

# **Helping Families with Young Children Navigate Work and Family Life \***

by  
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There is no question that many families with young children feel that the demands of their work and family responsibilities clash with each other and that these conflicts are escalating. According to the Families and Work Institute's nationally representative studies of the U.S. workforce—the National Study of the Changing Workforce—16 percent of employed parents with children under six reported significant work-family conflict in 1992. By 1997, that percentage had more than doubled, with 34 percent now reporting significant conflict.

At the Families and Work Institute, we have followed the business response to employees' work-family needs over time, looking at employees' access to work-life support from the vantage point of employees through our National Study of the Changing Workforce as well as from the vantage point of employers through our Business Work-Life Study, a representative study of employers with 100 or more employees. In addition, we staff two leadership groups of employers concerned with these issues: The Work-Life Leadership Council of The Conference Board, a group of approximately 35 employers who have met together since 1983 and The Employer Group, a group of employers of lower-wage employees who have met together since 1995 to discuss the work-life needs of hourly, lower wage, and entry-level employees. This paper draws on information from all of these sources.

## **THE EVOLUTION OF FAMILY SUPPORTIVE POLICIES**

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The process of responding to employees' personal and family needs has been one of broadening focus. In the 1970s and 1980s, employers focused on women and their child care concerns. Then, as more employers began to provide child care assistance, the focus in the late 1980s was enlarged to encompass all workers and a broader array of programs to meet their needs, including elder care and time flexibility. As such programs and policies became more widespread in the early 1990s, leading employers recognized that if the culture frowned upon or if supervisors penalized employees who took leaves or worked flexible schedules, then these policies might as well not exist. In response, leading employers initiated efforts to train supervisors in how to manage work-family issues at the workplace and took steps to create more family-responsive environments. More recently in the late 1990s, the focus has broadened again to include attention to work structure and work processes based on research that shows these factors are crucial to employees' effectiveness at work as well as to their health and well being. Finally in the late 1990s, the focus has moved beyond the organization doors to encompass the need for stronger connections between employers and the communities in which they are located (Galinsky & Johnson, 1998).

### **PREVALENCE OF EMPLOYER WORK-LIFE SUPPORT: FINDINGS FROM THE 1998 BUSINESS WORK-LIFE STUDY**

Although employers have increasingly addressed the work-family concerns of employees in the past two decades, there have been few attempts to track the prevalence and trends in employers' response. Most of the studies to date have been conducted on non-representative samples (e.g. The Conference Board, 1994; Hewitt Associates, 1990, 1993; Scharlach & Stanger, 1994; Buck Consultants, 1990).

Data, however, are now available for a representative sample of 1,057 employers with 100 or more employees from the 1998 Business Work-Life Study (Galinsky & Bond, 1998). This study found that 68 percent of companies with 100 or more employees allow employees to periodically change starting and quitting times while 24 percent allow employees to change starting and quitting times on a daily basis. As for maternity leave, 9 percent permit fewer than 12 weeks off while 33

percent allow more than the federally mandated 12 weeks. Fifty-three percent offer at least some replacement pay for maternity leave and 13 percent for paternity leave. One half (50 percent) provide dependent care assistance plans (DCAPs) that help employees pay for child care with pretax dollars, 33 percent give employees access to information to locate child care in their community, and 9 percent sponsor child care at or near the worksite.

The major predictors of companies' providing work-life assistance are 1) industry, 2) company size, 3) the proportion of top executive positions filled by women, and 4) the proportion of top executive positions filled by minorities.

## **ACCESS TO EMPLOYER SUPPORTS FOR THE PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN: FINDINGS FROM THE 1997 NATIONAL STUDY OF THE CHANGING WORKFORCE**

Knowing that the work-life assistance employers say they provide is only one side of the coin. It is equally important to know about access to work-life support from employees' point of view. The National Study of the Changing Workforce, conducted every five years by the Families and Work Institute, allows us to address two questions for the 536 wage and salaried mothers and fathers with children under six in our sample:

- To what extent do working parents with young children have access to traditional benefits; family-friendly workplace programs and policies; supportive supervisors and a supportive culture; and a better quality workplace environment?
- Which working parents are more likely to have such access?

