

increased marital tension or does marital tension lead to increased perceptions of work-family conflict? Prospective longitudinal studies may be especially helpful for understanding the nature of gender differences in work-family conflict by examining the impact of selection. For example, researchers can investigate which types of people are more likely to modify employment obligations (e.g., move from full-time to part-time work or leave the paid labor force altogether) in response to work-family conflict. Such designs can also shed light on the extent to which individuals may modify family obligations (e.g., decisions to marry, to stay married, to have a child, to use nonparental childcare) in response to existing or anticipated work-family conflict. Longitudinal designs make it possible to study both the short-term and longer-term consequences of work-family conflict.

Future research would also benefit from additional efforts to understand heterogeneity in the experience of work-family conflict. For example, continued attention should be paid to conditions under which individuals exposed to the same objective work and family role demands perceive different levels of work-family conflict. Focusing on personality factors and coping styles seems key here. Existing research also points to meaningful differentials in the experience of work-family conflict across social class groups, but in general, this topic remains understudied. Future research should use diverse samples to better understand these and other group differences.

In conclusion, as work-family conflict is associated with lower productivity and increased distress, additional efforts to ease incompatibilities between work and family roles, either at the family level or in the workplace, are clearly needed. For example, flexible work schedules and employer-supported dependent care are associated with reductions in employees' perceptions of work-family conflict. Future studies should further examine the effects of interventions designed to make work and family roles more compatible in practice.

*Kathryn M. Coursole and Megan M. Sweeney*

See also Division of Labor in Households; Dual-Earner Couples; Employment Effects on Relationships; Retirement, Effects on Relationships; Work-Family Spillover

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## WORK-FAMILY SPILLOVER

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The term *work-family spillover* is often used in a general way to refer to the effects that paid employment has on family relationships. Initial research focused on maternal employment, based on the idea that a mother's work outside of the home might adversely affect her children and family. This assumption was incorrect, however, and painted a far too simplistic picture of work and family life; rather, the specific characteristics and experiences of jobs—not merely employment itself—have both positive and negative consequences for the family. This entry discusses the effects that work can have on family relationships, as well as the processes by which these effects may occur.

### Effects of Job Characteristics and Work-Related Experiences on Family Relationships

Studies of job conditions and job characteristics now commonly include subjective appraisals of work to understand how individuals' experiences or views of their jobs might bring about changes in family dynamics. Job satisfaction is one of the chief features of work life that is studied. In general, parents who are more satisfied with their careers show greater warmth and responsiveness to their children and report greater marital satisfaction. Workers who experience more autonomy and complexity on the job also display more positive parenting and less harsh and restrictive parenting. Characteristics that select individuals into jobs with certain degrees of complexity and autonomy—educational level for instance—may also help shape parenting behavior. Researchers rely on longitudinal designs, with the same group of participants followed for months or years, to tease apart the impact that jobs have on parenting from the influence of factors that underlie both. The evidence from the longitudinal studies indicates that jobs can serve as an arena outside the household where workers may experience achievement and fulfillment that can carry over into the family with positive implications for those relationships.

Research also consistently indicates that chronic job stress affects family relationships through a negative impact on individual well-being. For example, the subjective experience of job stress has been associated with self-reports of personal distress, such as depression, that have then been linked to poorer marital and parent-child relations. In the absence of individual distress as an intervening link, however, there is no connection between chronic job stressors and family outcomes.

One facet of job stress is the social climate or quality of social relationships at work. Parents who experience a noncohesive or conflictive work atmosphere seem to have more negative interactions with their children (e.g., they are less affectionate, more angry), with longitudinal studies suggesting that these effects may hold up for months. Similarly, couples who report negative and unsupportive relationships at work also experience more marital tension and arguments. Social

support in the workplace has been linked with greater individual health and well-being; these links are thought to have positive implications for family life. However, because investigators have tended to focus on the impact of a negative work atmosphere, there is not as much evidence that supportive relationships at work benefit family social life.

Another aspect of job stress is time pressure and work overload, which can lead to parents feeling overwhelmed by and conflicted about their work and family roles. Similar to the association between the social atmosphere at work and family relations, studies reliably show that overloaded parents have poorer relations with their children (e.g., more conflict, less acceptance). In addition, more time pressure at work has been connected to reduced parental monitoring, meaning less knowledge about children's activities and whereabouts, and less allocation of time to parenting. For couples, time pressure and work overload are associated with greater marital tension and poorer marital adjustment. Overall, the subjective appraisal of job demands as being stressful or overwhelming seems to have a greater influence on family interactions and relationships than do the objective job conditions.

