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ABSTRACT

The focus of the Working Parents Project (WPP) has been on how families adapt and function in relation to workplace policies, with particular attention given to the participation of parents in contexts of child care and socialization, including education-related activities. This report builds on previous data from the WPP by expanding the sample of dual-earner families to include 30 single-working-mother families. Research with this sample focused on processes linking workplace policies and the social supports available to the single mothers. Data were collected from Anglo, Black, and Mexican American single-parent (divorced) families through in-depth and structured interviews concerning family demographics, work history, and information about characteristics of the mothers' jobs. Findings are reported under the following headings: (1) involvement in schools; (2) family types, focusing on authoritative, inadequate, no control, and dependent mothers; (3) family type and school involvement; (4) fathers' involvement; (5) ethnic differences; (6) mother-child relationships; (7) support networks; and (8) dual-earner and single-parent families. The study recommends that employer assistance programs be expanded to include some services related to the mental and financial health of workers and their families, e.g., on-site education and training activities such as stress management, parenting education and financial counseling. (AS)

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WORK AND FAMILY LIFE AMONG ANGLO, BLACK AND  
MEXICAN AMERICAN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

Executive Summary of the 1983 Annual Report

WORKING PARENTS PROJECT

December 1983

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## INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, women are either working or looking for work outside the home. In 1890, about 3.7 million women were in the labor force, a rate of participation of about 18 percent. Since 1947, the rate of participation in the labor force by women has steadily increased, but the rate of increase has been significantly faster for married women and, in the last decade, for mothers. By March of 1979, 16.6 million, or 54 percent of the women with children under 18 years of age were working or looking for work. Of these working mothers, 23 percent were divorced, separated, widowed, or had never been married. Divorced mothers were more likely than other mothers to be working or looking for work--79 percent did so in March 1979 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1981).

A more striking change taking place during the seventies was the sharp rise in the number of working women who had the principal responsibility for the maintenance and welfare of their own families--from five million in 1970 to 8.5 million in 1979, a 42 percent increase in less than a decade. An even more striking increase is the increase in female-headed families with children under 18 who are working or looking for work--from 1.7 million to 3.5 million; an increase of over 100 percent in nine years. The labor force participation rates for mothers maintaining their own families was higher for those with school-age children (72 percent) than for those with children under six (56 percent) (U.S. Department of Labor, 1981).

The impact of these facts on family life and on the education of children is still in the early stages of study and discussion by researchers, policy makers, and employers.

Recognizing the need to understand the impact of these broader societal changes on individual families and to explore their implications for education, the Working Parents Project (WPP) has been engaged now for over three years in the study of the interrelationships between work and family life in dual-earning and single-parent families.

The focus of this research has been on how families adapt and function in relation to workplace policies which affect their availability to participate in the tasks and responsibilities involved in maintaining a household. Particular attention has been paid to the participation of the parents in child care and socialization, including participation with their children in education-related activities.

The work reported here builds on the previous data from the Working Parents Project by expanding the sample of dual-earner families to include a comparable number (30) of single-working-mother families. The focus of research with this sample has been on the processes linking workplace policies and the social supports available to the single mothers with participation by single mothers and by other adults in the formal and informal educational experiences of elementary school-age children.

In addition to the research activities, a significant Project effort has been made to lay the groundwork for translating research findings into concrete suggestions for programs and policies that schools, workplaces,

and agencies can implement to assist working parents. The Project has begun to identify researchers, practitioners and advocates who are active in the area of work, schools, and the family so that the in-house research can be used during 1984, in conjunction with other research findings, to assist ongoing programs in the region. This process of identification of relevant projects and researchers has enhanced the project's normal networking and reporting of research-in-progress.

#### METHOD.

The research reported here used one in-depth semi-structured interview, and one short-answer structured interview to obtain information about various aspects of the work and family lives of 10 Anglo, 10 Black, and 10 Mexican American single parent (divorced) families. Data obtained with the in-depth interview explored family functioning, perceptions and feelings of the mothers, while the structured interview obtained quantifiable data about family demographics, work history, and information about current characteristics of the mothers' jobs.

The data generated by the interviews was used to address the following general areas of the interface between work and family life:

1. Workplace Policies and Children's Education  
What are the processes whereby selected workplace policies affect the ability and/or availability of single (divorced) working mothers to be involved in the education of their children, both at home and in school?

2. Support Networks and Children's Education  
What is the role of extended family, friends, caregivers and other household members in the education of the children of single working mothers? How do the different types of relationships between these children and their non-custodial father influence children, their mothers, and other caregivers?

The sample consisted of thirty (30) single parent families equally divided among Anglo, Black, and Mexican American families. The mothers were recruited from the same workplaces and occupations as the women in the dual-earner families studied during the previous phase. Thus, the relevant workplace policies are comparable. Similarly, the women selected in this sample were employed in non-management, non-supervisory jobs, have been employed there for at least one year, have jobs that do not require more than a high school education, and have no more than four children, with at least one child in elementary school. Finally, only women who have been divorced for at least two years were to be selected.

Subjects were recruited from two types of workplaces using a more or less standard procedure. The only difference was that phone company subjects were located with the assistance of union officials and shop stewards from the Communications Workers of America (CWA), while in the banks contacts were made through their respective Personnel Departments.

The first interview was designed as a questionnaire that could be easily coded, and, in some cases, generate self-ratings by the inter-



viewee. The main instrument sections were as follows:

a. Household Members This section was designed to obtain a complete listing of all household members, including their genders, ages and relationship to the head of the household.

b. Dwelling and Neighborhood Here, information was collected about length of residence in the city, reasons for moving here, home ownership, contact with neighbors, involvement in the neighborhood, etc.

c. Work History In this section, information was gathered about educational history, and a complete work history, including preparation for and attitudes about work while in high school. Other questions were directed at mothers' experiences in jobs prior to the current job.

d. Current Job/Work Policies This section sought information about current jobs, including any prior jobs with the same company. Information was requested about the nature of daily work, relations with supervisors, stress and pressure experienced on the job, various aspects of leave policies, job satisfaction, and future career orientation.

e. Social Relations at Work This section attempted to map the relationships of divorced mothers with their co-workers. It asked for information about the personal characteristics of people and the nature, frequency, and intensity of those relationships.

f. Family Finances This section obtained information about the overall picture of family financial situations, including various sources of income and use of other supplemental assistance, whether private or public.

g. Family/School Relations This section gleaned information about how families, in particular mothers, maintained contact with the school and supervised the education of their children.

h. Home Management/Task Allocation Here, information was collected on allocation of housework among family members, methods used to make changes in and the family members' satisfaction with the system.

The second interview was designed to be a more open-ended, semi-structured data gathering effort which explored perceptions of mothers about some of the major events of their lives, including marriage and divorce; and about their work lives. The main sections of this instrument were as follows:

i. Family/Work Interrelatedness This section recalled information from the work and family history data collected during the first interview and probed for information and judgments about the impact of major life events on mothers' family lives. It then moved to the present, and explored their perceptions about how various aspects of their jobs and their family lives influenced each other.

j. Family Images and Adjustment to Divorce Here, information was obtained about courtship and the circumstances surrounding marriage, and

married life and the factors leading to the separation and/or divorce. Questions were also asked about present adjustment to single parenthood, as well as judgments about children's adaptation to the divorce.

k. Ex-Husband's Current Relationship with Family Members Inquiries were made about the relative presence and influence of ex-husbands on various aspects of family life, family as a whole, or individual members in particular.

l. Family Activities Respondents were asked about their individual/joint (those with other family members) activities, conflicts, and factors which influence the frequency and nature of those activities.

m. Social Network Respondents were asked about the people important in their lives and their children's lives currently.

n. Family Communication Respondents were queried about the quality and frequency of their communication with their children.

o. Parental Self-Assessment Information was requested about respondents' self-perceptions as parents, including changes from their pre-divorced or pre-separated parenting practices.

p. Aspirations and Plans for the Children This section sought details about mothers' plans and aspirations for their children's educational and occupational future.

## FINDINGS

The thirty families interviewed for this study constitute what is commonly referred to as a purposive sample. They were screened and referred to the Working Parents Project staff by their union or their personnel officers, who used the criteria provided to them by the WPP staff. In the phone company, the sampling criteria almost exhausted the available pool of eligible subjects in the job categories, ethnicities and family characteristics required. The available pool of subjects from three banks was exhausted, and two additional banks were contacted to meet the predetermined quota of employees in the various categories and ethnicities. None of the women contacted by the WPP staff refused to participate. We have no reason to suspect bias in the screening and referral by union and personnel officers.

Despite the lack of evidence of bias in the sampling procedure, our sample still cannot be considered a representative sample of divorced women in these job categories and family conditions. This does not invalidate the findings or conclusions, however, since the goal was not to estimate parameters for normative variables, but rather to explore interrelationships between conditions, illustrate mechanisms, and suggest possible hypotheses about psychological and sociological phenomena. We can compare our groups among themselves, and, when appropriate, indicate how our sample and any phenomena associated with it relates to known indices in the population at large or among the ethnic groups sampled.

Some basic descriptive statistics are presented in summary form in Tables 1, 2, and 3, to provide the reader with a profile of the main characteristics of the families interviewed. Data on their perceptions of various aspects of their jobs and workplaces are also presented. When appropriate, tests of statistical significance of differences between groups are provided, along with the corresponding significance levels.

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF FAMILY VARIABLES BY ETHNICITY

GROUPS: Variables:	A	B	MA	COMPARISON t's.		
	ANGLO N=10	BLACK N=10	MEX AM N=10	A-B	A-MA	B-MA
Age at the time of the interview .....	32.7	28.2	34.5	4.60*	1.70	6.50*
Age at the time of marriage .....	19.0	18.7	21.3	.60	3.71*	5.01*
Years married and living together ...	8.1	3	8.2	5.47*	.05	5.47*
Years separated and divorced .....	4.7	5.2	5.3	.86	1.32	.05

\* Significant at the  $p = .01$  (1,18 d.f)

The sample of single parent (divorced) families, not only met the basic sampling requirements in terms of ethnicity, job classifications and age of children, but also reflects a range of other conditions present in divorced families. The families are relatively healthy and functioning well, although the resources available to them to cope with life, in general, vary substantially. Judging from information gathered to provide a context for the exploration of their current status, it is clear that, for the most part, they consider that their current lives constitute a marked improvement over their former married lives. Many of the women sampled did not experience a dramatic drop in "available" income when they divorced, because of the instability of their ex-husbands' prior performance as providers. Factors contributing to this appear to have been either unstable work, or the husbands' tendency to spend a significant part of family income on alcohol and non-family related activities. In many of these families, the women already were part of the labor force, thereby contributing a salary that was used to meet basic family needs.

In the case of those women who had stayed home raising their children, there was a tendency for their husbands to have had relatively high salaries. This allowed the women to get favorable divorce settlements, which often included keeping their homes or buying another one. More often, though, these husbands have continued supporting their children after the divorce.

Even though most women report that the quality of their lives has improved since divorcing and many have not experienced a significant



decline in available income, financial hardships are, nonetheless, a continuing source of stress for them. Several women do not own automobiles in a city with inadequate public transportation, and few are able to accumulate any savings.

It is clear from data presented that, compared to Anglo and Mexican American women, the Black sub-sample of women married younger, had proportionally shorter marriages, and have been divorced proportionally longer. They are also younger and thus, tend to have younger children. They are the only group in which some of them share households with other adults (either family or housemates). Sharing expenses is an adaptation to the fact that, as a group, these women earn substantially less from their jobs (especially in the banks) and receive little help, if any, from their former husbands. This appears to explain why, overall, Black women are less satisfied with their jobs, have higher ambitions, and are more likely to be seeking advancement through education, training, and/or promotions, or by actively contemplating job changes in the near future.

Overall, the two types of workplaces used (phone company and banks) are still characterized by the same differences found in the study of dual-earner families, in which the women were drawn from the same labor pool. Phone company jobs are better paying, their leave policies are more rigid, the level and frequency of stress is higher, and the women are less satisfied, overall, with their jobs. They continue to report greater difficulty in keeping in touch with their children during the day, and report being penalized more often for brief, unscheduled absences. (see Tables 2 and 3 for summary of workplace differences.)

#### 1. Involvement in Schools

Because of the association found among dual-earner families between rigidity of leave policies and lower involvement in their children's education, a special effort was made to explore this phenomenon in the sample of single parent families. Surprisingly, this association was not replicated in the single parents sample. It had been expected that the absence of a second parent would intensify the unavailability of these mothers to be involved in their children's education, but that was not found to be true.

Overall, 77 percent of the mothers were judged to be moderately to highly involved in the education of their children. Although availability of a flexible leave policy was not associated with school involvement, other work-related factors were found to be important.

Women who reported a low level of school involvement were more likely to be experiencing frustration at work, mostly due to unmet expectations in terms of salary and/or advancement opportunities. Several of them can be described as feeling "underemployed." More often than the other groups, these women have sought part-time employment in addition to their regular jobs. This appears to be a way for them to increase their income, afford more education for themselves, or improve their chances for more satisfying/better paying jobs. (See Table 4 for a summary of these findings.)

On the other hand, women who reported high involvement in their children's education were more likely to be either (1) bank women satisfied with their jobs and not career oriented, or (2) phone company women in high

TABLE 2

SUMMARY TABLE OF WORK VARIABLES BY WORKPLACE  
(Means/Mean Ratings)

Variable:	PHONE CO. N=15	BANKS N=15	t	p
Years with same employer .....	6.2	3.2	6.31	.01
Years in the same job .....	3.8	1.9	5.34	.01
Mean rating of decision-making allowed by job .....	1.6	1.9	1.79	.10
Mean rating of control over organization of tasks on job..	1.5	1.8	2.67	.05
Mean rating of quality of relat- ionships with supervisor .....	3.2	3.1	.68	n.s.
Mean rating of the intensity of job pressure.....	2.8	2.2	4.50	.01
Mean rating of the intensity of job stress.....	2.6	1.6	5.75	.01
Mean rating of satisfaction with leave policies .....	2.4	3.3	5.22	.01
Mean rating of overall job satisfaction .....	2.3	3.1	4.19	.01

TABLE 3

MEANS OF SALARY EARNED AND TOTAL FAMILY INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES  
IN 1982 BY WORKPLACE AND ETHNICITY

		ANGLO	BLACK	MEX AM
TELEPHONE COMPANY EMPLOYEES	Salary.....	\$20,100	\$19,200	\$19,800
	Total Income..	\$22,316	\$21,118	\$21,528
BANK EMPLOYEES	Salary .....	\$12,040	\$ 9,535	\$12,114
	Total Income..	\$20,540	\$10,545	\$16,726

stress jobs. It appears that high stress and job dissatisfaction of women in this second group into becoming involved in their children's education. This could be both a way to make sure that the children will have a chance for better jobs when they grow up, and to compensate for dissatisfaction in their current lives.

Information about persons these mothers consider important in their lives--their social support networks--was examined to determine the role these networks play in mothers' school involvement. Having a diverse network, one which includes both family and friends, was found to be associated with higher school involvement. In addition, mothers who report low involvement in schools also report fewer people in their networks.

Specific questions about direct involvement in children's education on the part of other adults, including fathers, revealed that in 40 percent of the families, children have some assistance with homework from other adults. Also, in 67 percent of the cases, other adults assisted in other, less-direct ways with the education of children. This assistance did not replace or make up for low levels of maternal involvement. Rather, it seemed to encourage and reinforce patterns of relatively high levels of involvement that these mothers had already established.

The role of a few fathers who were involved in the education of their children, on the other hand, appears to have had the effect of making up for a relatively lower level of maternal involvement. Whether this was a continuation of pre-divorce patterns or a post-divorce adaptation could not be ascertained with the available data.

## 2. Family Types

A concerted effort was made in the analysis of data collected from these single parent families to find ways in which overall family functioning could be described. Examination of a number of first order variables led to the delineation of five family types.

The nature of mother-children relationships (in terms of communication, discipline, conflicts, and participation in family life) was the major focus of this assessment, but not the only one examined. Yet, mother-children interactions are so central that they greatly affect overall functioning of the family as a unit as well as individual members. This led to the choice of the more encompassing term "Family Types," instead of "Mother-child Relationship Types."

The labels used with these family types have been chosen to describe succinctly key traits found to color most of the interactions between mothers and their children. Although these types were derived empirically from this sample's data, they are thought to be descriptive of major forms of mother-child relationships. The only element making these types unique to divorced families is that they describe a family situation in which the father is permanently absent from the day-to-day family life.

It should be understood that these types are meant to describe adaptations that single (divorced) families have made. They describe the nature of functioning at the present time, and cannot be considered unchangeable, either by time, personal development, or change in family composition, as

new members are incorporated into the family and others leave.

The five types below are descriptions of family interactions and functioning, rather than descriptions of the relationships of any individual mother-child dyad.

a. Authoritative Mother In these families the mother exercises firm authority, but she is not authoritarian in her approach to discipline. She is not overly concerned with the children following her rules and children have input into family decisions regarding household tasks and recreational activities. Overall, the communication is open and two-way. Even though there are conflicts on occasion, these are relatively minor and brief and conflicts that are long-lasting are appropriate, given the developmental stages of the children. The mother expresses confidence in her parenting style and skills, but is not overly confident. The mother and child(ren) engage in many joint activities, yet the mother and children have their separate lives and activities, which are not resisted. The children in these families tend to make minor contributions to the household management and typically will make major contributions only upon reaching adolescence.

b. Authoritarian Mother In these families the mother is very authoritarian and maintains rigid control over her children, and the mothers tend to report very few or no conflicts. Since the children are punished quickly and firmly in response to infractions of the rules, there are no openly admitted long-standing conflicts--they are not allowed. The mother and children participate in a few joint activities but the mother has a distinctly separate life from that shared with her children, and the communication is satisfactory but not very intimate. These mothers report that they are very confident about their parenting and even criticism from relatives and friends does not daunt their enthusiasm for their approach to childrearing. Relative to their age, the children typically contribute much to household management.

c. Inadequate Mother These families are characterized by minor discipline problems associated with undue anxiety and guilt on the part of the mother. The conflicts between the mother and children are of moderate intensity, yet the mother responds to these conflicts with self-doubt and confusion about her role as mother and disciplinarian. These mothers typically have conflicts within themselves about how authoritarian/egalitarian they should be. They exercise inconsistent authority over their children. The mother and children share many activities together, yet the mother expresses guilt over the lack of time she devotes to her children. In addition, these mothers report that they are not satisfied with the communication between themselves and the children, usually stating that the children do not confide in her. These mothers are trying very hard to be "good" mothers. However, they are unsure about their parenting abilities.

d. No Control Mother In these families, conflict predominates in the interactions between the mother and the children. The mother is attempting to maintain control by being authoritarian in her discipline, but her authority is continually being challenged by the children. The children are rebelling against the mother's authority and are attempting to exercise their own control in the relationships with their mother. Usually the



1

mother is trying to have her own life separate from the children and is managing to engage in separate activities, but her activities are strongly resisted. As would be expected, communication is poor with little directness and openness. The children do not contribute much toward household management and this is typically a source of contention between the mother and children.

e. Dependent Mother In these families the mother relies heavily upon the children for assistance in managing the household, and frequently relies on the children for advice in personal matters. The mother and oldest child are typically confidants and have very close, two-way communication. Correspondingly, there are few or no conflicts present in these relationships as the mother and child(ren) are very interdependent. The mother reports that there is little need for discipline as a result of their unusual interdependence, and her authority in the home is rather weak. The mother and children engage in very many joint activities and the mother seldom does anything without involving the children. (See Table 5 for an abbreviated description of the family types.)

Most of the mother-child relationships in this sample of divorced working women appear to be healthy with concomitant good overall family functioning. However, those mothers and children classified as No Control families would likely need intervention by a professional to improve their relationships within the family. Mothers classified as Inadequate Mother families would likely benefit from parenting education. And the mothers and children classified as Dependent Mother families could be predicted to experience difficulties later, given the intensity of their interdependence.

Based on the data collected, the type of family organization of each of the 30 families was determined. Eleven of the families (37 percent) were classified as Authoritative Mother family type. The remaining families were more or less equally distributed among the other types. Five (17 percent) of the families were classified as Authoritarian Mother family type, and six (20 percent) of the families were classified as Inadequate Mother family type. Five (17 percent) families were classified as No Control family types, and the remaining 10 percent (3) were classified as being Mother-Dependent family type.

### 3. Family Type and School Involvement

When families in the sample were assigned to family types, Anglo families were found to be overrepresented among the Inadequate and No-Control family types, where discipline problems and conflicts constitute a distinguishing trait. Black families, on the other hand, were more often characterized by rigid discipline and mother's satisfaction with a highly organized household. Most Mexican American families were classified as Authoritative Mother family type, which is characterized by conflict-free, more egalitarian mother-child relationships. Only two of the Mexican American families reported conflicts and discipline problems with their children.

When families in the sample were classified simultaneously by Family Type and by Level of School Involvement (two measures derived independently), those classified as No Control family type were found to have low



MOTHERS SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

Low Involvement in School Mothers (N=7)

High Involvement in School Mothers (N=9)

S's Code <sup>a</sup>	Work-place	Job stress	Job satisfaction	Career invol.	Educ. years	Commitment to work	Worked part-time	S's Code	Work-place	Job stress	Job satisfaction	Career invol.	Educ. years	Commitment to work	Worked part-time
BA2	Bank	Mod	Low	High	12	High	Yes	BA1	Bank	High	High	Low	12	Low	No
BA4	Bank	Low	High	Mod	16	Mod	No	BB2	Bank	High	High	Low	8	Low	No
BB1	Bank	Low	Low	High	12+8 <sup>b</sup>	High	Yes	BB5	Bank	Mod	High	Mod	12	High	No
BB4	Bank	Mod	Low	Mod	14	Low	Yes	PA4	Phone	Mod	Low	Low	12	Low	No
BM2	Bank	Low	High	Mod	16	Low	Yes	PB1	Phone	High	Low	High	14	High	No
BM3	Bank	Mod	High	High	12	High	No	PB4	Phone	High	Low	Mod	16	Low	No
PA3	Phone	High	Low	Mod	12	High	No	PB5	Phone	High	Low	High	12	High	No
								PM4	Phone	High	Low	Low	14	Mod	No
								PM5	Phone	High	High	High	12+8 <sup>b</sup>	High	No

<sup>a</sup>Subject's code: first letter = workplace; second letter = ethnicity; numeral = subject number

<sup>b</sup>Business college

TABLE 5

TYPES OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS  
(Mother and Children Only)

Family Type	Average Age of Oldest Child	Communication	Activities Shared	Mother's Control	Conflict	Resistance to Mother's Activities	Children's Contribution to Household Management	Mother's Perception of Her Parenting
Authoritative Mother	10.2	Open	Many	Firm	Low	Low	Minor	Satisfied
Authoritarian Mother	9.4	Somewhat Closed	Few	Rigid	Very Low	Very Low	Minor	Very Satisfied
Inadequate Mother	10.5	Somewhat Closed	Many	Inconsistent	Moderate	Moderate	Very Little	Dissatisfied
No Control Mother	13.0	Very Closed	Very Few	Challenged	High	High	Minor	Very Dissatisfied
Dependent Mother	10.0	Very Open	Very Many	Weak	Very Low	Very Low	Major	Very Satisfied

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levels of school participation. Families classified as Authoritarian Mother family type tended to be highly involved mothers, as were families classified as belonging to the Authoritative Mother family type. (These two types are characterized by a relative absence of conflict, tension, and relatively smooth-functioning families.)

Several connections were established between family types and specific work-related variables. Families classified as Authoritarian Mother family type tended to have a high level of career involvement, while families classified as Authoritative and Dependent Mother family types tended to have low career involvement. It appears that single mothers who maintain a high career involvement also rely more on highly structured and rigid behavior in the home as a general coping strategy to experience success both as a parent and as a worker.

Families classified as No Control Mother family type are more likely to be in low stress, low pressure jobs. They seem to be managing their family-related stress by consciously separating work from family life. Since taking time off for school-related activities would constitute an invasion of family life into the work domain, they may simply avoid doing so in order to maintain this important coping strategy. Such behavior could explain their relatively low involvement in the education of their children.

Involvement in children's education requires communication, which is typically closed and tense in these conflict-ridden families. It must be emphasized that these families are concerned and distressed by their difficulties, and that these mothers are motivated to be the best parents possible. However, they may be simply striving to confine family-generated stress to after-hours in order to protect their ability to hold their jobs. This appears to be a necessity in order to help ensure the viability of their family units, as they are the primary and often the only providers.

#### 4. Fathers' Involvement

Slightly less than half of the fathers described in this sample are in regular contact with their children. Examination of the correlates of fathers' involvement in their children's lives revealed that the nature and quality of the ex-spousal relationship is the most significant factor related to fathers' involvement. However, whether the nature of the ex-spousal relationship determines the level of father involvement is unclear.

Only a few fathers who have no communication with their ex-spouses have contact with their children. It appears that some level of communication and cooperation between ex-spouses is necessary for fathers to remain involved with their children. There are few mechanisms utilized by most families which allow fathers to interact with their children if the ex-spouses are unable to communicate. Several fathers only interact with their children when the children are visiting the fathers' families. Sometimes fathers' families encourage them to be actively involved in their children's lives. In other cases, the fathers' families appear to act as mediators between the ex-spouses and provide a conflict-free atmosphere for the transfer of children from mother's to father's care.

Even though the ex-spousal relationship does not clearly determine the level of father's involvement with his children, conflictual ex-spousal relationships sometimes instigate and perpetuate conflict between the parents and their children. Ex-spousal relationships may be fraught with conflicts concerning parenting issues without deleterious effects upon mother-child and father-child relationships. However, those ex-spouses who engage in conflicts centering around personal grievances unrelated to their parenting have troubled relationships with their children. Parents who retain hostile feelings toward their ex-spouses and yet are able to communicate with their ex-spouses about parenting concerns without bringing other grievances in to the communication, are better able to maintain harmonious parent-child relationships. In conclusion, those divorced parents whose primary purpose for communication is to promote the well-being of their children appear to have the most successful relationships with their children.

#### 5. Ethnic Differences

Ethnic differences appear to be more significant than do the differences between types of employment relative to the overall functioning of divorced working women and their families. Black mothers appear to be more successful as working single parents based on the data collected from this sample. Not only did the Black mothers report fewer discipline problems with their children, they also reported higher school involvement and higher involvement in their careers. Historically, Black women have assumed the role of single working parent in much larger numbers than either Anglo women or Mexican American women. Therefore, Black women have grown up with many relevant role models within their own immediate families and within their communities. Thus, they have had the benefit of having been "taught," through observation and rewards, to manage the roles of nurturer and provider. The availability of these role models and the greater acceptance of the single parenthood status within their cultural milieu combine to enhance Black divorced mothers' self-esteem and confidence in their ability to perform well the many roles held by divorced working women with dependent children. As one Black mother stated when asked what she wanted for her children (girls) when they grow up;

"I want them to be independent like I am and work, and take care of their family."

Black women were more likely to have discussed career plans with their children and seemed to expect their daughters to have careers more so than did the Mexican American and Anglo mothers. Another Black mother when asked whether she would want her daughter to have a job similar to hers some day stated:

"I would like for her to be something better. I would like her to be something professional, be something that no one never expected her to be, especially being Black."

In general, Black women expressed more interest in their own and their children's careers and seemed more ambitious in terms of educational goals for themselves and their children. Even though Black women's school involvement appears to be affected adversely by career frustrations, as is

that of the other mothers, they are not as likely to experience the negative effects of role overload documented for many single working parents.

As reported earlier, Black women and their families differ from Anglo and Mexican American families in several important ways. While all Anglo and Mexican American mothers maintain independent family units consisting of themselves and their children, only six of the ten Black women are living alone with their children. One Black woman lives with her mother, one with her sister, one has an adult female housemate, and one's adolescent niece lives in the home. All of these women share the household and childrearing responsibilities with the other adult in the home. This reduces the time the mother must spend in domestic activities and increases the time available for career and educational pursuits. The Black women were also more likely to have tight, interconnected primary support networks in which all her friends (including her male friend) know her family and she knows the families of her friends. They were also more likely to have mixed support networks than were the Anglo mothers. Those Black women who do have low density networks do so because their families live out of state. The nature of the Black mothers' support system is another factor that adds to the relative success of these families.

#### 6. Mother-Children Relationships

Another relevant difference in Black families when compared to Mexican American and Anglo families can be seen in the nature of the mother-child relationships. While many (60 percent) of the Anglo mothers are experiencing discipline problems with their children only two (20 percent) of the Black mothers reported mother-child relationship problems, and these tended to be minor. The Black women were much more likely to exercise authoritarian control with their children yet were unlikely to report communication and/or discipline problems. The Black women, 40 percent of whom were categorized as Authoritarian Mother families, were also more likely to maintain separate social lives from those with their children. They seem better able to meet their own needs without experiencing guilt and anxiety about neglecting their children. This is not to say that the Black women actually spend less time with their children or that they leave their children in the care of others more frequently. However, some who have other adults living in the home are able to do this more easily. The Black mothers simply express less anxiety and guilt concerning their separate lives and their parenting styles.

While Black women seem to have accepted the role of employed mother for themselves and others from childhood, many of the Mexican American and Anglo mothers were unprepared psychologically for the dual role of worker and mother. As one Anglo woman expressed it:

"Somewhere in the back of my mind I still had this image of being a housewife because when I worked I knew I didn't have to work...when I got my divorce...I still kind of had that attitude and gradually as the years go by I've realized that I'm really a working...I mean, I'm running my house, raising my kids and I've got a job... and I go, 'Wow,' because I don't think of myself like that but I guess I really am."



The Mexican American and Anglo women appear to experience more stress at the time of divorce because of their lack of preparation for the roles of primary provider and single parent.

#### 7. Support Networks

As stated earlier, divorce appears to be more disruptive to family ties for the Mexican American women. In addition, their status within their culture and their families declines upon divorce. Ties with grandparents and in-laws are more frequently broken. Thus, the Mexican American woman's support network becomes smaller, and conflict between the divorcing couple and their families is more intense. The Anglo women in the sample did not report as many broken ties with the ex-husband's family, and the divorces did not seem to produce as much intra-family conflict. However, the Anglo women in this sample are from lower-middle to middle class backgrounds and exhibit attitudes that are common among traditional families with two parents. In particular, Anglo women are attempting to maintain a family life for their children that is as similar to that of two-parent households as possible. They appear to be trying to maintain a single family household and the advantages of this structure (privacy and little interference from others) but suffering the subsequent burdens of being the primary (and sometimes only) provider and caregiver. Because of their desire to maintain an independent, separate family unit, they are frequently taking on more roles than do the Black women with similar financial and time constraints. It is readily apparent that Anglo women are experiencing more difficulties in childrearing. This appears to be due to their lack of preparation for assuming both roles of provider and caregiver. In addition, Anglo mothers appear to be less likely to share child-rearing responsibilities with their ex-husbands, and, overall are attempting to fulfill the obligations of many roles without much instrumental assistance from other adults.

#### 8. Dual-Earner and Single-Parent Families

Only a few general comparisons of dual-earner families and divorced working mother families will be presented and discussed at this time. Two areas of interrelationships between work and family were most clearly different for divorced working mothers and dual-earner families. One of the most notable findings from our study of women in dual-earner families was the large number of women who expressed guilt surrounding their employment outside the home because of the reduced amount of time and energy they had for childrearing responsibilities. Understandably, the divorced working mothers view their role as an employed person quite differently since they are the primary providers for themselves and their children. When asked what they felt they did particularly well as a parent, many of the divorced women reported that they provided for their children's material needs. One mother's response was as follows:

"I'm working, supporting them. I'm feeding them, putting clothes on their backs. And, if they're having a problem, you know, I try to work it out with them."

Another responded,

"I work and make a living (laughed). That's the thing I do best."



Although the divorced mothers are not as likely to feel guilt or have doubts about whether they should work, many did express concern about the little time they have to spend with their children. Since all of the divorced mothers realize the necessity of working full time, their guilt about the time they spend away from their children tends to surround their seeking personal fulfillment socially. In several families the children tended to resist mothers' spending time with their friends, and these mothers often expressed anxiety and guilt about engaging in social activities that do not involve the children.

The divorced mothers also appear to use different criteria for assessing the quality of their family lives. While many married working women become angry when their children do not perform their assigned household tasks, the divorced working women seem to view their children's lack of participation in household tasks as an indication that their family is not a cohesive unit. The divorced mothers not only were angered when their children did not do their part in the housekeeping, they felt that the children did not have a sense of "belonging" or "family."

As expected, the most frequently reported area of conflict between the divorced mothers and their children is that of sharing household responsibilities. Divorced mothers face the dilemma of wanting the children to take on more responsibility, more sharing of household and family responsibilities, while simultaneously maintaining the role of the highest and only authority in the family. It appears to be difficult to strike a workable balance between the level of contribution to household management a child should have and the level of self-governing and independence a child should be allowed. The divorced mothers are clearly not as concerned about the added tasks they must perform if the children do not contribute as they are about the lack of family solidarity which the children's failure to participate in household tasks represents.

Additionally, single mothers appear to emphasize the necessity of having a clean, organized house more than the mothers in dual-earner families. A clean house seems to symbolize her success as a single parent. This also appears to be a way of demonstrating that her family is doing just as well now as it was during her marriage and that her family is not suffering because of the decision to divorce. Overall, these divorced mothers exhibit a lack of specific career goals, and their priorities center around the family. Thus, if they are to achieve, it will have to be at home, where a clean, organized house becomes a symbol of achievement as well as a symbol of family cohesion.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the recommendations presented here were discussed during a regional mini-conference sponsored by the Working Parents Project. Held in Austin on September 28-29, 1983, the conference gathered a cross-section of researchers, service providers, and advocates from the six states in the SEDL region. Specific solutions already being implemented in various locations were discussed under the overall theme of "Increasing Supports for Two-parent and Single-parent Families." A full report on the conference proceedings is available as a separate document.

Preliminary findings from this study were presented during that conference. They provided further support for the importance of the issues identified and the appropriateness of the recommendations offered, in spite of some limitations derived from the size of the sample. Although it cannot be considered to be a representative sample of all clerical white collar workers, it includes women employed by two types of businesses: one, a private utility and the other, banks. This, in addition to the near certainty that no bias was introduced in the selection of the subjects, adds confidence that the suggestions or recommendations derived from this study are well-grounded. Also, there is enough homogeneity as well as diversity among families in the sample that they can, in this sense, be considered representative of a range of possible types of families within the category "single (divorced) working mothers of elementary school age children."

Just as there are no two families whose life histories are exactly alike, considerable diversity exists among workplaces, and among jobs within the same workplace. Further, workplaces are dynamic, changing social organizations, and, as such, they are affected by broader social forces. Even at the time of this study, the phone company was on the verge of great changes which will be brought about by the break up of the parent company. The consequences of these changes are hard to predict. Uncertainty has filtered down to the level of individual workers in this sample, as they reflected during the interviews what the changes would mean for their own jobs and personal future.

But it is precisely the dynamic nature of workplaces which can create the conditions for changes to improve not only productivity and efficiency, but also the personal satisfaction and well-being of workers and their families.

Similar considerations can be extended to the other social institution of concern in this study--our schools and the educational system. This is a time for much soul searching and re-examining the goals of our schools and of education. Major studies and commissions have started to report, at the national level, how schools have not kept up with changes in our society. Even more importantly, they report how schools are not able to prepare the next generation for a future that we know will be different from the present.

In our study, we have focused on that segment of divorced mothers who work full-time to support themselves and their dependent children. We have identified two categories of social institutions whose practices and policies can affect the well-being of these families. They are (1) Employers and unions, who influence the conditions of the work that these single (divorced) mothers perform in exchange for a wage or salary and (2) Schools, who have primary responsibility for the education of their children and social service agencies designed to support families, in particular child care providers and other community agencies and services.

#### 1. Employers, Unions and the Workplace

Our research examined characteristics of jobs and workplaces as they

affected mothers' ability and availability to become involved in the education of their children. At the onset, it must be said that the power of employers is limited, since no employer can force employees to do something that they do not want to do. However, an employer can, by instituting certain policies and practices, facilitate or encourage parental participation in schools, and improve the overall atmosphere at work to relieve some of the pressures and tensions built-in at the workplace.

a. School Involvement Affirmative Action Policy We propose that leave policies for school related needs should be studied jointly by managers and employees. An explicit statement by employers which affirms the value of school involvement, similar to affirmative action statements about employment, is one way to recognize the social importance of children and their education. In order to avoid opposition from employees who are not parents, any such school involvement affirmative action policy must be a product of the widest form of employee participation and discussion possible, with emphasis on the fact that it is a benefit primarily for children, secondarily for parents, and also good for schools and the community.

Note that this policy is recommended for working parents, whether male or female, married, remarried, single, divorced or separated, with or without custody of their school children.

b. Employer Assisted Child Care One of the main sources of tardiness and unexcused absences of working parents, particularly working mothers, has to do with problems relating to alternative care for young children while mothers are at work. Alternative child care is a need that must be met by any mother who does not have a built-in child care system, such as their mothers or other relatives residing in the household.

As with most other options subject to marketplace forces, the quality of child care, in general, is directly proportional to its cost. The problem for parents with incomes just above the poverty level is to find affordable quality care. Social mechanisms such as subsidies, which tend to lower the cost of quality care such as in church-sponsored day care centers, public school-based extended day care or publically funded day care centers, are inadequate to meet the needs of a growing population of working mothers.

Employer supported child care rarely covers the extended care of school age children. A growing number of schools and school districts are currently participating in extended care in various forms. These include making their facilities available to non-profit providers as an "in-kind" contribution, leasing their unused facilities to providers (proprietary or non-profit), and actually operating their own extended care systems. In most cases, such extended care programs are almost totally self-supporting through fees collected from parents using the services.

Some form of voucher system for child care assistance appears to have the greatest promise, because it allows different employers to select the level of commitment that is compatible with their willingness to offer this support. It also allows workers to choose arrangements to suit their own preferences. When offered in a "cafeteria" style menu of employee bene-

fits, it appears to suit the needs, resources, and preferences of employers and employees. Thus, such efforts have the greatest chance of support from all parties.

c. Employee Assistance Programs Findings from this study support the growing realization that workers cannot be perceived and treated as just one more resource, one which can be used, developed, refined, and, when no longer profitable, simply discarded. In addition to their skills and energy, workers bring to work every day a variety of hopes and concerns, aspirations and limitations, problems and possibilities. The source of these is more often home, which together with the workplace accounts for almost the all of the time and energy available to and used by working people. The extent to which these psychological carry-overs from home to work are positive and energizing, productivity and efficiency will be high? If, however, the carry-overs are mostly negative, they can interfere significantly with job performance.

The opposite phenomenon is equally true. Workers who go home physically tired but emotionally energized, or at least not depleted, are likely to contribute positively to a satisfying home life. Workers who go home loaded with pent-up negative feelings that they were unable to deal with at the workplace, are likely to seek a sympathetic ear for these concerns at home. In the absence of other adults, as in the case of many single parents, children end up bearing the brunt of these frustrations for a day, a week or all of their childhood years.

High stress is a condition associated with certain jobs or occupations that can affect not only individual workers, but which can touch others through certain behavioral reactions. This includes co-workers, and can produce negative consequences for all. Stress also can be produced by adverse non-work situations, such as home- or family-related problems. The consequences of stress, whether such stressors are work or family conditions, can affect the whole life of individuals and can spill over to their relationships with co-workers and family alike.

Two highly related and complementary approaches to deal with stress are proposed here. The first consists of a comprehensive examination of the workplace, its job structure and overall functioning as a social organization. The goal is to minimize or eliminate those conditions which produce stress. For example, work quotas, performance standards, and deadlines can be examined, when feasible, to periodically evaluate and re-evaluate their usefulness. Solutions in this area can include a redefinition of jobs, changes in interdependence of jobs, increased worker autonomy, use of teams and relief workers, greater flexibility in work schedules, allocation of work loads, etc. The most widespread source of frustration and anxiety expressed by mothers in our sample had to do with inflexible short-term leave policies. Measures must be taken to increase the flexibility of parents to attend to unexpected child-related events, often requiring no more than an hour or two. Often penalties are imposed, or workers must forego a full day's pay when all they needed was a couple of hours of leave.

Another important source of frustration detected in our study has to do



with both objective and subjective (perceived) job security, opportunities for training, transfers and promotions. Although not all workers are equally motivated to advance into higher levels of responsibility, it is important that such opportunities be open and available to those willing to take them. In many cases, the perception concerning a lack of opportunities is due to a lack of information, rather than to the absence of those opportunities. The most clear need is to improve the means for internal information so that employees can be aware of opportunities open to them, and can plan according to their own personal priorities.

The second and complementary approach proposed here assumes that there can be certain stress-producing conditions which cannot be eliminated or minimized. However, workers can be trained in techniques which have been found useful in managing unavoidable stress. These techniques are so generic that they often can be used as general coping strategies. Workers trained to use them at work could find their application equally beneficial for circumstances they must deal with at home.

A similar approach can be used to deal with some sources of stress that are found in the home. Parenting education has long been recognized as a valuable tool to help parents improve their management of their children's behavior. In addition to community-based programs, workplace "Noon Time Seminars" or "Brown Bag Lunch Seminars" have been used successfully by many employers. The advantages are obvious: parents are already there, know each other, and will continue to see each other anyway. Thus, the potential for follow-up support networks being formed from such programs is considerably greater than that of community-based programs which are often not neighborhood-based.

Parenting difficulties were only one type of difficulty experienced by some of the single parents in our study. They could benefit from consumer/financial counseling--a preventive service which could improve the financial health of not only single parents, but that of workers in general. This type of information can also be provided in a Noon Time/Lunch Sack setting at the workplace.

In summary, based on some of the needs and concerns expressed by single parents in our study, it is proposed that the format and basic operating principles of Employee Assistance Programs be expanded to cover, in addition to their traditional focus on alcohol and substance abuse, some services related to the mental and financial health of workers and their families. These services could include on-site education and training activities, such as Stress Management, Parenting Education, and Financial Counseling. In addition, Information and Referral Services can be offered to cover other needs which can be met by existing community based agencies and services, such as mental health, marital counseling, child abuse, legal assistance, adult education and training, and recreation services.

The types of assistance proposed here are most critical for single parents, given their relatively limited time and financial resources. It also can be of great importance to dual-earner families and parents, in general, and in many cases to single and/or childless workers. Thus, this is a proposal that can be described as non-discriminatory in nature, and,



as such, can be considered a benefit for all workers.

A program such as the one proposed should not be evaluated simply in cost/benefit terms, or in terms of its value as a financial investment, its tax advantages, or the bottom line--net profits. Allowances must be made to make these types of programs an expression of a human-oriented joint corporate and union philosophy. It must be a part of the broader concept of what a corporation can offer to workers; parents and non-parents; single, divorced, widowed and remarried; male and female; young and old; management, supervisory and clerical; skilled and unskilled.

## 2. Schools and Alternative Care Providers

Schools are central to the lives of children. They are the setting where children spend most of the day. Schools are trusted with one of the most important functions of society--educating its members. There are many ways in which parents can become involved in the education of their children. We found that most mothers expressed a desire to be more involved in their children's school activities. They were particularly interested in attending activities in which their children are taking active part. These included plays, band concerts, and field trips. Unfortunately, many of these activities are scheduled during the mothers' work hours. Many workers are not allowed to leave the workplace to attend school activities because of specific policies regarding short term leave. Others seem reluctant to request time off for such activities for fear of abusing their employer's somewhat more liberal short term leave policies. An unwritten rule seems to hold these needs as being of lesser value than "real emergencies."

Young children have difficulty understanding why their mothers cannot attend "their" activities, when other mothers are there participating. These demands can introduce stress into mother-child relationships. The presence of a proud parent, maybe the only one they have, can be an important reinforcer to children.

Teachers also tend to equate the presence of parents at these types of events with interest and support for their work. Unconsciously, the absence can be taken as a sign of lack of interest, often reinforcing already existing misconceptions about divorced mothers and children of "broken homes."

Several suggestions can be derived from some of the experiences related by parents in this study. Because of the diversity of schools and grade levels represented in our sample, these suggestions are couched in general terms, and they do not ignore the fact that some or even many schools and individual teachers are already implementing similar measures.

a. Scheduling of Activities and Special Events The most obvious suggestion is that schools should schedule more activities for after-work hours. However, as was the case for some of the women in our sample, many of them work evenings or irregular shifts. There is a need to find a balance between day, evening and weekend activities. In any case, teachers should expect that some parents will not participate. A simple reminder to children about the fact that some parents are very busy, or working and

unable to attend, would do much to alleviate the guilt many parents feel for not being there, as well as the disappointment or embarrassment often experienced by their children.

b. Publicity for Upcoming School Events Several parents stated that if they knew well in advance, time off could be requested or arrangements made with co-workers and supervisors to be away for a short period. Children often can be somewhat unreliable messengers to the home for school news. A well-publicized schedule of events would undoubtedly enable more parents to anticipate as well as participate in school activities.

In addition to direct mailings or phone contacts, schools can promote periodical listings of activities in local newspapers or neighborhood publications. Some schools publish regular newsletters mailed to all residents of their attendance zone.

Schools can help promote the adoption by businesses and employers of a School Involvement Affirmative Action policy described in the previous section. A first step would be to provide business and other large employers with calendars of major (and minor) school events. These calendars, posted in the workplace, would tell employees that their employer cares about children, in general, and their children in particular. At the same time it could help parents plan their own participation in those events listed.

c. School Involvement of Non-custodial Parents In single-parent families (and in step-parent families as well), the custodial parent is not always the one who is most involved in the children's education. Divorce and loss of custody does not necessarily eliminate non-custodial parents from children's lives. We found several instances of a clear commitment to participate. Schools, however, often ignore the non-custodial parent.

At a minimum, schools should inform non-custodial parents about their children's educational progress. Furthermore, these parents should be advised about school events. It should be left up to parents and children to decide who can or should attend school functions. Only in extreme cases, such as when a court order applies, should schools prohibit non-custodial parents' access to information held by schools and to contacts with school officials regarding the educational progress of their children.

Such an expanded communication policy also can include mailing school grades and other school information to non-custodial parents who do not reside in the same city.

d. Homework Although about 40 percent of the single parent families in our sample reported that sometimes other adults helped their children with homework, this also implies that at least 60 percent do not have any help.

Homework can be a constant source of stress and tension in the family. First, it often calls for parents to constantly monitor children's work on assignments and keep them away from distractions. Second, in addition to being a drain of energy from exhausted mothers, this monitoring function often turns into an adversarial relationship. It can become a source of strain in relationships that are already restricted to just a few hours a

day for working single mothers who must also manage their households. Third, many mothers are ill-equipped to help their children with many homework assignments. Half of our sample had only a high school education.

No unequivocal solution is suggested by our study of single mothers. However, the issue of homework, its nature and its purpose, is something that must be considered seriously by the education community. To the extent that it builds up and reinforces skills acquired during the school day, it may be a necessary part of education. However, educators also must recognize its potential for frustrating parents, who cannot help, and children, who cannot complete assignments.

One solution that has been implemented by some Extended Care Programs is the allocation of space, time, and tutors to supervise children who wish to complete their assignments during that period. This frees both parents and children's time at home for recreation, relaxation, or household work.

An alternative solution, implemented by some teachers and schools as an informal policy, is simply not to assign homework to be done over the weekend. With their time already limited, parents and children in dual-earner and single-parent families can allocate weekends for family pursuits of a relaxing nature.

The elimination of homework as a source of family conflict and stress could have a significant impact on the quality of life in single-parent households, and on other family forms as well.

These and other changes in procedures and policies of employers, unions, schools, and other agencies can be of great importance to working parents, in particular, because they allow them greater flexibility to plan not only for the multiple demands arising from their work careers, but also those arising from child care, their children's education, and other family needs. Changes such as those discussed here should be welcomed by other family forms, including those single, childless, or with older children since these could also accommodate their own needs for a satisfying personal life apart from their jobs and careers.