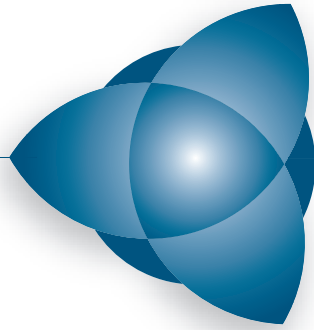


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# CONTEMPORARY FAMILY TRENDS

## WORK/FAMILY BALANCE: WHAT DO WE REALLY KNOW?

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Jacques Barrette is holder of a master's and a doctoral degree in industrial and organizational psychology, Professor Barrette's research focuses on performance-management systems and their relationship to organizational performance. His research interests include the study of connections between management practices and organizational learning in the public sector. Much of his research deals with skills evaluation, expertise development and organizational interventions for enhancing work adjustment and performance. Professor Barrette has published numerous articles on human resources management and I/O psychology in journals such as *Gestion*, *Canadian Journal of Administrative Science*, *International Journal of Psychology*, *European Review of Applied Psychology*, *Relations industrielles/industrial relations*, and *Applied Psychology: An International Review*. In 1995, he received the *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences's* Best Article Award, given for the year's outstanding article on management in Canada, and in 2001 he was awarded the *Prix Guy Charest* (Samson Bélair Deloitte Touche) for the best article published in the international management journal *Gestion* (HEC Montréal). Before beginning his academic career, Professor Barrette worked for more than 14 years in human resources management in the public and private sectors, for such organizations as Québec-Téléphone, Laurentian Bank, and provincial and federal governments. He has held a variety of positions in the organizational diagnosis field for the development of high performance management systems, in addition to acting as a consultant and training officer for numerous organizations, among them the Montréal Urban Community Police Department, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Fédération des Caisses Populaires Desjardins and the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency. Jacques Barrette is currently full professor at the University of Ottawa's School of Management and the Director for the Center for Leadership, a centre for the development of future leaders. He teaches performance management, human resources management, organizational design, staffing and management skills development.

The Vanier Institute of the Family was established in 1965 under the patronage of Their Excellencies Governor General Georges P. Vanier and Madame Pauline Vanier. It is a national voluntary organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of Canada's families through research, publications, public education and advocacy. The Institute regularly works with businesses, legislators, policy-makers and program specialists, researchers, educators, family service professionals, the media and members of the general public.

*Contemporary Family Trends* is a series of papers authored by Canadian experts on topics related to families in Canada.

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Vanier Institute of the Family.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The last two decades has seen a proliferation of research on the nature, scope and, implications of work/family conflict. This paper reviews much of this research and endeavours to (1) explain the fundamental causes of the work/family conflict, (2) demonstrate the impacts of this imbalance on families and organizations, (3) discuss the challenges families face, and (4) present possible strategies to improve the situation.

Clearly, the causes of work/family imbalance are many. It stems as much from the economic, social, and demographic transformations of our society as from the changes in our management structures, systems, and philosophies. The pressures of market globalization, the feminization of the work force, and the impact of emerging technologies have meant that in order to keep up, many workers must work at all times (e.g., weekends, nights, vacations, etc.) and from anywhere (e.g., at home, in the bus, in restaurants). People who work irregular hours (e.g., weekends, non-standard shifts, etc.) or who log an excessive amount of overtime also spend less time with their children and spouses and, once at home, they spend part of their time doing household chores to the detriment of family interactions.

In a reversal of the situation of 20 years ago, the majority of families comprised of Mom, Dad and kids now send both parents into the labour market. The presence of two-income families combined with each parents' work demands and professional needs is forcing parents to modify the way they interact with their children and to rethink the division of family chores. The weight of this adaptation rests disproportionately on the shoulders of mothers who, in addition to their paid work, do more around the house than their spouses.<sup>1</sup>

In the wake of these changes, work/family conflicts have progressively worsened in the last 10 years. The percentage of parents who have a hard time juggling work and family has steadily risen since 1996 and now sits between 46% and 61%. Some studies suggest that this situation will likely continue to deteriorate.<sup>2,3</sup>

These trends are cause for alarm. The research clearly shows that the worse the work/family conflict becomes, the weaker the outcomes on various physical and psychological health indicators among parents and their children.<sup>4,5</sup> By and large, a stressful and demanding job increases the risk of family dysfunction and dissatisfaction with family life and hinders an individual's

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1 INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC, 2001: "Portrait social du Québec. Données et analyses," Éditions 2001. Québec City.

2 TREMBLAY, D.G. and AMHERT, C.H., March 2003: "Articulation emploi-famille, mesures de conciliation et temps de travail : une comparaison de personnels des secteurs syndiqués au SCFP et de personnels hors SCFP. Note de recherche 2003-9," Canada Research Chair on the Socio-Organizational Challenges of the Knowledge Economy. Télé-Université.

3 STATISTICS CANADA, 1996: "General Social Survey on Time Use," 1996, Ottawa.

4 HIGGINS, C., and DUXBURY, L., 2002: "The 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study Report One," Ottawa: Health Canada. URL: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/work-travail/report1/index-eng.php>.

5 FRONE, M., RUSSELL, M., and COOPER, M., 1997: "Relation of Work-Family Conflict to Health Outcomes: A Four-Year Longitudinal Study of Employed Parents," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 70, pp. 325–335.

performance as a parent and as a partner.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, more mothers claim that their work hinders them from performing their parental role.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the growing body of research and increasing awareness of the issues related to work/family conflict,<sup>8</sup> in reality, organizations are still hesitant to implement programs to support their employees grappling with these challenges. Only 10% to 20% of companies actually implement work schedule flexibility measures and daycare programs.<sup>9</sup> For their own benefit and for the benefit of our society, organizations have a responsibility to develop their own work/family balance measures to round out those adopted by families and public policies.

Balancing work and family life, however, is not the sole responsibility of the market place. Workers must also modify individual behaviors, starting with a fairer division of household chores between both parents and with children. Parents must take responsibility for the values they live by and the decisions they make on how to best support their family, maintain a harmonious relationship as a couple, and stay healthier while respecting their work priorities.

One in four Canadians faces a high level of work overload, and this trend is steadily on the rise.<sup>10</sup> The adaptation practices presented in this article cannot solve the work/family conflict if the work overload—and resulting stress—do not stop growing. Change is possible. It is a matter of seeing things differently. Inexpensive options for improving working conditions are known: adapting work hours, planning and organizing work, clarifying roles, reducing overload, and increasing autonomy are just a few examples. On the whole, efforts by every segment—governments, organizations, unions, and parents—are critical for this issue to be resolved to the benefit of today's families.

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6 DUXBURY, L. and HIGGINS, C., 2003: "Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report," October. Healthy Communities Division, Health Canada.

