After-school Care and Work-Life Issues (2008)

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Basic Concepts & Definitions

I. Basic Concepts and Definitions

Out-of-school time and after-school are two terms that have been used to define the time that passes between the end of a typical school day and the time when working parents generally return home from work. The authors here use “after-school” as their conceptualization of this time. After-school is defined by some to include school holidays, early release days, and summer vacations, and has been more specifically “conceptualized along a continuum, characterized at one end by a stable schedule utilizing the same setting or settings over time, and, at the other end, by a high degree of change on an hourly, daily, weekly, or monthly basis” (Nash & Fraser, 1998). After-school arrangements include self-care, formal after-school programs, and family or other relative care. Children who care for themselves after school are often referred to as “latchkey children.” They arrive home from school while their parents are still at work and remain unsupervised until an older child, a parent, or another adult arrives home. Formal after-school programs include a variety of activities that take place in the school building such as clubs, homework hall, and enrichment activities. Formal after-school programs can also take place outside of the school setting, both in neighborhoods and in communities. Finally, family or other relative care refers to after-school supervision by an older sibling or other family member such as an aunt or grandmother.

Given the variety of after-school access and options, families with diverse structures and needs may or may not have their desired arrangements in place. Despite large increases in federal funding through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Child Care and Development Fund, some working parents who work standard hours are still concerned about their children when school has released and before the workday is complete. The term, “Parental
concerns about after-school time” (PCAST), is defined as the degree to which employed parents are concerned about the welfare of their school-aged children during this gap.

It is becoming widely recognized that quality after-school care can benefit working families and their social environments such as their workplace, home, and community. Regular attendance in high-quality after-school programs is associated with a range of positive developmental outcomes for children, including improved academic performance, task persistence, improved work habits and study skills, and improved feelings and attitudes (Vandell, et al., 2005).

II. Importance of the Topic to Work-Family Studies

Increasing numbers of parents are entering the labor force. Parents of minor (mostly school-aged) children constituted 32.5 percent of the labor force (close to 50 million employees) in 2005 (percentage computed by the authors from data in U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006a, 2006b). Among parents of these children, roughly two-thirds (66.5 percent) were employed full-time, and 61.3 percent were dual-earner families (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006a, 2006b). Dual-earner couples were working a combined 91 hours per week in 2002, an increase of 10 hours per week since 1977 (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Prottas, 2003).

Working parents, particularly from dual-earner or single-parent families, may face additional work and family challenges based on their after-school care needs. With respect to personal well-being and organizational outcomes, parental after-school concerns affect both employed parents’ well-being and their performance on the job (Barnett & Gareis, 2006). After-school care is an issue that affects families, their work, and how working parents organize their lives to promote a successful integration of both areas.

III. State of the Body of Knowledge

Many books and articles have been written on the topic of after-school care. Historically, much of the literature focused on disparities in the need for and access to quality programs. Today, the literature has become much more specific, evidence-based, and theory-driven. There are many aspects to consider about after-school arrangements and how they can help and/or hinder working families.

Scheduling Conflicts

Two-thirds of dual-earner couples work standard hours which often results in a mismatch with their children’s school schedules (Presser, 2000). For these working parents, the gap between the end of the
school day and the time they arrive home from work is estimated to be between 15 and 25 hours per
week (Gareis, Sabattini, Barnett, & Carter, 2006). As a U.S. Department of Labor report (1999) noted,
“Using the most generous calculations, only about 64 percent of a full-time worker’s standard work
schedule is covered by the hours children are typically in school.” Because of the gap between the time
school ends and the time most employed parents arrive home from work, large numbers of parents may
be concerned about their children’s welfare during the after-school hours. Arguably, concerns are higher
among dual-earner couples in which both partners work standard full-time schedules or single-parent
families in which the parent works a full-time standard schedule.

Some families have found that working nonstandard work hours is necessary in order to care for their
children. Accordingly, one-third of dual-earner couples with children work in shifts (Presser, 2000). The
U.S. Census Bureau (2005) recently reported that preschoolers whose mothers worked a night or
evening shift were more likely to have their father as a child-care provider than those whose mothers
worked day shifts (39 percent and 18 percent, respectively). However, one cannot be sure whether shift
work is due more to employer demands or family needs.

