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Having It All: Managing Jobs and Children

Nancy L. Marshall

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Phone: 781-283-2510 Fax: 781-283-2504

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents information from several studies conducted recently at the Center for Research on Women, that shed light on the kinds of supports that working parents need in order to manage jobs and children. This paper is based on a talk given at Lotus Corporation, Cambridge, MA, March 17, 1993.

The last forty years have seen dramatic social changes in the United States. Spurred by the shift from a manufacturing economy toward a service economy, as well as by other demographic and economic changes (Oppenheimer 1973, 1982), women's rate of participation in the labor force has steadily increased. While significant proportions of single mothers have been in the labor force throughout this century, with almost two-thirds of all single mothers employed in 1986 (Rix, 1988, pg. 376), the rise in women's employment rates has also spread to married women with young children. While in 1960 less than 20% of married-couple families with children under six were two-earner families, by 1985 more than half of such families were two-earner families (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1985). And, as more married women with young children have entered the labor force, married-couple families have undergone considerable change.

PARENTAL LEAVE

How, then, are two-parent families in the 90's managing children and jobs? The answer to that question is complex. The issue actually first comes up for families when a child is born or adopted. In the 1950's, the arrival of a child generally meant that the wife stayed home, at least until the child entered school. That is no longer true, and over half of all mothers return to work by the time the child is a year old.

With this increase in women who return to work in the first year, parental leave has become an important policy issue. The U.S. lags far behind other nations in parental leave policies. In 1986, Business Week reported that more than 100 countries provided job-protected maternity leave with some wage replacement. For example, in France,

mothers could take 16 weeks at full pay, up to a maximum covered by social security, for their first and second children. They could take up to six months for any additional children. Either parent could take up to two years unpaid parental leave with their job held for them, if they are employees of companies with 100 or more workers. And in Canada, mothers could take up to 15 weeks at 60% of their pay, which is covered by national social insurance (all data from Sheila B. Kammerman, cited in Business Week, October 6, 1986). Here in the U.S., prior to this year, the only federal policy that covered maternity leave was the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, which, in practice, covered fewer than 40% of working women.

While federal policy has been limited, some employers have had parental leave policies. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, in 1989, a little over one-third (37%) of employees in medium to large firms were covered by unpaid maternity leave, and less than one in five were eligible for unpaid paternity leave. Only 3 percent of workers had paid maternity leave, and one percent had paid paternity leave, separate from their other, regular paid leave, such as short-term disability and paid vacations (U.S. Department of Labor, 1990).

On February 5th, 1993, the Family and Medical Leave Act was signed into law. It represents major progress in this country, and covers about 50% of all employees. Yet the Act only enables employees to take up to 3 months unpaid leave to care for a newborn or newly adopted child (or for medical reasons).

Women's Experiences with Maternity Leave

Its not yet clear what impact the new Family Leave Act will have on working

mothers and fathers. But it may be informative to look at recent experiences of women. In 1991, the Center for Research on Women conducted a survey, with Working Mother magazine, of over 4,000 women (Marshall, 1992). Most of the readers who answered the survey had returned to work by the time their baby was a year old, the majority of them returning by the time their baby was 6 months old.

The readers reported that employers' support for women taking time off for a baby, and then returning to work, varies considerably.

- * One in six women described their company's maternity-leave policy as generous, about half described the policy as adequate.
- * One in four described their company's maternity-leave policy as miserly, and one in seven had no maternity-leave policy at all.

But women's experiences with maternity leave are influenced by more than just policy, they are also affected by the general culture of the workplace. About two thirds of the readers reported that their employers were at least somewhat supportive of their taking time off for their baby:

- * More than two out of three women agreed that "my boss was supportive of my taking time off after my last child."
- * More than two out of three women agreed that "Taking a leave hasn't hurt my career at all."

However, for many readers, their employers provided little or no support:

- * One in three women reported "I was treated less favorably after my leave."
- * About half reported that "where I work, women who take maternity leave are seen as less committed to their jobs than other workers."

Higher Job Satisfaction

For women returning to work after a baby, employer policy and workplace culture are key factors in how they feel about their jobs.

- * Almost half of women with generous maternity-leave policies were very satisfied with their current jobs, compared to only one in four women with miserly policies.
- * Twice as many women whose bosses were supportive of their taking time off after their last child reported that they were very satisfied with their jobs, compared to women whose bosses were not supportive (43% compared to 20%).

Profiles

While employer policy and workplace culture were important, so were women's expectations and goals. When we looked at women's responses closely, we found four "profiles" of mothers who returned to the job in the first year: The full-time-by-choice worker. About one in eight readers returned to work full-time after the baby, and wanted to go back full-time from the start. Women who fit this profile were more likely to describe their jobs as careers and to work as executives, administrators or managers than were other women. They were also much more likely to report that the importance of their work is the key reason that they returned to their jobs when they did. These

women were very satisfied with their current jobs, and were more likely than other women to feel that "taking a leave hasn't hurt my career at all." Almost every one of the full-time-by-choice women believes that working makes her feel good about herself, and very few find that "working leaves me with too little time to be the kind of parent I want to be."

Like other women, most of these women reported that they missed their baby a lot during the day, but most of these women (82%) did not feel strongly that they had to leave their babies sooner than they wanted. In fact, among women who returned full-time-by-choice after their babies were 6 months old, no one felt she returned too soon. For these women, working full-time while raising their children gives them the right balance of the rewards of work and parenting.

One of these women, a mother of two who works 50 hours a week, said, "I never even considered not returning to work. Working defines part of who I am as a person. I love my children -- intensely -- but after 6 weeks off I could not wait to get back to work. I even went into work and attended meetings with my daughter in tow during my 6 weeks maternity leave."

The full-time-because-we-need-the-money worker. Another one out of four readers were able to return when they thought their baby was old enough, but they had to return full-time, even though they would have preferred to return part-time at first. While work is less central for these women -- and finances were the main reason they returned when they did -- they were very similar in other ways to the full-time-by-choice worker.

One of these women, a mother of three, said the key reason she was able to return to work full-time by the time her youngest was 6 months is because her employer gave her the flexibility she needed, such as being able to come in late or leave early. She adds, "We have three wonderful adjusted children. They enjoy their day care and probably, given the choice, would take day care over being with mom all day. They have lots of friends there. When you have an A+ day care, it makes the decision of going back to work a lot easier."

The part-time worker. One out of four readers wanted to return to work part-time, at least at first, and were able to do so. They were more likely than women who returned full-time-by-choice to say that "it was easy to come back because my employer gave me the flexibility that I needed." Part-time workers were more likely to work as professionals, and less likely to work as executives, than were other women. These women have often created their part-time work options on their own -- they were less likely than other women to have had maternity leave policies at their old jobs, and more likely to have switched jobs, and employers, when they went back to work.

One reader, who returned to work part-time by the time her youngest was 6 months old, said, "I'm not cut out to be a full-time mother. As much as I love my kids, they drive me up a wall sometimes. The money I make basically pays for day care. I miss some of the benefits that a full-time job would give me - like life insurance and disability coverage - but, for me at least, the part-time job/part-time parenting keeps me sane."

The conflicted worker. Two out of five readers felt that they had to leave their babies

sooner than they wanted, and had to return to work full-time, even though they wanted to return part-time. These readers were experiencing serious conflicts as working mothers. Their overwhelming reason for returning to work was financial, and they were more likely than other women to say they would have lost their jobs if they had not returned when they did. Conflicted workers were more likely than other women to be employed as administrative support, secretaries, clerks, technicians, machine operators or assemblers. They were less likely to describe their employer's leave policy as generous, and more likely to describe it as miserly. While most mothers missed their babies during the work day, the conflicted worker felt "constantly torn about not being with my baby."

The conflicted worker was less likely to report rewards from working -- only one in three conflicted workers said that "working makes me feel good about myself," and only one in four was very satisfied with her job. Three out of four conflicted workers said that "working leaves me with too little time to be the kind of parent I want to be."

While it is tempting to say that part-time work would solve the dilemmas these conflicted workers face, in fact, it would not. These women returned full-time because they need a full-time salary. These workers would benefit from longer, paid maternity leave policies, and better pay.

COMBINING WORK AND PARENTING: ROLE STRAINS AND GAINS

Once mothers are back at work, families face new challenges as they combine employment and caring for their children. Some have argued that individuals have limited time and energy, and adding extra roles and responsibilities necessarily creates

tensions between competing demands, as well as a sense of overload and inter-role conflict (c.f., Coser, 1974; Goode, 1960; Slater, 1963). There is some evidence to support this; women and men who combine work and parenting do sometimes experience role overload and role conflict (c.f., Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Emmons, Biernat, Tiedje, Lang, & Wortman, 1990; Holahan & Gilbert, 1979). However, not all individuals experience role strain (Marshall & Barnett, 1993a; Gerson 1985).

