Coders were trained by:

- a) familiarizing themselves with the interview and coding scheme;
- b) listening to a previously coded interview with reference to the scoring sheet and generating questions regarding decision rules;

- c) participating in a training session in which decision rules were clarified; and
- d) coding previously coded interviews without access to the scoring sheet.

Only when coders achieved inter-rater reliability in excess of 75 percent were they permitted to code actual audiotapes. The principal investigators monitored the coders' progress through regular meetings, spot-checking of 25 percent of tapes and availability to consult on coding questions. Overall, the 300 interviews were coded with over 80 percent inter-rater reliability, indicating that of the 276 decisions made for each interview, coders were in agreement for at least 221. Disagreements were randomly distributed.

PROCEDURE

The sample was obtained from respondents to our survey of public sector employees (for a detailed description of this survey see Duxbury, Higgins, Lee, & Mills, 1991). In this survey, respondents were asked whether they were willing to be interviewed in greater depth regarding how they balance work and family.

Interviewers were provided with this list of potential participants. Given the work and family demands faced by these women, a strategy characterized by *persistence* and *flexibility* was adopted. It was considered vital to ensure that all reasonable efforts were expended to facilitate the participation of women whose schedules provided little free time to accommodate an interview.

Interviewers were instructed to make up to five attempts to call each respondent. They were encouraged to vary the time of day at which they called. After five unsuccessful calls (unable to get a reply at the number given), the interviewer marked the date of the last attempted call. Two weeks later attempts were again made to contact the respondent. On average, interviewers made at least four telephone calls to establish contact with each participant.

Interviewers were also instructed to be flexible in rescheduling and a considerable number of calls were made in the evenings and on weekends. A significant number of participants were unable to take part in the interview at the agreed-upon time and interviewers made on average two to three repeat phone calls before they were

able to conduct the interview. Thus, for each completed interview, interviewers made between six and seven phone calls.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Several steps were employed to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Participants were identified on the tape recording by first name and ID number only. About a quarter of participants requested copies of the results of the interview study and provided their names and addresses. These names were kept on a list that does not include the ID number or any other information that would link the name and interview responses. Computerized data include ID number only.

III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SAMPLE AND ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

The sample composition is presented in Table 1. Slightly over half of the women who were interviewed held earner positions (administrative or clerical) and the remainder held career positions (professional and managerial). Three quarters of the mothers were married, the rest were single parents. The majority of the sample had children in the two categories below age 13.

Three between-group comparisons were performed as part of this study: job type (career versus earner); marital status (married versus single mothers); and life-cycle phase (age of youngest child: 0-5; 6-13; 14-18). With the exception of the abbreviated version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS4; Cohen & Williamson, 1984) which yields continuous data, all variables were categorical and were analyzed using chi-square analyses. PSS data were analyzed by means of independent group *t* tests (for comparisons of career versus earner and married versus single) and ANOVA (for comparisons according to age of youngest child).

Responses in the tables are generally presented in order of the most-frequent to the least-frequent response. Because the respondents often gave more than one response, total percentages may exceed 100 percent. Only significant results are discussed in the text.

TABLE 1
Sample Composition

<i>Percentage</i>						
<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
<i>Career</i>	<i>Earned</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
45.6	54.4	74.3	25.7	37.4	44.2	18.5

TIME MANAGEMENT

Because pressures of time are the most frequently cited frustrations of work-family conflict, the interviewer began by asking the question, "Do you find that there are enough hours in the day to accomplish everything you have to do?" The data presented in Table 2 indicate that the majority of respondents stated emphatically that they did not have enough time. This perception was least pronounced in mothers with children aged 14 or older.

TABLE 2
Do you feel there are enough hours in the day to accomplish everything you have to do?

	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earned</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Yes	13.2	11.8	14.5	12.4	16.1	10.1	10.3	26.5
No	86.8	88.2	85.5	87.6	83.9	89.9	89.7	73.5

Responses to the question "Where does all the time go?" are presented in Table 3. Not surprisingly, the most common response was work, especially for career women. Notably, individual and family leisure were mentioned by only 10 percent of the sample. Interestingly, whereas one in six (16.5 percent) career women mentioned that they spend some of their time in individual leisure, less than one in twenty (4.3 percent) earned women said this. Only 3.0 percent of mothers with preschoolers said that they spend some of their time in individual leisure, whereas 11.4 percent of mothers of young school-age children and 22.4 percent of mothers of adolescents mentioned that they had time for their own leisure activities.