7 ROYER, N., PROVOST, M., and COUTU, S., 1998: "Concilier travail et vie familiale : le stress ressenti par les parents d'enfants d'âge préscolaire," pp. 124–133, in Louise S. Éthier and Jacques Alary (eds.), *Actes du 4e Symposium québécois de recherche sur la famille*. Ste-Foy: PUQ.

8 CONSEIL DE LA FAMILLE ET DE L'ENFANCE, 2001: "La détermination et la gestion des problèmes de conciliation travail-famille en milieu de travail," Survey conducted jointly by Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance and Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines et en relations industrielles du Québec. Québec City: Government of Québec.

9 TREMBLAY, D.G. and AMHERT, C.H., 2000: "La vie en double : Obstacles organisationnels et socioculturels à la conciliation emploi/famille chez les pères et les mères," Québec City: Télé-université.

10 DUXBURY, L., HIGGINS, C., and JOHNSON, K., 1999: "An Examination of the Implications and Costs of Work-Life Conflict in Canada," Ottawa: Department of Health.

## WORK/FAMILY BALANCE: WHAT DO WE REALLY KNOW?

The difficulty of balancing work and family is a hot topic in our society. Hundreds of books, thousands of articles, and numerous symposia and conferences, government policies, and union initiatives clearly reflect how important this issue is today. Everyone agrees that our families have a hard time adapting to the frantic pace of modern life, especially when it comes to striking a balance between work and family responsibilities. But what do we really know about this problem and its solutions? By looking mainly at the scientific literature, this article is meant to (1) explain the fundamental causes of the work/family conflict, (2) demonstrate the impacts of this imbalance on families and organizations, (3) discuss the challenges families face, and (4) present possible strategies to improve the situation.

### Fundamental Causes Of The Work/Family Imbalance

There are a number of causes of the work/family imbalance. It stems as much from the economic, social, and demographic transformations of our society as from the changes in our management structures, systems, and philosophies. At play in the background are market globalization and its economic imperative, which has profoundly transformed the way our organizations are managed. To adapt to the competition, organizations have implemented many management practices deemed vital to their survival. Some examples of these include just-in-time production, performance management and results measuring systems, extended customer service hours, and reduced lead times.

On the one hand, these practices exert added pressure on employees to increase their work performance and productivity. To boost efficiency and productivity, organizations streamline operations by reducing personnel, which also creates greater insecurity and often overloads “surviving” personnel. On the other hand, due to market globalization, certain categories of employees find themselves obligated to work outside of regular business hours to accommodate different time zones. Technological transformations heighten pressure to acquire new expertise and speed up the pace of work.<sup>1</sup> The Internet, cellular phones, and BlackBerries keep people more connected while at the same time allowing work to encroach further into family life. To keep up, it has become easy and often necessary to work at all times (e.g., weekends, nights, vacations, etc.) and from anywhere (e.g., at home, in the bus, in restaurants). For a number of professionals and

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<sup>1</sup> GOSSELIN, H.L., 2005: “Pourquoi des entreprises mettent en place des mesures de conciliation emploi-famille?” in *De la conciliation emploi-famille a une politique des temps sociaux*, G.B Tremblay, Presse de l’Université du Québec, Sainte-Foy, pp. 135–164.

managers, working overtime and weekends has become the only way to successfully meet organizational objectives. This spillover of work into personal life and this overload of work are now monopolizing the time and energy of most employees at medium-sized and large companies and have serious consequences on the health of parents and their families.<sup>2</sup> More and more evidence has shown that people who work irregular hours (e.g., weekends, non-standard shifts, etc.) or who log an excessive amount of overtime spend less time with their children and spouses and once at home, they spend part of their time doing household chores to the detriment of family interactions.

The shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy has also profoundly altered a number of the conditions and characteristics of work and made it harder to balance work and family. With the expansion of the service sector, customers have become king, and to satisfy them, organizations continuously require employees to be more flexible. In order to provide uninterrupted service and ensure productivity, many organizations are adopting non-standard work hours (rotating shifts, evening shifts, on-call shifts), creating atypical jobs (temporary, part time, contractual), and increasingly outsourcing work.<sup>3</sup> For example, in 1998, 46% of workers held a non-conventional job in Canada.<sup>4</sup> These conditions of insecurity, unstable employment, and split or unpredictable work schedules that are subject to customer demands and pressure for increased performance exacerbate the challenge of striking a balance between work and family life. It is important to stress that women<sup>5</sup> hold the majority of these types of jobs and are thus harder hit by the effects of such working conditions.

These working conditions inevitably result in work hours spilling over into hours normally devoted to family activities. They definitely complicate many family activities (e.g., school, shopping, daycare, etc.).<sup>6,7</sup> The need to extend work hours into family time, the obligation to work under pressure and handle an overload of work, the ambiguity of work roles, the lack of sufficient feedback, anxiety about job security, the penury of

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2 DUXBURY, L. and HIGGINS, C., 2003: "Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report," October. Healthy Communities Division, Health Canada.

3 TREMBLAY, D.G, VILLENEUVE, D., 1998: "L'aménagement et la réduction du temps de travail: les enjeux, les approches, les méthodes," Montréal, Éditions Saint-Martin, pp. 260–270.

4 JOHNSON, K.L., LERO, D.S., and ROONEY, J.A. 2001: "Work-Life Compendium 2001: 150 Canadian Statistics on Work, Family & Well-Being. Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being," Human Resources Development Canada, Canada.

5 86% of women active in the job market hold service industry positions compared to 63% of men.

6 ST-AMOUR, N., LAVERDURE, J., DEVAULT, A., and MANSEAU, S., 2005: "La difficulté de concilier travail-famille : ses impacts sur la santé physique et mentale des familles Québécoise," Institut national de santé publique du Québec, URL: <http://www.inspq.qc.ca>.

7 ZUZANEK, J., 2000, "Les effets de l'emploi du temps et des contraintes de temps sur les relations parents-enfants," Summary of the research report submitted to Health Canada, Optimum Publications, URL: [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/publications/pdf/timepcr-tempsrpe\\_f.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/publications/pdf/timepcr-tempsrpe_f.pdf)

sufficient work training, and the need to work a different schedule than one's spouse are all characteristics imposed by the workplace that exacerbate the work/family life conflict.<sup>8,9</sup>

Coupled with these transformations, demographic and social changes have made it harder for parents to balance work and family life. Divorce and separation are a major reflection of the current social changes that have been occurring in the past 15 years.

In the past 30 years, the divorce rate in Canada has increased by 600%.<sup>10</sup> In 2003 in Canada, the divorce rate was 3,654 divorces per 10,000 marriages; in other words 37% of marriages ended in divorce. These figures do not take into account separations of parents in common-law marriages, who are over twice as likely to separate. Since common-law marriages are increasingly popular, official divorce statistics are significantly understated.<sup>11</sup> A Québec author has suggested that the divorce rate is more likely closer to 46%.<sup>12</sup> The consequences in terms of single-parent<sup>13</sup> or blended families considerably modify and complexify family dynamics and the division of family responsibilities. As 80% of single-parent families are led by women, they are primarily the ones who feel the negative effects of these changes when the work variable enters into the equation. The impact of divorce on children is also significant. Studies estimate that 25% of children of divorced parents have serious psychological, social, or learning problems.<sup>14</sup>

Of the profound changes affecting the family dynamic, one issue rises to the fore: the feminization of labor. The percentage of women in the labor force in Canada rose from 33% in 1971 to over 50% in 2008.<sup>15</sup> Of this number, 69% are mothers with a child under 3 years old. The participation rate of mothers aged 20 to 44 with children under the age

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8 DOBY, V.J. and CAPLAN, R.D., 1995: "Organizational Stress as Threat Reputation: Effects on Anxiety at Work and at Home," *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, pp. 1105–1123.

9 HUGHES, D.L. and GALENSKY, E., 1994: "Work Experiences and Marital Interactions: Elaborating the Complexity of Work," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15, pp. 423–438.

10 Tim Rotheisler, *Alberta Report*, August 4, 1997.

11 STATISTICS CANADA.. Report on the Demographic Evaluation in Canada. 2003 and 2004. Catalogue No. 90-209-XIE, Minister of Industry, 2005.

12 ROY, C., 2005 : « Quand les syndicats font partie de la solution : Projet de politique en matière de conciliation du travail et de la famille », dans *De la conciliation emploi-famille à une politique des temps sociaux*, Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, Presse de l'Université du Québec, Sainte-Foy, pp. 173-181.

13 En 1998, au Québec sur 946000 familles, 192,000 (20,3%) étaient des familles monoparentales et 98,000 (10,4%) des familles recomposées. (Saint-Jacques Marie-Christine, Parent, Claudine (2002). La famille recomposée : Une famille composée sur un air différent. Le Magazine Enfants : Éditions de l'Hôpital Sainte-Justine.

14 HETHRINGTON, E.M. et KELLY, J. 2002: « For Better or for Worse: Divorce Reconsidered», Norton & Company New York. London

15 CANADIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA HISTORIA, 2008: "Women in the Labor Force," <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0008680>.

of 16 jumped from 37% in 1976 to 70% in 1997.<sup>16</sup> The massive influx of women into the job market has altered the “traditional” family dynamic. New needs have emerged, modifying the demand for services for evenings and weekends to accommodate working women’s restricted availability.

In a reversal of the situation of 20 years ago, both parents are now active on the job market. The presence of two-income families combined with each parents’ work demands and professional needs is forcing parents to modify the way they interact with their children and to rethink the division of family chores, with the weight of adaptation resting once again today on the shoulders of mothers who, in addition to their job, do more around the house than their spouses.<sup>17</sup> Many women have the added responsibility of playing the role of caregiver for elderly parents—an inevitable consequence of the aging population in the last 15 years. In Canada in 2002, 27% of parents between the age of 45 and 64 with children under 25 living at home were also taking care of a senior, and women were spending twice as much time doing so as men (29 hours a month versus 13 hours a month for men).<sup>18</sup>

The need for organizations to offer support to help families strike a better balance is now clear. However, companies have yet to provide their employees with sufficient support. For example, less than one-fourth of Canadian workers benefit from time management measures, and these measures are primarily available to parents with the most highly protected jobs.<sup>19</sup>

## **Impact Of These Changes On The Work/Family Balance: Research Findings**

Despite the discussions and publicity on the practices put forward by numerous organizations, the work/family conflict has progressively worsened in the last 10 years. The percentage of parents who have a hard time juggling work and family has steadily risen since 1996 and now sits at between 46% and 61%, according to studies. The situation

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16 CONSEIL CONSULTATIF DU TRAVAIL ET DE LA MAIN-D’ŒUVRE, 2001: “Concilier travail et famille : Un défi pour les milieux de travail,” Action Plan.

17 INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC, 2001: “Portrait social du Québec. Données et analyses,” Éditions 2001. Québec City.

18 WILLIAM, C., 2004: “L’emploi et le revenu en perspectives », *Perspective*, 5(9), Statistics Canada, Online Catalog No. 75-001-IXF.

19 LIPSETT, B. and REESOR, M., 1997: “Flexible Work Arrangements: Evidence from the 1991 and 1995 Survey of Work Arrangements,” Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

will continue to deteriorate.<sup>20,21</sup> The percentage of people whose professional activities interfere with their family obligations has doubled (5% to 10%) in 10 years. In addition, 44% of Canadians feel that their work has a negative impact on their family and interferes with the amount of time they spend with their children. One in six parents say that they are unsatisfied with their ability to adapt to everyday situations.<sup>22</sup> In Québec, 56% of respondents in a survey by Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines et des relations industrielles feel that balancing work and family will become more and more difficult. This difficulty in coordinating job requirements and family obligations has a serious affect on the family unit.

## Impact On The Health Of Parents And Children

The stress caused by the work/family conflict is affecting our Canadian families. For example, a survey by Statistics Canada<sup>23</sup> demonstrates that 26% of fathers and 33% of mothers suffer from excessive stress from not having enough time. This stress has harmful consequences on the health of both parents and children.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the worse the work/family conflict becomes, the more physical and psychological health indicators diminish.<sup>25,26</sup> For example, in terms of psychological health, an excessive work/family conflict is associated with an increase in depression<sup>27,28</sup> and other mood disorders (e.g., anxiety, irritability).<sup>29</sup> These disorders are sometimes exacerbated by the age group of the

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20 TREMBLAY, D.G. and AMHERT, C.H., March 2003: "Articulation emploi-famille, mesures de conciliation et temps de travail : une comparaison de personnels des secteurs syndiqués au SCFP et de personnels hors SCFP. Note de recherche 2003-9," Canada Research Chair on the Socio-Organizational Challenges of the Knowledge Economy. Télé-Université.

21 STATISTICS CANADA, 1996: "General Social Survey on Time Use," 1996, Ottawa.

22 DUXBURY, L. and HIGGINS, C., 2003: "Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report," October. Healthy Communities Division, Health Canada.

23 STATISTICS CANADA, 1999: "Overview of the Time Use of Canadians, 1998," Ottawa, November. Cat. No. 12F0090X1F.

24 KELLOWAY, E.K., GOTTLIEB, B.H., BARHAM, L., 1999: "The Source, Nature, and Direction of Work and Family Conflict: A Longitudinal Investigation," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 4, pp. 337–346.

25 HIGGINS, C., and DUXBURY, L., 2002: "The 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study Report One," Ottawa: Health Canada. URL: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/work-travail/index.html>.

26 FRONE, M., RUSSELL, M., and COOPER, M., 1997: "Relation of Work-Family Conflict to Health Outcomes: A Four-Year Longitudinal Study of Employed Parents," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 70, pp. 325–335.

