Rural families experience considerable and distinct challenges in relationship to work-family issues. Human capital deficits, substandard child care and transportation infrastructure, and limited economic diversity result in rural work contexts that are quite different from those experienced by urban families. In recent decades, economic restructuring has had a significant impact on rural families.

While the term “rural” has many connotations, it generally refers to sparsely populated areas with restricted access to urban centers (Housing Assistance Council, 2002; USDA Economic Research Service, 2004). Among a wide range of definitions, the government most commonly relies on the Census Bureau definition of “rural” and the Office of Management and Budget definition of “nonmetro.” The U.S. Census Bureau defines “rural” as “territory, population, and housing units” that are not urban, meaning they are in open territory or have “fewer than 2,500 inhabitants” (U.S. Census Bureau, 1994, p. 12-1). The Office of Management and Budget uses the companion term “nonmetropolitan” (nonmetro) to describe areas that lie outside metropolitan areas. Metropolitan areas are urbanized places with a population of 50,000 or more, along with surrounding, economically enmeshed areas with a total population of at least 100,000 or, in New England, 75,000 (Office of Management, 2000). Rural places may therefore lie within metropolitan counties, causing them to be designated metro.

These definitions rely heavily on numerical data and on county and municipality boundaries, which may be arbitrary in relation to population clusters. In addition, like some other definitions used by state and local governments, these definitions ignore important social characteristics (Pruitt, 2006). Among the places that meet the nonmetro definition but do not share many characteristics typical of rural places are college towns, exurban places, and rural resort communities. Such places tend to attract more affluent and highly educated populations, which in turn enjoy greater access to amenities and services (Hamilton, Hamilton, Duncan, & Colocousis, 2008). Compiling data and constructing an accurate portrayal of rural life are complicated by the varying definitions, as well as by the regional, cultural, and economic differences among the great array of places popularly considered rural (Pruitt, 2008b).
Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies

A sizable minority of the U.S. population—“about 17%, or almost 50 million people”—live in nonmetro areas (USDA Economic Research Service, 2007b). Families, defined by the Housing Assistance Council (2002) as a “householder and one or more people living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption,” comprise 70% of rural households (Housing Assistance Council, 2002, p. 15). Despite popular notions, traditional nuclear families are not more prevalent in rural society; a married couple heads 68% of both metro and nonmetro families (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004a). Additionally, female-headed families are now nearly as prevalent in nonmetro places as in metro ones (Turner, 2006), and the gap continues to narrow (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2004). These similarities between metro and nonmetro families conceal important distinctions between the two, including poverty levels, social and cultural differences, and infrastructure deficits.

Rural Poverty

Across all categories, poverty rates for rural families are higher and more enduring than for their urban counterparts (Jolliffe, 2004). In 2007, 15.4% of the nonmetro populace (about 7.4 million people) lived in poverty, while the poverty rate in metro areas was 11.9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Of the 500 poorest U.S. counties, 459 are rural (Housing Assistance Council, 2002). Of 386 persistently poor counties—“those with poverty rates greater than 20% in each decennial census since 1960”—340 are nonmetro (Jolliffe, 2004). In 2000, women headed more than 10% of nonmetro households with children under the age of 18, representing a 34.5% increase since 1980 (Housing Assistance Council, 2002; Snyder & McLaughlin, 2004). These families have the highest rate of poverty by family type, at more than 40% (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2004). Dual-adult households, on the other hand, have the lowest rates of nonmetro poverty, at 9% (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2004). While historically many rural places were racially and ethnically homogeneous, diversity is on the rise in rural America (USDA Economic Research Service, 2007c), where persons of color are disproportionately poor (Churilla, 2008; Housing Assistance Council, 2002). Despite the greater prevalence and persistence of rural poverty, research and policy overwhelmingly focus on urban poverty (Porter, 2005; Slack & Jensen, 2002).

Cultural Differences

Despite deficiencies in infrastructure and opportunity, rural residents are often unwilling or unable to relocate to urban centers. Women cite family and community ties, “environmental security,” and commitment to the land as primary reasons for continuing to reside in rural areas (Tickamyer & Henderson, 2003, p.113). Connections with family and place are highly important to many rural residents, especially those with intergenerational ties to the place. They report living in an area because
“they had always lived there,” because of informal or economic support from family members, and because they fear “breaking ties” (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000).

Rural parents also tend to believe that residence in rural areas enhances the physical, social, and psychological safety of their children (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Despite some empirical evidence to the contrary, rural parents strongly adhere to myths about the safe and nurturing environment afforded by rural living. They commonly associate rural living with wide open spaces that allow children to play safely outdoors, away from threats of traffic and “other people” (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000, p. 30). For many families, the perceived benefits of a “wholesome, family-friendly environment” outweigh the material benefits of relocation (Tickamyer & Henderson, 2003, p. 112).

Yet, popular images of rural simplicity and wholesomeness are incomplete. The gap between rural and urban crime rates has narrowed in recent years (Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells, 2006). Family violence is a particular concern in rural areas (Pruitt, 2008b), where intimate partner homicide occurs at a significantly higher rate than in large cities (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). Gangs are increasingly present in rural areas (Weisheit et al., 2006), and substance abuse is a significant social problem. Indeed, rural youth abuse most substances at rates higher than their urban peers (Pruitt, 2009a). Poverty, lack of good employment opportunities, and a dearth of social services contribute to the occurrence of these social problems, while also aggravating the difficulties they create for rural families (Lohmann & Lohmann, 2005).

**State of the Body of Knowledge**

Researchers recognize a range of complex work-family challenges facing rural families. These include economic restructuring, limited job markets, entrenched gender-based role expectations, and lack of services. Scholars have studied an array of strategies employed by families to respond to these challenges and improve their economic well-being. Among these are variations in work arrangements, informal activities, and home-based enterprises.

**Rural Economics**

Contrary to the widespread, idealized perception that most rural families are self-sustaining through farming, less than 2% of the national population lives on a farm (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Farm employment has steadily declined in recent decades; more than 12% of nonmetro jobs were farm-based in 1976, compared to slightly more than 6% in 2004 (Kusmin & Parker, 2006). Furthermore, farming does not guarantee financial independence, and many farm families depend on wages from non-farm employment (Lobao & Meyer, 1995; Naples, 1994; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Castle (2000) notes
that literature on rural America, while extensive, may be fundamentally irrelevant in some contexts because its focus on agriculture-based economies ignores most rural economies.

Many rural communities face economic instability as manufacturing jobs, which account for 18% of nonmetro employment, are relocated overseas or replaced by automation (Glasmeier & Salant, 2006; Housing Assistance Council, 2002; McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008). Between 1997 and 2003, 1.5 million rural workers were displaced (Glasmeier & Salant, 2006). Because a single industry often dominates a particular rural economy, workers have less bargaining power, and the closing of one manufacturing plant can have significant detrimental effects on a rural community (McLaughlin, 2002; McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008). Worker displacement and inability to secure new employment adversely impact families in myriad ways. Job loss is associated with “loss of self esteem, declining health, increased marital discord, a reduction in the ability to parent, an increase in abuse of alcohol and other substances, and an increased likelihood of divorce” (Glasmeier & Salant, 2006, p. 1). In some persistently poor rural areas, unemployment rates are higher than during the Great Depression (Pickering, Harvey, Summers, & Mushinski, 2006).

Limited Labor Markets

Insufficient wages, few or no benefits, and little opportunity for advancement are hallmarks of rural employment. Two-thirds of rural adults work in the manufacturing or service sectors (USDA Economic Research Service, 1997), which are characterized by low wages and a lack of stability and benefits (McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008; Slack & Jensen, 2004; Tickamyer & Henderson, 2003; Ziebarth & Tigges, 2003). Many employment opportunities are part-time or seasonal (McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008; Slack & Jensen, 2004; Ziebarth & Tigges, 2003). Rural workers often hold more than one job and are more likely than their urban counterparts to be seeking full-time employment (Kusmin & Parker, 2006).

Family economic success depends largely on parental employment, but employment does not necessarily translate into financial security (Churilla, 2008). Incomes are significantly lower in rural areas, with workers twice as likely as their urban counterparts to earn minimum wage (Housing Assistance Council, 2002; O’Hare, 2007). In 2006, rural full-time workers averaged $5,000 less per year than full-time workers in central cities (Churilla, 2008). On average, nonmetro workers earn about 25% less than metro workers, a substantial gap considering that the cost of living in nonmetro areas is only about 16% lower (Kusmin & Parker, 2006).
Entrenched Gender Roles

Long-time rural residents cling more to traditional beliefs and conservative values than their urban counterparts (Bescher-Donnelly & Smith, 1981; Snyder & McLaughlin, 2004; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2003). These values are reflected in traditional gender-role ideology, which means rural families tend to be more highly patriarchal (Pruitt, 2008a). Conventional views of motherhood are prevalent and “the question is not whether women will be workers or mothers, but how they will reconcile the tension between these roles” (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2003, p. 293). Regardless of employment status, rural mothers tend to view their parenting roles as most important (Naples, 1994; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Nevertheless, women’s waged labor is increasingly necessary to augment family income (Pruitt, 2008a). While nonmetro women are still employed at slightly higher rates than metro women, nonmetro mothers of children under age six are more likely to be employed than their metro counterparts (Smith, 2007). Rural women who work outside the home face particular structural disadvantages in securing and keeping employment (Pruitt, 2007b; Tickamyer & Henderson, 2003).

Rural women are particularly associated with low-skill, low-wage occupations. Workplace gender separation is pronounced in rural areas, where even college-educated women work primarily in female-dominated fields (Bescher-Donnelly & Smith, 1981; Miewald & McCann, 2004; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2003). Acknowledging that some women have entered previously male-dominated fields, Tickamyer and Henderson (2003) observe that these advances involve so few women as to be largely symbolic. Gender-based wage discrepancies are also common; in 2000, rural women earned as little as 61% of their male counterparts with comparable schooling (Gibbs & Parker, 2001).

Structural Challenges

Despite the great need for public assistance among rural residents, federal welfare reform legislation largely ignored, yet exacerbated, the particular structural problems associated with rural poverty (Pruitt, 2007a). The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). While some measures indicate PRWORA’s nationwide success, the law’s time limits on assistance and emphasis on participants’ employment impose great hardship on rural residents, whose access to job-training services, transportation, and child care is limited (Pickering et al., 2006). Most significantly, rural labor markets are typically undiversified and may lack sufficient jobs, while the available jobs often do not provide financial stability (Parisi, McLaughlin, Grice, Taquino, & Gill, 2003). Female-headed households and residents of persistently poor counties face particular barriers in meeting PRWORA’s demands. Although many rural residents have been removed from welfare rolls as a result of PRWORA, they have not necessarily achieved economic self-sufficiency or been lifted out of poverty.
Though educational attainment is rising in nonmetro America, low education levels continue to limit workers. In 2000, only 15.5% of rural residents over age 25 had a college degree, compared to nearly 27% nationwide. Twenty-three percent of nonmetro residents had no high school diploma or equivalent (USDA Economic Research Service, 2007a). Fewer educational opportunities exist in rural areas. In rural Iowa, for example, four out of five rural counties lack a community college, which forces residents to travel 20 to 40 miles to attend classes (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, & Litt, 2000). Inability to afford college, fewer incentives for educational attainment, and lack of family support further contribute to the urban-rural education gap (Housing Assistance Council, 2002).

While the overall cost of living is widely believed to be lower in rural places because of lower housing costs (Kusmin & Parker, 2006), rural families pay more than their urban counterparts for food, goods, fuel, health care, and utilities (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004b). This is because geographic isolation inhibits economies of scale and typically results in less competition. Many rural residents do not have access to a chain supermarket, thus requiring them to buy food from small, local stores where they pay about 17.5% more than recommended by the USDA for basic foods (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004b). Rural residents must often choose between costly travel to a “big-box” store or paying higher prices in their own communities for food, clothing, furniture, and other items. (Annie E Casey Foundation, 2004c).

