**Sloan Network Encyclopedia Entry**

**Family Leave: A Policy Concept Made in America (2004)**

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**Basic Concepts & Definitions**

"Family leave" is a policy concept that bundles together several different family-related reasons for taking time off from work. Conventionally it refers to taking time off from work for childbirth, care of an infant, bonding with an adopted child, or care of a sick child, spouse or parent. Reasons for leave under the rubric of "family leave" include but are not limited to childbirth, recovery from childbirth, and care of an infant. Concepts related to family leave are maternity, paternity, and parental leave, which provide for taking time off from work to care for an infant or young child. Pregnancy disability leave allows a woman to recover physically from childbirth.

"Family leave" addresses goals of gender equality and support for family-provided care work. The goal of gender equality refers to creating institutions in which women and men have equal life chances. Care work refers to the paid and unpaid work of caring for people. The concept of family leave addresses the goal of gender equality because it defines a policy available to both men and women. It supports care work because it allows people to keep their jobs who would otherwise be forced to interrupt employment to care for family members. Family leave is one of several types of policies designed to help people meet both work and family goals. These policies are termed "family-friendly".

Family leave is an important social policy. A significant proportion of health and welfare benefits in the United States is provided through employment relationships. Family leave, whether mandated by law or offered in a workplace for other reasons, is part of these critical employer-administered health and welfare systems. In the United States the only federal law giving employees a right to job-protected leave is the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) [see the Encyclopedia entry on FMLA]. The FMLA provides for up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave from work annually to recover from childbirth, care for an infant, bond with an adopted child, care for a sick child, spouse, or parent or because of an employee's own illness. The law does not require provision of income replacement during leave and it only covers workplaces with 50 or more employees. The FMLA resulted from feminist-led efforts to pass a family leave law (Elving, 1995; Vogel, 1993; Wisensale, 2001).

*This Encyclopedia Entry was part of the former Sloan Work and Family Research Network which is no longer in operation.*
The American policy concept of family leave breaks with the European legacy of maternity leave in that it embodies a comparatively radical notion of gender equality. Historically, European maternity policies were designed to help working women fulfill family roles, to increase birth rates, or to encourage mothers to enter paid work (Lewis and Astrom, 1992; Heinen, 1990; Hobson, 1993; Moeller, 1993). In contrast, the American concept of family leave embodies the notion that men and women should be equally involved in both paid work and family care (Vogel, 1990). European leave policies are now written as gender neutral, but pro-natalism and traditional gender ideals are still important motivations (Morgan and Zippel, 2003; Kocourková, 2002). However, compared to the United States, European policies are very generous. Durations of paid parental leave in Europe range from 3 to 36 months. This paid parental leave is often in addition to paid pregnancy disability, paternity and other family care leave (Haas, 2003).

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

Family leave is a critical topic for work-family studies. It addresses a conundrum at the core of institutionalized work-family conflict: In order to support family-provided care, workplaces and career structures must be able to accommodate family leave without disadvantaging those who take time off to have babies and care for family members. If employees who take family leave are channeled into lower-paying jobs and given fewer advancement opportunities, then family leave practices will devalue care work and discourage family provided care. But treating leave takers on par with those who do not take leave challenges the assumption, generally taken for granted in the United States, that private households alone should carry the risks of family care work. Because most family leaves are currently taken by women, how leave takers are treated in workplaces and career structures will have profound consequences for gender equality as well as for the supply of family provided care and the societal valuation of care work.

When employees can take job-protected family leaves, the care they provide to family members contributes to social goods such as healthier post-partum mothers and babies, faster recovery time for sick and injured children, and higher educational achievement (Heymann, 2000; Hyde et al., 1996). As discussed below, employers may also benefit from supporting the care work of their employees. These individual outcomes add up to public goods that we all benefit from as employers, workers, and citizens.