27 ALLEN, T.D., HERST, D.E.L., BRUCK C.S., and SUTTON, M., 2000: "Consequences Associated with Work-To-Family Conflict: A Review and Agenda for Future Research," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 5(2), pp. 278–308.

28 FRONE, M., RUSSELL, M., and COOPER, M., 1997: "Relation of Work-Family Conflict to Health Outcomes: A Four-Year Longitudinal Study of Employed Parents," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 70, pp. 325–335.

29 FRONE, M.R., 2000: "Work-Family Conflict and Employee Psychiatric Disorders: The National Comorbidity Survey," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(6), pp. 688–695.

children in question. For example, burnout is most common among parents of children aged 6 and under since this parent group is particularly affected by the tension generated by daycare-related difficulties. The stress associated with the work/family conflict also has harmful effects on certain types of behavior. Studies show that difficulties balancing work and family increase the risk of alcohol and drug dependence. These effects are even more serious since they have a tendency to be long lived.<sup>30,31</sup>

Researchers have observed multiple physical and psychosomatic symptoms among parents suffering from a significant work/family imbalance. A wide range of symptoms have been observed, including hypertension, high serum cholesterol levels, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal disorders, allergies, and migraines.<sup>32,33</sup> A number of studies have also established a positive correlation between the presence of a work/family conflict and various other signs of stress such as fatigue, lack of appetite, and nervous tension.<sup>34</sup> The work/family conflict and stress follow parallel curves and are growing at the same rate. It therefore comes as no surprise that the health costs associated with work-related stress represent billions of dollars.

We know that a very large part of the stress parents feel stems from the difficulty of balancing work obligations (e.g., work schedule, workload, etc.) and family responsibilities. We also know that excessive stress undermines the family system by hindering the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional development of children. Studies show that situations where both parents grapple with stressful work conditions (e.g., overload, lack of decision-making flexibility, ambiguous roles) simultaneously have an even greater effect on the quantity and quality of parental relationships. In return, this situation leads to an increase in behavior disorders among children.<sup>35</sup> Overwhelmed parents have cooler attitudes toward their teenagers and thus more conflicting interactions with them.<sup>36</sup> Parental stress

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30 FRONE, M., RUSSELL, M., and COOPER, M., 1997: "Relation of Work-Family Conflict to Health Outcomes: A Four-Year Longitudinal Study of Employed Parents," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 70, pp. 325–335.

31 FRONE, M., RUSSELL, M., and COOPER, M., 1997: "Relation of Work-Family Conflict to Health Outcomes: A Four-Year Longitudinal Study of Employed Parents," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 70, pp. 325–335.

32 DUXBURY, L., HIGGINS, C., LEE, C., and MILLS, S., 1991: "Balancing Work and Family: A Study of the Canadian Public Sector," Ottawa: Prepared for the Department of Health and Welfare Canada (NHRDP).

33 THOMAS, L. and GANSTER, D., 1995: "Impact of Family-Supportive Work Variables on Work-Family Conflict and Strain: A Control Perspective," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80, pp. 6–15.

34 ALLEN, T.D., HERST, D.E.L., BRUCK C.S., and SUTTON, M., 2000: "Consequences Associated with Work-to-Family Conflict: A Review and Agenda for Future Research," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 5(2), pp. 278–308.

35 STEWART, W. and BARLING, J., 1996: "Fathers' Work Experiences Affect Children's Behaviors via Job-Related Affect and Parenting Behaviors," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 17, pp. 221–232.

36 GALAMBOS, N.L., SEARS, H.A., ALMEIDA, D., and KOLARIC, G.C., 1995: "Parent's Work Overload and Problem Behavior in Young Adolescents," *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 5, pp. 201–223.

also affects the choice of disciplinary strategies used with young children. Studies indicate that inappropriate disciplinary strategies have a negative impact on the emotional and cognitive development of young children.<sup>37</sup> These studies show that psychological stress in parents has a negative influence on the cognitive stimulation children receive at home, and such stimulation is key to success in school.<sup>38,39</sup> Research shows that this can lead to issues like attention problems, as well as a higher level of disobedience and aggression, and a decrease in social skills.<sup>40,41</sup> Excessive stress caused by a significant spillover of work onto family activities must therefore be taken seriously because it reduces parents' ability to fully play their role and has serious consequences on the child's development.

## Differences In Impact By Gender

Some effects of the work/family conflict vary by gender. We know that women assume greater responsibility with regard to taking care of children, performing household chores, and caring for and supporting elderly parents. Because they are more overloaded and stressed than their spouses, mothers say they are less satisfied than their partner in their performance as a parent.<sup>42</sup> They also have more of a tendency to believe that their work hinders them from performing their parental role.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the impact on their physical and psychological health is greater than on that of their spouse.<sup>44</sup> Studies tend to show that women have higher rates of burnout and depressive states than men. Female managers and professionals with an overload of roles and stress feel these effects even more.<sup>45</sup> Among these women, blood pressure actually rises after work, whereas

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37 CRNIC, K.A., GRENBERG, M.T., and SLOUGH, M.N., 1986: "Early Stress and Social Support Influences on Mothers' and High Risk Infants' Functioning in Late Infancy," *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 7(1), pp. 19–33.

38 NIEVAR, M.A. and LUSTER, T., 2006: "Development Processes in African American Families: An Application of McLoyd's Theoretical Model," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, pp. 320–331.

39 GUTMAN, L.M., MCLOYD, V.C., and TOKOYAWA, T., 2005: "Financial Strain, Neighborhood Stress, Parenting Behaviors, and Adolescent Adjustment in Urban African American Families," *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 15(4), pp. 425–449.

40 BARRY, T.D., DUNLAP, S.T., COTTON, S.J., LOCHMAN, J.E., and WELLS, K.C., 2005: "The Influence of Maternal Stress and Distress on Disruptive Behavior Problems in Boys," *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 44(3), pp. 265–273.

41 MCLOYD, V.C., 1998: "Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Child Development," *American Psychologist*, 53(2), pp. 185–204.

42 DUXBURY, L. and HIGGINS, C., 2003: "Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report," October. Healthy Communities Division, Health Canada.

43 ROYER, N., PROVOST, M., and COUTU, S., 1998: "Concilier travail et vie familiale : le stress ressenti par les parents d'enfants d'âge préscolaire," pp. 124–133, in Louise S. Éthier and Jacques Alary (eds.), *Actes du 4e Symposium québécois de recherche sur la famille*. Ste-Foy: PUQ.

44 LUNDBERG, U. and FRANKENHAEUSER, M., 1999: "Stress and Workload of Men and Women in High-Ranking Positions," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 4, pp. 142–151.

