

Parent Employment and Chaos in the Family

Rena Repetti and Shu-wen Wang

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1989) bioecological model recognizes that experiences outside of the home can be important to child development. Such experiences include those in environments that the child may never encounter directly, such as the parent's workplace. There is no question that parent employment is almost always a net benefit to the family. Jobs generally bring income, health care, routines, sources of social support, and enhanced well-being, all of which reduce or protect against chaotic elements in a child's life. However, parents' experiences in the workplace are not always uniformly advantageous; this chapter focuses on employment experiences that can add to, or exacerbate, chaos in the home. We begin with research that examines how psychosocial characteristics of the workplace, particularly stressors, can affect family relationships. Job-related time commitments that can detract from a healthy family environment are considered next, followed by child-care arrangements and certain job benefits, particularly paid leave, all of which are critical elements in the broader context that shape how workplace experiences extend into the home. Finally, we turn to the sometimes devastating impact that parental job loss and long-term unemployment can have on families. Our chapter concludes with a conceptual model that integrates key findings and promising directions for future research.

Psychosocial Characteristics of the Workplace

The impact that jobs can have on physical and mental health (Kuper & Marmot, 2003; Repetti & Mittmann, 2004) is thought to also shape employees' interactions with family members (Crouter & Bumpus, 2001; Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, &

We, the chapter authors, thank the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the University of California, Los Angeles, Center on Everyday Lives of Families for supporting our work. Shu-wen Wang's work on this chapter was also supported by a predoctoral fellowship from the American Psychological Association Minority Fellowship Program. We appreciate suggestions from participants in the First Bronfenbrenner Conference on the Ecology of Human Development, especially Feyza Corapci, John Eckenrode, Gary Evans, Barbara Fiese, Taryn Morrissey, and Henry Ricciuti. Lisa Flook, Darby Saxbe, Jacqui Sperling, and Rich Slatcher also provided helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

Crouter, 2000). The research reviewed next points to the potential for work experiences to introduce or exacerbate chaos in the family environment.

Overload and Social Stressors

Work overload occurs when heavy demands are placed on workers, that is, when the number of tasks and responsibilities, and the pace at which they must be completed, are elevated. Research suggests that work overload can have an impact on the family via its influence on an employed parent's energy, mood, and behavior. One pattern of findings suggests that heavy demands for attention and energy in the workplace drain parents' resources and detract from their monitoring and supervision of children. For example, more time pressure at work has been associated with less allocation of time to parenting and with less knowledge of children's whereabouts and activities (Bumpus, Crouter, & McHale, 1999; Greenberger, O'Neil, & Nagel, 1994).

Repetti (1992) proposed that social withdrawal—a reduction in social interactions and emotional responsiveness with family members that helps an individual recuperate from high-stress workdays—is one pathway through which job stressors impact the parent-child relationship. In one study, mothers were more withdrawn from their preschoolers on days when they reported greater workload (Repetti & Wood, 1997a). Furthermore, mothers who reported experiencing more psychological distress were the most vulnerable to this daily effect. In a daily report study of male air traffic controllers, fathers were less behaviorally and emotionally involved with their children on higher workload days (Repetti, 1994). Though social withdrawal may be an adaptive short-term coping response, over time, chronic withdrawal may damage feelings of closeness and gnaw at family cohesion (Repetti & Wood, 1997b).

The perception of work overload has also been linked with greater tension and conflict and less warmth and acceptance in parents' relationships with adolescents (Galambos, Sears, Almeida, & Kolaric, 1995). In the mother-preschooler study mentioned earlier, reports of aversive or impatient parent-child interactions increased on higher workload days for mothers who endorsed more depressive symptoms (Repetti & Wood, 1997a).

Negative interactions with supervisors and coworkers can lead to feelings of frustration, anger, and discouragement that carry over from the workplace into the home. In the mother-preschooler study, mothers were more withdrawn on days of high interpersonal stress at work, an effect that was especially pronounced for the women who reported more Type A behaviors (Repetti & Wood, 1997a). Researchers have also identified a "negative emotion spillover" response, a short-term process in which negative emotions generated at work are expressed at home, increasing the likelihood of conflict in the family (e.g., Piotrkowski, 1979). In the air traffic controller study mentioned earlier, working fathers reported greater use of discipline and more negative emotion expression (e.g., anger) with their children on days that were more interpersonally stressful at work (Repetti, 1994). Even interactions with infants appear to be influenced by social stressors at work. Costigan, Cox, and Cauce (2003) found that a more negative interpersonal workplace atmosphere experienced by moth-

ers predicted the quality of parenting behaviors displayed by both mothers and fathers 3 months later; negative (e.g., intrusive) behaviors increased and positive (e.g., stimulating and sensitive) behaviors decreased.

Another way that stress can be introduced from the parent's workplace into a child's life is through its impact on the marital relationship. Daily report studies have demonstrated a same-day linkage between stressors at work and both social withdrawal and tension in marital interactions (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Repetti, 1989; Schulz, Cowan, Cowan, & Brennan, 2004; Story & Repetti, 2006). Studies on paths of stress and emotion flow suggest that tension in the marital relationship influences parents' interactions with their children (Almeida, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999). Therefore, any impact that work stressors have on the marital dyad may also be echoed in the parent-child dyad.

Autonomy and Complexity

Two job characteristics—control or autonomy and cognitive complexity—are thought to influence child-rearing values and socialization practices. Melvin Kohn, who studied under Urie Bronfenbrenner, theorized that work environments influence personality tendencies, which then shape parenting values and behaviors (Kohn, 1969; Kohn & Schooler, 1982). Because autonomy and complexity are more stable characteristics of a job than are the stressors discussed earlier, they are more closely tied to the skills and personal qualities that are required of the worker and are therefore more closely linked with social class. Kohn and Schooler (1982) found that middle-class jobs involving more autonomy and complex tasks socialized workers to be more oriented toward self-directedness, whereas working-class jobs socialized workers toward greater conformity and obedience to rules and supervisors. Their conclusion was that the occupation's socialization of workers' values translated into qualitatively different parenting practices.