### **Access to health insurance with family coverage**

Health insurance coverage for one's family is by far the most important traditional work-family benefit offered by employers. As shown in Table 1, more than four in five workers (84%) with children under six have access to paid and unpaid family health insurance plans through their

employers. Employed parents who are men, who have higher hourly wages, who have higher family incomes, who are married or living with a partner, who work full time, and who work for larger employers are more likely to have access to family health insurance through their employers than other groups. Employees more traditionally at risk—women, workers with lower-wage jobs and in lower-income families, and workers raising children by themselves—are less likely to have access to family health insurance than other groups.

**TABLE 1: ACCESS TO FAMILY HEALTH INSURANCE BY EMPLOYED PARENTS  
WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX**

<b>Employee Group</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>No Access</b>	<b>Significance (df, test)</b>
<i>All Parents (n=533)</i>	84%	16%	
<i>Gender</i>			
Men ( <i>n=304</i> )	89%	11%	***
Women ( <i>n=229</i> )	78	22	( <i>df=1, P c<sup>2</sup></i> )
<i>Hourly earnings</i>			
\$7.70 or less ( <i>n=119</i> )	66	34.5	***
\$7.71-\$19.25 ( <i>n=254</i> )	87	13	( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )
More than \$19.25 ( <i>n=125</i> )	95	5	
<i>Family income</i>			
Less than \$28.7K ( <i>n=112</i> )	69	31	***
\$28.7K-\$71.5K ( <i>n=280</i> )	86	14	( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )
\$71.6K or more ( <i>n=120</i> )	93	7	
<i>Marital status</i>			
Married/partnered ( <i>n=453</i> )	86	14	**
Single ( <i>n=78</i> )	73	27	( <i>df=1, P c<sup>2</sup></i> )
<i>Work status</i>			
Full time ( <i>n=461</i> )	89	11	***
Part time ( <i>n=69</i> )	56.5	43.5	( <i>df=1, P c<sup>2</sup></i> )
<i>US employees</i>			
Fewer than 50 ( <i>n=161</i> )	71	29	***
50-999 ( <i>n=150</i> )	89	11	( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )
1000 or more ( <i>n=209</i> )	91	9	

*Significance Levels: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001. Tests: P  $\chi^2$  = Pearson  $\chi^2$ ; M-H  $\chi^2$  = Mantel-Haenszel  $\chi^2$ .*

*Source: Families and Work Institute, 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce*

The number of employees with employers who cover the entire cost of family health insurance is small: 17%. However, 77% of employees receive at least partially paid family coverage.

Working parents who are men, who have higher hourly earnings and family incomes, who are married or living with a partner, who work full time, and who work for larger employers are more likely to have access to family health insurance fully or partly paid by their employers than other employees.

Since workers may have access to health insurance from other sources than their employers, we also investigated the extent to which wage and salaried workers have any source of health insurance for their children. Overall, 5% of wage and salaried workers do not have health insurance coverage for their children from any source (Table 2). The percentage of workers whose children are uncovered from any source rises to 11% among single parents and 12% among workers in low-income households.

**TABLE 2: ACCESS TO FAMILY HEALTH CARE FROM ANY SOURCE  
BY EMPLOYED PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX**

<b>Employee Group</b>	<b>Access From Own Job</b>	<b>Access From Other Source</b>	<b>Not Covered</b>	<i>Significance (df, test)</i>
All Parents (n=536)	62%	33%	5%	
<i>Gender</i>				
Men (n=305)	73	22	5	*** (df=1, P $\chi^2$ )
Women (n=231)	47	49	4	
<i>Hourly earnings</i>				
\$7.70 or less (n=122)	40	52	8	*** (df=1, M-H $\chi^2$ )
\$7.71-\$19.25 (n=254)	63	32	5	
More than \$19.25 (n=126)	79	21	1	
<i>Family income</i>				
Less than \$28.7K (n=116)	40	48	12	*** (df=1, M-H $\chi^2$ )
\$28.7K-\$71.5K (n=280)	65	31	3	
\$71.6K or more (n=120)	73	27	1	
<i>Marital status</i>				
Married/partnered (n=457)	64	32	4	** (df=1, P $\chi^2$ )
Single (n=79)	48	41	11	

