

## Family and Work

How the Balancing Act Disadvantages Women in the Workplace

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Though women have more opportunities in the workplace than ever before, they still lag behind men in terms of wages and access to high-status positions and occupations. Mounting evidence suggests much of this inequality is rooted in the family<sup>1</sup>. Analyzing a sample of young, full-time working men and women, one study concludes that an astounding 41% of the wage gap is due to the different effects of marriage and children on men's and women's careers.<sup>2</sup> While men's careers and earnings are either unaffected or even enhanced by marriage and children, women's earnings fall about 7% for each child they have.<sup>3</sup> Fully aware of these inequalities, ambitious women often must choose between having a career and having a family, a choice men do not have to make: in a survey of managers, fully 2/3 of the married men had children, but less than 1/3 of the women did.<sup>4</sup>

As these figures suggest, understanding how work and family interact and why working women are penalized for their family roles is a first step in achieving equality for working women. This fact sheet provides findings from recent studies on the relationship between family and women's careers, debunks some common myths, and considers proposed solutions to the problems working women face.

### By the Numbers

Ratio of women's earnings to men's <sup>5</sup> :	73.6%
Ratio of mothers' earnings to fathers':	66%
Ratio of childless women's earnings to men's:	84%
Percent of parents who work full-time <sup>6</sup> :	52% (mothers), 90% (fathers)
Ratio of mothers' employment to fathers':	58%
Percent of married couples with only husband working:	19.4%
Percent of married couples with only wife working:	5.8%
Percent of married couples with both partners working:	52.7%
Hours per week married couples spend on housework <sup>7</sup> :	33.2 (women), 18.6 (men)
Ratio of men's hours to women's hours:	56%
Percent of children cared for by a single mother <sup>8</sup> :	24.3%
Percent of children cared for by a single father:	4.6%

### Myths & Reality

*Myth: Women choose to prioritize family over work. The fact that mothers earn less than fathers and less than women without children simply reflects the priorities of working mothers.*

**Reality:** While women (and men, for that matter) value their families, there is no indication this means women place less importance on their careers. Indeed, for many women, being a good mother means earning a good wage<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, surveys of young men and women suggest they hold similar career and family ambitions: 96.6% of women and 97.6% of men say they expect to work after having children. Despite the ambitions of these young women, however, only 46.3% of young men think their wives will work once they become parents. Perhaps reflecting these unequal gender expectations, over twice as many women as men anticipate encountering work-family conflict<sup>10</sup>. These figures suggest that the accommodations women make to balance work and family are not necessarily indications of the values women hold. It is likely, rather, that the unequal division of labor within the family combined with a workplace structure that ignores or devalues the family responsibilities of workers constrains the options available to working women.

*Myth: Jobs traditionally held by women, part-time jobs, and temporary employment make it easier for women to combine work and family responsibilities. While these jobs may pay less than other jobs, women prefer such employment because they want to be able to take care of their families.*

**Reality:** Women actually have less flexible work schedules than men do. Because traditionally female and part-time jobs are also typically low-paid and low-status jobs, women are less likely than men to be able to decide when to take a day off work or to alter the hours they work<sup>11</sup>. Temporary work is not much of an improvement: jobs are often assigned at the last minute, which makes finding suitable child care arrangements difficult.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, there is no evidence that mothers prefer these types of jobs to higher paying jobs. In a study following women who had recently given birth, Estes and Glass found that new mothers were more likely to change jobs for higher wages than for more flexibility<sup>13</sup>.

*Myth: Combining work and family creates the same problems for all women.*

**Reality:** While all women experience penalties in the workplace, the challenges facing working women vary considerably by race, social class, occupation, and other characteristics. Low-income women, for instance, are unable to purchase many of the services women with higher incomes use to meet work and family demands. Similarly, the higher incidence of single motherhood among African American women means that the challenges they face are different than those of white women. In addition to these differences, stereotypes about minority and low-income women and discrimination create additional burdens. As a result, no single solution will meet the needs of all working women. For example, when asked about the types of policies that would make their lives easier, poor women cited community-based childcare, while middle class women preferred childcare provided at their workplace<sup>14</sup>.

*Myth: Only mothers experience work-family conflict.*

**Reality:** Other types of care-givers, including fathers, also struggle to meet the demands of work and family. Although mothers bear the disproportionate burden of child-rearing, an increasing number of men are assuming an equal share of parenting responsibilities, and over 3 million children live with a single father<sup>15</sup>. These fathers face many of the same problems working mothers routinely experience. However, because breadwinning, not care-giving, is the type of family involvement expected from fathers, men receive less support from bosses and co-workers in meeting their family responsibilities. In addition, other types of care-givers – like children caring for elderly parents or same-sex partners caring for one another – must also balance work and family. Estimates vary, but as much as 20% of the working population provides care for an ill or disabled adult in a given year<sup>16</sup>. The devaluation of care-giving in the workplace is a primary mechanism through which gender inequality is maintained, but it is important to remember that mothers are not the only ones affected.

