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RP489 Impacting Private Sector Policy For Families

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Who is caring for families(*) these days? Historically, we've had the notion that families needed to be self-sufficient. But, today, dramatic changes in family structure and family member's employment have shifted this thinking. As family policy educator and researcher Shirley Zimmerman (personal communication, April 26, 1993) states,

> "increasingly it is recognized that the well-being of families is dependent on the functioning of other societal institutions, such as government and business. For this reason, government is taking an expanding interest in the role of the private sector, namely business and industry, for ensuring the health and economic security of workers and their families."

As the power of organized labor has declined and employers have cut costs by eliminating many benefit practices, lawmakers seek to respond to the gap at both the federal and state levels (Roosevelt Center for American Policy Studies, 1989). This, however, is not enough. Today, the private sector-- business/industry--is being pushed to respond as well. This publication has been written primarily to help families and business owners focus on the need for private sector involvement in promoting family well- being and secondly, how citizens can influence the processes.

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* Definition of "Families"

The American Home Economics Association defines the family unit as "two or more persons who share resources, share responsibility for decisions, share values and goals, and have commitment to one another over time regardless of blood, legal ties, adoption, or marriage".

(American Home Economics Association, 1975)

Public and Private Responses to Work and Family Issues

According to Kammerman and Kahn (1987), government is required to provide the foundation for

creating an effective family care policy; employers should enhance such policy as needed. This is a challenge according to Susan S. Stautberg (cited in Miller, 1991) who has studied public and private responses to family issues. She states "any major transformation of corporate society will probably be instituted by the courts or Congress, implemented by companies only after a new idea becomes federal or state law" (p. 277). One such development is The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which became effective on August 5, 1993. This act guarantees 12 weeks annual unpaid leave to employees in companies with 50 employees or more following the birth or adoption of a child, to care for a seriously ill family member or recover from personal serious illnesses.

In May 1989, the Roosevelt Center for American Policy Studies conducted public opinion forums on the topic of "Balancing Work and Family" with 813 citizens at 12 locations in eight states. Participants discussed the extent to which the private and public sector have responsibility to help families balance their work with family matters. When asked whether businesses should be expected to adapt their personnel policies to the realities of family life or whether workers should adapt to their employers' expectations first, more than 80% of the participants nationwide asked for new personnel policies. In the Midwest communities of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Peoria, Illinois, more than two-thirds of the participants asked business to do more toward helping people balance their work with family life. These responses are relevant to family policy.

The Growing Impact of Work on Family

"Nuclear family blinders," as described by Coleman and Ganong (1992), result in a narrow view of the family as a traditional breadwinner father with a dependent wife and children. The thinking behind this cultural belief clouds the reality of the variety of other family structures that exist in today's society. Further, it impedes the development of family friendly policy by the private sector. This outdated view of families limits the ability of private and public decision makers to think about work and family issues in a realistic fashion.

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Work and Family Revolution

The family has become the shock absorber of a stalled work and family revolution -- which is the social equivalent to losing the ozone layer.

(Hochschild, 1992, November 8)

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The impact of work on family is being felt in millions of homes and workplaces with the tremendous surge in the number of working mothers. According to the 1990 Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992), 66% of all mothers of children under age 18 are employed outside the home and 59% of all mothers of children under age 6 are employed outside the home. During the last decade, rural women have sought outside employment at an accelerated rate, notably rural women with preschoolers (Ollenburger & Grana & Moore, 1989).

Research indicates that the agribusiness sector has an expanding role to play in providing family-support options for the growing numbers of off-farm employed individuals and their families. Part of this is attributable to the agricultural recession of the 1970's. During the 1980's, actual consumer purchasing power declined because of slower economic growth, declining incomes, and inflation. With more than two-thirds of the total income of farm families coming from non-farm sources, the rural community has been forced to adjust. In locales where agribusinesses are the economic backbone of the rural community, they have been forced to compete with business in metropolitan areas in terms of employment

opportunities and job benefits (Stegelin & Stegelin, 1990).