One such objective measure is the length of the workday, or the number of hours spent on the job. Initially, it was assumed that long hours at work would be associated with poorer family outcomes. However, research indicates that long work hours do not predict individual or family functioning, with most studies reporting no reliable linkages between time on the job and lower marital quality or poorer home environments for children. This likely results from the many benefits (income, access to health care, social support) that typically increase with more hours of employment. However, the distribution of parents' work hours over the day (e.g., amount of overlap with spouse's work schedule and child's school day) and the subjective appraisal of those work hours (e.g., do work hours fit one's needs) do influence family relationships. In particular, among two-parent families in which one parent works a nonstandard shift (e.g., at night), there is often a disruption of family routines. Increased rates of marital dissatisfaction have also been observed. In single-parent households, shift work can place an extreme burden on the family.

Researchers have also turned their attention to experiences that occur *in transit* between work and home. Although commuter stress is associated with negative individual health outcomes, such as high blood pressure, there does not appear to be a substantive link between commuting and family relations and functioning. Studies have implicated the length, unpredictability, and uncontrollability of commuting as characteristics that help explain commuter stress via their associations with worker's greater negative mood and decreased frustration tolerance and task motivation. However, no conclusive evidence indicates that these effects contribute to increased tension in the home.

### Short-Term Processes

Because chronic job stressors can affect family relationships, researchers have been interested in understanding just *how* experiences at work come to have an impact at home. One approach to this question puts families under the microscope, focusing on a short period (days or weeks), to see if day-to-day fluctuations in stressors at work correlate with day-to-day changes in family behavior. This strategy differs from approaches that consider the effects of stable job characteristics or conditions. For example, instead of comparing an ER trauma nurse (who generally perceives high job stress) with a florist (who generally perceives little job stress), the researcher is comparing the same person, say the florist, with himself or herself on different days with different levels of job stress (Valentine's Day versus the day after). Thus, the effects of both stable job characteristics and individual characteristics on family behavior are eliminated; the focus is exclusively on the effects of short-term variations in experiences at work. Using this strategy, work-to-family effects are often observed and they seem to fall into two categories—social withdrawal and increases in anger and conflict. Interestingly, these short-term consequences of job stress are observed both in marital and in parent-child interactions and they are found in studies that use objective measures of daily job stressors.

The social withdrawal response to job stress consists of short-term decreases in the employed individual's usual level of social engagement at home. Coming home after a stressful day at work,

he or she might speak less, express less positive and less negative emotion, and be less interested and less involved in social interaction. For instance, a parent may be less likely to help with homework or to discipline a child. The second type of response is quite different. After more difficult or stressful days, the employed family member may express more anger and be more critical than usual. Researchers have found that a one-day increase in stress at work is associated with increases in marital arguments and use of disciplinary tactics with children later that day. In one investigation, air traffic controllers were both more socially withdrawn and expressed more anger when they came home from a shift at the airport characterized by higher air traffic volume or lower visibility conditions.

How does a high-stress day at work affect behavior in the family? Researchers believe that job stressors leave a cognitive, affective, and physiological residue, such that the employee's thoughts, feelings, and biology are changed, at least in the short-term, by his or her experiences at work. For example, the employed person may return home at the end of the day preoccupied with worries about an impending deadline at work, or with lingering feelings of anger and physiological arousal because of an argument with a coworker. This is the more technical and narrow meaning of the term *spillover*: the experience of a mood or a biological response in one setting that originated in a different setting. Negative mood and arousal caused by stressors experienced at work sometimes do persist when the employed person returns home, and evidence suggests that those spillover effects account for some of the increase in anger and conflict that were described previously.

There is, of course, an alternative to simply experiencing and directly expressing the residue of job stress at home; employees can attempt to change their physical and psychological state, perhaps by relaxing, or distracting themselves from thoughts about a difficult day, or engaging in any one of a number of coping tactics. The social withdrawal response to job stress may be one such coping strategy. In other words, rather than discuss job-related worries or problems at home, the employee may avoid social interaction, perhaps to reduce the chances that negative mood or irritability will lead to arguments and to facilitate a process of relaxation and unwinding.

Whether the residue of stress at work directly affects the employed family member's social behavior through spillover processes or indirectly affects his or her behavior through a coping response, partners in the social interaction feel the impact. Researchers are beginning to investigate processes of emotion transmission, whereby emotions are transferred from one member of a dyad to another through their social interactions. Likewise, some evidence indicates that stress hormone levels, such as cortisol, in couples are synchronized when spouses are at home together and are less closely linked during the workday. The field is thus beginning to see how stress at work can ultimately affect the psychological and biological functioning of other family members. However, spouses and children are active participants in the daily social life of families and contribute to the dynamics of the employed family member's reactions at home to stress at work. For example, studies have uncovered different ways that spouses and children can either encourage or disrupt an employee's attempts at social withdrawal. In the end, the impact of job stressors on family relationships and well-being depends on the reactions of all its members.

