

Antecedents and Correlates of Parental After-School Concern

Exploring a Newly Identified Work-Family Stressor

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Employed parents' concern about their children's welfare after school (PCAST) has been linked to psychological well-being. To explore the risk factors for PCAST, the authors estimate the effects of parent job flexibility and commuting time, child time unsupervised after school, and partner after-school availability on PCAST in a sample of 243 parents employed at a financial services company. Because parents with high PCAST are likely to be distracted at work, the authors also examine the effects of PCAST on job performance. For mothers and fathers alike, PCAST is predicted by job flexibility and by child time unsupervised after school, and PCAST is a significant predictor of job disruptions.

Keywords: *parental after-school concern; job flexibility; unsupervised time after school; commute time; job performance*

Increasing numbers of parents are in the labor force. As of 2001, more than one third (37.2%) of the labor force consisted of parents of minor children (percentage computed by the authors from data in U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002, 2003), and the majority of those children are school age, that is, in Grades K-12. There is a significant gap between the work schedules of most parents and the school schedules of their children. Consequently, employed parents have to make arrangements for their children's care during the after-school hours. However, there are not nearly enough slots available in high-quality, affordable, and accessible after-school programs to meet current and projected demands; moreover, there are significant health, academic, and social risks associated with leaving school-age children unsupervised (Heymann, 2000). As a result, parents are likely to be concerned about their

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children's welfare during the after-school hours. This concern constitutes an as yet poorly understood family demand; namely, parental concern about after-school time (PCAST).

Despite being so widespread, child care concerns of parents of school-age children have received little attention from workplaces and communities. And far fewer policy initiatives and community resources are available for school-age than for preschool-age children (Heymann, 2000). Indeed, many policy initiatives (e.g., on-site child care, paid/unpaid maternity and paternity leave) have been initiated to address the problems of working parents with preschool-age children. In addition, perhaps because of this attention in the policy realm, more community resources (e.g., infant day care, family day care) are now available to parents of preschool children than in the recent past. Yet far more working parents have school-age than preschool-age children.

To the extent that working parents are concerned about their children's welfare after school, they are apt to bring these concerns to the workplace, giving rise to job disruptions. Such disruptions may include being called at work to handle problems caused by a sick after-school care provider, a late bus, or a child who refuses to go to the after-school care provider. Even in the absence of such overt disruptions, worry about the possibility of such events may affect productivity.

Prior research suggests that employed mothers and fathers with high PCAST (formerly known as parental after-school stress, or PASS) report low psychological well-being (Barnett & Gareis, 2004). It is now important to ask about the antecedents of PCAST and its workplace correlates. In particular, (a) What are the direct and indirect effects of workplace policies (e.g., job flexibility), community resources (e.g., unsupervised after-school time, commuting time), and family characteristics (e.g., availability of the partner to care for the child after school) on PCAST? and (b) What are the direct effects of PCAST on job disruptions, and is this relationship moderated by family demographic characteristics? In this analysis, we estimate these direct and indirect relationships in a series of regression analyses with a sample of 243 employed parents who have at least one school-age child and who work at a *Fortune* 500 financial services institution. To our knowledge, no previous study focuses on the antecedents of PCAST or on the factors that directly and indirectly link PCAST to job disruptions.

Antecedents of PCAST

There is a consensus in the research literature that flexibility is key to managing parental and workplace demands (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998; Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993). Scholars agree that individuals 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; Schor, 1991). Although most researchers have focused exclusively on workplace flexibility (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Protta, 2003), Emlen and his colleagues (Emlen & Koren, 1984;

Emlen, Koren, & Schultze, 2000) proposed three primary sources of flexibility for employed parents: work, family, and caregiver. Having at least one of these sources of flexibility is necessary for the well-being and productivity of employed parents; having flexibility from all three sources is optimal (Rosenzweig, Brennan, & Ogilvie, 2002).

Although Emlen (Emlen & Koren, 1984; Emlen et al., 2000) was addressing the needs of working families with preschool children, we extend his work to school-age children. This expansion is needed, as it is widely agreed that “the family needs of employees vary with the age of their children” (Glass & Estes, 1997, p. 293). Specifically, we expand Emlen’s model by conceptualizing after-school care arrangements as one of two key community resources, the other being transportation. For example, if a variety of high-quality after-school arrangements is locally available, that increases caregiver flexibility, whereas having many transportation options increases worker flexibility. Communities that have rich transportation options provide parents with a measure of flexibility by, for example, reducing commuting time.

Within the work-family literature, it is often assumed that the presence of preschool children is especially demanding, particularly in dual-earner and single-parent families. This assumption is not surprising, given the intensive and time-consuming nature of early child care. Yet Jacobs and Gerson (2004) found that the age of a child had little affect on work-family conflict, which appeared to be related to the mere presence of children and not to their age; as they noted, “The nature of parental stresses may change as children age, but they do not necessarily diminish, as many parents of teenagers will attest” (p. 92). Despite this finding, the care issues confronted by employed parents of school-age children receive relatively little systematic attention (Heymann, 2000). The care resources for school-age children are scarcer than those for preschoolers, yet the need is huge (Heymann, 2000), especially given that far more employed parents have school-age than preschool children.

In addition, when available, the hours of care provided for preschool children typically match well with the work schedules of their parents. Not so for school-age children. Schools typically dismiss their students between 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m., whereas parents may be at work until 5:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., or later. Many parents also have long commutes home from work, adding to the time they are away from their children and perhaps, to the time those children may be unsupervised by an adult.

Yet previous research (Barnett & Gareis, 2004) indicates that not all employed parents of school-age children experience high PCAST. In the present sample, we obtained almost the full range of scores on PCAST, from parents who reported being not at all concerned to parents who reported being extremely concerned about their children’s welfare during the after-school hours. What conditions are associated with high PCAST? Certain workplace policies, community resources, and family characteristics may be important. Specifically, the extent of flexibility on the job, the amount of time the child spends unsupervised after school, the length of the parent’s

commute, and the availability of a partner to provide after-school care are likely candidates.

Correlates of PCAST

PCAST is an aspect of family demands that might reasonably be expected to disrupt job performance. Stated differently, PCAST-related job disruptions can be conceptualized as an aspect of family interfering with work. Considerably more research has been conducted on work interfering with family than on family interfering with work (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), perhaps because work interfering with family is more common than family interfering with work (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). Yet common sense and abundant anecdotal evidence suggest that family interfering with work is prevalent and has serious workplace consequences. The literature, however, does not yield consistent findings. One possible reason is that in many studies, at least within the human resource management field, family demands are not assessed directly but are inferred from such demographic variables as number of children or elderly dependents (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). In the present study, we assess family demands directly by measuring PCAST. We then estimate the relationship between PCAST and job disruptions.

There is some research on parental job disruptions associated with breakdowns in child care arrangements. For instance, in a large national sample of employed mothers, 15% reported being late, leaving early, or missing a day of work in the preceding month because of child care arrangement failures; in the same survey, 17.9% of mothers reported missing a day of work to stay home with a sick child in the preceding month (Hofferth, Brayfield, Deich, & Holcomb, 1991). In a similar manner, Fernandez (1986) found in a large sample of employees that 42% of women and 28% of men had missed work in the previous year because of personal or family problems. Fernandez also reported that although work interruptions because of family responsibilities decline as children grow older, 39% of mothers and 17% of fathers of children aged as old as 15 to 18 reported such interruptions.

