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Improving Work-Life Balance for Caregivers

An Analysis of Employment Policies and their Effect on Work-Life Balance for Caregiving Parents of Children with Special Needs

Sara Panella

ABSTRACT

This capstone addresses the work-life conflict facing employed caregiver parents with special needs children by 1) identifying what employed parents of children with disabilities need from their employer in order to achieve a work-life balance that improves economic security and emotional well-being, and 2) evaluating how well policies address those needs. An investigation of work-family conflict and stress among parents of special needs children is conducted by examining the current literature and conducting interviews with caregivers to explore their work-life balance needs. Policy recommendations are provided, based on an analysis of public and workplace policies currently in use and policy innovations recommended by policy scholars to improve work-life balance among employed caregiving parents.

Introduction

Changing technology and the forces of globalization continue to increase productivity expectations while also reducing job security. Workplace structures, policies and practices have not changed to address the increasing pressures on work-life balance. Employees work with increasingly greater job demands within an environment that expects work to be conducted with limited schedule control or consistency. Many workers are confronted with the need to care for family while coping with these increased work demands with limited public and private sector policies to balance those dueling needs. Parents of children with special needs (caregiver parents) experience a greater difficulty in striking this balance (Meyers, Brady, & Seto, 2000).

This capstone addresses the work-life balance and economic insecurities facing caregiver parents in the workforce. The purpose is to understand the economic and emotional effects on employed parents of special needs children and the trade-offs between employment and family responsibility. Goals of this capstone are to:

- 1) Identify what employed parents of children with disabilities need from their employer in order to achieve a work-life balance that improves economic security and emotional well-being
- 2) Evaluate and analyze policy solutions that best fit to address those needs

I investigate work-family conflict and stress among parents of special needs children by examining the current literature and conduct interviews with caregivers to explore their work-life balance needs. An in-depth, comprehensive literature review includes sociological literature on work, family and disability; labor economics literature on work-family conflict; and management literature on workplace policy. Interviews with caregiving parents will investigate the work-family conflict and stress experienced among caregiver parents, and the meaning of policies and benefit programs to these parents.

This capstone concludes with policy recommendations based on an analysis of the successes and limitations of public and workplace policies that are currently in use or recommended by policy scholars to improve work-life balance among employed caregiving parents.

Background

Work-life conflict is the combination of pressures from parent-role and work-role responsibilities that become incompatible with each other, resulting in reduced employee, family and community health and well-being (Zhao, Settles, & Sheng, 2011). Without appropriate work leave benefits, flexibility of work time and location, or a universal, comprehensive child care system in the United States, the economic burden falls on employed parents to piece together supportive care and employment structures. Children with physical or behavioral disabilities require specialized care and experience more emergencies than typically developing children. These families must make significant adjustments in their schedules to accommodate these crises and special needs. This literature review explored the challenges of and strategies for balancing employment and caregiving among parents of children with disabilities to provide a basis for understanding the needs and barriers to addressing those needs, as they are associated with employment.

Sociological research demonstrates that work-life balance issues have financial, social and emotional implications for parents of special needs children. In the U.S. it is estimated that almost 22% of all households with children have at least one child with a special need (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, 2007). Parents of special needs children have a greater caregiving burden than parents of typically-developing children and lack sufficient resources to combine work and family in a balanced way (Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992; Rosenzweig J. M., 2003; Brennan & Brannan, 2005; Morris, 2014). Research

on parent caregivers find that caregiver strain, time constraints and unplanned interruptions pose significant challenges to meeting their work-family needs, as compared to working parents with typically developing children only (Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie, 2002). Whether their children have developmental or behavioral issues and whether they are mild or severe, caregiving parents face issues managing scheduled care-related services and addressing unscheduled needs or crises during the workday. The time constraint on parents can negatively impact their own mental health, causing symptoms that present obstacles to stable employment and work-life balance, such as over-exhaustion, increased aggravation and parent or worker burnout (Morris, 2014; Bouchey, 2011). Working outside of the home improves the mental health, level of stress, and caregiving ability for parent caregivers (Morris, 2014; Brennan & Brannan, 2005). Positive spillover effects occur between work and home, especially for mothers, creating a respite effect for the parent, which lends itself to more positive outcomes in both work and caregiving responsibilities (Morris, 2014).

Without care services, on-call replacement workers or the ability to complete work on an alternative schedule or location, parents may face difficulties remaining employed with such unscheduled absences (Rosenzweig J. M., 2003). Child care is difficult to access and typical child care subsidies are ineffective for these families due to child care provider restrictions and the behavioral or health complexities their children face. Employment is less consistent for parent caregivers than for non-caregiver parent employees, with caregivers more likely to work part-time, reduce work hours, earn less for the hours they do work and have a harder time maintaining continuous employment (Catherin E. Cutler Institute for Child and Family Policy, 2006; Cidav, Marcus, & Mandell, 2012; Meyers, Brady, & Seto, 2000; Swanberg, 2005).