This line of inquiry has continued, with studies suggesting that greater job autonomy and complexity is associated with a host of more positive and effective parenting practices, including an emphasis on internalization of social norms by children instead of the use of direct parental control (Parcel & Menaghan, 1993), less restrictive parental control (Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, Hiraga, & Grove, 1994), greater parental acceptance of children and less authoritarian parenting (Grimm-Thomas & Perry-Jenkins, 1994), more use of inductive reasoning with children (Whitbeck et al., 1997), and less harsh parenting (Greenberger et al., 1994; Whitbeck et al., 1997). In addition, parents who report greater job autonomy and work complexity have been found to be more warm and responsive (Greenberger et al., 1994) and to provide home environments with more emotional support and intellectual stimulation (Cooksey, Menaghan, & Jekielek, 1997; Menaghan & Parcel, 1991; Parcel & Menaghan, 1994).

Thus, research suggests that the degree of autonomy and complexity in parents' jobs is associated with child-rearing values and behaviors that are, to some degree, consistent with the behaviors needed for success at work. However, selection is a powerful force in this process. An individual's intellectual

capacity, educational background, personality, and values limit the range of his or her potential jobs or careers. Because these individual variables also shape parenting, it is critical that the causal paths connecting social class, job selection factors, and job characteristics be carefully considered in any effort to understand how occupations are linked to parent socialization practices (see, e.g., Greenberger et al., 1994). Unfortunately, teasing apart the unique effects of job characteristics from the characteristics of the individuals that select into these jobs is a research goal that has rarely been met.¹

Few studies have uncovered significant associations between parent job stressors and child developmental outcomes and, when these associations have been found, the effect sizes have been small (see Repetti, 2005). However, evidence for an impact of job stressors on the quality of family relationships has been much more consistent. When overload and social stressors deplete an employee's physical, cognitive, and emotional stores, the effects at home can range from less parental attention and monitoring and greater social withdrawal to more interpersonal conflict. In addition, child-rearing values and behaviors may be shaped to some degree by the autonomy and complexity that parents experience at work. Of course, there is no simple equation to characterize how parents' responses to experiences at work shape their behavior at home. A host of individual and family variables—such as socioeconomic status, personality traits, psychological distress, and family conflict—influence work-family dynamics.

Time at Work

Jobs and families have been described as "greedy institutions" that require much, including commitments of time, from their members (Coser, 1974). An economic analysis points to the family's fixed budget of time; by working more hours in the labor market, the family has fewer hours to spend together, and vice versa (Leibowitz, 2005). In a Dutch sample, fathers who spent more time at work spent less time in activities with their adolescent children, although no such effect was observed for mothers (Dubas & Gerris, 2002). On the one hand, more time in the labor market usually means that more goods can be purchased for the family, including basics such as better housing and food. On the other hand, unpaid labor in the home, such as the care of children, shopping, and meal preparation, also benefits the family. The question here is this: What kinds of time commitments at work detract from a healthy family environment?

Long Hours

Time demands at work are increasing; since 1970, the number of Americans working more than 50 hours per week has gradually increased, with jobs that entail long hours more likely held by fathers and by employees with higher

¹Brooks-Gunn et al. (see chap. 10, this volume) provided an interesting discussion of how parallel selection factors challenge causal modeling in neighborhood effects research.

educations (Barnett, 2006).² Across the globe, working parents lament the loss of time with their children resulting from demands on the job (Heymann, Simmons, & Earle, 2005). A recent report from the Pew Research Center showed that among working mothers in the United States, only 21% felt that full-time work was the ideal situation for them, down from 32% who expressed that opinion 10 years ago (Taylor, Funk, & Clark, 2007).

Although longer work hours can be stressful, researchers have not found a reliable association between work hours, *per se*, and individual well-being outcomes. In fact, the length of the workweek is often associated with positive individual outcomes, such as better physical and mental health. That may be because more work hours are associated with increased income, more opportunities for advancement, greater job security, and greater access to health insurance and other benefits. Moreover, according to the "healthy worker effect," parents who feel most able to manage both job and family are the most likely to work longer hours, whereas parents in poor health reduce their work hours. When time spent commuting is considered, however, the story may be different. For example, in a study of rail commuters, Evans and Wener (2006) found that longer commutes were associated with elevations in cortisol, a stress hormone.

The association between time spent in work-related activities and family outcomes is complex. A daily report study found that when husbands spent more hours working (this measure included both paid and unpaid work), both they and their wives described less warmth in their marital interactions that day (Doumas, Margolin, & John, 2003). In another study, longer driving commutes predicted more self-reported negative mood when employees arrived home (Novaco, Kliwer, & Broquet, 1991). Excessive time spent commuting on public transportation interferes with the establishment of family routines, especially among single mothers (Roy, Tubbs, & Burton, 2004). Despite the fact that longer work hours are associated with scheduling difficulties at home and perceptions of work-family strain, in two-parent families they are generally not linked to more marital strain, less marital companionship, or a lower quality of the home environment provided to children (Barnett, 2006).³

In dual-earner families, more maternal work hours are associated with greater father involvement in household labor and child care. For example, Crouter, Bumpas, Maguire, and McHale (1999) found that when wives worked longer hours, fathers were significantly better informed about their children's daily activities, whereabouts, and companions. In a study of seasonal changes in work hours, Crouter and McHale (1993) showed that fathers whose wives were employed during the school year but not in the summer had better knowledge of their children during school months, a pronounced drop in knowledge over the summer, and then a sharp increase when their wives returned to work the following school year. Increases in paternal involvement and knowledge

²See chapter 2 of this volume for a longer historical perspective on working time and American families.

