Basic Concepts & Definitions

During the last quarter of the twentieth century industrialized society witnessed a dramatic metamorphosis in the roles of men and women in the workforce and, to a lesser extent, in the home. This change was fueled by the Women's Movement, which successfully advocated for the equal opportunity of women in the workplace (Friedan, 1963), and by the steady decline in the earning power of men's wages, making women's employment a necessity for many families (Wilkie, 1991; Mishel, Bernstein, & Schmitt, 2001, p. 120). Beginning in the 1960s the traditional breadwinner-homemaker lifestyle, which was the norm for middle-class married couples, gave way, at first slowly and then with gathering momentum, to the dual-earner couple, dyads in which both members work for pay. Today, dual-earner couples are the norm, representing 54% of married couples in the U.S. in 2001 (see Figure 1 [requires PowerPoint to view]) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This dyad is even more common among couples with children in the home, representing 64% of parental dyads and 57% of couples with children under the age of 6 in 2001 (see Figure 2 [requires PowerPoint to view]) (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002).

Because of their dual responsibilities, working couples are particularly vulnerable to the problems of work-family spillover, conflict, and crossover. Work-family spillover, which can be negative or positive and is bidirectional, involves the transfer of mood and behavior from one domain (home or workplace) to the other (Almeida, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999; Bromet, Dew, & Parkinson, 1990). For example, negative work-to-family spillover occurs when an employee is distracted and irritable at home because of pressures at work (see Table 1 below for other forms of work-family spillover).
Work-family conflict occurs when the responsibilities of work and family interfere with one another. For example, work-family conflict occurs when a parent must leave work to attend to a sick child, or when an employee brings work home to complete during family time.

Crossover, a third concept relevant to dual-earner couples, occurs when events at the workplace influence the mood or behavior of one’s spouse (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989). For example, negative crossover occurs when a disagreement at work leads to tension between the employee and the employee’s family members later when at home.

[See also in this Encyclopedia: Work-Family Linkages and Work-Family Role Conflict.]

**Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies**

The rise in the number of dual-earner couples has fueled interest in the area of work-family studies. When the breadwinner/homemaker template was the norm in the 1950s, work and family were considered separate and primarily gender-specific domains (Kanter, 1977). Separate bodies of literature existed on the workplace and on the family, but rarely was the connection between the two studied. Interest in studying the relationship between work and family grew as the number of dual-earner couples rose, and the boundaries and roles within the home and the workplace blurred.

The struggles faced by dual-earner couples has also spurred interest in work-family studies. Workplace and government policies in the mid-1900s were based on the assumption that someone was at home full-
time to care for the needs of the family leaving the worker unencumbered by outside demands (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2002; Kanter, 1977; Moen, 2003). As the number of dual-earner couples has grown, the mismatch between workplace and public policies and the reality of working families has become increasingly problematic. Although the length of the average work week has changed little over the past twenty years, the aggregate amount of time that couples spend at work has increased dramatically (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001; Mishel, Bernstein, & Schmitt, 2001). The average couple in 1997 worked ten hours a week more than the average couple in 1970 (Jacobs & Gerson, 1998). This has created a time squeeze for dual-earners, who have lost much of the discretionary time previously devoted to home and family care. As a result, working couples have difficulty maintaining the home, nurturing relationships within the family, and caring for children and aging family members. To cope, many couples delay or limit childbearing, turn down jobs that require a heavy workload, travel or relocation, and reduce their commitment to work in order to meet the needs of the family.

By studying dual-earner couples, researchers can identify the challenges, choices, and the outcomes associated with the combined responsibilities of work and family, as well as how existing workplace policies and social arrangements constrain or enlarge their options and their choices. This knowledge can serve as a guide for couples and societal institutions as they adjust to meet the needs of what is now the “typical” worker - a man or woman who is part of a dual-earner household.

State of the Body of Knowledge

**Working and Well-being:** Combining the roles of work and family is generally conducive to the well-being of men and women (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Marshall & Barnett, 1993). Women who work full-time experience less anxiety and depression and better physical health than full-time homemakers, and their husbands are more involved with caring for their children (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Repetti, Matthews, & Waldron, 1989; Wethington & Kessler, 1989). Work also provides men and women a buffer for the stresses in the home, a network of social relations, and opportunities for meaningful engagement and success that are not available to those who are not employed (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Finally, working for pay is crucial to the economic viability of many families. Not only are two wages often necessary to adequately provide for the needs of most families, dual-earner couples are less economically vulnerable than single-earner families, for whom a lay-off can mean financial collapse.

Well-being among working couples is maximized when one's work-related behaviors are consistent with one's and one's spouse's gender role attitudes (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). For example, one study of dual-earner couples found that work-related travel enhanced marital satisfaction when it was congruent with the couples’ gender role attitudes and detracted from marital satisfaction when incongruent (Roehling & Bultman, 2002). Other studies have found that working couples are happier when the wife's employment
is consistent with the gender role attitudes of the husband and the wife (Brennan, Barnett & Gareis, 2001; Hoffman, 1989; Vannoy & Philliber, 1992).

**Work-family Conflict:** Work-family conflict is particularly acute among dual-earner couples, for whom no one is readily available to care of the needs of the family. Among dual-earner couples, wives typically experience higher levels of work-family conflict than husbands, particularly when young children are in the home (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1994; Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Roehling, Moen, & Batt, 2003). Other factors associated with increased work-family conflict among dual-earner couples are high levels of job involvement, a heavy workload, conflict at work or at home, and low levels of supervisor support (Fox & Dwyer, 1999; Higgins, Duxbury, & Irving, 1992; Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1994). Work-family conflict is, in turn, linked to increased levels of depression, alcohol use, marital tension, and poorer health (Fox & Dwyer, 1999; Frone, Russell, & Barnes, 1996; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

**Work-Family Spillover and Cross Over:** Despite the difficulties involved in managing work and family, dual-earner couples tend to report more positive than negative family-to-work spillover (see Table 1 for descriptions of spillover). That is, family life enhances one's work life more than it detracts from it. Furthermore, family life enhances work life to a greater degree than work life enhances family life (Roehling, Moen, & Batt, 2003).

Crossover, when the stresses of work affect the mood and health of one's spouse, is more likely to affect women than men. Husbands' work load, work-family conflict, and work-related stress all predict wives' reports of role overload, work-family conflict, anxiety and depression. Furthermore, when men encounter arguments and conflict at work, they are more likely to later engage in arguments at home (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989). By contrast, wives' work load and work-related stresses have little or no relationship to the well-being of the husband or to interactions in the home (Crouter, Bumpas, Maguire, & McHale, 1999; Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Jones & Fletcher, 1993; Pleck & Stains, 1985; Westman, Etzion, & Danon, 2001).

**Division of Labor:** Despite the rising number of women in the workforce, men's hours on the job and women's hours at home continue to perpetuate a neo-traditional division of labor for most dual-earner couples (Moen & Yu, 2000; Clarkberg & Moen, 2001). With the influx of women in the workplace, there has been a shift in the division of labor in the home. Women today perform less housework than previous generations, and men perform more household chores than their predecessors. However, women, whether employed or not, still tend to perform more housework than men, approximately a 1.8 fold difference (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Hochschild, 1989). This is down from the six fold difference in 1965 (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000).
Several factors influence the amount of time that dual-earner couples spend on housework. When the husband or wife works relatively long hours he/she tends to spend less time on housework, and his/her spouse tends to spend more time on housework (Almeida, Maggs, & Galambos, 1993; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). Housework is generally most equitably shared among egalitarian couples and also among couples in which the wife earns a greater proportion of the income (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Deutsch, Lussier, & Servis, 1993). Finally, the presence of children, particularly young children, increases the amount of time that the wife spends on housework, but not the husband (Clarkberg & Merola, 2003).

Men in dual-earner couples are typically more engaged in caring for their children than men in traditional, single earner families, although women typically still perform the majority of child care. Men are most likely to care for children when the wife is unavailable to care for the child. For example, husbands are more likely to care for children when the wife works long hours or when the couple works alternate shifts (Deutsch, Lussier, & Servis, 1993; Deutsch & Saxon, 1998). However, when both members of the couple are home, the caregiving usually falls to the wife (Deutch & Saxon, 1998). Paternal involvement appears to benefit children. Children whose fathers have been actively involved in their care tend to have higher self-esteem and less gender-typed behaviors and attitudes than children with less involved fathers (Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001).

Prioritizing Careers: Despite the fact that most adult women now work for pay, traditional gender role schemas still hold sway when dual-earner couples are forced to make choices between the career of the husband or the wife. Even among a sample of professional, dual-earner couples, when faced with career turning points, the husband’s career is more often given priority over the wife’s career (Pixley & Moen, 2003). Women are also less likely than men to make career-based choices that will disrupt the lives of their family members. For example, men are more likely than women to relocate the family for their job (Bielby & Bielbly, 1992). Relocation often comes at a cost to the wife, who is at risk of being underemployed following such a move (LeClere & McLaughlin, 1997; Morrison & Lichter, 1988). Men in dual-earner couples are also more likely than their wives to travel for work (Moore, 2002; Roehling & Bultman, 2002). The presence of children in the home further decreases the chances that the wife will travel for work, but does not affect the husband’s propensity to travel (Roehling & Bultman, 2003).

Strategies for Managing Work and Family: Prior to having children, many dual-earner couples are able to maintain a high commitment to work, each working 40 hours or more per week. Following parenthood, however, this high level of dual-commitment to work is difficult to maintain, often prompting one member of the couple to scale back their commitment to work (Becker & Moen, 1999; Bianchi & Spain, 1996; Cohen & Bianchi, 1999). Typically, the wife makes the greatest adjustment by reducing her work hours, or even leaving the workforce (Glass & Riley, 1998). As the children grow older, the wife tends to increase
her hours, or reenter the workforce. On average, however, her hours will never again match those of her husband. (Lundberg & Rose, 2000).

A second common strategy employed by dual-earner parents is the adoption of staggered shifts. More than one-quarter of all dual earner-couples and one-third of dual-earner couples with children, include at least one spouse who works a non-standard schedule, and more than half include at least one spouse who works weekends (Presser, 1999). While economical, this strategy has its costs. Young couples who work staggered shifts are three to five times more likely to divorce than dual-earner couples who work standard day-time shifts (Presser, 1999).

Dual-earner couples are also likely to utilize many workplace strategies for managing work and family (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). One of the most popular strategies is the use of flextime, the ability to control the hours during which one works. A 1998 survey of businesses in the United States found that over two-thirds of large employers allow their workers to periodically change starting and quitting times and one-quarter allow employees to change starting and quitting times on a daily basis (Galinsky & Bond, 1998). Extending flextime to employees has tremendous benefits to the employer and employee. Flextime has been linked to reductions in tardiness, absenteeism, sick leave and to a reduction of turnover, as well as to increased psychological and physical health and greater employee loyalty (Glass, & Riley, 1998; Lisa Kingston, 1990; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Roehling, Roehling, & Moen). Further, companies that adopt flexible work schedules are less likely to be sued by their employees (Kaman, McCarthy, Gulbro, & Tucker, 2001).

Telecommuting, the use of technology to perform paid work while at home, is another strategy used by working couples. In 1998 a little more than half of the companies surveyed reported that they allow their employees to work at home occasionally, and one-third reported that their employees work off-site or at home regularly (Galinsky & Bond, 1998). Telecommuting allows workers to be more available for family-related needs, thereby relieving some of the strain endemic to dual-earner couples. However, telecommuting blurs the boundaries between work and home, which can lead to increased negative work-family spillover (Chesley, Moen, & Shore, 2003; Roehling, Moen, & Batt, 2003).

The attitude of the employer toward work-family conflict is at least as important to worker well-being as are the workplace policies. Employees who perceive their supervisors as being understanding and supportive when they confront work-family conflict report lower levels of psychological and physiological distress, and work-family conflict, and are less likely to contemplate leaving their job (Eagle, Icenogle, Maes, &Miles, 1998; Fox & Dwyer, 1999; Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Pisarski, Bohle, & Callan, 1998; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Supervisor support is also linked to higher levels of job satisfaction, feelings of success, and greater loyalty toward one's employer (Roehling, Roehling, & Moen, 2001; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Valcour & Batt, 2003).
Many of the strategies that make the management of work and life easier for dual-earner couples, like flextime and telecommuting, are not available to all employees. Women and employees involved in direct service to consumers, such as waitresses, health care workers, and clerks, and those who work in small businesses are less likely to have flextime available to them than other workers (Galinsky & Bond, 1998; Higgins, Duxbury, Lee, & Mills, 1994). These direct service workers often have the greatest need for workplace flexibility because they lack the financial resources to hire someone to take care of family needs in their stead.

Marriage and Fertility: Concomitant with the rise in the number of dual-earner couples has been a change in the timing and the rate of fertility. In the past fifty years the peak age for childbearing has shifted from the early twenties to the late twenties and early thirties. This is particularly true for women with higher levels of education, who want to establish themselves in their careers before they have children (Bachu & McConnell, 2000). Additionally, because of the difficulty of combining work and family responsibilities, many professional men and women in dual-career marriages limit their family size or decide not to have children at all (Altucher & Williams, 2003). Between 1976 and 1998 the number of married, childless women between the ages of 40 and 44 almost doubled (see Figure 3 [requires PowerPoint to view]). Some professional women have chosen to remain childless because of the negative impact that parenthood could have on their career and marriage (Bram, 1985). Other women have inadvertently postponed childbearing until they have passed their window of fertility (Hewlett, 2002; Chen & Morgan, 1991).

Implications for Practice and Research

There are both advantages and disadvantages to being a member of a dual-earner couple. Men and women who are active both in the home and in the marketplace have higher levels of psychological and physical well-being. They have larger networks of social support, a greater sense of competency, and a higher degree of economic security than those who do not have these multiple roles. However, because of the dearth of social supports (government subsidized day care, after school programs, on-site day care, paid maternity and paternity leaves), and the long hours built into contemporary work expectations, men and women, particularly those with children, find that dual full-time employment can lead to conflict between the demands of work and those of the home. Bending to the lack of support structures and the high expectations of the workplace, many employees, particularly women with children, choose to reduce their hours at work, work non-standard shifts, and turn down opportunities for relocation and travel in order to maintain and provide stability for the household. Although these choices are often necessary, they can result in the permanent alteration of an employee's career trajectory.

Researchers need to identify and publicize the quandary that dual-earners face and the creative solutions that employees and employers are adopting to face this challenge. Employers need to be made aware of
the benefits that accrue to themselves and to their employees when they are attentive to the work-family needs of their workforce. For example, employees who have flexibility in scheduling their work hours are more loyal to their employer, have lower rates of turnover and absenteeism, and are less likely to sue their employer. Employees who perceive that their supervisors are supportive of them when they encounter work-family conflicts report higher levels of psychological and physical health, greater job satisfaction and employee loyalty, and fewer intentions to leave their job.

Researchers need to examine how other innovative strategies such as job sharing, condensed work week, and telecommuting affect employees, their families, and their workplaces. We also know very little about how the success of these strategies might be affected by gender, parenthood, gender role behaviors and occupational status. Some workplace requirements, such as extended travel, frequent relocation, or international assignments, are particularly difficult for family members. Employers and employees need to know how these practices impact the employee and the employee’s family as well as the measures that they can take to mitigate the potentially negative effects. Identifying the patterns and policies that promote greater gender equality and increased quality of life for working men and women, and their children, requires the study of policies as well as people, and the expected and unexpected shifts in work careers and family careers over the life course.

The change in women's roles in the workplace has been a global phenomenon, particularly in Western and industrialized countries. This article, however, will focus largely on research from the United States and Canada.

References


**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](...)).

Concepts related to adult development are relevant to all of the "Individual" domains in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Study. In addition, theories of adult development are relevant to Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings.

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 work-family 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 need & 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).
Table 1: Matrix of Information Domains (9/30/01)

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