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RESOURCES OR REWARDS?[1]

THE DISTRIBUTION OF WORK-FAMILY POLICIES

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This research brief examines the distribution and use of work-family policies and other scholarly resources among academics. As the composition of the work force changed in the mid-twentieth century and married women increased their labor force participation rates, government and private work-family policies slowly emerged as resources or rewards designed to help employees balance work and family activities. Institutions of higher education introduced work-family policies in response to two interacting factors—the changing sex composition of faculty and a broad-based movement promoting these policies.

Much is known about the availability of work-family policies in higher education (Hollenshead et al. 2005; Sullivan, Hollenshead, and Smith 2003). In contrast, little is known about the distribution and use of work-family policies at academic institutions, and even less is known about the distribution and use of work-family policies compared to other scholarly resources. This brief begins to fill that gap by focusing on mothers employed as sociology faculty. It asks whether those academic mothers who qualify on the basis of need, regardless of scholarly prestige and productivity, use work-family policies or whether policies are distributed to and used by an elite group of rising stars.

BACKGROUND

The sex composition of U.S. faculty has been shifting since the 1970s as all academic disciplines continue to feminize, and, more recently, as a large cohort of male faculty hired in the 1960s retires. By 2003, almost 67 percent of psychology PhDs and 59 percent of sociology PhDs were earned by women. Almost half of the PhDs in the life sciences were awarded to women (National Science Foundation 2004). Even the physical sciences, disciplines with the lowest percentage of women PhDs, increased their output of women doctorates by five times to 25 percent since the mid 1960s. Despite the increasing share of women PhDs, a leaky pipeline results in relatively few women reaching the top ranks of the professorate (Mason and Goulden 2002, 2004a, b).

[1] An earlier version of this work appeared in *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* (see Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2005).

"As long as academic women continue to want babies, and academic men have a higher rate of working wives than they did in the 1960s, the conflict between the need for scholarly productivity and the need for family time will continue."

Researchers suggest that expectations of long hours and high productivity, rather than overt gender discrimination, is the reason for many women's difficulty in climbing the academic ladder and their loss to the academic profession (Hargens and Long 2002; Jacobs and Winslow 2004; Mason and Goulden 2004a and b). As long as academic women continue to want babies, and academic men have a higher rate of working wives than they did in the 1960s, the conflict between the need for scholarly productivity and the need for family time will continue. To ameliorate this situation, a growing social movement, composed of foundation officers, organizations of women in higher education, college personnel organizations, some university administrators, and faculty unions, is engaged in increasing the availability of work-family policies to academics (for example, see Curtis 2004; American Psychological Association (APA) 2004; Christensen 2003; College and University Work Family Association (CUWFA) 2005; National Education Association (NEA) 2006; O'Malley 2004). Pressure from this movement has expanded the range of institutions of higher education that have begun to offer at least minimal work-family policy options.

The most widely available policy to reduce work-family conflict is the federally mandated Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). This law requires that employers in firms with more than 50 full-time employees allow those who have been on staff for at least one year to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave for childbirth, adoption, a seriously ill child or other family member and then return to their own or a similar position. Institutions of higher education are covered by this mandate. Movement activists have encouraged academic administrators to design and implement additional work-family policies. These include paid family leave, tenure clock breaks, modified teaching loads, part-time tenure track positions, transitional support programs, and university sponsored child care to faculty who meet the conditions for their use.

In academia, work-family policies are designed to keep careers on track while faculty parents of both sexes make time for new or seriously ill family members. These policies differ from previous "special treatment" maternity policies that were fixed firmly in notions of separate spheres with women as housewives and men as breadwinners (Vogel 1993), because they are universal rather than gendered. They are designed to permit interruptions in academic activities, reduce hours of work, or provide faculty with more control over time use for specified periods.

THE TWO ARGUMENTS FOR WORK-FAMILY POLICY

Movement activists make two main arguments for increasing the availability of work-family policies. The first is a *universal or needs-based argument* and the second is a recruitment of the *best and the brightest* argument.

