

Why Working Families Avoid Flexibility: The Costs of Over Working

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Work Pursues You

- Work is pursuing today's families
 - Parents are overworking
 - Parents don't feel good about working
 - Parents don't know how to change the situation
- Achieving workplace flexibility will require a change not only in employers, but in employees and the American ethic toward work.



Evidence

- Alfred P. Sloan *500 Family Study*
 - For this analysis the sample was limited to full-time, dual-income families
 - N = 524 Moms and Dads or 262 couples with children
- Unusual Sample
 - 84% have at least a bachelor's degree
 - 83% have an income above the national median, (approximately) \$50,000
 - Occupational distribution
 - Managers/administrators - 19%
 - Teachers - 7%
 - Lawyers - 6%
 - Education administrators - 5%
 - Physicians - 4%



Instruments

- ESM
 - Time diary which asks respondents to fill out a battery of questions when prompted by wristwatches 8 times throughout the day
 - Details respondents' locations, activities, and their subjective experiences
- Surveys
 - Parent surveys are designed to obtain demographic information, including job characteristics and work habits
- Interviews
 - In-depth interviews examining the issues today's working families face



How Much Do Parents Overwork?

- On average, mothers and fathers work 48 hours per week*
 - Parents are working an average of 10.5 extra hours per week
 - 504 extra hours per year
 - Approximately 67.2 days, or 2 months of extra work per year

***Based on a 37.5 hour work week, 7.5 hours per day**



When are Parents Working?

	Time spent overworking per week
Works while commuting	1 hour
Stays late*	2 hours and 45 minutes
Goes to work early	2 hours
Works evenings at home*	2 hours and 30 minutes
Works weekends at home	2 hours
Works weekends at work*	45 minutes

*Mean differences between Moms and Dads are significant at the $p \leq .001$ level.

- Dads are more likely to stay late, work evenings, and work weekends.



How do Parents Feel?

- The more hours you work, the more likely you are to feel less happy, more stressed, and more frustrated; moms also feel that they are not meeting their expectations about their role as spouse, parent, and worker.

	Average for Full Sample	Those working 31 – 45 hrs/week	Those working > 45 hrs/week
Your expectations	2.12	2.12	2.11
Control	2.16	2.14	2.13*
Stressed	.57	.60	.64*
Happy	5.05	2.14	2.11*
Frustrated	4.46	5.05	4.99*

Notes: Expectations, control, and stress based on a 4 point scale: 0 (not at all) to 3 (very much). Happy and frustrated are based on a 7 point scale: 1 (very sad) to 7(very happy).

*Mean statistics are significantly different than the full sample mean ($p < .001$).



The Costs of Over Working

- If you work more than 45 hours per week, you are more likely to feel competitive

Hours per week	Average	31-45 hrs/week	> 45 hrs/week
Competitive	.10	.18*	.24*

Competitive is based on a 4 point scale: 0 (not at all) to 3 (very much).

*Mean differences are significant at the $p < .001$ level.



The Costs of Over Working

- Over 50% of parents feel that they have to “work at home in order to keep up.”
 - Suggesting that over working is not solely a response to employer demands, but is also a subjective feeling regarding the need to work.
 - “He’s sort of [been] lulled into the role of just work, work, work.”
 - *Mom commenting on her husband’s attitude toward work*



How Families Manage Their Busy Lives

Multi-Tasking

- In this sample, in an average week, both mothers and fathers spend slightly more than 1 day multi-tasking, or 25% of their waking hours per day. The more you work the more you multi-task.