The problem of work-life balance has implications for labor force participation and economic stability for these families. A parent's decisions about and patterns of employment are influenced by the age of their children, severity of their disability, cost of childcare and workplace policies offered, and include concerns about the costs to parents in terms of time, quality of care, foregone wages (due to unemployment or reduction in hours for greater flexibility) and direct costs of specialized equipment and care (Smolensky & Gootman, 2003; Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992). Additional factors include financial stress, transportation, support for household tasks, mental health treatment, work disruptions, stress and childcare providers or schools unable to cope with behavior issues (Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie, 2002). Due to these concerns, jobs with rigid or unpredictable scheduling present problems for employees experiencing interruptions and complex care coordination (Georgetown Law, 2011). A survey of parents found issues at work included: the need to reduce hours, missed opportunities for promotion, inability to accept job offers, a fear of losing their job and being fired because of the demands of their child's special needs (Catherin E. Cutler Institute for Child and Family Policy, 2006). Without access to the appropriate services to support their time at work, caregiving parents experience work-life balance issues that create workforce participation issues and economic insecurity.

There are opportunity costs inherent in inconsistent work or short job duration, resulting in barriers to higher wage employment (Bouchey, 2011). Workplace flexibility is the latitude to negotiate work schedules or location without fear of discrimination or penalty (Allen & Russell, 1999). Employed caregivers and experts on the topic have identified schedule control, flexibility of place or time, compressed workweek, telecommuting, wages, paid leave time, group scheduling systems, schedule predictability, supervisor support and workplace culture as helpful benefits for working parent caregivers to resolve work-family conflicts (Bouchey, 2011; Cidav, Marcus, & Mandell, 2012; King, et al., 2012; Catherin E. Cutler Institute for Child and Family Policy, 2006; Matos & Galinsky, 2012) The traditional workplace systems are strict and hierarchical in nature, relying on the market model of a flexible, ideal worker to be unencumbered by family responsibilities and adapt to long hours or work on short notice. Work schedules built on this model are often rigid and unpredictable (Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie,

2002). In the absence of a flexible structure, caregiver employees devise work-family adaptive strategies including adjustments, trade-offs, accommodation and scaling back in either family or work responsibilities to mediate the negative effects of work-life conflict (Voydanoff, 2005). Parents report they can improve their work-family fit when they build alliances with their coworkers and supervisors, disclosing their children's disability to gain support (Rosenzweig & Huffstutter, 2004). Workplace compromising may stymie the positive spillover effects on parent-role from work-life balance gains (Rosenzweig & Huffstutter, 2004).

In order to sustain the strict work and family expectations in our society, it is important to understand how policies have shaped practice to support improved work-life balance among families. Although not designed to address work-family conflict, the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) established the minimum wage and overtime pay, both of which affect the ability of workers to reserve time to care for families, but did not deal with flexibility of the work schedule. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act also made efforts to establish work performance as a determinant of employment and earnings, as opposed to a worker's personal characteristics. Public programs established under the Social Security Act of 1935 provide assistance to offset the costs of caring for children with disabilities when full, regular employment is not possible. These programs, including Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), provide income support, but fail to cover caregiving leave for employed caregivers. The 1993 Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides job protection for workers who need to take leave for caregiving, although it does not require the leave be paid and covers only a limited percentage of workers. While these policies do not adequately address the issues associated with poor work life balance among parents of children with disabilities, such as work flexibility, they appear to be cushioning some of the material hardship and economic insecurity facing highly vulnerable families (Meyers, Brady, & Seto, 2000).

The Alternative Schedules Work Act, passed in 1985, allows federal agencies to offer their employees the option of a flexible or compressed work schedule. This law shifted the view of work hours expectations by measuring the work time in a two-week period instead of by day, allowing an alternative schedule for work completion, as long as it does not affect operations (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). An analysis of the impact of AWS on federal employees found that flextime did produce positive results, like reduced stress and greater equity among household members, for certain groups including single workers, employees without children, and males whose spouses were not employed (Liechty & Anderson, 2007). The law was reinvigorated in the mid-1990's with recommendations from both President Clinton and Vice President Gore that the federal government should set the standard for a family-friendly workplace by ensuring that employees have access to their full flexibility (Liechty & Anderson, 2007).

There are some significant disparities in the distribution of these policies across industries, with professional, higher-wage fields providing greater workplace flexibility and leave benefits than low-wage fields, which often require employees to respond to irregular shifts or on-call work opportunities. Flexible options are offered most commonly as a part of the benefit package among higher wage, professional jobs (Matos & Galinsky, 2012). It is unlikely that employers feel compelled from a business perspective to offer these benefits as job recruitment efforts for low-wage positions (Pedersen et al 2009).

Some degree of schedule flexibility is still essential as shown by research that employees' control over their work time is crucial to reducing work-life conflict (Davis, 2008; Swanberg, 2005; Rosenzweig J. M., 2003). Policies for flextime, schedule control, and supervisor support result in a variety of positive outcomes for work-life balance, including improvements in job and life satisfaction and organizational commitment; and decreases in work-family conflict, absenteeism, intentions to quit, turnover and health weakening behaviors (Brennan, Rosenzweig, Ogilvie, Wuest, & Shindo, 2007; King, et al., 2012). Research shows that flexibility is also a key

factor in employee retention and morale. The National Study of Employers, conducted by the Families and Work Institute, found that the average employee now ranks flexibility and paid time off as a top priority and that flexibility options are on the rise (Matos & Galinsky, 2012).

