



Work *and* Family Life

RECIPROCAL EFFECTS

This article draws on data from the Institute's Australian Family Life Course Study to examine the extent to which work and home life impinge on each other. The authors discuss how factors related to the working environment, family circumstances and time pressures influence these reciprocal effects, and they identify the main predictors of work impinging on home life.

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At the heart of work–family/work–life issues is a paradox: the essential competition between the business imperative to be productive and efficient in the market place and the need of workers to enjoy satisfying family and personal lives. According to Rapoport and Bailyn (1996): 'The struggle to have both a good family life (or personal life) and a good career arises from a dominant societal image of the ideal worker as "career-primary", the person who is able and willing to put work first and for whom work time is infinitely expandable.'

Work and family conflicts and tensions can occur as the result of role overload or role interference when there is not enough time or energy to meet the commitments of multiple roles or the expectations and demands if the two roles conflict (Duxbury and Higgins 1994). For workers with family responsibilities, time appears to be the major juggernaut of those who are combining paid work with family responsibilities – time for children, time with partners, time for elderly parents, and time for household chores, personal leisure, and meeting the demands of work.

Although work and family studies reveal that balancing these two roles can be stressful for many families, research consistently finds that between 25 and 40 per cent of respondents indicate that their job

interferes with family life to some extent (Wolcott and Glezer 1995; Morehead et al. 1997; Galinsky et al. 1998).

Reciprocal impacts

To gain an understanding of the reciprocal impacts of employment on family and personal life, and of family on work life, 2688 respondents in the Australian Family Life Course Study, a random national longitudinal telephone survey conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in late 1996, were asked a number of questions about the balance between their work and family life.

Respondents were asked: 'Do you find that your work life interferes with your home life?' Figure 1 shows that, whether employee or self-employed, significantly more men (40 per cent) than women (28 per cent) felt that work interfered with home life.

Those with partners were also asked whether their partner's work interfered with home life. Figure 1 shows that, in contrast to their own work situation, women (35 per cent) were more likely than men (28 per cent) to say that their partner's work added to family tension.

Finally, respondents were asked whether their home life interfered with their work life. Figure 1 shows that surprisingly few men or women (10 per cent) claimed this to be the case.

Work Impinging on home life

The impact of work on family and personal lives varies across the ages and stages of people's lives. Work tended to interfere the most with home life for those in the age ranges where child rearing and job and career demands were at a peak.

More than 40 per cent of men and 30 per cent of women aged 30–49 years felt work interfered with home life. Older women aged 50–60 plus and men aged 60 or over (20 per cent) were least likely to feel this strain, although men aged 50–59 (35 per cent) were still feeling the effect of work demands on home life.

Work environment

Recent research highlights the increased levels of work intensity, particularly longer working hours (Morehead et al. 1997; WFD 1998). In the Institute's Australian Family Life Course Study, 66 per cent of men and 23 per cent of women were working more than 41 hours per week. The data confirm that the hours of work, particularly long working hours, influenced significantly how work affected home life.

Half of all employed men and 46 per cent of employed women who worked 41 or more hours felt work interfered with home life compared to less than one-quarter (22 per cent) of women and the small proportion of men who worked less than 30 hours a week.

The level of control over working hours was examined and found not to be associated with the degree to which work interfered with home life for both men and women.

Preferred work hours

Working hour preferences were clearly related to how men and women felt about the impact of work on home life. The preference to work fewer hours was associated with working longer than standard hours for men and full-time for women. Around 60 per cent of men and women who indicated that they preferred to work fewer hours than they currently worked said that work interfered with home life compared with about 25 per cent of men and 15 per cent of women who were content with the hours they worked.