³The probability of divorce does increase as wives work more hours. However, the direction of causality is not clear because women anticipating a divorce may seek to increase their financial security by working more hours, and time spent at work may be a way to avoid the kind of severe marital difficulties that precede a divorce (Barnett, 2006).

may explain Barnett's (2006) finding that, in a sample of dual-earner families, fathers rated the quality of their experiences in the parental role more positively when their wives worked longer hours.⁴

The best predictor of family outcomes is not the objective number of work hours but the subjective experience of those hours, such as the fit between parents' work schedules and their families' needs, and feelings of role overload (Barnett, 2006). This pattern is consistent with research reviewed earlier connecting perceptions of work overload with disruptions in marital and parent-child interactions.

Nonstandard Hours

Barnett's (2006) review of the literature shows that the distribution of parents' work hours over the day is more important for families than is the absolute number of hours that parents work. Among shift workers, night, evening, and rotating shifts are far more disruptive than is the day shift. In general, people who are more socially and economically disadvantaged are more likely to work nonstandard schedules (weekends or nonday hours), although education does not show a linear association with nonstandard hours. Shift work is mostly found in relatively low-paying service sector jobs (e.g., cashiers, truck drivers, sales workers, waiters), and future job growth in the United States is projected to be disproportionately high in these occupations. Single mothers are also more likely than married mothers to work nonstandard schedules. In two-parent, dual-earner families, working nonstandard hours is more common among younger, less educated parents and among those with more children. Younger child age is also associated with greater likelihood that parents work nonstandard schedules (Barnett, 2006).

One reason mothers and fathers choose nonstandard schedules is to maximize the amount of time their children are cared for by a parent. For example, mothers may try to synchronize employment hours with children's school schedules and, in two-parent homes, "tag team" work hours with a spouse (Bianchi & Raley, 2005). There do appear to be some immediate benefits to this approach. Research indicates that when wives work nonday shifts, fathers spend more time on homework and child care, know more about their children's activities, and receive more disclosures from their children (Barnett & Gareis, 2007; Staines & Pleck, 1983). However, some of these short-term advantages to shift work may be offset by long-term disadvantages. For instance, dual-earner couples in which wives work nonday shifts report more overall work-family conflict (Staines & Pleck, 1983). When both parents work full-time, night, evening, and rotating shifts are far more disruptive of family routines and relationships than is the day shift. Most men working nonstandard shifts report a decrease in their functioning in the family (Barnett, 2006).⁵ For poor single mothers, the situation

⁴It is interesting to note that wives who worked longer hours described their own parent role more positively, but they also reported more work-family conflict and more psychological distress (Barnett, 2006).

⁵There is also evidence of the negative effects of shift work on men's individual health outcomes (especially true for night and rotating shifts). The symptoms include sleep disturbance, fatigue,

can be extreme, with some women taking on responsibilities for full-time caregiving during the day and full-time employment at night (Roy et al., 2004).

Among two-parent families, it may be more important to consider the degree of overlap in parents' work schedules than the impact of one spouse's shift schedule alone. The most obvious consequence when one parent's time at work does not overlap with the school and work schedules of the rest of the family is the limited time that the members spend together. Families with school-age children tend to live in sync with the rest of the world but out of sync with that parent, making it difficult to develop or maintain family routines and rituals (Crouter & McHale, 2005). As Fiese and Winter (see chap. 4, this volume) pointed out, structure and routine are valuable resources used by families in child rearing. When a parent works a nonstandard shift, even the family dinner—one of the most common family rituals—may be a rare event (Presser, 2005). Shift work also reduces couple time at home, so that parents have less time for their own relationship building. Perhaps it is not surprising that among dual-earner couples there is greater marital dissatisfaction when either spouse works a nonday shift and in families with children the odds of marital disruption are 2.5 times higher when wives work nights (Barnett, 2006).

When shift schedules are voluntarily chosen, the likelihood of any negative outcome is reduced (Barnett, 2006; Staines & Pleck, 1983). However, most people do not voluntarily choose nonstandard schedules; the seniority that often confers greater schedule control is typically not achieved until a time when children are past school-age. Perry-Jenkins (2005) found, for example, that the often random nature and timing of overtime work for the working-class parents in her study caused difficulties, such as the need to arrange child care at the last minute. As she pointed out, the level of control over scheduling extra hours at work that is possible for most professionals may explain why long hours do not have uniform associations with family functioning.

Long work hours can add stress to, and reduce time spent with, the family, but it is the subjective experience of those hours and the way that they are distributed over the day, rather than the mere number of hours spent on the job, that appears to be most important. Nonstandard shift schedules, particularly when they are not voluntarily chosen, can add chaos to family life.

Arranging Time and Care for Children and for Family Health

Family-friendly employer benefits, supportive federal policies, and reliable child care constitute critical components of the larger work-family context. In the United States, some employer-provided benefits that can help workers manage their responsibilities at home, such as paid holidays, vacation, and sick leave, are common for full-time workers. Other paid benefits, such as paid personal leave, assistance for child care, and on-site or off-site child care, are rare. Conversely, unpaid family leave has been much more common, especially after the late 1990s with the enactment of federal legislation (Ruhm, 2005). Workers at

gastrointestinal ailments, trouble concentrating, headaches, and substance use or abuse (cigarettes, caffeine, and other stimulants), as well as heart disease and other illnesses (Barnett, 2006).

smaller companies as well as part-time and less-skilled workers have access to fewer employer-provided protections and opportunities in the United States (Henly & Lambert, 2005; Ruhm, 2005).⁶

Ruhm's (2005) review shows that, compared with European countries, the U.S. labor market is one with long work hours, short vacations, limited availability of parental leave, and little support for child care. He further describes economic analyses indicating that many Americans willingly trade off more time at work and less workplace flexibility for increased wages. In other words, employers provide and the government mandates few family-friendly benefits because the public's behavior and choices reveal a preference for higher wages.⁷ U.S. government policies are aimed at maintaining high employment rates and maximizing individual earnings as well as national income. As Ruhm (2005) concluded, within this context, balancing increasing job responsibilities with the needs of families through employer actions, or government-mandated policies, such as those that would increase paid leave and child-care options, is expensive and controversial.

