



## Program on Gender, Work & Family

*"Reshaping the workplace  
around the values people hold  
in family life."*

### WORK-FAMILY POLICY BENEFITS CHILDREN

**Child poverty is exacerbated by the lack of support for working families.** For low-income families, work is a double-edged sword: anything less than full-time work cannot maintain economic security, but full-time work either creates expensive child care costs or puts children at risk. When parents cannot keep jobs due to lack of child care or workplace flexibility, both the parents and the children suffer economically.

**Child care costs are unaffordable for most low-income families.** Full-day child care can cost anywhere from \$4,000 to \$10,000 per year, sometimes more than college tuition at a public university. Parents who cannot afford these costs rely on family members and older siblings to care for the children. These arrangements often fall apart at the last minute, leaving parents to choose between work and caring for their children. Sometimes the result is leaving kids without care: nearly 7 million children are home alone after school each week during the afternoon hours when juvenile crime peaks.

**The lack of workplace flexibility harms poor families the most.** The lowest income parents are the least likely to have paid leave or workplace flexibility, turning common childhood occurrences into job crises for low-income parents. Taking unpaid leave often causes families to drop below the poverty line: nearly one in ten leave-takers receiving less than full pay during their longest leave is forced onto public assistance. In cases of family emergency, these workers must choose between caring for their children and poverty – a no-win situation.

**Child development suffers when parents are unable to spend time with their children.** Parental involvement in children's education has been shown to influence significantly how well children fare in school. Children of the working poor are even more disadvantaged because their parents are more likely to work nights and evenings than are the working non-poor, thus allowing them far less time to spend with school-age children.

**Public policies such as workplace flexibility, part-time parity, and paid family and medical leave can help.** By restructuring the workplace around the values we hold in family life, we can ensure the safe and healthy development of all children, as well as allow parents to provide for their economic security.

**THE PROGRAM ON GENDER, WORK & FAMILY** is a research and advocacy organization, based at American University, Washington College of Law, that seeks to restructure the workplace around the values held in family life. Please visit our website at <http://www.wcl.american.edu/gender/workfamily> for more information about the program.

<sup>1</sup> Children's Defense Fund, "Child Care Basics" Fact Sheet, [http://www.childrensdefensefund.org/cc\\_facts.htm](http://www.childrensdefensefund.org/cc_facts.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> S. Jody Heymann, Renee Boynton-Jarrett, Patricia Carter, James T. Bond, and Ellen Galinsky, "Work-Family Issues and Low-Income Families" (Ford Foundation 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Betty Holcomb and the National Partnership for Women and Families, "Why Americans Need Family Leave Benefits and How They Can Get Them," <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/content.cfm?L1=8&L2=2.0&GSID=237>.

<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Bradley, Stephen L. Rock, Bettye M. Caldwell, Pandia T. Harris, Holly M. Hamrick. "Home environment and school performance among Black elementary school children," *Journal of Negro Education*, 56(4):499-509 (1987).