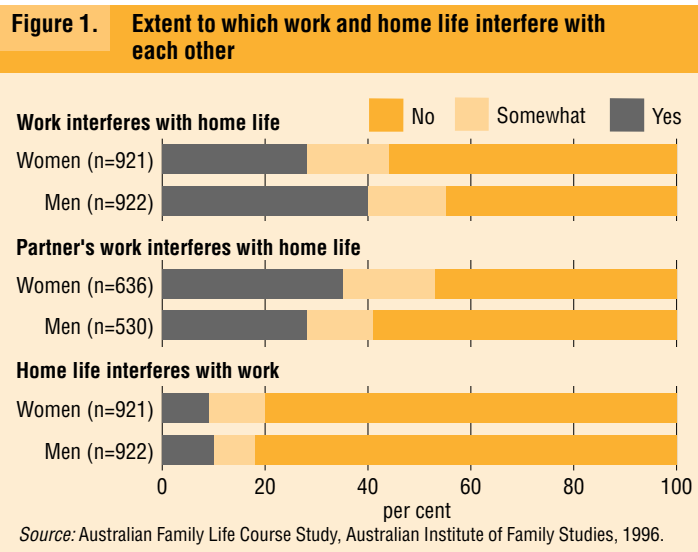
Occupational status

Although higher status occupations usually confer greater control and flexibility of time, people working in higher status jobs tend to work longer hours, under pressure (Morehead et al. 1997). In the Institute study, respondents in white collar occupations reported significantly higher levels of work interference in home life (men 45 per cent, women 38 per cent) than lower white collar workers (men 36 per cent, women 22 per cent), or blue collar workers (men 34 per cent and 27 per cent).

Couples with children under 18 years

The presence of children can complicate the processes of balancing work and family demands. In addition to the organisation of child care and after school activities, children become ill and parental time and energy are needed for just ordinary daily nurturing and support.

The age of the youngest child had little impact on the degree to which work interfered with home life for mothers, but for fathers the presence of younger children seemed to have a greater impact. Fathers who worked long hours, particularly those with young children, were most likely to feel that work interfered with home life. It should be borne in mind that it is women who tend to adjust their working hours or leave the workforce if work is interfering with home life during the child bearing years.



Where both partners are employed, either partner's work schedules and conditions may affect family life. A good day at work can spill over into cheerfulness at home, while a harassed day may reduce a person's energy and tolerance for handling everyday household tasks and hassles as well as limiting their patience to be interested and involved with other family members (Crouter 1994; Lambert 1990).

Overall, 47 per cent of fathers and 41 per cent of full-time working mothers in couples with children under age 18 indicated that their work interfered with home life. Mothers who worked part-time were significantly less likely to feel that work interfered with home life (21 per cent). It should be remembered that the reason many women work part-time is to achieve a better balance between work and family responsibilities (Wolcott and Glezer 1995).

Around one-third of couple fathers (31 per cent) and mothers (38 per cent) who worked full-time, compared with 43 per cent of mothers working part-time, also felt that their partner's work interfered with home life. Again, although part-time work improves the balance of work and home for mothers, it may not increase the time fathers working long hours have for home life.

More men than women in dual working couples regard their own work as interfering with home life; this is not surprising since men tend to work longer hours per week than women, and have less time for family and social life.

Wives who worked part-time or not at all take on more child care and household activities, therefore relieving their partners from some of these demands. This may enable men to work longer hours. On the other hand, because they work part-time and tend to assume more household tasks, these women may wish for more sharing of household tasks, child care and social life from husbands who were putting in long hours at work.

Lone mothers with children under 18 years

For lone mothers, the potential for work to interfere with family life may be greater than in couple families since all responsibilities fall on the one parent. Overall, 39 per cent of lone mothers with children under 18 years found work interfered with home life. As with mothers in two-parent families, lone mothers working full-time (50 per cent) are more likely to experience work interference in family life than those working part-time (27 per cent).

Home life impinging on work

In commenting on the reciprocal influences of work and family conflict, Frone et al. (1994) concluded: 'It appears that employees are better at managing the potentially disrupting influence of their family demands on work life than they are at managing the potentially disrupting influence of their work-related demands on home life.'

Confirming this conclusion, Figure 1 shows that only 10 per cent of employed men and women in the Institute's Australian Family Life Course Study believed that home interfered with work. There

were no significant differences by age and life stage. Irrespective of the ages of children who were living at home, only 11 per cent of men, 13 per cent of women working full-time, and 10 per cent of women working part-time said that home life interfered with work. Ten per cent of lone mothers working full-time or part-time reported similar feelings.

