Bridging the work-family policy and productivity gap: A literature review

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ABSTRACT *This paper uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the relationship between work–family conflict and six work outcomes: performance, turnover, absenteeism, organizational commitment, job involvement, and burnout. Also reviewed are studies on the effects of employer (work–family) policies aimed at reducing such conflict. Policies to aid employees in managing work and family roles can be expensive, and studies show that they are often marginally effective. The review shows that relationships between work–family policies and organizational effectiveness is mixed and their connection to work–family conflict often under-examined. Work–family conflict is a critical link that may shed light on policy impacts. Suggestions on how future studies can build bridges between practitioners and academics and more clearly examine organizational effectiveness links are provided.*

KEY WORDS *Work and family policies; work–family conflict*

RESUMEN *Este artículo emplea métodos cualitativos y cuantitativos para examinar las relaciones entre el conflicto laboral-familiar y seis resultados de trabajo: rendimiento, movimiento, ausentismo, dedicación organizativa, participación laboral y agotamiento. También se reseñan investigaciones de los efectos de las políticas empresariales que tienen como objectivo reducir el conflicto entre las dos vertientes, la familiar y la laboral. Pueden ser caras las políticas que se centran en ayudar a los trabajadores a conciliar el rol laboral y el rol familiar y las investigaciones han demostrado que suelen ser poco efectivas. La reseña apunta unas relaciones desiguales entre las políticas laborales-familiares y la efectividad organizativa e indica que suelen ser poco examinadas sus conexiones con el conflicto laboral-familiar. El conflicto laboral-familiar es un vínculo crítico que quizás ilumine las mellas políticas. Como conclusión, se proporcionan sugerencias a futuras investigaciones para que salven la distancia entre profesionales y académicos y se examinen más a fondo los vínculos de efectividad organizativa.*

PALABRAS CLAVES *Conflicto laboral-familiar; políticas laborales-familiares*

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A growing number of organizations offer employees dependent care resource and referral programs, flexible work arrangements, and other human resource policies aimed at helping them balance work and family responsibilities (Towers Perrin, 1994). Yet reports indicate they are often underutilized by employees, frequently unsupported by prevailing corporate cultures (Solomon, 1994), and may not reduce work–family conflict (Blum, Fields & Goodman, 1994) or improve organizational effectiveness (Dunham, Pierce & Castenada, 1987).

Given the increasing employer resources being allocated to work–family policies and the growing literature raising concerns about their effectiveness, the goal of this article was to use qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the relationship between work–family conflict and six work outcomes that are important to organizations, as well as the effects of human resource (HR) policies aimed at reducing conflict. The outcomes studied include: performance, turnover, absenteeism, organizational commitment, job involvement, and burnout. These work outcomes all have implications for an employee's job productivity.

Work–family conflict, an individual's perception of conflicting tensions between work and family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), is a critical, often unmeasured link in HR studies examining work-life programs (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). HR studies generally have not considered exactly *how* (i.e. their effects on work–family conflict) these policies are affecting work outcomes. This paper draws on the implications of these findings for practitioners and provides suggestions for future research by scholars in order to build bridges between these groups. While practitioners working or consulting on work-life policy issues for organizations often focus on user satisfaction with policy implementation and program management, many academics studying work-life issues usually focus on how experiencing work–family conflict affects employee attitudes, and psychological aspects of managing these roles such as social support from workers, and family members and emotional distress. By examining linkages between work outcomes and conflict and these programs, our paper helps to integrate previous work on HR policy with work–family conflict research.

Human resource management literature on work and family policies

Traditionally, human resource policy research has been descriptive and has tried to assess the nature and extent of various work–family practices, programs, and policies. In our review of the human resource policy literature, we found two basic streams: a *demographic stream* and a *policy impact stream*. The *demographic stream* examined how employee and family characteristics directly relate to work outcomes (e.g. absenteeism rates of women with small children), and the perceived attractiveness of work/family policies (e.g. Grover & Crooker, 1995). To give an example of the latter studies, scholars (e.g. Kossek, 1990) have looked at which policies were perceived as the most attractive and/or had the greatest use by various demographic groups of employees like women, single

parents, and managers. Since most of these studies did not actually measure work–family conflict but rather used demographics such as the number of child or elderly dependents as implicit proxies for work–family conflict levels, we decided to focus on the second main group of studies, the policy impact stream.

The *policy impact stream* assesses how use of human resource work/family policies affect work attitudes and behaviors. Within the policy impact group, studies tended to use one of two main methodological approaches. The most common approach was to use one-time measures to look at the relationship between the use or availability of such policies and employee attitudes and behaviors such as organizational commitment, absenteeism, and turnover. The second methodological approach uses pre- and post-treatment measures to explore the effects of introducing a single policy, such as flextime or a child care center, on similar outcomes.

Regardless of the methodology used, studies typically examine whether policy use reduces negative work behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover (e.g. Burke, 1988; Goff, Mount & Jamison, 1990). Others have investigated how policy use improves work attitudes such as organizational commitment (e.g. Gray, 1989; Wiley, 1987; O'Driscoll, Ilgen & Hildreth, 1992), performance (Greenhaus, Bedeian & Mossholder, 1987; Kossek & Nichol, 1992), and extra-role behaviors (Lambert, 1996). By far most of this work has focused on child care and flextime. Human resource policy scholars have given relatively limited attention to elder or spouse care, or emerging flexible arrangements such as part time work and job sharing, temping, and telecommuting, although studies on these issues can be found in other literature such as gerontology or sociology. Human resource policy studies also tend to focus nearly exclusively on formal policies, giving little if any concern to informal supports from peers, supervisors, or a family supportive workplace culture. They also fail to look at the effects of policies on the entire family, rather than just individuals, which is a critical gap since policies clearly have consequences for more than simply the employee.

