

## **SINGLE MOTHERS: THE IMPACT OF WORK ON HOME AND THE IMPACT OF HOME ON WORK**

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*The purpose of this study was to assess the relationships between family/home satisfaction and job satisfaction of single working mothers with at least one child under the age of 18 living at home. The principal objectives were to identify the stressful situations in the lives of working single mothers and the factors that contributed to home satisfaction and work satisfaction. Data were gathered by self-report questionnaire from single working mothers. Factor analysis was used to reduce data into home and work satisfaction factors. These factors were then analyzed by multiple regression to determine the variance explained. Using stepwise multiple regression the following three factors predicted both satisfaction with home life and satisfaction with work 1) family interaction, 2) income, housing, and health, and 3) family diet and money management. Two additional factors, 1) time commitments and 2) family and community support, can predict satisfaction with work. The work factors that predicted home life satisfaction were 1) work schedule, 2) work environment, and 3) salary and advancement. Work factors that predict satisfaction with work were 1) breaks and control, 2) schedule and salary, and 3) commuting and friends at work. Working single mothers identified single parenting, financial problems, major changes in work or family, and problems with children as the situations causing stress in their lives. Using analysis of variance a statistically significant relationship was found with income and 1) education, 2) perception of enough income, 3) satisfaction with home life, and 4) work satisfaction.*

Balancing work and family roles has become a key personal and family issue for American society (Dubeck, 1998; Burge & Culver, 1989). Employers and family studies specialists find that the changing American family structure is a major source of stress and role strain in both the work place and the home.

The literature indicates that some of the most significant differences between traditional two-parent families and single-parent families are that the latter experience reduced income and/or poverty, lack of a support system, lowered self-esteem, reduced personal satisfaction, and increased time pressures (Besharov, 1992; McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Richards, 1989).

As an individual attempts to balance work and family, role strain, conflict and stress often result. Voydanoff and Donnelly (1989) conceptualized role strain as the individuals appraisal of the level of conflicts between roles and of the degree of experienced from attempting to meet multiple role demands.

Consequences to the children of single parent families included less support, greater high school dropout, less parental attention and supervision at home, and less money for their needs.

Work is the cause of conflict and many and various types of stress among single working mothers. It is associated with long, irregular, rigid working hours, travel away from home, and "spillover" of fatigue, preoccupation, and irritability from work to family and family to work (Pleck, 1985).

This study focuses on the single mother family. Evidence shows that these families face a greater variety of hardships (stressors) than do the two-parent families (Parcel, 1998; McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Quinn & Allen, 1989; Richards, 1989; Burden, 1986; Rubin, 1976). Both work and family are valued in American society. Questions of how these single mothers perceived work demands influencing their family and family demands influencing work have been addressed. This study has examined how conflicting demands have caused stress, whether this stress is exacerbated by the exhausting lives the single parent leads or is simply a matter of stress from the conflict between work and family demands.

Danes (1998) studied role satisfaction in farm women. She investigated the possibility that one of two conflicting theories, role scarcity or role enhancement was at work in this sample:

The role scarcity model posits that people do not have enough energy to fulfill role obligations; thus, it implies that the more roles one accumulates, the greater the probability of exhausting one's supply of time and energy and of confronting conflicting obligations. The role enhancement theory on the other hand posits that multiple role involvement can be energy generating; it assumes that people find energy for that to which they are highly committed and they often feel more energetic after doing those activities. (pp.403)

After this investigation, Danes (1998) determined that using a measure of well being that included satisfaction was more appropriate than either of the role theories she studied.

### Changes in Family Structure

The traditional American family with a working husband, a homemaker wife, and two or more children made up only 7% of the nation's families in the 90's (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). While single parent families comprised 11 percent of American families in 1970, this proportion increased to 25.7 percent by 1984 (Norton & Glick, 1986) and 26.6 % in 1994 (Blau, Ferber & Winkler, 1998). Another way to assess the increase in single parent families in the U.S. is to consider that one of every 3.8 families with children under 18 years of age in 1998 was a single parent family (March census 1998). This was up from five in every family in 1984 and from one of every ten families in 1970 (Norton & Glick, 1986).

A study at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities based on Census data shows the average incomes of the poorest 20 percent of female-headed families with children fell from 1995 to 1997 despite continued economic growth in America (Primus, 1999). According to Schuchardt and Guadagno (1991), 8% of all two-parent families in the U.S. are living in poverty compared to 40% of the white single-mother families who are living in poverty. In Utah between 1980 and 1990, the number of female-headed families with children increased by 38% and the number in poverty increased to over 50% (Report To The Governor; Poverty in Utah, 1991). Since 1970, the number of single-parent families has increased from 13% of the 29.6 million total families to 34.7% in 1990 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1990). These figures indicate that single-parent families have almost tripled in number from

1970 to 1990. Of the 8.6 million single-parent families with children under age 18 in 1989, 79% were maintained by women and 21% were maintained by men (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Commerce Current Housing Report, 1992). The importance of employment becomes evident. Problems single-parents experience, in association with having to go to work, include the lack of support in managing the home and children (Burden, 1986). Single parents are constantly pressed for time. Work, shopping, cooking, and housekeeping are fixed time consumers, leaving nurturing, emotional support, and cognitive stimulation to suffer by default. (Garrett, Ng'andu, & Ferron, 1994).

### Family Satisfaction and Work Performance

The need to examine the effects of home on work as well as to study the many complex relationships among elements of work and the family is now recognized. Renshaw (1976) was one of the first to document the interactive nature of work and family. His findings demonstrated a strong relationship between a satisfying family life and high levels of job satisfaction. According to Duxbury and Higgins (1991) the concern for work-family conflict as a source of stress has been correlated with the following dysfunctional negative consequences: increased health risks, poorer performance of the parenting role, decreased productivity, tardiness, absenteeism, turnover, poor morale, reduced life satisfaction, and lower mental health.

Holtzman and Glass (1999) found that declines in job satisfaction routinely accompany the birth of a child. Having an intellectually engaging and challenging job and higher wages increased job satisfaction as did the flexibility to alter one's schedule and having a supervisor support.

Conversely, Hanson and Sloane (1992) found that young children had no effect on the job satisfaction of men and women workers regardless of time period, work status, or marital status. They found this to be true for women working in the labor market as well as in the home. They explain that perhaps working women with young children do experience role conflicts, but they also derive satisfaction from their work.

Single-parent mothers were found by Burden (1986) to suffer the most strain between family life satisfaction and job satisfaction. London (1996) found, as did McLanahan, & Booth in 1998 that his population of single mothers had reduced chances of completing school, decreased opportunities for marriage, and increased risks that public assistance will be needed to maintain the economic viability of the family. Two important domains of existence, the family and the workplace, come into conflict as single mothers struggle to live well in both areas. Family life may make demands on work that the work role must accommodate, just as work may require adjustments in family life (Dubeck, 1998, Felstehausen et al., 1986). The literature clearly implicates the reciprocal influence of the two roles.

### Reducing Stress and Education

People have less stress in their lives, both at home and at work when they have the skills necessary to put balance in their lives. In favorable circumstances, adolescents acquire critical adaptive skills in the family, among friends, and in the neighborhood but most will need added skills gained through systematic instruction and practice in the classroom. Teaching skills in the areas of time and finance management, health and nutrition, parenting and family relations, job preparedness, decision making, and coping strategies would help children acquire the knowledge, ability, and attitudes necessary for success in life.

Felstehausen and Couch (1989) developed a model for linking research to practice. The model emerged from data collected from teachers who indicated if and where they included work and family issues in the secondary curriculum. Work and family concepts were most likely to be included in 1) family relations and 2) parenting and child development classes.

The results of a follow-up to two major work and family satisfaction surveys were used by Felstehausen, Couch, and Wragg (1993) as the basis of a curriculum to teach life skills to adolescents. They defined life-skills as the skills needed to be a healthy and productive member of the community. These skills enable the adolescent to become a self-sufficient and productive citizen. A single parent mother who has learned these skills as an adolescent will be better able to cope with the rigors of her new role in life.

## **Method**

The target population for this study was the single working mothers living in Iron County, Utah, with at least one child under the age of 18 living at home. Effort was made to identify these individuals through churches, government and other family social services agencies, and University departments working with single women. An invitation to respond was included in the local newspaper and names were volunteered by family, neighbors, friends, and business associates.

The data were gathered by a self-report instrument developed at Texas Tech University (Felstehausen et al., 1986). Using the pilot data, a reliability of .95 to .98 was established for the instrument (Felstehausen et al., 1986). Reliability was calculated using Cronback's Coefficients Alphas.

This instrument included family and work satisfaction scales and inventories and is conceptually grouped into four major sections: personal and family data, stress factors, work hours and scheduling (labeled work factors), and conditions relating to work and family environments (labeled home and family factors). The following questions guided this study in assessing relationships between family/home satisfaction and job satisfaction in single mother families: 1) What are the stressful situations in the lives of working single mothers? 2) How stressful is the home life of working single mothers? 3) What are the home and family factors that contribute to home satisfaction of working single mothers? 4) What are the home and family factors that contribute to work satisfaction of working single mothers? 5) How satisfied are working single mothers with their home life? 6) What are the work factors that contribute to satisfaction with work of working single mothers? 7) What are the work factors that contribute to the satisfaction of home life of the working single mothers?

The self-report format includes a semantic differential scale after each item. For example, if the respondent answered "yes, the situation caused stress" the amount of stress was indicated on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 where 1 equaled "not stressful at all" and 7 equaled "very stressful."

In addition to individual factors, respondents were asked to give an overall rating of satisfaction with their home and family life and an overall satisfaction rating with their work. Likewise, they were asked to report the overall effect of their work on the quality of their home life. Finally, a global question ("How difficult is it for you to combine work and family responsibilities?"), is included as a summary item. Respondents replied on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 7 where 1 equaled "not difficult" and 7 equaled "very difficult."

The data were analyzed to provide frequency counts and percentages to describe the population. Factor analysis was used to reduce data into three or four underlying home

satisfaction and work satisfaction factors that were analyzed to determine the variables that were highly correlated. These new factors were entered into a multiple regression to determine the variance explained by the factors (treated as independent variables). A stepwise regression procedure was used in order to determine the linear combination of independent variables that will best predict work and home satisfaction. Analysis of variance identified the significance and Spearman correlation coefficient established the strength of the correlation.

## **Findings**

Since a random sample was not practical, a purposive sample of single working mothers with at least one child under the age of 18 living at home was used (Vogt, 1993). A total of 59 persons responded to the 73 survey's sent out making it an acceptable return rate of 80%. The profile of the respondents included 3.4% minority women. All respondents had at least a high school education with 49% having college degrees.

The average number of children per family in this study was 2.3, with the range being from 1 to 9. The average family annual income was between \$10,000 to \$15,000. The lower amount is just below the 1998 poverty level of \$10,915 (Poverty in Utah 1998). This level has only increased by \$1,219 from the 1987 poverty level of \$9,696. When respondents were asked to indicate their perception of the adequacy of their income, 31% said they could only meet necessities and 42% said their income allowed them to afford more than just necessities. The remaining 27% reported that their incomes were not at all adequate.

The respondents reported the hours they worked each week ranged from 3-77. The mean hours worked was 33 hours. The average age of the respondents was 42 years. Age ranged from 21 to 53. Working single mothers identified (in order of most frequent response) single parenting, financial problems, major changes in work or family, and problems with children as the situations that were causing stress in their lives.

### Factor Analysis

Factor analyses were conducted on 28 home and family variables and 22 work variables to identify clusters of variables that were related to home satisfaction and work satisfaction. The analyses in this study determined that the following six home and family factors were related to satisfaction with home life (listed in order of variance explained) (see Table 1):

1. family interaction;
2. time commitments;
3. health, housing, and income;
4. family support;
5. family diet and money management; and
6. community support.

Home and family factors related to satisfaction with work were (listed in order of variance explained) (See Table 1):

1. family interaction;
2. housing, health, and income;
3. time commitments;
4. family and community support;
5. family diet and money management;

6. child care and family drug and alcohol abuse; and
7. family communication.

Table 1  
*Factors that Influence Satisfaction with Home and Work*

Factors	Satisfaction with Home		Satisfaction with Work	
		**		**
<b>Home and Family</b>				
Family Interaction	*1	24.8%	1	31.1%
Time Commitments	2	9.8%	3	8.2%
Health, Housing and Income	3	8.7%	2	9.0%
Family Support	4	6.5%	4a	7.1%
Family Diet and Money Mgt	5	6.0%	5	6.1%
Community Support	6	5.5%	4b	
Child Care			6	5.1%
Family Communication			7	4.0%
Accumulative % Variance explained		61.3%	70.6%	

\*Numbers indicate order of variance explained

\*\*Percent of variance explained

Listed, in order of the variance explained, are the work factors that were related to satisfaction with home life (see Table 2):

1. work environment;
2. salary and advancement;
3. breaks and parking;
4. benefits and security;
5. commuting and friends at work; and
6. work schedule.

Work factors related to satisfaction with work were identified as (listed in order of variance explained) (See Table 2):

1. work environment;
2. schedule and salary;
3. break and control;
4. commuting and friends at work;
5. benefits and security; and
6. work conditions.

Table 2  
*Factors that Influence Satisfaction with Home and Work*

Factors	Satisfaction with Home		Satisfaction with Work	
		**		**
Work				
Work Environment	*1	37.3%	1	38.5%
Salary	2	9.0%	2a	10.2%
Breaks	3	7.9%	3	7.2%
Benefits and Security	4	6.3%	5	4.8%
Commuting and Friends at Work	5	4.9%	4	6.6%
Work Conditions			6	4.6%
Work Schedule	6	4.6%	2b	
Accumulative % Variance explained		70.0%		71.9%

\*Numbers indicate order of variance explained

\*\*Percent of variance explained

### Stepwise Multiple Regression

A subsequent series of regression analyses were conducted to find which of the new factors could predict home life satisfaction and work satisfaction. Findings indicate that home and family factors accounted for 63% of the variance ( $R^2=.63$ ) in predicting satisfaction with home life. They were:

Factors	$\beta$	t	p value
1. family interaction;	.63	7.64	.00**
2. income, housing, and health; and	.42	5.05	.00**
3. family diet and money management.	.24	2.92	.01**

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Home and family factors that entered the regression equation and explained 38% ( $R^2=.38$ ) of the variance in predicting satisfaction with work were:

Factors	$\beta$	t	p value
1. family interaction;	.37	3.37	.00**
2. time commitments;	-.26	-2.43	.02*
3. housing, health, and income;	.26	2.37	.02*
4. family and community support; and	.25	2.35	.02*
5. family diet and money management.		2.02	.05

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Forty-two percent of the variance ( $R^2 = .42$ ) in satisfaction with home life could be accounted for in the following work factors:

Factors	$\beta$	t	p value
1. work schedule;	.40	3.82	.00**
2. work environment; and	.38	3.69	.00**
3. salary and advancement.	.34	3.28	.00**

\*<p.05 \*\*p< .01

The work factors that could explain 40% of the variance ( $R^2 = .40$ ) in predicting satisfaction with work were:

Factors	$\beta$	t	p value
1. breaks and control;	.38	3.6	.00**
2. schedule and salary; and	.36	3.43	.00**
3. commuting and friends at work.	.35	3.29	.00**

\*<p.05 \*\*p< .01

### Analysis of Variance and Spearman's Correlation Coefficient

Spearman correlation, which shows the degree of monotonic relationship between two variables that are arranged in rank order, was conducted because the variables were measured using a Likert scale. A statistically significant relationship was found with income and 1) education ( $F=19.72$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p< .008$ ), 2) perception of enough income ( $F=24.67$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p< .000$ ), 3) satisfaction with home life ( $F=18.50$ ,  $df=15$ ,  $p< .022$ ), and 4) work satisfaction ( $F=27.86$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $p< .006$ ). The research indicated a significant relationship (at .02 or above) between income and four factors: education, perception of enough income, satisfaction with home life, and work satisfaction.

## **Conclusions**

Consistent with other research, findings, this study suggest that income is correlated with education and perception of enough income to meet family needs. Income is also correlated with satisfaction with home life and work satisfaction. Implications of this study point to the importance of making educational programs available for lower income and the lesser educated, single working mothers. These programs should include parenting and employment skills, time and financial management, health and nutritional information, and ways to cope with change. The study reinforces the importance of friends at work and family interactions. It would be important to make socializing with peers a strong component of these educational programs. These findings would indicate a need to begin vocational classes in the early years in high school for at-risk youth or pregnant unmarried teen women.

Educators, especially those concerned with family relations and/or family resource management, can help guide families to improve current job skills or develop new skills aimed at securing better-paying jobs. Policy makers and educators need to become cognitive of the magnitude of the problem and aware that intervention through education is less expensive than teen pregnancy and long-term public assistance. Findings in this study are consistent with previous studies regarding the importance of intervention through education (Felstehausen, Couch, and Wragg, 1993; Schuchardt & Guadagno, 1991).

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