TABLE 3
Where does all the time go?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earned</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Work	79.6	85.8	73.9	80.6	77.4	86.9	79.5	65.3
Chores	51.3	55.1	47.8	49.8	58.1	55.6	52.1	40.8
Child care	46.4	46.5	46.4	46.8	45.2	59.6	53.0	4.1
Individual leisure	10.2	16.5	4.3	8.5	16.1	3.0	11.1	22.4
Family leisure	9.8	11.0	8.7	11.9	3.2	11.1	10.3	6.1
Volunteer	6.1	9.4	2.9	6.5	4.8	1.0	8.5	10.2

Time is a finite commodity. Consequently, the activities reported in Table 3 take place at the expense of other activities. Responses to the question “What gets left out?” are presented in Table 4. The data suggest that women devote time to work at the expense of time for themselves and time for their families. Career women were more likely than earner women to report that they did not have time for individual leisure (62.8 percent versus 43.6 percent). It is likely that compared to women in earner positions, women in career positions have higher expectations about devoting time to their individual lives. Couple and family leisure were also reported as being forfeited. Mothers with younger children were more likely to report not having time for couple leisure than were mothers with adolescent children. Over a third of the sample noted that they did not have time to clean the house to the standards they would like. One in eight women reported that they felt they did not have sufficient time to spend in child care.

TABLE 4
What gets left out?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earned</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Individual leisure	52.5	62.8	43.6	52.3	54.9	53.8	50.5	54.5
House cleaning	38.7	35.1	41.8	38.4	39.2	37.2	40.9	36.4
Couple leisure	16.7	13.8	19.1	22.5	NA	28.2	11.8	3.0
Family leisure	15.2	16.0	14.5	15.2	13.7	16.7	16.1	9.1
Child care	12.3	9.6	14.5	12.3	12.3	9.0	16.1	9.1

The results presented in Table 5 corroborate these findings. When asked "If you had an extra hour each day, how would you spend it?" over two thirds of the sample said they would spend time on themselves. The older their children, the more likely mothers were to mention spending any extra time in individual leisure. Women with younger children were more likely to report that they would spend the extra hour with their children. Earner women were more likely than career women to report that they would spend the extra time with their spouses (10.1 percent versus 3.1 percent).

TABLE 5

If you had an extra hour each day, how would you spend it?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Individual leisure	68.1	71.2	63.0	66.2	74.2	57.6	70.1	83.7
With children	22.4	19.7	25.4	22.9	21.0	30.3	21.4	10.2
Chores	14.4	14.2	14.5	13.9	16.1	16.2	13.7	12.2
With spouse	9.0	3.1	10.1	9.0	NA	9.1	7.7	0
Sleep	8.7	8.7	9.4	7.5	12.9	12.1	6.0	10.2

LEVELS OF STRESS

Responses to stress questions are presented in Table 6. Scores can be compared to U.S. norms. For those mothers who are employed full time this norm is 4.2. Whereas the mean scores for women who responded to the questionnaire (Duxbury et al., 1991) were above North American norms, indicating that they were experiencing high levels of stress, the means reported in this sample were below average, indicating that the interview respondents may represent a subset of public sector employees who are less stressed by the challenges of balancing work and family. Therefore, in interpreting results from this study, it should be borne in mind that the coping strategies reported here are those used by women who are coping better than average with the demands of balancing work and family.

Looking at Table 6, mothers with preschoolers reported above average stress. Consistent with the questionnaire data, earner women reported higher levels of stress than did career women. Interestingly, single mothers had lower stress levels than married mothers. Perhaps their source of stress "walked out the door."

TABLE 6
Responses to the perceived stress scale

<i>How often have you felt:</i>	<i>Average Scores</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earner</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Unable to control important things in your life	1.47	1.35	1.53	1.43	1.52	1.77	1.38	1.24
Confident about your ability to handle things	0.52	0.20	0.70	0.59	0.40	0.64	0.56	0.33
Difficulties piling up	0.78	0.57	0.90	0.83	0.69	1.23	0.65	0.44
Things were going your way	0.95	0.58	1.17	1.04	0.79	1.37	0.78	0.75
TOTAL SCORE	3.78	2.70	4.40	3.90	3.50	5.10	3.40	2.80

INDIVIDUAL COPING

Responses to the question “How do you cope?” are presented in Table 7. In coping with conflicting work and family demands, the two most common strategies were to set priorities and to divide tasks within the family. Women reported that they could not hope to accomplish everything and that it was necessary to set priorities to determine which tasks should be omitted. Similarly, they acknowledged that they could not realistically expect to accomplish everything themselves and that successful coping required that other family members (spouse and children) also take responsibility for household and child-care tasks.