**State of the Body of Knowledge**

*Introduction*

Research to date focuses on patterns of leave needing and leave taking, relating leave variables to health and well-being outcomes, and investigating job and career consequences of taking family leaves. Because consequences of leaves are partly an outcome of workplace practices, researchers also
investigate how organizational culture and workplace social relations accommodate family leaves. Scholars have also investigated the politics and processes of policy making around family leave.

**Needing and Taking Family Leave**

The U.S. Department of labor has commissioned two representative surveys of leave needing and leave taking in the United States. They were fielded in 1995 and 2000 (Commission on Leave, 1996; Cantor et al., 2001). The surveys investigated the extent to which employees take time off from work for reasons covered by the FMLA [see the Encyclopedia entry on FMLA]. The surveys investigated both formal and informal leave taking during an 18 month period in the entire population of employees. The survey findings indicate that about 20% of employees will need a leave and about 16.5% will actually take a leave in an 18 month period. Based on the 1995 survey, Armenia et al. (n.d.) estimate that 6.2% of the employed population took a family leave, that is a leave to care for a family member including leaves for childbirth, during an 18 month period.

Data collected in 2000 show that of all leaves taken for FMLA-qualifying reasons, most (52.4%) are medical leaves, i.e., leaves taken due to an employee's own health problem. Of employees who had taken a leave, only 7.9% did so due to pregnancy disability and 18.5% indicated caring for an infant, or newly adopted or fostered child as a reason for leave. Including both medical and family leaves, most leaves are less than 10 days. However, the mean length of family leaves reported in the 1995 survey was 38 days (Armenia et al., n.d.). The 2000 survey indicates that around the birth of a child, women usually take at least two weeks, but not more than 12 weeks of leave (Cantor et al., 2001).

Patterns of leave taking are marked by gender, racial, and class differences. Women are more likely to take leave than men (Armenia et al., n.d.; Cantor et al., 2001; Gerstel and McGonagle, 1999; Sandberg, 1999). In particular, women take leaves to care for family members more often than men do, even when controlling for workplace variables and family responsibilities (Armenia et al., n.d.; Gerstel and McGonagle, 1999; Sandberg, 1999). However, the surveys also document men's need for family leaves. Caring for an ill family member and having children at home both strongly increase men's likelihood of taking a family leave (Sandberg, 1999). Racial/ethnic differences interact with gender so that men of color are as likely to take a family leave as women in all racial/ethnic groups, while white men are least likely to take a family leave (Armenia et al., n.d). Yet, even controlling for household income, compared to white women, African American women are less likely to take a leave for any reason (Gerstel, 1999) and less likely to take a family leave (Sandberg, 1999).

The surveys also indicate that higher socio-economic status enables leave taking. Salaried employees and those with higher household incomes are more likely to take a leave to care for a family member (Armenia et al. n.d.; Gerstel 1999; Sandberg 1999). Most people who reported needing a leave for a
family or medical reason actually did take some time off from work. About 2/3 of these leave takers receive some pay while on leave. However, the 2000 survey indicates that 2.4% of the employed population needed a leave for a family or medical reason but did not take a leave during the period surveyed. Most (77.6%) of these leave-needers reported not being able to afford the associated income loss; most (87.8%) stated they would have taken time off if some income replacement had been provided (Cantor et al. 2001).

**Family Leave and the Health and Well-being of Family Members**

Studies that investigate relationships among leave variables and health and well-being are concentrated on mothers and very young children. Pediatricians and other child development specialists argue that parents - and perhaps especially mothers - need several weeks at home with their newborn infants in order to establish the secure and sensitive relationship necessary for healthy child development and parent functioning (Brazelton, 1988). Using systematic, longitudinal evidence, Hyde et al. (1996) argue that taking a maternity leave of less than 12 weeks is a risk factor for depression in post-partum mothers and may lead to higher incidence of negative mother-infant interactions. Similarly, analysis of health indicators in a national, racially diverse sample of postpartum women found that taking more than 6 weeks of maternity leave was associated with significant reductions in mothers' depressive symptoms (Chatterji and Markowitz, 2004). Some research suggests that if mothers work too much during the year after a child is born, there may be small negative affects on cognitive development for some groups of children (Smolensky and Gootman, 2003).

Studies of men's family leaves also focus on the parent-child relationship. Pleck (1993) finds that most fathers in the United States actually do take time off from work around the birth of a child although such leave is usually informally arranged and therefore not included in counts of formal leaves. More recently, interest has turned to how policy can encourage men to take more parental leave (Seward et al., 2002). Experiences in Europe and Canada suggest that reserving job-protected paid parental leave for the father or providing longer durations of paid leave to be shared by the parents can increase the incidence and length of fathers' parental leaves. For instance, only 3% of Swedish fathers took parental leave in 1974 and the end of the 20th century more than half took some paid parental leave (in addition to the paid "daddy days" reserved for the father around the birth of the child). In Norway about 80% of eligible fathers take the one month of paid family leave reserved for them after the birth of a child (Leira, 1999). After increasing the amount of paid parental leave available to families in Canada, the rate of new fathers taking parental leave jumped from 3% in 2000 to 10% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2003).

The consequences of men's family leave-taking on the health and well-being of fathers, mothers, and children has barely begun to be investigated (see Malin 1998 for a concise review). Fathers who take longer leaves are more involved in child care (Seward et al., 2002), which is presumably beneficial for
both children and mothers. Fathers' leaves are included in research reporting that parents who can take paid leaves are more involved in children's schooling, which, in turn, leads to better educational performance. Likewise, when parents are more involved in children's medical care—which should be facilitated by availability of job-protected family leave—chronic illnesses are managed more effectively and children recover faster from acute illness and injury (Heymann, 2000).

The role of job-protected family leave in common family care situations is largely unstudied. Family care of seriously ill, chronically ill, terminally ill and disabled family members is usually done by women, is often time intensive and caregivers make a variety of accommodations in work schedules (Cancian and Oliker, 2000; Pavalko and Artis, 1997; Mutschler, 1994). Yet, we do not know how job-protected family leave policies influence the supply or quality of family care in such situations, the quality of life of caregivers, or the financial security of family caregivers and their families. The 1995 survey of leave taking indicates that younger men are more likely to take family leaves than older men and that men and women are equally likely to have responsibility for the care of an ill family member (Sandberg, 1999). These findings suggest a possible generational shift towards an increase in men's involvement in family caregiving. Such a shift would amplify even further the need to investigate the influence of family leave policies on family care of ill and disabled family members, since, compared to women, men's leave taking appears to be somewhat more responsive to workplace factors (Gerstel and McGonagle, 1999; Sandberg, 1999).

Family Leave and Career Outcomes

The initial impetus for family leave policies was to facilitate women's employment continuity. Thus, early efforts focused on pregnancy disability and maternity leave policies. Research also focused initially on job and career consequences of pregnancy disability and maternity leave policies for women. More recently, investigators have recognized the importance of studying how leave taking for a variety of different reasons might affect career outcomes for both women and men.

In the early part of the 20th century it was assumed that women's roles as mothers prevented them from equal access to employment opportunities. This attitude undergirded practices such as forcing women to quit their jobs upon becoming pregnant (Vogel, 1993). Against this background, feminists view job-protected family leave policies as critical tools for maintaining women's labor force attachment over the life course. Family leaves, even when unpaid, allow women who would otherwise be forced to quit their jobs to maintain employment continuity. Maintaining employment continuity is especially important in the United States due to the high proportion of health and welfare benefits provided through the employment relationship.

Research confirms the positive impacts of leave policies on women's employment. For instance, Hofferth (1996) finds that availability of a liberal—even if unpaid—leave policy increased the likelihood of returning to
work after childbirth. Glass and Riley (1998) find that availability of longer maternity leaves sharply decreased both employment exit and job changes among a sample of women at 6 months postpartum. Waldfogel (1997; 1998) finds independent, positive affects on women's wages of both postpartum employment continuity and maternity leave coverage.

When leave taking is an alternative to interrupting employment, it improves employment outcomes. However, when compared to non-leave takers, leave takers experience negative career consequences. Using personnel data, Judiesch and Lyness (1999) analyzed the impact of formal leaves of absence on performance ratings and salary increases among a very large sample of 10,584 managers drawn from multiple sites within one firm. They found that performance ratings were lower during the year a leave was taken, but were not affected in subsequent years. Nonetheless, taking a formal leave of absence at any time during the period 1990-1994 decreased the probability of promotion and lowered merit salary increases for managers in 1995. The negative impact was equivalent for family and medical leaves, male and female managers, shorter and longer leaves. Furthermore, this result was not influenced by a manager's 1994 performance rating. Although formal leaves had the same negative consequences for men and women, most (89%) of the leaves were taken by women. The researchers were unable to test for an interaction between gender of leave taker and type of leave because they found only two family leaves taken by men in the entire sample. (Note, however, according to Pleck (1993) men arrange family leave informally when possible.)

As noted above, some research exists on the employment outcomes of maternity leaves for women in non-managerial work. However, the impact of family leaves on employment outcomes for men and women in jobs more typical than managerial employment largely remains to be studied.

*Family Leave from the Perspective of the Workplace*

As part of investigating the implementation of family-friendly policies, organizational scholars have begun to analyze benefits of leave policies for employers, how leave takers are seen and treated in workplaces, and how workplace factors might facilitate or inhibit family leaves. Research focuses mostly on maternity or parental leave, rather than family leave, and studies of organizational practice are concentrated on professional and managerial workplaces.

Potential benefits of leave policies for employers include reduced turnover, increased loyalty, and improved morale. Maternity leaves offer an alternative to quitting and thereby reduce turnover (Glass and Riley, 1998; Waldfogel, 1998). An economic analysis of potential consequences of introducing paid family leave in California predicts reduction in turnover costs benefiting employers (Dube and Kaplan, 2002). Aetna Life Insurance Company increased retention of new mothers and reported improved employee morale with a policy allowing up to 6 months of family leave (Commission on Leave, 1996). Fathers on
parental leave may learn skills that make them better managers (Haas, 2002). Some authors suggest that a family leave policy signals a general stance of caring about employees, thereby fostering loyalty and good morale (Fried, 1998).

Yet, a family leave policy may create dilemmas for managers related to work flow and fair allocation of performance evaluations and rewards. Longer term advantages such as employee loyalty and good morale are not always apparent in the short term in a work group. A leave-taker's work still needs to get done. Supervisors and co-workers usually pick up the slack and work piles up to be done by the leave taker upon return. Managers may end up in the contradictory position of being charged with implementing family leaves against their own immediate interests (Powell and Mainiero, 1999). About 1/3 of American employees feel that a leave taker unfairly burdens co-workers (Cantor et al., 2001). Grover (1991) finds that people more likely to benefit and those with more positive attitudes towards women are more likely to view parental leave policies as fair. These issues raise the question of how work might be organized to accommodate leaves more easily and managers could be rewarded for successful management of leaves.

A few studies investigate family leave taking as part of workplace social processes. Ashcraft (1999) found that the maternity leave of the founder and CEO of a company became an opportunity for employees to revise the founder's role. Both Fried's (1998) study of parental leave in one corporation and Miller et al.'s (1996) review of literature on maternity leave suggest a surprisingly high level of uncertainty within workplaces about how to deal with leaves. Miller et al. (1996) advocate a model of maternity leave as essentially an interpersonal process of role negotiation with a variety of possible repercussions for a work group.

Scholars are also interested in how leave-takers are viewed within company cultures. Most concretely, a person away from work is seen as contributing less than a person who is at work. Feminist scholars have argued in relation to family leave that this view depends on the institutional premise of family care not being a contribution to the employer (Acker, 1990; 1998). The traditional boundaries between work and family in industrial society have created an "ideal worker norm" (Williams, 2000) that requires employees to act as if they had no responsibilities outside their workplaces (Kanter, 1977). However, this critique offers little practical guidance for the immediate problem of defining comparable performance evaluation criteria for leave takers and non-leave takers.