Needs-Based Argument

The universal or needs-based argument emphasizes that policies should cover all faculty who have new babies (or other critical family situations), regardless of scholarly productivity or other characteristics, because the long work days necessary for tenure

occur simultaneously with periods of family formation and childbirth. Proponents of needs-based arguments, such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), claim that academic parents, especially mothers, cannot do it all within constrained time periods (Curtis 2004). According to this view, work-family policies will increase the likelihood of productive and satisfying careers in institutions that remain tacitly organized on the outmoded model of male breadwinners with stay-at-home wives.

The Recruitment Argument

The recruitment of the best and the brightest or of future stars appears to be a more prevalent argument. A recent report by the American Council of Education (ACE), signed by the leaders of 10 major institutions of higher education, encourages other leaders to develop policies that pay attention to life cycle needs so as to "attract and retain those who are most talented in order to maintain excellence in teaching and in cutting edge research." (2005:3). In order to attract and retain "exceptionally talented faculty" who will carry the university into the future, the administration at the University of California system introduced a series of policies and programs to assist faculty in achieving satisfying and productive work and family lives (Mason et al. 2005). Our focus is whether either of these arguments reflects current usage in the academy.

WHAT THE LITERATURE SUGGESTS

Most studies focus on faculty members' fear of using work-family policies rather than the pattern of dissemination or use of these policies. According to these studies, relatively few eligible faculty members report using these policies because they are afraid that their academic reputation will suffer as a result of a professional culture biased against caregivers (Colbeck and Drago 2005; Drago and Colbeck 2003; Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004). For example, a respondent to a University of California survey claimed that there was really no such thing as "slowing down" the tenure clock because "Colleagues will always look at the number of papers published per year" (Mason et al. 2005:9). This research, however, has not paid sufficient attention to how academic organizations distribute these policies by comparing the characteristics of those who do use these policies with those who do not, especially their needs and productivity.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The research presented in this brief goes beyond the fear factor to study a cohort of faculty parents who receive or use work-family policies compared to those parents who do not. Along with the fear factor, faculty may not be aware that they have access to work-family policies, and administrators may not inform faculty about their availability or approve their use. (As we will see no more than 70 percent of faculty think that have access to at least one policy, when, in fact 100 percent should have access to the federally mandated Family and Medical Leave Act.) The gatekeeper to these policies (often the department chair) may or may not regard work-family policies as entitlements regardless of the institution's official stance or the law.

In theory, policy distribution and policy use should be measured separately, but the distinction may not be clear in reality because there are always gatekeepers who restrict or encourage use. Faculty members are not free to use these policies without the knowledge and approval of their chairs and often their deans or human resources departments as well.[2]

[2] We define need as giving birth to or adopting children, caring for sick children or other close family members. Productivity is traditionally measured by publications that are the most important grounds on which academics are judged and rewarded. Departments care about the publications of their faculty because faculty publication rates are also a key indicator of organizational reputation and prestige.

CHART 1

Some Goals of the 1996/1997 Cohort of PhDs in Sociology, 1998

What Women Want…

"I want to publish 1–2 books, 4–5 articles and win a teaching award."

"I would like to publish my work and continue developing my teaching and research skills."

"Get a job, continue doing research, publish more articles."

"Tenure. Publish a book."

"To have a permenent faculty position and to publish sociological works."

…at least what newly minted women sociology PhDs said they wanted in 1998.

The Survey

In 1998 the American Sociological Association (ASA) began a longitudinal study of a cohort of all sociology PhDs who obtained their degrees in the U.S. between June 1996 and August 1997. From the beginning, the study focused on the potentially contradictory efforts of developing successful careers and forming families. Brief follow-up surveys were conducted in 1999 and 2001 to obtain information on job changes, new marriages, and children. During 2003, six years past their PhDs, we conducted an on-line survey asking the cohort members a battery of questions about work-family policies at their institutions, available resources, and strategies to balance work and family. The findings presented here reflect the responses of cohort members employed in the academy.

