

WORK SCHEDULING AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY DISRUPTION

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ABSTRACT

Using a unique paired sample we compare two types of non-traditional work scheduling with "standard" work scheduling (approximately eight hours a day during daylight, five or six days a week), in order to evaluate their perceived disruptive effects on family life. We find that one spouse's perception of the disruptiveness of work scheduling is the strongest predictor of the other spouse's perceived disruptiveness of work schedule, far stronger than many of the structural variables that might be thought to mitigate the effects of alternative work scheduling, and far stronger than even the schedule itself. The findings provide strong statistical and conceptual evidence that work scheduling itself is less important than how the marital partners interpret that scheduling, and lend credence to theoretical approaches that conceptualize the family as a microscopic social system where increasingly members must negotiate or construct the rules and roles that define behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

The connection between work scheduling and family life has gained the attention of numerous scholars (Forsyth 1992; Gramling, Forsyth 1987; Hughes, Galinsky, Morris 1992; Kanter 1977; Ladewig, Heath, McGee 1986; Piotrkowski 1979; Pleck, Staines, Lang 1980). The fact that most people in the work force are also married has naturally called attention to the complex work/family interface (Hughes et al 1992), and the difficulties that workers experience managing their dual roles in the work place and the family (Voydanoff 1988). Augmenting this scholarly attention has been the precipitous rise in the number of persons engaged in non-traditional work scheduling (Blair, Johnson 1992; Gramling 1989; Gramling, Forsyth 1987; Presser 1987; Staines, Pleck 1983). This latter body of research has found agreement on at least one issue; nonconventional work scheduling is demanding and potentially problematic for families. Gramling and Forsyth (1987) argued that the best explanation for the disruptiveness of non-traditional work scheduling was to be had within the social construction of reality paradigm first proposed by Berger and Kellner in 1964.

As Berger and Kellner (1964) originally noted:

The re-construction of the world in marriage occurs principally in the course of conversation, as we have suggested. The implicit problem of this conversation is how to match two individual definitions of reality. By the very logic of the relationship, a common overall definition must be arrived at -otherwise the conversation will become impossible and, ipso facto, the relationship will be endangered.... The longer this conversation goes

on, the more massively real do the objectifications become to the partners. In the marital conversation a world is not only built, but it is also kept in a state of repair and ongoingly refurbished. The subjective reality of this world for the two partners is sustained by the same conversation.

Gramling and Forsyth contended that non-traditional work scheduling was problematic in that it not only was the intrafamily "conversation" that Berger and Kellner referred to interrupted, but also that consequently interfamily relationships were affected.

As alternative work scheduling increases... family members, or portions of the nuclear family, increasingly experience interaction within the family's social network as individuals or as portions of the nuclear family. Because of the indexical and reflexive nature of these experiences, the absent member(s) can never really share, in a total sense, in these experiences, or the constructs that emerge from them. Thus family members' individual biographies and their relationships to the family's social network are different, a situation that further exacerbates the loss of shared meaning. It is very difficult for these losses to be made up, as most members of the family's social network are on traditional schedules, and are thus not available for interaction when the nontraditional schedule individual has leisure time. (Gramling, Forsyth 1987)

The present research uses a unique paired sample of couples to further investigate the relationship between work scheduling and perceptions of family disruption.

We use two types of non-traditional work scheduling: what Gramling (1989) has called "concentrated work scheduling" where one member of the family (usually the male) is gone for extended period of time on the job; and shift work, where the individual works cyclical patterns of employment hours over the 24 hour day. These are contrasted with "standard" work scheduling, approximately eight hours a day during daylight, five or six days a week.

NON-TRADITIONAL WORK SCHEDULING Concentrated Work Scheduling

Although a great deal of literature has been devoted to the effects of nontraditional work scheduling, only a small portion of this research is concerned with those families in which the father/husband is regularly (or irregularly) absent from the home for extended periods due to his employment.¹ Certain vocations require this type of scheduling and consequently families in which a spouse has a concentrated work schedule are more vulnerable to the problems caused by work/family inter-face (Jones, Butler 1980). Merchant seamen (Forsyth 1988, 1992; Forsyth, Gramling 1990), military personnel (Hunter 1984; Hunter, Nice 1978), fishermen (Maril 1983; Orbach 1977), offshore oil workers (Forsyth, Gauthier 1991; Gauthier, Forsyth, Bankston 1993; Gramling 1989; Morrice, Taylor, Clark, McCann 1985; Storey, Lewis, Shrimpton, Clark 1986; Wooddell, Forsyth, Gramling 1994); long-distance truck drivers, and jet-setting business executives are examples of what Forsyth and Gramling (1987) have termed a "feast or famine" schedule. The present research uses one of these potentially problematic occupations, offshore oil work.

