

Many organizations and governments focus on the costs associated with making it easier for employees to balance work and family and ask "but can we afford to make these changes." This section of the paper takes a different tact and looks at the costs of not reducing work-life conflict from the perspective of key stakeholders (i.e. employees, organizations, and society. In other words, it focuses on the costs of NOT changing. It is hoped that the data presented in this section will familiarize business and government leaders with the business case for change in this area.

What does high work-life conflict "cost" employees?

Conflict between work and family demands has been found to be problematic for employees and their families. With respect to families, high levels of work-life conflict has been found to negatively affect the strength of families and marriages (i.e. work-life conflict positively associated with marital problems, impaired parenting, reduced family and life satisfaction) (Scott, 2000; Frone and Rice, 1987; Lamert, 1990, Barling, 1990, Mathews et al., 1996; Duxbury and Higgins, 1998, 1999, 2001). In fact, research shows that work is more likely to have a negative impact on families than the reverse (Scott, 2000, Duxbury and Higgins, 1998, 1999, 2001). In addition to the above, employees with families are more likely to miss career opportunities when they need to put their family responsibilities ahead of their work.

With respect to the impact of work-life conflict on employees, a number of researchers (i.e. Frone et al., 1996; Frone et al., 1997; Duxbury and Higgins, 1998, 1999, 2001) have found that high work-life conflict contributes directly and indirectly to poor physical and mental health. These studies have found work-life stress to be positively associated with a variety of negative outcomes including anxiety and depression, drug abuse, decreased work productivity, absenteeism and high turnover. It also appears to be an important causal factor in physical diseases such as high blood pressure, serum cholesterol, gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular disease, allergies and migraines (Schlssel et al., 1992).

Other research would suggest that while paid employment per se is not associated with negative child outcomes, the stresses related to balancing work and family (i.e. financial and time deficits) do affect children (Hochsfield, 1997; Scott, 2000). Finally, while there is not much research in the area, that which is available suggests that families today need assistance in balancing work and family demands to foster the best environments to raise healthy children (Scott, 2000).

Costs to Organizations

From the employer's perspective, the inability to balance work and family demands has been linked to reduced work performance, increased absenteeism, higher turnover, lower commitment and poorer morale (Duxbury and Higgins, 1998, 1999, 2001). Work-life conflict has also been linked to productivity decreases associated with lateness, unscheduled days off, emergency time off, excessive use of the telephone, missed meetings, and difficulty concentrating on the job (Vanderkolk and Young, 1991; Ganster and Schaubroek, 1999; Scott, 2000). A recent study by the authors of this report estimated the direct cost of absenteeism in Canadian firms due to an inability to balance work and life at just under \$3 billion dollars per year (Duxbury, Higgins and Johnson, 2000). This same study determined that employees with high work family conflict missed an average of 13.2 days of work per year - a substantially higher number than the 5.9 days missed by employees with low work-life conflict. Other researchers (Bond et al., 1997) have also linked high work-life conflict to