Almost 30 percent of the respondents reported that one of the strategies they find helpful is to pay to have household chores done by someone outside the family. Notably, this was more frequently mentioned by married than by single mothers and more frequently by career than by earner mothers. This pattern is likely explained by the higher income available to these individuals. Single mothers reported that the support they receive from their extended family helped them cope with work and family. Finally, one in ten women described their skills in organization as being essential to their successful coping.

TABLE 7
How do you cope?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Set priorities	65.4	69.3	62.3	63.2	72.6	66.7	64.1	67.3
Divide responsibilities	60.1	59.8	60.9	66.7	38.7	55.6	63.2	63.3
Pay someone else to do chores	28.9	42.5	15.9	34.3	11.3	26.3	26.5	38.8
Support from extended family	12.2	10.2	13.8	10.0	19.4	16.2	13.7	0
By being organized	10.3	9.4	10.9	9.5	12.9	7.1	12.0	12.2

Respondents were asked to consider “What else would help you to cope with the demands of work and family?” Interestingly, the responses all refer to strategies that rely on additional help or support from others (see Table 8). Most mothers reported that they were already using all their personal resources to balance work and family. Thus, any improvement would require a change in the workplace, the community, or in other family members.

Over a third of the sample mentioned that they would be better able to cope with the demands of work and family if they had a greater sense of job security. This is self-explanatory. During times of recession, working mothers, like the rest of the work force, experience concern that they will lose their jobs. The second factor that mothers thought would help them in coping was further division of responsibilities in the family. This is consistent with the earlier finding that mothers recognize that the challenges of fulfilling work and family demands can only be met with the cooperation of all family members (see Table 7).

A significant proportion of mothers stated that community supports such as after-school child care and increased availability of organized activities for their children (such as brownies, cubs, sports) would help them to better balance work and family. Not surprisingly, after-school child care was mentioned by mothers with children under 13.

TABLE 8
What else could help you cope?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Job security	35.4	40.2	31.2	35.3	35.5	38.4	35.0	30.6
Division of responsibilities	14.8	15.0	14.5	17.4	6.5	12.1	16.2	16.3
After school child care	13.3	15.7	10.9	15.4	6.5	18.2	14.5	0
Organized activities for children	12.9	14.2	12.3	13.9	9.7	15.2	14.5	6.1
Support from extended family	6.8	9.4	4.3	8.0	3.2	10.1	6.8	0
Cooperative babysitting	6.8	5.5	8.0	7.5	4.8	11.1	6.0	0
Interaction with other parents	6.4	10.2	2.9	7.5	1.6	10.1	2.6	8.2

THE ROLE OF THE SPOUSE

Married mothers were asked, “What does your spouse do that helps you to balance the demands of work and family?” Responses are presented in Table 9. The majority of the married women in the sample (84.1 percent) reported that their husbands help them to balance work and family by carrying out household chores; almost 60 percent help by participating in child care. In addition, a significant proportion of women also reported that the task of balancing work and family was made easier by their husband’s supportiveness, understanding, and sensitivity to family needs. The husband’s sensitivity to family needs was mentioned by a larger number of career mothers (40.2 percent) than earner mothers (22.9 percent) indicating that sensitivity may be particularly important to women who have significant job demands.