<i>Work status</i>				
Full time ( <i>n</i> =463)	67	28	5	*** ( <i>df</i> =1, <i>P c</i> <sup>2</sup> )
Part time ( <i>n</i> =72)	25	72	3	

<i>US employees</i>				
Fewer than 50 ( <i>n</i> =163)	44	49	8	*** ( <i>df</i> =1, <i>M-H c</i> <sup>2</sup> )
50-999 ( <i>n</i> =151)	66	31	3	
1000 or more ( <i>n</i> =210)	74	23	3	

*Significance Levels: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001. Tests: P  $\chi^2$  = Pearson  $\chi^2$ ; M-H  $\chi^2$  = Mantel-Haenszel  $\chi^2$ .  
Source: Families and Work Institute, 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce*

### Access to paid vacation days

Vacations are important to families. Vacations seem to reduce parents' sense that life is too hectic and rushed, that they are pressed for time (Whirlpool Study, 1995), and that they don't have enough time together as a family (Galinsky et al., 1993).

More than four in five employees with young children have access to paid vacation days (Table 3). Importantly, 22% of mothers with young children and 31% of low-wage workers have no access to paid vacations. Working parents who are men, who earn more on an hourly basis, who work full time, and who work for larger organizations have greater access to paid vacation days than other workers.

**TABLE 3: ACCESS TO PAID VACATION DAYS  
BY EMPLOYED PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX**

<b>Employee Group</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>No Access</b>	<i>Significance (df, test)</i>
<i>All Parents (n=535)</i>	84.5%	15.5%	
<i>Gender</i>			
Men ( <i>n</i> =306)	89	11	*** ( <i>df</i> =1, <i>P c</i> <sup>2</sup> )
Women ( <i>n</i> =229)	78	22	

<i>Hourly earnings</i>			
\$7.70 or less ( <i>n=121</i> )	69	31	*** ( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )
\$7.71-\$19.25 ( <i>n=254</i> )	88	12	
More than \$19.25 ( <i>n=126</i> )	90.5	9.5	

<i>Family Income</i>			
Less than \$28.7K ( <i>n=114</i> )	78	22	* ( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )
\$28.7K-\$71.5K ( <i>n=278</i> )	86	14	
\$71.6K or more ( <i>n=120</i> )	88	12	
<i>Work status</i>			
Full time ( <i>n=461</i> )	89	11	*** ( <i>df=1, P c<sup>2</sup></i> )
Part time ( <i>n=71</i> )	58	42	
<i>US employees</i>			
Fewer than 50 ( <i>n=161</i> )	74.5	25.5	*** ( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )
50-999 ( <i>n=151</i> )	84	16	
1000 or more ( <i>n=210</i> )	94	6	

*Significance Levels: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001. Tests: P  $\chi^2$  = Pearson  $\chi^2$ ; M-H  $\chi^2$  = Mantel-Haenszel  $\chi^2$ .  
Source: Families and Work Institute, 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce*

## Access to paid holidays

Studies in child development reveal that ritual and tradition are important to children's development, school readiness, and family functioning (Powell, 1992). For many families, the most memorable rituals take place around the celebration of holidays.

As with vacations, more than four in five employed parents with young children have access to paid holidays. However, one third of low-wage parents and 29% of single parents in the labor force have no access to paid holidays. Working parents who are men, who earn more hourly, who have higher family incomes, who are married or living with a partner, who work full time, and who work for larger organizations have greater access to paid holidays than other workers.

## Access to paid time off to care for sick children

Surveys of workers indicate that having sick children is one of the most stressful aspects of being an employed parent (Fernandez, 1986). Estimates from other studies vary about the access that parents have to taking time off for their sick children, but it is evident that this issue is of major concern to parents and policymakers alike (Heymann, 1996).

Overall, almost one in two wage and salaried workers with young children (49%) is able to take time off for sick children without losing pay (Table 4). For families with fewer resources, however, access is much lower: only 36% of parents with lower family incomes, 37% of single parents, and 34% of part-timers can take time off to care for sick children without lost pay.