Little attention by HR policy researchers to work–family conflict

Although most human resource policy research is designed with the assumption that use of organizational policies to support family roles will reduce work–family conflict, relatively few studies on human resource policies actually measure work–family conflict (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). We could only find four studies (see end of Table 1) that measured family-oriented HR policies, any form of work–family conflict, and work outcomes. Of these, only two reported clear positive effects. In a study of male executives, Judge, Boudreau and Bretz (1994) rated the work–family policies available to these employees and found that more comprehensive benefits were associated with lower work interference with family (i.e. work-to-family conflict), but not family interference with work (i.e. family-to-work conflict). It is important to note the Judge *et al.* study was conducted on a group of mostly married, successful male managers who

TABLE 1. Effects of HR work–family policies

Study	HR interventions/independent variables	Main findings	Sample characteristics	N
Performance				
Dunham et al. (1987)	Flextime (4/40 week)	Introduction of a 4/40 week associated with improved organizational effectiveness, although the effect was not statistically significant	Health care, clerical, supervisory and professional workers	140
Kossek and Nichol (1992)	Use of corporate day care center	Child care not related to supervisor views of performance	Health care workers	155
Orthner and Pittman (1986)	Military base responsiveness to family needs and family support centers	Performance very weakly related to responsiveness and support centers (0.07, 0.03)	Air Force personnel on nine bases	751
Pierce and Newstrom (1982)	Three kinds of flextime	Performance measures highest for those on staggered, fixed schedules, followed by fixed hours and self-determined, prescheduled flexible hours; true flextime associated with lowest performance	Workers in four insurance firms	94
Pierce and Newstrom (1983)	Eight kinds of flextime	Performance related ($r = 0.20$ to 0.22) to shorter core, bandwidth, and schedule flexibility	Workers in a mix of insurance firms	188
Turnover/turnover intentions				
Dalton and Mesch (1990)	Flextime (8 hours, 7:00–6:00)	Flextime introduction did not affect turnover	Utility company workers	275
Denton et al. (1990)	Positive advantages of elder care-related benefits	Companies believe that most elder care options (day care, EAP, flextime, unpaid leave, subsidies, and informal policies) encourage employee retention, although the effects of referral and information services may vary depending on employee needs	Organizations in Chicago	20

Study	Intervention	Finding	Sample	N
Dunham et al. (1987)	Flextime (40 hours/week, 1:30–3:30 core)	Introduction of flextime did not significantly affect turnover intentions	Health care, clerical, supervisory and professional workers	140
Grover and Crooker (1995)	Three types of family benefits received	Employees with access to family responsive policies significantly less likely to intend to leave the organization	Randomly selected US workers	745
Milkovich and Gomez (1976)	Use of day care center supported by employers	Center users were significantly less likely to quit their jobs	Center users and colleagues	90
Pierce and Newstrom (1982)	Three kinds of flextime	Turnover intentions increased as the level of flexibility in the organization declined	Workers in four insurance firms	94
Rothausen (1994)	Flexibility index	Flexibility had a strong negative relationship ($r = -0.45$) to turnover intentions	Workers in retail industry	144
Youngblood and Chambers-Clark (1984)	Introduction of corporate day care	Employees with company-sponsored day care were less likely to intend to leave	Workers in textile firms	410
Absenteeism				
Dalton and Mesch (1990)	Flextime (8 hours, 7:00–6:00)	Introduction of flextime reduced absenteeism, which climbed again when regular hours were restored	Utility company workers	275
Goff et al. (1990)	Use of on-site day care center	Use of an on-site center did not reduce absenteeism	Workers in Midwestern firm	253
Kossek and Nichol (1992)[a]	Use of corporate day care center	Child care not related to supervisor impressions of care-related absences	Health care workers	155
Krausz and Friebach (1983)	Flextime (1.5-hour flex bands as start and end) vs standard hours	Absenteeism rates significantly lower under flextime; married women/mothers had lowest rates when working flextime	Female employees in an Israeli insurance firm	277
McGuire and Liro (1987)	Flextime (6-hour core) and staggered fixed hours	Staggered, fixed schedule was associated with lower absenteeism, but flextime was not	NY State employees	274
Milkovich and Gomez (1976)	Use of day care center supported by employers	Center users had significantly fewer absences	Center users and colleagues	90
Mize and Freeman (1989)[a]	Projected effects of a proposed on-site day care center	Employees believed that absences would be lower if the university had an on-site center	University employees	350

TABLE 1. *(Continued)*

Study	HR interventions/ independent variables	Main findings	Sample characteristics	N
Pierce and Newstrom (1982)	Three kinds of flextime	Intention to be absent highest in firm with fixed schedule, decreased as level of flexibility increased; actual time lost highest with fixed schedule, lowest in firm with staggered hours	Workers in four insurance firms	94
Pierce and Newstrom (1983)	Eight kinds of flextime	Absenteeism related to schedule flexibility ($r = 0.30$)	Workers in a mix of insurance firms	188
Thomas and Ganster (1995)	Referral services, dependent care services, flexibility index	Flexible scheduling and dependent care assistance not related to absenteeism	Health care professionals with children at home	398
Wagner and Hunter (1994)[a]	Elder care referral service use	Users of elder care referral services reported missing more days due to care giving than non-users; these employees were also more involved in providing care	Employees in two large firms using the same elder care service provider	115
Youngblood and Chambers-Clark (1984)	Introduction of corporate day care	Absenteeism rates slightly lower after day care center started, but also fell in control group	Workers in textile firms	410
Organizational commitment				
Dunham et al. (1987)	Flextime (4/40 week)	Introduction of a 4/40 work week did not increase organizational commitment	Health care, clerical, supervisory and professional workers	102
Goldberg et al. (1989)	Satisfaction with family friendly benefits received	Satisfaction with child-care and related policies was positively related to commitment for all employee groups; the relationship was particularly strong for married women ($r = 0.58$)	Parents of preschoolers	321
Grover and Crooker (1995)	Type of family benefits received	Employees with access to family responsive policies had significantly higher commitment; effect of referral services greater on those eligible for the benefit	Randomly selected US workers	745