## Solutions

Numerous solutions have been proposed to help women balance career and family demands and to make combining work and care-giving easier for all workers. Among these, flexible scheduling, job sharing, on-site childcare facilities, child and adult care expense plans, and short-term leaves are the most common. Unfortunately, few of these benefits are guaranteed to all workers, and the workers most likely to need work-family benefits – women, minorities, and low-wage workers – are also those least likely to hold jobs providing these benefits<sup>17</sup>. Further, most of these ‘solutions’ are only temporary: they do little to alter the underlying gender inequality within families or the devaluation of care-giving in the workplace that create work-family conflict in the first place<sup>18</sup>.

## Important Legislation and Federal Policies

**Pregnancy Discrimination Act:** Passed in 1978, the PDA makes it illegal for employers use pregnancy as a basis to make employment decisions. In addition, the PDA requires employers to treat pregnancy the same as any other similar condition in the provision of benefits.

**Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993:** The FMLA provides up to 12 weeks per year of unpaid leave to care for a newborn or newly adopted child, an ill child or relative, or for an employee’s own illness. It is limited to employees who a) worked at least 1,250 hours for the same employer in the preceding 12 months and b) worked for an employer with at least 50 employees within 75 miles of the worksite.

The most recent estimates show that 17.1% of employees eligible for an FMLA leave took a leave in the preceding year. Since FMLA leaves are unpaid, many employees report that financial concerns led them to hasten their return to work or to forgo taking a leave at all. While the most common reason for taking a leave was for the employee's own health, a substantial portion of leave-takers used leaves for care-giving. There is evidence, however, that gender roles influence leave-taking behavior: of all leave-takers, more women than men took leaves to care for children or other relatives<sup>19</sup>.

**Child Care and Development Fund:** Revised along with welfare reform in 1996, the CCDF provides block grants to states to provide child care for low income and working families. Between 1997 and 2002 federal expenditures through CCDF reached nearly \$20 billion, but government estimates suggest that only 15% of children eligible for CCDF subsidies received them<sup>20</sup>. As a result, lack of child care is a major hurdle to women trying to work their way off and stay off welfare.

**Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit:** One of the largest federal subsidies for child care (comprising 60% of all federal spending on child care in 1996), this tax credit allows parents to deduct eligible child or adult care expenses from their federal income tax bills. However, because the credit is non-refundable, it does not benefit low-income families. Even so, through this program middle-income families can recover approximately 20% of their child care expenses<sup>21</sup>.

### Resources for Further Information

*In addition to the sources cited here, the following books, articles, organizations and websites will be useful to teachers, researchers, and practitioners interested in learning more about work and family.*

#### **Books and Articles**

*Black Working Wives.* Bart Landry (2000. Berkley: University of California Press.)

“Envisioning the Integration of Family and Work: Toward a Kinder, Gentler Workplace.” Jennifer Glass (2000. *Contemporary Sociology* 29:129-143.)

*Family Man: Fatherhood, Housework, and Gender Equity.* Scott Coltrane (1996. Oxford University Press)

“Marriage, the Costs of Children, and Gender Inequality.” Paula England. (2000. Pp.320-342. In Linda Waite (ed.) *The Ties That Bind: Perspectives on Marriage and Cohabitation.* NY: Aldine de Gruyter.)

*The Price of Motherhood.* Ann Crittenden. (2001. New York: Metropolitan Books.)

*The Time Bind.* Arlie Hochschild (1997. New York: Metropolitan Books.)

*Unbending Gender.* Joan Williams (2000. New York: Oxford University Press)

*Work & Family in America: A Reference Handbook.* Leslie Stebbins (2001. California: ABC-Clilo.)

-The extensive list Stebbins provides of videos, books, journals, and organizations will be especially useful to teachers and researchers.

#### **Research and Policy Organizations**

Families and Work Institute

<http://www.familiesandwork.org>

Institute for Women's Policy Research

<http://www.iwpr.org>

National Partnership for Women and Families

<http://www.nationalpartnership.org>

Sloan Work and Family Research Network

[http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/wfnetwork](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/wfnetwork)

-The online work/family encyclopedia and classroom activities will be of interest to teachers.

#### **Government Organizations and Information**

Administration for Children and Families

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov>

Bureau of Labor Statistics

<http://www.bls.gov>

Department of Labor

<http://www.dol.gov>

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

<http://www.eeoc.gov>

Women's Bureau

<http://www.dol.gov/wb>

#### **State Government Information**

Visit your state's department of labor website for information on specific state policies and resources. A listing of state websites is available at [www.dol.gov/esa/contacts/state\\_of.htm](http://www.dol.gov/esa/contacts/state_of.htm).