Cost and Availability

To further complicate matters for working families, whereas job flexibility and social capital may ease the
burden of after-school care-related issues for high-earning couples, many families cannot afford the
expense of high-quality after-school care despite their dual-earner status. On average, families with an
employed mother and children younger than age 15 paid an average of $107 per week for child care in
spent 29 percent of their monthly income on child care, compared with only 6 percent for families at the
poverty level or above (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Alternatively, research has also shown that 12
percent of children from families with low incomes (below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, or FPL)
use self-care, compared with 17 percent of higher-income children, indicating that perhaps lower-income
families are receiving subsidies to help them with formal after-school care arrangements (Vandivere et al.,
2003). Optimistically, and following this logic, the funding for child and after-school care has been on the
rise, and more families are receiving assistance for their care arrangements. A range of funding streams,
including the Child Care and Development Fund, TANF funds, and Workforce Development funds, as well
as more targeted funds, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, are being used to
support the development and implementation of a diverse set of after-school programs serving a diverse
population of youth (Little, 2007). Among poor families, those receiving support for after-school care
increased from 31 percent in 1996 to 36 percent in 2001 (Urban Institute, 2004).
In addition to the issue of cost, the paucity of slots available in high-quality, affordable, and accessible after-school programs means that parents often have to use less-than-ideal child-care arrangements (Heymann, 2000). The general consensus is that there are far too few programs to meet need, and given state and federal budget-cutting measures, the problem of inadequate supply is getting worse rather than better (Afterschool Alliance, 2003). Moreover, parents perceive that there are not enough formal after-school programs for their children. In 2003, less than a third of voters (29 percent) believed that there were enough or more than enough programs in their area, while a majority (55 percent) believed there were not enough (Afterschool Alliance, 2003). Accordingly, parents may feel forced to put their children in whatever program is available, regardless of whether it meets their or their children’s needs in terms of quality and content. Because data on the availability and need for after-school programs are collected on a state-by-state basis, it is hard to determine whether there are too few programs available overall or whether there are many programs that are quickly filled.

Of the slots that are available, some are based in the schools; others are not. Those that are based outside of schools often create transportation problems for parents, raising additional concerns about their children’s safety (Newman, Fox, Flynn, & Christeson, 2000). Parents who cannot find or afford quality, formal after-school care options often have to rely on family or other relative care. Although children in these settings are with an adult, other factors mitigate the positive effects of adult supervision on parental concerns. Previous research shows that asking relatives to assist with child care can at times increase parents’ stress, mostly because of the fear of imposing and straining relationships, because they feel obliged to reciprocate the favor, or because they feel guilty or negatively judged by family members for not being able to care for their children independently (Bastida, 2001; Bullock & Waugh, 2004; Hansen, 2004; Nelson, 2000; Sabattini, 2004). Moreover, such ad hoc arrangements tend to be dangerous and unreliable, creating distress for both parents and children (Heymann, 2000).

The reality is that, due to reasons of availability, cost, safety, or logistics, many working parents of school-aged children wind up relying on self-care, on the assistance of their older children, or on a patchwork of informal setups (Newman et al., 2000). For example, Allen and Funkhouser (1998) found that 44 percent of 12-year-olds were in self-care after school, and many of these children were also caring for younger siblings. Vandivere et al. (2003) found that among 10- to 12-year-olds, those with parents employed full-time were over two-and-a-half times more likely than those with unemployed parents to use self-care. Younger children were also more likely to be in self-care if their parents were employed full-time; 6- to 9-year-olds were about twice as likely to use self-care if their parents were employed full-time.
Parental Concern

Employed parents of older children have good reason to worry about their children during the after-school gap. After-school care is an issue for parents of children of all ages; however, the type of after-school care arrangements and concerns of parents regarding care can differ depending upon the child’s age. Developmental considerations are often a major factor in parental decisions regarding after-school care arrangements. Whereas a second-grade child may be placed in a supervised after-school program, an eighth-grade child may be at home unsupervised while parents are at work. For older children, who are likely not to want to participate in after-school programs, there is added concern. There is, for example, a well-documented spike in juvenile crime between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. In addition, unsupervised tweens and teens are at high risk for such risky behaviors as alcohol use, loitering, truancy, smoking, substance use/abuse, car crashes, sexual activity, and crime victimization (Cohen, Farley, Taylor, Martin, & Schuster, 2002; Kurz, 2002; National Center for Schools & Communities, 1999; Newman et al., 2000). Cohen et al. (2002) found that high-school aged “youths who were unsupervised for 30 or more hours per week were more likely to be sexually active compared with those who were unsupervised for 5 hours per week or less” (p. 66). Understandably, many full-time employed parents whose children are unsupervised after school report high parental concerns.

