Workplace Supports for Families of Children and Youth with Disabilities:

Lessons from human resource professionals and employed parents

Julie M. Rosenzweig and Eileen M. Brennan
NIDRR-funded Research

Presentation #206NR-S Workplace Supports-Rosenzweig & Brennan
Work-Family Challenges

Employed family members raising children/youth with disabilities report:

• Significant overlap in time and attention demands across exceptional care responsibilities & work obligations.

• Diminished access to community resources & services designed for children/youth with typical development.

• Benefit from workplace supports, e.g., flexible work arrangements, that enhance work-family integration.
Work-Life Integration Research

• Focus group method used to study workplace experiences related to flexibility requests, communication strategies, and supportive practices.

• Outcomes of disclosing vs. concealing family needs at the workplace.

• Focus Group Participants:
  – 28 family members raising children/youth with mental health difficulties
  – 17 human resource (HR) professionals in large organizations.
Employed Family Members

• Continual need for work adjustments.

• Experienced “courtesy stigmatization” in the workplace.

• Made decisions to disclose/conceal their family’s unique needs based on:
  – Past experiences with disclosure, stigmatization.
  – Perceived culture of the organization.
  – Confidence in ability to competently communicate needs and successfully negotiate for workplace supports.
Disclosure Decision Outcomes

**DISCLOSURE**

- Formal supports accessed
- Flexible work arrangements secured
- Informal support from supervisors, co-workers increased
- Others in the workplace educated about diverse family needs

**CONCEALMENT**

- Courtesy stigmatization avoided
- Equity concerns absent
- Performance scrutiny minimized
- Worries from home escaped
- “Normal appearing” work life maintained
Human Resource Professionals

• Concerned with equity issues when the employee seeks flexible work arrangements or workplace supports.

• Negotiated the boundaries of communication—respecting privacy, confidentiality.

• Had a dual focus: creating a positive work climate while protecting the company from negative legal consequences.
Improving Family Supports for Integration

• Service providers working with families raising children/youth with disabilities can help by:
  – Exploring the challenges & strategies of work-family integration, including disclosure concerns.
  – Gaining & sharing knowledge about legal work-family provisions and workplace supports.

• Workplace HR and supervisors can help by:
  – Gaining knowledge about challenges facing employees with exceptional care responsibilities.
  – Developing effective communication strategies to use in work-family negotiations.
The development of the contents of this presentation were supported by funding from the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research, United States Department of Education, and the Center for Mental Health Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services (NIDRR grant H133B040038 and H133B090019). The content does not represent the views or policies of the funding agencies. In addition, you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.
Work-Life Integration Resources

• HR Training Manual: *Children/Youth with Disabilities: Their Parents Are YOUR Employees.*

• Work-Life Integration Project Website:

• Work-Life Factsheet: