WOMEN LEADERS IN HIGH-POVERTY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: WORK-RELATED STRESS AND FAMILY IMPACT

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This qualitative study explores the experiences of women administrators in high-poverty community schools, investigating four women's perspectives on work demands and the impact on their families. Their work demands are related to the characteristics of impoverished communities, whereas their work resources are based on intrinsic rewards and social justice. Family demands and resources are related to the developmental stages of families, and therefore vary among the women interviewed. The research identifies the boundary-spanning demands between work and home, and the resources and strategies used by these educational leaders to manage the challenges of working in high-poverty community schools.

Key words: school leadership, urban education, principals, inner-city schools

Cette étude qualitative porte sur les expériences de directrices d'école dans des milieux défavorisés. L'auteure analyse le point de vue de quatre femmes sur les exigences de leur travail et l'impact sur leurs familles. Les exigences de leur travail sont reliées aux caractéristiques des milieux pauvres tandis que leurs ressources professionnelles se fondent sur des récompenses intrinsèques et la justice sociale. Les exigences et les ressources en matière familiale sont liées au stade de développement des familles et varient donc d'une répondante à l'autre. La recherche identifie les exigences quant à l'interpénétration des frontières entre le travail et la maison ainsi que toutes les ressources et stratégies utilisées par ces cadres en vue de faire face aux défis de travailler au sein d'écoles implantées dans des milieux défavorisés.

Mots clés : direction d'école, école urbaine, directeurs d'école, écoles dans des milieux défavorisés

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The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived work-related stress on family life as experienced by women administrators in high-poverty community schools. I used Voydanoff's (2005) conceptual model of work-family fit and balance, based on a demands and resources approach, as a framework to analyze results. In the literature review, I have examined issues related to poverty and schooling, leadership in high-poverty communities, women in educational leadership, and work-related stress. I present results of four qualitative interviews with women administrators, as well as implications for practice and suggestions for future research.

The research questions guiding this study are:

What are the everyday realities of leadership in high-poverty community schools?

How do women administrators in such schools manage work-family fit and balance?

In what ways do their job experiences lead to work-related stress for school leaders and their families?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Voydanoff's (2005) research explores the demands, resources, and strategies that affect a worker's ability to accomplish fit and balance between work and home. "As it became clear that work and family are interrelated domains, scholars and practitioners began to develop approaches to increase our understanding of the linkages between them" (p. 822). Voydanoff's (2005) conceptual model posits that both work and family place demands upon an individual, and they also offer resources which "are structural or psychological assets that may be used to facilitate performance, reduce demands, or generate additional resources" (p. 823). The congruence of these demands and resources results in fit, whereas incongruence results in stress.

Boundary-spanning refers to how work and family influence each other. Voydanoff (2005) suggests that both boundary-spanning demands and resources affect one's ability to achieve work-family fit. In addition, individuals implement boundary-spanning strategies that can reduce work and family demands and increase work and family resources. The degree to which an individual and her family are able to achieve work-

family fit and use boundary-spanning strategies will affect work-family balance, and the level of work and family role performance and quality. Voydanoff's (2005) conceptual model offers a process to examine issues related to the work-family experiences of this study's participants, notably women who are school leaders working in high-poverty communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty and Schooling

Today, 20 per cent of Canadian children live in poverty (Lee, 2000), a statistic crucial for educators because the socio-economic status of families is strongly related to the academic achievement of their children (see the *National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth: Growing Up in Canada [Cycle 2]*, Human Resources Development Canada, 1996). In essence, children living in families with lower incomes are at greater risk of experiencing negative outcomes in school (Ross & Roberts, 1999). Studies indicate that the corollary is also true: the lower the level of educational attainment, the higher is the risk of poverty (Silver, 2000). These data suggest that, even as issues related to low socio-economic levels challenge schools in impoverished areas, those same schools are, in part, the solution to persistent poverty. Although educators understand that poverty plays a pivotal role in student success, they are often overwhelmed by the scope of the issue (Levin & Riffel, 2000).

Many children living in poverty are faced with daunting challenges as a result of their families' socio-economic status, challenges that have an impact on their ability to meet with academic success in school. For example, families living in poverty often lack affordable housing and move frequently to find adequate shelter. High migrancy rates affect children's opportunities for educational consistency and the stability necessary for academic progress. In addition, these children often lack adequate food, clothing, and resources to support and enrich their school experiences (Silver, 2000). These research findings indicate the necessity for research related to the role of schools in improving the lives of families living in poverty.