The offshore oil-worker typically goes to the job site and comes back to his residence seven, ten, fourteen, twenty-eight, or sixty days later. Then, after a specified number of days off, stands ready at the dock again.² The succession of partings and reunions, which can be as many as 26 a year, has been noted to affect the familial life of the offshore oil worker, however, stressful reactions to it, are not peculiar to offshore work, but rather seem to epitomize what is found in other occupations having similar work patterns (Forsyth, Gramling 1987; Gramling 1989).

Shift Work

Research on shift work indicates that alternative schedules interfere with family life, especially in terms of the time available to spend with spouses and children (Hertz, Charlton 1989). Shift workers report interference between work schedule and the ability to fulfill roles as spouses and parents (Blair, Johnson 1992; Peterson, Gurson 1992; Presser 1980, 1986). When compared to day working families, both working and non-working wives report dissatisfaction with the division of household labor in shift work families. Working long or odd hours limits the extent to which members are physically available for family or school related activities, while evening and week-end work often prevents workers from being available for family activities sporting and/or club events and family gatherings (Hood, Golden 1979; Presser 1984, 1987; Voydanoff 1988). Research has shown that shift workers have a higher prevalence of disrupted social lives than day workers (Gordon, Cleary, Parker, Czeisler 1986).

WORK AND FAMILY DISRUPTION

Level of disruption is a complex issue. The temporal demands of work in some careers are so encompassing that they have been reported to severely curtail family interactions (Jones, Butler 1980). Forsyth and Gramling (1987, 1990) have found the gradual emerging of some very non-traditional familial strategies among families of offshore workers and merchant seamen. Nearly all of these families were thrown into temporary conflict by the husband's schedule, while others remained in conflict permanently. Morrice et al (1985) found the intermittent presence of husbands to be extremely stressful and disruptive to wives. Forsyth (1992) has found that alienation scores were higher among individuals who adapted certain of these strategies. An absent husband means dislocation of the familiar pattern of family interaction. During this absence the wife may experience several stress inducing situations. The level of stress can be mediated by specific family strategies which have been constructed in response to husband/father absence (Forsyth, Gautier 1991; Forsyth, Gramling 1987, 1990).

If the construction of social reality perspective is the most useful in examining family disruption as Gramling and Forsyth

(1987) argue, then what is really of interest is the *construction* of family disruption. Given that some antecedent condition may be present for a mutually agreed upon impact of work scheduling on the family, once that initial condition is present, it may well be that the interactive process becomes more important in the construction of family impacts than the scheduling itself. Similar families where the male works similar schedules may end up with very different decisions concerning how disruptive that scheduling is. Because we have paired data, and because we asked both members of the couple how disruptive the male's schedule was, we can compare the relative effects of various schedules, various intervening factors, and the perception of the spouse. In short, if the best predictor of how disruptive one partner sees the work scheduling is how the other partner sees it, rather than structural factors such as the scheduling itself, then perhaps a much more process oriented approach toward examining the interaction of work and family would be appropriate. Alternatively, if structural factors, such as the scheduling of work, the number and age of children, income and education of the husband and wife, predict the extent of perceived disruption, then the exploration of how these factors line up to maximize or minimize disruption would be appropriate for both research and practical reasons. The data collection procedure described below was designed to address this issue.

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this study were obtained in interviews with an available sample of married couples where the husband was in a variety of work scheduling situations. A structured questionnaire was used in the interviews. This resulted in a final useable sample of 388 families: 121 families in which the husband worked a normal work schedule (approximately 8-5, 5 days a week); 68 families in which the men worked some kind of shift work (swing-shift, graveyards or rotating shifts, eight hours or more a day, 4, 5, or 6 days a week); and 199 families in which the men worked offshore.

