

Introduction

This report explores the development of a social science frontier: theory, research, and policy concerning the dynamic intersections of work and family systems in contemporary American society. The impetus for effort on work-family interactions comes from several sources. In their concern for the increased well-being of citizens, national policy makers have recently focused attention on the impact of the structure and availability of work for the quality of life (see O'Toole, 1974). At the same time, Walter Mondale in the Senate, and others have turned attention to dilemmas and changes in family structure, arguing for the creation of a national family policy which would, in turn, consider the effects on family life of governmental legislation and organizational decisions. The Foundation for Child Development, for example, has recently supported an investigation of the feasibility of attaching "family impact" statements to legislation.

Such concerns derive from specific social changes as well as a general interest in the quality of life. The women's movement and the increase of women in the paid labor force (especially married women with children) have focused policy attention on the work-family link for women: the extent to which work systems

make it possible to maintain effective participation in both worlds. A rise in the number of single-parent families has similarly directed attention to the question of bridging the two worlds. And these issues, of course, are of critical interest to those individuals who find themselves bearing major responsibilities in both domains (working mothers or single-parent fathers). The 1960s also brought a number of social movements challenging the usual patterns of middle-class work and family life. Concerns with some unfortunate human effects of contemporary economic organization (pollution, executive ulcers, etc.) and the “growth potential” inherent in private life led to a variety of experiments (communes, work cooperatives) in which people tried to connect work and private life in very different ways, giving priority to leisure, personal expression, and relationships rather than career mobility. The movements of the past decade gave rise to the common use of the term *life-style* and awareness of the plurality of life-styles in the society (Zablocki and Kanter, 1976). There has also been a growing awareness of a turning away from career striving as the dominant measure of individual success, along with a revaluing of private, family life on the part of professionals inside organizations (Bailyn and Schein, 1976) as well as younger people (Gartner and Reissman, 1974), particularly as the personal “costs” of overly work-absorbed careers have been made clear. And studies of work and leisure, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s, began to focus attention on this critical link (e.g., Riesman, 1958; Wilensky, 1961).

Several recent intellectual trends have also highlighted the importance of studying work and family life together. In sociology and economics, a revival of interest in Marxist theory and research has taken a first premise that no part of modern life goes uninfluenced by the structure of capitalist institutions. Families as well as schools, in this view, take their own shape from the demands of capitalism for workers and consumers (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Thus, the family is one of the critical links in the capitalist economy, as it both produces “labor power” and consumes goods and services. Secondly, in psychology, sociology, and psychohistory, a concern with the total life cycle has also led to interest in the variety of settings in which adults as well as children spend their lives as both family members and workers. A growing interest in adult development naturally leads to questions about the ways in which people are shaped by and

manage their multiple involvements in their private as well as organizational lives. The timing of events in both the work and family worlds has also begun to receive attention in this developmental perspective (Brim and Abeles, 1975; Rapoport and Rapoport, 1965). (Hareven, 1974, has argued that historical studies of family structure also need to add this developmental focus on the family as “process,” unfolding and changing over the life cycle.) Developments in certain applied fields also pave the way for the examination of work-family linkages. In both organizational social psychology (applied behavioral science or industrial psychology) and the growing field of family therapy, open systems theory has provided a useful perspective. Organization development has concerned itself with integrating social and technical aspects of work, and family therapy has taken as its central premise the notion that the problems of individuals must be seen and treated in the context of the total family system (e.g., Kantor and Lehr, 1975). The open systems perspective (see Katz and Kahn, 1966) makes it possible to consider the inputs into each system from others in its environment.

Finally, the evolving character of the society as a whole has made this a particularly good time to consider the relations of work and family life. Growth in the numbers of people employed in service institutions and other changes signalling the “post-industrial society” have led scholars, such as Daniel Bell (1973), to conclude that in the future economic enterprises will pay more attention to their “sociologizing” (i.e., human welfare) functions than their “economizing” (profit-making) functions. But, of course, people come to work in organizations not just as individuals but also as members of private systems, such as families, that are themselves affected by the policies and practices of organizations. It may be that organizations of the future will have to pay attention to their effects on people other than employed persons (spouses, children) and allow the needs of families to influence organizational decisions and shape organizational policies. Questions about day care, part-time work, maternity and paternity leave, executive transfers, spousal involvement in career planning, and treatment of family dysfunctions—all difficult to approach at present—may become primary considerations for organizations in the future.

For all of these reasons, then, it is important to raise and

consider the nature and problems of work-family connections for people in a variety of social circumstances. This report attempts to offer some of the relevant background, by synthesizing previous studies and providing a coherent framework for current reflection. It is intended to raise questions that can provide an impetus to further investigation, to outline directions for fruitful exploration. There are several possible audiences: social science researchers, primarily in sociology and psychology; individual practitioners in mental health and human welfare fields; legislators and other social policy formulators; and internal staff and decision makers in work organizations, particularly large employers.