**TABLE 4: ALLOWED TO TAKE TIME OFF FOR SICK CHILDREN WITHOUT LOSING PAY:  
EMPLOYED PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX**

<b>Employee Group</b>	<b>Allowed</b>	<b>Not Allowed</b>	<i>Significance (df, test)</i>
<i>All Parents (n=522)</i>	49%	51%	
<i>Hourly earnings</i>			
\$7.70 or less ( <i>n=121</i> )	37	63	*** ( <i>df=1, M-H <math>\chi^2</math></i> )
\$7.70-\$19.25 ( <i>n=247</i> )	48	52	
More than \$19.25 ( <i>n=124</i> )	61	39	
<i>Family income</i>			
Less than \$28.7K ( <i>n=115</i> )	36	64	*** ( <i>df=1, M-H <math>\chi^2</math></i> )
\$28.7K-\$71.5K ( <i>n=274</i> )	48	52	
\$71.6K or more ( <i>n=116</i> )	65.5	34.5	
<i>Marital status</i>			
Married/partnered ( <i>n=443</i> )	51	49	* ( <i>df=1, P <math>\chi^2</math></i> )
Single ( <i>n=78</i> )	37	63	
<i>Work status</i>			
Full time ( <i>n=450</i> )	51	49	** ( <i>df=1, P <math>\chi^2</math></i> )
Part time ( <i>n=71</i> )	34	66	

*Significance Levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Tests:  $P \chi^2$  = Pearson  $\chi^2$ ; M-H  $\chi^2$  = Mantel-Haenszel  $\chi^2$ .*

*Source: Families and Work Institute, 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce*

## **Access to Flexitime**

When employees are asked what would most help them manage work and family life, time flexibility is typically at the top of the list (Families and Work Institute, unpublished data).

Employees who have access to *traditional* flexitime are allowed to select their starting and quitting times, but must stick to the times they choose, while employees with daily flexitime can change their starting and quitting times whenever they choose.

Overall, 44% of employed parents with young children have access to traditional flextime. Not unexpectedly, women, lower wage workers and workers with lower family incomes have less access than other workers. It is important to note that workers at smaller organizations have no less access to traditional flextime than workers at larger organizations.

Far fewer working parents (26%) have access to daily flextime. As is the case with many work-family policies, women, lower wage workers, and workers from lower income families have less access than other workers. Only 13% of workers from lower income families can change their start and finish time daily.

### **Difficulty taking time off to address family needs**

As other studies have shown, the offering of flexible time and leave policies doesn't necessarily indicate that employees can or will use them. Sometimes supervisors stand in the way or the company culture disapproves on their usage. Likewise, employees with no access to *formal* policies may, in fact, take time off work when they need to. Thus, we asked employees a question that reflects the practice at their organization: "How hard is it for you to take time off during your work day to take care of personal or family matters?"

Among parents with children under six, 36% report that it is either very or somewhat hard to take time during the day for family or personal issues. Employees from lower income households (*Mantel-Haenszel*  $\chi^2=5.79$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and larger companies (*Mantel-Haenszel*  $\chi^2=4.74$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.05$ ) find this more difficult than other groups of employees.

Employees were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "At the place where you work, employees who ask for time off for family reasons or try to arrange different schedules or hours to meet these needs are less likely to get ahead in their jobs or careers." Forty-three percent of workers with children under six strongly or somewhat agree that the use of flexibility impedes advancement. Parents with children under six who work in large companies are more likely to feel this way (*Mantel-Haenszel*  $\chi^2=4.34$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Otherwise there are no differences among employee groups in the extent to which they believe that using flexibility impedes advancement.

## **Access to parental leave for childbirth**

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 provided 12 weeks of job-guaranteed leave for childbirth or adoption for employees who had worked at least 1250 hours over the preceding year for an employer with 50 or more employees within a 75 mile radius of the her or his worksite. Applying these requirements, data from The 1992 National Study of the Changing Workforce were used to estimate how many employed mothers and fathers with children under 18 at home have access to parental leave under FLMA. The results indicate that approximately 41% of employed mothers and 49% of employed fathers meet the eligibility requirements and are covered by FMLA (Galinsky & Bond, 1996).

It is well known, however, that employer policy and practice often exceed these requirements. Thus the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce provides an opportunity to ascertain how many women and men with young children think that they can take time off from work for childbirth or for becoming a father without endangering their jobs.