A closer look at workplaces reveals specific dimensions of organizational culture that affect leave taking and perceptions of leave takers. Fried (1998) finds a "culture of overtime" that measures employee contribution in terms of "face time," that is, time actually spent at work. A leave taker is simply viewed as having earned less than non-leave takers. Allen, Russell and Rush (1994) ask whether leave takers are seen as less committed to their employer. In an experiment with a sample of business students, they find...
that fictional leave takers are not viewed as less committed and are equally likely to be recommended for rewards such as a salary increase. Yet, the experimental situation differs importantly from many real life situations in that subjects were not asked to allocate a total "pot" of rewards among leave takers and non-leave takers within a group. Haas, Allard, and Hwang (2002) find that aspects of organizational culture, including a stronger ethic of care, a more positive attitude towards women's equality, and flexibility at the work group level increase the likelihood of fathers' taking parental leave and the length of fathers' leaves. Working in a group with task- rather than time-based evaluation of employees increased the length of fathers' parental leaves. Women take family leaves more often and for longer periods of time than men do, but male family leave takers may be treated more harshly (Allen and Russell, 1999).

The specific dilemmas raised by family leave practices in non-managerial and non-professional workplaces and in small businesses remain to be studied. For instance, in bureaucratized and, of course in unionized, workplaces, seniority often determines greater access to choice of jobs, shift schedules, paid time off, and other perks. A family leave policy might conflict with seniority because it allocates leaves according to need. In FMLA-covered workplaces, absences for FMLA-qualifying reasons cannot disadvantage a worker in programs that offer rewards for perfect attendance (Tyler 2001) or be counted in no-fault attendance programs (Silbergeld and Cosgrove, 1999). No fault systems allow a specified number of absences for any reason and punish workers for any absences beyond the allowed allotment (Kuzmits, 1984). Absences for FMLA-qualifying reasons cannot be counted towards the allotment. It might be easier to temporarily replace the labor of a less-skilled worker than a professional employee, but in work groups already cut to the bare minimum, one person's leave might still result in stressful overtime and speed-ups. Smaller businesses have more difficulty covering a leave-taker's work (Butler and Wasserman, 1988). In labor markets characterized by insecure employment, lacking internal labor markets and fringe benefits, a "family leave" policy could be meaningless. Instead, family leave might mean quitting and finding a new job later.

Little is known about how leaves to care for a disabled or seriously ill family member are understood within organizational cultures and handled by leave takers and their colleagues. Caring for seriously ill parents or spouses often comes later in life, so that employment options, goals of caregivers, and sympathies of supervisors and co-workers probably differ from those relevant for parental leaves (Pavalko and Artis, 1997; Stone and Short, 1990).

**Family Leave and Gender Equality**

The concept of family leave was developed to create employment policy addressing the potentially conflicting goals of gender equality and providing time off from work for family reasons. Historically, labor laws restricted women's access to employment on the grounds that working outside the home should not interfere with women's roles as bearers and mothers of children (Burstein, 1995; Vogel, 1993). Such laws
regulated employment in the interests of family well-being but reinforced gender inequality. Laws prohibiting sex-based discrimination in employment promote gender equality, but do not help people meet family needs. For decades feminists have argued that the equal opportunity approach falls short. Labor markets reward those who can always put work first, therefore jobs and career structures must change before we can achieve both gender equality and family well-being (Hochschild, 1975; Kanter, 1978; Williams, 2000). Family leave is part of the project to change the workplace to accommodate the family (Burstein, 1995; Vogel, 1990; 1993).

The federal FMLA in the United States follows Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited sex-based discrimination in employment, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 (hereafter PDA), which prohibited discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and childbirth. These laws established the principle of women's and mothers' equal opportunity within existing occupational structures. The FMLA of 1993 embodies the feminist position that achieving gender equality requires changing occupational structures rather than simply integrating women into existing structures. Prior to the 1980s, a handful of states included pregnancy and childbirth within state-mandated temporary disability insurance programs (Wisensale, 2001, p. 119) and a few states enacted maternity leave laws (Vogel, 1993, p. 73-74). These types of laws gave mothers-but not fathers-the right to leave after the birth of a child. Some later state laws and the FMLA were designed to avoid pitfalls of a law that applied only to women (Elving, 1995; Vogel, 1993; Wisensale, 2001). Because the FMLA is a gender neutral law that covers a wide range of family care and self-care needs it works against the stereotype that men do not have family responsibilities, it does not risk running afoul of mandates for gender neutral employment practices, and it has a broader political constituency because it helps more people.

In the United States feminists have successfully defined family leave as a tool for gender equality. This was vividly demonstrated in the Supreme Court's 2003 decision in the case of Nevada Department of Human Resources et al. v. Hibbs et al.1 Writing for the majority Opinion in a 6 to 3 decision, Chief Justice Rehnquist argued that a federally mandated right to family leave is justified because "[s]tereotypes about women's domestic roles are reinforced by parallel stereotypes presuming a lack of domestic responsibilities for men." "These mutually reinforcing stereotypes," the Opinion continues,

created a self-fulfilling cycle of discrimination that forced women to continue to assume the role of primary family caregiver, and fostered employers' stereotypical views about women's commitment to work and their value as employees.

Thus, the Opinion concludes, it would not be good enough for States to make leave policies equally available to men and women because this would allow for a policy of no family leaves. And a policy of no family leaves "would exclude far more women than men from the workplace." The Opinion specifically states that in passing the FMLA, Congress recognized the inadequacy of Title VII and the PDA as laws
for eliminating sex-based employment discrimination. The Opinion emphasizes the necessity of breaking down the "pervasive sex-role stereotype that caring for family members is women's work" and explicitly condemns discrimination against men in requests for parental leaves. This Opinion indicates a sea change in how the Supreme Court understands gender, work, and family. Notably, it was written by the same man, who, in 1976, wrote the majority Opinion arguing that General Electric's policy of excluding pregnancy and childbirth-related events from health insurance coverage did not constitute discrimination against women in employment (429 U.S. 125, 97 S.Ct. 401).

Implications for Policy and Practice

A policy of job-protected family leave helps people take time off from work to care for family members. Representative surveys of American employees show there is a significant need for job-protected family leave. Further, studies indicate that family care work contributes importantly to health and well-being. Because family leave policies influence the supply of family care work, family leave is both an employment benefit and a social policy. Job-protected family leave is especially important in the United States where a significant part of health and welfare benefits are provided through employment relationships. Family leave blurs the generally taken-for-granted boundaries between work and family. It offers employees job-protected time off from work in response to family needs. Because family leave calls upon employers to help support family care work, family leave can be a tool for affirming the value of care work.

The current state of knowledge implies four directions for practice and research. First, there is the role of job-protected family leaves in family care situations other than childbirth and parenting. Second, there is the problem of distributing costs of family leaves fairly. A third focus should be on practical solutions for expanding availability of job-protected family leaves. Finally, a critical analysis is called for of the notions of family need emerging through family leave policies and practices.

Most research on family leave and health outcomes focuses on mothers and young children. Related topics that should be of interest to scholars include how job-protected leave might help people be better parents of older children and teenagers; how fathers' parental leaves affect children, spouses and the family division of labor; how job-protected leave might influence the quality of family care and quality of life for caregivers and recipients in cases of serious or terminal illness and care of the frail elderly; and whether leave policies can influence the gender division of care work and economic security of families coping with common family care situations.

While the long term benefits of job-protected family leaves are both individual and social, too often the costs are carried by individuals. Individual leave takers bear the costs if they are penalized in performance evaluations, promotions, and by income loss. Individual members of work groups coping
with a leave taker’s absence might also bear direct costs such as longer work hours and stressful increases in work load. Providing job-protected leaves might unduly burden small employers. Practitioners and researchers have begun to conceptualize research questions around these issues. Studies direct attention in particular to problems of covering a leave taker’s work, fairly evaluating leave takers, understanding roles of managers, supervisors, and co-workers as part of the social infrastructure of care, and consequences for workplaces of providing job-protected leave. Understanding and then addressing these problems with the aim of fostering family leave practices that promote both equality and family well-being implicates fields of practice and research as diverse as benefit administration and financing, studies of time use and task division within workplaces, and investigations of how people judge the fairness of distributional principles. Furthermore, almost nothing is known about these aspects of family leave as practiced (or not) in blue-collar and service work forces or by small employers and among self-employed and contingent work forces.

In the United States the federal right to job-protected family leave anchored in the FMLA of 1993 is restricted to employees who work in sites with more than 50 employees. The availability of job-protected family leave in the United States is further limited by family economic constraints. Half of leave-takers returned to work earlier than desired due to income loss and almost two thirds of those who needed a leave but did not take one were stopped by income needs (Gerstel and McGonagle, 1999). Providing income replacement during family leaves will make leave more accessible and longer leaves feasible for more people. The State of California has led the way with the first comprehensive paid family leave legislation in the history of the United States. The California law funds partial income replacement during family leave by collecting a small premium as a payroll tax from all employees. At the time of this writing (2004), several other States are considering similar laws. More information about such initiatives is available on the website of the National Partnership for Women and Families (http://www.nationalpartnership.org).

Although administered by employers, family leave in the United States is a social policy to promote gender equality and support family care work. As feminist welfare scholars have argued with regard to state-administered social programs, policies do not simply meet needs, policies also define needs (Fraser, 1989). As a social policy administered by employers, family leave policies and practices should be subject to the same critical scrutiny. Welfare state studies provide a guide to analysis, pointing to questions such as who administers the benefit, who certifies eligibility, and what definitions of family need are embodied in bureaucratic categories and practices? A welfare state lens on family leave suggests employer-administered family leave practices, and demographic and health care delivery trends will interact to shape emerging and contested definitions of family needs.
The concept of job-protected family leave is now established in the United States. People continue to debate a variety of specific issues. For example, is intermittent leave - leave taken in small increments over a period of weeks or months - a good policy? Should the law protect the job security of parents who take time off from work to participate in a child’s education as it does in some states (Wisensale, 2001) and has been proposed in the recently introduced “The Family and Work Balancing Act of 2004” (H.R. 3780)? Should the definition of family members include grandparents and parents-in-law as it does in some states (Wisensale, 2001)? How much time should employees be allowed to take off from work and should leave takers receive income replacement? Typically, associations representing employers’ interests such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Federation of Independent Businesses and the Society for Human Resources Management lobby against legally mandated family leave, against mandated income replacement for leave takers and in favor of narrowing the scope of qualifying reasons for leave and covered family members. Feminist organizations and advocates for the well-being of children and families typically support expanding the array of legally allowed reasons for job-protected family leave and providing financial support for leave takers (Bernstein, 1997; Burstein et al., 1995; Elving, 1995; Wisensale, 2001).

Footnote

1 At issue in this case was whether an individual employee could sue a state employer for damages caused by violation of the FMLA. The Court’s decision turns on the question of whether or not Congress is justified in abrogating sovereign immunity of States. My point here is not this particular legal issue, but the way gender equality is used to justify family leave in general in the Court’s decision.

References


Stone, R.I., & Farley Short, P. (1990). The competing demands of employment and informal caregiving to disabled elders. Medical Care, 28(6), 513-26.


Other Recommended Readings on this Topic:


National Partnership for Women and Families website at http://www.nationalpartnership.org


**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
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Sloan Work and Family Research Network
Resources for Teaching: Mapping the Work-Family Area of Studies

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 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
<th>Domain D: Responses to W-F Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain E: Outcomes and Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Individual Antecedents</td>
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**Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains**