

## **Testing Work-Family Hypotheses Using the General Social Survey**

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### **Source:**

Sweet, Stephen, Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes, Joshua Mumm, Judith Casey, and Christina Matz. 2006. *Teaching Work and Family: Strategies, Activities, and Syllabi*. Washington DC: American Sociological Association.

**Type:** Assignment / Paper

### **Purpose:**

This assignment requires students to use the Survey Documentation and Analysis website at UC Berkeley to develop and test hypotheses on a variety of work-family issues. Students choose variables from a list of work and family-related variables in the General Social Survey to include in their hypotheses. The list of variables is not intended to be exhaustive, but instead a sampling of some of the variables related to work and family contained in the GSS. Instructors can either add to this list or allow students to select additional variables from the 2002 Topical Module on the Quality of Working Life. After testing their hypotheses, students must use one or two sociological theories to explain their findings.

This assignment is intended to provide students with some experience in writing, testing, and explaining hypotheses without having to collect their own data. Instructors who wish to expand this assignment can add a library research element to it by having students compare their findings to those published in sociological journals. A brief discussion of hypothesis testing and theoretical application, along with a demonstration on how to use the software on the SDA website by the instructor, should adequately prepare students for this assignment.

### **Pedagogical Benefits:**

1. It provides students with the opportunity to understand how research in work and family is conducted.
2. It requires students to think of social variables as independent and dependent variables.
3. It requires students to apply sociological theories to findings from the tests of their own hypotheses.
4. It helps students achieve better overall quantitative literacy consistent with the objectives of the special issue of *Teaching Sociology* (Vol 34, No. 1) published in January, 2006.

### **Course Applicability:**

Instructors of marriage and family, work and family, and work-related courses might find this assignment useful. The assignment is more appropriate for upper-division undergraduate courses. However, if assigned in lower-division courses, additional time should be spent in class going over the instructions, including guidelines on reading cross-tabulation tables and the role of probability in hypothesis testing.

### **Place in Course to Introduce Assignment:**

The assignment should follow an overview of work-family theoretical perspectives and methods, along with a discussion of the empirical connections between work and family. As a general rule, I assign these kinds of projects somewhere in the middle-third of the semester, making sure to provide students with enough time to turn in rough drafts for feedback.

### **The Assignment:**

This assignment requires you to develop, test, and explain your own hypotheses regarding several work-family variables by conducting simple statistical analyses and applying one or two sociological theories. You can use any sociological theory covered in the textbook and/or in class. Your paper must be typed, double-spaced, and be between 4-6 pages in length.

The variables you will be using come from the General Social Survey. This data is available for statistical analysis using the Survey Documentation and Analysis website at the University of California, Berkeley (<http://sda.berkeley.edu:7502/archive.htm>). You will be using the GSS Cumulative Datafile 1972-2004 and the cross-tabulation feature of the website for your analyses. I will demonstrate in class how to use the SDA data analysis software, including how to enter the variables, select the proper options, and interpret the tables and statistical results.

Using the list of variables below, you will select five to be your dependent variables (what you want to explain). Next, you will select three to five additional variables that will serve as your independent variables (the causes). After you have selected your variables, you are to formulate hypotheses (predictions) based on how you think these variables might be related to one another. **Do not perform any analyses before writing your hypotheses.**

**Here is what your paper must contain:**

1. **Introduction (about ½ to 1 page in length):**

Provide a list of the independent and dependent variables you will be using in your analyses. Briefly explain why you selected these variables. For instance, are they more timely or important issues facing working couples than the other variables, etc?

2. **Hypotheses (about 1 to 1 ½ pages in length):**

In this section, describe how your independent variables are related to your dependent variables. Be sure to explain why you believe each variable is related (and how) to your dependent variable. You must develop a hypothesis for each relationship for a total of five. **Note: For your analyses, be sure to enter your independent variables as the column variables and your dependent variables as your row variables. Before running your cross-tabulation analyses, make sure you have selected “statistics” so that the program generates a chi-square result with a probability level so that you can determine statistical significance.**

3. **Results (about 1 to 1 ½ pages in length):**

You need to report a few things here: For each hypothesis, provide a

general summary of the cross-tabulation table using the column percentages, report the Pearson chi-square results (chi-square number and probability), and whether or not your hypothesis is supported. Be sure to do this for each hypothesis.

4. **Theoretical Explanation (about 1 ½ to 2 pages in length):**

Here you will provide a theoretical explanation of your findings using one or two sociological theories, regardless of whether or not your hypotheses were supported. In other words, what accounts for the relationships or lack of relationships among your variables?

5. **References:**

Include a reference section that contains a listing of all of the sources you used according to the *American Sociological Review*. Please consult the **Notice to Contributors** in one of the volumes for instructions.

**List of variables from the GSS that can be used as either independent or dependent variables:**

Mustwork - When you work extra hours on your main job, is it mandatory?  
Chngtme - How often are you allowed to change your starting and quitting times on a daily basis?  
Wrkhome - How often do you work at home as part of your job?  
Famwkoff - How hard is it to take time off during your work to take care of personal or family matters?  
Wkvsfam - How often do the demands of your job interfere with your family life?  
Famvswk - How often do the demands of your family interfere with your work on the job?  
Secondwk - Do you have any jobs besides your main job or do any other work for pay?  
Workfast - Agree/Disagree (My job requires that I work very fast)  
Workdiff - Agree/Disagree (I get to do a number of different things on my job)  
Lotofsay - Agree/Disagree (I have a lot of say about what happens on my job)  
Wktopsat - Agree/Disagree (My main satisfaction in life comes from work)  
Respect - Agree/Disagree (At the place where I work, I am treated with respect)  
Wkdecide - In your job, how often do you take part with others in making decisions that affect you?  
Satjob1 - All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?

**List of variables from the GSS that can be used as independent variables only:**

Marital - Marital status  
Childs - Number of children  
Degree - Highest degree  
Sex - Sex  
Race - Race  
Babies - Household members less than 6 years old