Study	Intervention	Findings	Sample	N
Orthner and Pittman (1986)	Military base responsiveness to family needs and family support centers	Job commitment was positively related to base support for families	Air Force personnel on nine bases	751
Pierce and Newstrom (1982)	Three kinds of flextime	The level of organizational commitment was positively related to the degree of flexibility	Workers in four insurance firms	94
Pierce and Newstrom (1983)	Eight kinds of flextime	Flexibility measures not strongly related to organizational commitment, except bandwidth ($r = -0.15$) and time autonomy ($r = 0.24$)	Workers in a mix of insurance firms	188
Youngblood and Chambers-Clark (1984)	Introduction of corporate day care	Employees with a company-sponsored day care facility were more committed	Workers in textile firms	410
Job involvement				
Dunham *et al.* (1987)	Flextime (40 hours/week, 1:30–3:30 core; 4/40 week)	Job involvement did not increase with the introduction of either flextime or 4/40 work week	Health care, clerical, supervisory and professional workers	242
Pierce and Newstrom (1982)	Three kinds of flextime	Job involvement higher in firm with true flextime	Workers in four insurance firms	94
Work–family conflict				
Dunham *et al.* (1987)	Flextime (40 hours/week, 1:30–3:30 core; 4/40 week)	While those under a 4/40 schedule reported less interference with personal activities involving friends and families, those switched to a flextime schedule reported more	Health care, clerical, supervisory and professional workers	242
Goff *et al.* (1990)	Introduction of on-site day care center	Use of an on-site center did not reduce work–family conflict	Workers in Midwestern firm	253
Judge *et al.* (1994)	Company work–family policies	Policies associated with lower work-to-family (but not family-to-work) conflict	Male executives	1062
Wagner and Hunter (1994)	Elder care referral service	Care giving interference with work more frequently reported by service users (users also more involved in care)	Employees in two large firms using the same elder care service provider	115

[a] Studied care-related absenteeism rather than general absences.

probably would not have achieved their positions unless their degree of family-to-work conflict was uniformly low. The second study showing positive effects found that while use of an on-site day care center did not reduce work–family conflict, satisfaction with care apparently did (Goff *et al.*, 1990).

Of the studies reporting negative effects, Wagner and Hunt (1994) indicated that employees who used company-provided elder care information services were more likely to report that care giving interfered with their work than those who did not. However, since this study was cross-sectional and users were also more involved in providing assistance, it does not necessarily show that the services were ineffective. Looking at scheduling, Dunham, Pierce and Castenada (1987) noted that employees switched to a flextime schedule actually reported more interference with personal activities involving families and friends (although the effect was not quite statistically significant), while those placed on a 4 day/40 hour schedule reported less. Research, then, does not necessarily show that policies aimed at reducing work–family conflict are effective. However, it is important to note that out of all these studies, only one (Goff *et al.*, 1990) used a widely accepted measure of work–family conflict in a controlled pre- and post-test research design, and their findings were probably influenced by the quality of the program, which seemed to be a key factor.

In summary, the vast majority of HR policy researchers only measure use of a policy and/or proxies of work/family conflict such as gender, age of children, number of children, and marital status. Through these variables, human resource policy scholars may implicitly be measuring how work–family conflict affects work attitudes and behaviors (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Yet these variables may relate to work and family attitudes and behaviors via work–family conflict to a greater extent than operating directly. Simply stated, work–family conflict is what causes turnover, not necessarily the number and age of children or one's gender. Similarly, an increase in organizational commitment (a widespread finding) once flextime is implemented, may be because family to work conflict has been reduced, yet currently the field does not really know *why* flextime use and these work attitudes are positively correlated, perhaps because so few studies measure work–family role conflict in any direction. Most of the work in the HR policy area has failed to fully integrate the substantial contributions of a closely related field: the work to family and family to work role conflict literature. Similar arguments can be made regarding the work–family conflict field's lack of attention to the influences of the effects of formal HR policy on conflict or work-related outcomes (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

Below you will first find a description of our methodology and how we selected studies for review. We then summarize the main research findings on links between HR policies, work outcomes and work–family conflict. Since a goal of this paper was to better integrate the HR policy and the role conflict literatures, in our results section we look at each of the six outcomes, combining a quantitative (meta-analysis) review of studies that looked at their relationship to work–family conflict, with a qualitative review of studies that focus on their implications for HR policies.

Method

Selection of studies for review

Using two computer databases, *Psychological Abstracts* (which covers publications from 1967 to the present) and the *Expanded Academic Index* (1987 to present), we attempted to identify all studies related to the interface between work and family published in academic journals. Key words used included work and family, along with organizational commitment, performance, turnover, absenteeism, job involvement, flextime, flexible hours, company and child care, and work and elder care. While over 100 HR policy studies were initially found, we have limited this review to those that actually measured work–family conflict and its relation to the six work outcomes, or alternatively those assessing relationships between an HR policy and these outcomes. Studies were excluded because the sample was a subset of another study (Hunter & Schmidt, 1990), or if they did not discuss one of the six outcomes and conflict or a relevant HR policy.

Selection of studies for meta-analysis on work–family conflict and work-related outcomes. Twenty-seven studies were included in the meta-analysis, meeting our criteria that they report a correlation between a work–family conflict measure and at least one of the six work outcomes. The authors of these studies, a summary of the results and information samples can be found in Table A1 in the Appendix. The Hunter-Schmidt (1990) method of meta-analysis was used to estimate the true correlation between work–family conflict and the six organizational outcomes in the general population of working adults. Previous research has shown that the direction of work–family conflict can have an impact on findings (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), so we categorized each study by the three main types of conflict measures used. Fifteen studies measured work interference with family life (work-to-family conflict), which assess the extent to which work affects the employee's family life. Seven studies measured family-to-work conflict, which assess the extent to which family responsibilities influence the employee at work. Twelve studies used bi-directional measures that mixed items about the two kinds of conflict into a general scale of total or overall conflict. For a number of studies it was necessary to reverse the sign, since some researchers scored high levels of conflict as high and others as low. In this analysis, a higher score indicates a greater amount of what is being measured (e.g. greater conflict or commitment). The reported correlations were corrected for errors of measurement; then a weighted average was calculated. Following the procedures outlined by Hunter and Schmidt (1990), we used correlations between measures to calculate reliability estimates and combined results when more than one effect size was reported for the same group of individuals. For each variable and type of work–family conflict, we developed an estimate of the population correlation (rho) and its variance, as well as 95% confidence intervals and the percentage of variance between the correlations that could not

be explained by the artifacts corrected for, measurement and sampling error. Table 2 summarizes these results.