The Center for Research on Women recently conducted a study of 300 two-earner couples, where both the man and the woman were working full-time. About one in five of the parents reported that combining work and parenting did not create strains for them and their children. When we compared parents and non-parents, we found that mothers' work-family strains are greater than fathers' and greater than non-parents' work-family strains. However, we also found that both mothers and women without children reported greater benefits or gains from combining work and family than did fathers or men without children (Marshall & Barnett, 1993a).

The level of strains or gains that parents reported depended on several things. Parents reported greater gains from combining work and family when they had good jobs, things were going well with their children, and they had high levels of social support. In addition, mothers with less traditional sex-role attitudes reported higher gains. Parents reported greater strains when they worked more than 35 or 40 hours a week, when they felt that they spent too much time on housework at home, and when they reported that parenting was demanding or stressful. We also found that parents with high prestige jobs were more likely to feel that work interfered with their family

time, and women with a child under the age of 12 were also more likely to report work-family strains (Marshall & Barnett, 1993a).

SUPPORTS FOR EMPLOYED PARENTS

While some parents do not report strains from combining work and family, and others find that the benefits balance the costs, those parents who are feeling strained by combining work and family are a reflection of the fact that our society has not kept pace with the changes in women's employment (Ross & Mirowsky 1988). There are several important supports from which all parents would benefit: changes in the division of labor in the family; societal support for quality, stable child care; and changes in the workplace, particularly, increased flexibility.

Division of Labor

In the 1950's, when most mothers in two-parent families were home full-time, the woman had primary responsibility for day-to-day care of the children and the home, and put in more hours taking care of home and children than did the man. However, when the woman goes to work outside the home, she has less time for her work at home. It's reasonable to expect that there would be some change in the division of labor -- in who does what around the house. In fact, men are doing more around the home than they used to, although women are still doing the majority of it. National time-use studies indicate that, in couples, men's share of caring for children and doing housework has increased from about one-fifth of the total time spent in the 60's to about one-third of the total time (Pleck, 1993).

In the study of 300 two-earner couples mentioned above, in at least two-thirds of the families with a child under 13, the woman has primary or total responsibility for planning, remembering and scheduling day-to-day care of their children. While the woman is the "planner", men do share supervising children's activities in more than half of the families, and men share taking time off from work to stay home with a sick child in almost half of the families. However, making child care arrangements for when the parents are at work is still the woman's task in three-quarters of the families (Marshall & Barnett, 1992).

Several studies have found that, when husbands do share in caring for their children, employed women are less likely to be depressed (Ross & Mirowsky 1988; Kessler & McRae 1982; Ross, Mirowsky & Huber 1983). In addition, another study (Kessler & McRae 1982) found that, when men share childrearing responsibilities at home, their wife's employment is a more positive experience for them than it is for men who do not share childrearing responsibilities. We found, in the study of two-earner couples, that both women and men report less psychological distress when the husband shares in supervising children's activities (Marshall & Barnett, 1992). The message here is that, as we might expect, when men are involved in childrearing, their employed wives benefit. However, the research also tells us clearly that men benefit, too.

Child Care

Non-parental child care is another crucial institutional support for two-earner couples (Ross & Mirowsky 1988). In the recent past, when parents had to manage employment and caring for their children, and wanted to do so without using non-

parental child care, they have done so in one of two ways: (1) by delaying the mother's employment until the youngest is in school or older; or (2) by arranging parental work schedules so that the parents can provide child care. Delaying employment until the children are older is no longer financially feasible for the majority of families. However, many families continue to arrange their work schedules to enable parents to care for their children. In 1987, the Center for Research on Women surveyed a representative sample of 750 families in Massachusetts (Marshall, Witte, Nichols, Marx & Colten, 1988). We found that one third of families in which both parents are employed arrange their work schedules so that one or both parents provide child care (Marshall, Witte, Nichols, Laws, Silverstein, & Mauser, 1988). In about one in five families, the mother works part-time. About one in eight families are using "tandem care" -- both parents are working full-time, but their work schedules are staggered so that one parent is always available for child care. Part-time work is more likely to be used by middle- and upper-income families while lower-income families are more likely to use tandem care rather than part-time maternal employment.

Non-parental Care

While some families can manage to combine childrearing and work through part-time employment or tandem care arrangements, the majority of families use some form of non-parental child care. More than three-quarters (86%) of children under 6 in employed-single-mother families, and almost three-quarters of young children in two-earner families, are cared for by someone other than a parent on a regular basis. Child care is also important for school-age children; about three-quarters of the older children

in employed-single-mother families, and two out of five older children in two-earner families, are cared for by someone other than a parent when the child is not in school (Marshall, et al, 1988).¹

Relatives and Babysitters. The traditional source of child care outside the immediate family has been relatives -- and relatives are still important providers, especially for infants and school-age children. About one-third (30%) of young children in care, and about half (49%) of school-age children, are cared for by relatives.² However, relatives are not always available, as families move around to follow job opportunities, and as the employment of women rises and reduces the number of women at home to watch their relatives' children.