Paid and Unpaid Leaves

The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requires public agencies and large employers to offer 12 weeks of unpaid leave for employees to care for babies, sick relatives, or their own health problems. Workers may be required to first use accrued sick leave or vacation time; however, health insurance continues during the leave (Ruhm, 2005). There are often hidden costs for using up all paid leaves prior to the return to work, a strategy that is often voluntarily adopted by mothers to maintain income during a maternity leave. One major cost, after the mother returns to work, is the accumulation of unexcused absences (e.g., to care for a sick baby or keep appointments with the pediatrician) that result in written warnings and other penalties, such as pay docking (Perry-Jenkins, 2005). The Project on Global Working Families, which interviewed working parents in six countries (Mexico, Botswana, Vietnam, the United States, Russia, and Honduras), found that in all the countries that were studied, when children are sick, poor parents find it difficult to make arrangements for their care, such as getting leave time from their jobs (Heymann et al., 2005).

Unfortunately, poverty and illness go together. One study found that it was quite common for poor working mothers in the United States to care for children or elderly relatives with chronic illnesses. These women often lost or resigned from full-time jobs because of the hospitalizations, frequent medical

⁶However, even when family-friendly policies are available to employees (e.g., allowing employees to pay for child care with pretax dollars), they may not be used to maximum benefit, at least not by working-class parents (Perry-Jenkins, 2005).

⁷Employers who voluntarily offer extensive family-friendly benefits that are not required by the government may attract a disproportionate number of employees who expect to take advantage of the costly benefits. Because these benefits are likely to be financed by lower wages, individuals who do not expect to use them will avoid those companies. In that scenario, the family-friendly benefits are even more expensive because they are spread over a high concentration of people who use them rather than being pooled with many employees with lower expected benefit use (Ruhm, 2005).

appointments, and other heavy caregiving demands that they faced (Burton, Lein, & Kolak, 2005). It is interesting that the most common reason for taking FMLA leave is for one's own health problems, not for care of newborns or newly adopted children (Ruhm, 2005).⁸ However, employed mothers in low-wage jobs often ignore their own health symptoms and postpone regular checkups and treatment in order to keep up with their work and family responsibilities (Burton et al., 2005).

Child Care

The cost of child care is a great challenge for many working families. Employed single parents have a particularly high cost burden because a larger percentage of their total family income is spent on child care, even though single parents use the cheapest sources of care. Free child care (usually provided by grandparents and other relatives) is used disproportionately by workers with the fewest resources in terms of earnings and education (Ruhm, 2005). Some research suggests that working-class families in the United States have lower quality care arrangements than do either poor or high-income families. They earn too much to receive child-care subsidies or support but too little to afford the cost of high-quality child care (Perry-Jenkins, 2005).⁹

Unpredictable and nonstandard work schedules present the greatest difficulties. Even though many parents choose shift work as a way of avoiding nonparental care for their children, the majority of low-skilled single mothers in the United States cite labor market rather than child-care reasons for working nonstandard hours (Henly & Lambert, 2005). Unfortunately, it is rare for providers to offer child care at times that can accommodate nonstandard work schedules, such as weekends, late evenings, or early mornings (Henly & Lambert, 2005). Most U.S. parents working nonstandard hours rely on informal care, especially relatives, and multiple arrangements. Many low-wage workers must also cope regularly with unpredictable schedules, which means that parents often must patch together a plan both within and outside of the formal child-care sector at the last minute. Even when provisions can be made, the process is hectic, stressful, and sometimes inadequate (Henly & Lambert, 2005).¹⁰

It is common for low-wage parents, especially single mothers, shift workers, and workers with some unpredictability in their hours, to use a collection of multiple formal and informal arrangements for child care; this usually consists of a primary arrangement and then one or more auxiliary caregivers who supplement that care on either a routine or a "just in case" basis (Henly & Lambert, 2005). Depending on their ages, children may also spend some time alone at

⁸One reason is that many women eligible for maternity leave under the FMLA already had rights to job absences under other workplace benefits and state and federal laws (Ruhm, 2005).

⁹See chapter 9 of this volume for a discussion of how family and child-care variables can function synergistically to influence child development.

¹⁰Preliminary research in The Netherlands has not uncovered any negative effects on child development associated with greater use of flexible options in child-care centers, such as extended hours and evening meals, when they are available (De Schipper, Tavecchio, Van IJendoorn, & Linting, 2003).

home or in the care of siblings. The international study mentioned earlier found that serious accidents can occur under these circumstances. Moreover, among poor and single-parent households in the third-world countries that were studied, older children, especially girls, were often taken out of school to provide care for younger siblings or cousins (Heymann et al., 2005).

Although child-care quantity and quality do not appear to be important mediators of the effects of parental work on child developmental outcomes (Korenman & Kaestner, 2005), that does not mean that families do not benefit when children are in reliable, safe, high-quality care. A parent's peace of mind, predictable schedules, and child comfort make for a better family climate, whereas shifting and unpredictable child-care arrangements contribute to a chaotic environment for children (Henly & Lambert, 2005).

Job Loss and Unemployment

Unstable employment is a major source of chaos for the family. The loss of a job is not a single stressful event; it leads to a cascade of secondary stressors, most resulting from the sudden change in financial circumstance, such as moving to less expensive housing or deferring payment on household bills (Price, Friedland, & Vinokur, 1998). Everyone in the household is exposed to these downstream effects, so it is not surprising that secondary stressors also affect the spouse's mental health and degrade the quality of the couple's relationship (Howe, Levy, & Caplan, 2004). Children also react to the changes in the family. For example, parental job loss predicts initiation of smoking in early adolescence, an effect that is observed even after controlling for socioeconomic status, educational, and parenting characteristics (Unger, Hamilton, & Sussman, 2004).