Because our meta-analysis involves a small number of studies on thematically related relationships, our results, while valuable, should be viewed as exploratory. Since studies assessing productivity effects are still relatively new and few in number, our results are influenced by the nature of the samples selected. Notwithstanding this caveat, the meta-analysis should help the readers by shedding light on the strength of the relationships in the literature reviewed. Meta-analysis is generally used to: (1) resolve conflicts in the literature (is a correlation truly weak or strong, positive or negative?), and (2) quantitatively summarize the literature on a topic. Both are goals of this paper.

Selection of HR policy studies for qualitative analysis.   We also integrate findings from 19 HR policy studies that were selected if they estimated the effects of an HR policy or intervention on at least one of the six work outcomes, or work–family conflict. The vast majority of these studies dealt with flextime or dependent care assistance, two of the most prevalent approaches to helping workers balance work and family responsibilities. We reviewed the group of studies on the effects of HR policies on performance, absenteeism, turnover, organizational commitment, job involvement, burnout, and work–family conflict, and tried to look for patterns in the findings. The HR interventions, samples, and study results, including effect sizes where easily interpreted, are reported in Table 1. Most of these studies did not measure work–family conflict, but the few that did are also included where noted in the Appendix in the meta-analysis.

Results and discussion

Performance

Quantitative analysis of the relation to work–family conflict.   As Table 2 shows, only three studies quantitatively measured the relationship between work–family conflict and performance. Using a sample of male and female accountants, Greenhaus et al. (1987) found a small negative correlation with work-to-family conflict. That is, the higher one's work-to-family conflict, the lower the performance. However, Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrian (1996) found that family-to-work conflict was quite closely related (-0.38) to sales performance and self-efficacy at work, while work-to-family conflict apparently had no impact in a sample of mostly married female real estate agents. Based on a sample of hospital employees, Kossek and Nichol (1992) found a low negative correlation of -0.16 between performance and a single 'bi-directional or global' conflict measure, as might be expected from the average of the family-to-work and work-to-family conflict correlations reported in the first two studies. Another possible reason for the range of findings is construct differences owing to the different types of measures. For example, Kossek and Nichol's (1992) measure

TABLE 2. Results of the meta-analysis

Relationship	No. of correlations	N	Mean ρ	SD ρ	V_r	V_e	% variance unexplained	95% CI
Performance								
w–f	2	522	−0.03	0.00	0.000540	0.004825	0[a]	−0.07 < p < 0.00
f–w	1	186	−0.45	0.10	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	−0.50 < p < −0.26
Both directions	1	155	−0.19	0.10	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	−0.38 < p < 0.01
Turnover intentions								
w–f	4	1358	0.32	0.06	0.006903	0.003641	47.3	0.24 < p < 0.40
f–w	3	530	0.17	0.04	0.008465	0.006517	23.0	0.06 < p < 0.27
Both directions	1	440	0.54	0.05	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.45 < p < 0.63
Absenteeism[b]								
w–f	1	59	0.18	0.14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	−0.09 < p < 0.45
f–w	0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Both directions	4	820	0.17	0.17	0.035296	0.005019	85.8	−0.01 < p < 0.35
Organizational/work commitment								
w–f	4	847	−0.05	0.09	0.014530	0.006284	56.8	−0.17 < p < 0.07
f–w	3	493	−0.17	0.18	0.041382	0.008483	79.5	−0.40 < p < 0.06
Both directions	3	915	−0.27	0.18	0.035003	0.003413	90.25	−0.48 < p < −0.06
Job/work involvement								
w–f	7	1630	0.10	0.24	0.063924	0.005769	90.7	−0.09 < p < 0.29
f–w	4	1219	0.07	0.11	0.018823	0.006044	67.9	−0.07 < p < 0.20
Both directions	3	296	0.69	0.27	0.091588	0.016385	82.1	0.35 < p < 1.00
Burnout								
w–f	7	2282	0.50	0.20	0.039467	0.002431	93.8	0.35 < p < 0.65
f–w	2	333	0.40	0.00	0.003517	0.007234	0[a]	0.32 < p < 0.48
Both directions	5	1193	0.33	0.16	0.031068	0.005857	81.2	0.18 < p < 0.49

[a] Indicates less variance than would be expected by chance.
[b] Although we have averaged the results here, two different definitions of absenteeism were used: studies by Kossek and colleagues looked at only care-related absences; the others looked at all missed days.

includes items capturing the sense of self-efficacy in balancing work and family demands, unlike the scales used in the other two studies.

HR policy studies.   We identified five studies that looked at the effects of 'family-friendly' policies on performance. Three dealt with flextime (Dunham *et al.*, 1987; Pierce & Newstrom, 1982, 1983), and the results seem to imply that a limited amount of flexibility is associated with improved individual performance. However, performance was better under a staggered, fixed schedule (e.g. employees decide when they will flex in advance) or a 4-day, 40-hour alternative work week than under true flextime, where employees had the option of varying schedule in an *ad hoc* manner on a 5-day basis. Having a 'core period' when all employees must be present also positively related to performance.

Only one study has examined the effects of using dependent care assistance on performance. Examining the effects of using a corporate day care center (Kossek & Nichol, 1992), found no significant differences in supervisors' views on the performance of employees who used the company's day care center and those who did not, though users of the center did rate the quality of their own performance higher and felt better about their ability to juggle roles than non-users. Clearly, a longitudinal study on how use of a quality on-site center relates to the performance of employees in a cross-section of companies could significantly contribute to our understanding. Finally, another study conducted in the military (Orthner & Pittman, 1986) found very small positive relationships between performance and views of base responsiveness to families (0.07) and the existence of a family support center (0.03).