Time spent multi-tasking (hours/week)	Overall	> 45 Hours/Week Overall	Home	> 45 Hours/Week at Home	Work	> 45 Hours/Week at Work
Whole Sample	35	36	15	16	21	24
Moms	36	38	16	17	21	25
Dads	33	34	15	15	20	22

- “The kids want you available. And cleaning the kitchen is more available than sitting at a computer typing and working.”
 - *Full time education administrator and mother of 3*

What Parents are Doing When They Multi-Task

Primary Activities

- Eating a meal - 24%
- Driving -17%
- Getting ready - 11%
- On the phone (work) - 11%
- Cooking - 10%
- General cleaning - 10%
- Helping child w/ homework - 10%
- Non-intensive working - 7%

Secondary Activities

- Talking with children - 26%
- Talking with spouse - 18%
- Eating a meal - 13%
- Caring for children - 10%
- Talking about business - 10%
- Getting ready - 9%
- General cleaning - 7%
- Helping child w/homework – 7%



How Parents Feel When They Multi-Task

Subjective Experiences while Multi-Tasking				
	Whole Sample		Parents who Work > 45 Hours/Week	
	Discrete	Multi-tasking	Discrete	Multi-tasking
Did you enjoy what you were doing?* ¹	1.97	1.79	1.83	1.91
Did you feel in control of the situation?* ¹	2.21	2.17	2.33	2.41
Did you feel good about yourself?	2.27	2.16	2.19	2.34
Felt stressed?*	.43	.58	.68	.68
Felt worried?* ¹	.38	.43	.63	.57
Felt irritated?* ¹	.31	.40	.46	.58

Measures are based on a 4 point scale: 0 (not at all) to 3 (very much).

*Mean differences between discrete and multi-tasking are significant at the $p < .001$ level for the whole sample.

¹ Mean differences between discrete and multi-tasking are significant at the $p < .05$ level for parents who work more than 45 hours per week.

How Over Working Parents Feel When They Multi-Task

Subjective Experiences of Parents who Over Work while Multi-Tasking								
	Dads Full Sample		Dads > 45 Hours/Week		Moms Full Sample		Moms > 45 Hours/Week	
	Discrete	Multi-tasking	Discrete	Multi-tasking	Discrete	Multi-tasking	Discrete	Multi-tasking
Did you enjoy what you were doing?*	1.82	1.88	1.82	1.97	1.92	1.84	1.84	1.85
Did you feel in control of the situation?	2.32	2.16	2.32	2.41	2.18	2.17	2.34	2.40
Did you feel good about yourself?	2.26	2.18	2.26	2.38	2.26	2.14	2.10	2.30
Felt stressed?	.63	.57	.63	.66	.54	.64	.75	.70
Felt worried?	.59	.41	.59	.55	.46	.47	.67	.59
Felt irritated?*	.42	.38	.42	.58	.33	.38	.51	.58

Measures are based on a 4 point scale: 0 (not at all) to 3 (very much).

*Mean differences between discrete and multi-tasking are significant at the $p < .05$ level.



Work-Family Conflict

“When I do work at home, I typically wake up at 2am. I won’t take the time in the evening when the kids are awake or when my wife is awake to work. I’ll wait till they’re either asleep or I’ll wake up early and do it when they’re sleeping so as to not – not take time at home. I mean, the amount of time that I work has always been a source of conflict...so I’ve tried when I’m home not to work except when everybody else won’t notice, like when they’re sleeping. I think that’s an accommodation that I made. It’s a double-edged sword, and then I get tired and crabby, so what the heck.”

- *Full-time administrator and father of 3*

“Well, out of necessity or out of – you know, sometimes, I’ve never chosen work over family, but there’s no one else that’s going to do it. Like with the state meet, it was at the same time when my son was at a really important golf tournament, and I would have much rather been watching him, but I can’t. The same thing happens a lot where I have to put it [work] first. It works out, but it’s not the best scenario.”

- *Full-time teacher/coach and mother of 5*

- 36% of moms report experiencing work-family conflict often or very often
- 34% of dads report experiencing work-family conflict often or very often

Notes: Work family conflict is based on a 5 point scale: 0 (never) to 4 (very often).