The impact of job loss is much more destructive when it leads to a prolonged period of unemployment. Research in Scandinavian countries indicates that a decline in the functioning and well-being of the unemployed parent can have profound effects on the family. A birth cohort study found that unemployed parents are at increased risk of drug abuse, violence, and out-of-home placements for their children (Christoffersen, 2000). Of course, unemployment does not always have such devastating effects. However, whatever the repercussions for the family, they are magnified when there is only one parent in the home and, unfortunately, unemployment rates tend to be higher among single parents (Strom, 2001). In two-parent homes, the negative effects on well-being spread to the other parent, and long-term unemployment in either spouse increases the risk of divorce, particularly for couples with limited financial resources (Strom, 2003).

Parental unemployment also has direct effects on children. Mothers' long-term unemployment has been associated with an increased risk of serious child abuse, even after controlling for the other adverse family factors linked to unemployment (Christoffersen, 2000). The outcomes for offspring include more psychological and physical health problems and serious accidents (Strom, 2001, 2003), as well as higher rates of hospitalization, psychiatric problems, suicide attempts, and prison sentences (Christoffersen, 2000). Research conducted in Slovakia found that paternal unemployment lasting more than 1 year was linked

to lower self-rated health among adolescents; this was true even after controlling for the father's education, perceived financial stress, and family affluence (Sleskova et al., 2006).

Selection factors are a very important consideration in any analysis of the effects of unemployment. Moreover, characteristics that increase a parent's chance of becoming unemployed, such as mental health problems and drug abuse, are also aggravated during the period of unemployment. In addition, couples often share risk factors for becoming unemployed, such as poor educational background and regional employment rates, resulting in a phenomenon sometimes called "couple unemployment" whereby spouses of the unemployed are at higher risk for unemployment themselves. But selection factors do not explain all of the effects, especially during periods of high unemployment. In fact, most of the findings cited earlier controlled for the effects of adverse selection on unemployment, with the exception of one critical variable. Of all the risk factors for, and mediators of, job loss and unemployment, low income is by far the most significant. Jobs that pay poorly are less stable, and economic hardship is the dominant mediating force for all of the major effects of unemployment on families (Strom, 2003).

Not only do adverse selection factors get exacerbated and act as mediators of the negative effects of unemployment, but the picture is further complicated by processes of reverse causality. For instance, job loss is often due to absenteeism and, among employed parents, especially single mothers with young children, unreliable child-care arrangements and health problems are the two primary reasons for missed days from work (Holzer, 2005). Thus, chaos in the family increases risk of parental job loss, which not only increases economic hardship but also exacerbates other existing strains in the family. On the other hand, benefits such as health care, child-care assistance, and flexible working schedules can help parents be more stable and productive employees (Holzer, 2005).

Integration of Research Findings

The research record is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in which the parent's workplace acts as an exosystem, a setting that children do not directly experience but that nonetheless contributes to their development. Our review reveals different microsystems—work, day care, home—acting together and influencing each other, and highlights the kinds of parental work experiences that can contribute to a chaotic atmosphere in families. Parents' jobs pose threats to the family when they are unstable and when they are characterized by an overload of responsibilities and demands, distressing interpersonal relationships, nonstandard and unpredictable schedules, or insufficient paid leave time. Inextricable from this mix is the availability of quality child care; the effects of risky job characteristics are greatly exacerbated when child care does not meet both the needs of the family and the demands of the workplace. However, the financial resources that parental employment brings to the family provide protection against chaos, as is underscored by our discussion of the repercussions of economic hardship resulting from job loss and long-term employment.

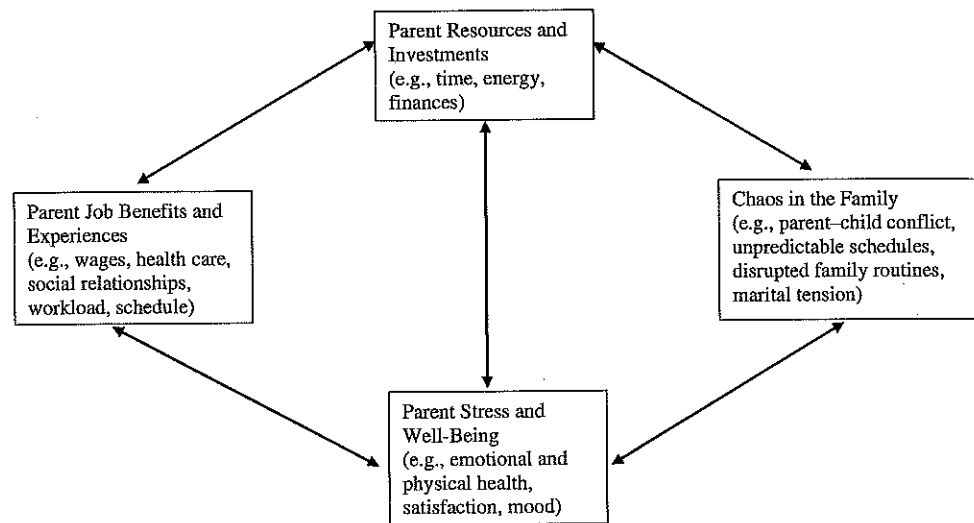


Figure 12.1. Model of the effects of parent employment on chaos in the family.

A simple model that integrates key findings reviewed here is depicted in Figure 12.1. It includes the impact that jobs have on the resources that parents bring to the family, as well as their emotional and physical well-being. On the one hand, when a job leads to a reduction in parental investments and an increase in parent stress, there is a potential addition or exacerbation of chaotic elements in the home. On the other hand, most jobs benefit families; as a job increases the resources that a parent can invest in the family or enhances a parent's well-being, there is a potential reduction in chaos or a strengthening of the protections against chaos (cf. van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijart, 2007).

Investments include the parent's devotion of time, energy, attention, and financial resources to the family. In addition to wages, jobs usually bring other resources that can be invested in the family, such as access to health care, a broader social network, knowledge, and values. According to the research literature reviewed here, a parent's time spent at work detracts from family life when it interferes with the family's ability to maintain structure and routines. Interference from work occurs when (a) work hours are distributed in an awkward pattern across the week, such as in nonstandard work shifts; (b) work schedules are unpredictable and uncontrollable; and (c) parents cannot arrange reliable, high-quality child care, either because the costs are prohibitive or the care that is available does not meet the family's needs. Workers in low-wage jobs and single mothers are disproportionately represented in all three categories.

The second mediator in Figure 12.1 is the parent's level of stress and well-being, which can have direct effects on the family's social environment as well as indirect effects through their impact on parent investments. An example of an indirect effect is when stress generated at work detracts from a parent's energy, patience, and cognitive stores, leaving less of each to invest at home. Job stress can also have a more direct impact, as the evidence of negative emo-

tion spillover indicates. Jobs can also enhance parent well-being in many ways, such as when employees derive satisfaction, pride, hope, and a sense of control from their jobs, or when medical benefits mean improved health. Under these circumstances, positive effects on the family are mediated through the parent's mood and physical well-being. Of course the model presented in Figure 12.1 is highly simplified. As discussed next, future research will suggest more complex models with variables that act as moderators and selection factors.

Research Agenda

Our review suggests several promising directions for future research. First, to observe how parental employment contributes to chaos in the family, researchers should focus on unstable jobs, the cumulative effects of different risky job characteristics, and mismatches between the demands of a job and the family's resources and needs. Second, because the effects of parental employment are not uniform, investigators must carefully consider the role of moderator variables, particularly social class, the number and ages of children in the household, and a variety of social and psychological attributes of parents, children, and families. These variables help to define the particulars of families' lives, and it is those details, in combination with certain aspects of the parents' jobs, that determine how the parental workplace adds to, or detracts from, chaos in children's lives.

Recognizing the roles of group differences and moderators means choosing an appropriate sampling strategy in research. One method is to use a random sample with the expectation that both the sample size and the variability in family and job characteristics will be sufficient to detect interaction effects. However, low-income households are typically underrepresented in studies of work-family issues, so that the full range of job and family characteristics needed to identify moderator effects is not always present. Another approach focuses on more homogeneous subgroups to uncover associations that might otherwise be too small to observe in a random sample. For example, investigators can address questions about the impact of different kinds of work schedules by focusing exclusively on single-mother families, or on two-earner families, or on families with children within a particular age range (infants, or school-age children, or teens). The varying child-care needs and practices of these different family types are integral to understanding how work hours affect family routines. In the absence of very large samples that can distinguish among the variety of consequences of work hours that would likely emerge in diverse subgroups, it is more productive to focus on subpopulations in which the effects might be more consistent and therefore easier to detect.

Our third suggestion, therefore, is for more detailed, descriptive investigations of groups of families who share certain features. The complexity of the work-family interface really comes to life in research studies that provide a close-up view of families as they cope with job demands (e.g., Perry-Jenkins' 2005 study of working-class families, Burton et al.'s 2005 study of low-income families, Henly and Lambert's 2005 investigation of low-skilled and hourly wage job holders). The particulars and nuances of families' lives tend to get buried in

the general trends that are the focus of large-scale investigations. Our experience with this type of research has been through the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Center on Everyday Lives of Families at the University of California at Los Angeles. This interdisciplinary research center created a digital video archive of the daily lives of middle-class, dual-earner families over the course of an average week. With these data we observe naturalistic social interaction and the regulation of emotion within families (Ochs, Graesch, Mittmann, Bradbury, & Repetti, 2006). For example, among the fathers, more socially distressing days at work were followed by higher levels of cortisol at home in the evening (Saxbe, Repetti, & Nishina, 2008). Other analyses indicate that these fathers are often ignored by their children when they return home from work (Campos, Graesch, Repetti, Bradbury, & Ochs, *in press*). Our videotapes show parents sometimes struggling to cope with their children's busy schedules, echoing increases in the number of Americans who report "always feeling rushed" in national surveys (Bianchi & Raley, 2005; see also chap. 4, this volume). This situation was highlighted by Bronfenbrenner in his rather alarming statement that "the hectic pace of modern life poses a threat to our children second only to poverty and unemployment" (Father of Hum Ec Dies, 2005, ¶ 13).

A focus on the particulars of family life also makes clear that jobs are not randomly distributed in the population. Our fourth suggestion is that researchers take selection factors into account when addressing questions about the effects of work on family life. The same variables that are associated with risk for chaos in the family—for example, parent education, personality, and level of functioning—also help to determine the kinds of jobs that parents hold and help to shape their experiences at work. Many of those risk factors are, in turn, exacerbated by stressors at work or the loss of a job creating a complex cycle of influence. We believe that ignoring the role of selection factors and the dynamic ways in which they are entangled with and influence family processes will only limit an understanding of how parents' jobs influence their families.