Awareness of the magnitude and potential seriousness of this problem has not escaped the popular press. “Home Alone and Worried at Work” (Galt, 2006), “Idle Hours Are a Parent’s Nightmare” (Brady, 2006), and “At Work, Worrying about the Kids” (Cho, 2006) are but a few of the many newspaper headlines highlighting the dilemma that this schedule mismatch creates for working families. In spite of considerable popular press concerns, researchers have been slow to embrace this issue. To the extent that the problem has received systematic attention, the focus has been largely on the need for “at-risk” youth to have more targeted and supervised educational experiences after school (e.g., Bell & Fink, 2000; Bell, Flay, & Paikoff, 2002).

Adult supervision, as noted above, does not always ameliorate parental concerns. The exception is supervision by a parent, which is associated with low parental concerns (Catalyst, 2006). The more hours children spent in the care of their other parent during the after-school hours, the lower the parental concerns of the employed parent. However, most full-time employed dual-earner parents do not have a partner who is available after school.

Not surprisingly, if working parents are concerned about their children’s welfare after-school, they may bring these concerns to the workplace, giving rise to job disruptions in obvious ways. For instance, they may be called at work or even have to leave work if there is a disruption of their after-school care
arrangements. Even in the absence of obvious disruptions in child care, just worrying about the possibility may affect productivity and, hence, the employer’s bottom line. Concern about family can interfere with work in less obvious ways as well. Employees who are concerned about personal matters have more trouble concentrating and are more likely to make mistakes. Despite the fact that parents express genuine concerns about after-school care for their children, researchers know very little about the features of programs that affect PCAST because scant attention has been paid to parents’ needs in the design or the evaluation of these programs.

To address this deficit, Barnett and her colleagues conducted a large survey study of employed parents with at least one school-aged child (N = 1755) who were employed at three Fortune 100 companies (Catalyst, 2006). To assess parents’ degree of concern about their target child’s welfare during the after-school hours, participants completed the PCAST scale. Using a four-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (extremely), they indicated their level of concern in a variety of domains including safety, travel, productive use of time, and reliability, among others. Findings suggest that working parents were most at risk for high PCAST when they: (1) had more responsibility for child care in their households, (2) worked longer hours, (3) reported greater concern about behavioral/social issues with a particular child, and (4) when the child spent more time unsupervised after school. Because parents worry more about unsupervised daughters than about unsupervised sons, parents with a daughter who spent more time unsupervised after school were at particularly high risk for PCAST. This finding held true for children of every age, but older children were much more likely to spend time unsupervised after school. Moreover, experiencing high levels of PCAST was associated with: (1) lower satisfaction with promotion opportunities in the organization; (2) lower belief that one can compete successfully to advance in the organization; and (3) lower job satisfaction, which, in turn, predicted lower organizational commitment and poorer personal well-being.

In contrast to much conventional wisdom suggesting that mothers ought to experience higher parental concern than fathers, in this study, there was no significant gender difference in PCAST once responsibility for child care was taken into account. Although in most two-parent families, women are more likely than men to take on a larger share of child care, in those families in which fathers have the greater responsibility for childcare, they will likely be most vulnerable to PCAST. Thus, the difference between men and women’s susceptibility to PCAST is due not to gender, but to their degree of responsibility for child care in the household.

Research that speaks more generally on the topic of after-school care has also been conducted and has appeared in numerous comprehensive books. Bookman (2004), for example, writes on employees in the biotech industry and highlights their after-school patterns. She found that workers are often involved in a
partnership with their community service providers, schools, and faith-based institutions in order to secure a community-based social network that they can use in combination with paid care for their children. Additionally, Deborah Belle (1999) illustrates, through her interviews with parents and children, how after-school arrangements are not arbitrarily made for convenience; rather, they are determined through parents’ deep thought and efforts to select and negotiate the best arrangement for their needs as well as the needs of their children - no matter how complex the arrangements. Even to the children, Belle (1999) finds, it is the quality of the fit between family and care arrangement, not simply the presence of an adult that is important.

IV. Implications for Research and Practice

At present, there are many unanswered questions about the ways in which after-school care affects working families. Are parents restricting their work hours or limiting their job options due to after-school choices? Would parents prefer to work more hours if their children could have quality after-school supervision? What children do in the hours after school can have critical implications for both them and their families. In order to maximize the benefits and reduce the risks of certain after-school care arrangements, policymakers can influence the trends in after-school care availability, access, and quality. Parents and businesses must also remain invested in partnering with the efforts of schools to keep children supervised during out-of-school time.

Policies at the federal, state, local, and workplace levels can be expanded to allow for parents and caretakers to have more flexible job schedules to meet their child care needs after-school. Recent devolution of legislation to the states has sparked public discourse at the state level on this issue. For example in the 2005-2006 legislative session, seven states created task forces or committees in the state government to address after-school needs and development. Certain workplace policies can not only allow for parents to be home with their children, creating a safe and supervised environment, but they can also reduce the risk of high PCAST, which, in turn, benefits their place of employment.

The supports rated by parents as being most effective in reducing caregiving stress were those that reflect organizational culture (for example, an understanding supervisor/manager) and flextime/flex-place. Specifically, when employees had control over their work schedules, they were less likely to experience high levels of PCAST (Barnett & Gareis, 2006). In contrast, inflexible work schedules increased the likelihood of high parental concerns. Future research initiatives may benefit from an examination of workplace policies and conflicts that arise from an internal organizational workplace structure. Also, they might include an examination of the cost versus benefit of aligning parents’ workplace hours with
children’s school hours as well as how closing the gaps in school calendars and schedules versus work calendars and schedules might reduce PCAST.

Parental concerns about after-school time (PCAST) is emerging as a new and powerful predictor of a range of personal and organizational outcomes. As such, it may be useful for work-family researchers to include this measure in future studies, particularly with longitudinal designs, as the previous studies have been cross-sectional in nature. Having identified PCAST as a new family demand that may lead to work-family conflict, other research questions arise. These include: (1) What are the long-term effects of PCAST on personal well-being and job-related outcomes? (2) What is the level of PCAST among single employed parents? (3) How does PCAST relate to personal well-being and organizational outcomes among employed single parents, cross-sectionally and longitudinally?

Neighborhood and community resources should feature prominently in future research as viable options for after-school care (Pitt-Catsosughes, MacDermid, Schwarz, & Matz, 2006). Researchers should look beyond self-care, formal after-school care, and family and other relative care as options for working parents with school-aged children and extend possible choices to include community and neighborhood resources such as Youth Bureaus, the YMCA, and neighborhood community activity centers. An examination of the use of and satisfaction with these alternative programs in alleviating PCAST may be a relevant future area of investigation.

Lastly, funding for after-school care programs has been, and should remain, on the rise to ensure that all families, regardless of socioeconomic status, have access to quality after-school arrangements. Future research might consider the issues of access to after-school programs as well as use of and satisfaction with these programs. As mentioned previously, access to after-school care is dependent on a variety of factors, including parental employment, program availability, cost, and accessibility. Even when parents have access to after-school care, their reported satisfaction with the care is no doubt a factor in whether they continue to utilize this care arrangement. Therefore, lack of satisfaction with a program may prompt additional parental concern regarding after-school programs. There is a need for nationally representative data on after-school availability and quality.

**References**

Afterschool Alliance. (2003). Closing the door on afterschool programs: An analysis of how the proposed cut to the 21st century community learning centers program will affect children and families in every state. Washington, DC.


Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. (More about the Matrix ...).

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry’s topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.

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**Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains**
Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.

It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the workfamily area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between
specific factors or clusters of factors.

Process

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. **Key Informants:** The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants. Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. **Literature review:** Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. **Peer review:** On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes at pittcats@bc.edu
Assumptions

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:
1. Our use of the word "family" refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term "work-family" to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves. Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term "work-family" (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word "family" continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word "family" to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, caregiver/caretaker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal. Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

Outcomes

We will publish a Working Paper, "Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study," on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

Limitations

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a "work in progress." We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.
Listing of the Information Domains Included in the Map

The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:

1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

**Work-Family Experiences:** The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
- Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
- Families' work-family needs & priorities
- Families' work-family problems & concerns
- Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
- Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
- Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
- Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

**Antecedents:** Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individual Antecedents
- Family Antecedents
• Workplace Antecedents
• Community Antecedents
• Societal Antecedents

**Covariates:** The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see Column C in Table 1).

• Individual Covariates
• Family Covariates
• Workplace Covariates
• Community Covariates
• Societal Covariates

**Decisions and Responses:** The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

• Individual Decision and Responses
• Family Decisions and Responses
• Workplace Decisions and Responses
• Community Decisions and Responses
• Public Sector Decisions and Responses

**Outcomes & Impacts:** The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

• Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
• Outcomes & Impacts on Families
• Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
• Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
• Outcomes & Impacts on Society

**Theoretical Foundations:** The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
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