I begin with some historical and sociological speculation about why the gap between work and family has been maintained in the contemporary United States, locating some tentative answers both in industrial-organizational history and in the sociology of social science. The changes noted earlier are already helping to bridge the gap. The second section deals with the impact of occupational structures and work organization on families, identifying five dimensions or aspects of work positions that bear on family relations: the degree of occupational “absorption”; time and timing; the provision of rewards, both material and symbolic; occupational and organizational culture; and emotional aspects of one’s structural location at work. But individuals and families are not merely passive recipients of occupational and economic influences. Thus, the third section examines the family as an independent variable: a number of ways in which families and family life influence work decisions and the world of work. Because most of the research in these areas has dealt with the man as worker and breadwinner, and because women have traditionally faced a different situation as workers, the fourth section deals separately with women’s employment and family relations. It considers some issues around non-market work (home or housework) as well as work in the paid labor market, and it notes especially those changes in our models and methods required by a more realistic and nontraditional picture of women. Women bring work influences into the family as well as personal needs into work situations. The fifth section moves from those social structural considerations that can be more easily quantified into a social psychological frontier: qualitative exploration of working and loving as processes. Here the concern is with modes of interaction and the degree of convergence between

task-oriented and intimate relationships. In the sixth section, views of the effects of both work life and family life on personal well-being are raised, and it is suggested that the joint effects of the two systems be considered simultaneously, since the impact either sector has on the other depends heavily on the nature of the second system itself. How work pressures and stresses affect an individual and his or her family, for example, depends critically on the kind of family system in operation, just as the effect of family stresses on work life depends on the human organization of the work setting. Questions and issues for further research and policy consideration are raised throughout the discussion, but the last section summarizes major items for a research and policy agenda.

This review touches a large number of bases, but it inevitably leaves out some matters of importance. There is a stream in economics dealing with the decisions of individuals to allocate their time and resources across work and family systems, as well as a large number of writings on the family as an economic unit; these areas are not mentioned. I also do not review the large sociological literature on social mobility, in which the relative importance of family background for occupational, educational, or income attainments is extensively researched. Macro-social studies of the structure of the family under various stages of industrialization are left out, and demographic issues, such as fertility, family size, or relative age at marriage, are not considered. Such areas are all very important and well worth the attention of researchers. But they are not necessarily “frontiers,” because strong research traditions are already established.

A note on language and scope: the term *work* is often used synonymously with *paid employment*, for the sake of convenience, even though I recognize that *work* has a much broader meaning and legitimately encompasses non-market work, such as housework and volunteer work. At times in this report I do consider the effects of the organization of such non-market activities, especially in section four. And I would argue that to the extent that non-market work is as demanding and absorbing as market work, it can be analyzed using the same dimensions outlined in section two. Similarly, the term *family* is never really defined in the paper, since there are useful discussions elsewhere of the multiple meanings and confusing usages of the concept (e.g., Skolnick, 1975). *Family* tends to mean here the sphere of

intimate others, usually co-residents in the household, but also networks of kin outside; the fact that most often effects on marital bonds or on parent-child relationships are stressed is a function of the major emphases in the literature I review and not my personal preference. The realm of the family, similarly, encompasses here, for convenience, leisure pursuits and non-market work activities, even though these may sometimes be done by individuals with or without the participation of their “families.” Thus, the issue of family boundaries is not directly addressed, and I try to make few *a priori* assumptions about the appropriate unit in which particular work effects on personal life manifest themselves. But I am sure that not all unconscious biases have been exorcised, despite considerable care. The explicit limitation of scope to the United States (although I review a few studies based on other English-speaking countries) is a reflection of my attempt not to generalize beyond my own area of cultural familiarity. But, hopefully, this report will have broader usefulness.

I am grateful to Russell Sage Foundation for supporting this effort, especially Hugh Cline, under whose leadership this report was undertaken, Sarane Boocock, who provided intelligent advice and encouragement, and Jean Yoder, who shepherded the manuscript into publication. Valuable comments were provided by Jessie Bernard, Andrew Cherlin, Frank Furstenberg, Robert Rapoport, and Barry Stein, as well as several anonymous reviewers; Rapoport wrote particularly extensive comments. Susan Bell and Rosanna Hertz provided helpful library research, and Report Production Associates, Vivian Kaufman, and the Brandeis Sociology Department office staff assisted with the typing. Some of the work for this paper was carried out during 1975-76, when I held a Guggenheim Fellowship and was in residence at Harvard Law School; thanks are therefore also due to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.