In this paper, focus is given primarily to the work-life balance issues facing employed mothers of special needs children because mothers experience a disproportionate responsibility to care for children even while balancing work responsibilities (Zhao, Settles, & Sheng, 2011; Allen & Russell, 1999; Powers, 2001). The regulatory structure around labor in the U.S provides little guidance to help employers deal with the realities of flexible work (Catherin E. Cutler Institute for Child and Family Policy, 2006). Government interventions have addressed some labor market issues, including work protection standards, but many are still grounded in assumptions about work and family. These include assumptions that a caregiver is in the home to handle the needs and crises that arise during the day. As this is often not the case, it is the responsibility of the employee to integrate family and work. Paid time-off is a benefit to these families, insofar as leave time can be used with short notice. However, many leave policies have restrictions, requiring advanced notice. Emergency leave requests usually fall under sick leave, whether permitted or not, risking disciplinary action for the employee needing unexpected time off to handle a crisis.

Reviews from social and psychological research suggest that work-family conflict is significantly correlated with negative workplace outcomes including absenteeism, higher work stress, increased turnover and reduced productivity (Davis, 2008; Powers, 2001; Rosenzweig, 2003; Swanberg, 2005). The standard model of employment is not as efficient or as equitable as a functionally flexible, nontraditional employment model, especially among low-wage workers (Georgetown Law, 2011; Levin-Epstein, 2006). Among the general population, nonstandard work schedules exacerbate daily stressors and produce negative family-work spillover (Davis, 2008; Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004; Reynolds, 2005). Many businesses operating in competitive labor markets have begun to realize that reorganizing the workplace and adopting these policies reduce costs, improve productivity and competitiveness. Seeking to stand out as attractive, employers offer non-pecuniary workplace benefits because they act as a bargaining chip in competitive labor markets. Offering work schedules that improve work-life balance help to attract and retain talented employees (Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004). Investments in innovative benefits help businesses obtain recognition from organizations like the The Alfred P. Sloan Award for Excellence in Workplace Effectiveness and Flexibility, which awards hundreds of workplaces across the U.S. each year for these efforts (Matos & Galinsky, 2012). Human Resource Management literature argues that better work-life balance will improve productivity and that failing to treat their workers as assets by implementing better work-life balance policies is a business oversight (Bloom, Kretschmer, & Van Reenan, 2009). Research has found that employees are more motivated, productive and reliable in the presence of workplace policies that recognize and accommodate their work-life balance needs.

Workplace policies are one of several contextual factors that influence how individuals manage their complex roles. Without the alignment of both work support and care structures, parents face job security risks due to work interruptions. There is evidence suggesting that supervisors' support of employees' personal life, as well as employees' control over their work time, is a crucial component for interventions to reduce work-family conflict (King, et al., 2012; Jaoko, 2012; Swanberg, 2005). Culture must be established at high level in the business structure, because even supervisors with caregiving responsibilities themselves are no more likely to be supportive of workplace flexibility than those with no caregiving responsibilities (Jaoko, 2012). Workplace culture influences whether employees feel safe accessing benefits.

Flexible benefits work only to the extent that caregivers utilize them, and for flexibility to be utilized widely there must be a clear demonstration of support from the organization's leadership (Glass, 2004). Research on work-family policies has found a negative impact on subsequent wage

growth among mothers who accessed benefits, including telecommuting and reduced work hours (Glass, 2004). Parents feel apprehensive about employers' perception of their work ethic and commitment when requesting flexible accommodations and find they have to work harder or employ other strategies, including disclosure and reciprocity, to avoid negative stigma from coworkers or supervisors (Bouchey, 2011; Rosenzweig J. M., 2003; Schwartz, 1994). It is essential to inform and train businesses on how to enable greater schedule control and facilitate greater social support on the part of their employees (King, et al., 2012). Many employees are not empowered to request the schedule arrangements they need to maintain their work-life balance and employers are unaware of the needs or attitudes of their employees (Schwartz, 1994). Low-income families face more pressure for labor force participation while managing family, despite these conflicts and resource constraints (Lilly, Laporte, & Coyte, 2007; Pedersen, Minnotte, KIger, & Mannon, 2009). In addition to employment pressures, the societal assumptions about parental involvement and gendered caregiving that low-income mothers face influence employee productivity, parent stress, and the mental health of family members (Urban & Olson, 2005). High turnover and lack of commitment create productivity losses in the workplace (Georgetown Law, 2011). These workplace policies act as both family supports and workplace supports, improving worker efficiency and family life. The effects are circular, with positive spillover occurring in both directions when work-life strategies balance.

Methodology

An interview method has been used to gain direct feedback from parents about work-life balance experiences while caring for children with special needs and the importance of workplace policies. Interview participants were selected using purposive sampling from a parent-provider consortia, Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services, with guidance from a local agency that serves individuals with developmental disabilities, Port Resources. Several parents were identified as appropriate candidates, for their histories working and acting as the primary caregiver for their special needs child(ren). This study interviewed mothers only, for an intentional investigation of their experience of workplace culture and navigation of employment flexibility, anticipating that this would inform a focused analysis of workplace policies for employed mothers (Powers, 2001).

The interview procedure and content were submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to the research. Following IRB approval, identified interview participants were contacted for one-on-one interviews. This narrative research method provides additional context to evaluate how current policies and innovative alternatives would impact these families. Work-family strategies identified in previous literature were used to develop interview questions (Banerjee & Cummings Perrucci, 2012; Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie, 2002; Rosenzweig & Huffstutter, 2004; Rosenzweig J. M., *Employment Strategies for Managing Work-Family Fit*, 2003). Interviews consisted of four key topic questions, allowing for open-ended conversation.

Interview Questions:

1. What have you found to be the most significant challenges/barriers to finding and keeping employment due to caring for a child with special needs?
2. What strategies have you used to find and keep employment while caring for a special needs child? Have workplace benefits or flexibility been offered at those jobs?
3. Can you describe the workplace culture and amount of support your employers or workplaces provided to you, as a parent of a child with special needs?
4. What would improve the workplace's culture of work-life integration?

A review of innovative policy solutions will follow, with a analysis of policy alternatives on their value for more widespread application. Efficiency and equity criteria are used to determine whether the current or projected outcomes of new policies will solve this policy problem. This narrative-style research method will provide context for the evaluation of how current policies and innovative alternatives would impact these families.

Limitations

The sample for the interviews conducted in this study was very small and not representative. Only two mothers were interviewed and both are currently working in similar positions with flexible arrangements. This does not provide an opportunity to understand the population of employed parent caregivers as a whole.

Policy analysis criteria were limited to the themes determined by the research conducted for this capstone, specific to working caregiver parents. Several other criteria of importance in this policy area were not included as part of this analysis. These include, but are not limited to: a livable wage, comprehensive child care, employer-sponsored health and wellness benefits.

Analysis

I. Interview Data Analysis:

Interviews were conducted with two single, working mothers with special needs children. These parents both share a similar history of shifting jobs and obtaining additional education to attain a job that provides leave benefits and allows flexibility in work hours. A valuable component of this research was the similar situation and histories of both participants. As employed caregivers, with experiences across different fields and job levels, they were able to provide insight into the complexities of being a supervisor, employee and caregiver. They shared themes of disappointment and guilt about the challenges they face in supervising lower wage employees with strict schedules when those employees are often caregivers themselves.

The most significant issues reported by participants included: lack of flexibility, location, time, pay and guilt. Both mothers reported issues with jobs that did not provide enough leave time when child care fell through or they have had to leave early. Participants both work for an agency that employs shift workers with roles that hold them responsible for the care of clients. They recognized the inability to allow those employees the same flexibility provided to administrative staff and the difficulty of reconciling that paradox, as a parent of special needs children. Jobs with strict shift-specific schedules included positions with inflexible hours where coverage was a requirement if an employee took leave. Finding jobs that allowed flexibility, through a salaried position later in their careers, has made things easier by providing paid leave benefits. In their current jobs, the hours can be completed with some flexibility of scheduling. "If I have appointments or emergencies, I can adjust my day and still get paid." Flexible jobs described by participants included positions that were not tied to the office and those that took place during the time their children were in the hands of another care provider, allowing the parent to complete work tasks while their child was at school or child care and still be able to leave to pick them up. These jobs also allowed parents to do some work from home, if necessary.

Both mothers reported that location of their job to their child's school was very important. They need to leave work frequently for appointments, and very quickly if their child has a crisis. As single parents, these mothers reported time management as a significant issue when making decisions about work and appointments for their child. Having a flexible job helps with time

issues. Jobs that offered flextime benefits were helpful for times when they needed to stay late at work one day but could benefit by being home early on another day, sometimes unexpectedly. Additional workplace benefits that were noted as being important also includes work mobility, general earned time and wellness benefits. Work mobility is helpful to balancing work and life, so telecommuting opportunities, especially those that provide a laptop and cell phone, are key to a flexible job. Collapsed earned time at a job has allowed a parent to use time for whatever they need it for. Wellness benefits that provide reduced price gym memberships or massage are helpful for self-care. Fiscal benefits are valuable, such as group health programs that allow savings for medical costs in the future.

Reasonable wages were a barrier to managing caregiving responsibilities, especially in the earlier part of their careers. Their costs included transportation costs, child care, developmental sensory items, comprehensive health insurance coverage and copayments for treatments. One mother described “getting pushed toward MaineCare,” reporting that her family had a private insurance that lacked coverage for certain types of critical services, such as case management or in-home supports. They were eligible for MaineCare to cover the gap from private insurance, but she was unsure that using a public benefit was a good thing even though she was eligible. Both mothers reported feeling guilty about many components of keeping work and family needs together, including the inability to keep up with both. One mother said she still finds it difficult and embarrassing to ask for help because she wishes she could do everything on her own. As their child’s needs increase, their feeling of inadequacy increase. “As a professional and a mother, it feels like someone is always suffering.”

