

REPORT OF FINDINGS

Community, Families & Work Program

Parental After-School Stress Project

April 8, 2004



Study Conducted by



The Community, Families & Work Program
Brandeis University

Project Funded by



The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
New York, NY

**BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY, FAMILIES & WORK PROGRAM
PARENTAL AFTER-SCHOOL STRESS (PASS) PROJECT**

PASS AND JOB DISRUPTIONS

More than one-third (37.2%) of the labor force consists of parents of minor children, and the majority of those children are school-age. However, most of these parents have work schedules that prevent them from being home when their children get out of school; the gap between the time the school day ends and the time most parents get home from work is estimated to amount to 20 to 25 hours each week. At the same time, there are not nearly enough slots available in safe, accessible, high-quality, and affordable after-school programs to meet demand, and yet there are significant health, academic, and social risks associated with leaving school-age children unsupervised. The net effect is that working parents often worry about their children during the after-school hours, and this worry can have a profound effect on the parents' well-being and performance on the job.

In our new research on parental after-school stress (PASS), funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, we first developed two new yardsticks for capturing data on PASS and on job disruptions in the areas of missed work, distractions on the job, and poor quality of work. In a study of several hundred parents at JPMorgan Chase, we found that those parents who have greater concerns about their children's after-school arrangements report significantly more job disruptions and significantly lower psychological well-being.

- Parents with high PASS are more than three times as likely to report high levels of job disruptions and more than four and a half times as likely to report low levels of psychological well-being compared to their low-PASS counterparts.

Comparing parents with the highest and lowest levels of PASS shows that parental concerns about children's after-school arrangements have a bottom-line cost in lost employee productivity.

- This cost may be reflected in up to five extra days of missed work per year per employee: On average, not including vacation days, employed parents with high PASS miss about eight days of work per year, while their counterparts with low PASS miss about three days of work per year.
- Parents with high PASS are also significantly more frequently interrupted, distracted, and drained of energy at work by non-work issues; significantly more frequently make errors, turn down requests to work extra hours, and miss meetings and deadlines at work because of non-work issues; and rate their productivity and the quality of their work significantly lower than do their low-PASS counterparts.

WHO IS AT HIGHEST RISK FOR PASS?

Employed parents are at high risk for parental after-school stress when:

- their jobs are less flexible, and
- their children spend more time unsupervised after school.

There are also some “double whammies” in which parents who have a combination of two risk factors have higher levels of PASS than would be expected by simply summing the increased risk associated with each factor. These toxic situations include:

- having an inflexible job combined with a long commute home after work, and
- having children who are younger and who spend more time unsupervised each week.

WHICH WORKPLACE POLICIES AND PRACTICES AFFECT PASS?

Workplace policies and practices are related to employed parents’ reports of PASS. The risk of having high PASS is cut by about half when parents report any one of the following:

- that they can come in late, leave early, or take a midday break to deal with family matters;
- that they can count on being able to leave work at a regular time each day;
- that their supervisor is understanding about family matters;
- that they are free to make and take telephone calls at work to deal with family matters; and
- that they have workplace access to information about or referrals to local after-school programs.

IMPLICATIONS

- Employers now have data on the policies that help working parents be more productive; these data also confirm that flexible working arrangements, in particular, can have a positive impact on the bottom line. In addition, employers can use the data-capturing tools developed for this project to determine which of their existing policies and practices are most effective and to identify and target resources to help groups of parents with especially high PASS.
- Parents can use these findings to educate employers and talk to their managers about flexible working arrangements. Parents could also take these findings to their after-school providers to advocate for program practices that reduce parental stress.
- After-school programs can use these findings to examine their own policies and practices and to reflect on what they are doing that may be helping parents or inadvertently adding to their stress. Programs might survey their parent clients using the data-capturing tools developed for this project and use those findings to implement new program policies and practices to reduce parental stress.
- Community stakeholders – policy makers, community leaders, police, schools – can use these findings to justify continued funding for existing community programs for keeping kids safe and supervised after school and to drive the development of new ones.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

Respondents were recruited through an employer-sponsored parenting group at JPMorgan Chase. Our sample consisted of 243 employed parents (84.3% mothers; 15.7% fathers) who have at least one school-age (K-12) child. Parents work in six different states (Arizona, Delaware, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Texas) and at a wide range of jobs at all occupational levels from administrative assistants and clerks to systems analysts and client service officers to product and project managers and senior vice presidents.

Educational attainment ranges from a high school diploma to a graduate degree; the majority (62.4%) have some college or a bachelor's degree. Three-quarters of the parents (74.9%) are married or living with a partner. Of those spouses and partners, 91.2% are also employed.

Parents who have more than one school-age child answered the questions about after-school arrangements with regard to a randomly selected target child. As expected with a random selection method, the target children are approximately equally split between boys (49.8%) and girls (50.2%).

Parents filled out a 10-item measure of parental after-school stress (PASS) and a 12-item measure of job disruptions that were developed for this project. Both measures have excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas of .87 for PASS and .82 for job disruptions).

Further information about the sample is shown in the table below:

	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(Std Dev)</i>
Age	25 – 59	39.2	(6.3)
Weekly Work Hours	20 – 86	44.2	(8.5)
Spouse/Partner Work Hours ¹	12 – 100	46.4	(11.6)
Minutes in Commute Home	1 – 240	58.9	(33.6)
Target Child Age	4 – 18	9.2	(3.5)
Weekly Work/School Gap ²	0 – 45	13.7	(7.2)

¹ Only employed spouses/partners are included in these figures.

² Weekly hours between end of the target child's school day and the time that the responding parent gets home from work.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY OR TO LEARN HOW THE COMMUNITY,
FAMILIES & WORK PROGRAM AT BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY CAN ASSIST YOUR
ORGANIZATION, PLEASE CONTACT**

Rosalind Chait Barnett, Ph.D.
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
T: (781) 736-2287
rbarnett@brandeis.edu

Karen C. Gareis, Ph.D.
PROGRAM DIRECTOR
T: (781) 736-4886
gareis@brandeis.edu