Introduction: Work and Families

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Abstract

This issue of *Michigan Family Review* explores the interface of families and the world of work. Articles include work related topics such as the challenges of long distance commuting and how families have adapted to this form of work. Other articles explore the role of occupational status on leisure activities, and the challenges and adaptive strategies of the work poor in rural areas.

Key words: families, work, change

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History can speak to us in the present by illuminating not only what has transpired in the past, but also how those events have shaped the present. History can provide feedback which not only affects how individuals interpret their present circumstances but also how they perceive possibilities for the future. The fact that families are undergoing change stands without debate. Understanding the changes in the ways American families relate to and with the world of work may shed light on present adaptational challenges that impact their sustainability.

The Industrial Revolution brought change in the socioeconomics of western cultures. These changes, in turn, influenced families. Three major aspects of the industrial revolution have been cited by scholars of family history as having great influence on family life (Coontz, 1992; Hunt & Hunt, 1987; Lasch, 1983; Demos, 1986). First, the rise of market capitalism influenced which families had the opportunity to make money.

Second, consumerism, that is, the desire/ability to attain to a higher standard of living, changed families' motivation for earning money. Third, production work, described as family income produced by family members laboring at occupations outside the home or family business, changed the process through which a family earned money. The aspects of family life that were affected by these socioeconomic changes can be observed to fall broadly into four areas: 1) courtship and affection, 2) parenting views and behaviors, 3) family network and support affiliations, and 4) population movements.

For example, courtship/affection in families refers to the reasons marriage is contracted and the expectations of marital partners (Degler, 1983; Shorter, 1977). Couples in agrarian society courted and married for the purposes of survival (Olson & Leonard, 1990). If the needs of the family were met, the marriage was considered successful. The emotional energy that once was utilized for survival could now be directed toward relationship quality. Therefore, the basis for marriage changed from a survival or economic model to a companionship model. In keeping with this change, practices changed from "courting" to "dating" as a way to find a partner for marriage.

The aspects of parenting affected by market capitalism, consumerism, and production work were predominantly the ways in which children were reared and the influence of the mother-child bond (Degler, 1983; Shorter, 1977). Prior to the industrial revolution, family survival was paramount, and resources were invested almost exclusively to ensure survival. Consequently, the mother/child relationship was not the preeminent consideration. The task of rearing children was augmented with older siblings, relatives, and other members of the larger community serving as caregivers. Later, the mother/child relationship gained predominance as childrearing began to be viewed as providing meaning and emotional fulfillment, and the larger community had a less significant role in childrearing.

Family network/support affiliations also were brought into question by the socio-economic trends of capitalism, consumerism,

and production work. For example, who was responsible for granting permission to marry, passing on of values, or helping in times of crisis (Shorter, 1977; Bellah, 1985)? In our earlier agrarian society, the community, through the court system, religious institutions, and informal peer groups, served to pass on values, provide help in times of crisis, and even give permission to marry. As the home and family became the dominant means for gaining emotional fulfillment, its relationship to the larger community shifted. Demos (1986) describes this trend clearly when he states;

The family - far from joining and complementing other social networks, as in the earlier period - seemed to stand increasingly apart. Indeed, its position vis-a-vis society at large had been very nearly reversed, so as to become a kind of adversary relation. (p. 31)

The isolation of families from a larger community stands in contrast to the number of people that began to surround the family. Families began migrating from rural to urban to suburban settings in response to socioeconomic changes (Kain, 1990). The industrial revolution increased the amount and diversity of goods that were available for purchase by families. These goods were manufactured rapidly in large quantities in factories. The factories needed people to operate the equipment and do the needed tasks of assembly or construction. Many of the needed personnel came from people who migrated to the cities from rural areas.

In short, where work is found, and the work that is found to do in order to provide for families *will* change families. As changes in the world of work occur, whether it be through technological advances, economic slowdowns, or the level of training/expertise needed to perform the tasks of work, families will change in order to adapt. It is these changes and adaptations that are explored in this issue of *Michigan Family Review*.

Glutzer and Federlein's article uses what could be considered autoethnographic case studies (Duncan, 2004) to explicate the complex issues involved in commuter marriages. The

authors' use a family strengths perspective to analyze the pros and cons of families whose adaptation to work requires commuting. While established literature outlines the strengths of healthy families (Curran, 1983; Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985), the authors' research illustrates a primary purpose of their research, that is, to discover how families and couples weigh costs against opportunities. The case studies tell how families interpreted their unique circumstances and how they marshaled different constellations of resources to meet the demands of families experiencing commuter work. The authors do not use the outcomes of the case study families for proving that commuting is a panacea of family adaptation to work constraints. The case studies do illustrate how important it is that families marshal their resources in ways that fit unique family needs.

The article by Kuiack, Irving, and Faulkner investigates the interaction of variables on the leisure-time physical activity (LPTA) levels of women in a rural population. While the health implications of leisure time physical activity is a primary focus for this article, it is interesting to note that occupational status has a significant effect on the amount of leisure activity in which the women in the study participated. Even though this effect was mitigated when child care was factored in the model, it is important to see the dynamic interplay of family responsibilities, not the least of which is workforce participation, on the potential health of important family members.

The literature review in Stewart's article on the working poor reinforces the observation made by Kuiack, Irving and Faulkner when discussing the challenges that the working poor encounter as the wages and benefits in their jobs most times do not provide insurance or adequate resources to purchase health care. The penury families who are the working poor forces them to rely on other means to survive. Stewart observes that additional support is garnered through other support networks such as extended family and fictive kin. Families in the working poor, even though working several jobs at once, are still prone to poor health, inadequate health care and inadequate housing.

Family members must work in order to gain the resources necessary for survival in a complex social milieu. How these families go to work, the influence of work on other important areas of family life and individual development, and the manifest and latent influences of inadequate work on families are the focus of this issue of *Michigan Family Review*.

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