The standard sampling procedure of identifying a population, generating a sampling frame and then using a random or pseudo-random sample taken from the population was inappropriate for this research for two reasons. First, for all practical pur-

poses it is impossible to delineate the population of offshore workers. These people are not listed in any publication or directory, and because their concentrated work scheduling means that they only have to commute to work infrequently (e.g. with 14 and 14 scheduling only 13 times a year) they can live considerable distance from where they meet to go offshore. As a result offshore workers live all over Louisiana and Texas, contiguous states and indeed throughout the southern United States. Second, we needed an extreme over sample of offshore and shift work schedules, since these types of schedules are much less frequent in the population (only a tiny fraction in the case of offshore) than is standard work scheduling. Accordingly, the sample was drawn from Louisiana and Texas using a snowball method. Snowball sampling is a method through which the researcher generates an ever-increasing set of sample observations. One respondent in the sample under study is asked to suggest others for interviewing, and each of the succeeding interviewed participants is asked for additional recommendations (Babbie 1992; Glaser, Straus 1967). This type of sampling was the only practical way to obtain sufficient number of shift and offshore workers.

Each family in the sample consisted of at least a husband and wife. While we would expect that non-traditional work scheduling would be even more problematic for single head of household families, at least with offshore work the extremely restrictive scheduling might make it impossible for a single parent to work offshore. In addition the majority of single head of households are female and very few females work offshore, with anecdotal evidence that even fewer married females work offshore. In any event we did not find any single heads of households that were working offshore and for comparability restricted the entire sample to families where the husband and wife were both present. Also because very few females work offshore the husband's work schedule was the variable that divided the families into groups. This is not to say that non-traditional work scheduling by females in the family would not be as problematic, or perhaps more problematic than the males, only that we did not identify any married women who worked offshore to provide for comparison across samples.

Both husbands and wives filled out identical questionnaires. Each questionnaire requested information about the respondent, their spouse, both their own and their spouses work and work scheduling, and the perceived disruptiveness of their own and their spouses work. In this manner we obtain paired data with which we can compare the way in which individuals assess themselves and their work with the way their spouse assesses them and their work. Each couple was considered a single case, with the husband's and wife's questionnaire data entered as a single row in a rectangularized data file. Thus there are actually two of each conceptual variable in each case; one for the men and one for the women. Respondents were asked to not cooperate with each other in filling out questionnaires and in about 90 percent of the cases an investigator or an assistant was present when the questionnaire was filled out. In the other 10 percent of cases the husband was administered the instrument at his work site, on the first day of his shift, in the presence of a research assistant. The wife was mailed her instrument at the same time accompanied by a self addressed stamped envelope for return to the researcher.

In addition to work schedule, an assessment of the perceived disruptiveness of the work schedule and a variety of demographic information, we obtained information on the extent to which respondents embraced traditional family roles. Previous research on merchant seamen has found that wives of seamen generally have traditional outlooks, but that the necessity to undertake virtually all the household responsibilities when their husbands were absent created a conflict with these traditional views (Forsyth 1992; Forsyth, Gramling 1990). Morrice et al (1985) confirmed the same conflict pattern among offshore oil workers. Other researchers (Gauthier et al 1993; Storey et al 1986) have substantiated these dominant patterns among families of offshore oil workers finding that wives develop great proficiency in traditional male tasks while the man is away. When the husband/father returns he realizes and often resents his wife's new capabilities. The literature on occupationally induced father absence among military families and fishermen also supports these findings (Hunter 1984; Hunter, Nice 1978; Maril 1983; Orbach 1977). Thus, traditional/non-traditional attitudes and behavior for

either husbands or wives may mitigate or exacerbate the effect of work scheduling on family disruption.

Traditionalism about family matters was measured by the scale developed by Levinson and Huffman (1955). The Family Disruption scales (see Appendix) were developed by the authors on the basis of prior research [identifying references] and are comparable to other similar measures. The appendix contains those questions from that survey that were used in the present paper, along with the Cronbach's Alpha for the scales where appropriate.

We started with the wife's perception of the disruptiveness of the husbands schedule using this as the dependent variable for OLS regression. For independent variables we chose structural variables that could mitigate or exacerbate the effects of work scheduling. For both husbands' and wives' we entered education, traditionalism, friendship network support, and annual income. For the family we entered the age of the youngest child and years married (using the females' answers). To measure scheduling we entered two dummy variables one for shift work and one for concentrated work scheduling with normal scheduling as the excluded category, and the number of years on this scheduling (as reported by the males). Finally we entered the males perceived disruption of his schedule. We then constructed a second equation which used the same variables as in the first equation with two differences. In the first equation wives' perception of the disruptiveness of husbands work scheduling was the dependent variable and husbands' perception of the disruptiveness of his schedule was one of the independent variables. In the second equation husbands' perception of the disruptiveness of his scheduling was the dependent variable, and wife's perception of the disruptiveness of husbands' scheduling was one of the independent variables. We realize that this is not traditionally the way OLS regression is used. However, we have several special considerations that make this use appropriate. First, we would argue that to the extent that the disruptiveness of the husband's schedule is a construct shared by the couple this construct is not *usefully* conceived of as a cause and effect relationship. That is, it does not make sense to conceive of the husband's perception as caused by the wife's or vice versa. We recognize that

Table 1: Standardized OLS Coefficients for Regression of Wives' and Husbands' Perceptions of the Disruptive Effect of the Husband's Work Schedule on the Family

Independent Variable	R-squared	Wives' Perception	Husband's Perception
Wives' Perception of Family Disruption	.37122**	-	.60928**
Husbands' Perception of Family Disruption	.37122**	.50909**	-
Network Disruption	.45672**	.29516**	-
Concentrated Work Scheduling	.48125**	.15913**	-

**p> .005

husbands' perceptions, statements and actions influence wives and vice versa. We also recognize that it is possible to conceive of those influences over time as many (thousands) micro causal relationships, as something he does or says influences her and then her reply influences him. This is the way constructs are created. However, with the exception of a methodology like content analysis, in a laboratory like setting and for very short periods of interaction, it is simply not practical to approach the collection of empirical evidence of this process, and with those limitations the usefulness of the resulting data for our purposes would be questionable. We certainly cannot trace the years of construction that go on in a marriage, nor can we observe the things that were *not* said, or the effect of his *not* being there. Without belaboring the case we are conceiving of the construction process as one of reciprocal influence. Thus, we are using OLS regression as a form of multiple correlation, with regard to the two perception-of-disruption variables (his and hers) and are not trying to firmly establish cause and effect relationships.

Second, we wish to sort out the covariation between husbands' and wives' perceptions of the disruptiveness of his work scheduling from other factors that effect the perceptions of disruptiveness. In order to do this we must alternately use husbands perceptions as the dependent variable and then wives' perceptions as the dependent variable. Thus, while the variance explained will be the same whether using husband's perception alone to predict wife's or vice versa, our procedure allows us to compare that common variance to other factors that might predict either husbands' or wife's perceptions of disruption.

FINDINGS

With the wife's perception of the disruptiveness of the husbands schedule as the

dependent variable and the remainder of the variables entered as independent variables in a stepwise fashion, the first variable to enter the equation is husband's perception of the disruptiveness of his schedule, and this accounts for over 37 percent of the variance (Table 1). The second variable to enter the equation is wife's friendship network and it raises the R Square to .456. Finally, the dummy variable associated with concentrated work scheduling enters the equation raising the R Square to .481. No other variables entered at the .05 level.

With the husband's perception of the disruptiveness of his schedule as the dependent variable the first variable to enter the equation was wife's perceptions of the disruptiveness of his schedule, explaining, of course, over 37 percent of the variance, but unlike the equation where the wife's perception of the disruptiveness of the schedule was the dependent variable no other variables entered.

DISCUSSION

The interpretation of these equations is that for both husbands and wives the overwhelming factor in the perception of the disruptiveness of the husband's work schedule is spouse's perception of the disruptiveness of that schedule. Spouse's perception explains *far more variance than the schedule itself*, or the other structural factor (wife's friendship network) that might mitigate or exacerbate the effects of that schedule. For the women in this sample next in importance was whether their friends called or came by less when their husband was home, and finally the type of schedule itself. Since the dummy variable for concentrated work scheduling was the only significant schedule variable, it appears to be this type of work (usually offshore) that is the problem. For men, the schedule itself has *no significant relationship* to the perceived disruptiveness of his work. Overall the strength of

Table 2: Standardized OLS Coefficients for Regression of Friendship Network Disruption and Work Schedule on the Wives' Perceptions of the Disruptive Effect of the Husband's Work Schedule on the Family

Independent Variable	R-squared	Wives' Perception
Network Disruption	.18594**	.412514**
Concentrated Work Scheduling	.24134**	.236098**

**p>.0001

the relationship between husband's perception of the disruptiveness of his work schedule and the wife's perception of the disruptiveness of the husband's schedule, *which is far stronger than the work schedule itself*, provides strong statistical and conceptual evidence that work scheduling itself is less important than how the marital partners interpret that scheduling. This finding supports the idea that research and intervention aimed at addressing the effects of work scheduling on family life should take the construction process into account.