Women in the Cohort

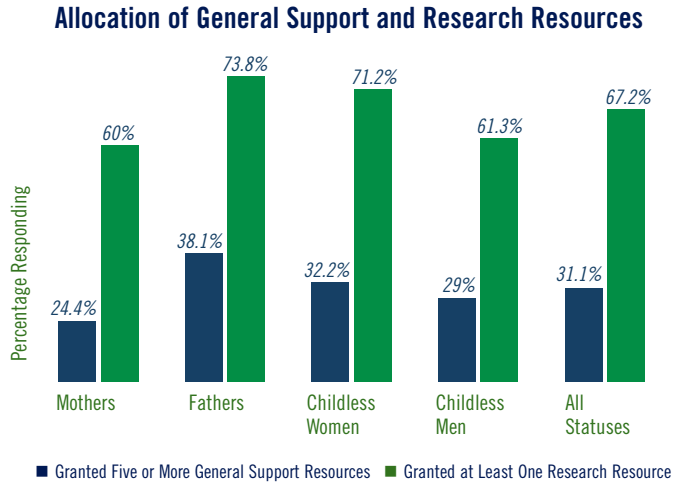
In 1998 these newly minted PhDs reflected on what they wanted to accomplish during the next five years of their professional careers. Both men and women saw research, publishing, and obtaining tenure as their primary goals (Chart 1). Few of them used the space available on the survey form to discuss the role they expected children and families to play in their lives. This finding was somewhat surprising, because the women were, on average, 38 years old and well into their childbearing years. Perhaps this lack of focus on children and families was because, as they began their careers, only about 1 in 10 women in the cohort reported that children would hinder their career advancement. Six years later (in 2003), fewer than half (43 percent) of these women, now in their early forties, were mothers, and about 30 percent said that they would have fewer children than they wanted during their childbearing years.[3] In contrast, by 2003 almost 60 percent of the men in the cohort were fathers with children at home. Perhaps these academic women are limiting their families because they or their colleagues experienced bias or differential treatment when caregiving responsibilities become known (Colbeck and Drago 2005; Drago and Colbeck 2003).

Distribution of General Support and Research Resources and Rewards

One measure of possible caregiver bias is the institutional resources distributed to mothers, as compared to other groups. If mothers obtain fewer resources, other factors being equal, then institutions of higher education are treating them differently. As was the case for this cohort while in graduate school, six years after they were awarded their PhDs, mothers

[3] For the purposes of this study, mothers are defined as women with children living with them at least half the time. This means that women with only partial custody of their own children or significant custody of their partner's child are considered mothers.

FIGURE 1



Source: ASA, Research and Development Department, PhD+6 Follow-Up Survey, January 2004.

report receiving fewer institutional resources than did fathers, childless women, and childless men in the cohort. These resources are of two types.[4] The first are general support resources that include a broad array of resources such as access to teaching assistants, graders, laptop computers, courses off, private offices, and travel money. The second are research resources and are more specific, including research assistants and help in publishing from senior faculty.

Figure 1 shows that about one quarter of mothers have five or more general support resources compared to 38 percent of fathers. About 60 percent of mothers report having research resources compared to 74 percent of fathers. A logistic regression analysis reveals that type of institution is the only factor significantly related to resources. Those cohort members employed in research and doctoral institutions are significantly more likely to have these resources than those employed in master's comprehensive or baccalaureate-only institutions. Mothers are less likely to receive resources because they are less likely to be employed in research and doctoral universities. There is some qualitative evidence from our study that mothers choose baccalaureate-only institutions because they believe that small schools are more family-friendly (see Spalter-Roth, Kennelly, and Erskine 2004).