Private and public sector policymakers, as well as social service providers, must be alert to increasing rates of employment among women. Low wages, lack of benefits, child care, elder care, dual career mobility, and female work patterns of discontinuous and part time jobs are increasingly important issues that must be addressed.

What is Family Policy?

According to Zimmerman (1988, 1992) "family policy" refers to a perspective for understanding and thinking about policy in relation to families. It is used in the singular as a policy perspective and also as a way of conveying the idea of a cluster of policy measures with identifiable family content that then find expression in family-related program activities. It also is used in the plural to refer to all the individual policies that affect families, both directly or indirectly.

Why Should the Private Sector Respond?

Work and family policies have traditionally been viewed as the compassionate, but nonessential "social policy" for the private sector. Today, that attitude is changing, to a more practical and profitable response to bottom line business concerns. Motivation and attitudinal change comes from two major pressures: (1) labor shortages and (2) the costs a company must absorb when workers with family responsibilities cannot handle work assignments (Vanderkolk & Young, 1991).

Extensive research conducted by the Families and Work Institute in a three year survey drawn from 30 industry groups provides information about the work and families policies and programs of 188 companies (63 percent response). In those companies with moderate or very supportive work and family programs, employee morale and recruitment/retention top the list of reasons for company interest in these issues. Concern about the real or perceived costs of work and family programs rank well above other factors as the reason for not adopting policies to address work and family problems (Galinsky & Friedman & Hernandez, 1991).

Women still assume primary responsibility for family life and thus experience more work and family conflict than men. However, this is changing. Research now indicates that as men take on more of the family roles and responsibility, they too suffer personally and professionally from role conflicts. Two out of every five employees, both men and women, experience problems managing their work and family demands (Galinsky et al., 1991).

But, what about the business that ignores or chooses not to respond to work and family issues? There may be a variety of reasons for not recognizing the importance of balancing work with family needs. For example, some businesses may not have experienced a shortage of skilled workers, or unemployment may be high enough in an area to allow employers to pick and choose among potential workers. Some employers are doing business as usual, inattentive to family issues because they have not experienced such problems in their own family structure which includes a stay-at-home wife. Other firms have waited until their workers can agree on what specific benefits they need. The employee level may not have asked for change. Many other businesses believe that the initial costs will be too high. As a result, they have done nothing. For those businesses that have implemented family friendly benefits, their process has been to use a studied approach of analyzing costs and benefits. Planning and coordinating efforts with workers and managers brings the entire team into the process (Vanderkolk Young, 1991).

Work and Family Definitions

"The words 'work and family' means different things to different people. On Capitol Hill, work and family is a catchphrase for a variety of new legislative proposals that use any of a number of federal government tools--including the tax code, regulation, and direct spending--to meet the needs of families and influence the private sector. For businesses, work and family generally refers to emerging personnel policies such as parental leave, on-site day care, long-term care insurance, and flexible work hours".

(Roosevelt Center for American Policy Studies, 1989, p. 29)

How Can The Private Sector Respond?

"Family friendly" policies do not develop quickly, but in step-by-step progressions as employees, employers, and their communities recognize the trends and begin to express concern about the issue. Perhaps it is most realistic to remember the three factors identified by the research as having the greatest effect on employees' ability to balance work and home. These include: (1) working in a demanding job with little control over the schedule or the long hours; (2) working with an unsupportive supervisor in an unresponsive business culture when work and family problems arise; (3) difficulty in finding/maintaining child and elder care (Galinsky et al., 1991).

These factors have a major effect on an employees' ability to balance work and home. Flexibility in work scheduling and leave time is an option that most employers implement first as they address work/ family issues at the workplace. Surveys indicate that this flexibility is most often mentioned as the most helpful balance to work and family demands (Work and Family Resource Center Technical Assistance Series, 1992).

The employee's relationship with a supervisor is one of the strongest predictors of work and family problems, according to research at the Families and Work Institute. Their work indicates that work and family support occurs when supervisors believe that handling family issues is part of the managerial role; are knowledgeable about work and family policies in the company; are flexible; and can handle work and family problems in a fair and equitable manner (Galinsky et al., 1991).

There are a variety of ways that a business can assist employees in finding/maintaining child care and elder care, beyond that of providing an on-site facility. Research indicates that other options include: information and referral services, flexible human resource policies, and financial assistance. Information and referral services occur when the employer provides information about care providers to employees. This appears to be one of the cost effective ways of helping employees.

Flexible human resource policies can include flex-time, job- sharing, work sharing, work at home, part-time work with benefits, flexible maternity/paternity leave, and flexible sick leave. For example, these policies might be tried on a pilot basis over a period of one to three years. Evaluation and adaptation of the policies would be part of the on-going effort.

Employers offering a cafeteria plan of financial assistance allow the employee to select what is individually needed. The "flexible spending account" is probably the most popular because both the employee and the employer save by paying no income or social security taxes on the money. A designated amount for dependent care is determined by the employee at the beginning of the year and this amount is deducted from the employee's pre-tax wages and placed in the "flexible spending account. As

needed throughout the year, the employer pays the care provider or reimburses the employee directly. Employees need to be able to anticipate these care expenses very carefully, because any leftover money is forfeited at the end of the year. A voucher system can be used to allow an employer to make direct payments to care providers which secures reduced rates and priority placement for employee care needs (Franklin & Ballenger, 1992).

Identifying Local Resources

The following names of state and local groups may help you get started in your local area.

State/Local Government Offices

- Cooperative Extension
- Department of Education
    - Office of Child Development
- Department of Health
    - Division of Maternal & Child Health/Nutrition
    - Division of Environmental Health & Housing Surveillance
- Department of Social Services
    - Day Care Licensing Consultant
    - Dependent Care Grant Coordinator
- Legislator and Staff

Local Government

- City Council
- Police/Fire Department
- Local Library
- Board of Commissioners/ Supervisors

Agencies

- Social Services/Family Services
- Family Preservation Teams
- Headstart
- United Way
- Urban League

Youth Organizations

- 4-H, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts
- YWCA/YMCA
- Church Groups
- Girls Club, Boys Club
- Camp Fire, Red Cross

Service Groups

- Church Organizations

- Chamber of Commerce
- Ethnic Centers

Schools

- Principal
- School Board Members
- PTA/PTO
- School Food Service
- Education Service Unit
- School Foundations

Child Care Providers

- Private Sector
- Preschool/After School Care
- Recreation/Game & Parks
- Employer Sponsored

How Can Citizens Help Their Community and Employer to Build Awareness and to Network for Action?

Citizen action gets its start as citizens begin to express concern about a problem and become involved in an issue. Citizens then clarify the issue by learning the extent of the problem and by beginning to consider alternative ways of dealing with it. These process skills for issue resolution are applicable to any issue that citizens are working through (Stevens, 1993).

As a specific example of this process, The Work/Family Project (The Work/Family Project, 1992), initiated in 1989, has used the public education process to increase awareness and action on behalf of families balancing work with child and elder care responsibilities. Consider these steps as you get started with other interested citizens in your community.

A. Include a variety of partners and understand the needs of the group they represent.
B. Draw up guidelines for working together including roles and goals.
C. Develop a list of organizations in the community that are concerned with child care, elder care and the needs of employed families. (Refer to the list titled Identifying Local Resources)
D. Begin your interviews with organizations where you have contacts and then find out the most appropriate person to interview at each organization.
E. Be alert to sensitive organizational issues.
F. Focus on work and family policies and how they were developed as well as future plans.
G. Try to keep interviews short and be sure to thank those you interview.

Implications for Society

Family policy scholar Frank Furstenberg (cited in Hochschild, 1989) proposes a Marshall Plan--the European reconstruction effort after WWII--that would provide a work and family strategy for the nation. This plan would model what other industrial nations have implemented as "pro-family" policy for the work setting.

Researcher John P. Fernandez (1990) also proposes developing a Marshall Plan for family care as a means for Americans to change policies and attitudes toward working women, the elderly and our children. He challenges our society to consider that more than just the corporate bottom line is at stake. Lawmakers, institutions and families must recognize the crisis and need for studying the challenges of family care.

"Society's responsibility to its children and its seniors cannot be overstated. Yet no legislation, corporate programs, [n]or educational reforms will solve the crisis in family care without the consent and assistance of the family itself. American families must take a hard look at themselves and see if they are living up to their modern potential or operating under outdated, unworkable stereotypes." (Fernandez, p.221)

Informed citizens can impact the private sector policies that are shaping their lives as they balance work and family concerns. Good family policies result from dialogue between families, government policymakers, and private sector decision makers. Each must be responsible for action or inaction in policymaking which addresses issues that affect families (Stevens, 1992).

Advice For the Next Decade

Vanderkolk and Young (1991) recommend that companies make the following adjustments to be successful during the next decade.

1. Take care of basic family needs;
2. become 'double jointedly' flexible, as flexibility is the primary characteristic of good family-oriented programs;
3. 'think female' (this might well be the new company bumper sticker)--women need to be shown that they are understood and valued, or firms will lose out;
4. reframe policies and practices to reflect the new personal values of the '90s work force;
5. welcome diversity--this will bring exciting new understandings and openness to everyone in the organization as well as increasing competitive ability the world market. Because many of the qualities of industrial age leaders are no longer relevant to today's needs, it will be important to
6. redefine the characteristics of a leader in the '90s workplace to ensure that these adjustments can be made and the firms will continue to have a visionary future.
7. Abandon isolationism and form partnerships with public and volunteer organizations; this is necessary in a time of shrinking fiscal and physical resources. This posture can also put a firm in a visible leadership position in the community. Lastly, business and government must
8. reward right actions in regard to family, female, and cultural diversity issues; this is the most potent step management can take in the '90s to increase morale and secure loyalty and success.

(p. 172)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you think are the most critical issues for working families today?
   o What are the obstacles?
   o What are the underlying causes?
   o What efforts have been made to address these issues?

2. Who in the community is addressing the needs of working families (employers, public officials, public and private agencies, consultants)?
   o Are there any existing model programs that can be studied for possible replication or any programs currently being considered for implementation?
   o Are there any legislative initiatives under consideration?

3. What services are available to employers who want to investigate their options for assisting their employees in balancing work and family responsibilities? What services might be useful?
   o Seminars or conferences.
   o Resource guides, fact sheets, videotapes.
   o Child care or elder care fairs or activity
   o On-site workshops for employees.
   o Private consultations with employers.
   o Private consultations with employees.
   o Preventive education in money management, nutrition, and parenting

   a. Which organizations offer these services?
   o Do you know anyone I could speak to at these organizations?

4. Is there a child care or elder care resource and referral agency in our area? Do they offer services to employers? If yes, what kinds of services do they offer?
   o Do you know anyone I could speak to at these agencies?

5. If our state or city has a Family and Medical Leave Law, what does it require of employers? (It may be useful to know the status of this regulation in your state before speaking with employers.)
   o Do you think it is effective?
   o What improvements might be made?

6. Are any other volunteer organizations working on dependent care issues? If yes, do you know someone I could speak to at these organizations?

7. Discuss the various dependent care services in our community.

   a. What kinds of child care services east in the community?
      ▪ Family day care homes (licensed, registered, certified or unregulated)
      ▪ Networks of family day care homes independent or affiliated with social service agencies, churches, synagogues, or child care centers
      ▪ Child care resource and referral systems
      ▪ Child care centers
      ▪ Nursery schools
      ▪ Child care programs in the public school system (preschool or before and after school)
      ▪ Head Start programs
      ▪ Programs for mildly ill children

   b. What kind of elder care services exist in the community?
      ▪ Adult day care centers
      ▪ Family day care homes which accept adults
      ▪ Senior centers
      ▪ Meals on Wheels
      ▪ Home health care
      ▪ Respite care services

- Services (medical and other) for frail elderly
- Homemaker services
- Geriatric case managers
- Transportation services
- Volunteer visiting

   c. Do any employers (corporations, hospitals, government agencies) in our community sponsor child or adult day care centers or networks of family day care homes? If yes, do you know anyone I could speak to about these programs?

   d. Have any employers set up other programs to support their employees' work and family responsibilities, such as resource and referral services or voucher programs for dependent care? If yes, do you know anyone I could speak to about these programs?

   e. Are any business associations (e.g. State or local Business Group on Health, the Chamber of Commerce) interested in dependent care? If yes, do you know anyone I could speak to at these associations? These persons may live in your neighborhood, attend your church, or work with you.

8. Is there a shortage of child care services in our community:
   - for infants and toddlers?
   - for preschoolers?
   - for school-age children?
   - for children with special needs?
   - for mildly ill children?
   - during off-hours, such as evenings and overnights?
   - for children from low income families?

9. Is there a shortage of elder care services in our community:
   - for the healthy elderly?
   - for the frail elderly?
   - for people with Alzheimer's and other debilitating diseases?
   - for respite care for family caregivers?
   - for the low income elderly?

10. What might be done to better address these child and elder care needs?

11. How concerned do you think our community is about work/family issues?
    - Has the media covered the dependent care needs of employed people? If yes, Do you know who wrote the article(s) and for which publication?
    - What might be done to raise our community's awareness?

(The Work/Family Project, 1992)

Citizen Steps for Influencing Private Policy for Families

- Talk to others.
- Establish focus groups.
- Do necessary research on worker-employee needs.

- Request company surveys of employee needs.
- Approach your employer with specific suggestions.
- Utilize data from the research.
- Speak your firm's language.
- Give examples of what similar companies are doing.
- Set reasonable expectations.
- Follow up.
- Be willing to serve on a task force or employee committee.
- Consider a consortium with other local firms.
- Monitor benefits of the new policies for both employees and employer.
- Document successes or failures and be ready to suggest needed changes.
- Give your employer credit for changes in the right direction.
- Keep your eye on the future; change happens incrementally.

(Vanderkolk & Young, 1991)

Myths Being Reexamined

Frequently employers, and therefore employees, are influenced by myths about family issues. The Work and Family Institute provides some commonly held business myths and challenges them from a work and family perspective.

- Personal problems should be kept at home. This is becoming an increasingly difficult and unrealistic expectation, especially when both parents work outside the home or there is only one parent.
- Give them an inch and they will take a mile. This statement is based on the assumption that employees will abuse whatever privileges they are given. However, the idea that more flexibility can help employees to be even more productive is counter-intuitive to most managers.
- Equitable means identical. Many managers believe that what you do for one employee you must do for everyone. Such managers are not used to dealing with the increasing kind of diversity found among employees today.
- Benefit programs are provided for long-term income security and protection. Companies' benefits are often aimed only at protecting employees in the event of catastrophe. However, work-family initiatives focus not on the tragedies of life but, rather, on everyday responsibilities. The idea of addressing day-to-day responsibilities--not just emergencies-- is new to managers.
- Benefit programs can only satisfy workers and make them happier; they cannot make employees more productive. According to earlier theories of motivation, benefits are extrinsic to worker productivity and cannot motivate people to perform better. This research, however, was conducted on male workers in the 1950s. It is quite likely that different factors motivate today's workers (even for men).
- Presence equals performance. The only way some managers can be convinced that employees are doing their jobs is to see them performing at the workplace. This strongly held conviction prevents many managers from granting time off or work-at-home options. Again, it may seem counter-intuitive to managers that employees could actually produce more by having time off or working at home.
- Hours equal output. Many managers measure, through time sheets and other tracking tools, the number of hours their employees work, and use these numbers to evaluate performance.

> Product quality, efficiency and effort are omitted from or de-emphasized in the equation.
>
> (Galinsky et al., 1991, p. 14)

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