School Leadership in High-Poverty Communities

The leaders of schools in high-poverty areas are uniquely challenged to ensure that students are nurtured and provided with opportunities to meet their academic potential. Effective leadership plays a key factor in improving those schools responsible for educating impoverished children (Lyman & Villani, 2001; West, Jackson, Harris, & Hopkins, 2000). It is, therefore, essential to recruit and retain skilled leaders for these schools. Research indicates that principals leading schools in impoverished areas have

a strong moral purpose but often wrestle with idealism/pessimism about how much this is possible in practice. Very often they spend long hours at work to the detriment of their health and family life. While this is not an uncommon feature of principals in other school contexts, it tends to be more prevalent in schools in challenging circumstances thus negatively affecting recruitment and retention in the areas of greatest need. (Thomson & Harris**,** 2005, p. 3)

Thomson and Harris suggest that little research has focused on the everyday realities of principals in schools in high-poverty communities. These realities include ongoing crises that require continual management (e.g., illness, death, violence, abuse); variable teaching quality; students with diverse academic and personal needs; truancy and retention issues; unrealistic expectations about raising student performance; barriers to community involvement; and the complexities of working with multiple agencies (pp. 6-7). Thomson and Harris also advise about the need for more focused and specific training and support for principals working in high-poverty community schools.

    A recent study examining the critical issues and essential supports of inner-city school principals found that these leaders are challenged by socio-economics and other poverty-related issues that affect life within schools (Lawson, 2005). The research also identified key areas of support that principals require, including access to skilled staff, opportunities for collegial networking, relationships with critical friends, and sustained personal wellness.

Women and School Leadership

Scholars in educational administration have examined the historical and present-day roles of women in school leadership. Reynolds (2002), reflecting on women's progress in school leadership, identifies several examples of successes and failures to achieve gender equity and suggests that school systems still do not recognize or respect women leaders, and that women who do succeed in becoming principals are often assigned to problematic schools. Related literature on gender equity includes research on marriage and motherhood, and their impact on women's careers. Hagnal (1995) indicates that much evidence still suggests that women are not promoted due to career interruptions for child-bearing or child rearing. She also suggests that the challenges that women who are teachers and principals face in balancing career and family are not being addressed within school systems. Although progress has been made on a national level to warrant longer maternity leaves, school systems have not been forward-thinking in their efforts to create flexible workplaces for working mothers.

Historically, women who have entered into school administration have been unmarried, have not had children, or have grown families (Loder, 2005). In more recent years, as younger women move into administration, the issue of family balance has become a larger concern. Research indicates that women in administration experience stress and burnout, possibly due to "women's tendency to deny their own needs while seeking to satisfy others' needs and desires, and their needs to cope with the work family conflict" (Oplatka, 2002, p. 213).

Loder (2005), who examines how women administrators negotiate their careers and personal lives, suggests that it is "woefully apparent that the overwhelming responsibility for managing work-family conflicts falls largely on women administrators" (p. 769). Noddings (2003) has even suggested that women have lost ground in some capacities because, although strides have been made to affirm women's rights in the work-place, their present-day position in the work force has not been counter-balanced by policy initiatives to foster more family-friendly work environments.

Young (1994) suggests that "research that invites and examines various perspectives on women administrators' practice would help us

learn more about the complexities and dilemmas women administrators face as they work with their schools' various constituent groups and try to live out their beliefs" (p. 362). As such, it follows that this study will contribute to the knowledge base in the field of educational leadership by examining the experiences of women who are school administrators in high-poverty communities, and who balance the daily demands of families and careers.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The main criterion for identifying high-poverty communities is socio-economic status, which is determined using Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut Off rates (LICO). The cut-offs are set where families spend 20 percentage points or more than the Canadian average on food, shelter, and clothing. A family below the LICO is considered to be living in impoverished circumstances because "any family spending such a high proportion of its income on these three essentials has too little money left for such other necessary expenditures as transport, personal care, house-hold supplies, recreation, health, and insurance" (Lezubski, Silver, & Black, 2000, p. 46).

The participants in this study were working in high-poverty community schools in an urban centre in Western Canada. The median family income for this urban centre, which encompasses the Census Metropolitan Area, is $64,000. In comparison, the median family incomes of the school communities in this study range from approximately $23,000 to $31,000. The percentage of all families living in poverty in this city is 15 per cent, whereas the percentages of families living in poverty in the school communities for this study range from 56 per cent to 74 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2001). These statistics, which portray the disparity between the high-poverty communities and the larger metropolitan area, provide a context for understanding the degree of poverty in the community schools where the study's participants worked.

ASSUMPTIONS

Researcher Positioning

As a public school educator, I spent 10 years working in high-poverty schools in the urban centre where this study took place, in roles includ-

ing special education teacher, resource teacher, vice-principal, and principal. Therefore, I approached this study with perceptions about the issues being examined. For example, I believe that poverty has a direct impact upon school communities, and the leaders of these schools experience more frequent and intensely stressful challenges. I also experienced first-hand the challenges of work-family fit and balance and how the stress of the job "followed me home." The emphasis in this study, however, was not to examine or substantiate personal percep-tions, but to explore the experiences of other women administrators in high-poverty community schools, using a specific focus on Voydanoff's (2005) conceptual model of work-family fit and balance.

Knowledge

From an interpretive perspective, knowledge is subjective, grounded in the realities of the everyday world. This perspective provides both epis-temological and ontological assumptions. As Burrell and Morgan (1985) contend, "the interpretive paradigm is informed by a concern to under-stand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience" (p. 28). In this research project, I made the assumption that knowledge is grounded in the lived experiences of study participants. This knowledge is subjective rather than objective in nature because it is formulated in the human context.

Research Methodology

In keeping with an interpretive perspective, this study does not build upon a priori assumptions about science and research. Hence, know-ledge of everyday realities is most effectively gathered through qualit-ative, values-oriented methods such as guided interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The qualitative research methodology that I used in this study focuses more heavily on investigating peoples' lived experiences, personal perspectives, and the reasons for their actions.

METHOD

I designed this study to give voice to women leaders in high-poverty community schools (Ardovini-Brooker, 2002). Prior to beginning the study, I received formal approval from the ethics committee of the

university at which I was completing doctoral studies. Using flexibly structured interviews, I gathered data on the perceptions of women administrators' work-related stress, and how this stress affected their families. To select participants, I received staff lists of principals from school superintendents. Having been an educator in this urban centre for many years, I was able to identify those administrators who met the criteria for the study: women with spouses and children living at home. I randomly selected principals from this group, and invited them to participate in the study. The first four women contacted agreed to be involved.

I provided an interview guide to each administrator prior to our meetng. During interviews, the process was flexible in terms of follow-up questions and conversation that fostered participant perspective (Erikson, 1986). I encouraged each participant to share her views beyond the scope of the pre-established research questions to create an atmos-phere of openness and freedom, and to support participants' need to communicate (Stringer, 2004). The interviews, which lasted from 45 to 90 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

To determine themes and patterns in the data, I analyzed and coded the transcripts from the first interviews soon after they were conducted. This procedure included topic analysis, which allowed for relevant issues to arise from the data. I then analyzed the second interview transcripts to determine consistent patterns and themes between the two interviews. Accordingly, I analyzed the third and then the fourth transcripts to identify themes consistently evident in all four interviews, as well as unique trends that emerged in the process of analysis.

Once this summative data presented itself, I conducted a member check by providing participants with a written summary of the findings, asking for input to ensure accuracy in my thematic analysis. The four particians supported the written summary.

Delimitations

I established the delimitations of this study to maintain manageability. The study was confined to one urban centre in Western Canada, and in

consideration of time constraints, I interviewed only four participants, interviewing each participant once. This study was restricted to women with spouses and children living at home. Indeed, many women educational leaders are not married, but have families; their voices are also legitimate despite not being part of this particular study.

THE WOMEN AND THEIR SCHOOLS

At the beginning of each interview, I asked participants to provide details about their current family structure and their careers in education. I have used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of both the participants and the schools in which they worked.

At the time of this study, Chris was in her third year as principal. Prior to this, she was the vice-principal at a school in another high-poverty community, and a classroom teacher for 20 years in other schools. Her school has a population of approximately 225 students, from nursery to grade six, with an extensive special education program. The school has a vice-principal and 50 staff members. Chris has been married for 24 years, and has two children at home, both young adults.

Kate was in her second year as principal. Prior to this, she had been vice-principal at the same school for four years, and had 22 years of teachng experience in various urban schools. Her school has 300 students from nursery to grade eight. There are two special programs for students whose behaviour dictates smaller and more structured classes. The school has a vice-principal and 40 staff members. Kate has been married for 29 years and has two adult children, one living at home and one who has recently married and moved out.

Kelly was in administration for two years as the vice-principal of a high-poverty community school. The school had 370 students, from nursery to grade eight, and 50 staff. Kelly recently left the school system to pursue graduate work. She has been married for 20 years and has four children at home, ranging from 2 to 13 years of age.

Sandy spent two years as the principal of a high-poverty community school. This kindergarten to grade-five school had 250 students and 35 staff. Sandy was recently appointed as principal of a much larger school in a suburban, and much less impoverished, area of the same school division. Sandy has past experience as a vice-principal at a suburban

school for 4 years, a language arts consultant, and a teacher for 15 years. She has been married for 23 years and has three children at home, ranging from 12 to 16 years of age.

RESULTS

Using the elements of Voydanoff's (2005) conceptual model of work-family fit and balance to present the research findings, I have organized the results topically, first according to work resources and second, work demands. In these two categories, definitive patterns occurred in the data for all four women administrators. Because the women's perceptions and experiences related to work-family fit and balance show significant variation in terms of family resources, family demands, and boundary-spanning concepts, I organized these responses according to similarities and differences between the perceptions and experiences of the women. Data analysis indicates that these women are in demanding roles leading schools in high-poverty communities while balancing family life. At the same time, the women expressed strong commitment to their roles in both domains.

Work Resources

Voydanoff (2005) describes work resources as those extrinsic and intrinsic assets of the workplace that one perceives to reduce demands, alleviate stress, and facilitate performance. For this study's participants, the intrinsic rewards and personal relationships appear to be front and centre. The women unanimously expressed passion for and commitment to their work. Kelly, for example, discussed the important role of the educator "who has the mandate to teach that child to read and write . . . because that's the only thing that's going to get them out of the cycle of poverty." Similarly, Sandy spoke of the rewards she felt when her students met with success while facing adversity. She explained that, "people are very proud of the school – despite its challenges, the children do remarkably well."

As another example of intrinsic reward, Kate and Chris referred to social activism and social justice. They shared a common understanding that schools in high-poverty areas are central to community develop-

ment and progress, and that educating children who live in poverty offers them hope and future opportunities.

These four school leaders also spoke of the importance of their personal relationships with children and families, and their efforts to build positive connections between families and their schools. In fact, Sandy, whose experience at her school was her first in a high-poverty community, explained her sense of the parents' perspectives:

They were very frightened; they just didn't feel like the school was theirs. I did tons more community work there. Maybe a lot of people would say that's not part of my job, but I feel that when it affects the learning of children, it is my job. (Sandy, interview)

Her comments reflect not only the commitment of these women to their schools and communities but also convey their perspective on the value of their work.

Another work resource for these women was the professional and personal support provided by colleagues. Chris found that she called other inner city administrators for guidance – "people who understand the situation, people who I would trust." Similarly, Sandy spoke of the "aweome staff," colleagues, and district supervisors who were always there to support her and the school community.

Interestingly, none of the women administrators mentioned extrinsic work resources, such as status, salary, and holidays. Their work resources were grounded in the intrinsic rewards from working in these high-poverty community schools.

Work Demands

The work demands on these administrators appeared deeply embedded in the more unsettling features of life in their school communities, which included poverty, crime, and family issues. This context affected the kinds of incidents they confronted, the stress they experienced, and how this work-related stress affected their families.

Each administrator identified the emotional challenges of working with families experiencing economic difficulties. Kelly eloquently articulated this problem:

I can remember driving home at Christmas, and having to stop outside the art gallery to get out of my car, because I was crying so hard that I couldn't see to drive. I just was sick about the Christmas that I was going home to and what they were going home to, and I struggled with that. (Kelly, interview)

Similarly, Chris shared a recent conversation with a teacher: "Her kids were comparing whether they liked wet or dry dog food – which tasted best. And you realize the kids are comparing it because they've eaten it. Those are things that hit you." All study participants had similar stories to share, which they perceived as causing them work-related stress.

Participants also identified criminal activity as a feature of life in their school communities which they perceived as a work demand and stressor. They noted incidents of gang activity, prostitution, weapons offenses, and vandalisms. Kelly explains:

It had been a really bad day. The police had been there three times: a shoplifting, a missing child, and a weapons offence. The third time the police came back, one of the officers said to me, "Wow, I wouldn't want your job." And I thought, "Here he is in a bulletproof vest and he has to carry a gun, and he thinks I have a tough job!" (Kelly, interview)

Each of the women interviewed shared similar experiences, all of which were demanding and many of which threatened the safety of children and staff in the school.

For Kate, the hanging death of a nine-year old student put immeasrable demands on her. She spoke reflectively of the impact on the school, and her response:

It affected everybody from my secretary, to my staff, to all of the children, and to the families – it extended to the community. And from wherever the strength comes to be able to cope with all of that, it just comes, and you just get through it. (Kate, interview)

Kate also shared her experience helping the child's mother through the grieving process, and explained that she "felt actually honoured in a way" to have been one of this mother's sources of support. This experience is an example of work demands being counteracted by work re-

sources, in this case, by the intrinsic value of helping a mother who has lost a child.

These women administrators also referred to the demanding pace of their work in high-poverty community schools. Kelly explained that, as a teacher, she did not realize the degree to which she had been sheltered from some of these issues: "I had administration that protected us from that, and let us teach. And then, when I became an administrator, I was the one doing the protecting. . . . I was now dealing with it." Similarly, Kate explained that "the stress comes from the constant pace of the day," dealing with one crisis issue after another. Sandy explained further that this stress is often because there is so much community work to do. "You become like a social worker and a police officer." Unfortunately, this pace often led to a lack of work resources because there was little time to reach out to colleagues. Chris explained: "Very rarely do I take the time to do that during the day because we're so busy. We don't stop to get ourselves support; we're just doing all the time."

These leaders also suggested that working in high-poverty communities often brought with it exposure to the harsh realities lived by the children with whom they work. Chris explained:

The kinds of things that cause stress hit you out of left field, like when kids come in and tell me what happened over the weekend. Or when they say, "That's the drawer the mouse lives in so I can't get my shirt out for school." When they tell me that nobody was home for supper last night, and they were locked out and wandered around in the cold. When they tell me about the partying, the violence, or having to hide from people. The stories that kids come in with make me think, "How? How do they live through it?" (Chris, interview)

These reflections reveal the emotional stress related to working in high-poverty community schools. The work demands affect these leaders on a personal and physical level. Kelly, Chris, and Sandy described it as exhausttion, worry, and sometimes even fear. Kate even shared her sense of how the job may have contributed to her recent experience with breast cancer:

I truly believe that this is some of the reason why I got sick. You can only share in people's pain so much before it comes out somewhere else. It comes out

physiologically, because you imbalance your system with that pain. (Kate, interview)

Interestingly, although these women were open in sharing their perceptions of work demands, they were equally passionate about the strengths of their students, schools, communities, and colleagues, and the immeasurable support and rewards that they received from work.

Differences in Family Demands, Resources, and Boundary Spanning

Although the findings of this research indicate consistent trends with regard to work demands and work resources, the structure or character-istics of each woman's family appeared to be related to family demands and resources, as well as boundary-spanning issues. With the exception of the fact that each woman was in a long-term spousal relationship, their families varied in terms of developmental stages.

The family with young children. Kelly, with four young children ages 2 to 13, experienced significant family demands related to caring for young children, being involved in their activities and school, maintaining the home, and sharing family responsibilities with her spouse. Although she expressed the rewards of motherhood, the demands of a young family were challenging. Kelly acknowledged the family resources of a support-ive husband and extended family, but within the boundary-span-ning context, she felt pressure and guilt in both domains:

I always felt, no matter what time I went to school, I'd always got to school too late and left home too early. And then the same thing coming home. I would stay at work as long as I could, but I'd still leave long before I had everything really done, and yet I'd get home too late and would have missed things. So, I was never doing anything right. (Kelly, interview)

As an actively involved mother trying to meet her family responsibilities, while maintaining a challenging and demanding career, Kelly exper-ienced stress when work and family did not fit. This was even more noticeable to her when she became pregnant with her fourth child, during her first year in administration:

That was a stress in itself. I was a new administrator, and it was the first time that I really hid the news [that I was pregnant]. I didn't want to share that news with people because I didn't know how it would be received. There was pressure to be on the career track, and to make that commitment to this job, so there would be a perception that I wasn't committed to my career. (Kelly, interview)

While on maternity leave, Kelly began graduate work, and decided to leave administration to pursue her studies. In the context of school leadership, she had little or no room for part-time or job-share positions. Returning to work would have entailed full-time school leadership, which would have been difficult to balance with graduate work and the continued responsibilities of a young family. As Kelly concluded, "Something had to give."

The family with adolescent children. Sandy was in the midst of managing the active lives of three children, ages 12 to 16, while working as the principal in a high-poverty community school. As with Kelly, she had a supportive husband who shared all family and household responsibilities. She also had a supportive network of friends and family, relied on the spiritual support of her church, and valued the close relationships within her nuclear family. These resources enabled her and her husband to manage the children's busy schedules and her family responsibilities.

Nonetheless, Sandy described a powerful example of boundary-spanning demands. It began with the early-morning discovery of a body on the school playground, and the follow-up in terms of protecting and supporting children, families, and staff. After dealing with the aftermath of this crisis and the fallout in the neighbourhood the next day, Sandy went home to host her son's birthday party. While the boys cavorted in the basement, she fielded calls at home from Victim Services. This example vividly describes boundary-spanning demands. At the end of the next school day, Sandy reacted to the tragedy: "It was Monday on the way home that the tears just started coming. Talk about family stress! I couldn't go home. I just couldn't, because I didn't want them to see me like that." Sandy sought the support of a colleague that day, instead of turning to family, possibly an effort to define and maintain the blurred boundaries between home and work.

When Sandy left this school last year, she maintained that her decision was not due to the context of this high-poverty community school, or the challenges of work-family balance. Instead, it was an opportunity to lead another school with a different set of challenges.

The family with young adults. Chris acknowledged that her family unit was unique because her husband had always maintained much of the home-based responsibilities. The context of his employment had allowed him to be more available for their daughters' family demands. Her husband's flexibility, along with the relative maturity of Chris's children, had enabled her to achieve relative work-family fit and balance. However, some of the more basic demands still chanllenged Chris such as being at home by 6:00 p.m., as was the family mandate. Further, she often found it difficult to maintain a positive attitude when arriving home after work:

Certainly, they are affected by the fact that I come home unable to give them anything. If it's been a really horrific day, I either need a good cry or I just need to go hide for awhile – just don't make any demands on me for a little while. . . . But now they understand it more. They see what motivates me and they don't just see it as a negative. (Chris, interview)

Chris' family offered much in the way of resources, as a result of collective support and the children's maturity. To a degree, the roles had reversed, and the children had become their mother's caregiver. Chris referred to the many times that her daughters would say, "Sit on the couch and put your feet up. You look wiped." This attitude certainly helped Chris to manage the demands of her "emotionally draining" job.

The adult family. For Kate, with one child married and one adult child at home, family demands appeared more limited. She described the contrast from when her children were young and she coached sports, taught Sunday school, and experienced many more family demands. However, one unique factor in Kate's current situation related to her experience with breast-cancer, and her family's subsequent concern for her wellness. There were unspoken and yet clear family demands that she take care of herself. In addition to this, the family had recently lost Kate's 10 year-old nephew and this, as well, had a significant effect on the family unit. They were closer and communicated better, but also

worried about her health and well-being much more, especially considering the challenges she faced each day at work. In essence, these family-based crises had placed their own demands on Kate, and yet had also created resources as the family became more open and supportive.

Similarities in Family Demands, Resources, and Boundary Spanning

A significant finding in terms of boundary-spanning demands was that the families of these women all worried about their safety and well-being at work. Kate and Chris both acknowledged that their husbands had encouraged them to find less-challenging schools. While pregnant, Kelly was challenged by work demands such as restraining violent students: "I was getting paid to do the job and the pregnancy shouldn't get in the way." However, when her husband heard of such incidents, he responded by saying, "Well, you're not doing that anymore." As another example, Sandy described an incident when her son, 10 years old at the time, had overheard her telephone conversation regarding a school crisis, and pleaded with her not to go to work. He did not fare well at school that day, worrying about her well-being.

In response to family members' tendencies to worry, one boundary-spanning strategy employed by these women may be best described as evasive deception. The women protected their children from the more tragic realities of their work, and admitted to the habit, as their careers advanced, of not sharing everything with their husbands. As Sandy suggested, she learned "to be careful which stories to share, because they worry so much."

Conversely, the sharing they did do became a boundary-spanning resource as well. The women realized that the experiences of the children and families in their high-poverty community schools served to enlighten their own children. With purpose, they shared the realities of poverty in those communities and the relative needs of the children. At the same time, these women encouraged their families to participate in school events to better understand the many ways that families are alike and the ways that every community "has its own rich traditions," as Sandy explained.

The women also spoke of their family's pride and respect for the jobs that they did. Chris reflected on her children's maturing understanding:

As they get older and as they realize how hard it is, they're more and more proud of the work. As they get more into social justice issues, they're happy that I'm there trying to do something about it. . . . So it's kind of their grounding. It's like they lend me to the school as part of their contribution. (Chris, interview)

This is another powerful example of a boundary-spanning demand: a family's worry, transforming into a boundary-spanning strategy; the sharing of significant stories, and further evolving into a profound family resource – pride and respect.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research study support the findings featured in the literature review, especially in terms of the work demands on administrators in high-poverty community schools and the family demands on women in these leadership positions. The impact of poverty, crime, and family issues challenge these school leaders, but the intrinsic rewards of the job are definite assets. One might argue that all principals experience work demands. However, those working in high-needs, inner-city communities may experience more intense and more frequent challenges.

Voydanoff's (2005) conceptual model of work-family fit and balance has been valuable in determining work-related stress on women leaders in high-poverty community schools, and the impact on their families. The model provides a framework for discussing demands and resources at work and at home. Further, the model offers a means of examining the more intricate and complex boundary-spanning demands, resources, and strategies that affect one's ability to attain work-family fit and balance.

Family stress management theory posits that the developmental stage, or life cycle stage, of a family affects the levels of stress experienced by that family (Boss, 2002). The results of this study reflect this theoretical underpinning because the structure of each woman's family affected her perceived work-family fit and balance.

Finally, it is beneficial to discuss the positive responses that the participants provided, when first invited to participate in this study, and then after the interviews, during member checks, when the women

reflected on the experience. As mentioned previously, the first four women administrators who were approached to participate in this study responded with interest. Their response suggests that the women valued the opportunity, and deemed it important to share experiences and reflect on the challenges and rewards of balancing work and family.

Following the interviews, each participant shared reflections on the interview process during member checks and provided feedback on the findings. Kate responded that, "it is good to sort things out by looking at the big picture of your life once in a while." Chris reflected on the importance of the research itself, as being a means of conveying their "voice to the academic world." These comments suggest that women administrators working in high-poverty community schools value the processes of reflection and dialogue.

Implications for Practice

There is no doubt that all educators face daunting challenges because of society's demands for accountability and, at the same time, social issues continue to have consequential impact on schools. Effective school leadership is critical to help schools and teachers to meet these challenges. As such, senior administration of school divisions, elected boards, and government would best serve children by acknowledging the demanding roles of in-school leaders, and by ensuring adequate support for them to effectively lead their schools. This suggestion is especially the case for those working in high-poverty community schools. For example, many smaller schools in high-poverty areas are managed by one administrator, with no support from a vice-principal. In the school division in which three of the principals participating in this study worked, schools with fewer than 350 students had only one administrator. Considering the work demands and job pace in high-poverty community schools, there is a need to explore the additional support required in these schools.

Regarding work-family fit and balance, there appears to be a need for more family-friendly policies for women administrators in high-poverty communities. Such policies should focus on structural changes that allow for part-time or shared leadership roles, on-site child care, and formal opportunities for dialogue and support among colleagues.

Future Research

The findings of this study suggest that there is significant benefit in determining the effectiveness of specific support strategies designed to assist women administrators in high-poverty school communities. To this end, I am currently conducting a more extensive study that will use collaborative action research methodology to investigate professional support for administrators working in high-poverty community schools. This study will also apply elements of dialogue theory, which articulates the value and power of conversation as a central avenue for acquiring new knowledge.

Another promising venture for researchers in educational administration is an examination of family-friendly policies and educational institutions that have adopted such policies. This solution would enable scholars and policy-makers alike to better understand promising approaches and the impact on women administrators and their families.

CONCLUSION

This research study investigated the work-family fit and balance experiences of women administrators in high-poverty community schools. Strong leadership is central to effective schooling, and schools are central to bringing about a better future for youth living in poverty. As such, it is imperative that research continues to focus on issues related to education in high-poverty communities, and the principals leading those schools. Further, as women continue to play an integral role in school administration, their professional and personal experiences must continue to be examined and articulated to enhance educators' understanding of the intricacies and challenges of work-family fit and balance.

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