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Does Community Resource Fit Matter to Fathers?

A Study of Employed Fathers, School and School Activity Schedules, and Well-Being

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Several scholars have noted that community resources might facilitate or hinder employees' ability to meet their many work and family demands, thereby affecting their psychological well-being. However, this is the first study to estimate these relationships using a newly developed quantitative measure of community resource fit that assesses the satisfaction of employed parents of school-aged children with key community resources. In this analysis, the authors focus on the relationships linking one aspect of community resource fit—specifically, child's school and school activity schedules, or school resource fit—as a contextual variable influencing well-being (i.e., job-role quality, psychological distress) in a sample of 53 employed married fathers. Among these fathers, having school and school activity schedules that meet their needs is associated with low psychological distress and high job-role quality. Importantly, fathers with fewer resources in terms of income or job flexibility benefit most in terms of their job-role quality.

Keywords: *community; work-family; school-aged children; job-role quality; psychological distress*

It is widely agreed that resources available to workers in their residential communities—for example, well-run schools, safe streets, and adequate transportation—might facilitate employees' ability to meet their many work and family demands. In one study, a more socially cohesive community was associated with better self-rated health for men and women (Muhajarine & Janzen, 2006). Such community resources might be especially helpful at

this time when employee access to workplace flexibility options is declining (Levin-Epstein, 2006). Despite growing interest in community among work–family scholars (e.g., Bookman, 2005; Voydanoff, 2001), research has been scattered and noncumulative, owing in large part to the absence of an agreed-on definition of community and relatedly to the lack of a reliable quantitative measure of community resource fit (Barnett, 2006).

We focus on employed fathers because they tend to work longer hours, to commute further, and to be less likely to take advantage of available workplace flexibility options compared with employed mothers (Fagnani, 1993; Glass & Estes, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). Thus, they may be especially reactive to the safety valve provided by good school resource fit. Moreover, several studies indicate that although mothers still do the bulk of child care, fathers are assuming a larger share of child care, especially in two-earner families (Becker & Moen, 1999; Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998), that the parent role is just as salient to fathers as mothers (Thoits, 1983), and that fathers derive the same mental health benefit as mothers from good parent–child relationships (Barnett, Brennan, & Marshall, 1994). Yet far less is known about the ways in which employed fathers manage their work and family demands.

What do we mean by community? Most of us are members of several communities based on our interests, faith, politics, profession, employment, interpersonal commitments, history, values, practices, and territory (Voydanoff, 2001). Each community has its own resources (e.g., holy book, traditions, political platform). The focus of this article is on employees' residential communities and on the resources (e.g., schools) within those communities. The notion of community defined as a residential space builds on Bookman's definition of community as a "real geographical community that shapes family life and work" (2005, p. 144).

Some researchers (e.g., Sampson & Groves, 1989) focus on objective features of communities (e.g., crime rate, poverty level) and assess resident awareness of those features. In contrast, Voydanoff (2001) identifies six aspects of community: (a) community social organization, (b) social networks, (c) social capital, (d) formal volunteering and informal helping,

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e) sense of community, and (f) community satisfaction. We build on Voydanoff's community satisfaction aspect using a newly developed quantitative measure to assess community member perceptions of how well community resources meet their needs.

In the larger study of which this analysis is a part, the focus is on subjective evaluations of satisfaction with how well the workplace and the local schools, after-school programs, and transportation systems meet the needs of working families with at least one school-aged (i.e., K-12) child (Barnett, 2006; Gareis & Barnett, 2008). For the present analysis, our specific interest is in the degree of mismatch between fathers' needs and children's school and school activity schedules (i.e., school resource fit) and the extent to which that mismatch is linked to the fathers' well-being (i.e., psychological distress and job-role quality).

According to Emlen (1997), employed parents with young children seek to increase work-family fit through a "flexibility solution." High fit occurs when there is flexibility in work, family, and child care. Low flexibility in any of these domains reduces work-family fit and increases stress in the family system. We expand Emlen's definition of flexibility to include the fit between employed parents' needs and available community resources. Emlen's contribution was in conceptualizing community resources as potential safety valves to offset the stress working families experience as they try to meet the demands associated with work and family obligations.