Family can also interfere with work in less overt ways than missed time. Glass and Estes (1997) noted that "parental worry over sick children left alone at home, latchkey children who travel on their own from school to home to spend the afternoon alone, or the inadequacy of limited child-care choices has productivity consequences" (p. 296). In one study, 53% of respondents reported that worrying about their children had caused them to waste time and make mistakes at work (Perry, 1982). In a sample of employees of 20 *Fortune* 500 companies, 28% of men and 53% of women reported that work-family stress affected their ability to concentrate at work (Rodgers, 1992). In a sample of employed mothers, Barling and MacEwen (1991) found that work-family conflict affected concentration and alertness, which interfered with performance on a proof-reading task. Thus, parents with high PCAST may be distracted and anxious on the job, thereby affecting their productivity. Such job disruptions are costly to employers.

Covariates and Potential Moderators

Parent gender. Many studies show that women have primary responsibility for the care and nurture of their children (Biernat & Wortman, 1991; Ozer, 1995), and women are more likely than men to adapt their work lives to accommodate child-related concerns (Glass & Estes, 1997). Some theorists have claimed that women are, by nature, more nurturing and relational than men, whereas men are, by nature, less emotional and more distant than women (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). This line of reasoning suggests that employed mothers will experience higher PCAST than employed fathers. It also suggests that the relationships among PCAST and its antecedents and correlates might be moderated by parent gender.

However, other theorists have argued that men and women are not inherently different in their nurturing capabilities and that situational factors shape caring behavior more than gender does (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Barnett & Rivers, 2004). Indeed, several studies comparing mothers with fathers who have primary child care responsibilities find no gender differences in nurturing behavior (Coltrane, 1996; Risman, 1986; Risman & Park, 1988). Other studies indicate that fathers who drop their young children off at day care experience at least as high levels of separation anxiety as do mothers (Deater-Deckard, Scarr, McCartney, & Eisenberg, 1994). This line of argument would predict that fathers who are at work while their children are out of school are as likely as mothers in the same situation to report high PCAST and moreover, that there should be no moderating effect of gender on hypothesized relationships.

Child age. Although it is reasonable to expect that employed parents can experience PCAST regardless of the age of their children, it may be that parents of younger, compared to older children, report higher PCAST. One possible reason is that after-school arrangements can break down, causing chaos, especially when alternative arrangements have to be made on the spot because children are too young to be left by themselves. Thus, we control for child age in all analyses; we also test whether child age moderates the hypothesized relationships.

Child gender. Parents of school-age children of either gender might well be worried about their children's welfare during the after-school hours. Some of the risky behaviors in which they may engage are gender specific; others are not. For instance, parents might worry more about girls' safety but trust unsupervised boys less. To take such gender-specific differences into account, we control for child gender; we also test whether child gender moderates the hypothesized relationships.

In sum, in this sample of 243 employees of a large financial services corporation, we test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Job flexibility, the amount of time the child spends unsupervised after school, the length of the commute home, and partner availability after school will be significant predictors of PCAST.

Hypothesis 1b: The antecedents listed above may interact with each other in predicting PCAST (e.g., the effect of job flexibility on PCAST may be moderated by the length of the commute home).

Hypothesis 2: PCAST will be a significant predictor of job disruptions.

We also test for the main effect of parent gender and the moderating effects of parent gender, child age, and child gender on Hypotheses 1a and 2. All analyses are conducted controlling for parent work hours, negative affectivity, and household income.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Participants were all employed by a leading global financial services corporation. Access was limited to members of the corporation's parenting group. To be eligible, parents had to have at least one school-age child (i.e., in Grades K-12). Survey packets were mailed to parents in six states: Arizona, Delaware, Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Texas. Packets included a brief (15-minute) self-administered survey, a postage-paid return envelope, and a postage-paid postcard to be mailed back separately to enter a drawing for one of five US\$100 American Express gift certificates.

We mailed surveys to 1,059 members of the parenting group and received complete, usable surveys from 243 eligible parents by our requested deadline, for a response rate of 22.9%. However, this response rate is artificially depressed to an unknown degree by the fact that not all of the parents who received a study packet were eligible to participate. Some members of the parenting group had children who were younger or older than school age.

Of the 243 participants, most (84.3%) were mothers; this percentage is similar to the percentage of mothers in the parenting group as a whole (81.5%). Participants worked from 20 to 86 hours per week ($M = 44.2$, $SD = 8.5$) and had worked in their current jobs from 1 to 36 years ($M = 7.4$, $SD = 6.6$). Participants worked at a wide range of jobs at all occupational levels from administrative assistants and clerks to project managers and senior vice presidents.

Participant ages ranged from 25 to 59 ($M = 39.2$, $SD = 6.3$). Educational attainment ranged from a high school diploma to a graduate degree; the majority (62.4%) had some college or a bachelor's degree, with the median being a bachelor's degree. The median household income of participants fell into the range from US\$90,000 to US\$104,999. Three quarters of the parents were married (70.0%) or living with a partner (4.9%). Of the parents' spouses and partners, 91.2% were also employed, working between 12 and 100 hours per week ($M = 46.4$, $SD = 11.6$).

Parents who had more than one school-age child answered the questions about after-school arrangements with regard to one selected target child; those parents were instructed to choose the child whose name comes first alphabetically as the

target child. As expected with a random selection method, the target children were equally split between boys (49.8%) and girls (50.2%), with ages ranging from 4 to 18 ($M = 9.2$, $SD = 3.5$), indicating that there did not seem to be any systematic bias associated with choosing the target child alphabetically. Participants had from one to five children at home, with an average of two children; most of the participants (78.9%) had one or two children.

Measures

PCAST. PCAST was assessed using a 10-item measure developed for this project. Participants used a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*) to indicate their level of concern about their target child's after-school arrangements in a variety of domains including safety, travel, productive use of time, and reliability; the overall score is the mean response to all items answered. Items were developed through a series of focus groups with employees of a Boston-area utility company. Participants varied in gender, exempt status, and ages of their school-age children. All participants were asked to think about their children's own after-school care arrangements and share what was and was not working for them; they also completed a draft measure and informed us of anything missing, needing clarification, or that should be dropped. On the basis of their responses, we added new items and reworded old items. Internal consistency of the revised 10-item measure was very good, with a Cronbach's alpha of .87 for the present sample.

Job flexibility. Job flexibility was assessed using a 3-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.

Child's time spent unsupervised after school. Parents were asked how many hours per week their target child spends in each of a number of different after-school arrangements. We summed parents' reports of the number of hours the child spends alone or with peers and the number of hours the child spends watching younger siblings to create an overall measure of the amount of time the child spends unsupervised by an adult after school.

Length of the commute home. Parents were asked how many minutes, on average, it takes them to get home from work, including all of the stops that they make on a typical workday.

Job disruptions. Disruptions were assessed using a measure developed for this project. Respondents answered 12 questions about job disruptions in the areas of

missed work (e.g., unplanned missed days), distractions on the job (e.g., being distracted at work by nonwork issues), not meeting expectations (e.g., missing deadlines), and poor quality of work (e.g., made errors at work). Items for this measure were developed during the same focus groups and in the same way as the items for the PCAST measure. Based on focus group responses, we modified a preliminary measure that had consisted of 3 items. Internal consistency of the revised 12-item measure was very good, with a Cronbach's alpha of .82 for the present sample.

Demographics. Parent gender and target child gender were coded as dichotomous variables (1 = male, 2 = female). Target child age is self-explanatory. Work hours were assessed by asking respondents how many hours they work per week on average, including overtime. Household income was assessed by asking respondents to indicate their yearly household income from all sources before taxes using the following categories (in U.S. dollars): Less than \$30,000; \$30,000 to \$44,999; \$45,000 to \$59,999; \$60,000 to \$74,999; \$75,000 to \$89,999; \$90,000 to \$104,999; \$105,000 to \$124,999; and \$125,000 or more.

Negative affectivity. Affect was assessed with the 10-item Trait Anxiety Scale (Spielberger, 1983), on which respondents indicated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*) how characteristic the traits were of them. Internal consistency is excellent, with a Cronbach's alpha of .92 for the present sample.

Partner after-school availability. Partner availability was coded as a dichotomous variable. For those who were married or had a live-in partner, partner availability after school (0 = no, 1 = yes) was determined by whether the partner spent any time watching the target child after school each week. For those without spouses or live-in partners, partner availability after school was scored as 0. (We did not score this variable continuously because the distribution was extremely skewed, with 57.7% of partnered parents reporting that their partners spent no time watching the target child after school and the rest reporting partners spending anywhere between 1 and 50 hours per week watching the target child after school.)

Results

Descriptive Results

On average, parents were "somewhat" concerned about the target child's after-school arrangements, with an average score of 1.72 ($SD = 0.61$) on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all concerned*) to 4 (*extremely concerned*). The obtained range of 1.00 to 3.80 stops just short of the maximum possible score, indicating that at least some

Table 1
Intercorrelations Among Measures

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Parental after-school concern	—									
2. Job flexibility	-.26***	—								
3. Child time unsupervised	.27***	.03	—							
4. Length of commute home	.13*	-.23**	-.01	—						
5. Job disruptions	.28***	-.12†	.02	.16*	—					
6. Parent gender	.11	-.12†	-.08	.14*	.22**	—				
7. Work hours	-.01	.02	.04	.06	-.05	-.18***	—			
8. Negative affectivity	.32***	-.22**	.05	.07	0.51***	.24***	-.18**	—		
9. Child age	.09	.09	0.47***	-.090	-.18**	-.19**	.11	-.05	—	
10. Partner availability	-.01	-.01	-.14*	.02	.01	-.13*	.17**	-.01	-.02	—
11. Household income	-.20**	-.29***	-.08	.01	-.06	-.10	.09	-.14*	-.04	.07

Note: $N = 243$. For parent and target child gender, 1 = male, 2 = female. For partner availability, 1 = partner spends at least some time watching target child after school, 0 = partner does not spend any time watching target child after school or respondent is unpartnered.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. † $p < .10$.

parents in the present sample are experiencing quite a bit of concern about their target child's after-school arrangements.

One third of the entire sample (33.3%) had a partner who spends at least part of the after-school hours with the target child, ranging from 1 to 50 hours per week ($Mdn = 7.0$, $SD = 8.5$), but half of the employed parents whose partners are available after school spend only 7 or fewer hours per week with the target child, leaving parents to make other arrangements for the majority of the after-school hours. It is not surprising that partner availability may be linked to the employed parent's gender: 47.4% of the 38 men in the sample have partners who are available during the after-school hours as compared to only 30.9% of the 141 women in the sample.

Individual job flexibility items were rated on different response scales; therefore, participants' responses to each item were converted to standard or z scores and then averaged. Thus, overall job flexibility scores can be interpreted in terms of standard deviations around a mean of 0. Obtained scores had a wide range, from -1.80 to 1.14 ($M = -0.01$, $SD = 0.74$). Child's time spent unsupervised averaged between 0 and 30 hours per week ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 5.21$), but the majority of the target children (78.5%) spent no time unsupervised after school. It is not surprising that as shown in Table 1, older children were more likely to spend more time unsupervised after school ($r = .47$, $p < .001$). Length of parents' commute home averaged between 1 minute and 4 hours, with a median of close to 1 hour ($Mdn = 55$ minutes, $SD = 34$ minutes). As with job

Table 2
Antecedents of Parental After-School Concern

Variable	Parental After-School Concern		
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Job flexibility	-.143***	-.174	.054
Child time unsupervised	.031***	.263	.008
Length of commute home	.001	.069	.001
Partner availability	.010	.008	.079
Parent gender	.063	.039	.104
Work hours	.003	.042	.004
Negative affectivity	.223***	.233	.061
Child gender	-.041	-.034	.073
Child age	-.001	-.003	.012
Household income	-.030†	-.117	.016
Model <i>R</i> ²		.24	
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²		.20	

Note: *N* = 243. For parent and target child gender, 1 = male, 2 = female. For partner availability, 1 = partner spends at least some time watching target child after school, 0 = partner does not spend any time watching target child after school or respondent is unpartnered.

****p* < .001. †*p* < .10.

flexibility, because individual job disruption items were rated on different response scales, participants' responses were converted to *z* scores and averaged. Obtained scores had a wide range, from -1.09 to 2.05.

With respect to the bivariate correlations in Table 1, PCAST was not significantly correlated with partner availability after school ($r = -.01, p = .92$) but was significantly correlated with job flexibility ($r = -.26, p < .001$), length of commute home ($r = .13, p < .05$), and child's time unsupervised ($r = .27, p < .001$). In addition, PCAST was significantly correlated with household income ($r = -.20, p < .01$), negative affectivity ($r = .32, p < .001$), and job disruptions ($r = .28, p < .001$).

Hypothesis Testing

Antecedents of PCAST. To test Hypothesis 1a, we first estimated a simultaneous regression model (see Table 2) using job flexibility, child's time spent unsupervised, length of commute home, and partner availability after school to predict PCAST. Covariates were parent gender, work hours, negative affectivity, child gender and age, and household income.

As shown in Table 2, as predicted, job flexibility and child's unsupervised time were significant predictors of PCAST: Specifically, parents with greater job flexibility and parents whose children spent less time unsupervised reported lower PCAST.

Table 3
Interactions Between Pairs of Antecedents in Predicting
Parental After-School Concern

Variable	Parental After-School Concern		
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Job flexibility	-.134*	-.162	.054
Child time unsupervised	.033***	.284	.009
Length of commute home	.004**	.201	.001
Partner availability	.011	.009	.079
Parent gender	.067	.041	.102
Work hours	.004	.062	.004
Negative affectivity	.215***	.224	.060
Child gender	-.036	-.029	.072
Child age	.003	.017	.012
Household income	-.036*	-.139	.016
Job Flexibility \times Child Time Unsupervised	.011	.067	.011
Job Flexibility \times Commute Home	.004**	.196	.001
Job Flexibility \times Partner Availability	.038	.021	.110
Child Time Unsupervised \times Commute Home	.001*	.165	.000
Child Time Unsupervised \times Partner Availability	.024	.080	.020
Commute Home \times Partner Availability	-.003	-.091	.002
Model R^2		.29	
Adjusted R^2		.24	

Note: $N = 243$. For parent and target child gender, 1 = male, 2 = female. For partner availability, 1 = partner spends at least some time watching target child after school, 0 = partner does not spend any time watching target child after school or respondent is unpartnered.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

However, neither length of commute home nor partner availability after school significantly predicted PCAST.

To test Hypothesis 1b, that the four antecedents listed above might interact with each other in predicting PCAST, we constructed six interaction terms representing each possible combination of the four antecedents and added them to the main-effects model described above. The addition of the six interaction terms resulted in a significant addition to R^2 over and above that associated with the main-effects model, $F_{\text{change}}(6, 212) = 2.91$, $p = .01$. As shown in Table 3, two of the interactions were significant. First, job flexibility interacted with commuting time. Specifically, as shown in Figure 1, the link between job flexibility and lower PCAST is most pronounced when the employed parent has a shorter commute home. Second, child's time unsupervised after school also interacted with commuting time. Specifically, as shown in Figure 2, the link between child's unsupervised time after school and higher PCAST is most pronounced when the employed parent has a longer commute home.

Figure 1
Significant Moderating Effect of Commuting Time
on the Relationship Between Job Flexibility
and Parental After-School Concern



Figure 2
Significant Moderating Effect of Commuting Time
on the Relationship Between Child's Time Unsupervised
and Parental After-School Concern

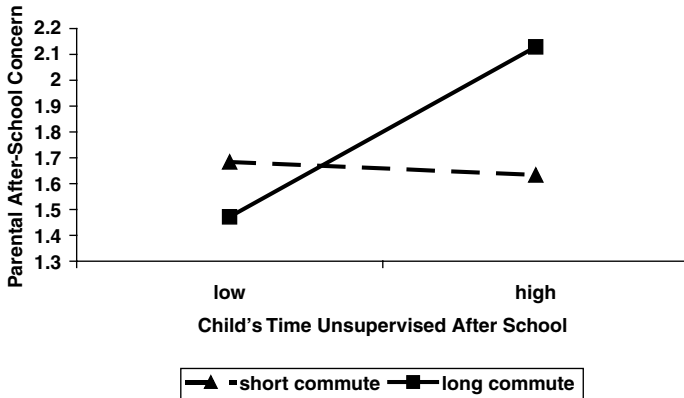


Table 4
Relationship Between Parental After-School Concern
and Job Disruptions

Variable	Job Disruptions		
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Parental after-school concern	.129*	.139	.056
Parent gender	.132	.139	.056
Work hours	.004	.062	.004
Negative affectivity	.394***	.442	.055
Child gender	-.032	-.029	.063
Child age	-.028	-.171	.009
Partner availability	.029	.025	.068
Household income	.007	.030	.014
Model R^2		.31	
Adjusted R^2		.28	

Note: $N = 243$. For parent and target child gender, 1 = male, 2 = female. For partner availability, 1 = partner spends at least some time watching target child after school, 0 = partner does not spend any time watching target child after school or respondent is unpartnered.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Parent gender was not significantly associated with PCAST, and parent gender did not moderate the relationships between PCAST and job flexibility, child's time spent unsupervised, length of commute home, or partner availability after school. Child gender or child age did not moderate any of these relationships either.

Correlates of PCAST. Hypothesis 2 states that those parents who have greater concerns about their children's after-school arrangements would report significantly more job disruptions than their counterparts who reported fewer concerns. To test this hypothesis, we estimated a simultaneous regression model using PCAST to predict job disruptions, with covariates of parent gender, work hours, and negative affectivity; child gender and age; partner after-school availability; and household income. The hypothesis was supported. As shown in Table 4, the three variables that were significantly associated with job disruptions are higher PCAST, a younger child, and higher negative affectivity.

It is interesting that neither household income nor parent gender were significant predictors of job disruptions when the other covariates were included in the model. Nor did parent gender act as a moderator, indicating that the relationship between PCAST and job disruptions is equally strong for men and for women. Child gender or child age did not act as moderators either.

Discussion

The main findings of this study of 243 employees who had at least one school-age child and who were employed at a major global financial services company were that PCAST was predicted by lack of flexibility on the job and by child's time spent unsupervised after school. Job flexibility and commuting time interacted in predicting PCAST. Parents who had both high job flexibility and short commutes had strikingly low levels of PCAST. Commuting time also moderated the relationship between child's unsupervised time and PCAST. There was a double whammy for parents who had both a long commute and a child who spent more time unsupervised after school; these parents had strikingly high levels of PCAST. Finally, high levels of PCAST were associated with significantly higher levels of disruptions on the job.

Overall, the findings lend support to Emlen's theory (Emlen & Koren, 1984; Emlen et al., 2000). Parents who had some safety valves (e.g., job flexibility or a supervised after-school arrangement) reported lower levels of PCAST than parents who were not so advantaged. However, although commuting time did figure in two significant interaction effects, we did not find the hypothesized main effect of commuting time on PCAST. Given the negative correlation between job flexibility and commuting time—that is, at least in our sample, the parents who had more flexible jobs also had significantly shorter commutes—it is possible that the effects of job flexibility are overwhelming the effects of commuting time. This interpretation is supported by the fact that when job flexibility is removed from the model, commuting time shows a trend to predict higher PCAST, as expected. Thus, it is conceivable that in a different sample in which job flexibility and commuting time are independent, we might find a main effect of commuting time.

However, the lack of significance in the relationship between partner availability and PCAST was unexpected. Conceivably, this result is idiosyncratic to this sample. Recall that the distribution on this variable was extremely skewed, with 57.7% of partnered parents reporting that their partners spent no time watching the target child after school and the rest reporting partners spending anywhere between 1 and 50 hours per week watching the target child after school. Perhaps in another sample, one in which there was a more normal distribution on this variable, the results would be different.

Our finding that parent's gender was unrelated to PCAST is consistent with recent research showing that mothers and fathers do not differ significantly in the quality of their relationships with their children (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Barnett & Rivers, 2004). Specifically, problems with their relationships with their children affect their distress levels equally (Barnett, Brennan, & Marshall, 1994), and there is no difference in the magnitude of the association between the quality of their relationships with their children and their own psychological distress (Barnett et al., 1994). As for child age, although it was not statistically significant, there was a trend for child age and

unsupervised time to interact in predicting PCAST. However, we had relatively low power to detect such an effect largely because in our sample population, relatively few younger children spent any time unsupervised after school.

Our finding of a main effect of job flexibility on concern suggests that employers can ease PCAST by initiating family-friendly flexibility policies and practices. Jacobs and Gerson (2004) noted that although 86% of the workforce can change their work hours "as needed," far fewer can choose their own hours (29%) or change them on a daily basis (40%). Nor is access to flexibility evenly distributed: "At least among professional and managerial workers, those most likely to need flexible scheduling have a more difficult time getting it" (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004, p. 106).

Also, as others have noted, simply demonstrating personal benefit is insufficient to convince employers to adopt flexibility. A solid business justification has to be made as well (Emlen et al., 2000). Our finding that PCAST is related to job disruptions demonstrates such a business justification. PCAST is associated with job disruptions that are both relatively hard to quantify (e.g., level of distraction at work) and those that are comparatively easy to quantify (e.g., missed days of work). It is striking that on average, not including vacation days, parents who were in the top quartile on PCAST missed 8 days of work per year compared to 3 days per year missed by parents in the bottom quartile on PCAST. Thus, the cost to employers of parental concerns about their children's welfare during the after-school hours has measurable and substantial bottom-line implications. With respect to employers, these extra missed days are typically unplanned and, therefore, highly disruptive to the smooth operation of the workplace. When these costs are added to the more difficult to quantify, but real, costs associated with other negative performance indicators, the total cost to employers of PCAST is considerable. These findings support the conclusion reached by Kossek and Ozeki (1999) that family interfering with work has strong negative relationships to job performance and warrants more research attention than it has received so far.

It is not surprising that parents of younger, compared to older, children reported more frequent job disruptions. This finding suggests that if after-school arrangements fall through for younger children, a not uncommon occurrence (Heymann, 2000), parents must make alternate arrangements, whereas an older child could be directed to go to a neighbor's or stay home alone. It is interesting that gender of child was unrelated to job disruptions. Thus, girls and boys are equally likely (or equally unlikely) to disrupt their parents' workday. Although there was a main effect of target child age on job disruptions, the relationship between PCAST and job disruptions did not vary by the target child's age or gender.

This study, like other studies, has its limitations. Specifically, all parents were employed by one employer in one business sector with one set of corporate policies. Future research needs to determine how generalizable these findings are. Also, we studied PCAST only in relation to the mismatch between work and school schedules.

We did not address the scheduling problems that working parents confront during school vacations and holidays, which as every working parent knows, present a formidable challenge. In addition, future research needs to take into account not only the number of hours employees work but also the distribution of those hours. For example, increasing numbers of employees are working nonstandard shifts (Presser, 2004). It is reasonable to expect that PCAST will be especially high among evening shift workers, who are away from home from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., which covers the entire after-school period.

These limitations notwithstanding, the results suggest that employers can identify parents at high risk for PCAST and then target specific flexibility policies that will reduce their PCAST and enhance their health and productivity. Our findings also underscore the importance of community resources such as transportation options that reduce the time employed parents spend commuting and the availability of affordable, high-quality, adult-supervised after-school arrangements.

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