

The Future of Children

Work and Family

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Overview

- Parents are the hub of service delivery for their children, providing direct care and coordinating other care, and the same is true for adults providing care for the elderly
- But most parents and elder caregivers also are employed, leading to potential work-family conflicts
- To better understand this, Sara McLanahan and I convened experts and asked them to review the latest research on:
 - demographic changes,
 - the challenges for employees who have care responsibilities for young children, school-age children, children with special health care needs, or elderly family members
 - possible policy responses, focusing on the role of employers, the role of government, and what other countries do.

Demographic changes, by Suzanne Bianchi

- American families have changed:
 - 70% of married mothers work, as do 76% of single mothers (who head about $\frac{1}{4}$ of families with children)
 - 64% of mothers work w/in 12 months of a birth
 - An increasing share of employees face elder care demands
- American workplaces have changed too:
 - More non-standard work, insecurity, earnings inequality
- These changes have increased work-family conflicts:
 - Too many hours of work for high-income families
 - Too few hours, too little control, and insufficient income for low-income families
- Job and financial insecurity, and limited resources to meet work-family needs, for middle-income families.

Families with young children, by Chris Ruhm

- Two principal types of policies help parents take care of young children: parental leave & early childhood care and education (ECCE).
- In both domains, the US provides limited public support, and unequal private support
- European countries provide a more integrated set of supports:
 - At least some job-protected and paid parental leave
 - Public funding for ECCE, usually including universal preschool in the year or two before school
- Ruhm recommends moderate extensions to paid leaves, and improvements in the quality of and access to ECCE

Families with school-age children, by Kathleen Christensen and co-authors

- Although it is often thought that family demands diminish when children start school, parents play an important role in the lives of school-age children & adolescents
- Many aspects of schools reflect out-dated notions of families and parental availability, and work-family conflicts could be reduced through school reforms
- But workplace reforms are likely to play the greatest role
- Workplace flexibility is the strategy parents prefer for balancing work and family obligations
- Two types of flexibility are particularly useful:
 - Flextime arrangements
 - Policies that allow workers to take short periods of time off

Families with children with special health care needs, by Mark Schuster and co-authors

- All families have children who are sick from time to time
- 15% have children with ongoing special health care needs
- Parents play a central role in the health care of their children, but this poses challenges to both employees and employers
- To address these challenges, the authors recommend:
 - Providing discretionary leave for employees to respond to routine, acute, or short-term health care needs of children
 - Exploring other leave mechanisms for families with children with ongoing special health care needs
 - Reforming the health care system and coordinating care with other systems (e.g. schools) to alleviate the burden on working parents

Families and elder care, by Ann Bookman & Delia Kimbrel

- Americans are living longer
- Although many elders are healthy, most will eventually need care and support, often provided by employed family members
- As with children with health care needs, care needs for the elderly may be acute or ongoing
- Thus, employed caregivers need both:
 - Flexibility and leave to address short-term situations
 - Flexibility and leave to allow them to provide ongoing care

The role of employers in providing more flexibility, by Ellen Galinsky & co-authors

- The need for more workplace flexibility is a recurring theme in the volume.
- Employee surveys consistently show strong demand for flexibility but also show that many employees, particularly the less advantaged, have little access to flexibility or, if they do have access, hesitate to use it
- Flexibility offers several advantages to employers – greater employee engagement, satisfaction, retention, health – and enhances productivity and is good for the bottom-line
- The authors describe and draw out lessons learned from an intervention that successfully engaged employers, employees, and communities in implementing more flexible workplace practices and facilitating their use

The role of government, by Heather Boushey

- Another recurring theme in the volume is the potentially important role of government – as an employer, as a source of data and information, and as a source of policy
- The three main types of policy address:
 - Workplace hours and flexibility
 - Paid time off for family responsibilities
 - Covering the cost of care when caregivers are at work/school
- In all three areas, policy developments have not kept pace with the changes in the American family and workplace
- Boushey then discusses recent developments at the local, state, and federal level as well as promising future directions in policies such as workplace flexibility and paid family leave

What other countries do, by Alison Earle and co-authors

- A final theme that recurs throughout the volume is the extent to which the US might learn from other countries
- In virtually every area of work-family policy, US policies tend to be less well developed and less equitably distributed
- The authors compare policies in the world's most competitive countries and find that aside from the US:
 - All provide paid leave for new mothers
 - All (except Switzerland) provide paid leave for new fathers,
 - Most provide paid leave to care for children's health care needs, paid vacation, & a paid day of rest

Policy implications

- The evidence in the volume offers three clear implications.
- First, the key role for more workplace flexibility
- Second, the need for more equitable policies, particularly with regard to paid leave
- Third, the need to increase the involvement of sectors other than families and employers in addressing work-family issues, in particular, schools, the health care system, and elder providers

Re-thinking some assumptions

- Work-family issues are *not* necessarily an area where employer and employee interests collide – indeed, greater workplace flexibility benefits both employers and employees
- Work-family issues are *not* of concern to women only – the gender gap in time caring for family members has narrowed, and substantial numbers of men have family obligations
- Work-family issues are *not* problems that only families and employers need address – there is a role for government, and for other sectors such as preschools, schools, health care providers, and community organizations

Conclusions

- Americans have a strong work ethic, but also care deeply about their children and other loved ones
- With more parents working, and more employees having elder care responsibilities, it is no wonder that employees are increasingly voicing concerns about work-family conflicts
- Employers are responding by exploring ways to increase workplace flexibility
- Local, state, & federal governments are responding by experimenting with policies to provide paid sick leave, paid parental leave, and more support for child care
- We hope the evidence in this volume will be useful in informing these responses and in inspiring further innovation