Sloan Network Encyclopedia Entry


Author: Raymond R. Swisher, Bowling Green State University- Department of Sociology
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Concepts and Definitions
There are several approaches to defining the family-friendly community. One defines it as a positive subjective appraisal that the community is supportive of family-related tasks and demands (Swisher, Sweet, & Moen, 2004). As such, it is a sub-component of the broader concept of community satisfaction (Voydanoff, 2001). Alternatively, Bookman (2004) developed a “family-friendly community index” that combined 10 social indicators of the presence of local amenities (e.g., housing affordability, childcare programs, etc.). Most recently, Mannon and Brooks conceptualized family-friendliness in terms of its relationship to outcomes - “community attributes that lead to positive family outcomes” (2006, p. 408). Given its development within work and family research, most definitions also imply that family-friendly communities facilitate the management of work and family role conflicts (e.g., need for childcare).

Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies
The concept of a family-friendly community derives from a confluence of research in the areas of work and family, neighborhood and community effects, and the life course. A great deal of attention has been paid to the role of workplaces in facilitating a family’s ability to juggle the often competing demands of work and family (for a review, see Glass & Estes, 1997). Yet the lives of families, particularly those with children, are often embedded within neighborhoods, communities, and institutions such as schools, churches, and civic associations. It is only recently that researchers have begun to examine the interconnections between families, work, and communities (Bookman, 2004; Bowen, Richman, & Bowen, 2000; Mannon & Brooks, 2006; Michelson, 1985; Swisher, Sweet, & Moen, 2004; Voydanoff, 2007).

Communities are potentially important resources, or social buffers, for families that are attempting to navigate the demands of work and family. At the same time, they may present challenges or additional demands with which families must deal. The sections to follow describe these resources and challenges, but also raise an important theoretical and methodological challenge; that the role of communities will vary considerably by stage of life course, gender, socioeconomic status, and other factors.

State of the Body of Knowledge
What about a community makes it family-friendly? As the concept has developed, researchers have drawn upon the broader literatures on neighborhoods and communities to identify which characteristics of communities should matter most to family-friendliness. In doing so, researchers typically distinguish
between the demographic and socioeconomic structures of neighborhoods, and the more proximal social processes or linking mechanisms through which contextual influences operate.

Community Socioeconomic Structure. Wilson’s theory of the new urban poverty (Wilson, 1997) and the empirical research it generated focus on the negative consequences of concentrated poverty and unemployment (Gephart, 1997; Levanthal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Others have focused on the importance of “concentrated affluence” – a critical mass of human capital and middle-class families within communities (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999). As early research on the family-friendly community has been based primarily on middle-class families, employment issues have been defined as more of an individual’s or couple’s concern -- i.e., typically a community is near the husband’s job -- rather than as a structural issue affecting large numbers of workers. Bookman’s (2004) index, however, rightly includes indicators of community socioeconomic status and housing affordability as components of family-friendliness.

Community Life Course Structure. The types of families in a community, and their stages in the life course, have also been found to be important for family-friendliness. Swisher, Sweet, and Moen (2004) found that the presence of families at a similar stage in the life course -- termed “life stage -- neighborhood fit” -- promotes positive perceptions of family-friendliness (see also Sweet, Swisher, & Moen, 2005). For example, parents of young children were more likely to rate their communities as being family friendly if they resided in neighborhoods with greater concentrations of other families with young children. Other research has found a neighborhood’s “child care burden” (e.g., ratio of children-to-adults) associated with elevated rates of child maltreatment, drug trafficking, violent crime, juvenile delinquency, teen childbearing, and low-weight births (Coulton et al., 1995).

Community Social Processes. As one of the first to conceptualize the work-family-community interface, Voydanoff (2001) used an ecological perspective to identify important community social processes, including community social organization, social capital, social networks, volunteering and informal helping, and sense of community. Bowen, Richman and Bowen (2000) similarly point to the social capacity of communities to extend care and control. These conceptualizations draw upon the broader social capital literature (Coleman, 1988), and particularly its application at the community level. Well-known is the work of Sampson and colleagues, who highlight the concepts of informal social control and collective efficacy -- community members’ perceptions that they can collectively accomplish shared goals (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earles, 1997). Consistent with this emphasis on social process, Sweet, Swisher, and Moen (2005) found “neighborliness” an often mentioned component of community family-friendliness.
Community Safety. Within poor communities, lack of informal control and efficacy are often associated with community violence, which numerous studies have linked to negative outcomes for youth well-being (Osofsky, 1995). Despite the much lower risk of being exposed to community violence, middle-class families rate safety as a top priority when choosing neighborhoods of residence (Sweet, Swisher, & Moen, 2005).

Community Institutions. Perhaps of most importance from a work and family perspective is the quality of public institutions and services. High quality schools and other educational opportunities, such as museums and libraries, are important resources for working families. In Bookman’s (2004) family-friendliness index, four of the 10 indicators pertained to preschool childcare, school-age childcare, elder care, and the quality of education in general. Voydanoff (2007) similarly emphasizes education and childcare as important “boundary spanning” (i.e., between workplaces, families, and communities) resources. Child- and family-oriented organizations and events are also valued community amenities for families with children (Sweet, Swisher, & Moen, 2005).

Heterogeneity and Agency in the Life Course. The life course perspective (Elder, 1998; Moen, 2003) recognizes that families look to communities for different things at varying stages of the life course (Swisher, Sweet, & Moen, 2004). The community-related needs of a single mother or father likely differ from those of a married couple with young children (or older children), and from those of a couple who has never had children or whose children have moved out of the home. In a recent study of the subjective definitions of community family-friendliness, by dual-earner, middle-class couples in upstate New York, parents were considerably more likely to place emphasis on educational opportunities (i.e., reputation of schools, libraries), and on recreational opportunities and family-oriented events. Community needs also likely vary by the career types and stages of adults within the family (Han & Moen, 1999; Moen, 2003), and by family socioeconomic status and race and ethnicity. For example, research by South and Crowder (1999), found significant differences by race in the effects of neighborhood disadvantage on premarital childbearing and transitions to first marriages.

Due to the gendered nature of the life course, the meaning of family-friendliness also likely varies for men and women (Moen, 1996). Sweet, Swisher, and Moen (2005) found some evidence of gender differences among dual-earner couples. Though in large part men and women mentioned similar factors as important to family-friendliness (e.g., educational and recreational opportunities, family-oriented events and organizations), women were considerably more likely to point to the quality and affordability of daycare, as well as cultural opportunities.

Also central to the life course perspective is that people are active agents, who engage in “planfulness” (Shanahan, Elder, & Miech, 2001) and develop “family adaptive strategies” for addressing situational
imperatives and traversing life transitions (Moen & Wethington, 1992). One such adaptive strategy is to select a community that will meet current and anticipated personal and family needs. Community-related factors topping the lists of reasons that dual-earner couples chose their current communities include safety, reputation of schools, and being near to a spouse’s job. Not unexpectedly, husband’s job requirements usually take precedence over wives’ careers (Sweet, Swisher, & Moen, 2005).

**Implications for Research and Practice**
Research on the family-friendly community has successfully drawn attention to an important context within which working families negotiate their increasingly demanding lives. It is clear that couples are cognizant of the importance of community characteristics both within their work and family lives, and the extent to which they are able to actively strategize when making residential location decisions. Nonetheless, additional future research would be helpful in this area.

In the area of conceptualization, future research should better distinguish between the contexts of community and neighborhood, as the two are quite distinct and have potentially very different relationships to work and family life. Another important topic of future research is to elaborate the specific mechanisms, or proximal processes, through which family-friendly communities and neighborhoods influence measures of success at work, in families, and in the balancing of work and family issues. A critical need is to expand the research lens beyond dual-earner middle-class families. Though existing research suggests that middle-class families mention many of the same concerns as low-income families in poor neighborhoods, the salience of various concerns likely varies considerably (e.g., safety, quality of schools), as does the ability of families of varying socioeconomic resources, and race and ethnicity, to choose where they work and live. Finally, future research must continue to recognize the importance of other types of heterogeneity of experiences within families, such as by gender, life stage, and family type.

In terms of community policy, research in the area of work and family suggests that communities are facing a different set of issues than those of the 1950s. As women have increasingly entered the workforce, and as the work hours of both men and women have increased, individuals and families have less and less time to devote to communities. Community institutions, such as parent teacher associations, need to be cognizant that the needs and resources of community members varies widely. More flexible means of participation in the community might enable more to become involved. Research also suggests that communities need to ensure that families have access to affordable and quality day care and after-care programs.

A common theme within community economic development, particularly within lower-income areas, is that social capital is a necessary precursor to development. Thus, providing family-friendly services, and strengthening such institutions, may have positive economic spillovers. Moreover, communities that have
such resources should be reminded that quality of life is an important draw that can be used to attract
businesses, especially those that increasingly rely on workers from dual-earner families.

On the business side, corporations must be attuned to the needs of their dual-earner workers, and the
resources that are available in the community. To the extent such resources exist, simple referral
programs may be effective. Where family-friendly community resources are lacking, partnerships between
businesses and the community, both of which have much to gain, are encouraged.

References
Bookman, A. (2004). *Starting in our own backyards: How working families can build community and

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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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<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
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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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