Finally, we encourage a search for general factors outside of the home that impede parents' functioning and interfere with family life. Although our chapter focuses on the workplace, other than the financial benefits that jobs bring, we do not believe there is anything unique about them in this analysis. Parents need to somehow cope, perhaps through a period of social withdrawal, in response to any set of daily responsibilities that overload them with too many tasks, or that sap their energy and patience, or that crowd their minds with worries. There would be a similar residue of emotional reaction to any kind of social interaction that entails conflict or otherwise generates feelings of anger and frustration, whether those relationships are with family members, neighbors, or coworkers and supervisors. Any rigid, awkward, or unpredictable schedule that is imposed on parents and makes it difficult to be with, and care for, their children will disrupt family routines and relationships; it does not matter whether that schedule is determined by college classes, by the needs of an elderly or sick relative, or by a job or career. When it comes to managing the care of children under these circumstances, ready and reliable assistance from others—which can come from a spouse, a grandparent or other relative, or someone who is paid to provide that assistance—is essential. And when parents are sick, or their children have special needs, such as when they are infants or

require medical care, mothers and fathers need a break from their other demanding responsibilities. That can mean a semester off from school, or an adult sibling taking over the care of a debilitated elderly parent, or paid leave from a job. Instead of an approach that focuses exclusively on the workplace, we believe an approach that identifies general processes in the exosystem that can impact microsystem chaos is ultimately more consistent with, and will help to advance, Urie Bronfenbrenner's goal of a general theory of bioecological development.

References

- Almeida, D. M., Wethington, E., & Chandler, A. L. (1999). Daily transmission of tensions between marital dyads and parent-child dyads. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, 49-61.
- Barnett, R. C. (2006). Relationship of the number and distribution of work hours to health and quality-of-life (QOL) outcomes. In P. L. Perrewé & D. C. Ganster (Eds.), *Research in occupational stress and well being: Vol. 5. Employee health and coping methodologies* (pp. 99-138). New York: Elsevier.
- Barnett, R. C., & Gareis, K. C. (2007). Shift work, parenting behaviors, and children's socioemotional well-being. *Journal of Family Issues*, 28, 727-748.
- Bianchi, S. M., & Raley, S. B. (2005). Time allocation in families. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 21-42). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bolger, N., DeLongis, A., Kessler, R. C., & Wethington, E. (1989). The contagion of stress across multiple roles. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51, 175-183.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1989). Ecological systems theory. *Annals of Child Development*, 6, 187-249.
- Bumpus, M. F., Crouter, A. C., & McHale, S. M. (1999). Work demands of dual-earner couples: Implications for parents' knowledge about children's daily lives in middle childhood. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, 465-475.
- Burton, L. M., Lein, L., & Kolak, A. (2005). Health and mothers' employment in low-income families. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 493-509). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Campos, B., Graesch, A. P., Repetti, R., Bradbury, T., & Ochs, E. (in press). *Opportunity for interaction? A naturalistic observation study of dual-earner families after work and school. Journal of Family Psychology*.
- Christoffersen, M. N. (2000). Growing up with unemployment: A study of parental unemployment and children's risk of abuse and neglect based on national longitudinal 1973 birth cohorts in Denmark. *Childhood*, 7, 421-438.
- Cooksey, E. C., Menaghan, E. G., & Jekielek, S. M. (1997). Life-course effects of work and family circumstances on children. *Social Forces*, 77, 637-667.
- Coser, L. (1974). *Greedy institutions: Patterns of undivided commitment*. New York: Free Press.
- Costigan, C. L., Cox, M. J., & Cauce, A. M. (2003). Work-parenting linkages among dual-earner couples at the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 17, 397-408.
- Crouter, A. C., & Bumpus, M. F. (2001). Linking parents' work stress to children's and adolescents' psychological adjustment. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10, 156-159.
- Crouter, A. C., Bumpas, M. F., Maguire, M. C., & McHale, S. M. (1999). Linking parents' work pressure and adolescents' well-being: Insights into dynamics in dual-earner families. *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 1453-1461.
- Crouter, A. C., & McHale, S. M. (1993). Temporal rhythms in family life: Seasonal variation in the relation between parental work and family processes. *Developmental Psychology*, 29, 198-205.
- Crouter, A. C., & McHale, S. M. (2005). Work, family, and children's time: Implication for youth. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 49-66). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- De Schipper, J. C., Tavecchio, L. W. C., Van IJzendoorn, M. H., & Linting, M. (2003). The relation of flexible child care to quality of center day care and children's socio-emotional functioning: A survey and observational study. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 26, 300-325.

- Doumas, D., Margolin, G., & John, R. S. (2003). The relationship between daily marital interaction, work, and health promoting behaviors in dual-earner couples: An extension of the work-family spillover model. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24, 3-20.
- Dubas, J. S., & Gerris, J. R. M. (2002). Longitudinal changes in the time parents spend in activities with their adolescent children as a function of child age, pubertal status, and gender. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 16, 415-427.
- Evans, G. W., & Wener, R. E. (2006). Rail commuting duration and passenger stress. *Health Psychology*, 25, 408-412.
- Father of hum ec dies. (2005, September 26). *The Cornell Daily Sun*. Available from <http://cornellsun.com/node/15373>
- Galambos, N. L., Sears, H. A., Almeida, D. M., & Kolaric, G. C. (1995). Parents' work overload and problem behavior in young adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 5, 201-223.
- Greenberger, E., O'Neil, R., & Nagel, S. K. (1994). Linking workplace and homeplace: Relations between the nature of adults' work and their parenting behaviors. *Developmental Psychology*, 30, 990-1002.
- Grimm-Thomas, K., & Perry-Jenkins, M. (1994). All in a day's work: Job experiences, self-esteem, and fathering in working-class families. *Family Relations*, 43, 174-181.
- Henly, J. R., & Lambert, S. (2005). Nonstandard work and child-care needs of low-income parents. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 473-492). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Heymann, J., Simmons, S., & Earle, A. (2005). Global transformation in work and family. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 511-528). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Holzer, H. J. (2005). Work and family life: The perspective of employers. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 83-95). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Howe, G. W., Levy, M. L., & Caplan, R. D. (2004). Job loss and depressive symptoms in couples: Common stressors, stress transmission, or relationship disruption? *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18, 639-650.
- Kohn, M. L. (1969). *Class and conformity: A study in values*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.
- Kohn, M. L., & Schooler, C. (1982). Job conditions and personality: A longitudinal assessment of their reciprocal effects. *American Journal of Sociology*, 87, 1257-1286.
- Korenman, S., & Kaestner, R. (2005). Work-family mismatch and child health and well-being: A review of the economics research. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 297-312). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Kuper, H., & Marmot, M. (2003). Job strain, job demands, decision latitude, and risk of coronary heart disease within the Whitehall II study. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 57, 147-153.
- Leibowitz, A. A. (2005). An economic perspective on work, family, and well-being. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 187-200). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Mason, C. A., Cauce, A. M., Gonzales, N., Hiraga, Y., & Grove, K. (1994). An ecological model of externalizing behaviors in African-American adolescents: No family is an island. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 4, 639-655.
- Menaghan, E. G., & Parcel, T. L. (1991). Determining children's home environments: The impact of maternal characteristics and current occupational and family conditions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 417-431.
- Novaco, R. W., Kliwer, W., & Broquet, A. (1991). Home environmental consequences of commute travel impedance. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19, 881-909.
- Ochs, E., Graesch, A., Mittmann, A., Bradbury, T., & Repetti, R. L. (2006). Video ethnography and ethnoarchaeological tracking. In M. Catsouris, E. E. Kossek, & S. Sweet (Eds.), *Handbook of work and family: Multi-disciplinary perspectives and approaches* (pp. 387-409). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Parcel, T. L., & Menaghan, E. G. (1993). Family social capital and children's behavior problems. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 56, 120-135.
- Parcel, T. L., & Menaghan, E. G. (1994). Early parental work, family social capital, and early childhood outcomes. *American Journal of Sociology*, 99, 972-1009.

- Perry-Jenkins, M. (2005). Work in the working class: Challenges facing families. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 453-472). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Perry-Jenkins, M., Repetti, R. L., & Crouter, A. C. (2000). Work and family in the 1990s. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 981-998.
- Piotrkowski, C. S. (1979). *Work and the family system*. New York: Free Press.
- Presser, H. B. (2005). Embracing complexity: Work schedules and family life in a 24/7 economy. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 43-48). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Price, R. H., Friedland, D. S., & Vinokur, A. D. (1998). Job loss: Hard times and eroded identity. In J. H. Harvey (Ed.), *Perspectives on loss: A sourcebook. Death, dying, and bereavement* (pp. 303-316). Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel.
- Repetti, R. L. (1989). Effects of daily workload on subsequent behavior during marital interaction: The roles of social withdrawal and spouse support. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 651-659.
- Repetti, R. L. (1992). Social withdrawal as a short-term coping response to daily stressors. In H. S. Friedman (Ed.), *Hostility, coping, and health* (pp. 151-165). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Repetti, R. L. (1994). Short-term and long-term processes linking job stressors to father-child interaction. *Social Development*, 3, 1-15.
- Repetti, R. L. (2005). A psychological perspective on the health and well-being consequences of parental employment. In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health and well-being* (pp. 245-258). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Repetti, R. L., & Mittmann, A. (2004). Workplace stress. In A. Christensen, R. Martin, & J. Smyth (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of health psychology* (pp. 342-344). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Repetti, R. L., & Wood, J. (1997a). Effects of daily stress at work on mothers' interactions with preschoolers. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 11, 90-108.
- Repetti, R. L., & Wood, J. (1997b). Families accommodating to chronic stress: Unintended and unnoticed processes. In B. H. Gottlieb (Ed.), *Coping with chronic stress* (pp. 191-220). New York: Plenum Press.
- Roy, K. M., Tubbs, C. Y., & Burton, L. M. (2004). Don't have no time: Daily rhythms and the organization of time for low-income families. *Family Relations*, 53, 168-178.
- Ruhm, C. J. (2005). How well do government and employer policies support working parents? In S. M. Bianchi, L. M. Casper, & R. B. King (Eds.), *Work, family, health, and well-being* (pp. 313-325). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Saxbe, D., Repetti, R. L., & Nishina, A. (2008). Marital satisfaction, recovery from work, and diurnal cortisol among men and women. *Health Psychology*, 27, 15-25.
- Schulz, M. S., Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P., & Brennan, R. T. (2004). Coming home upset: Gender, marital satisfaction and the daily spillover of workday experience into couple interactions. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18, 250-263.
- Sleskova, M., Salonna, F., Geckova, A. M., Nagyova, I., Stewart, R. E., van Dijk, J. P., & Groothoff, J. W. (2006). Does parental unemployment affect adolescents' health? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 38, 527-535.
- Staines, G. L., & Pleck, J. H. (1983). *The impact of work schedules on the family*. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.
- Story, L. B., & Repetti, R. L. (2006). Daily occupational stressors and marital behavior. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20, 690-700.
- Strom, S. (2001). Keep out of the reach of children: Parental unemployment and children's accident risks in Sweden 1991-1993. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 11, 40-52.
- Strom, S. (2003). Unemployment and families: A review of research. *Social Service Review*, 77, 399-430.
- Taylor, P., Funk, C., & Clark, A. (2007). *From 1997 to 2007: Fewer mothers prefer full-time work. A social & demographical trends report*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Unger, J. B., Hamilton, J. E., & Sussman, S. (2004). A family member's job loss as a risk factor for smoking among adolescents. *Health Psychology*, 23, 308-313.

- van Steenbergen, E. F., Ellemers, N., & Mooijaart, A. (2007). How work and family can facilitate each other: Distinct types of work-family facilitation and outcomes for women and men. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 12*, 279-300.
- Whitbeck, L. B., Simons, R. L., Conger, R. D., Wickrama, K. A. S., Ackley, K. A., & Elder, G. H., Jr. (1997). The effects of parents' working conditions and family economic hardship on parenting behaviors and children's self-efficacy. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 60*, 291-303.