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The development of a new measure for work-family research: Community resource fit

Karen C. Gareis* and Rosalind Chait Barnett

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We describe the development and validation of a quantitative measure of community resource fit; i.e., satisfaction with the extent to which community resources meet the needs of working families of school-aged children. The measure has good psychometric properties, and preliminary results suggest that the measure warrants further study. The measure is composed of six moderately intercorrelated subscales assessing resource fit in the areas of work, public transportation, school, school transportation, after-school programs and after-school transportation resources. We found interesting patterns of results linking community resource fit, especially in the areas of work and school resource fit, to a variety of quality-of-life and well-being outcomes among employed parents of school-aged children. These outcomes include work-to-family and family-to-work conflict and enhancement, psychological distress, job-role quality, likelihood of losing or leaving one's job and likelihood of leaving one's line of work.

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

Nous décrivons le développement et la validation d'une mesure quantitative qui traite des ressources de la communauté en fonction des disponibilités de ses services, considérant le degré de la satisfaction des besoins des familles appartenant à la force de travail, ayant en charge des enfants scolarisés. Cette mesure a de bonnes propriétés psychométriques; les résultats préliminaires exigeant une étude plus approfondie. La mesure se compose des six paramètres suivants: (1) lieux de travail, (2) transports publics, (3) écoles, (4) transports d'élèves, (5) activités après les heures d'école, (6) transports pour les activités en question. Ces points existent en corrélation avec les ressources et les disponibilités de la communauté. Nous avons trouvé des modèles intéressants liés à ces ressources, spécialement dans le rapport travail et la disponibilité des écoles. Ils déterminent le bien-être et la qualité de vie pour les parents qui travaillent ayant en charge des enfants scolarisés. Ces résultats mettent en lumière les conflits: travail famille, détresse psychologique, acquisition de statut professionnel, danger de perdre son emploi, possibilité de le quitter, ou changement dans sa trajectoire professionnelle.

Mots-clé: communauté; travail famille; enfants scolarisé; détresse psychologique; qualité du statut professionnel

The role of community in shaping the lives of families has been of interest to researchers in several disciplines. Sociologists have studied the impact on crime rates of such community-level variables as population density and social disorganization (Sampson & Groves, 1989). Social anthropologists have considered the interface between the workplace and the

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community (Bookman, 2005). Urban geographers have paid the most systematic attention to at least some aspects of community and how they affect working families. For example, they have studied residential location patterns in the context of proximity to the workplace, public transportation, shopping and day care or schools (Hanson & Pratt, 1988; Fagnani, 1993). It appears that there are gender differences in the residential decision-making process and in the length of commute to and from work. Specifically, women had a larger say in where to locate than men and a shorter commute to and from work.

In contrast, work–family researchers, while acknowledging the role of community factors, have focused on narrower definitions of community. For example, in a national sample of US married dual-earner parents of adolescents, Voydanoff (2004) found that level of participation in different community organizations affected several indicators of marital quality and that these relationships differed for mothers and fathers. Moreover, subjective aspects of community (e.g., satisfaction with home, neighborhood and city or town) were more consistently related to marital quality than were objective aspects (e.g., actual hours spent participating in different community organizations). This parallels findings suggesting that subjective indicators of work hours such as work schedule fit are a better predictor of work hours than are objective indicators such as the number of hours worked (e.g., Gareis & Barnett, 2002; Gareis, Barnett, & Brennan, 2003).

Despite growing interest in community among work–family scholars (e.g., Bookman, 2005; Voydanoff, 2001), research has been scattered and non-cumulative. One important reason for the current state of affairs is the absence of a consensus definition of community and, relatedly, the lack of a reliable quantitative measure of community resource fit (Barnett & Gareis, 2006). Based on Bookman's definition of community as a 'real geographical community that shapes family life and work' (2005, p. 144), the focus of this paper is on the development of a measure assessing the resources available in employed families' residential communities. Voydanoff (2001) identifies six different aspects of community, including: (1) community social organization, (2) social networks, (3) social capital, (4) formal volunteering and informal helping, (5) sense of community and (6) community satisfaction. We build on Voydanoff's community satisfaction aspect in developing our quantitative measure assessing individual community members' perceptions of how well resources in their residential community meet their needs. We are concerned with subjective evaluations of community resources relative to individual needs. Therefore, rather than assessing the objective resources available to working families in their residential communities, we focus on perceived fit, or satisfaction with the match between the community's resources and the person's values, desires or goals.