45 DUXBURY, L. and HIGGINS, C., 2003: "Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report," October. Healthy Communities Division, Health Canada.

men's blood pressure quickly falls once they return home.<sup>46</sup> These findings are even more striking for women who work in non-profit organizations (e.g., hospitals) where split schedules and night and weekend shifts are common. These mothers are more likely to suffer from mood disorders and anxiety than men due to these circumstances. On the other hand, fathers have a greater propensity to develop drug and alcohol dependencies in response to an excessive work/family conflict.<sup>47</sup>

## Impact On The Couple And The Family

Very few studies examine the impact of the work/family conflict on the quality of relations between spouses. However, it is reasonable to presume that a couple's stability and conjugal accord are greatly affected when spouses devote less and less time to each other. It would stand to reason that this distance between spouses also increases the risk of divorce. The few studies that examine this issue show that parents' constant concerns coupled with an overload of activities sometimes result in withdrawal from couple life, a reduction in affectionate and supportive behavior between spouses, and states of anxiety that tend to lead to aggressive behaviors between partners.<sup>48,49,50</sup> Having too much to do in too little time leads to stress that creates anxiety and fatigue, which often results in the emotional withdrawal of both partners. In summary, studies suggest that the worse the work/family conflict becomes, the more the conjugal accord suffers. However, the research is not unanimous on this point. Certain studies show that the work/family conflict is associated with decreased satisfaction with couple life for both partners, whereas other studies find that the impact is felt only by one spouse.<sup>51,52</sup>

The work/family imbalance also has concomitant repercussions on the health of the spouses. The overload, ambiguity, and conflict of roles at work are mainly responsible for

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46 FRANKENHAEUSER, M., LUNDBERG, U., FREDRIKSON, M., MELIN, B., TUOMISTO, M., MYRSTEN, A., HEDMAN, M., BERGMAN-LOSMAN, B., and WALLIN, L., 1989: "Stress on and of the Job as Related to Sex and Occupational Status in White-Collar Workers," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 10, pp. 321-346.

47 FRONE, M., RUSSELL, M., and COOPER, M., 1997: "Relation of Work-Family Conflict to Health Outcomes: A Four-Year Longitudinal Study of Employed Parents," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 70, pp. 325-335.

48 MACEWEN, K.E. and BARLING, J., 1994: "Daily Consequences of Work Interference with Family and Family Interference with Work," *Work and Stress*, pp. 244-254.

49 MATTHEWS, L.S., CONGER, K.A., and WICKRAMA, S., 1996: "Work-Family Conflict and Marital Quality: Mediating Processes," *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 59(1), pp. 62-79.

50 COVERMAN, S., 1989: "Role Overload, Role Conflict, and Stress : Addressing Consequences of Multiple Role Remands," *Social Forces*, 67(4), pp. 965-982.

51 COVERMAN, S., 1989: "Role Overload, Role Conflict, and Stress: Addressing Consequences of Multiple Role Demands," *Social Forces*, 67(4), pp. 965-982.

52 KINNUMEN, U. and MAUNO, S., 1998: "Antecedents and Outcomes of Work-Family Conflict Among Employed Women and Men in Finland," *Human Relations*, 51(2), pp. 157-177.

employee burnout. Studies indicate that one spouse's feelings of burnout are correlated with feelings of burnout in the other. In other words, when one spouse becomes burnt out, there is a greater probability that the other spouse will also be affected.<sup>53</sup> The repercussions on the family are considerable because when one parent suffers from burnout, the entire parent/child dynamic can suffer the effects.

## Impact On Family Life

Research shows that a stressful job increases the risk of family dysfunction and dissatisfaction with family life and hinders an individual's performance as a parent.<sup>54</sup> Exhaustion, overload, and depersonalization at work spills over into family life. Generally, the quality of family life is what suffers most when parents withdraw from certain family activities.<sup>55</sup> According to a study conducted among 31,571 Canadians employed by 100 organizations, one-third of respondents were moderately or somewhat satisfied with their relationships at home,<sup>56</sup> and one in four rarely engaged in activities to maintain or develop family stability. The repercussions for those who make work a priority over family life are considerable.<sup>57</sup> Such people are less satisfied with their family life and view themselves as less capable parents. Generally, they are less likely to live in a stable family unit. The lack of time devoted to family activities also has negative consequences on one's effectiveness as a parent.<sup>58,59,60</sup>

## Impact On Children

Very few studies have measured the impact of the work/family conflict on children. Those that have addressed this issue offer disturbing findings. On the one hand, we know

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53 WESTMAN, M. and ETZION, D., 1995: "Crossover and Stress, Strain and Resources from One Spouse to Another," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 16, pp. 169–181.

54 DUXBURY, L. and HIGGINS, C., 2003: "Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report," October. Healthy Communities Division, Health Canada.

55 JACKSON, S.E. and MASLACH, C., 1982: "After-Effects of Job-Related Stress: Families as Victims," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 3, pp. 63–71.

56 DUXBURY, L. and HIGGINS, C., 2003: "Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report," October. Healthy Communities Division, Health Canada.

57 Family life satisfaction is defined as the general satisfaction family members feel towards each other, i.e., relationships with their children, between spouses, parents, and inlaws. A stable, well integrated family is a family where parents help their children with their schoolwork and individual problems, take part in family events (e.g., going to the movies as a family), have family time during the week, and do things with their children that their children like.

58 CROUTER, A.C., 1984: "Spillover from Family to Work: the Neglected Side of the Work-Family Interface," *Human Relations*, 37(6), pp. 425–442.

59 MACEWEN, K.E., and BARLING, J., 1994: "Daily Consequences of Work Interference with Family and Family Interference with Work," *Work and Stress*, pp. 244–254.

60 YARDLEY, J.K. 1994: "The Relationship of Work-Family Conflict with Work Outcomes: A Test of a Model," unpublished dissertation. Department of Psychology, State University of New York at Buffalo.

that when both parents participate in quality activities with their children (e.g., helping them with school work), this reduces behavior problems and improves performance in school. Numerous studies support this.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, we should therefore expect that a lack of parent involvement with children, due to an excessively demanding job, would have a negative impact on child behavior. The few studies that examine this issue indicate that a lack of parent involvement in preschool-aged children's activities indeed increases their behavior problems.<sup>62</sup> According to another study, primary school children's learning skills may be hindered when the father faces a major work/family conflict.<sup>63</sup> As for teenagers, studies show that parents overloaded by numerous responsibilities tend to have cooler relations and more conflicts with teenage children. For a number of teenagers, the unavailability of parents leads to lower self-esteem.<sup>64</sup> Although other studies are needed to generalize these results, we can conclude from these scant studies that the increase in the work/family conflict may have striking and unexpected effects that will be difficult to correct given the critical developmental stage of these children.