### Individual and Family Differences

Although the research summarized here indicates that jobs do influence family relationships, both in the short-term and in the long-run, not every family is affected in the same way or to the same degree. For example, some individuals and families do not show any impact of job stressors on home life. A variety of individual and family characteristics—such as the socio-economic status and life stage of the family; the gender, personality, and psychological well being of the employee; existing patterns of conflict, parenting styles, and division of labor in the home—all help to shape work-family dynamics. For example, parents who are psychologically distressed seem to be more vulnerable to the effects of job stress on interactions with their children, and family relationships that are generally satisfying and harmonious seem to protect families from the short-term repercussions of job stress.

### Family-to-Work Spillover Effects

Although most investigations focus on work-to-family effects, there is also interest in bidirectional models. Studies have found evidence for both a negative (e.g., stress contagion) and a positive (e.g., useful skills and attitudes) impact of home life on work life. Of note, recent longitudinal research has suggested that marital quality has more influence on job satisfaction than vice versa, such that increases in marital satisfaction contributed to increases in job satisfaction over time, and increases in marital discord predicted declines in job satisfaction over time. Hence, evidence suggests that reciprocal effects between work and family simultaneously occur, and that these bidirectional pathways warrant further study.

In conclusion, although many employed adults say they worry that time spent at work may harm their families, on the whole, employment benefits the family environment. Jobs typically bring income, health care, social support, and a sense of accomplishment that contribute to the well-being of workers and their families. Only under certain circumstances (e.g., high job stress, mismatch of work shift with family schedule) does employment also bring negative consequences for the family.

*Rena L. Repetti and Shu-wen Wang*

*See also* Emotional Contagion; Employment Effects on Relationships; Job Stress, Relationship Effects; Work-Family Conflict; Workplace Relationships

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## WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

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Workplace relationships include any associations that are initiated, maintained, or dissolved at work. Workplace relationships include relationships between superiors (e.g., bosses, supervisors, leaders) and subordinates (e.g., employees, direct-reports), relationships between coworkers in the same unit, or relationships among a number of members of the workplace such as groups, within unit teams, and cross-functional teams, including telecommuting teams who seldom see each other face-to-face. This entry distinguishes between workplace relationships and other types of relationships, and expounds upon what is known about different types of workplace relationships such as those between superiors and subordinates, romantic partners, friends, and enemies. The entry also discusses the nature of workplace conflict, coping with conflict, and the future of workplace relationships.

### Distinction Between Workplace Relationships and Other Relationships

Workplace relationships differ in two fundamental ways from other adult relationships. The first difference is that these relationships involve a background of structure, with role expectations about who may issue commands, what actions should follow, and how individuals are expected

to spend their days. This structure can impose limits on the development, form, and expression of relationships. No matter how much coworkers might enjoy each other's company, structural boundaries may inhibit the development of the relationship.

The second difference is that the relationships tend to be semi voluntary, at best. Workers generally do not have the opportunity to select their supervisors, their coworkers on a project team, or the occupants of the offices, cubicles, or desks adjacent to theirs. As a consequence, employees must adjust to, accommodate, and try to find redeeming value in people with whom they would not otherwise choose to associate.

### Superior-Subordinate Relationships

The owner/supervisor-employee/subordinate relationship is a relatively new invention in human history and shares some features with other hierarchical relationships, such as parent-child and leader-subordinate. In the parent-child relationship, the parent is normatively expected to focus simultaneously on the well-being of the family as a whole, and on the nurturance and growth of the individual child. In the tribal leader-subordinate relationship, such as that of the regent-vassal, the leader has certain obligations, and the subordinate has certain rights, but the well-being and even life of the subordinate can be sacrificed during combat or religious rituals.

Business owners and managers differ in the extent to which they adopt a parental or regal attitude in their efforts to enhance the performance and retain the loyalty of their employees. Subordinates also differ in the extent to which they expect nurturance versus military-style commands from their supervisors.

Bosses and supervisors who are appropriately structured, supportive, fair, and clear in their communication tend to have the most effective employees, who are loyal to the organization. This effect runs throughout the organization, in that leader-leader exchanges affect leader-member exchanges. The more positive the exchanges between leaders, the better the leader-subordinate relationships are, and the more positive the subordinates are about the organization. However, when bosses and