Whether or not their partners worked full-time, part-time, or not at all, appeared to make no difference to men and women in a couple relationship in their perceptions of whether home life interfered with work.

In terms of reciprocal effects, among the 40 per cent of all men who found working interfered with home life, one in five found home life interfering with their work situation. Among partnered men whose work interfered with family life, half report some interference from their partner's work on their home life.

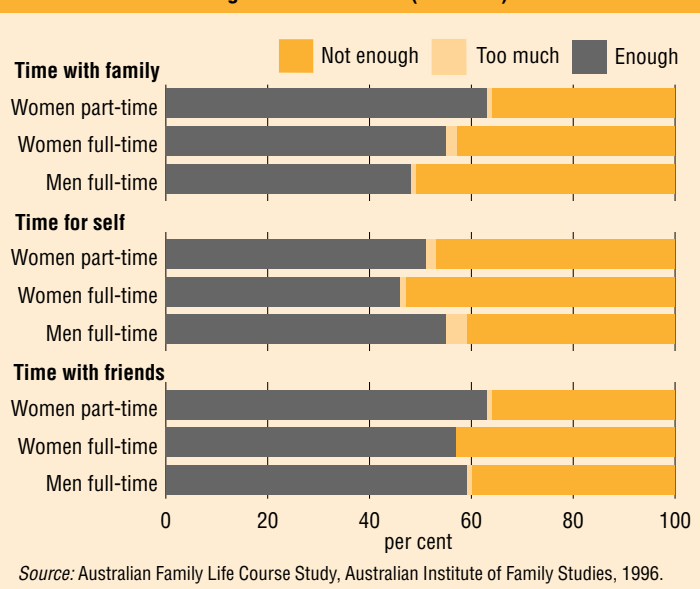
For the 28 per cent of women who experienced work interfering with home life, one in five agreed that home was interfering with work life; for those who were partnered and were experiencing work interfering with home life, 59 per cent found their partner's work interfered with their home life.

Similar findings were reported in a major United States workforce study (Galinsky et al. 1998). Only 17 per cent of employees said that their family or personal life sometimes or often kept them from doing as good a job at work as they could. A higher proportion of employees felt that family or personal life sometimes or often drained them of the energy needed to do their job (28 per cent), or kept them from concentrating on their job (33 per cent).

Achieving a Balance

Finding the time and energy for both work, family and personal life is the Holy Grail for most workers. Aspects of how time constraints affected respondents' lives was examined in the Institute's Australian Family Life Course Study.

Figure 2. Time pressures by full-time or part-time work status: all working men and women (n = 1829)



Time for self, family and friends

When all respondents who were in the labour force were asked whether the amount of time they had with family was enough, 51 per cent of men and 44 per cent of women working full-time replied there was not enough time. Although working part-time makes a difference, over one-third (36 per cent) of women working part-time still said there was not enough time with family (Figure 2).

When it came to time for oneself, women working full-time felt they had the least amount of time (53 per cent) compared to women working part-time (47 per cent), and men (41 per cent). Women with children who worked full-time were most likely to feel the lack of time for themselves (63 per cent).

Overall, around 40 per cent of all men and women said they did not have enough time for friends. It is interesting that working part-time for women made no difference in this regard.

Across the life course, age did not significantly affect how men and women felt about having enough time for family and friends.

Not surprisingly, feelings of time pressures are associated with feelings that work interfered with home life. Around 40 per cent of women and between 50 and 60 per cent of men who reported having insufficient time for themselves, their families or friends also reported that work affected home life.

Past research (Duxbury and Higgins 1994; Hochschild 1989; Gutek et al. 1991) suggests that women are more likely than men to feel that family demands come before personal needs, and to feel more conflict or guilt if their work role impinges on family time. Surprisingly, Bittman and Pixley (1997) conclude from time use surveys that Australian parents, both male and female, have increased the amount of time they spend with their children. Between 1987–1992 women have spent an additional one hour and 24 minutes per week, and men an extra two hours per week caring for children.