CONCLUSIONS

The data reported in this paper were specifically collected to attempt to test the relationship between work scheduling and family disruption, as reported by the marital partners and, moreover, to do so within the construction of reality perspective. Had we addressed the problem from a more structural approach we might very well have still examined the affects of work scheduling and friendship network support on the wife's reporting of the disruptiveness of the husband's work schedule. Had we done that we might also have entered the offshore dummy and network support as independent variables attempting to explain wife's perception of the disruptiveness of the husband's work scheduling. The results of this equation are reported in Table 2.

Here we find that network support is a much stronger predictor of perceived disruptiveness than concentrated work scheduling itself, initially explaining over 18 percent of the variance ($R^2 = .184$), and with the addition of the offshore dummy the equation explains almost a quarter of the variance (R^2 of .241). This, we could argue is an important finding, that network support may prove to mitigate the effects of certain types of alternative work scheduling, and certainly findings that explain less variance in the dependant variable are routinely reported in the major sociological journals. We can still make the argument that network support

may mitigate the effects of certain types of alternative work scheduling. However because we approached the problem with a data collection procedure that allowed the marital partners to be coded as a single case, and correspondingly to be assessed as a microscopic social system, we can argue that *how marital partners come to define the disruptiveness of a work schedule is more important than network support, and far more important than the schedule itself*.

Caveats are of course in order. First, the empirical associations reported in this paper are preliminary findings, and should be regarded as such until confirmed by additional research. Second, this research is narrow, focusing on the perceived disruptive effects, as we measure them, of specific types of work scheduling, as we sampled them. While we think some useful insights into the link between work scheduling and family interaction emerged from the findings, and suspect that these same findings (i.e. that interactively arrived at definitions of the situation have great explanatory power) would hold for other family, and other micro systems, we recognize the limitations of the current analysis. Third, others more creative than we have been may figure out a way to empirically disassemble the construction process that appears to be present, into its myriad causal elements. To date we have been unable to do so, and accordingly have addressed the consideration through a combination of data collection/coding and a slightly unorthodox use of multiple regression. Finally even though the relationships reported in this paper are strong we are still explaining slightly less than half of the variance in the variable of interest. Other structural variables, constructionist variables or a combination of both may be the key to further understanding the relationship between work scheduling and family interaction.

Without entering into the subtleties of the debates within the assorted micro-theoretical perspectives that lay claim to various

portions of the social construction process, or to the relationships between them (see Gramling 1990 for an overview), suffice it to say that when spouses perception of the disruptiveness of a particular work schedule is a far better predictor of reported disruptiveness than is the schedule itself, something is going on that is unlikely to be explained totally by structural variables. This is especially true since many of these structural variables were entered as controls in our analysis, but dropped out.

We want to be very clear that we are not proposing that structural variables are unimportant. They are significant in the findings reported here. We do feel, however, that it is important that investigators not fall into the trap of measuring variables because they are easy to measure, and perhaps missing important factors that drive human attitudes and behaviors. In the study of what is perhaps the quintessential example of the construction process, the nuclear family, creative ways to empirically address these broad, ongoing constructs are necessary if we are to understand the complex processes at work.

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END NOTES

1. These occupations are almost totally dominated by males, and in our data are *entirely* confined to males. Accordingly we will use masculine gender for simplicity and accuracy, since the literature and our conclusions could not be generalized to females.
2. Most commonly the days off are equivalent to the days at work (e.g. 7 & 7 or 14 & 14). However, some workers have a schedule with twice the number of work days compared to days off (e.g. 14 & 7).

APPENDIX

Network disruption (Wife)

1. My friends call or drop by less when my spouse is home (six point Likert scale)

Disruptiveness of husbands' schedules (Wife) (alpha = .813) (six point Likert scales)

1. My spouse's work prevents us from being together at times that we need to make decisions affecting our lives.

2. My spouse's work creates confusion about who makes the decisions in our family.
3. My spouse's schedule prevents involvement in important aspects in the children's lives such as sports events and holidays.

Disruptiveness of husbands' schedules (husband) (alpha = .791) (six point Likert scales)

1. My work prevents us from being together at times that we need to make decisions affecting our lives.
2. My work creates confusion about who makes the decisions in our family.
3. My schedule prevents involvement in important aspects in the children's lives such as sports events and holidays.

Work schedules (husband)

1. Concentrated work Scheduling: where the male is gone for extended period of time on the job (usually offshore work) (0, 1, dummy).
2. Shift work: where the individual works rotating cyclical patterns of employment hours over the 24 hour day (0,1, dummy).
3. Standard work scheduling: approximately eight hours a day during daylight, five or six days a week (excluded category).