Transportation presents another considerable and persistent challenge for rural families. Families depend heavily on reliable transportation to bridge the distances between residence, employment, child care, and other services. Compared to urban dwellers, rural families spend a greater percentage of their income on transportation; annual transportation expenditures of rural households exceed those in urban centers by over $1000 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). Rising fuel costs exacerbate an already difficult situation (Krauss, 2008). Furthermore, over 1.6 million rural households lack automobiles and rely on public transportation, which exists in only 60% of rural counties. Less than 10% of all federal funding for public transportation goes to rural areas (Housing Assistance Council, 2002). Even when available, public transport is inefficient. Limited operating schedules rarely accommodate those who work non-traditional hours.

Transportation challenges also affect rural children, who are less likely to participate in after-school activities (Annie E Casey Foundation, 2004c; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Spatial circumstances do not, however, diminish some parents’ strong desire to ensure that their children have sufficient academic and social opportunities to be competitive in broader society. Over-scheduling and parent chauffeuring allow more affluent rural youth to participate in extra-curricular activities comparable to those of their
metropolitan peers, although often at the expense of shared family time (Salamon, 2006).

Challenges in securing reliable, quality child care significantly influence rural parents' working lives. A scarcity of centers, long distances, and high transportation costs often make center-based care impractical or unavailable (Pruitt, 2007a; Smith, 2007). Variable work schedules and non-standard hours further complicate and limit child care options for parents working in non-traditional or seasonal jobs. As a result, 75% of rural children are in informal care settings, which tend to be more flexible and less costly, but which also tend to be less reliable (Pruitt, 2007a; Smith, 2006; Smith, 2007). Further, education and specialized training for child care workers are inferior in rural areas, where government regulation is less stringent (Pruitt, 2007a; Smith, 2006). Mothers express concern regarding the quality of such unregulated care, including fear of abuse and neglect (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). In a rural Michigan study, all respondents said that they had to "significantly change child arrangements at least once during their child’s life" (p. 33), citing affordability, trustworthiness, and care environment as reasons for changing providers (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Some mothers stay home because adequate day care is too difficult to find or because child care costs, along with expenses for transportation and work wardrobes, would consume any earnings (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2003).

**Responses to Challenges**

Rural families employ a variety of strategies to cope with the dearth of child care options. Sequential working arrangements, with one partner working a day shift and the other working at some other time, may decrease the need for child care (Nelson & Smith, 1998; Ziebarth & Tigges, 2003). A parent of school-age children, typically the mother, may seek part-time employment during school hours (McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008; Ziebarth & Tigges, 2003). Alternatively, a sole breadwinner may hold two or more jobs or piece together employment by taking seasonal or occasional work to supplement a full-time job, thus allowing the other spouse to remain home with the children (Nelson & Smith, 1998; Ziebarth & Tigges, 2003).

Rural families also commonly adopt informal work strategies. In one recent study of rural households in Kentucky, more than two-thirds of respondents reported engaging in informal economic activities (Tickameyer & Wood, 2003). Rural families barter goods and services; they also engage in self-provisioning and savings activities such as gardening, food preservation, home repair, and auto maintenance (Nelson & Smith, 1998; Oberhauser, 2002; Slack, 2007; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Tickamyer & Wood, 2003). Social connections are vital to informal exchange activities (Ziebarth & Tigges, 2003), and reciprocity is generally expected (Nelson & Smith, 1998; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Many self-provisioning activities depend on expensive equipment and resources, such as chainsaws and tractors. As a consequence, those with the most urgent financial needs are less likely to
participate (Nelson & Smith, 1998). The extent to which the informal economy continues to be of material significance to rural residents is a matter of debate (MacTavish & Salamon, 2003; Slack, 2007).

Small-scale, home-based enterprises ("microbusinesses") are sometimes conflated with the informal economy (Tickamyer & Wood, 2003), but they are more likely to be taxed and may also be regulated. Family farming, small-scale landscaping, seasonal shops, and mail-order enterprises are some examples. Such businesses provide alternative or supplemental income sources for many rural families (Beach, 1987; Nelson & Smith, 1998; Oberhauser, 2002). As opposed to the traditional compartmentalization of work time and family time, home-working arrangements permit families to integrate both responsibilities, while eliminating some transportation challenges. Responsiveness to family needs is cited as a principal benefit of home-based work, but drawbacks include lack of economic security, inconsistent salary, competing demands for time, and constant interruptions (Beach, 1987; Fitzgerald & Winter, 2001).

