

## *Appendix*

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# Flexibility at Home and Work: British Aerospace

In 1982, the Anglo-German Foundation sponsored a series of studies investigating the potential of part-time and flexible working patterns for reconciling economic efficiency and family functioning. Work for these studies was carried out by Dr. S. Epstein in Sussex, England; Dr. Rosemarie Nave-Herz in Germany; and Michael Fogarty, Rhona Rapoport and Robert Rapoport in London. Dr. Epstein's research was based upon comparative British and German data, and was published as *Women, Work and Family in Britain and Germany* in 1986. The following presents the results from the other British-based study. This research encompassed semi-structured interviews with families resident in the British Aerospace local labour market (Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield) – the community survey – as well as interviews with British Aerospace employees and managers - the company study.

### **The community survey**

A survey was conducted to provide a cross-sectional assessment of the attitudes of the residents, who make up a major part of the labour pool for local industry. A sample of 240 respondents, stratified by sex (120 male and 120 female) and household composition (at least one child in the pre-school 0-5 age group or one child in the secondary school age group 12-17). Interview data supported the position that these households were broadly representative of national norms. For example, 52 per cent of the households contained dual-earner families, 98 per cent of the men were in full-time employment, and 68 per cent of women in part-time employment. The distribution of occupations

was skewed in the direction of a higher than average proportion of women in unskilled occupations. Two-thirds of the men held non-manual occupations. The majority of women (63 per cent) reported that they carried the brunt of the responsibility for domestic work, and 83 per cent of the men reported that their outside work was more important to them than their domestic work (compared with 53 per cent of the women).

In terms of flexibility, the sample showed that men had considerably more flexibility in their working hours than women (41 per cent officially, 17 per cent unofficially; as compared with 21 per cent officially and 7 per cent unofficially for women). This is partly accounted for by the fact that there is a relationship between gender and work status. Among those employed as higher professionals, 92 per cent had some measure of official or unofficial flexibility, a proportion which steadily declined to the lower status jobs where flexibility fell to 33 per cent. As women were distributed more in the unskilled labour categories, this affected their flexibility. In fact, category for category, women had less job-related flexibility. Once again, those in most need of flexibility have least access to it. An exception to this was women who worked part-time in the evenings: 42 per cent of whom reported flexibility, partly accounting for their gravitation into these jobs.

Attitudes towards work also varied by gender, with women feeling that they had less say in determining workplace policy or their own work plans. Women more than men expressed dissatisfaction with workplace amenities, with availability of interesting work and with the degree of job security.

In terms of household labour, a majority of women felt that they did the major part of household chores (63 per cent of women as compared with only 4 per cent of men). Thirty-six per cent reported a 'more or less equal' division of labour. Although 90 per cent of men and 94 per cent of women felt that if both worked there should be equal responsibility, working women were generally divided as to whether they felt that their domestic work or outside jobs were more important to them. Eighty-three per cent of unskilled working women felt that household chores were more important than their outside paid work.

In relation to the links between work and family life, three-quarters of the women respondents as compared with only one third of the men, felt that family obligations set limits on their job choices. More men than women (16 per cent versus 3 per cent) felt that family obligations

limited their joining in on social occasions with workmates. Among the alterations suggested to improve the fit between family life and work, flexible hours scored the highest for both men and women (39 per cent of men, 29 per cent of women). Flexibility was particularly attractive to dual-earner families, with indications reported that this would improve their capacity to get their children to school (or nursery care), and to deal with children's illness. It was also reported to be useful in improving the couples' fitting together their own worktime schedules. Flexibility of work time was not expected, however, to be a panacea. Many of the men who already had considerable flexibility also felt higher tensions between work and family because they tended to be the men who held more responsible positions, worked more overtime without extra pay, and experienced some of the job stresses which go with middle-class occupations such as high expectations, competition and responsibility.

In the qualitative responses to open-ended questions, most of the men interviewed, particularly those with small children, felt that they would like more opportunity to spend time with their children. Many expressed the desire to start and finish the workday earlier so that they could spend more time with their children before that early evening period when small children tend to become tired and irritable. Men who worked within a flexible framework, allowing a build-up of time credits so that they could take an occasional day off, spoke highly of the benefits of such a scheme to themselves and their families.

Parents with older children expressed the feeling that they wanted to have more time with their children, and that their children needed more attention at this phase. However, unlike the smaller children, there was less predictability about when older children would want such attention, making the idea of flexibility even more appealing.

For women respondents, the key issue was whether their working hours clashed with school hours and holidays, and with some exceptions (night nurses and other shift workers), jobs were chosen where possible to avoid such a clash. This had the inevitable effect of keeping married women with children in part-time employment.

### **The company study**

Approaching the issues from the employing organisation perspective, a number of organisations were studied in the area, with a range of data from different vantage points within the British Aerospace plant. Interviews conducted there confirmed the various points of

ambivalence about flexible working time reported in other studies: managers were in favour provided they would not lose control of the productive process and provided it could be demonstrated that productivity would not decline. Workers, and their union representatives, were in favour of increased flexibility provided it was not used to erode aspects of job security and benefits. Both affirmed that there is in fact considerable flexibility within existing arrangements. Some jobs are intrinsically flexible (sales representatives, for example); and in others, supervisors often used their discretionary powers constructively to help their workers meet unusual outside requirements in ways that did not jeopardize the overall functioning of the workgroup.

A survey was conducted of two contrasting groups within British Aerospace: catering staff (which was predominately female, working part-time hours which did not conflict with children's school hours but which were not intrinsically flexible), and engineering design staff (which was predominately male, full-time, professional and with a degree of intrinsic flexibility in tasks). Seventy-nine members of the design staff were surveyed and eleven of the catering staff. Questions were asked about their work motivations and satisfaction, their family situations, job conditions, strains experienced and issues confronted in achieving a satisfactory balance between work and family.

Of the many patterns and correlations that emerged from this small sample study, the most important for present purposes is the correlation found between work satisfaction and family satisfaction. Many items in these areas were found to be inter-correlated, but when an index was formed of several items in each, the correlation was found to be highly significant. For work satisfaction, the items included satisfaction with supervisor, access to resources, participation in problem solving, feeling of a degree of autonomy in work, and feeling of having an influence on policy. On the family side, the elements of satisfaction included a feeling that one's spouse shared responsibility for domestic tasks, and of equity in the distribution of tasks at home, including childcare. This correlation affirms the interaction effect between work and family involvements. It must be noted that the sub-group with the highest scores for autonomy and participation was the design group, who in fact also had the greatest flexibility in the way their work tasks were constructed. Whereas catering staff had less control over their work, the nature of their tasks did not clash with domestic responsibilities as might other jobs,

therefore reducing conflict between the spheres. In both cases, the sense of balance was high, but for different reasons.

Many of the qualitative responses indicated both the presence of flexibility in existing arrangements, and the hazards that this entailed when not adequately explained. One person, for example, reported the belief that a homeworking arrangement allowed for a colleague being abused, but did not have any evidence for this. One possibility is that the individual concerned was envious, and did not have information on what productivity was actually being accomplished. At the same time, there were many suggestions for additional ways of introducing more flexibility. A most striking finding was the response to the questions ‘What would improve the quality of your home life’ and ‘What would improve your productivity at work’? In each case, a range of choices (up to 17 for each question) was offered, with an opportunity to indicate first and second choice. The first choices were as follows:

#### **To improve the quality of home life**

	Design Group	Catering Group	Total
Flexible working hours	30	2	32
Flexible time banking	16	2	18
Compressed work week	11	0	11
All others	20	2	22
Number =	77	6	

#### **To improve productivity**

	Design Group	Catering Group	Total
Flexible working hours	20	0	20
Worker participation in management	14	2	16
Flexible time banking	11	0	11
All others	26	5	31
Number =	71	7	

There was general recognition, particularly among design staff, that productivity was affected by efficiency of organisation of time (rather than sheer amount of time), and the capacity to get things done without going over them needlessly. The extent to which these would be enhanced by increased flexibility and autonomy in the organisation of one's time is a matter of speculation. Certainly, the engineers spoken to felt that a lack of flexibility in the work situation when there were family problems and strains outside work could well lead to inefficiency and wastefulness in the use of time on the job. Thus, *quality time* in the workplace would seem to be a consideration, balancing the new emphasis on quality in parenting – as distinct from the insistence on being there all the time, as in previous conventional ideas of parenthood.