One interesting study looked at the impact of a parent's job transfer as a source of work/family conflict. We know that when one parent is transferred to another region for work, the entire family often moves with them. For some children, this change has positive repercussions (e.g., new friends). For others this uprooting is difficult. Studies show a link between relocation and an increase in physical health problems among teenagers as well as a decrease in their persistence in school. It is also believed that moving has a negative impact on children's ties of friendship in terms of the quality of their relationships, the ease with which they make friends, and later social adjustment skills.<sup>65</sup> Children need the active support of their parents during this transitional period in order to promote better adaptation and minimize the negative impacts of this change.

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61 CANADIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, 1999: "Work, Family, and Community: Key Issues and Directions for Future Research," Ottawa, Human Resources Development Canada.

62 ZICK, C.D., BRYANT, K.W., and OSTERBACKA, E., 2000: "Mother's Employment, Parental Involvement, and the Implications for Intermediate Child Outcomes," *Social Science Research*, 30(1), pp. 25–49.

63 STEWART, W. and BARLING, J., 1996: "Fathers' Work Experiences Affect Children's Behaviors via Job-Related Affect and Parenting Behaviors," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 17, pp. 221–232.

64 GALAMBOS, N.L., SEARS, H.A., ALMEIDA, D., and KOLARIC, G.C., 1995: "Parent's Work Overload and Problem Behavior in Young Adolescents," *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 5, pp. 201–223.

65 BRETT, J.M., 1982: "Job Transfer and Well-Being," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 67, pp. 450–463.

## Challenges For Organizations

Although human resource management professionals are increasingly aware of the issues of the work/family conflict,<sup>66</sup> in reality, organizations are still hesitant to implement programs to support their employees grappling with this predicament. For example, only 25% of Québec employees have access to a flexible schedule. Moreover, only 10% to 20% of companies actually implement work schedule flexibility measures and daycare programs.<sup>67</sup> However, organizations have everything to gain from helping their employees tackle this issue because the impact on the organizations that choose to ignore this problem is considerable. We know that employees who experience a high level of work/family interference are more stressed, less satisfied, and less committed to their organizations.<sup>68</sup> The costs associated with absenteeism, lateness, high turnover, denied promotions, and difficulty drawing and retaining key employees should convince directors to be proactive. For example, employees with a serious work/family conflict miss an average of 13.2 days of work a year versus 5.9 days missed for those without. The resulting financial losses in Canada are estimated at \$2.7 billion a year in direct costs and \$10 billion in indirect costs.<sup>69</sup> Implementing practices to balance work and family has proved a profitable investment and will become increasingly so for companies who rely heavily on attracting and retaining key employees to carry out their mission. Studies increasingly confirm the positive returns companies see from engaging in these management practices.<sup>70</sup>

For their own benefit and for the benefit of our society, organizations have a responsibility to develop their own work/family balance measures to round out those adopted by families and public policies. Their first challenge is to recognize the magnitude of the problem and its repercussions in human, social, and organizational costs. It is critical that managers become more aware of the benefits of supporting a work/family balance and put a figure on the direct and indirect financial impact (e.g., employee retention, decreased absenteeism) and the qualitative spinoffs (e.g., inhouse job atmosphere) for their own organization. It is only by forming an objective image of the concrete advantages

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66 CONSEIL DE LA FAMILLE ET DE L'ENFANCE, 2001: "La détermination et la gestion des problèmes de conciliation travail-famille en milieu de travail," Survey conducted jointly by Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance and Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines et en relations industrielles du Québec. Québec City: Government of Québec.

67 TREMBLAY, D.G. and AMHERT, C.H., 2000: "La vie en double : Obstacles organisationnels et socioculturels à la conciliation emploi/famille chez les pères et les mères," Québec City: Télé-université.

68 MARTENS, L. L., EDDLESTON, K.A., and VERGA, J.F., 2002: "Moderators of the Relationship Between Work-Family Conflict and Career Satisfaction," *Academy of Management Journal*, 45, pp. 399–409.

69 DUXBURY, L., HIGGINS, C., and JOHNSON, K., 1999: "An Examination of the Implications and Costs of Work-Life Conflict in Canada," Ottawa: Department of Health.

70 PERRY-SMITH, J.E., and BLUM, T.C., 2000: "Work-Family Human Resource Bundles and Perceived Organizational Performance," *Academy of Management Journal*, 43, pp. 1107–1117.

of work/family balance measures that human resources managers will convince upper management to invest in this lever of organizational performance.

However, the presence of work/family balance measures (e.g., flexible hours) at a company does not guarantee that people will use them, unless the corporate culture lends itself to it.<sup>71</sup> Companies must first adopt values, standards, and regulations that foster a philosophy of family support before employees will appropriate them. Too often, unfounded beliefs such as thinking that the work/family balance creates inequity or that only disloyal employees take advantage of them limits their implementation and use. The strength of these values guides supervisors in their human resources management decisions. Employees will be hesitant to take advantage of the work/family balance programs at their disposal if they perceive that their supervisor will react negatively to such requests or if they perceive that taking advantage of them will have harmful effects on their career.<sup>72</sup> Upper management's support and open communication between employees and managers are vital conditions for work/family balance measures to be taken seriously in the organization.

## Challenge For Parents And Families

Part of the responsibility in balancing work and family life also entails modifying individual behaviors, starting with a fairer division of household chores between both parents. We know that a spouse's support significantly helps reduce the work/family conflict and considerably mitigates harmful stress among women.<sup>73</sup> Other strategies may also be considered such as negotiating a division of household chores with children, making certain household chores a priority or reducing the time spent on them, increasing tolerance for a certain level of disorder in the home, and hiring outside help (e.g., housecleaners, healthcare professionals to care for elderly parents). Other possibilities include building a support network to tackle common issues (e.g., transportation, after-school daycare) as well as strictly setting aside time for family activities (e.g., supper, weekends, etc.).<sup>74</sup> Families also must not overlook concrete time planning and management efforts (e.g., setting realistic objectives and dates, priorities, agendas, etc.) that may make a big difference in stress management. On a more personal level, if practiced regularly,

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71 THOMPSON, C.A., BEAUVAIS, L. L., and LYNESS, K. S., 1999: "When Work-Family Benefits Are Not Enough: The Influence of Work-Family Culture on Benefit Utilization, Organization Attachment, and Work-Family Conflict," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 54, pp. 392-415.

72 ST-ONGE, S., GUÉRIN, G., TROTTIER, R., HAINES, V., and SIMARD, M., 1994: "L'équilibre travail-famille : un nouveau défi pour les organisations," *Gestion*, May, pp. 64-73.

73 BURLEY, K., 1995: "Family Variables as Mediators of the Relationship Between Work-Family Conflict and Marital Adjustment Among Dual-Career Men and Women," *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 135(4), pp. 483-497.