Like some other aspects of rural society, entrepreneurial undertakings tend to be acutely gendered. Men’s microbusiness ventures are typically outside the domestic sphere (e.g., car repair, snow removal, heavy equipment operation) and garner higher income. Women usually engage in domestic ventures (e.g., in-home child care, sewing, kitchen-based businesses) for lower earnings (Nelson & Smith, 1998; Oberhauser, 2002).

"Nontraditional" Rural Places

Some nonmetro places are more affluent than the norms described above. A growing number of nonmetro places have (to varying degrees) gentrified into exurbia or rural resorts. In addition, a few nonmetro places are home to colleges or universities. In these places, the affluence of a significant number of residents may overcome some of the structural challenges associated with rural living (Salamon, 2003b). These newcomers, however, frequently bring attitudes and practices that are at odds with those of long-time residents. Some of these that affect families include high levels of consumerism and a less tolerant attitude toward youth (Salamon, 2003a; Salamon, 2003b; Salamon, 2006).

Better educated and more affluent persons who move to rural places may commute or telecommute to urban centers (Hamilton et al., 2008; Salamon, 2003a; Salamon, 2003b). Indeed, telecommunications and transportation infrastructure (e.g., broadband, good roads) are often critical to such a demographic shift (Alter, Bridger, Sager, Schafft, & Shuffstall, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2008; Salamon, 2003a). Once significant numbers of newcomers arrive in such amenity-rich rural places, they typically attract more of the services and amenities they expect and can afford (Hamilton et al., 2008). This, in turn, tends to raise the cost of living, which may drive out long-time rural residents.
**Implications for Policy & Practice**

Rural families are often not well served by policies and regulations that reflect urban agendas and respond to urban concerns. Such policies and laws may be unworkable for rural residents, in the context of rural economies. In addition, many rural employees do not benefit from federal employment protections because they work for small employers who are not bound by such laws (Pruitt, 2008a). Funding formulas, qualification requirements, and eligibility constraints that appear reasonable in urban contexts may be impracticable and inappropriate for rural residents (Pruitt, 2007a; Pruitt, 2009a; Tickamyer, 2006). Porter (2005) asserts that rural residents are largely invisible to legislators and scholars, who fail to consider the rural population when collecting data and assessing governmental proposals. This failure “permits both neglect and romanticization of rural life and livelihoods” (Tickamyer, 2006, p. 330).

Policy reform that is practical and effective for rural families requires a comprehensive understanding of the interactions among rural residency, the private sector, and the state. Despite criticism among scholars, culture-of-poverty theories that are informed by an urban bias persist (Tickamyer, 2006). Rural-specific policies, or adaptations to urban-oriented policies, are needed to address the substandard infrastructure, human capital deficits, and lack of economic diversification and opportunity that face rural families. The economic success of many rural families depends on child-care subsides, increases in the federal minimum wage, and adequate transportation options (Annie E. Casey, 2004c; O’Hare, 2007). Further, welfare reformers must recognize the distinct challenges of the rural context if they are to reduce rural welfare participation without leaving rural residents even more destitute (Parisi, et al., 2003; Parisi, McLaughlin, Grice, & Tacquino, 2006; Pruitt, 2007a).

A quarter of a century ago, Smith and Coward (1981) called for a more comprehensive understanding of rural family dynamics, relationships between rural families and social institutions, and effective strategies for providing human services and enhancing rural livelihoods. While a growing number of case studies provide observations of the rural experience, data are nevertheless restricted in terms of “generalizability to broader populations and areas” (Tickamyer & Wood, 2003, p. 399). Systematic, national sampling and a case-comparative approach to location-based studies are critical for developing a broad understanding of both the diversity and similarities among rural places. The rise in racial and ethnic diversity in rural America also invites the study of minority families in rural contexts (Johnson, 2006; Pruitt, 2009b; Slack & Jensen, 2002). Evaluating the intersections of gender, class, and race in rural settings is of particular importance (Tickamyer & Henderson, 2003).
References


Other Recommended Readings on this Topic


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

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

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

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<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 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)

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<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>
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<td>Individual Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
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Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains