

Study finds increased employee flexibility, supervisor support offer wide-ranging benefits

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Work-family conflict is increasingly common among U.S. workers, with about 70 percent reporting struggles balancing work and non-work obligations. A new study by University of Minnesota sociologists Erin L. Kelly, Phyllis Moen, Wen Fan, and interdisciplinary collaborators from across the country, shows that workplaces can change to increase flexibility, provide more support from supervisors, and reduce work-family conflict.

The study, titled, "Changing Work and Work-Family Conflict: Evidence from the Work, Family, and Health Network," was published by the *American Sociological Review* online today and is scheduled to appear in the June print edition of the journal. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded the research.

Using a sample of nearly 700 employees from an information technology department of a large Fortune 500 corporation, the research team gave half of the group greater control over when and where they worked, as well as increased supervisor support for their personal lives and family. The other group worked under their normal conditions.

The researchers found that employees whose work environments were modified experienced significant improvements over the six-month study period. Not only did they have a decrease in work-family [conflict](#),

but they also experienced an improvement in perceived time adequacy (a feeling that they had enough time to be with their families) and in their sense of schedule control.

"This study gave us the chance to look very carefully at how modifying the workplace can effectively address work-family stresses," Kelly said. "The purpose was to help employees work more effectively and more sanely, so they can get their work done well but also address their personal and family needs."

The study suggests the modified work environment brought greater benefits to employees more vulnerable to work-family conflict, in particular parents and those whose supervisors were less supportive before the workplace initiative. There was no evidence that this intervention increased work hours or perceived job demands.

"This study has major practical value in helping organizations imagine similar ways to resolve their employees' chronic sense of being pulled in two directions by obligations at work and at home," Moen said.

"Work-family conflict can wreak havoc with employees' family lives and also affect their health," said Rosalind King, Ph.D., of the Population Dynamics Branch at the National Institutes of Health. "The researchers have shown that by restructuring work practice to focus on results achieved and providing supervisors with an instructional program to improve their sensitivity to employees' after-[work](#) demands, they can reduce that stress and improve [employees'](#) family time."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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