Feeling stressed and pressured

Recent research highlights the increased levels of stress due to added pressures in the workplace and perceptions that it has become more difficult to balance work and family lives. In addition to the intensification of work, feelings of insecurity about one's job as redundancies become more commonplace can add to a sense that one has to devote even more time to the workplace so as to be seen to be a committed employee. For the self-employed, increased competition means even longer hours are seen to be necessary to service clients and customers (Walker 1998).

To obtain some idea of work and family pressures in the lives of those in the Institute study, respondents in the workforce were asked whether they felt too rushed to do the things they had to do, and how often they felt tired and run down.

Around 49 per cent of all employed men and 59 per cent of women often felt too rushed. Men aged 30–60 years and women aged 30–50 were affected. Similarly, 43 per cent of men and 53 per cent of women often felt tired and run down. However, age

was not a factor. Feeling rushed and tired were positively correlated with work interfering with home life for both working men and women.

These findings are consistent with recent overseas research. Half of full-time workers in a British survey (WFD 1998) were concerned about having too little time with their families, and 25 per cent did not believe it was possible to have a good family life and get ahead in their current job. Those most concerned about too little time with family were professionals (67 per cent), those working in large companies (56 per cent), and those with small children (61 per cent). Marginally more men than women felt this way. Around 27 per cent of employees surveyed in a United States study felt they often did not have enough time for their family, or other important people in their lives. or for themselves (Galinsky et al. 1998).

Caring and stress

While time and energy for children may dominate the earlier stages of the life course, caring for the elderly and for partners as they age come to the fore in the later stages of working life. Thus the reciprocal effects of work and family life are ongoing across the life course.

Studies of employed caregivers of elderly, ill and disabled people conclude that combining paid work with caring could be both stressful and enhancing. Positive aspects of work on caring obligations include increased financial resources and a better relationship with the care recipient because of the stimulation and satisfaction at work. Reduced time or energy for caregiving and caregiver stress are major negative aspects of combining roles (Sharlach 1994; Caring Costs Alliance 1996; Phillips 1995; Moen et al. 1996; Murphy et al. 1997).

In the Institute study, 13 per cent of employed respondents identified themselves as main carers of the elderly, ill and disabled. For employed caregivers, two-thirds of whom were aged 30–50 years, the reciprocal impacts of work on family life were similar to workers without main caring responsibilities, and to parents in the ordinary child rearing stage of life.

While being a main carer was not strongly associated with work to home interference, where either the respondent or their partner had health problems this was significantly related to work being seen to impact on home life, for both men and women.

Satisfaction from family life

The social, emotional and cultural environment at work has been shown to affect family dynamics. Hochschild (1997) reports that many fathers and particularly mothers of young children found their workplace more satisfying than their home environment. Hochschild describes workplaces where sympathetic supervisors, feelings of team spirit, and rewards for work well done were in contrast to homes where children are fractious, housework is unending, and demands on time and energy seem overwhelming, especially when husbands are perceived as not doing their share.

Hochschild makes the critical point that higher expectations of family relationships and parenting today, both material and psychological, complex family structures, and an environment of diminishing community support for parents and family life, are the aetiology of these attitudes. She argues that family relationships are at risk when time at work becomes, whether by choice or coercion, dominant.

When it comes to feelings about family life and work life, somewhat in contrast to Hochschild's American employees, employed Australian parents appear to gain much satisfaction from family life.

Around 80 per cent of all employed men and women in the Australian Family Life Course Study said that when things were not going well at work they generally gained satisfaction from their home life. Results were the same for mothers and fathers of children under 18, regardless of their age.

On the other hand, when things were not going well at home, only 40 per cent of men said they gained satisfaction from their work. Interestingly however, 60 per cent of women employed full-time and part-time generally found satisfaction in work even when things were not going well at home; this was particularly the case for women in higher status jobs.

Men in blue collar positions were less likely to say home life compensated for less satisfaction from work. While a work identity has defined most men's concepts of self, working-class men particularly have been seen to be less involved in some of the practical and emotional aspects of family life and, therefore, may find it less easy to substitute satisfactions from one sphere to the other (Probert 1996). In general, lower incomes means that, for women particularly, there is less ability to ease some of the domestic and child care tasks at home which contribute to family tensions.