Interestingly, the most frequently mentioned suggestion in response to the question “What else could your husband do to help you balance work and family?” was to be sensitive to family needs (Table 10). This finding is consistent with the literature which suggests that the burden of meeting family demands relates not so much to who spends time in completing tasks, but to who has responsibility for ensuring that a task

TABLE 9*What does your spouse do that helps you balance work and family?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>					
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Chores	84.1	81.5	86.2	81.6	83.1	93.5
Child care	59.2	60.9	57.8	70.1	55.4	38.7
Sensitive to family needs	30.8	40.2	22.9	29.9	31.3	32.3

TABLE 10*What else could your spouse do to help you balance work and family?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>					
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Be sensitive to family needs	26.4	35.9	18.3	32.2	18.1	32.3
Chores	23.9	23.9	23.9	26.4	19.3	29.0
Child care	15.9	15.2	16.5	20.7	14.5	6.5

is accomplished. Women wanted their husbands to anticipate needs (i.e., take responsibility for) rather than helping out when requested to do so. Once again, sensitivity to family needs was more frequently mentioned by career mothers, highlighting the importance career women place on spousal support. Married mothers also stated that they would like their husbands to participate more in both child care and household chores. Interestingly, there were no differences among mothers with children of different ages in terms of their likelihood of mentioning a particular type of spousal support.

Married women were asked, "On the whole, how satisfied are you with the division of responsibilities in your family?" Responses are presented in Table 11. The overwhelming majority of married mothers in this sample reported that they were either somewhat or very satisfied with the division of responsibilities between them and their spouse. Only 17 percent expressed dissatisfaction. Women clearly stated their appreciation of their husband's participation in family tasks by comments such as "My husband is very involved. I couldn't manage everything I have to do if he did not do so much."

TABLE 11
How satisfied are you with the division of responsibilities in your family?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>					
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Very satisfied	50.3	45.3	56.1	42.7	59.8	51.6
Somewhat satisfied	31.7	41.1	22.4	36.0	24.4	35.5
Neutral	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.1	1.2	0
Somewhat dissatisfied	11.1	9.5	12.1	13.5	7.3	12.9
Very dissatisfied	6.0	3.2	8.4	6.7	7.3	0

A spouse’s availability to help in the family is constrained by many factors including the flexibility of his job. Responses to the question “Compared to you, how much flexibility does your husband have in his job?” are presented in Table 12. In considering these findings, it should be noted that the phrasing of the question here refers to *perceptions* of job flexibility rather than to formal characteristics of the husband’s job.

TABLE 12
Compared to you, how much flexibility does your spouse have in his job?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>					
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Spouse has more	28.6	17.9	36.2	32.2	18.1	32.3
Spouse has same amount	24.8	37.3	16.0	26.1	24.6	22.2
Spouse has less	46.0	44.8	46.8	44.9	49.2	40.7

The impact of the husband’s job flexibility is presented in Tables 13 and 14. Women who reported that their husband had less flexibility reported significantly more difficulty in balancing work and family if their children were 13 or under; if children were over 14, then the spouse’s schedule flexibility had no influence on coping with work and family demands.

TABLE 13

*For those whose spouse has **more flexibility**: How does this affect the task of balancing work and family?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>					
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Easier	76.1	83.3	73.5	84.2	76.5	60.0
More difficult	15.2	8.3	17.6	15.8	17.6	10.0
Has no influence	6.5	8.3	5.9	0	5.9	20.0

TABLE 14

*For those whose spouse has **less flexibility**: How does this affect the task of balancing work and family?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>					
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Easier	8.5	10.0	7.3	6.7	9.7	10.0
More difficult	73.2	70.0	75.6	83.3	77.4	30.0
Has no influence	18.3	20.0	17.1	10.0	12.9	60.0

THE ROLE OF THE EMPLOYER

Mothers were asked, "What does your employer do that helps you to balance work and family demands?" Results are presented in Table 15. The most frequently cited benefit (64.2 percent) provided by the employer was family leave provisions. Not surprisingly, this benefit was mentioned most frequently by mothers with pre-schoolers.

In addition to formal benefits provided by the employer, over half the women in the sample (52.8 percent) also stated that having a supportive supervisor or a boss who was understanding of work and family helped them to manage these competing demands. The next most commonly mentioned benefit was work-time flexibility (33.2 percent). The opportunity to work at home (work-location flexibility) was mentioned by almost one in ten women.