Overall, 93% of employees with children under six think that women can take time off from work for childbirth without endangering their jobs. Perhaps surprisingly, there are no differences among employee groups on this question, including women and men, those who have lower and higher family incomes or those who work for small, mid-sized or large organizations.

A smaller proportion of working parents (81%) think that men can take time off work when they become fathers without endangering their jobs. Single employees (including those who are divorced or widowed) with young children report that men have less access to paternity leave without job jeopardy than do workers with young children who are married or living with a partner (Pearson  $\chi^2=4.13$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

## Access to child care resource and referral

Another important way employers can help employees with young children manage their work and family responsibilities is by providing assistance with dependent care. One in five employees with children under six works for an employer that offers a program or service that helps employees find child care (Table 5). Access is higher for workers from households with incomes in the top quartile and for those who work for large companies (1,000 or more employees).

**TABLE 5: ACCESS TO CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL  
BY EMPLOYED PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX**

Employee Group	Access	No Access	Significance (df, test)
All Parents (n=522)	20%	80%	
Family income			
Less than 28.7K (n=113)	16%	84%	*
\$28.7K-\$71.5K (n=272)	18	82	(df=1, M-H $\chi^2$ )
\$71.6K or more (n=118)	26	74	
US employees			
Fewer than 50 (n=161)	11	89	***
50-999 (n=144)	8	92	(df=1, M-H $\chi^2$ )
1000 or more (n=203)	35.5	64.5	

Significance Levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Tests:  $P \chi^2$  = Pearson  $\chi^2$ ; M-H  $\chi^2$  = Mantel-Haenszel  $\chi^2$ .

Source: Families and Work Institute, 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce

## Access to on or near-site child care

When many people think of assistance with child care, an on or near-site center comes to mind. Generally, however, it has been found that not many employees want child care at work and not many employers want to provide it. Where it is feasible and desired, child care at the workplace is highly appreciated and has been linked to less worry about child care while at work and greater

satisfaction with the quality of child care the employee's child receives (Families and Work Institute, 1993).

Twelve percent of employees with children under six report that they have access to a child care center operated or sponsored by their employer at or near their work location. Parents employed by larger companies are more likely to have access to employer-sponsored or employer-operated child care at or near their work site (*Mantel-Haenszel*  $\chi^2=7.52$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

### Access to financial assistance for child care

The cost of child care is of great concern to employed parents who typically spend about 10% of their family income on child care. Low-income families, however, often pay a much greater share of their family income for child care. Families earning less than \$15,000 per year—who pay for child care services—pay 23% while families earning \$50,000 or more pay 6% (Hofferth et al., 1991).

Twelve percent of employed parents with children under six work for employers that provide employees with direct financial assistance—vouchers, cash, or scholarships—to help defray the cost of child care (Table 6). Full-time employees and those who work for larger employers are the most likely to receive financial assistance for child care.

**TABLE 6: ACCESS TO FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR CHILD CARE BY EMPLOYED PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX**

<b>Employee Group</b>	<b>Financial Assistance</b>	<b>No Financial Assistance</b>	<i>Significance (df, test)</i>
<i>All Parents (n=522)</i>	12%	88%	
<i>Work status</i>			*
Full time ( <i>n=450</i> )	13%	87%	<i>(df=1, P <math>\chi^2</math>)</i>
Part time ( <i>n=69</i> )	4	96	

<i>US employees</i>			
Fewer than 50 ( <i>n=163</i> )	4	96	***
50-999 ( <i>n=147</i> )	9.5	90.5	( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )
1000 or more ( <i>n=200</i> )	19.5	80.5	

*Significance Levels: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001. Tests: P  $\chi^2$  = Pearson  $\chi^2$ ; M-H  $\chi^2$  = Mantel-Haenszel  $\chi^2$ .*  
Source: Families and Work Institute, 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce

Another way that employers help employees pay for child care is by setting up Dependent Care Assistance Plans allowed under federal tax law. Under these plans, employees set aside part of their pretax wages in an account that can be used to pay for child care.

Thirty-one percent of employees with children under six have access to DCAPs (Table 7). Those more likely to have access are employees who have higher hourly earnings, who have higher family income, who are married, and who work for larger employers. In fact, 47% of employees with young children who work for large companies have access to DCAPs. Although the relative tax advantages of DCAPs for lower income families can be debated, it is ironic that those most in need of financial assistance for child care have the least access to this benefit.