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- <sup>1</sup> While this fact sheet focuses on the role of family, family is only one of many factors that contribute to gender inequality in the workplace. In particular, discrimination, occupational sex segregation, and the so-called 'glass ceiling' are important sources of disadvantage for women in the workplace. See Irene Padavic and Barbara Reskin's (2002) *Women and Men at Work*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press) for a more comprehensive analysis of the sources of gender inequality within the workplace.
- <sup>2</sup> Waldfogel, Jane. 1998. "The Family Gap for Young Women in the United States and Britain: Can Maternity Leave Make a Difference?" *Journal of Labor Economics* 16(3): 505-545.
- <sup>3</sup> Budig, Michelle and Paula England. 2001. "The Wage Penalty for Motherhood." *American Sociological Review* 66: 204-225. See also Waldfogel, Jane. 1997. "The Effect Of Children on Women's Wages." *American Sociological Review* 62: 209-217
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office. 2002. "A New Look through the Glass Ceiling: Where Are the Women?" Available online at [www.equality2020.org/glass.pdf](http://www.equality2020.org/glass.pdf) (pg. 11)
- <sup>5</sup> Figures reported throughout this fact sheet compare men and women who work full-time, year around. See the source document for a full description of how figures are measured. U.S. Department of Labor. 2002. "Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2001." Available online at [www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2001.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2001.pdf) Tables 15, 9
- <sup>6</sup> Parental status is determined by the presence of children under 18 in the household. 'Child-less' refers to the absence of children under 18 years old in the household, and thus includes many parents with grown children. The effects of child-raising on women's wages and careers, however, likely extends beyond the period in which children are directly in the household, so these figures probably underestimate the penalty mothers experience in earnings. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2002. "Table 5: Employment Status of the Population by Sex, Marital Status, Age of Own Children under 18, 2000-01 annual averages." Available online at [www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.t05.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.t05.htm)
- <sup>7</sup> Noonan, Mary. 2001. "The Impact of Domestic Work on Men's and Women's Wages." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63 (November): 1134-1145.
- <sup>8</sup> Casper, Lynne and Suzanne Bianchi. 2002. *Continuity & Change in the American Family*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. (p 116)
- <sup>9</sup> Estes, Sarah Beth and Jennifer Glass. 1996. "Job Changes Following Childbirth." *Work and Occupations* 23(4): 405-436.
- <sup>10</sup> Johnson, Monica Kirkpatrick and Jeylan Mortimer. 2000. "Work-Family Orientations and Attainments in the Early Life Course." Pp 215-248. In Toby Parcel and Daniel Cornfield (eds). *Work & Family: Research Informing Policy*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- <sup>11</sup> McCrate, Elaine. 2002. "Working Mothers in a Double Bind." Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper. Available online at <http://epinet.org>
- <sup>12</sup> McAllister, Jean. 1998. "Sisyphus at Work in the Warehouse: Temporary Employment in Greenville, South Carolina." Pp. 221-242 in Kathleen Barker and Kathleen Christensen (eds.), *Contingent Work: American Employment Relations in Transition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- <sup>13</sup> Estes, Sarah Beth and Jennifer Glass. 1996. "Job Changes Following Childbirth." *Work & Occupations* 23 (4): 405-436.
- <sup>14</sup> Lambert, Susan. 1999. "Lower-Wage Workers and the New Realities of Work and Family." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*. 562:174-190. (pg 177)
- <sup>15</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2000. *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- <sup>16</sup> Fredriksen-Goldsen, Karen and Andrew Scharlach. 2001. *Families and Work: New Directions in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- <sup>17</sup> Blair-Loy, Mary and Amy Wharton. 2002. "Employees' Use of Work-Family Policies and the Workplace Social Context." *Social Forces* 80(3): 813-845. Deitch, Cynthia and Matt Huffman. 2001. "Family-Responsive Benefits and the Two-Tiered Labor Market." Pp. 103-130. In Rosanna Hertz and Nancy Marshall (eds.) *Working Families: The Transformation of the American Home*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Glass, Jennifer and Sarah Beth Estes. 1997. "The Family Responsive Workplace." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 23:298-313
- <sup>18</sup> For a fuller development of this criticism, see Gerson, Kathleen and Jerry Jacobs. 2001. "Changing the Structure and Culture of Work" Pp. 207-226. In Rosanna Hertz and Nancy Marshall (eds.) *Working Families: The Transformation of the American Home*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- <sup>19</sup> In contrast, men were more likely to take leaves for their own health reasons. U.S. Commission on Family and Medical Leave. "Balancing the Needs of Families and Employers: Family and Medical Leave Surveys 2000 Update." Available online at [www.dol.gov/asp/fmla](http://www.dol.gov/asp/fmla). See also Sandberg, Joanne and Daniel Cornfield. 2000. "Returning to Work: The Impact of Gender, Family, and Work on Terminating a Family or Medical Leave." Pp 161-184. In Toby Parcel and Daniel Cornfield (eds). *Work & Family: Research Informing Policy*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- <sup>20</sup> U.S. House of Representatives. 2000. *The 2000 Green Book*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. (p598)
- <sup>21</sup> Technically, all families are eligible for this tax credit, but poor families do not pay enough in taxes to use the credit. Fredriksen-Goldsen, Karen and Andrew Scharlach. 2001. *Families and Work*. New York: Oxford University Press. (see pages 207-208). Folbre, Nancy. 2001. "Public Support for Parents." Pp 63-85. In Mary King (ed.) *Squaring Up: Policy Strategies to Raise Women's Incomes in the United States*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (p. 72)