TABLE 15

What does your employer do to help you balance work and family?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Leave for family reasons	64.2	70.9	50.8	62.2	71.0	73.7	59.0	57.1
Supervisors understanding of work and family	52.8	58.3	47.8	54.7	46.8	52.5	56.4	44.9
Flexible work hours	33.2	41.7	25.4	37.8	16.1	39.4	27.4	34.7
Opportunity to work at home	9.4	14.2	5.1	11.9	1.6	7.1	13.7	4.1
Parental leave (maternity, paternity, adoption)	6.0	5.5	6.5	7.5	1.6	13.1	0.9	4.1

Comparisons of responses by women in career and earner positions revealed that career women were more likely to report that family leave, flexible work hours, and work at home help in balancing work and family. This makes intuitive sense because career women are more likely to hold positions that offer such flexibility. Married women were more likely than single mothers to report that they were helped by the provision of flexible work hours and work at home. Finally, there were no differences in benefits mentioned according to the age of the youngest child, except that mothers of younger children were more likely to report that family leave helps them.

The fact that employed mothers appreciate having work-time and work-location flexibility is consistent with other research findings. Flexibility in both work time and work location allows individuals greater control of the work day and facilitates a better ability to manage unexpected occurrences at home.

When asked "What else could your employer do to assist you in balancing the demands of work and family?" women most frequently mentioned flexible work schedules (23 percent), increased family leave (20 percent), and on-site day-care (18.9 percent) (see Table 16). These factors are attractive because they allow mothers

TABLE 16*What could your employer do to help you balance work and family?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Flexible work hours	23.0	19.7	26.1	23.4	22.6	23.2	26.5	14.3
Increased family leave	20.0	24.4	15.9	20.4	17.7	23.2	20.5	12.2
On-site day-care	18.9	17.3	20.3	19.9	16.1	33.3	13.7	2.0
Supervisors understanding of work and family	17.4	18.1	16.7	17.4	17.7	15.2	23.1	8.2
Shorter hours	15.1	11.8	18.1	15.4	14.5	18.2	12.8	14.3
Work at home	14.0	15.0	13.0	12.4	17.7	14.1	14.5	12.2
Part-time work	9.8	8.7	10.9	12.9	0	14.1	8.5	4.1
Job sharing	7.5	7.1	8.0	9.5	1.6	9.1	6.0	8.2
Day-care subsidy	6.8	5.5	8.0	6.5	8.1	12.1	5.1	0

greater flexibility in arranging their work and family responsibilities and hence, greater control in dealing with unexpected events at either work or home.

Mothers also stated that the employer could help them balance work and family demands by enabling them to reduce the amount of time they had to spend at work so that they would have more time with their families (i.e., shorter hours, part-time work and job sharing). Both part-time work and job sharing were more frequently mentioned by married mothers than by single mothers, likely for economic reasons.

Once again, a significant proportion of mothers reported that having a supportive and understanding supervisor would help them in balancing work and family. They reminded our interviewers that the climate of the supervisory relationship may be a significant determinant of their comfort in making use of benefits to which they are entitled. Moreover, in the absence of a formal policy, a supportive supervisor may allow sufficient flexibility to enable them to fulfil work and family responsibilities. Clearly, a supportive supervisor is necessary if family-related policies are to be implemented in a meaningful fashion. Many of the women interviewed also said that they

were uncomfortable with situations in which no policy existed and supervisory discretion was used in determining the amount of flexibility allowed to employees. They noted that this led to feelings of frustration when inequities were perceived.

STABILITY AND CHANGE IN WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Respondents were asked to compare their current situation with their situation a year ago. Results are presented in Table 17. Interestingly, less than a quarter of respondents reported that things were comparable to last year. For approximately half of the women, their situation had become easier, and for a little over a quarter, it had become more difficult.

TABLE 17
How have things changed since last year?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Easier	52.1	50.8	52.6	50.5	57.4	51.5	52.6	50.0
Harder	26.8	30.2	24.8	29.5	18.0	33.3	25.0	20.8
No change	21.1	19.0	22.6	20.0	24.6	15.2	22.4	29.2

The reasons provided to account for changes are presented in Tables 18 and 19. For those who reported that the task of balancing work and family had become easier (Table 18), the reasons mentioned were: that their children had grown older and had become more independent (63.2 percent); that they had changed their attitudes (14 percent); and, that they had become more organized (10.3 percent). Job-related factors were less frequently mentioned, but included the work becoming easier and having changed jobs.