**TABLE 7: ACCESS TO DEPENDENT CARE ASSISTANCE PLANS  
BY EMPLOYED PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX**

<b>Employee Group</b>	<b>Access to DCAPs</b>	<b>No Access to DCAPs</b>	<b>Significance (<i>df, test</i>)</b>
<i>All Parents (n=513)</i>	31%	69%	
<i>Hourly earnings</i>			
\$7.70 or less ( <i>n=115</i> )	20%	80%	***
\$7.71-\$19.25 ( <i>n=242</i> )	28	72	( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )
More than \$19.25 ( <i>n=123</i> )	43	57	
<i>Family income</i>			
Less than \$28.7K ( <i>n=109</i> )	13	87	***
\$28.7K-\$71.5K ( <i>n=269</i> )	30	70	( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )
\$71.6K or more ( <i>n=116</i> )	45	55	
<i>Marital status</i>			
Married/partnered ( <i>n=438</i> )	32	68	*
Single ( <i>n=73</i> )	20.5	79.5	( <i>df=1, P c<sup>2</sup></i> )

<i>US employees</i>			
Fewer than 50 ( <i>n=159</i> )	13	87	
50-999 ( <i>n=143</i> )	27	73	***
1000 or more ( <i>n=200</i> )	47	53	( <i>df=1, M-H c<sup>2</sup></i> )

*Significance Levels: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001. Tests: P  $\chi^2$  = Pearson  $\chi^2$ ; M-H  $\chi^2$  = Mantel-Haenszel  $\chi^2$ .*  
Source: Families and Work Institute, 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce

## Support of supervisor and workplace culture

Studies conducted by the Families and Work Institute reveal the importance of support by both the supervisor and the workplace culture. Employees with supervisors and a workplace culture that are supportive when the employee has a work-life issue feel less stressed and more successful at balancing work and family life. In addition, they are more loyal, more satisfied with their jobs and more likely to recommend their employer as a place to work (Families and Work Institute, 1993; Galinsky & Bond, 1996; Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998).

Between six and seven of every ten employed parents with children under six strongly agree that their supervisor accommodates them and is understanding when work-family issues arise. Fewer (approximately two fifths) strongly agree that they are comfortable raising work-family issues or that their supervisor really cares about the effect that work demands have on their personal or family life.

The only findings of note were differences related to the size of local work sites. Employed parents at smaller work sites were more likely to view their supervisors as accommodating of family/personal business (*Mantel-Haenszel  $c^2=7.30$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.01$* ), to feel comfortable raising personal or family business with their supervisors (*Mantel-Haenszel  $c^2=6.63$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.05$* ), and to feel their supervisors really care about the impact of work demands on family and personal life (*Mantel-Haenszel  $c^2=4.43$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.05$* ).

Between one fourth and one third of workers with young children perceive their workplace culture as not supportive of their personal and family concerns. The only differences found were that employed parents at smaller local work sites were more likely to perceive the cultures of their

workplaces as supportive. They were less likely to agree that putting family or personal needs ahead of jobs was not viewed favorably (*Mantel-Haenszel*  $\chi^2=4.67$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and that employees have to choose between job advancement and devoting attention to their personal or family lives (*Mantel-Haenszel*  $\chi^2=9.59$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.01$ ). This pattern of findings also held for employees at companies with different numbers of workers nationwide.

## **Characteristics of jobs**

Analyses of both the 1992 and 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce reveal that the characteristics of jobs are significant predictors of employee well-being and effectiveness at work. For example, employed parents with young children who have more job autonomy, and less pressure on the job tend to experience less work-family conflict, less job-related stress, and better coping than other workers. In addition, workers with greater job autonomy are also more satisfied with their jobs, more committed to helping their employers succeed, and less likely to look for employment elsewhere than other workers.

To measure job autonomy in the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following items: "I have the freedom to decide what I do on my job;" "It is basically my own responsibility to decide how my job is done;" and "I have a lot of say about what happens on my job." Employed mothers, workers with lower hourly earnings, and those with lower household incomes have less job autonomy than other groups of employees.

