FLEXIBLE WORK AND THE FAMILY

Edited by Anja-Kristin Abendroth
and Laura Lükemann

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES
IN FAMILY RESEARCH

VOLUME 21

FLEXIBLE WORK AND THE FAMILY

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EDITED BY

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FOREWORD

With the availability of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the extension of digital infrastructures, employees increasingly have more control over when and where they work. Moreover, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which for many meant a shift to working from home to reduce the spread of the virus, more workers and employers than ever before experienced such flexibility. *Flexiplace* arrangements (also referred to as teleworking, working from home, or remote working) and *flexitime* (flexible starting/finishing times and the option to interrupt work as needed to attend to other responsibilities) offer employees more leeway in work location as well as in scheduling tasks during the traditional work week. These two forms of flexible work are the main focus this volume.

The consequences of work flexibility on an employee's family life are currently being debated: Does such flexibility help to better align the competing demands of work and family,[1] or does it harm family well-being by allowing work to invade the employee's personal sphere? According to *resource perspectives*, work flexibility allows employees to respond to predictable and unpredictable family needs. In turn, relationship quality in families and women's careers might be sustained despite work and family obligations, and men might experience additional opportunities to become more involved in care and household tasks. In contrast, *demand perspectives* suggest that flexible working increases the likelihood that work will invade the employee's family sphere. The timing and location of work may not be clearly set or separated, thus blurring work–life boundaries, and/or employers might use flexible work in their own interests to realize high work demands.

Regarding the implications of flexitime and flexiplace for employees' families, the research findings have been inconsistent, suggesting that there is no uniform relationship. This volume aims to contribute a more nuanced understanding of the interrelation of flexible work and the family. The contents are divided into three sections. The first section, "Flexible Work and the Family During the COVID-19 Pandemic," provides insights into the relationship between work and family while working from home during the pandemic. The authors not only suggest that the implications of flexible working are context-dependent but also point to the various facilitators and barriers present in the work and family spheres. The second section, "Gender, Parenthood, and Status-Specific Patterns of Flexible Work and the Family," acknowledges and emphasizes group differences when it comes to the ways in which flexible work is experienced. Moreover, it provides some evidence that these patterns have been sustained during the pandemic. In

the third section, "Linked-Lives Perspective on Flexible Work and the Family," the contributing authors go beyond the individual experiences of work–family conflict or balance and discuss the implications of work flexibility for patners' well-being and parenting behavior.

Throughout this volume, the research on the interrelationships of flexible work and the family represents contexts from different countries, including Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States, thus revealing a broad spectrum of similarities and differences.

Section 1: Flexible Work and the Family During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The first three chapters provide insights into the work–family balance and work–family conflicts experienced by employees who were working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. They offer lessons learned about potential facilitators and barriers with regard to flexible working arrangements that could help employees to better align their work and family demands. In "When Home Becomes the Workplace: Work–Life Balance Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic", Samantha Metselaar, Laura den Dulk, and Brenda Vermeeren applied a mixed-methods design to study how Dutch government employees perceived their work–life balance during the pandemic as compared with the pre-pandemic situation, as well as how to explain differences in what these employees were experiencing. The results indicate that the combined demands and resources at work, at home, and at the personal level shaped whether working from home facilitated work–life balance. In particular, respondents' control over their boundary management and strategies helped them distinguish between different roles across their life domains and were important in their achieving a satisfactory work–life balance. Family demands, such as care responsibilities and homeschooling, were found to hinder an individual's ability to achieve such balance but only in the absence of coping resources, such as sharing a task with a partner. Working parents reported experiences of family enrichment, since working entirely from home gave them more time to spend with their partners and children.

In "Working from Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons Learned About the Relationship Between Flexible Work and Work–Family Conflict", Mareike Reimann used a sample of employees who worked from home taken from German linked employer−employee data, collected in spring 2021, and shows that pronounced caring obligations were associated with more work−family conflicts. However, temporal flexibility, job autonomy, and the existence of fixed rules and a supportive supervisor were identified as workplace facilitators that contributed to fewer work–family conflicts among the employees working from home irrespectively of family obligations. Autonomy was even more beneficial for individuals who cared for other relatives, since it was associated with fewer work–family conflicts.

In "Working Remotely During the COVID 19-Pandemic: Work and Non-Work Antecedents of Work–Life Balance Development," Liisa Mäkelä, Heini Pensar, Samu Kemppinen, and Hilpi Kangas used longitudinal data from a multinational company in Finland that were collected in May/June 2020 and December 2020.

In studying remote workers' work–life balance, these authors showed that time saved by not having to commute facilitated a better work–life balance. Investigating how work–life balance has changed over time during the pandemic, they noted a general reduction in work–life balance, which could be explained by an increase in the employees' quantitative workload. Beyond the initial differences in the experiences of work–life balance – that is, less work–life balance among mothers at the beginning of the pandemic, the decreases reported during the pandemic did not differ by gender or number of children in the household.

Section 2: Gender, Parenthood, and Status-Specific Patterns of Flexible Work and the Family

Whereas previous research has identified gender, parenthood, and status-specific patterns in the use of work from home, two of the chapters investigate these patterns to determine variation in the implications of flexible work for work-to-family conflicts and improvements in the temporal alignment of work and private life. In "Does Telework Mediate the Impact of Occupational Status on Work-to-Family Conflicts? An Investigation of Conditional Effects of Gender and the COVID-19 Pandemic", Antje Schwarz, Ayhan Adams, and Katrin Golsch used data from two waves (2017–2020) of the German Family Panel. The results showed that work-to-family conflicts among parents did not change during the pandemic but that work-to-family conflicts were in general higher among parents who telework and who have a higher status. In general, the conflict-enhancing implications of telework seemed to be more pronounced for mothers than for fathers. Stronger conflicts among higher-status employees were also found to be mediated by telework, especially for mothers before and during the pandemic.

In "Does Working from Home Improve the Temporal Alignment of Work and Private Life? Differences Between Telework and Informal Overtime at Home by Gender and Family Responsibilities", Alexandra Mergener, Ines Entgelmeier, and Timothy Rinke found that formally recognized telework is more likely to be a resource that contributes to a temporal alignment of work and private life when compared with informal overtime at home. They also identified the gender- and parenthood-specific implications of telework. Based on their results using data from the German BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018, these researchers concluded that mothers did not benefit from telework during regular working hours in particular; however, when they worked informal overtime at home, their temporal alignment of work and private life was found to be worse than that for the other groups studied.

Section 3: Linked-Lives Perspective on Flexible Work and the Family

The two final chapters contribute a linked-live perspective on the implications of flexible work for the family. Whereas previous research focused mainly on the importance of flexible working in terms of the individual employee's experiences of work–family conflict or balance, these researchers investigated the meaning of flexible working for other family members. In "Individual and Cross-partner Transitions to Flexitime and Teleworking and Cognitive Subjective Well-Being,"

Aneesa F. Qadri used British Understanding Society data from 2009 to 2019 to investigate transitions to flexitime and teleworking by employees and how it affected their subjective well-being and that of their partners. Fathers' transitions to teleworking were found to increase their likelihood of reporting higher levels of satisfaction with their amount of leisure time, and flexitime fostered their female partners' satisfaction with leisure time. Mothers' transitions to flexitime and flexiplace positively impacted their own satisfaction with leisure time but not that of their partners.

In "Workplace Flexibility, Work–Family Guilt, and Working Mothers' Parenting Behavior" Melissa Rector LaGraff and Heidi E. Stolz looked at a sample of US working mothers to show that flexible working was positively associated with positive parenting, positive reinforcement, and warmth behaviors. Work–family guilt did not mediate these relationships but was negatively associated with workplace flexibility. The authors concluded that policies that promote flexible work arrangements could also promote positive family outcomes as well as reduce feelings of guilt related to employees' work and family life.

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NOTE

1. In this context, the term "family" refers to individuals who live together in the same household with their own or adoptive children, partners, or relatives.