Work-Family Policy Use

In contrast to research and support resources, the availability of work-family policies is not significantly different for mothers and fathers. In fact, there are no significant differences in the percentage of mothers, fathers, childless men, or childless women in the cohort who report access to at least one work-family policy. This is because the most widely available policy, unpaid family and medical leave, is federally mandated and should be available to all, though apparently not all cohort members know this. Unlike other resource policies, however, mothers are significantly more likely to use work-family policies than are fathers (see Figure 2). Yet only 40 percent of those women who have children report using at least one work-family policy, with FMLA reported as the most frequently used. Overall, about 20 percent of the cohort used these policies, although more than three times this proportion had access to at least one.

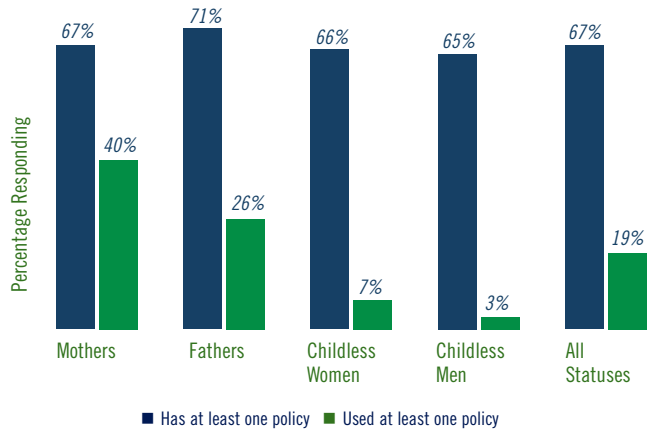
Among the 40 percent of mothers who do use at least one policy, what factors are related to usage? To answer this question we compared mothers who used at least one policy with those who did not. We were particularly interested in whether a faculty mother's needs, measured by the birth of a child after assuming a faculty position, were significantly related to policy use.

[4] These two types were developed through the use of factor analysis.

The logistic regression model charted in Figure 3 shows the factors that significantly increased the odds of a mother using at least one work-family policy, relative to one another. These factors add to 100 percent. The figure also shows conspicuous absences that we will address first.

FIGURE 2

Availability and Use at Least One Work-Family Policy by 1996/1997 Cohort of PhD Mothers, as of 2003



Source: ASA, Research and Development Department, PhD+6 Follow-Up Survey, January 2004.

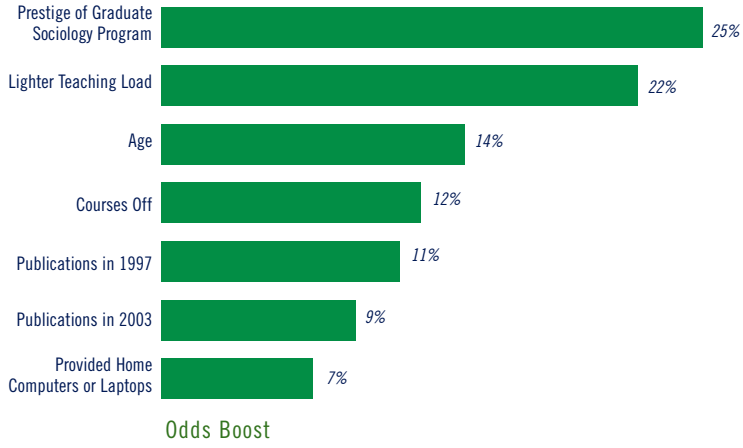
Absent Factors

The following factors have no significant relationship to use of work-family policy.

Need. If policies are granted and used on the basis of need, then having had at least one child after completing a PhD program and becoming a faculty member should boost the odds of using at least one work-family policy significantly. It did not. Therefore Figure 3 does not include having a child post PhD as a boost factor because it is not related to policy usage when other factors are taken into account. This suggests that work-family policies are not treated as needs-based resources to which academic mothers are entitled.