Another source of child care is a sitter in the family's home, either someone who comes in during the day, or a live-in nanny. About one in eight (13%) children who are in regular non-parental child care are cared for by non-relative sitters (Marshall, et al, 1988).

Family Day Care. What are working parents' other options for child care? Family Day Care (care by a non-relative in the provider's home) is used for about one in six (17%) of the younger children who are in care, and for about one in eight (12%) of the older children who are in care.

Center-based Care. Center-based care is the other major option available to parents. Center-based care is offered under many different labels, including day care centers, nursery or preschool, extended day nursery school, extended day kindergarten and school age programs. About half (48%) of young children in care are in center-based care, and

one third (35%) of school-age children are in center-based care (Marshall, et al, 1988).³

Impact of Child Care on Parental Well-being

While non-parental child care is an important support for employed single mothers and two-earner families, some child care arrangements are more supportive than others. Child care can be a source of stress. For many working parents, there are the everyday stresses associated with having a child in non-parental care: there's the stress of making lunches, getting children and parents dressed and out the door, or getting the children settled with the sitter, there are the occasional tearful farewells, or the tearful refusals to leave day care because they're having too much fun, or the angst over sharing your child's care with someone else.

There are also stresses that weigh more heavily, when parents are concerned about the quality of care their child receives: is he or she getting enough stimulation, enough opportunities to play with other children, enough tender nurturing? Is their child physically safe, healthy, eating right, getting enough rest?

And there are the stresses that arise when care arrangements break down, when a provider quits, or is out sick, when a child "graduates" from one age-group and parents need to find new care, or when their child is sick and can't go to day care.

All of these stresses can affect parents' well-being or feelings of psychological distress. In the two-earner couple study (Marshall & Barnett, 1992), we found that parents, men and women, who feel that their child care arrangements do not meet their child's social development needs are more distressed. Conversely, parents whose children are in high quality care that meets their child's social development needs are

less distressed.

Child Care Stress

Parents in that study were also asked how much stress they'd experienced about their child care arrangements in the past six months. Parents who report greater stress over the past six months also report greater psychological distress. This was true for both men and women.

In addition, we found that men and women who feel that their child care arrangements do not meet their child's emotional and social needs well, or cause health problems, are more likely to report child care stress. However, men who do not share responsibility for making child care arrangements report less stress about child care than do men who share the responsibility. For women, the majority of whom are making child care arrangements, sharing the task with their husbands does not reduce their stress. This suggests that exposure to the day-to-day vicissitudes of child care arrangements (dropping off and picking up children, arrangements that breakdown, providers and children who get sick, concerns about the quality of care, etc.) is the factor associated with child care stress, rather than whether or not this task is shared (Marshall & Barnett, 1992).

Workplace Flexibility

In addition to a more equitable division of labor, and quality, stable child care, parents' lives are also easier when they have flexible jobs. Researchers have examined the impact of flexible work schedules, commonly known as Flextime, and have generally

found some positive effects (Pleck, 1992). However, only 12% of workers in 1985 reported that they could vary the beginning and ending hours of their work (Mellor, 1986). A recent study (Staines, 1990) suggests that the level of flexibility is important. Staines (1990) found that employed mothers of newborns who could change their starting and ending times on a daily basis reported lower work-family conflict, compared to those who could choose a work schedule but then had to keep that schedule for some minimum period of time.

In our study of two-earner couples (Marshall & Barnett, 1993b), we examined the importance of workplace flexibility in a broader sense, defined as having a job with sufficient flexibility to allow the worker to respond to non-work situations. This might include specific work schedules that are compatible with family needs, or the option to vary work schedules as needed, but would also include the general culture of the workplace. For instance, can workers receive and make phone calls to take care of family matters? If the babysitter is sick, or a child is sick, can the worker take time off on short notice?

Many of the men and women in the two-earner couple study have at least some job flexibility; this probably reflects the high proportion of managers and professionals in the study (Marshall & Barnett, 1993b). Two-thirds of the men and women can set their own work schedule and report that their hours fit their needs. Almost three-fourths report that their job is flexible enough to allow them to respond to non-work situations.

However, workplaces vary in the flexibility they offer, and this variation is

reflected in job satisfaction and work-family strains. Workers with more flexible jobs report greater job satisfaction, and reduced work interference in their home lives. Flexibility is associated with greater job satisfaction and reduced work-family strains for all workers, mothers, fathers, women without children, and men without children (Marshall & Barnett, 1993b).

CONCLUSION

What does all this mean for managing jobs and children? There is a pretty clear message here about what parents need to be good parents, and good workers, who are relatively happy with our lives. First, they need the basics that everyone needs: a good job, good relationships with their families, and strong social support.

In addition, when families first have a child, they need paid parental leave policies that allow both parents some time off, and at least one parent the option of being home with their child for at least as long as six months, without a loss of pay or job. Some of us will happily return sooner, and others will choose to not return until later, but we all need the choice.

Once back at work, both parents need to be involved parents, sharing all the daily responsibilities of childrearing. In addition, families need high quality child care, where their children receive responsive, nurturing care, stimulation that is developmentally appropriate, and opportunities to learn about themselves and their world, and to develop relationships with other children and adults. Families also need stable child care, including backup plans for when their child care is not available, or a child is sick and

can't go to the regular care arrangements. Finally, parents need support from their employers, including an acceptance of workers who take parental leave, and flexibility at work once parents return to work.

While this seems like a simple prescription, in fact, each of these supports is not yet available to all families. The lives of working parents will be improved to the extent that parents find such support from within their families, from their employers and from society at large.

APPENDIX

Based on the research described in the preceding paper, we have created a self-administered checklist for working parents. This checklist can help parents to identify both the supports they have, or don't have, and some of the sources of the stress they experience.

MANAGING WORK, FAMILY AND CHILD CARE

Answer each item. Then add up the points (in italics) associated with your answers.

Work

In an average week, I work:

| | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 0-10 hrs | 11-29 | 30-40 | 41-50 | 51+ |
| <i>3 pts</i> | <i>1 pt</i> | <i>1 pt</i> | <i>3 pts</i> | <i>4 pts</i> |

My occupation is:

| | | | | |
|----------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Other | Admin. Support | Tech- nical | Profess- ional | Manage- ment |
| <i>1</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>4</i> | <i>4</i> |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| | Never/ Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Almost Always |
| I have too much to do at work | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| My work is challenging | <i>4</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>1</i> |

Parenting

| | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| I have too much to do at home | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| I enjoy the time I spend with my child(ren) | <i>4</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>1</i> |

Work & Family

| | | | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Because of my family responsibilities, the time I spend working is more pressured | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| Because of my job responsibilities, the time I spend with my family is more pressured | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |

MANAGING WORK, FAMILY AND CHILD CARE

| | Never/ Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Almost Always |
|--|------------------|-----------|-------|------------------|
| <u>Supports</u> | | | | |
| I can find someone (friend, family, co-worker) to talk to when I need to | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| My spouse (or an adult you live with) shares watching the children | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| My job is flexible enough that I can respond to family situations | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| <u>Child Care</u> | | | | |
| My child's social and emotional development needs are well met by his/her current care | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| In the last 6 months, I've had to make other arrangements for my child's care (take time off from work, find another provider, etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

What scores mean: 13-16 Few stresses from work and family
 17-28 Typical working parent
 29-44 Some extra stresses
 45-52 Highly stressed

Endnotes

1. While these data are from Massachusetts, national data show similar patterns. For example, in the fall of 1987, 92% of children under five, whose mothers were employed and not living with a husband, were in non-parental care. Similarly, 71% of children under five in two-earner families were in non-parental care (calculated from table 1 in U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990).
2. The proportions of children in the various types of care will add to more than 100% because some children were in more than one type of care on a regular basis.
3. These data are for Massachusetts. National data for children under five with an employed mother show that 29% of children in non-parental care are with relatives, 8% are with sitters, 30% are in family day care, and 24% are in center-based care (calculated from table 1 in U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). For children five to 14, national data show that 57% of children in non-parental care are with relatives, 8% are with sitters, 18% are in family day care, and 17% are in center-based care (calculated from tables 1 and 6 in U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). Massachusetts and national figures for relative care and sitter care are similar. The data suggests that more children in Massachusetts are in center-based care, and fewer are in family day care, than is true nationally. However, the two data sources are not directly comparable. Unlike the national data, the "younger children" in Massachusetts include five-year-olds, who are more likely to be in center-based care than are younger children. The "older children" in the national data include 13 and 14 year-olds, who are less likely to be in center-based care than are five to 12 year-old children.

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