Data from the Australian Family Life Course Study indicate that workers who find that work is interfering with home life have significantly lower levels of work satisfaction and general life satisfaction. Also respondents who report that home life is interfering with work life have significantly lower levels of work satisfaction and general life satisfaction. Lower levels of job performance and work satisfaction have been found in other studies where work demands leave insufficient time and energy for family life (Galinsky et al. 1997; Morehead et al. 1997).

Predictors of work interfering with home life

As this paper has shown, people are far more likely to report work impacting on home life than home impinging on work. In order to identify the main predictors of work interfering with home life for those in couple families with children under the age of 18, the multivariate technique of discriminant function analysis was used.

The following independent variables related to work were: working hours, preferred working hours, work satisfaction, occupation level. The independent variables related to individual and family circumstances were: age, education level,

age of youngest child, marital satisfaction, general life satisfaction, home life interferes with work, partner's work interferes with home life, not enough time for self, not enough time for partner, feeling tired and run down, feeling too rushed to do the things you have to do.

The main predictors for partnered women with children under 18 of work interfering with home life (79 per cent of cases correctly predicted) were: prefer to work less hours; partner's work interferes with home life; and feel tired and run down.

The main predictors for partnered men with children under 18 of work interfering with home life (78 per cent of cases correctly predicted) were: prefer to work less hours; partner's work interfering with home life; home life interfering with work; not enough time for family; working long hours; and having higher education.

So for both sexes, preferring to work fewer hours, and finding one's partner's job is interfering with home life are two of the main predictors of



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work impacting on family life; this is followed for women by feeling tired and run down. Additional predictors for men of work spilling over into family life are when home life impinges on work and they have insufficient time for family. These pressures were also more evident for men working longer hours, often associated with higher educational status and occupations.

Data from the Australian Family Life Course Study consistently demonstrates how work interferes with home life, both one's own work and one's partner's work. The data also confirm that long working hours generate time pressures for meeting work, family and personal needs. However, men and women report far less interference from home to work, a common result of other work and family studies.

Conclusion

In her book *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, Arlie Russell Hochschild (1997) muses that: 'The idea of more time for family life seems to have died, gone to heaven, and become an angel of an idea.'

When all is said and done, there are only so many hours in a day and days in a week. Families require time and energy to nurture and enjoy. Work requires time and effort to earn essential income and keep businesses profitable. If families are important to an individual's wellbeing as parents

and partners and to the community in the form of involved citizens, then a better way has to be found to enable these commitments to be integrated. The current trend to long and pressured hours at work, the ubiquitous presence of work at home with laptops, faxes and mobile phones, combined with fear of potential redundancy if work doesn't take priority over family demands, does not engender a positive or satisfying environment for family and community life.

Employees who can achieve a more satisfying balance between personal, family, and work requirements and needs will be able to be more supportive as partners, more effective as parents and more involved as community participants. Stronger families and communities are more likely to generate the best attributes in future citizens including the future workforce. When workplace demands and stress contribute to tensions in family relationships, not only work performance is impaired, but the quality of children's, parent's and community life is also diminished (Hochschild 1997; McKenna 1997; Edgar 1995; Levine and Pittinsky 1997).

Many fathers and particularly mothers of young children found their workplace more satisfying than their home environment.



As this study has illustrated, women who work part-time, or at least reduced full-time hours, experienced less interference from work to family life. There is no reason to believe that men, too, wouldn't benefit from a more balanced investment in work and family roles, as would their families (Barentt and Rivers 1996).

For viable family and work partnerships to be achieved, we as a community must define our priorities – whether we want parents (both mothers and fathers) to have time for children and their own relationship, whether we want men and women to have time to care for elderly parents and to make time for community involvement. We have to decide on the price we are all willing to pay, what personal compromises we all have to make and what necessary public and private partnerships we all will support to achieve a feasible balance between a productive and competitive workplace and a financially secure, satisfying and caring family and personal life.

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