FIGURE 3

Factors Related to Policy Use by 1996/1997 Cohort of PhD Mothers, 2003



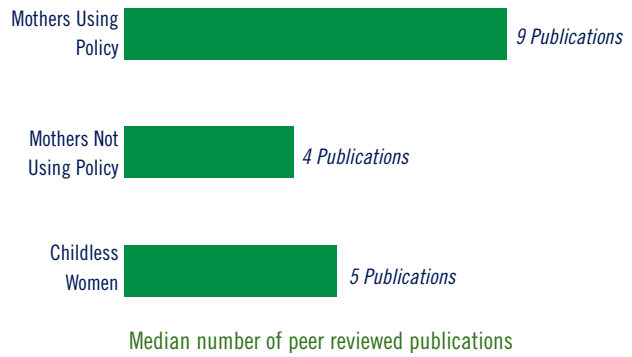
Source: ASA, Research and Development Department, PhD+6 Follow-Up Survey, January 2004.

Type of Institution. Recall that the distribution of research and support resources is significantly related to type of employing institution. This is not the case in the use of work-family policies. There is no significant relationship between policy usage and institutional type. Fewer than 60 percent of mothers at research and doctoral schools used least one work-family policy compared to more than 50 percent of mothers at baccalaureate-only schools.

Tenure Status. Mothers who use at least one work-family policy, including time off for childbirth, post-

FIGURE 4

Peer Reviewed Publications of PhD Mothers Using Work-Family Policies, as of 2003



Source: ASA, Research and Development Department, PhD+6 Follow-Up Survey, January 2004.

poning tenure, and modified duties, are less likely to have tenure status six years after they received their PhD than are mothers who did not use at least one work-family policy and childless women (13 percent, 43 percent and 53 percent, respectively). This is because they use policies that delay tenure.

Odds Boosters

The following factors boost the odds of using at least one work-family policy.

Lighter Course Loads. Time is a major factor in scholarly productivity. Figure 3 shows that relative to the other factors, lower course loads (for example, teaching two rather than three courses per semester) and being granted at least one course off (aside from work-family policies) significantly boost the odds of using work-family policies (by 22 percent and 12 percent, respectively), relative to other factors Mothers who teach more per semester—those with higher course loads (an average of three courses per semester) and without any courses off—are less likely to use work-family policies in spite of having had at least one child since becoming a faculty member. Mothers who teach fewer courses are more likely to publish more peer-reviewed articles than mothers who do not use at least one work-family policy.

There is a cause and effect problem here. Which comes first: the policy use or the publications? It is plausible to think that mothers who are perceived as highly productive may be rewarded with more courses off to produce additional scholarly publications on the basis of their perceived merit. By contrast, faculty mothers who teach more courses may be less likely to be rewarded with courses off because they are perceived as less productive. Alternatively, they may be too anxious about their status to request policies.

Productivity and Prestige. Publications in peer-reviewed journals are often used as a proxy measure for scientific contributions and hence for faculty members' value to their departments (Long and Fox 1995). Academic administrators may encourage the use of work-family policies by academic mothers who are perceived to be productive scholars or rising stars.

Figure 3 shows that having a higher number of peer-reviewed publications in the six years since obtaining one's PhD boosts the odds that mothers use at least one work-family policy by nine percent, relative to the other factors. Mothers who use at least one work-family policy are the highest average producers of peer-reviewed publications among the women faculty, with a median of nine articles compared to four for non-policy using mothers and five for childless women (see Figure 4).

Once again, there is a cause and effect problem. Which came first: the policy use or the publications?

"Mothers who use at least one work-family policy have higher numbers of peer-reviewed publications than other groups in this cohort…"

By giving mothers more control over their time, did policy use increase their publication rate, or did the publication of articles encourage the allocation and use of work-family policies? To shed light on this problem we examine measures from the period prior to these mothers becoming faculty members.

The first measure is the number of peer-reviewed publications mothers completed while in graduate school. Previous research shows that early publishers are likely to continue being productive scholars (Long, Allison, and McGinnis 1993). The second measure is the prestige of the mother's PhD-granting department. This status measure also has long-term effects on scholarly careers. We find that both these measures significantly boost the odds of using at least one work-family policy. Graduate department prestige provides the strongest boost to the odds that a mother uses at least one work-family policy. This factor alone is responsible for one-quarter of the total odds boost, when the other factors are taken into account. Peer-reviewed publications written in graduate school boost the odds of policy use by 11 percent (Figure 3).

These findings suggest that faculty mothers who attended high-prestige graduate schools and who published while in graduate school are probably considered good candidates for future accomplishments, despite pregnancy or childbirth. As a result they may be encouraged to use work-family policies to ensure their continued success. Aware of this reward system, faculty mothers may try to adapt to this form of policy distribution. Some mothers that we interviewed in the course of this study reported deliberately developing a strategy of publishing as much as possible before embarking on maternity in order to increase their chair's interest in their continued success.

The only other resource that is significantly related to the use of at least one work-family policy family is access to laptops and home computers.

A Note on Policy-Using Fathers

While use of work-family policies are related to academic mothers' scholarly productivity, this does not appear to be the case for the small group of academic fathers in the PhD cohort who used at least one work-family policy. Unlike policy-using mothers, policy-using fathers did not appear to be potential rising stars. They did not have significantly more publications during or after graduate school or attend higher-prestige graduate departments than non-policy-using fathers. Their post-PhD publication rates were lower than policy-using mothers. More research is needed to understand how academic fathers and administrative gatekeepers use work-family policies as rewards or resources for this group.

CONCLUSIONS

The increasing availability of work-family policies in institutions of higher education results from the changing sex composition of faculty and the efforts of a social movement whose purpose is to increase the availability and use of these policies. The wider availability of work-family policies, however, does not necessarily correspond to their wider use. The low rate of policy usage suggests that academic parents are not being encouraged to use them, are afraid to do so, or both. This research brief compares the members of a cohort of sociology faculty with

PhDs who do use at least one of these policies with those members who do not. The findings suggest that the distribution and use of work-family policies, unlike general and research support resources, are tied to graduate school productivity and prestige and are probably rewards for faculty achievement and future career promise. This study suggests that work-family policy use is a reward not a resource.

Given the importance of scholarly publications productivity as a basis for reputational ranking of faculty and departments, academic administrators may be encouraging the use of work-family policies by academic mothers who are perceived to be rising stars on the basis of their early publications and their graduate school prestige. In addition, mothers who have this prior record of publications and prestige may be less afraid to use of work-family policies than those with a weaker graduate record. Mothers who use at least one work-family policy have higher numbers of peer-reviewed publications than other groups in this cohort, and they work on average of two hours less per week than non-policy users. Although only a small percent had tenure as of 2003, given their publication rates and the prestige they carry with them, mothers who used work-family policies appear to be excellent candidates for tenure in the near future.

Chairs and other administrators may be less willing to distribute work-family policies to mothers who are perceived as the faculty who keep departments running by teaching heavier course loads and taking less time off. Women in this position may be afraid to ask for time off than are the rising stars.

Academic administrators may be satisfied with this resource distribution. However, work-family policies, especially those that are federally mandated, are designed to be needs-based policies to help all parents of new babies (as well as other categories of family members) better balance the obligations of work and family. As a matter of law, academic institutions need to ensure federally mandated policies are visible and available to all faculty members (Williams, Shames, and Kudchadkar 2005). The allocation of tenure track extension policies, modified duties, and the distribution of other resources should be examined carefully to ensure that entitlement policies are adhered to in practice. Increasing numbers of women are suing when denied these policies (Williams 2005).

To increase the use of work-family policies by mothers and fathers, human resources departments need to take responsibility for educating chairs as well as faculty about their availability and encouraging their use. Chairs need to inform themselves about the entitlement to work-family policies, deans need to hold chairs accountable for their distribution, and provosts need to hold deans accountable. The broad-based, multi-organizational social movement supporting work-family policies needs to continue monitoring institutions of higher education. In addition, the stories of those who successfully used work-family policies need to be disseminated in order to overcome the fear factor so that women (and men) who need them will use them.

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