74 HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CANADA, 2008: "Responses to Work-Family-Community Conflict," [http://www.rhdsc.gc.ca/fr/pt/psait/ctv/14\\_05.shtml](http://www.rhdsc.gc.ca/fr/pt/psait/ctv/14_05.shtml).

relaxation and meditation techniques considerably ease the effects of work/family conflict-related stress.<sup>75</sup>

The decision to change our work habits also means refusing to work overtime if job expectations are unreasonable, restricting the amount of work we bring home, reducing commute time, and making a clear and non-negotiable division between the time spent with family and the time spent doing work. Of course, opting to work part time is another possibility, but this option is often difficult for many parents, given its negative financial repercussions (e.g., decreased income, pension, employee benefits, etc.). In this regard, research shows that women are more likely to choose this option—not necessarily by choice, but often out of necessity.<sup>76</sup> The involuntary part time employment rate rose from 12% to 36% between 1976 and 1994, with 69% of these jobs held by women.<sup>77</sup>

Balancing work and family is certainly an even greater challenge for single-parent families. In 2001, 16% of families in Canada were single-parent families. In the same year, 19% of Canadian children lived in single-parent families, primarily with a woman as the head of household. We know that depending on the year and region in question, between 35% and 65% of these families lived below the poverty line.<sup>78</sup> In 2003, the median income of single-parent families was \$28,600 compared to \$62,600 for two-parent families.<sup>79</sup> We were unable to identify a specific study that addresses the issue of work/family balance for single-parent families. However, there is no doubt that being a single parent in charge of a family is an additional factor of stress, particularly for people of low economic status. If this mother or father holds a job, the difficulty of balancing work and family is certainly a daily trial. We can presume that this situation almost inevitably places an added burden on the shoulders of the head of family. The greater amount of care required to look after children in this situation is just one example.

We know that a very high percentage of single-parent fathers and mothers comes from a disadvantaged or modest socioeconomic environment and often has a lower level of education.<sup>80</sup> This group of parents is therefore less likely to hold the specialized or professional jobs with the greatest flexibility to adapt work conditions to meet families’

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75 MATTHIEU R., 2003: “Plaidoyer pour le bonheur,” *Pocket Évolution*.

76 KARAMBAYGA, R., and REILLY, A.H., 1992: “Dual Earner Couples: Attitudes and Actions in Restructuring Work for Family,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 13, pp. 585–601.

77 JOHNSON, K.L., LERO, D.S., and ROONEY, J.A. 2001: “Work-Life Compendium 2001: 150 Canadian Statistics on Work, Family & Well-Being. Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being.” Human Resources Development Canada.

78 Statistics Canada. Report on the Demographic Evaluation in Canada. 2003 and 2004. Catalogue No. 90-209-XIE, Minister of Industry, 2005.

79 STATISTIQUE CANADA. 2005. Revenu familial. Le quotidien, 20, mai. [www.statscan.ca:80/Daily/Français/050520/q050520c.htm](http://www.statscan.ca:80/Daily/Français/050520/q050520c.htm) .

80 Amber, A.M 2006. Institut Vanier de la Famille : Tendances contemporaines de la famille.

needs. We can advance the hypothesis that fathers and mothers with a modest job also have less power to negotiate individual arrangements with their employer to facilitate their work/family balance. Single-parent fathers and mothers often have a lower family income and are thus at a disadvantage in terms of being able to pay for outside help (e.g., babysitters at home or tutors for their children). Moreover, because of their additional family responsibilities, these parents have less time and energy to invest in their work and career. As a result, they have a lower chance of advancing and improving their financial situation. Even for those who hold a professional job or who are in a good financial situation, work obligations (e.g., overtime, travel) become more restrictive when there is no spouse to help out in unexpected circumstances (e.g., pick up the kids at daycare). For a single mother or father, a number of common work situations—such as meetings early in the morning or late in the afternoon, an unplanned business trip, work that has to be finished at home, or a weekend training session—are even harder and more stressful to deal with.

## Adopting Practices Fostering Work/Family Balance<sup>81</sup>

There is a wide variety of work/family balance measures,<sup>82</sup> but very few studies have focused on their effects on families. Those that have attracted researchers' attention primarily concern flextime, compressed workweeks, work time sharing, telework, and at-work daycare services.<sup>83</sup>

## Work Time Management

Of all the practices identified, flextime is the most heavily studied. This practice consists of creating a range of hours including mandatory work time slots and mobile slots where workers choose the beginning and end of their work day.<sup>84</sup> According to Statistics Canada<sup>85</sup> only 25% of workers experiencing a work/family conflict have access to flextime. Moreover, very few collective agreements (just 6%) include provisions on work time management.<sup>86</sup>

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81 Measures that affect various types of group insurance are excluded because they are not specifically designed to resolve work/family life conflicts. However, certain financial assistance measures with direct repercussions on work/family balance have been included.

82 Interested readers will find Government of Canada publications with details on a number of practices presented in this article at the following website: <http://www.rhdsc.gc.ca>.

83 KARAMBAYGA, R. and REILLY, A.H., 1992: "Dual Earner Couples: Attitudes and Actions in Restructuring Work for Family," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 13, pp. 585–601.

84 HAINES III, V. Y., GUÉRIN, G., and ST-ONGE, S. 1999: "Les effets de l'horaire flexible sur le taux de roulement et l'absentéisme d'employés ayant des responsabilités parentales," *Revue Canadienne des Sciences Administratives*, 16(4), pp. 323–333.

85 STATISTICS CANADA, 1996: "General Social Survey of Time Use of Canadians," 1996, Ottawa.

86 CONSEIL CONSULTATIF DU TRAVAIL ET DE LA MAIN-D'ŒUVRE, 2001: "Concilier travail et famille : Un défi pour les milieux de travail," Action Plan.

As for the voluntary compressed workweek, it gives employees the option of condensing their weekly work hours into a shorter than normal period of time.

Studies on flextime and the compressed workweek show that parents coordinate their responsibilities better at and outside of work, are more satisfied with their work/family balance, and perceive a positive impact on their relationships with their children.<sup>87</sup> They also spend more time with their families and more openly take part in household chores than those with a fixed schedule.<sup>88</sup> These measures result in less conflictual interference with family activities, foster autonomy, and allow parents to find free time to spend on certain family activities. However, with the compressed workweek, certain employees exhibit an excess of fatigue that also affects their medium- and long-term productivity at work.<sup>89</sup>

One variant of flextime allows employees to personally negotiate their schedules to meet a specific need (e.g., care for a disabled child). This measure fosters employee commitment to the organization and helps reduce stress. Furthermore, certain organizations modify work hours to better accommodate public transit schedules and employees' needs.

Another increasingly popular measure is to allow employees to work remotely from home. This enables those who so desire to work some or all of their hours from home. This measure reduces wasted time (e.g., transportation) and gives employees the flexibility to care for their dependents (e.g., elderly parents, sick children, etc.) or to meet an immediate need (e.g., drive a child to daycare). However, this option has certain disadvantages such as the risk of parents having to deal with greater interference between work and family life and thus more stress.<sup>90</sup> For parents, it requires a certain level of personal discipline to keep work from encroaching even more upon their family responsibilities.