Given how much empirical attention has been paid to family-friendly workplace policies and practices, it seems timely to explore the role other community institutions can play in facilitating the positive adjustment of working families. In this article, we test a modified version of Emlen's safety-valve model by focusing on one source of community resource fit, school resource fit, or the degree to which the school and school activity schedules of one's child meet one's own needs. We test the relationship linking school resource fit to well-being outcomes—specifically, psychological distress and job-role quality—in a sample of married, employed fathers whose partners vary in employment status and among those who are employed, in work hours, and who have at least one school-aged child. Job-role quality is a broad measure assessing employee perceptions of the extent to which a range of workplace features are rewarding or "of concern." As such, it resembles job satisfaction and is construed to be an indicator of well-being.

There is a substantial literature on fathers' communication with their children's schools (e.g., Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005), although most studies focus on the contribution that mothers make toward children's education. Much of the research on fathers concerns preschool children,

children who are at risk for academic failure, young immigrant children (e.g., Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, & Evans, 2006), and fathers of children in such foreign countries as Taiwan (Beckert, Strom, Strom, & Yang, 2006). In one study, father–school communication in kindergarten was related to job flexibility (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005). Specifically, fathers who had less flexibility at work were less likely to be involved in their children’s schools. The outcome variables in these studies are almost always the children’s social competence or academic progress. Most importantly, none of the studies focuses on the linkage between fathers’ engagement with their child’s school and fathers’ own well-being outcomes. In the present study, we focus on the relationship between (a) the degree to which fathers report that their children’s school and school activity schedules meet their needs and (b) their own well-being.

Multiple Safety Valves

As Emlen noted, families may have multiple safety valves in various domains of their lives. Safety valves may include such factors as higher household income, greater job flexibility, and other resources that make it easier for employed parents to manage their work and family lives. The implication is that the more safety valves working families have, the greater the likelihood of positive outcomes. There are at least two mechanisms by which multiple safety valves might benefit employees: (a) the additive effect of having more than one safety valve on an outcome and (b) the indirect effect of a second safety valve on the relationship between the first safety valve and an outcome. The presence of a second safety valve might have a synergistic effect such that when both safety valves are present, the ameliorative effect of the first is heightened. Therefore, in addition to testing the main effect of one safety valve, school resource fit, on outcomes, we test the direct and indirect effects of several secondary safety valves—household income and job flexibility—on the relationship between school resource fit and outcomes.

Moderators

We expect school resource fit to be especially helpful to fathers who do not have other resources at work or at home—specifically, fathers who have low income or little job flexibility.

Household Income

Fathers with high income may be less affected by their level of school resource fit than their low-income counterparts, perhaps because they are more easily able to purchase after-school child care and other services that could increase the likelihood of their being able to handle work and family demands without undue negative effects on their job experiences or well-being. Stated differently, adequate family financial resources can constitute a safety valve that protects working families from untoward consequences.

Job Flexibility

Fathers with greater flexibility on the job may be less affected by their level of school resource fit than their counterparts with less job flexibility. There is a growing consensus in the research literature that workplace flexibility is key to successfully managing parental and job demands (Bond et al., 1998; Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993; Glass, 2000). Scholars agree that employees can better manage long work hours and the unpredictable demands of dependent care when they are given a measure of control over when and where their work is done (Barnett, 1994; Glass, 2000; Schor, 1991).

Finally, we include *negative affectivity* as well as *fathers' and mothers' work hours* as covariates. Negative affectivity is a mood-dispositional trait to view the world negatively that is thought to account for spuriously high correlations between self-report measures of predictor and outcome variables, especially in cross-sectional analyses (Brennan & Barnett, 1998). We control for mothers' work hours because the mothers in this sample vary in employment status and among the employed, in work hours. Similarly, despite the fact that the fathers in this sample are all employed, there is still a fair amount of variability in their work hours (see Table 1).

In sum, in this random sample of 53 employed married fathers whose partners vary in employment status, and among the employed in number of hours worked, and who have at least one school-aged child, we test the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: School resource fit will be negatively related to psychological distress.

Hypothesis 2: School resource fit will be positively related to job-role quality.

Hypothesis 3: School resource fit will be more closely linked to outcomes for low-income fathers than for high-income fathers.

Hypothesis 4: School resource fit will be more closely linked to outcomes for fathers with less job flexibility than for their counterparts who have more job flexibility.

Table 1
Intercorrelations Between Measures

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Work hours	48.62 (13.04)	–							
2. Partner work hours	22.62 (19.74)	–.22	–						
3. Negative affectivity	1.69 (0.42)	–.35*	.23 [†]	–					
4. Household income	\$88,674 (27,673)	–.04	.43*	–.06	–				
5. Job flexibility	0.01 (0.76)	–.04	–.29*	–.19	.20	–			
6. School resource fit	5.45 (0.74)	–.12	–.23 [†]	.09	–.28*	.02	–		
7. Job-role quality	1.12 (0.79)	–.21	.00	–.23	.08	.23	.33*	–	
8. Psychological distress	10.29 (9.96)	–.04	.25 [†]	.53*	.21	–.14	–.30*	–.29*	–

Note: $N = 53$. For partner work hours, partners who are not employed are scored as working 0 hr.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$.

Method

Participants

As part of a larger study of how parents of school-aged (i.e., K-12) children in one Boston-area city coordinate their work schedules with their children's school, after-school, and transportation schedules, we interviewed all parents in 29 dual-earner families, 29 families with one main breadwinner and one stay-at-home or part-time employed parent, and 29 single-parent families ($N = 145$). For the present article, we report only on the data from the married, employed fathers ($n = 53$). Table 1 shows descriptive data on fathers' and mothers' work hours, annual family income, and other variables for this subsample. In this subsample, the fathers ranged in age from 30 to 56 ($M = 42.9$, $SD = 6.3$) and worked an average of 48.6 hr per week ($SD = 13.0$). One third (34.0%) of the mothers in this sample were not employed; among those that were employed, the mothers worked an average of 34.3 hr per week ($SD = 13.6$). Annual household income ranged from \$43,250 to \$175,000, with a median of \$87,500 (mean = \$88,674).

The families had from one to four children, with most having two (39.6%) or three (41.5%) children. The children in the household ranged in age from infancy to 22 years of age, although at least one child in the household had to be school-aged in order to meet the eligibility criteria for participation in the study.

Procedures

The sample was drawn randomly from the city's household census. Residents received introductory letters followed by a screening call to determine eligibility and willingness to participate. As with other studies relying on public databases to develop random samples, it is difficult to determine a response rate. Because many of those contacted refused to give demographic information, we were unable to determine how many nonparticipants were actually eligible, nor does the household census provide information on presence of school-aged children.

Data were collected during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years. Trained interviewers arranged 45-min face-to-face quantitative interviews with parents at a time and place convenient to the participants. In the case of two-parent families, mothers and fathers were interviewed privately. Parents also received a 15-min mailed questionnaire to be completed in advance and returned at the time of the interview. Each parent received \$50 for participating.

Measures

School resource fit was measured using a subscale of a global community resource fit measure developed for this study through a series of open-ended interviews with parents and guardians of school-aged children. Participants rated their satisfaction with six school resource fit items on a scale ranging from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*completely satisfied*); these items were: "The time(s) your child(ren)'s school(s) start(s) in the morning," "The time(s) your child(ren)'s school(s) let(s) out in the afternoon," "The way different schools in the community coordinate their schedules with each other," "The scheduling of school meetings, parent conferences, and events," "Scheduling of extracurricular activities," and "Communication between the school(s) and parents." In the full community resource fit measure, participants rated their satisfaction with 36 items in the areas of work, school, after-school activities, public transportation, and transportation to and from school and to and from after-school activities. Internal consistency is excellent for the scale as a whole in the

present sample ($\alpha = .90$) and acceptable for the school resource fit subscale ($\alpha = .71$).

Psychological distress was assessed using a state measure asking participants to indicate on a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*) how often in the past week they experienced each of 10 anxiety symptoms and 14 depression symptoms (Derogatis, 1975). Sample depression items include "feeling low in energy or slowed down" and "feeling lonely." Sample anxiety items include "feeling fearful" and "feeling tense or keyed up." In the present sample, the depression and anxiety subscales are highly correlated ($r = .89, p = .000$) and show similar relationships to other study variables. Therefore, as in our previous work (e.g., Barnett, Marshall, Raudenbush, & Brennan, 1993), anxiety and depression scores were combined to create a measure of psychological distress. The combined score has excellent internal consistency in the present sample ($\alpha = .91$), further supporting the decision to combine these subscales.

Job-role quality was assessed with a modified version of a measure on which participants were instructed to rate on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*considerably*) the extent to which each item was rewarding or of concern (Barnett & Brennan, 1995, 1997). Three items concerning schedule control were removed so as not to overlap with the construct of job flexibility, leaving 28 items in the measure. The remaining items covered job conditions in the areas of skill discretion, decision authority, job demands, pay adequacy, job security, and supervisor relations. Sample reward items include "challenging or stimulating work" and "your supervisor's respect for your abilities." Sample concern items include "the job's dullness, monotony, lack of variety" and "having to juggle conflicting tasks or duties." Concerns were negatively weighted and rewards positively weighted in constructing the score, which was the weighted average of item scores (Barnett et al., 1993). Internal consistency is excellent in the present sample ($\alpha = .86$).

Job flexibility was assessed using a three-item measure from the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce (Bond et al., 1998) with questions about whether the participant can choose starting and quitting times within a certain range of hours, whether starting and quitting times can be changed daily, and how difficult it is to take time off during the workday to take care of personal or family matters. Internal consistency is acceptable in the present sample ($\alpha = .65$).

Work hours was assessed by asking participants how many hours they work per week on average, including overtime, at all jobs. *Logged per capita household income* was assessed by asking participants to indicate yearly household income from all sources before taxes and dividing this

figure by household size. The distribution of this variable is skewed, so we used the natural log of per capita income in the analyses.

Negative affectivity was assessed with the 10-item Trait Anxiety Scale (Spielberger, 1983) on which participants indicated on a scale from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*) how characteristic traits were of them; items include "I am a steady person" and "I have self-confidence." The overall negative affectivity score is the mean response to all items answered. Internal consistency is very good in the present sample ($\alpha = .79$).

Results

As shown in Table 1, there are significant bivariate correlations between school resource fit and both well-being outcomes (psychological distress and job-role quality). To determine whether these relationships held up while controlling for important covariates, we estimated a series of simultaneous multiple regression models using school resource fit to predict psychological distress and job-role quality, with covariates of negative affectivity as well as fathers' and mothers' work hours. The results for psychological distress are shown in Table 2, Main Effects: School resource fit is significantly negatively related to psychological distress. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, the better the father's school resource fit, the lower his psychological distress. As an indication of effect size, Cohen's d is -0.82 , classified as a large effect (Cohen, 1988). Cohen's d can be computed by plugging the partial correlation controlling for all covariates used in the model ($r_{\text{partial}} = -.38, p = .007$) into the formula $(2 \times r) / \sqrt{1 - r^2}$.

Table 3 shows the results for job-role quality. As shown in the first column, school resource fit is significantly positively related to job-role quality: The better the father's school resource fit, the higher his job-role quality, as predicted in Hypothesis 2. Cohen's d is $+0.80$ (based on $r_{\text{partial}} = .37, p = .008$), again classified as a large effect.

Next we added the secondary safety valves of household income and job flexibility to both of the main-effects models described above. As shown in the second column of Tables 2 and 3, there were no main effects of these safety valves on psychological distress or on job-role quality, nor did the addition of this pair of variables contribute significantly to R^2 for either outcome.

Finally, we tested whether the relationships between school resource fit and the two outcomes were moderated by household income or job flexibility by adding the interaction terms School Resource Fit \times Household Income and School Resource Fit \times Job Flexibility to the main-effects

Table 2
Relationship Between School Resource Fit and Fathers' Psychological Distress

Psychological Distress	Main Effects			Secondary Safety Values			Moderation		
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
School resource fit	-4.38*	-.33	1.54	-3.98*	-.30	1.57	-1.75	-.13	2.12
Father work hours	0.11	.15	0.09	0.11	.14	0.09	0.12	.16	0.09
Mother work hours	0.04	.07	0.06	-0.02	-.03	0.07	-0.07	-.14	0.08
Negative affectivity	14.13*	.60	2.83	14.54*	.61	2.87	14.70*	.62	2.84
Household income	-	-	-	11.22	.18	7.59	14.40 [†]	.25	7.69
Job flexibility	-	-	-	-0.89	-.07	1.63	-1.44	-.11	1.69
School Resource Fit \times Income	-	-	-	-	-	-	-16.23	-.19	13.55
School Resource Fit \times Job Flexibility	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.35	.18	2.33
<i>R</i> ²	.43			.45			.49		
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.38			.38			.40		

Note: *N* = 53.

[†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05.

Table 3
Relationship Between School Resource Fit and Fathers' Job-Role Quality

Job-Role Quality	Main Effects			Secondary Safety Valves			Moderation		
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
School resource fit	0.38*	.36	0.14	0.41*	.38	0.14	0.58*	.55	0.17
Father work hours	-0.02*	-.28	0.01	-0.02†	-.25	0.01	-0.02*	-.38	0.01
Mother work hours	0.01	.12	0.01	0.01	.15	0.01	0.01	.21	0.01
Negative affectivity	-0.73*	-.39	0.25	-0.66*	-.35	0.26	-0.59*	-.31	0.23
Household income	-	-	-	0.23	.05	0.68	0.24	.05	0.63
Job flexibility	-	-	-	0.19	.18	0.15	0.33*	.32	0.14
School Resource Fit × Income	-	-	-	-	-	-	-2.63*	-.38	1.10
School Resource Fit × Job Flexibility	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.50*	-.35	0.19
<i>R</i> ²	.27	-	-	.30	-	-	.47	-	-
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.21	-	-	.21	-	-	.37	-	-

Note: *N* = 53.

†*p* < .10. **p* < .05.

models described above. For psychological distress, there was no significant increment to R^2 with the addition of this set of variables, nor were any of the individual interaction terms significant (see Table 2, third column), offering no evidence of moderation by the secondary safety valves. However, for job-role quality, the addition of the set of interaction terms resulted in a significant increment to R^2 over that associated with the main-effects model; $F_{\text{change}}(2, 44) = 6.65, p = .003$. As shown in the third column of Table 3, household income and job flexibility both moderated the relationship between school resource fit and job-role quality, offering partial support for Hypotheses 3 and 4.

As shown in Figure 1, the relationship between school resource fit and job-role quality is significantly stronger for low-income fathers, whereas there is essentially no relationship between school resource fit and job-role quality for high-income fathers. In other words, under conditions of low school resource fit, it is the low-income fathers whose job-role quality suffers, whereas under conditions of high school resource fit, the low-income fathers report slightly *higher* job-role quality than do their high-income counterparts. Cohen's d for this interaction is -0.72 (based on $r_{\text{partial}} = -.34, p = .022$), classified as a large effect.

Figure 2 shows that as with household income, job flexibility moderates the relationship between school resource fit and job-role quality, with a stronger relationship between school resource fit and job-role quality for fathers with low vs. high job flexibility. Under conditions of low school resource fit, it is the fathers with less flexible jobs whose job-role quality is lowest, whereas under conditions of high school resource fit, the low-flexibility fathers are indistinguishable from the high-flexibility fathers in their ratings of job-role quality. Cohen's d for this interaction is -0.80 (based on $r_{\text{partial}} = -.37, p = .011$), classified as a large effect.

Discussion and Conclusion

When their children's school and school activity schedules meet their needs, married fathers reap a well-being benefit. Specifically, in this sample of married employed fathers with at least one school-aged child, fathers whose children's schools provide them with a safety valve reported high job-role quality and low psychological distress. These findings support a modified version of the Emlen hypothesis. In addition, a good match between fathers' needs and the school and school activity schedules of their children was particularly beneficial to the job-role quality of fathers with

Figure 1
The Relationship Between School Resource Fit and Job-Role Quality Is Moderated by Household Income