Moms Would Prefer to Work Part-Time

- 64% of full-time moms would prefer part-time work

“I don’t like my work hours, I wish I was home. I think it makes a world of difference. When the children come in the door and I’m like, ‘Hi, how are you?’, I follow them around and I try to sit or talk with them. I would like to be there for them. I wish I was there. I’d be willing to work part-time, I wish I didn’t work full-time so I could really spend more time with them.”

- *Full-time education administrator and mother of 3*



Why Moms Prefer to Work Part-time and the Need for Flexibility

“Benefits right now is a tremendous issue. I just assumed that my husband, you know, his jobs always had the benefits. But flexibility was really important. My first job back was a facilitator, actually, for groups that happened in corporations. So it was really just over the lunch hour. So I was here everyday to see the kids off on the bus and here, you know, theoretically, when they came home. So that was great. And then this job that I took now, definitely is a big issue on flexibility. In fact, as you know, I have two job offers right now, pending, and one of them looks a lot more flexible than the other and that is really a huge issue for me. It's...I really prioritize my family. So it's very hard.... If I had my druthers I would only work part time.”

- *Full-time education administrator and mother of 3*



A Need for Flexibility

“I would like to do less driving, less chauffeuring. I wish I had, it’s harder on the nights that I work because I have to make dinner, have to feed everyone, I wish I had less to do. I wish I had more time with my kids, I mean really I, I would love to be home every day of the week. Well, I wouldn’t say every day of the week, but I would love not to work nights and be home with my family. I could do it, but we’re dependent on both our incomes, so I don’t have a choice. I have to go to work those two nights. Then if I have a case overflow then I have to go a third night. But I would love to be home every night.”

- *Full-time psychotherapist and mother of 3*

“Even in a supposedly enlightened law firm the issues that were unrecognized in the workplace were the balance problems...There were a number of woman in the firm and we had a very powerful woman partner, who was well recognized throughout the city of Bayside, and still is, as one of a handful of significantly powerful women in the profession. So, it wasn’t that the law firm didn’t in theory and in practice grant women respect; what they hadn’t done was the second half of it, which was to figure out how to allow people a life.

- *Full-time attorney and mother of 3*



Problems with the Corporate Culture

- Why aren't women taking advantage of this?
 - 57% of moms take work home because they feel they "have to in order to keep up"
- Flexibility does exist, but it is limited
 - 44% of moms surveyed report work-at-home options are available at their place of work
 - 62% of moms surveyed report that flexible hours are available at their place of work
 - 73% of moms surveyed report paid absence is available at their place of work



Being Flexible in the Corporate Culture

“Balancing work and family is awful. I think that big business needs to take a look at this and make some compromises to value families. They're the future, and if we don't raise our children in a caring loving environment...You have to have face time for that, you can't just do that over the phone, you can't just think it's going to happen because you're available on Sundays from 2:00 to 4:00. You know, I mean, you really have to be there and be able to have them prioritized. So it's a challenge, but big business, many times they're so demanding of people that they just don't even consider it and it's only going to be to our dismay. I worked with Motorola and Motorola said, ‘We have to interview...for every 100 people we interview, there's maybe one that we would consider.’ And I know why. I mean, you have to...someone has to be there to help nurture that person to be a life long learner and be an upstanding kind of person, be the person that Motorola wants. They really need to value family time and allow people to take time to go on a field trip or if their child's sick go home and that kind of stuff. They really do need to come to the party. Motorola did, I don't know if they...they certainly had enough policies, whether the supervisors did, I don't know, but there's other corporations that don't even think that's appropriate at all. And that's very unfortunate.”

- *Full-time education administrator and mother of 3*



Looking Ahead

- Things need to change.
 - The workplace needs to be more accommodating
 - Not only do we need more flexibility options, we also need employees to learn how to put the brakes on work.
- People don't have a choice they have to work.
 - Not just for financial stability and benefits, but also for their own satisfaction.
- Stress will continue to escalate unless we find a better way to accommodate the needs of working families.