There is a full range of work/family balance practices dealing with parental leave that go beyond the legal minimums, including leave for natural or adoptive parents upon the new child's arrival, maternity and paternity leave, adoption leave, and bereavement leave. In addition, compensatory time off gives employees time off for working overtime. This allows them to accumulate a bank of overtime hours they can draw from to take time off for family obligations without loss of salary. For those who plan well in advance, deferred pay leave is an alternative that makes it possible to finance a later leave set aside for family activities (e.g., a trip, new child, etc.). Giving employees flexibility when

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87 RAU, B.L. and HYLAND, M.M., 2002: "Role Conflict and Flexible Work Arrangements: The Effects on Applicant Attraction," *Personnel Psychology*, 55, 111–136.

88 RALSTON, D.A. and FLANAGAN, M.F., 1985: "The Effect of Flextime on Absenteeism and Turnover for Male and Female Employees," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 26, 206–217.

89 FRONE, M.R. & YARDLEY, J.K., 1996: "Workplace Family-Supportive Programs: Predictors Employed Parents' Importance Ratings," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 69, pp. 351–366.

90 DUBURY, L.E., HIGGINS, C.A., and THOMAS, D.R., 1996: "Work and Family Environment and the Adoption of Computer-Supported Supplemental Work-at-Home," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 49, pp. 1–23.

choosing their annual vacation dates allows them to divide up their annual vacation time into shorter periods to allow them to fulfill certain isolated family obligations. A number of these options allow parents to take off work without losing wages or employee benefits for family obligations, emergencies (e.g., sick child), or to take part in important events for the family (e.g., teacher meetings).

Daycare services at work are the exception to the rule. For example, in Québec, only 2.5% of collective agreements include inhouse daycare provisions. Satisfaction with onsite daycare service helps to considerably alleviate the work/family conflict.<sup>91</sup> It is therefore a practice worth implementing at more organizations. Others, without providing daycare services themselves, provide a daycare referral service to help parents find a spot for their children.<sup>92</sup> Daycare services provided at the company are highly appreciated by employees.

Certain financial assistance measures can have significant repercussions on work/family balance. For example, concrete measures to support families may include offering financial assistance for caring for dependents (e.g., daycare fees), full or partial reimbursement of daycare fees, complementary pay plans to bridge the gap between actual wages and the benefits of a public parental leave plan, financial assistance for adoption, compensation for overtime hours in leave time rather than money, use of a free phone line for couples working remotely, and free access to a visiting nursing service for people who are at home sick.

All these practices are indeed valid and may accommodate parents by providing them with support and a certain level of flexibility to fulfill their family responsibilities. However, their impact will continue to be limited if the sources of work/family conflict related to the nature of the work itself—such as an overload of work, ambiguous and conflicting roles, and the lack of feedback and autonomy—stay the same. We know that these factors create undue stress that has repercussions on the health of the parents and the family.<sup>93</sup>

One in four Canadians faces a high level of work overload, and this trend is steadily on the rise.<sup>94</sup> The adaptation practices presented in this article cannot solve the work/family conflict if the work overload—and resulting stress—do not stop growing. The

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91 GOFF, S.J., MOUNT, M.K., and JAMISON, R.L., 1990: "Employer Supported Child Care, Work-Family, and Absenteeism: A Field Study," *Personnel Psychology*, 43, pp. 739–809.

92 GOSSELIN, H.L., 2005: "Pourquoi des entreprises mettent en place des mesures de conciliation emploi-famille?" in *De la conciliation emploi-famille a une politique des temps sociaux*, G.B Tremblay, Presse de l'Université du Québec, Sainte-Foy, pp. 135–164.

93 KARASEK, R. & THEORELL T., 1990: "Healthy Work. Stress, Productivity, and the Reconstruction of Working Life," New York: Basic Books.

94 DUXBURY, L., HIGGINS, C., and JOHNSON, K., 1999: "An Examination of the Implications and Costs of Work-Life Conflict in Canada," Ottawa: Department of Health.

responsibility of organizations therefore goes beyond implementing practices, and they must first consider the workload they expect employees to handle. For organizations, this means identifying the causes of work overload and overtime (e.g., unrealistic demands, poor planning, unjustified tight schedules, unnecessary supervision) and providing employees with the decision-making freedom and training needed to plan and perform their own jobs. Organizations must work to find strategies to reduce offsite meetings and implement a corporate culture that makes it possible for everyone—without exception—to take advantage of these practices to help improve work/family balance without negative consequences

## Conclusion

Economic, technological, and social changes have profoundly altered the workplace and created conditions that heighten pressure on parents and their family. Research findings on the impact of the work/family conflict on parents and children are disconcerting and warrant examination by the community. As these studies show, the difficulty of striking a balance between family and work responsibilities not only affects parents and their children, but also organizational productivity. The similarities in research findings on the impact of the work/family conflict on health are consistent enough to justify action by all parties involved. However, additional research is needed to clarify the harmful effects on spouses and children.

Work/family conflict management is a shared responsibility. It is clear that governments, through their public policies, provide a framework that affects social security, labor standards, job security, and family services. They must serve as a model for other organizations. Unions have the responsibility to take this issue into account in their negotiations.

Parents must take responsibility for the values they choose and the decisions they make on how to protect their family, maintain a harmonious relationship as a couple, and stay healthier while respecting their work priorities.

Organizations clearly have a major role to play. Their level of awareness has greatly increased in recent years, as evidenced by the numerous initiatives certain companies have implemented to support their employees. We must applaud these initiatives, but they remain too insufficient and sporadic to counter the harmful effects the work/family conflict currently has on parents and their family. The findings show that despite these initiatives, work/family conflict-related stress continues to grow. Of course, confronted with performance objectives dictated in part by economic requirements, organizations constantly demand higher productivity. However, even within this model there is a degree of leeway that does not involve additional expenses. The challenge for organizations

may not be as demanding as it may seem at first glance. It is a matter of seeing things differently. Inexpensive options for improving working conditions are known. These options even have the potential to serve the twofold mission of improving productivity and creating greater harmony between work and family requirements. Adapting work hours, planning and organizing work, clarifying roles, reducing overload, and increasing autonomy are just a few examples. It is in large part a matter of raising awareness that it is possible to do things differently without necessarily spending more.

What does the future hold? Should we expect the impact on family health to be so significant that it forces governments to legislate and impose restrictive laws? Should we expect organizations affected by the costs associated with absenteeism, the expenses of group insurance, and the difficulties of attracting and retaining employees to be forced to incorporate the work/family component in their strategic human resource management objectives? Will the labor shortages announced in certain employment categories associated with the demands of the Internet generation move organizations to innovate and adopt consistent reconciliation measures to address these changes? On the whole, efforts by every segment—governments, organizations, unions, and parents—are critical for this issue to be resolved to the benefit of today's families.

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