Integrative summary of performance results.   Overall, the results show the critical need for future studies to include various measures of performance and both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict in the same study, as well as job and care giving demands across a variety of organizational populations and employee demographics. While it seems common sense that high levels of any type of work–family conflict should be negatively related to high performance, research clearly needs to assess the direction of conflict, and the types of conflict. For example, time-related conflict may have a different effect on performance from emotional psychological conflict. (Not being able to do two things at the same time may impact performance differently than feeling bad about it.) More research also needs to be done to assess the type of performance behavior (e.g. extra-role behavior, customer service, appraisal rating) being affected. The Netemeyer *et al.* (1996) finding that family-to-work conflict has the strongest negative relationship to performance supports intuitive logic suggesting that family-to-work conflict is likely to have a bigger effect on work-related outcomes than work-to-family conflict. Yet, ironically, more of the HR policy studies have measured work-to-family conflict or global conflict than family-to-work conflict. More work needs to be done on how specific HR policies relate to performance,

and the key in any study would be to assess links between use and effectiveness of a policy and reduction in family-to-work conflict.

Turnover

Quantitative analysis of the relation to work–family conflict.   Three studies (Burke, 1988; Good, Sisler & Gentry, 1988; Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996) looked at the relationship between conflict and turnover intentions. In all but one sample there was a strong correlation between all types of conflict and a desire to leave the organization. The single exception was a group of small business owners; the correlation between turnover intentions and family-to-work conflict for this sample was extremely low (0.02). However, this latter finding may simply be due to the fact that this is a unique group of self-employed individuals who may have more control over how the home and family roles affect each other. Because of this study, the amount of variance explained by artifacts was low for family-to-work conflict, but high (over half explained) for work-to-family conflict. The study of a sample of mostly female retail managers by Good *et al.* (1988) found a strong positive correlation between having general conflict in both directions and turnover.

HR policy studies.   Eight studies on the impact of a wide range of HR policies on turnover were located. A multi-employer study reported that HR personnel in Chicago companies believe elder care assistance options generally encourage employee retention (Denton, Love & Slate, 1990). Two other studies (Milkovich & Gomez, 1976; Youngblood & Chambers-Clark, 1984) that attempted to measure the effects of corporate day care centers found that such programs were associated with lower turnover intentions. A study by Grover and Crooker (1995) looking at family responsive policies in general reported that employees with access to these policies had lower turnover intentions than employees in firms without work–family policies.

There is less consensus on the effects of flextime on turnover. Two studies found no relationship to either turnover (Dalton & Mesch, 1990) or turnover intentions (Dunham *et al.*, 1987). The policy studied by Dalton and Mesch offered relatively little flexibility (workers were required to be on site for 8 hours between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.), while Dunham and his colleagues' study involved the introduction of a flextime schedule with a short core period, 1:30–3:30 p.m. Two other studies, one with insurance employees (Pierce & Newstrom, 1982) and the other with retail workers (Rothausen, 1994) found that turnover intentions increased as the level of flexibility declined. These studies measured degrees of flexibility, instead of just one policy, unlike the others we reviewed. Particularly strong effects were found for working parents by Rothausen (1994), who used a flexibility scale, while somewhat weaker results were obtained by Pierce and Newstrom (1982), who compared individuals under various systems.

Integrative summary of turnover results. With the exception of self-employed individuals, greater work–family conflicts of all types is associated with higher turnover (or turnover intentions). More research needs to be done on how specific HR policies affect all forms of work–family conflict and real turnover (not just turnover intentions). The results also suggest that the degree to which users view the HR policies as allowing for personal control over flexibility are conditions that must be met in order for turnover to be favorably affected. Workers must see work arrangements as truly allowing for flexibility and schedule control. The lack of extensive, systematic research on turnover, work–family conflict, and HR policies suggests that the field is wide open for future work to be done on how policies effect turnover via their impact on work–family role conflict.

Absenteeism

Quantitative analysis of the relation to work–family conflict. Two trends are clear from the research on absenteeism, which may not be reflected in the results of the meta-analysis. First, the two studies that looked at conflict and overall absenteeism (Goff *et al.*, 1990; Thomas & Ganster, 1995) reported effects ranging from 0.00 to 0.16, while the three studies by Kossek and associates (1990, 1992, 1993) found effects ranging from 0.20 to 0.41 because they specifically asked about family-related absences. It appears that, overall, people who experience high levels of work–family conflict are not absent more frequently than their co-workers, but they are more likely to miss work for family-related reasons, such as caring for sick family members. No study has looked at the relationship of family-to-work conflict and absenteeism, a significant gap in the literature since, intuitively, this type of conflict seems to be the most likely to cause one to miss work.

HR policy studies. The 12 studies dealing with HR policies and absenteeism also reported conflicting results. University employees surveyed by Mize and Freeman (1989) believed that having access to a proposed on-site day care center would lead to fewer absences, but the findings of four empirical studies of operating centers (Goff *et al.*, 1990; Kossek & Nichol, 1992; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Youngblood & Chambers-Clark, 1984) did not provide much support for this contention. However, corporate day care center users did miss work less often than non-users in a study by Milkovich & Gomez (1976). Goff *et al.* (1990) suggest one possible reason for the differences: they found that general work–family conflict, which appears to mediate the relationship between interventions and absence, was not necessarily lower for employees using a corporate day care center, but was reduced when workers were more satisfied with their care situation. Possibly perceived satisfaction with care and/or the actual quality of care in the 1976 study was higher than in the other cases. Also, child care center policies on illness may also explain the lack of reduction in

absenteeism from center use for most of the studies, since most parents are typically unable to bring sick children to the center and thus may end up missing work anyway.

Users of elder care services such as counseling, information, and referrals reported a higher level of absences than non-users, but this was probably owing to the fact that they were also more involved in providing assistance to the elderly people in their lives than non-users of these services (Wagner & Hunt, 1994). It is likely that those employees who are more involved in making the care giving arrangements are also more likely to manage problems or unexpected emergencies in care giving when they arise, than those who are not. To capture this, studies should measure the extent of *responsibility* rather than simply asking 'Do you have an elder for whom you provide care?' Finally, Thomas and Ganster (1995) found no relationship between use of information and referral services and absenteeism.