Strategies that participants used to manage their work-life balance included: organization and planning, disclosure of family issues at work and obtaining additional education. Organization and planning was a common strategy for both participants, reporting that structure was essential to keep their schedule moving smoothly. Taking extra steps to plan and prepare their routine is a big effort, but it helped them manage crises. Open communication and disclosure of their child’s disability and their family struggles helped develop bonds with their employer and staff. When coworkers understood the reasons for their absence they were less likely to be worry about their commitment to their job or that they were taking advantage of the benefit. Participants report that use of flexibility options is challenging when the workplace culture is unsupportive or uncertain. One mother was forced into disclosure after her child’s behavior resulted in her repeated removal from daycare. Both participants described experiences in past jobs where they did not feel safe and supported to disclose their family struggles with their supervisor. Concerns about disclosure include fear of judgment, loss of respect, job security and promotion opportunities. Now in supervisory or leadership positions, they also find that asking for help at work sets a tone, encouraging staff to give help and also ask for help with their own issues. Striking a balance between privacy and transparency helps to create understanding from staff while still maintaining their respect. Working in a non-judgmental environment makes balancing work and family significantly less stressful.

Both mothers adopted a long-term strategy to obtain work in a flexible and culturally supportive workplace by seeking additional post-graduate work in human services. One mother estimated she had made five major career shifts in her life based on the needs of her family and that she was solely responsible to find that adjustment as a single parent. Benefits and flexibility options used by participants included: FMLA, flextime, telecommuting and employer sponsored health insurance and wellness benefits. Both parents reported using FMLA intermittently; one when her child was transitioning to a different source of care and scheduling that required her presence. This benefit helped her focus on her child, knowing that her job would be safe.

Participants reported that setting the culture of understanding, support and flexibility starts at the top, with senior leadership as a significant force driving. Participants reported past experiences in workplaces that intended to be understanding of employees with caregiving responsibilities, but still presented a “you really need to be here” attitude. In the earlier years of

employment they faced less forgiving workplaces, especially in jobs with a smaller proportion of female employees. One participant believes that there has been more awareness and knowledge about disabilities that has improved the environment of understanding of employed parents with special needs children. One participant primarily contributes the tone of support and flexibility to the organization's leadership.

Ideal shifts in the workplace that would help work-life balance included: culture of flexibility, sensitivity training for managers, a reduced 30-hour workweek and employer facilitated support group for caregivers. Education and training of managers and human resources about the experience of having a family member with special needs and the complexity of their work-life balance would help improve the workplace culture. From a wider perspective, one mother believes an expanded awareness in society about disabilities would also help the efforts to reduce the discrimination toward caregivers in the workplace. A reduced 30-hour workweek would help improve the relationship between parent and child. An agency-provided space to hold a workplace support group for similarly situated caregiver employees was identified as a non-financial benefit that employers could offer. Participants report the long workday affects the behavior of their children. Both parent and child are strained when they are only together for a short time each day. As the difficult behaviors increase, the quality of their home life declines. On the topic of working fewer hours, one participant predicts, "I think the quality of my work would be better if that balance was better." The ideal home life includes the time and structure to follow a routine with their children.

These mothers agreed that flexibility is partly structural and partly cultural. As a member of management, one mother discussed the benefits offered by their organization and the changes made to improve the work-life balance for employees in various roles. In their current workplace, the organization has been able to offer more than the 12 weeks of FMLA leave time legally required by the law to ensure that employees can fully manage their family needs. A financial benefit that allowed employees to choose the cash equivalent of their paid leave benefits was eliminated as they found more employees chose the cash over their leave time. They found this benefit created a detriment to employees who often needed to use leave time they no longer had available, especially parents of special needs children who faced emergencies that would keep them out of work. The lack of leave time perpetuated stress and an unhealthy management of their employees' work-life balance. They even found this trend among managers, creating a dependency on these staff that rarely took time off instead of building systems of coverage for staff on leave.

Participants discussed the difficulty of managing these benefits and equalizing them among positions with shift rigidity. They recognize that staff working in those jobs have a different experience in managing their work life balance than administrative staff or management. Acknowledging that the financial burden of working in a low wage job exacerbates the stress of managing the work-life balance as a parent of a special needs child, both participants agreed that salary was an important factor in workplace policies to improve work-life balance. Without a livable wage, their employees are more likely to work extra shifts or cash out their leave time to make ends meet financially, increasing work-life conflict. Participants speculated that these employees do not experience the job security that they do, in higher-ranking positions with flexibility options. They report that their organization has made strides to remedy this by increasing the wages for their lowest paid employees, to provide a livable wage. However, one participant believes that the training and workplace policies needed are not widespread enough to realistically create flexibility as a standard for shift work.

II. Policy Analysis:

Policy solutions are still needed to address the integration of employment and caregiving responsibilities among parents with special needs children. A review of the literature and

interviews identified what employed caregivers need from their employer in order to achieve a healthy work-life balance. This policy analysis will employ the interview themes of lack of flexibility, location, time, pay and guilt as elements of barriers to work-life balance. This section will outline and evaluate alternatives, in both public policy and private workplace policy, to improve work-life balance among employed caregivers. Key evaluation criteria for workplace structures include: flexibility benefits (flextime, telecommuting, reduced workweek, paid leave time), culture of supportive awareness (sensitivity training, leadership role-modeling), job security. The analysis will expand the discussion of employment flexibility by exploring the opportunity for and influence of these alternatives in the labor market.

It is the differences in labor market environments that indicate whether employers will respond to the problems of work-life balance on their own or not. For all labor markets to operate ideally, the presence of competition should keep employers interested in remaining efficient, even if it requires additional costs for long-term benefits. Competitive efficiency tends to resolve itself in competitive labor markets, but suffers from market failure in terms of the imperfect competition in secondary labor markets due to an oversupply of labor, particularly in low-wage fields. Employers in these monopsonistic labor markets face an oversupply of labor and are more capable of influencing the costs of labor inputs, including wages and non-pecuniary benefits like flexible hours. These monopsonist elements are common in markets with low wage positions, such as service employment. Results are workplaces with fewer opportunities for job advancement, little job stability, and more discrimination than the primary labor market.

The unsatisfactory and arguably deficient nature of labor markets with imperfect competition is cause for concern and policy consideration. In order to efficiently address the problem, work force participation must be made available to employees at a level that ensures economic security by considering the work-life balance issues that may be more easily addressed within the workplace. Given the themes presented in the research on employed parents of special needs children and those presented through the interviews from this research, several relevant policy alternatives will be analyzed.

The three policy areas outlined here describe the elements of success, areas of concern, and potential effectiveness for families of children with disabilities, including how industry and occupational differences may impact implementation. This is not an exhaustive list, but a selection of priority areas that best address the needs identified by interview participants, including: 1) workplace flexibility, 2) workplace culture and structure and 3) protection from discrimination on the job.

Priority Areas for Policy

1. Workplace flexibility and schedule predictability

Overview and elements of success:

These policies provide flexible leave options beyond those required by the Family and Medical Leave Act. Adjusting start time or leave time to accommodate personal schedules or working a compressed workweek to reduce the costs and complications of child care are both popular among employed caregivers with jobs where this works. Telecommuting, when possible is a successful additional resource for employees who intend to keep regular business hours. Providing laptop, cell phone or home access capability to work resources help employees stay productive even when their schedule is interrupted. Group scheduling for shift work provides employees with some schedule control and is a solution for low-income workers, who are the least likely to have access to other flexibility options. Group scheduling tools allow employees to take an active role in weekly or monthly scheduling. It provides an interactive method of rescheduling and obtaining coverage to occur between employees through a shared platform, taking strain off of managers while

providing control to the employee for scheduling preferences and creating a community of work sharing between coworkers.

Instrumental concerns:

Many of these benefits, aside from group scheduling, are difficult to achieve with job roles that require an on-site presence, such as customer facing service work. Implementation costs may be an issue as may be an undersupply of workers available for coverage of schedule changes. The additional cost to employers of hiring more workers may be a barrier to effective use. However, many large employers of low-wage workers are significantly undercutting their labor wages and reaping. Consideration should also be given to introducing too big a pool of workers, the hours and income earned by all workers will be reduced.

2. Workplace culture and structure:

Overview and elements of success:

Providing sensitivity training to employers and managers builds a culture of understanding and support in the workforce for parent caregivers. This culture prevents discrimination, promotes teamwork and improves worker satisfaction. Implementation guidance for flexibility policies, tailored to workplaces, can shift the culture of a workplace, an essential component to sustainable positive outcomes for employees. Employers in many industries have experienced significant gains from focusing on helping employees improve their work-life balance. Employees who feel supported by their coworkers and supervisors work harder and tend to stay in their jobs longer. Reduced turnover and employee job satisfaction positively impact outcomes for the business. Tailoring workplace programs and policies to the specific business can help maximize these gains and help mitigate issues that may affect productivity or unsustainable cost.

Instrumental concerns:

The implementation effort may vary widely, depending on the size of the business and their staffing infrastructure to manage the human resources and training component. Incentives for implementation should be considered to encourage participation.

3. Protection from discrimination on the job

Overview and elements of success:

Laws against workplace discrimination based on family caregiving responsibilities provide employees with job security. Protection from discrimination policies require employers to reasonably consider and award flexibility alternatives to employees under all circumstances where it will not present significant costs or other negative consequences to business process. Enforcement of and guidance on caregiver discrimination will put measures into place to reduce the fear of managing work-life balance among parent caregivers, improving their job tenure, work participation and economic security. These laws may also proactively encourage businesses to implement flexibility policies as a precautionary measure to avoid potential discrimination charges.

Instrumental concerns:

Protection from discrimination when requesting flexibility does not necessarily create a culture of acceptance. Even if employers do not actively punish employees who take advantage of flexibility opportunities, but there may still be a social culture of disapproval that affects the quality of the workplace and increases work-life conflict.

The following analysis will examine two policy alternatives based on the policy areas outlined above to correct the conditions of imperfect competition to encourage businesses to realize the benefits of workplace flexibility policies and prevent businesses from discriminating against employees with caregiving responsibilities. The alternatives were chosen for further analysis based on political feasibility and substantive goals of equity, efficiency and social welfare. The policy alternatives will include A) Incentivized Workplace Cultural and Structural Redesign, B) Right to Request Law.

Policy A will provide a workplace flexibility structure redesign education and guidance through voluntary business engagement. An informational campaign about the benefits of flexible workplace policies will be executed within a community, alongside opportunities for in-kind assistance to encourage, guide and offset costs for flexibility program adoption. Structural redesign within industries will shift the cultural expectations for the workplace, transitioning the policy from a public effort to an institutional practice.

Policy B will provide a right to request law that protects employees from discrimination when requesting flexibility options and requires employers to grant such requests when it does not require the business to incur unreasonable costs. Requests can be negotiated between employer and employee and amount to nonpecuniary benefits, such as restructuring work hours, method of scheduling or place of work.

Policy Alternatives

A. Policy to Practice: Incentivized Workplace Cultural and Structural Redesign

As businesses continue to employ labor under a more traditional, standard model they provide inefficient employment opportunities or face challenges to remain competitive. Without information about the most efficient ways to respond to the needs and demands of workers and without some cost reduction mechanism, private sector businesses in labor markets with imperfect competition may not create flexible workplace policy without an incentive. An in-kind subsidy, that provides new scheduling software, managerial training or human resources training, will offset costs to employers and incentivize policy implementation, with an opportunity to experience the effects of such a shift in their policy. Combining a public information campaign with this subsidized assistance will disseminate guidance and a new cultural narrative about alternative workplace arrangements and the benefits to employers. This combination of information campaign and subsidies will promote the program and help enact workplace policies in a way that they will meet the needs of both parties.

Guidance for implementation of these flexible workplace policies can be made available on a state-wide or other jurisdiction-wide level using a toolkit strategy. A toolkit strategy present a menu of flexibility options to employers, along with consultants to help with implementation. Models already exist for this type of program, including a Houston, TX initiative: Flex in the City (TCT Enterprises, LLC; Lyons, 2006). Typical flexibility strategies include: group-scheduling; flexible start and stop times; compressed work week; telecommuting; reduced-hours with formal, standard part-time employment with benefits; job sharing; seasonal flexibility; and compensatory time. The strategies chosen are based on peer-reviewed literature from a combination of social science research and human resources best practices. Flexibility tools are chosen at the discretion of the employer and would be implemented with the assistance of a consulting team to provide management training about how to leverage the advantages and mitigate the disadvantages inherent to flexible systems. Experts in the area of workplace flexibility, named "Business Champions," act as best-practice leaders, promoting flexibility as a critical strategy to ensure

success in the global economy (Matos & Galinsky, 2012). Subsidized consultant services will also provide sensitivity training about work-life balance and the challenges caregivers face. These services provide business-specific statistics on the costs and benefits to employers, post-implementation. Measurable changes resulting from these interventions support the goals of greater work-life balance, including increases in employee schedule control, changes in organizational systems supportive of employee time control, changes in managerial self-awareness and supportive behaviors, and changes in employee behavior and organizational citizenship.

Offering a limited implementation subsidy would help push forward and expand the reach of such a labor policy effort. The public information campaign is a critical component of this policy due to the stereotypes and discrimination currently imbedded in the workplace about employees who make use of flexibility benefits. Groups like the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's National Workplace Flexibility Initiative have already created a framework to increase public understanding of flexibility policy and to increase private sector implementation of these policies (Georgetown Law, 2011). Continuing work like this will create a consistent message about the benefits of workplace flexibility and help to reduce stigma and normalize a work-life balance culture that can empower employees to ask for those changes.

Limitations of Policy A

The government can sometimes position itself as a model for behavior it intends to encourage or enforce, such as federal action with the Alternative Schedules Work Act. Most state and federal employment now allows some flexibility options, including compressed work weeks and paid leave, demonstrating that employees who need time should request it. By championing the efforts of participating employers through a recognition and reward system, such as a “Flexible Workplace Employer” icon, this program rewards and influences others. By enacting other rewards or benefits to employers for their compliance with new flexibility policies, the government could demonstrate how employers who grant these requests should be applauded, creating a culture of endorsement among businesses that have not yet subscribed to these practice. An unintended consequence that many private-sector businesses have found is a promotional value in being a “flexible” or “family-friendly.” These labels are appealing to their customers seeking to support businesses that treat their employees well.

Equitable distribution of opportunities for work-life balance, based on the needs of caregivers, is an important goal of this policy. Caregiving responsibilities may stem from children, aging parents or disabled family members and in order to provide an equality of job rewards among workers, this policy should extend flexibility benefits to all employees, not just parents. This policy solution would also be accessible to employers within competitive labor markets, who may already have been able to implement flexible workplace policies. It would be relatively difficult to limit this subsidy to only targeted employers in labor markets with limited competition without further defining the parameters of primary and secondary labor markets. In cases where subsidized assistance would not correct the market failure of limited competition, a deadweight loss will result. However, the distributional benefits that the widespread valuation a shift in workplace policy would have to the entire workforce may have intrinsic benefits of its own. It is difficult to make an assessment of this sort and to do so would require additional research. Shifts in business practices are hard to predict unless based on mandatory regulations.

The potential for government failure should be considered to the extent that the program is not sufficiently funded to provide assistance to all participating employers. Programs should be executed at no larger than state-level initiatives because smaller jurisdiction levels can more successfully measure the needs and successes of the program. Requiring the allocation of public tax dollars as a funding source to provide subsidized services makes feasibility a concern. While overutilization is possible in a voluntary, demand-side subsidy, it is not a significant concern as workplace flexibility policies are not highly popular within low-wage labor markets. As a socially

desirable, work-related policy that the private market fails to provide itself, this policy may gain mainstream support as the topic of workplace flexibility becomes more prevalent. To the extent that workplace policies keep workers employed at higher levels and for longer, this policy will reduce the cost of income supports to unemployed or underemployed caregivers.

B. Right to Request Law

Workplace discrimination against caregivers based on their family caregiving responsibilities is a rapidly growing problem. Recently, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission responded by issuing new enforcement guidance on caregiver discrimination. However, U.S. law does not mandate this protection. A Right to Request Law takes a more proactive response to the problem of work-life balance issues among caregivers and reduces discrimination in the workplace by giving workers the right to request a flexible schedule without fear of retaliation. This law protects employees from discipline when asking for or taking advantage of flexibility or predictability in their work schedule.

This law requires employers to set up a process to discuss and negotiate workplace flexibility with employees. Employers would be permitted to refuse requests for specific reasons that would burden the employer with additional, unreasonable costs, negative effects on consumer demand or on business quality and performance. This law could provide explicit guidelines and protections to help employees create more predictable schedules with realistic hours. Employment issues such as overtime can be negotiated between employee and employer without coercion.

The precedent for Right to Request laws have already been set in several countries, including the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia. With evidence of employer discrimination based on family responsibilities, U.S. state policymakers are beginning to respond to the need for workplace protections for caregivers with Family Responsibilities Discrimination (FRD) Laws in states and cities. Right to Request laws take the FRD protections a step further, putting the onus on employers to provide the workplace policies to comply. Employees who are wrongfully denied these flexibility options have justification to seek enforcement under the law. The existing trend for these protections, already starting in states, shows that this policy is politically feasible.

Limitations of Policy B

The institutional feasibility of this policy should be considered. Similar to Policy A, the Right to Request law would have to be accessible across all labor markets, to all employees and with an implementation schedule that accommodates a variety of employers and their unique market conditions. A law like this could impair businesses from operating efficiently by placing too demanding of a labor restriction on more sensitive business. A carefully constructed set of limits to protect both employer and employees are essential to the success of this law.

There are significant benefits to employees under the policy, who will experience a new workplace model based on work-life balance values. While employers still maintain the discretion to approve or deny requests, the framework for an employer to claim “undue harm” places a new level of responsibility on the employer that does not exist in the absence of this law. This is especially beneficial to low-wage employees, but only to the extent that low-wage employers innovate workplace policies to facilitate requests for flexibility. Depending on the enforcement of the law, ensuring that denied requests are legitimate, this policy could have a varying impact on work-life balance for employed caregivers.

Analysis Conclusion

Familial caregiving serves societal goals of protecting the welfare of children, the elderly and the disabled and it is in the best interest of the government to promote corrections to the labor market to allow for a healthy work-life balance. Workers with the least access to predictable work

schedules are disproportionately low-wage workers, women, and workers of color. Rigid and unpredictable workplace policies not only hinder work-life balance for employees, but also result in additional costs to employers due to poor workplace morale, high turnover rates and training costs for new employees. Employers and employees alike would benefit from the distributional effects of both of these policies. Some employers may want to provide flexibility but find that their reducing inputs to production, like labor costs, is not feasible while still remaining competitive in the market. For employers in businesses that are highly sensitive to production cost fluctuations, policies with an opt-out mechanism would be desirable. However, many businesses in a labor market with limited competition may be creating a deadweight loss due to inefficient production practices. In order to increase employee and employer surplus, a revision of workplace policy is required. Policy A would favor employers more than employees in this regard because it provides the power of choice of which flexibility tool to implement and also subsidization of those changes. However, Policy A also provides a broad range of cultural messaging that may have effects of workplace culture that are difficult to measure.

Among workplaces that would not participate, regardless of subsidies, Policy B would be more effective at achieving equity among workers because it reduces employers' ability to discriminate. The efficiency gains in Policy A are tied to its effectiveness at employer participation. As it is voluntary in nature, there are risks of opportunistic behavior among employers who rely on the limited competition of the labor market to dictate a low participation rate. Employers who do choose to enroll may benefit from being "the first" but they also take on the risk of time investment in a program where the benefits are relatively uncertain. As a law, Policy B would inherently achieve greater efficiency because it is enforceable. Historically, laws have had the ability to push cultural change insofar as practices that are averse to the law are challenged.

Policy makers must carefully account for the costs or consequences policies may have on businesses. The ability to predict both short-term and long term costs and benefits of these policies are critical, considering the often contentious and polarizing environment around labor policy debates. Ideally, both policies would be implemented simultaneously. There are no tax-expenditures required for Policy B, which makes it more politically and institutionally feasible. Meanwhile, Policy A provides an informative and supportive structure for successful workplace policy change that is absent from Policy B.

In order to best use labor resources wisely and improve job force participation, policy makers must look for more innovative ways that businesses can improve work-life balance for employed caregivers through the provision of workplace flexibility in labor markets with limited competition. Experimentation is important, and policy should support this type of testing and exploration. States that legislate more generous benefits than current federal provisions can serve as a model for an subsequent federal law transformations, as happened during the early decades of the twentieth century with minimum wage laws. It is likely that comprehensive solutions are necessary, including a combination of legal discrimination protections, part-time work that offers pay proportionate to full time work, workplace flexibility, and public supports for formal disability care and education. (Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie, *Work-Family Fit: Voices of Parents of Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 2002).

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