For those who reported that things had become more difficult (Table 19), changes were attributed to having less time, to children being older, and to work becoming more difficult. The apparent contradiction here (that children getting older makes life easier for some and more difficult for others) is related to the time demands made on mothers by their children. For some mothers, the growing

TABLE 18*For those who reported that things have become easier: What has made things easier?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Children are older	63.2	67.2	59.7	64.4	60.0	58.8	67.5	62.5
I have more time	16.9	12.5	20.8	19.8	8.6	15.7	18.0	16.7
I have changed my attitude	14.0	17.2	11.1	12.9	17.1	13.7	11.5	20.8
Work has become easier	11.0	15.6	6.9	12.9	5.7	5.9	13.1	16.7
I am more organized	10.3	12.5	8.3	8.9	14.3	13.7	8.2	8.3
I have changed jobs	8.1	9.4	6.9	5.9	14.3	7.8	6.6	12.5

TABLE 19*For those who reported that things have become harder: What has made things harder?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
I have less time	37.5	44.7	29.4	40.7	18.2	36.4	34.5	50.0
Children are older	31.9	26.3	38.2	35.6	18.2	27.3	44.8	10.0
Work has become harder	23.6	28.9	17.6	22.0	27.3	27.3	13.8	40.0
I have changed jobs	9.7	10.5	8.8	11.9	0	15.2	6.9	0
I have a new child	6.9	7.9	5.9	8.5	0	15.2	0	0
Family crisis	6.9	7.9	5.9	6.8	0	0	13.8	10.0

independence of their children allows them greater free time. Other mothers find that as their children grow older, and are more involved in activities outside the home, there is an increased need to chauffeur children around, which adds another time pressure.

Job factors that were mentioned in association with things becoming harder included the work having become more difficult and having changed jobs. It is interesting to note that job-related factors were more commonly mentioned in relation to the situation having worsened than they were in relation to the situation having improved.

SELECTIVE EXITING

One of the most severe consequences of work-family conflict is that women may leave their jobs. Towards the end of the interview, when rapport was well established, respondents were asked if they had ever considered quitting their jobs (Table 20). Almost 60 percent of respondents responded affirmatively.

TABLE 20
Have you ever thought of quitting your job?

	Percentage Saying "Yes"							
	Total	Job Type		Marital Status		Age of Youngest Child		
		Career	Earned	Married	Single	0-5	6-13	14-18
Yes	59.9	52.0	67.9	60.0	61.3	62.6	55.2	67.3

The reasons they offered for having considered quitting are presented in Table 21. The most frequent response was that they felt they did not have enough time for their children (40.9 percent). Mothers with preschoolers were most likely to report this (74.2 percent). Married mothers were more likely to mention time with children as a factor that had made them consider quitting than were single mothers (50 percent versus 13.2 percent).

Over a quarter of the respondents stated that the task of balancing work and family was simply too stressful and therefore they considered leaving the job. Other factors included being unhappy in the job, being offered a new job, finding it too difficult to do everything, and not having enough time for oneself.

TABLE 21*For those who had thought of quitting: Why?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earners</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
Not enough time with children	40.9	39.4	41.9	50.0	13.2	74.2	29.7	0
Balancing work and family too stressful	27.0	28.8	25.8	28.3	23.7	25.8	31.3	21.2
Unhappy in my job	20.1	22.7	18.3	19.2	23.7	11.3	23.4	30.3
Opportunity for a new job	18.9	19.7	18.3	20.0	15.8	9.7	21.9	30.3
Too difficult to do everything	17.7	13.6	20.4	18.3	15.8	14.5	21.9	15.2
Not enough time for self	15.1	15.2	15.1	13.3	21.1	9.7	15.6	24.2

When considering whether one should quit a job, it is clear that for our respondents, time pressures play a critical role. A significant number of employed mothers in this sample find that maintaining the dual roles of employee and mother are excessively draining. They feel compromised in each role and have no time left over for themselves. This problem of time is reported by employed mothers in both career and earner positions, by both married and single mothers, and across the phases of the life cycle. These findings are consistent with a growing literature that indicates that when mothers enter the work force they assume another role, that of employee, without a concomitant decrease in their family roles. The employed mothers in this sample provided clear descriptions of the challenges of having to complete a “second shift” or “double day.”