Looking at the effects of flexibility, Dalton and Mesch (1990) found that introducing flextime reduced absenteeism among utility company workers, who missed work more often when regular hours were re-introduced. This is probably owing to the fact that having flexibility allows workers to manage unexpected care giving demands and appointments (e.g. doctor, school) without having to miss work for the entire day, unlike fixed work hours. A study on women working in an insurance firm in Israel also found lower absenteeism in divisions with flexible scheduling (Krauz & Freibach, 1983). However, two studies that compared standard schedules with staggered, fixed hours and flextime found the best results when workers were allowed to choose their regular starting time in a stagger fixed schedule, as long as staffing was sufficient for all key jobs to be covered (McGuire & Liro, 1986; Pierce & Newstrom, 1982). In a follow-up article a year later, Pierce and Newstrom (1983) noted a fairly strong positive relationship: the greater workers' use of flexible scheduling, the lower the absenteeism. In contrast, Thomas and Ganster (1995) found no relationship between absence rates and flexible scheduling. Thus, introducing a degree of flexibility does appear to reduce absenteeism in some, but not all, cases.

Integrative summary of absenteeism results. The results suggest that satisfaction with care and quality of care are key variables to include in future HR policy studies on absenteeism links. Perhaps workers who are less satisfied with care are more likely to experience greater affective work–family conflict and, therefore, are more likely to be absent as they feel a greater need to be involved in care giving problems and/or search for new arrangements. The results also suggest a need for a more fine-grained analysis of the reasons people are absent. Many firms have HR policies that mask absenteeism rates by combining sickness and vacation time into one policy, making archival research difficult and also hiding the impact of policies. The results also call for greater examination of the perceived utility of HR policies allowing flexibility (including the

extent and nature to which workers perceive they truly allow for flexibility) and the subsequent relation to work–family conflict and absenteeism. For example, Pierce and Newstrom (1983) found that policies allowing for flexibility where workers did not have to get supervisory approval were more effective in reducing absenteeism than policies that required approval.

Organizational commitment

Quantitative analysis of the relation to work–family conflict. The results of research on the relationship between work–family conflict and organizational commitment are inconsistent, although the directionality of the conflict measures may provide a partial explanation. The studies that looked at work-to-family conflict generally found a weak negative or null relationship. Netemeyer *et al.* (1996) found a moderate (-0.20) correlation, while others obtained effects closer to zero. Ayree (1992) studied job–parent, job–spouse, and job–homemaker effects separately, and found a low negative correlation between job–spouse conflict and occupational commitment, and low positive correlations for the other two types of conflict. The combined effect, reported in Appendix Table A1, was 0.06. So, in general, the higher the work conflict with family, the lower the commitment.

Three studies that looked at family-to-work conflict reported mixed results. While Wiley (1987) and Netemeyer *et al.* (1996) found relatively similar negative respective correlations of -0.23 and -0.25 (the higher the family-to-work conflict the lower one's organizational commitment), a third study (O'Driscoll *et al.*, 1992) reported a weak positive correlation of 0.14 (as shown in the Appendix). One reason for the difference may be the somewhat different nature of O'Driscoll *et al.*'s job/off-job conflict measure, while the other studies used a work–family conflict measure that specifically focused on the family role. Results for the three studies that used global measures were consistently negative, although Good *et al.* (1988) found a stronger relationship (-0.42) among retail managers than did Gray (1989) in his research on female nurses (-0.14), or Anderson-Kulman and Paludi's finding of -0.06 for mothers using the same day care center. The high level of unexplained variance may be because all three of these latter studies used relatively different measures of work–family conflict.

HR policy studies. Four studies we identified as dealing with family-oriented benefits and policies and commitment all support the same conclusion: workers who benefit from day care centers, information services and other family-supportive benefits are more committed to their organizations (Goldberg *et al.*, 1989; Grover & Crooker, 1995; Orthner & Pittman, 1986; Youngblood & Chambers-Clark, 1984). We also found three other studies that dealt with organizational commitment and flexible scheduling. Two studies by Pierce and Newstrom (1982, 1983) did find greater commitment as flexibility increased,

particularly as the degree to which employees perceived they had autonomy over the use of their time increased. A later study by Dunham *et al.* (1987) involving health care workers found that the introduction of a 4-day, 40-hour week, however, had no significant effect on the commitment of employees.

Integrative summary of organizational commitment results.   While the HR policy studies seem to suggest that the introduction of family friendly benefits such as a child care center or referral program seems to positively relate to organizational commitment, the introduction of flexibility will favorably relate to commitment only if workers experience the policies as providing control over time autonomy. Although a few studies suggest mixed conclusions, the meta-analytic results on the relationship between organizational commitment and work–family conflict show that, in general, workers tend to have lower commitment if they experience conflict of any kind between work and family roles.

Job involvement

Quantitative analysis of the relation to work–family conflict.   Although there are exceptions, most research shows that people who are very involved in their work tend to have higher levels of work–family conflict of all types. As the Appendix table shows, with the exception of Thompson and Blau's (1993) study of full-time employed females, of which less than half had children at home and one third were not married, studies of family-to-work conflict reported a weak positive correlation to job and work involvement with scores ranging between 0.09 and 0.14. The population estimate for the correlation between work-to-family conflict and job involvement was larger, as was the range, from 0.38 for women in dual career relationships (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1989) to a correlation of − 0.41 (Jones & Butler, 1980) for a study of male sailors. The navy sample was the only one reporting a negative relationship, and again, this may have something to do with the sample, as their jobs involved leaving home for weeks at a time. Measurement artifacts had a strong impact on the corrected population estimates for scales measuring conflict of any form, as the alphas reported for job involvement in the Duxbury and Higgins (1991) and Frone and Rice (1987) studies were lower than the 0.7 minimum standard, ranging from 0.25 to 0.64. When corrected for error of measurement, the correlations with low alphas approached the 1.0 level, suggesting that more research with improved measures is needed.

