

changes that may have had an impact on work-life balance in Canada. Section three seeks to determine the extent to which work-life conflict is a problem within Canada today by: (1) looking at current (i.e. 2001) data on the prevalence of high work-life conflict in Canada, and (2) comparing employees' work-life balance experiences in 1991 to their experiences today (2001). Also included within this section is a discussion of who within the Canadian population is at risk of higher work-life. The data included in section four provides the business case for change as it looks at how high levels of work-life conflict effects individuals, families, organizations and society in general. Section five looks at what organizations and governments can do the decrease work-life conflict and offers a number of recommendations on how to best support working families in Canada in the 21st century.

1.0 What is Work¹-Life Balance?

We all play many roles: employee, boss, subordinate, spouse, parent, child, sibling, friend, and community member. Each of these roles imposes demands on us which require time, energy and commitment to fulfill. Work-family or work-life conflict² occurs when the cumulative demands of these many work and non-work life are incompatible in some respect so that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other role.

Research has been conducted in area of work-life balance for several decades. The research paradigm has, however, shifted over time from a preoccupation with the separate worlds of work and family (1970s) to research which focused on how experiences at work (both positive and negative) spill over into the family domain and vice versa (1980s) to research exploring the interaction and interconnectedness of the work, family and community domains (Scott, 2000).

At the present time work-life conflict is conceptualized to include role overload (having too much to do and too little time to do it in!) as well as role interference (when incompatible demands make it difficult, if not impossible, for an employee to perform all their roles well). Role interference, in its turn, can be divided into two factors: family interferes with work (FIW) and work interferes with family (WIF). In the first case, interference occurs when family-role responsibilities hinder performance at work (i.e., a child's illness prevents attendance at work; conflict at home makes concentration at work difficult). In the second case, interference arises when work demands make it harder for an employee to fulfill their family responsibilities (i.e., long hours in paid work prevent attendance at a child's sporting event, preoccupation with the work role prevents an active enjoyment of family life, work stresses spill over into the home environment and increases conflict with the family). In this sense, then, work-life conflict can be seen to have two major components: the practical aspects associated with time crunches and scheduling conflicts (i.e. an employee can not be in two different places at the same time), and the perceptual aspect of feeling overwhelmed, overloaded or stressed by the pressures of multiple roles.

¹Throughout this paper the term work refers to paid employment.

² In the 1970s through to the early 1990s researchers studied work-family conflict. In the later part of the 1990s the term was changed to "work-life" conflict in recognition of the fact that employees' non-work responsibilities can take many forms including volunteer pursuits and education, as well as the care of children or elderly dependents.