Responses to the question “What would have to happen for you to consider quitting your job?” are presented in Table 22. Having an ill or disabled child was mentioned by 32.3 percent of respondents. Thinking wishfully, 23 percent said they would quit if they had a windfall of money. More realistically, 25.2 percent of the career women stated that they would consider quitting if their work was not rewarding. Among earner women, the percentage (12.6 percent) was much lower. Increased work stress and having an unsupportive and demanding boss were also mentioned as factors

TABLE 22
What would make you think of quitting?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage Giving Response</i>							
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Job Type</i>		<i>Marital Status</i>		<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>		
		<i>Career</i>	<i>Earner</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>6-13</i>	<i>14-18</i>
If my children were ill/disabled	32.3	37.7	27.4	31.3	36.8	27.3	35.4	35.6
If I had a windfall of money	23.0	23.0	23.0	21.7	26.3	25.3	23.0	17.8
If my work was not rewarding	18.7	25.2	12.6	20.7	11.3	20.2	14.0	26.5
Increased work stress	18.1	19.7	16.7	16.4	24.2	23.2	15.4	14.3
If there was an increase in family needs	14.4	14.8	14.1	15.7	8.8	12.1	17.7	11.1
If my boss was not supportive	13.6	16.5	10.9	13.9	12.9	19.2	9.4	12.2
If I became ill	10.9	9.8	11.9	11.1	10.5	7.1	9.7	22.2
If my spouse had to move for his job	5.4	9.8	1.5	7.1	NA	6.1	5.3	4.4

that would cause women to consider quitting. Family reasons such as increased needs were noted by 14.4 percent of the sample.

A surprisingly small number of women reported that they would consider quitting if their husband had to move for his job. This response was more frequent among career than among earner women. One possible explanation for this pattern might be that career women are more likely than earner women to be married to career men whose jobs would require mobility.

To examine “selective exiting” more closely, chi-square analyses were conducted on responses to the question “What does your employer do that helps you to balance work and family demands?” The only benefit which distinguished among mothers who had considered quitting and mothers who had not was whether the mother had the opportunity to work at home (i.e., increased work-location flexibility). That is, respondents who mentioned that they had the opportunity to do work at home

were significantly less likely to report having considered quitting their job than were those who did not have the same opportunity.

IV

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this interview study corroborate and expand on the findings from the questionnaire study (Duxbury et al., 1991). Working mothers consistently report that they do not have enough hours in the day to accomplish all that they would like. Once they have fulfilled the requirements of work and family tasks, there is little time left for individual activities.

It is striking that these findings were obtained among employed women who reported lower than average levels of perceived stress. This suggests that the findings represent the opinions of employed mothers who are coping well with the demands of work and family. Thus, the results may present an unrepresentatively positive picture. Nevertheless, almost 60 percent of the sample have considered quitting their jobs. It is likely that among women who are experiencing higher levels of stress, an even larger proportion are considering quitting their jobs.

Our results suggest that working mothers recognize that they cannot hope to accomplish everything and manage single-handedly. Consequently, they cope by setting priorities and by dividing chores within the family. It is clear that in attempting to balance work and family demands, women shoulder considerable responsibility for making changes in their own behaviour and in family activities.

The majority of married mothers report that their husbands contribute by carrying out chores. A significant proportion of mothers also reported that their husbands

participate in child care. Although a large proportion of the married women reported high levels of satisfaction with the division of responsibilities, almost a quarter of the women would like their husbands to contribute more in terms of chores, child care, and being sensitive to family needs (i.e., taking more responsibility).

Working mothers view their employers as helping them to balance work and family by providing flexibility to enable them to cope with unexpected demands in the family domain. This could be done through allowing leave for family reasons, as well as by permitting the employee work-time flexibility and work-location flexibility. In addition to formal family-sensitive policies and benefits, the employer creates an environment that helps employees balance work and family roles by having supervisors who are sensitive to the needs of working mothers. The employed mothers in this sample stated clearly that in the absence of supportive supervisors, they often do not feel comfortable in making use of the family-related benefits and flexibility to which they are formally entitled.

Women would like their employers to help them by providing more flexibility — both in terms of when they have to work and where they work. This could be accomplished through flexible work schedules, family leave, work at home, part-time work, and job sharing. They would also like their supervisors to demonstrate understanding of their work-family conflicts.

It is striking that the population of working mothers cannot be considered to be homogeneous. Among working mothers there are considerable differences expressed. One factor that distinguishes between working mothers is the type of job. Career mothers report receiving more benefits than do earner women — they perceive their work situation as being more flexible. Not surprisingly, earner women report higher levels of perceived stress.