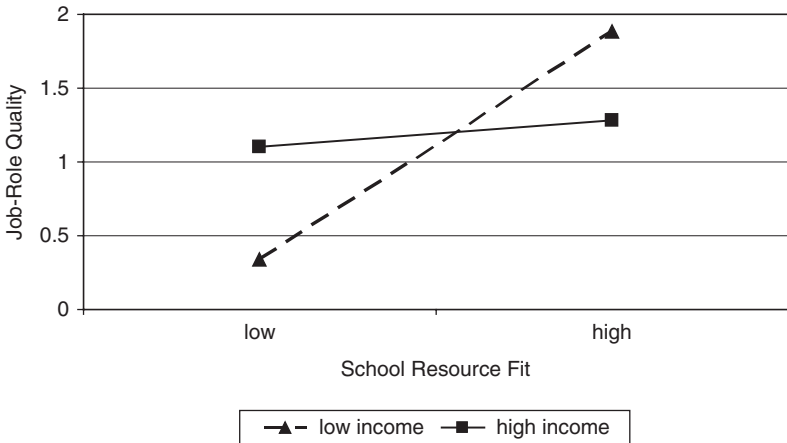
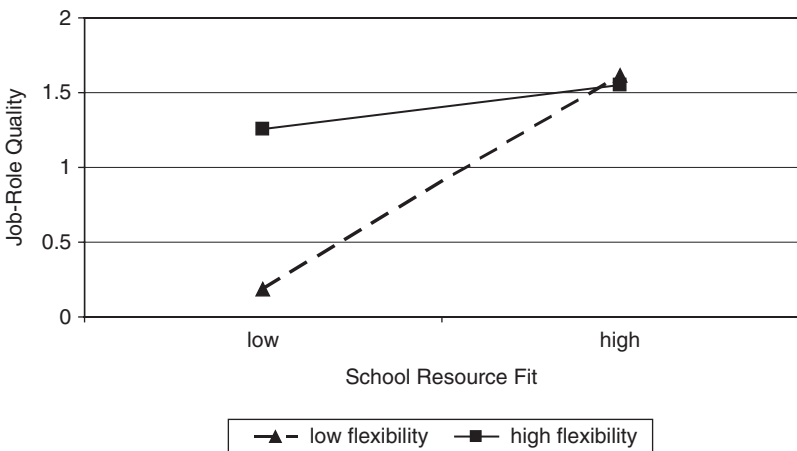


Figure 2
The Relationship Between School Resource Fit and Job-Role Quality Is Moderated by Job Flexibility



few work and family resources (i.e., fathers who have low income or low job flexibility), as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Specifically, it is fathers with low incomes and low job flexibility whose job-role quality suffers most under conditions of poor school resource fit.

Thus, if school schedules (e.g., start and end times, schedule of parent conferences and school events) can better accommodate the schedules of working fathers (and most likely mothers), they may become a community resource that ameliorates some of the stress such parents would otherwise experience. It thus behooves school administrators and activity planners to accommodate as best they can the schedules of their pupils' fathers. However, if the price of achieving better fit for fathers is that children have to stay longer in school, then this tradeoff in terms of added burden on the school and potential effects on the children would have to be evaluated. A full treatment of the impact of community resource fit on married employed mothers' outcomes as well as the within-couple effects of community resource fit on both partners' outcomes and on their children are important topics to be addressed in future studies. These analyses could also examine the extent to which mothers' work hours may act as a moderator of the relationship between fathers' school resource fit and fathers' outcomes because mothers who work fewer hours can "cover" for fathers.

Safety valves include community, family, and personal resources. For example, high school resource fit, a community resource, may act as a safety valve when work resource fit is low. At the personal level, employees with high income may be less affected by the level of school resource fit than employees with low income. High school resource fit may act as a safety valve, releasing the strain that might otherwise diminish the job-role quality of low-income and low-flexibility fathers. Similarly, employed fathers who enjoy the safety valves of high income and high job flexibility may be less affected by school resource fit, whereas those without such safety valves may be especially benefited when school resource fit is high.

This study, like other studies, has limitations. Notably, the sample was quite small, and all participants resided in one Boston-area city. Consequently, issues of generalizability arise. In addition, there were too few single fathers in the sample to allow us to analyze their data. Future research should include a larger sample drawn from multiple communities that differ with respect to various aspects of community resource fit and family composition.

A larger sample would also permit the inclusion of many additional covariates. Major among these is child age, which strongly conditions parents' school-related obligations. Although our sample was too small to include child age as a covariate or test it as a moderator, there is some

suggestion in our data that this variable is important to include in future studies of school resource fit. Specifically, in analyses not reported here, the older the average age of the children in the family, the lower the father's rating of school resource fit, although the correlation was only marginally significant ($r = -.27, p = .06$). Other important variables include the number of children in the family, whether fathers work a nonstandard (i.e., evening, night, or weekend) shift, and the extent of fathers' responsibilities for such tasks as transporting children to and from school. In future research, it would also be desirable to include parents from diverse communities in which school schedules might vary and in which the range and timing of school activities might also vary.

Nevertheless, the study yielded several significant findings that strongly suggest the utility of incorporating the notion of community resource fit into future studies of work-family issues. Furthermore, although the specific components of community resources we assess are those of special importance to families of school-aged children, it would certainly be possible to tailor the measure to include modules assessing resources that are important to different types of families; for example, those with caregiving responsibilities for preschoolers or for elders.

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