To measure job pressures, respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: "My job requires that I work very hard;" "I never seem to have enough time to get everything done on my job;" and "My job requires that I work very fast." Employees with higher hourly earnings and/or family experience more pressure on the job than other workers. In addition, working parents who are married or living with partners experience higher pressure on the job than single parents.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS FROM THE 1997 NATIONAL STUDY OF THE CHANGING WORKFORCE**

These findings lead to several important conclusions:

First, while work-family assistance on the job has grown dramatically over the past two decades, workers who are socio-economically advantaged benefit more than others. For example:

- Workers with higher hourly earnings are more likely than their lower earning counterparts to have access to family health insurance from their employer, family health insurance that is fully or partly paid by their employer, health insurance for their children from some source, paid vacations, paid holidays, paid time off to care for sick children, traditional flextime, daily flextime, DCAPs, and job autonomy.
- Workers with higher family income are more likely than their lower family income counterparts to have access to family health insurance from their employer, family health insurance that is fully for partly paid by their employer, health insurance for their children from some source, paid holidays, paid time off for sick children, traditional flextime, daily flextime, time off during the workday, child care resource and referral, DCAPs, and job autonomy.
- Married workers or workers living with a partner are more likely than their single, divorced or separated counterparts to have access to fully or partly paid health insurance for their children from their employer, health insurance for their children from some source, paid holidays, paid time off to care for sick children, paternity leave, and DCAPs.

Second, despite the fact that employed mothers are known to have greater responsibility for managing work and family concerns, employed fathers have greater access to work-family assistance:

- Employed fathers with young children are more likely than employed mothers with young children to have access to family health insurance from their employer, family health insurance that is fully paid by their employer, family health insurance that is fully or partly paid by their employer, health insurance for their children from some source, paid vacations, paid holidays, traditional flextime, daily flextime, and job autonomy.

Third, employed parents who work for larger employers have greater access to work-family programs and policies that require expenditures by employers, but not to time flexibility and leave. Moreover, there is greater supervisor support and a more supportive workplace culture at small local work sites than larger ones.

- Employed parents who work for large organizations nationwide are more likely than employed parents at smaller organizations to have access to family health insurance from their employer, health insurance for their children from some source, paid vacations, paid holidays, child care resource and referral, on or near site child care, financial assistance for child care, and DCAPs.
- There are no differences by employer size in access to time flexibility and leave.
- Employed parents who work at smaller local work sites have more supportive supervisors and workplace cultures; the same is true for those employed by companies with fewer employees nationwide.

Finally, we are left with a few startling statistics:

- Only 17% of employed parents with young children have family health insurance that is fully paid by their employers.
- 24% of employed parents with young children from low-income households do not have access to family health insurance that is fully or partly paid by their employers.
- 12% of employed parents with young children from low-income households and 11% of single parents with young children do not have health insurance for their children from any source.
- 31% of employed parents with young children whose earnings fall in the bottom quartile and 22% of employed mothers with young children do not have access to paid vacations.
- 33% of employed parents with young children whose earnings fall in the bottom quartile and 29% of single parents with young children do not have access to paid holidays.
- 64% of employed parents with young children from low-income households and 63% of single parents with young children do not have access to paid time off to care for sick children.
- 56% of all parents with young children, 69% of employed parents in low-income households, and 61% of employed mothers do not have access to traditional flextime.
- 74% of all parents with young children, 87% of employed parents in low-income households, and 80% of employed mothers with young children do not have access to daily flextime.
- 57% of employed parents with young children from low-income households find it difficult to take time off during the day to care for family issues.
- 87% of employed parents with young children from low-income households do not have access to DCAPs.
- Between one fourth and one third of employed parents with young children report that the work-family culture of their workplaces is not supportive of them as family members.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Decision makers in business and government seldom discuss work-life issues in the U.S. laborforce. Typically their interactions are forced, adversarial, and distrustful. Yet, both parties have strong vested interests in seeing that these issues are addressed.

In the past month, two business groups that the Families and Work Institute staffs—the Work-Life Leadership Council of The Conference Board and The Employer Group—have met in Washington with members of the administration, with federal agencies implementing work-life policies, with staff to members of Congress, and with representatives of the National Governors’ Association. Out of these discussions, many opportunities have been identified that could increase employee access to and use of family supportive policies. Our overarching recommendation is that there be a constructive, proactive, and ongoing dialogue between business and government at the federal state, and local levels, and that this discussion be expanded to include the full range of institutions (schools, child care providers, health care providers, etc.) in the communities where employers are located.