Another factor that clearly distinguishes different groups of mothers is the age of the youngest child at home. The stresses of balancing work and family are most pronounced for mothers who have children aged thirteen and younger. For almost a third of mothers of preschoolers, on-site day-care and day-care subsidies would help in balancing work and family — for mothers of older children, this is less of a concern. Many mothers reported that, over time, the task of balancing work and family becomes easier — as children become more independent and as mothers develop effective routines.

It is clear that the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities are most difficult for mothers with preschool children. During the time when their children are very young, mothers experience extreme time pressures and are concerned to find reliable alternative child-care arrangements that fit with their work schedules.

Women with very young children are entering the work force in increasing numbers. It is incumbent upon employers to find innovative ways to support employees during the relatively brief but intense time when they have preschool children. During this time, employed mothers may require a variety of benefits, including flexibility (both time and location), day-care or day-care subsidies, and the ability to take leave for family reasons. If the period of most intense family needs is viewed within the perspective of a work life, then the number of years of disruption is relatively short. Employers may be able to attract and retain competent female employees if they demonstrate that they provide a work environment that permits the employee to fulfil both work and family roles.

V

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings presented here indicate that even among women who are coping relatively well with the demands of work and family, a large proportion actively consider leaving their job. The data clearly show that employed mothers face considerable time pressures in attempting to fulfil their work and family roles. These mothers appreciate the steps that employers have begun to take towards helping them to balance work and family demands. The results clearly indicate, however, that additional initiatives from their employers would help them to balance these roles more easily. The following specific recommendations are proposed:

Provide Greater Work-Time Flexibility

Organizations, both public and private, who use regular work schedules assume no differences between individuals. The same expectations are held for single parents, married parents, those in earner jobs and those with careers. Clearly, this ignores the unique situations of many individuals.

Organizations should consider restructuring the work environment to offer greater work-time flexibility. This could be done by the widespread implementation of a “flexible” flextime work arrangement. The type of program we recommend is one with more flexibility than those with a 30-minute window (i.e., the employee must be

there between 8:00 and 8:30). A better program would have a 90-minute window (i.e., be there between 8:00 and 9:30).

The rise in the number of dual-income families, coupled with high rates of unemployment and the appeal of part-time work for many women, suggests that organizations should also seriously consider offering part-time positions. The introduction of part-time work, if this were made legitimate and detached from the traditional definition of part-time jobs (those requiring low skills and having low potential for upward mobility), would enable women (and men) to handle work and family requirements more effectively. The compressed work week is also an option, but we do not recommend this unless the make-up period is spread over three or more weeks — that is, the employee would have every third Friday off by working an extra 15 to 20 minutes per day. Compressed work weeks which require the employee to work 10 hours for four days often leave employees too tired to enjoy the fifth day.

Provide Greater Work-Location Flexibility

Organizations should consider restructuring the work environment to offer greater work-location flexibility. This could be done by encouraging work-at-home options and by facilitating this arrangement through the provision of portable technologies. Research shows that the use of portable technologies results in many positive outcomes, such as higher perceived productivity and decreased absenteeism. The use of voice-mail systems, electronic mail, cellular telephones and fax machines can provide flexibility for many employees. In cases where an employee might take a day off, either for a minor illness or to look after a sick child, substantial amounts of work could be accomplished at home.

Educate Employees on the Issues of Work-Family Conflict

Organizations could consider offering courses to help employees learn how to cope with the conflicts they experience. Such workshops could be applied to a wide range of work-family issues, including coping with stress and the need for better time management. Organizations could also facilitate an information and referral function, letting employees know of resources available through community groups, educational institutions or social agencies.

Human resource personnel should also be knowledgeable about the issues of work and family and keep management up-to-date on how other companies are responding to these issues. In the future there will be major competition to hire and retain high quality individuals, many of whom will be women. Those companies that are responsive to work/family issues will be in a better position than those who ignore them.

Educate Managers

Finally, changing managerial attitudes towards women — and making managers more supportive of the problems women face in coping with a career and a family — is a necessity. Our findings indicate that it is not organizational policies that are the cause of many of the problems experienced by women, but the outdated attitudes of male managers. Without the understanding of their supervisors, many employed mothers do not feel comfortable in making use of family-related policies. These “outdated” managerial attitudes will take years to change, but the process can be hastened by organizations who are responsive to the issue. Unfortunately, many managers are openly supportive but do not “walk the talk.”

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