Our conceptualization of the role of community resource fit in managing work and family responsibilities builds on Emlen's (1997) notion of a 'flexibility solution'. In his work with employed parents of preschoolers, Emlen argues that employees who have 'safety valves' in their families, at work or at their child-care provider are less likely to suffer negative effects of managing work and family. Such safety valves provide parents with a kind of insurance against the crises that crop up all too often in working parents' lives. In our work, we extend Emlen's insights to families with school-aged children (Barnett & Gareis, 2006; Barnett & Gareis, in press). For these parents, in addition to family and work flexibility, we posit that the most critical areas in which flexibility is needed are school, after-school care and transportation – all aspects of community resources. Given how much empirical attention has been paid to family-friendly workplace policies and practices, it seems timely to explore the role that community institutions such as these can play in facilitating the positive adjustment of working families.

In the larger study of which this analysis is a part, the focus is on how well the workplace, the local schools, the after-school programs and the local transportation systems – including public, school and after-school transportation – meet the needs of individuals in working families who have at least one child who is in primary or secondary school (i.e., in US grades K through 12). Although the specific components of community resources we assess are those of special importance to families of school-aged children, it would be a simple matter to tailor the measure to include modules assessing resources that are important to different types of families; for example, those with infant-care or elder-care responsibilities.

Method

Stage I: measure development

For the first phase of the study, we conducted and audiotaped open-ended telephone interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes with 17 parents and guardians of at least one school-aged child (i.e., in grades K–12) about each family member's work or school schedule and transportation needs and asked them about what factors in the community, the children's schools and the parents' or guardians' workplaces made it easier or more difficult to coordinate family schedules and transportation.

The sample was developed through a combination of random sampling from the household census of the city in which Stage II of the study was conducted and publicizing the study and asking interested volunteers to contact us. Parents and guardians were stratified on family type, with four respondents from dual-earner families, four respondents from families with one main breadwinner and one stay-at-home or part-time employed parent, five respondents who were single parents and four respondents who were custodial grandparents. Because custodial grandparents were difficult to locate, we publicized the study on a national listserv for such grandparents; therefore, three of the custodial grandparents were not from the Boston area. The remaining parents and guardians ($n = 14$) were from the city in which Stage II of the study was conducted. Each interviewee received \$25 for participating. The audiotapes were transcribed and analyzed to develop a measure of community resource fit.

Stage II: measure validation

In the second phase of the study, we collected data on the psychometric properties of the measure and validated it against theoretically related outcomes. As part of a larger study of how parents of school-aged children (i.e., in grades K–12) in one Boston-area city coordinate their work schedules with their children's school, after-school and transportation schedules, we conducted private 45-minute face-to-face interviews with 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 (total $N = 145$). In the interviews, parents completed the new community resource fit measure and established measures of a number of theoretically related outcomes.

Respondents completed a measure of work-to-family and family-to-work conflict and enhancement using items selected from MacDermid et al. (2000). For the work-to-family and family-to-work interference scales (five items each), items addressed the time, energy, strain and behavioral components of interference rated on a scale from 1 (*rarely*) to 4 (*most of the time*) plus a global item rated on a scale from 1 (*minimal*) to 4 (*very considerable*). For

the work-to-family and family-to-work enhancement scales (six items each), items addressed the time, energy, strain, behavioral and support components rated on a scale from 1 (*rarely*) to 4 (*most of the time*) plus a global item rated on a scale from 1 (*minimal*) to 4 (*very considerable*). Psychological distress was assessed using a 24-item measure asking respondents to indicate on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*) how often in the past week they were bothered by each of 10 symptoms of anxiety and 14 symptoms of depression (Derogatis, 1975). Job-role quality was assessed by asking respondents to rate on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*considerably*) the extent to which each of 31 items in the areas of skill discretion, decision authority, job demands, schedule control, pay adequacy, job security and supervisor relations was rewarding or of concern (Barnett & Brennan, 1995). Finally, respondents answered single items about the likelihood of losing a job one wants to keep within the next 12 months, voluntarily leaving one's job within the next 12 months and leaving one's line of work and going into another line of work entirely within the next five years, rated on a scale from 1 (*extremely unlikely*) to 7 (*extremely likely*). Each parent received \$50 for participating.

The sample to be screened was drawn randomly from the city's publicly available household census. Residents received letters describing the study and screeners followed up by telephone to determine whether they were eligible and willing to participate. As discussed above, we stratified the sample on family type, with 29 families in each of the three types (dual-earner, one-main-breadwinner and single-parent families). As with other studies relying on public databases to develop their random samples, it is very difficult to determine a response rate. Many people contacted refused to give demographic information, so we were not able to determine how many who did not respond were actually eligible to participate, nor does the household census provide information on presence of school-aged children.

On average, the mothers in the sample were 42.0 years of age ($SD = 6.31$; $range = 24-58$) and the fathers were 43.5 ($SD = 6.44$; $range = 30-57$). On average, the 68 employed mothers (of 86 total mothers) worked 30.2 hours per week ($SD = 18.94$; $range = 10-73$), whereas the 54 employed fathers (of 59 total fathers) worked 44.5 hours per week ($SD = 18.42$; $range = 10-90$). Some 44.2% of the mothers and 52.5% of the fathers had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, and the median annual family income was \$77,500 ($SD = \$35,168.05$; $range = \$20,000-\$175,000$). The median number of children living at home at least half of the time was 2 ($SD = 0.79$; $range = 1-4$), and the average age of those children was 10.8 years ($SD = 4.62$; $range = 2.67-19.50$).

Results

Content analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions in Stage I yielded a 36-item community resource fit measure (see Appendix). Although the size of the measure development sample was fairly small ($n = 17$), there was remarkable consistency in the types of resources they identified as helpful; these did not appear to differ by family type or by community. The items ask respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with 36 aspects of community resources clustering into six categories of resources (work, public transportation, school, school transportation, after-school programs and after-school transportation) on a scale ranging from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*completely satisfied*). Respondents are instructed to skip those items that are not applicable or to which they do not know the answer; scores are computed as the mean response for answered items. (As shown in the Appendix, we suggest cutting the measure to 31 items by

Table 1. Cronbach's alphas and descriptive statistics for community resource fit scale and subscales.

	Alpha		Mean (SD)	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
Global score	.86	.90	4.90 (0.73)	4.97 (0.64)
Work	.77	.80	5.18 (1.24)	5.15 (1.24)
Public transportation	.91	.81	4.83 (1.31)	4.64 (1.16)
School	.73	.69	5.36 (0.95)	5.45 (0.71)
School transportation	.77	.73	5.09 (1.15)	5.04 (0.97)
After-school programs	.88	.85	4.54 (1.18)	4.81 (0.99)
After-school transportation	.95	.91	4.43 (1.32)	4.68 (1.16)

Note: $N = 145$ (86 mothers, 59 fathers) except for work resource fit; only 122 parents (68 mothers, 54 fathers) were employed. Scores on the scales ranged from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*completely satisfied*).

combining several of the after-school transportation items and dropping two of the less relevant after-school program items.)

The overall community resource fit scale has excellent psychometric properties (see Table 1), with a Cronbach's alpha of .86 for mothers and .90 for fathers. Internal consistency for the subscales was within the moderate to high range, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .69 to .95. There were no significant differences in global community resource fit scores by gender; $t(143) = 0.65$, $p = .515$ or by family type; $F(2,79) = 0.05$, $p = .955$. As shown in Table 1, the mean for the global score was 4.90 ($SD = 0.73$) for mothers and 4.97 ($SD = 0.64$) for fathers; these scores are almost one full point above the midpoint of the scale, close to 'slightly satisfied'. The subscale means ranged from a low of 4.43 ($SD = 1.32$) for mothers' ratings of after-school transportation resource fit to a high of 5.45 ($SD = 0.71$) for fathers' ratings of school resource fit. As shown in Table 2, subscale scores were moderately intercorrelated, with correlations ranging from .05 ($p = .630$) to .38 ($p = .000$).

Table 3 shows the correlations between resource fit scores and outcomes, controlling for logged per capita household income and negative affectivity (Spielberger, 1983), 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). As shown in the table, parents who report higher global resource fit report significantly higher levels of work-to-family enhancement. Of the subscale scores, work-to-family enhancement is specifically associated with higher levels of work and school resource fit. School resource

Table 2. Intercorrelations among resource fit subscale scores.

Resource fit	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Work	–					
2. Public transportation	.12	–				
3. School	.18*	.38*	–			
4. School transportation	.29*	.31*	.29*	–		
5. After-school programs	.20*	.16†	.33*	.05	–	
6. After-school transportation	.15	.30*	.30*	.33*	.29*	–

Note: $N = 145$ (86 mothers, 59 fathers) except for work resource fit; only 122 parents (68 mothers, 54 fathers) were employed.

* $p < .05$.

† $p < .10$.

Table 3. Partial correlations linking community resource fit to outcomes.

	GLOBAL	WORK	PUBTRAN	SCHOOL	SCHTRAN	AFTSCH	AFTRAN
Work-to-family conflict	-.08	-.42*	.04	-.02	.00	-.01	.01
Family-to-work conflict	-.03	-.22*	.06	-.16†	.11	.03	-.01
Work-to-family enhancement	.24*	.46*	.01	.21*	.17	.10	.03
Family-to-work enhancement	.14	.04	.02	.23*	-.03	.16†	.10
Psychological distress	-.10	-.32*	-.01	-.11	.07	-.04	.02
Job-role quality	.31*	.64*	.04	.19*	.09	.11	.06
Lose job	-.08	-.37*	.01	-.06	.05	-.01	.05
Leave job	-.10	-.30*	-.07	-.03	-.13	.06	-.07
Leave occupation	-.20*	-.18†	-.10	-.19*	-.09	-.05	-.18†

Note: GLOBAL = global resource fit, WORK = work resource fit, PUBTRAN = public transportation resource fit, SCHOOL = school resource fit, SCHTRAN = school transportation resource fit, AFTSCH = after-school resource fit, and AFTRAN = after-school transportation resource fit. $N = 145$ (86 mothers, 59 fathers) except for work resource fit; only 122 parents (68 mothers, 54 fathers) were employed. All correlations controlled for negative affectivity and logged per capita household income.

* $p < .05$.

† $p < .10$.

fit is also a significant positive predictor of family-to-work enhancement, and work resource fit is a significant negative predictor of work-to-family and family-to-work conflict. These results provide support for the idea that good community resource fit, particularly in the areas of work and school, may act as a safety valve buffering working parents of school-age children from the stress they might otherwise experience as they try to meet the demands associated with work and family obligations.

As shown in Table 3, good work resource fit is also significantly associated with lower levels of psychological distress, higher levels of job-role quality and lower reported likelihood of losing one's job or voluntarily leaving one's job in the next 12 months. Good school resource fit is significantly associated with higher levels of job-role quality and lower reported likelihood of leaving one's line of work in the next five years.

Public transportation and school transportation resource fit were not significantly associated with any outcomes, and after-school program and after-school transportation resource fit showed only a single marginal association each with outcomes (after-school program resource fit with greater family-to-work enhancement and after-school transportation resource fit with lower reported likelihood of leaving one's line of work in the next five years).

Discussion and conclusions

To summarize, we have developed a quantitative measure of community resource fit, a construct that has not previously been assessed by work-family researchers. The measure has good psychometric properties and warrants further study. The measure is composed of six moderately intercorrelated subscales assessing resource fit in the areas of work, public transportation, school, school transportation, after-school programs and after-school

transportation resources. Even with a fairly small sample, we found interesting patterns of results linking community resource fit, especially in the areas of work and school resource fit, to a variety of quality of life and well-being outcomes among employed parents of school-aged children. The introduction of this measure should be useful to other work–family researchers who are interested both in assessing the community resources that are available to working families and in examining how such resources can be helpful to employees in managing their work and family responsibilities.

Previous models of the work–family relationship should be expanded to include the direct and indirect effects of community resource fit. Our findings suggest the need to more fully identify the range of community resources that impact worker distress. The present scale could easily be modified to add or subtract modules assessing resource fit in areas of concern to different types of families or to families in different stages of the life cycle. For example, families with preschoolers could be asked about community resource fit in the area of day care, while families with adult-care or elder-care responsibilities could be asked about similar aspects of community-based resources for adults and elders.

Our findings also suggest that community-level policies and practices can act as resources that alleviate stress for working parents. Given the pattern of results we found, such community resources appear to have consequences for families (e.g., work-to-family and family-to-work conflict and enhancement, psychological distress) and for workplaces (e.g., job–role quality, likelihood of losing or leaving one’s job and leaving one’s line of work). Such community-level policies and practices might include, for example, coordinated start and end times for elementary, middle and high schools in the community; engaging, high-quality after-school programs that are located in schools to avoid the need for transportation, or in central locations with safe, reliable transportation provided; and workplaces that allow for flex-time and flex-place scheduling, such as programs allowing parents to work in the office during school hours and then from home during the after-school hours.

Further research into the impact of community resources on worker outcomes is clearly needed. Ideally, such research should be longitudinal in design, and include employees from a wider range of workplaces and residential communities internationally – inner city, exurban, suburban and rural – with a broader range of community resources. With a larger and more heterogeneous sample, we will be better able to detect relationships between the full range of community resource fit subscales and outcomes of interest using more sophisticated analytic techniques. More extensive data would also allow us to further validate the measure by linking theoretically related predictors to community resource fit scores.

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Notes

1. Response scale ranged from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*completely satisfied*); respondents could also answer ‘not applicable’ or ‘don’t know’.
2. We suggest dropping items 26 and 27 in the interests of shortening the measure.
3. We suggest combining items 30 and 33, items 31 and 34, and items 32 and 35 into three items about the availability, scheduling and reliability of transportation ‘to and from after-school activities’ in the interests of shortening the measure.

Notes on contributors

Karen C. Gareis, PhD, is a Senior Research Associate and the Program Director of the Community, Families, and Work Program at Brandeis University's Women's Studies Research Center, where she has directed research on the relationships linking full-time, reduced-hours and nonstandard-shift work schedules to employee well-being and family life. A second stream of research investigates the effects of caregiving concerns for school-aged children or for elders on employee well-being, family life, and job-related outcomes.

Rosalind Chait Barnett, PhD, is a Senior Scientist and Executive Director of the Community, Families, and Work Program at Brandeis University's Women's Studies Research Center. Alone and with others, she has published over 100 articles, 39 chapters, and seven books on work-family and gender issues. Dr Barnett is the recipient of several national awards, including the American Personnel and Guidance Association's Annual Award for Outstanding Research, the Radcliffe College Graduate Society's Distinguished Achievement Medal and Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government's 1999 Goldsmith Research Award.

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Appendix

*Community resource fit measure*¹

Work resources

1. The way your work schedule fits with your child(ren)'s schedule(s)
2. The flexibility available at your workplace to handle emergencies
3. The flexibility available at your workplace to attend to family needs
4. Your ability to work at home if necessary
5. Your ability to bring child(ren) to work if necessary

Public transportation resources

6. The way the public transportation schedule fits with your own travel needs
7. The way the public transportation schedule fits with your child(ren)'s travel needs
8. The convenience of your own access to public transportation
9. The convenience of your child(ren)'s access to public transportation
10. The way that the available public transportation routes meet your own travel needs
11. The way that the available public transportation routes meet your child(ren)'s travel needs

School resources

12. The time(s) your child(ren)'s school(s) start(s) in the morning
13. The time(s) your child(ren)'s school(s) let(s) out in the afternoon
14. The way different schools in the community coordinate their schedules with each other
15. The scheduling of school meetings, parent conferences, and events
16. Communication between the school(s) and parents
17. Scheduling of extracurricular activities

School transportation resources

18. Where the children wait to be picked up by the school bus in the morning
19. Where the children wait to be picked up by the school bus in the afternoon
20. The reliability of school bus transportation to and from school
21. The availability and scheduling of late buses

*After-school program resources*²

22. The availability of after-school programs
23. The cost of after-school programs
24. The location of after-school programs
25. The scheduling of after-school programs
26. The availability of supervised programs for children on early release days
27. The availability of supervised programs for children during school vacations
28. Communication between after-school program providers and parents
29. The expectations of after-school program providers for parental involvement

*After-school transportation resources*³

30. The availability of transportation between school and after-school activities
31. The scheduling of transportation between school and after-school activities
32. The reliability of transportation between school and after-school activities
33. The availability of transportation between after-school activities and home
34. The scheduling of transportation between after-school activities and home
35. The reliability of transportation between after-school activities and home
36. The cost of transportation to and/or from after-school activities