The areas in which we have identified both business and government interest include, but are not limited to, the following:

### 1) Increasing disposable income for employed parents

**Earned Income Tax Credit:** While Earned Income Tax Credits and Advanced Earned Income Tax Credits are very important supports to the low-wage families, access is constrained and utilization limited for a variety of reasons. Members of the Employer Group met with representatives from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, and the Center on Budget and Policy two weeks ago to discuss how tax forms and their presentation by employers could be made more user friendly and how employers could facilitate applications for EITC benefits. Further discussion and action steps are being planned.

**DCAPs:** The definition of dependency for using DCAPs for elder care should be revisited. Given the strict definition, relatively few employees qualify.

## **2) Increase access to health care**

**Gaps in coverage:** While there is a larger need to address the issue of long-term uninsured Americans, there is an immediate need to address issues of gaps in coverage. Many employers that do provide insurance coverage require an extended waiting period of 30, 60, or more days for new employees and their families. Closing this gap is an important societal and business issue.

### **Lack of awareness of public health insurance programs for children:**

Employers are largely unaware of the existence of publicly subsidized (Medicaid/CHIP) health insurance programs for the children of low-income workers. More effective outreach to and through employers who do not provide subsidized family coverage would be welcomed by many employers and their employees.

## **3) Increasing access to stable, quality, affordable child care**

**Access to quality care/education.** The quality of child care programs is typically mediocre (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990; Galinsky, Howes, Kontos & Shinn, 1994; Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Team, 1995), yet child care is really education before school (Galinsky & Friedman, 1993). Various approaches to developing affordable child care capacity and improving child care quality in both formal and informal settings are being tested in states and communities across the country. Some efforts have significant involvement from the business community, while others do not.

**Increasing employer investment:** Efforts to involve employers in community, state, and national task forces on financing child care (for example, Colorado and New Hampshire) should be supported. Employers' investments of specific skills, lobbying effort (for example, Florida), and/or money can reap significant benefits not only for children and families in the community, but also for their own employees and themselves. These efforts typically lead to increased state and local

financing for child care and sometimes to a new vision for services, as is the case for Educare in Colorado.

#### **4) Increasing access to flexible time and leave programs**

**Family and Medical Leave Act:** The administration has proposed that the nation move toward paid family and medical leave, and state-level experimentation on how to provide wage replacement during leave may soon be underway. Although employers are generally opposed to paid leave requirements, they would rather be part of the discussion than left out of the loop. Since many already provide part or full disability pay (which includes maternity-related disability), the issue is mainly that of how non-disability leaves (leaves for parenting and care of seriously ill family members) might be covered.

**Flexible Time :** Further discussions are needed between employers and government about how to provide increased work schedule flexibility for employees while ensuring employee protection.

#### **5) Increasing overall access to family-friendly initiatives**

There should be a broad-scale effort to raise public awareness of the importance of employers supporting the parents of young children. These efforts should emphasize the win/win nature of work-life assistance: There are benefits for the employer in enhancing productivity and there are benefits for families and young children in reducing family stress and providing better quality services and supports to young children. This public awareness effort should address all employers, with special emphasis on those that employ large numbers of low-wage and single parents. Smaller employers should be targeted as well.

Such public awareness efforts should include respected public spokespersons and respected business leaders speaking out on behalf of the needs of young children. A business-to-business approach would be very effective.

Accompanying the public awareness would be incentives to employers. Since some employers express reservations about the efficacy of tax credits to

motivate increased family-friendliness, a national panel of employers should be convened to determine what public-sector incentives would be most effective.

Technical assistance should be available to employers in implementing a family-friendly agenda. Technical assistance can come from state and local government, other businesses, business associations, or consultants.

## **CONCLUSION**

Two to three decades ago, the role of the workplace in supporting the families of young children was on the sidelines, if in the picture at all. In this decade, the workplace is beginning to be considered in research, policy, practice and legislation. In the coming decade, the workplace should move more to the front and center as we consider how to improve the development of young children.

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