HR policy studies.   We located only two studies that looked at family-related HR policies and job involvement, both dealing with flextime. Job involvement did not seem to increase when either a 4/40 week was introduced in the organizations studied by Dunham *et al.* (1987) or when flexible working hours were offered at the four insurance firms studied by Pierce and Newstrom (1982). Of all schedules, however, employees under a flextime schedule were

the most involved in their work, as these workers also experienced this schedule as offering the greatest time autonomy.

Integrative summary of job involvement results.   Although there are exceptions, the results for job involvement show that workers who have higher job involvement do experience somewhat more work–family conflict, in general. This relationship runs counter to the popular myth that workers who have high involvement in their jobs are likely to have less concern for family issues. Clearly, more work is needed to examine how HR policies can effectively aid employees in managing work–family conflict and at the same time allow for high job involvement.

Burnout

Quantitative analysis of the relation to work–family conflict.   In this analysis, we focused on the emotional exhaustion component of burnout, since this allowed us to include the highest possible number of studies. High levels of work conflict with the family role were strongly correlated to burnout in all but one sample in the nine studies we found. The exception was a group of female physicians married to male physicians and living in Israel, studied by Izraeli (1988). Contrary to prediction, she found essentially no relationship (− 0.03) between work–family conflict and burnout for female physicians married to male physicians, but a consistent relation of 0.18 for the male physicians married to female physicians. She postulated that the reason for her findings with the female doctors may be the uniqueness of the sample: all of these women had undergone years of training and were a self-selected, non-traditional group with spouses who clearly understood the dynamics of their careers. While differences in measuring tools and samples may explain why there is no overall pattern of gender differences in this relationship, in the two other studies which explicitly compared male and female groups (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991; Etzion, 1988), the correlation was stronger for women. Other researchers consistently found positive relationships, although the correlations varied in strength, ranging from 0.18 for the male spouses of Izraeli's physicians to 0.60 for a group of male police officers (Burke, 1988). The range is approximately the same for both work-to-family and global work–family correlations, and in neither case did artifacts (sampling and measurement error) explain a substantial portion of the variance in obtained correlations.

HR policy studies.   We could find no published studies in the literature that looked at the impact of HR work–family policies on burnout.

Integrative summary of burnout results.   Given that burnout is consistently related to work–family conflict, as the meta-analysis above demonstrated, and burned out employees are less useful to their organizations, it is critical that future

research be conducted on whether family-focused HR policies can reduce burnout. Studies of how different interventions might vary in effectiveness across occupations and gender may also be useful, as some of the variance in the results of the meta-analysis may be due to unique samples and job demands.

Summary of conclusions and practical implications

This review indicates that, while work conflict with the family role may not necessarily be related to job-related productivity and attitudes, family conflict with the work role is. Organizations and many scholars have overlooked how the changing nature of family demands has important ramifications for high performance, productivity, and positive attitudes in the workplace. Employers need to develop creative ways to redesign the workplace to allow employees to better meet varying family demands. In addition, the review showed that greater conflict between work and family roles of any form is associated with higher turnover intentions, care-related absences, and lower commitment to organizations and careers. Employers might also take note that most studies have found that conflict is related to greater job involvement, probably because dedicated employees are more likely to experience conflict as they try to excel at multiple roles. We also found that conflict between work and family is strongly associated with burnout.

Do family supportive policies reduce such negative effects? Even in a sample of senior male executives (Judge *et al.*, 1994), work–family policies did have influence on the levels of work–family conflict experienced. Higher levels of individual job productivity and favorable attitudes appear to be related with more flexible schedules and a sense that the organization cares about workers' families. Flexibility and dependent care benefits also do appear to reduce turnover and increase commitment, at least in some instances. While reported results are mixed and more longitudinal research that looks at the effect of HR interventions on work–family conflict is needed, the evidence does allow us to be cautiously optimistic that policies do make a difference.

However, while individual and organizational effectiveness can be boosted by introducing greater flexibility or dependent care supports, these programs are expensive and it is important to be sure they are well thought out and fit with the needs of both employees and the organization. For example, depending on the nature of the work to be done, it may make the most sense to offer workers a *choice* of staggered, fixed schedules or a 4/40 week, for example. Before investing in an on-site facility, too, companies should remember that quality matters: remember that Goff *et al.* (1990) found that satisfaction with child care arrangements was associated with reduced work–family conflict, but using a company day care was not. Also, unless provisions are made for the care of sick children and elderly dependents, there will be no change in employees' need for time off from work to handle such 'family emergencies'. The bottom line is that individual employees must *experience* a policy as enabling enhanced role integration, before job performance and attitudes are favorably affected. This

relationship is likely to vary across employee groups, so organizations would be well advised to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and researchers should avoid making sweeping hard fast generalizations for all types of workers, jobs, and families.

More research and company evaluations need to be conducted on the work–family conflict and job productivity effects of newer HR policies such as elder or spouse care or emerging flexible arrangements such as part-time work and job sharing, temping, and work at home arrangements. Also, since policy studies tend to focus nearly exclusively on formal policies (often a single policy), evaluation needs to be conducted on the influence of informal supports from peers, supervisors, a generally family supportive workplace culture, job characteristics, or the combined effects of using multiple policies; future work should also seek to fill these gaps. Further, most research and employer assessments generally has not examined the combined effects of using all work–family policies available to a dual earner family unit on the entire family, rather than just individual workers. An individual's level of conflict can depend on many things, not only access to HR policies to support work and family integration. If the relationship between policies, informal resources, and work–family role conflict are not assessed, we cannot be sure policies serve their purpose.

More research needed on how and why particular policies are considered helpful by various employee groups

There have been a number of studies done on what types of benefits employees consider most helpful. Flexible schedules, unpaid family leave, financial assistance and elder care referral services are considered the most helpful by employees with elder care responsibilities, who are also very receptive to the idea of employer-provided companion programs and day care centers (Kossek *et al.*, 1993; Scharlach & Fredrickson, 1994). Sick care services and on-site day care are the most preferred assistance programs for parents, with single parents even more likely to place a high value on such benefits (Kossek, 1990). Employed parents of preschoolers would be most inclined to switch jobs if offered a shorter work week, flexible scheduling, or an on- or near-site child care center (Goldberg *et al.*, 1989). Unmarried single employees whose pets are their main family may desire supports to take care of their animals while they are on business trips (Lobel & Kossek, 1996).

Further, detailed analysis is needed on the utility of policies to various employee groups in reducing conflict. We also need to examine the processes by which they operate and connect them to theories regarding the linkage of work and family roles (e.g. see Lambert 1990). Some policies, such as the ability to use flextime, may help certain employee groups manage *negative spillover* between work and family roles. Others, such as an on-site day care center with a nursing room on site, may help new born parents by enabling *positive spillover* between roles. A sick care policy that allows for parents to separate the parental role from the work role, by having a nurse care for a mildly ill child, may enable

segmentation of roles. Still another policy that allows for respite time off from work after a lot of travel, may provide *compensation* between roles, where one is now able to give less to the work role in order to compensate for giving less to the family role during business travel.

Measurement recommendations for future policy evaluation

One of the difficulties in conducting this review is that there are a wide variety of scales in use that vary in the direction and type of conflict being measured (see Kossek & Ozeki, 1988, and Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996, for further discussion.) For those who are interested, a measure developed by Gutek and Klepa (1991) to look at both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict has been one of the most reliable and popular with researchers. Another promising scale was recently tested by Netemeyer *et al.* (1996). Both are reasonably short (8–10 items) and easy to administer. Kossek and Ozeki (1998) argue that evaluators need to use work–family scales that relate to the family role being measured (e.g. spouse, elder care giver, household management, parent). New approaches also need to be developed to assess the type of conflict a particular HR policy is addressing (e.g. role strain, time-based, skills-based) and the process underlying its operation (e.g. compensation, segmentation, spillover). Regarding the work-outcomes studied, scholars (and cooperating field organizations) need to develop standards of the most reliable scales assessing absenteeism, performance, burnout, job involvement, and organizational commitment and use these consistently in studies in order to help build a literature. Then, in another 5–10 years, a meta-analysis using a larger number of studies investigating all three of the main categories examined in this paper (work–family policies, work–family conflict, and the six work outcomes), should be conducted once again.

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Appendix

TABLE A1. Studies included in the meta-analysis

Study	Work-to-family	Family-to-work	Both directions	Sample characteristics	N
Performance					
Greenhaus et al. (1987)	−0.05			Male and female accountants	336
Kossek and Nichol (1992)			−0.16	Parents	155
Netemeyer et al. (1996)	0.00	−0.38		Real estate agents, most married women	186
Turnover intentions					
Burke (1988)	0.30			Mainly male police officers	828
Good et al. (1988)			0.45	Retail managers, 68% female	440
Netemeyer et al. (1996)	0.25	0.23		Teachers and administrators, mostly married women	182
Netemeyer et al. (1996)	0.14	0.02		Small business owners, most married, over half male	162
Netemeyer et al. (1996)	0.28	0.17		Real estate sales people, most married women	186
Absenteeism[a]					
Goff et al. (1990)	0.16			Parents working in a Midwestern firm	59
Kossek (1990)			0.35	Public utility workers, parent of children under 12	198
Kossek et al. (1993)			0.41	Elder care providers	69
Kossek and Nichol (1992)			0.20	Parents	155
Thomas and Ganster (1995)			0.00	Health care workers, 99% female, 89% married	398
Organizational/work commitment					
Anderson-Kulman and Paludi (1986)			−0.06	Working mothers of preschoolers	204
Ayree (1992)	0.06			Married professional women in Singapore, 50% child under 6	354
Good et al. (1988)			−0.42	Retail managers, 68% female	440
Gray (1989)			−0.14	Female nurses, about half married	271
Netemeyer et al. (1996)	−0.20	−0.25		Teachers and administrators, most married women	182
O'Driscoll et al. (1992)	−0.06	0.14		Random sample of people working 20+ hours/week, 66% married	120
Wiley (1987)	−0.10	−0.23		Working MBA students, 63% married, 57% parents	191

TABLE A1. (Continued)

Study	Work-to-family	Family-to-work	Both directions	Sample characteristics	N
Job/work involvement					
Adams et al. (1996)	0.28	0.10		Workers living with one other	163
Duxbury and Higgins (1991)			0.48	Males in dual-career relationships	131
Duxbury and Higgins (1991)			0.56	Females in dual-career relationships	109
Frone and Rice (1987)			0.26	Non-teachers at a university	56
Frone et al. (1992)	0.05	0.09		Stratified-random sample, living w/partner or child, working 20+ hours	631
Greenhaus et al. (1989)	-0.02			Men in dual-career relationships	115
Greenhaus et al. (1989)	0.38			Women in dual-career relationships	115
Jones and Butler (1980)	-0.41			Male sailors, all married	181
Thompson and Blau (1993)	0.21	-0.14		Mix of firms, workers 70% female, 72% married, 43% children in home	234
Wiley (1987)	0.20	0.14		Working MBA students, 63% married, 57% parents	191
Burnout					
Bacharach et al. (1991)	0.57			Female nurses	215
	0.49			Male engineers	430
Burke (1988)	0.60			Mainly male police officers	828
Drory and Shamir (1988)			0.36	Male Israeli prison guards	266
Etzion (1988)	0.31			Female engineers	51
	0.21			Male engineers	51
Greenglass and Burke (1988)			0.22	Teachers/school administrators	566
Israeli (1993)			-0.03	Female physicians married to male physicians in Israel	126
			0.18	Male physicians married to female physicians in Israel	126
Leiter and Durup (1996)	0.55	0.26		Female health care professionals, living with child or partner	151
Netemeyer et al. (1996)	0.56	0.38		Teachers and administrators, most married women	182
	0.47	0.19		Small business owners, most married, over half male	162
Ray and Miller (1994)			0.55	Female nurses, 55% married, 85% full-time	119

[a] Two different definitions of absenteeism were used: studies by Kossek and colleagues looked at only care-related absences; the others looked at all missed days.