

8-8-2009

## **Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities as an Extension 4-H Agent**

Joseph Richard Rhea

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BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES  
AS AN EXTENSION 4-H AGENT

By

Joseph Richard Rhea, Jr.

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
Mississippi State University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
In Agricultural Information Science and Education  
In the Department of Agricultural Information Science and Education

Mississippi State, Mississippi

August 2009

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2009

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AS AN EXTENSION 4-H AGENT

By

Joseph Richard Rhea, Jr.

Approved:

---

Walter N. Taylor  
Assistant Dean and Professor,  
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences  
(Director of Dissertation)

---

Michael E. Newman  
Professor, School Human Sciences

---

Vincent McGrath  
Professor, Leadership and Foundations

---

Patsilu Reeves  
Professor Emeritus,  
Family Education and Policy

---

Ronnie W. White  
Extension Professor and Leader,  
School of Human Sciences

---

Jacquelyn P. Deeds  
Professor, School of Human Sciences  
(Graduate Coordinator)

---

Melissa Mixon  
Interim Dean of the College of  
Agriculture and Life Sciences

---

Gary Jackson  
Associate Professor and Director,  
School of Human Sciences

Name: Joseph Richard Rhea, Jr.

Date of Degree: August 8, 2009

Institution: Mississippi State University

Major Field: Agricultural Information Science and Education

Major Professor: Dr. Walter N. Taylor

Title of Study: BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES AS AN  
EXTENSION 4-H AGENT

Pages in Study: 182

Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

A career with Extension can be very rewarding, but also very demanding, as employees have to balance job stress and time demands with family goals and demands. The very nature of Extension work brings some tension between the job and family, and employees need to be equipped to make decisions about personal and work time. If the Extension System is to be a leader of positive change for individuals, families and communities, its employees must be able to find that balance.

Previous research with 4-H agents has identified 23 job responsibilities that were stressors, with some studies showing a direct relationship between Extension work and family problems. To build on these studies and establish the current situation among Extension agents with 4-H responsibilities in the Southern Region, this correlational study examined the relationships and differences between job characteristics and marital satisfaction, how agent characteristics directed those relationships, and what coping mechanisms agents used to ameliorate negative work-family interactions. The study

instrument utilized the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT) to arrive at a global score that represented the distress level of the relationship for each agent.

Demographic information and work-related information was also gathered from the agent responses to the instrument, and then used to develop relationships among variables.

The findings of the study were that agents experience the stressors in similar ways and amounts, but their perceptions of those stressors and how they affect marital satisfaction differ. The group experiencing the stressors to the most detrimental level was the members of the “Sandwich Generation,” which include employees aged 35-54, and who find their careers sandwiched between raising children and caring for aging parents. They, along with other agents, need to employ numerous strategies to cope with the stresses they experience, including prioritizing, planning, and building a strong social support system as the top strategies.

Key words: Extension Service, 4-H, Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test, marital satisfaction, Sandwich Generation

## DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my loving wife, Elizabeth, who has been ever so patient with me throughout my career with the Mississippi State University Extension Service and through this research process, and who has been my teacher and model of how to lovingly balance work and family responsibilities. Only God knows what the next step is for us, but we will face it confidently and faithfully, and together we will find the road to tomorrow.

I also dedicate this to my three sons, who have grown up in a 4-H home. Together we have made some of the mistakes, and lived the same struggles about which I heard and wrote in this dissertation. Their patience and encouragement made the difference in finishing this project, and we have grown closer together through it all.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With heartfelt thanks, I applaud the members of my doctoral committee who were so encouraging along this journey: Dr. Walter Taylor, Dr. Michael Newman, Dr. Vince McGrath, Dr. Patsilu Reeves, and Dr. Ron White. Their teaching, guidance, friendship, and encouragement made this possible.

Thanks also go to Mississippi State University Extension staff members who have encouraged me, discussed ideas along the way, and will continue to be life-long friends. Special thanks go to the 4-H staff members who have given fantastic guidance and support throughout this study.

Special thanks are also extended to several people for their targeted direction and support. Thanks go to Dr. Joe Wilmoth of MSU and Belinda Gray of The Gottman Institute for direction and clarity in using the Locke Wallace Marital Adjustment Test. Thanks also go to Dr. Ron Brown, Dr. Bo Beaulieu and Dr. Alan Barefield at MSU, for their directions in contacting the directors and 4-H leaders at the institutions in the Southern Region. Thanks also go to Dr. John Edwards of the Social Science Research Center for help in developing and implementing the survey for the study, and to Christine Williams and Jonathon Miller at MSU for their guidance through the IRB process.

This journey has also been closely watched by a group of friends who, at times wondered if I was crazy, and then decided I was just crazy enough to finish. Thanks for the encouragement and push to complete what I had started.

Finally, to my parents who gave me the example of how parents can invest time, money, and energy into their children, even when they had to do without!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*Cinched snugly in his seat belt, Joe leaned against the car door and went fast asleep. He was only four, but had already logged more than 50,000 miles over Mississippi roads. Some nights his teddy bear cushioned his head, while other nights his mom brought along his pillow and blanket.*

*Mom worked late several nights each week, and Joe was usually in tow. There was no grandma, no aunts or other family members close by, and dad seemed to be gone as much as mom. What Joe did have was plenty of hands to reach out, pick him up, tousle his hair and tickle his ribs. He now responded to names such as “Cutey” and “Sweetie,” along with “Joe.” He didn’t mind the girls picking him up, and he enjoyed wrestling with the boys. He had even memorized the 4-H pledge, and would stand and repeat it with the members of the 4-H clubs his mom visited. Joe was already a 4-H’er - not a bona-fide member, but an Extension agent’s kid. His world revolved around daycare, 4-H meetings and 4-H events. His mom, the county 4-H agent, dropped him off in the morning, picked him up almost every afternoon, and carried him with her many nights. The weekends revolved around 4-H events too, as livestock shows, horse shows, fairs and other events became family outings. Joe didn’t complain, as he knew no other lifestyle.*

*The home scene was a little different. Mom and Dad usually got along, but at times Joe could hear them talking loudly in their bedroom. “This is the third nighttime meeting this week! Why do you have all these meetings?” Dad would shout. The shut door muffled the rest of the words, but he could tell they were upset. Lately, it seemed to be happening more frequently, and he was spending a lot more time with mom.*

## Background

Peering behind the bedroom door would reveal a different picture of an Extension family. This family unit, with an Extension agent as a member, had hit a path found by so many predecessors. Extension agents spend numerous hours away from home, often resorting to dragging their young children with them. The staff member becomes torn between family commitments, expectations of clientele and administrators, and her own personal and work goals. The work week includes night and weekend meetings, with the daily work bleeding over into time at home, with a phone that seems to ring incessantly. The home, a place designed to provide a nurturing environment for a couple and their children, becomes a motel where the family members check in, sleep, shower, eat breakfast, and then leave to face another day.

Babkirk and Davis (1982) reported Extension faculty members often face conflicting expectations from clients and the important people in their lives. Their work with Extension staff members identified extended work hours, client expectations, juggling busy work and family schedules, and the need for personal renewal as issues affecting family lives. An Extension Committee on Organization and Policy report (ECOP, 1994) identified a “workaholic culture” among Extension agents, with balancing

work and family needs as the number one human resource issue facing the Cooperative Extension System at that time.

When jobs absorb almost all of a person's time, harmful effects spill over on families (Hawkins, 1982). This disruptive effect is true for many professionals, and if work becomes the absolute value, the family may end up as a third or even fourth priority. Numerous studies have shown work-family conflict to be perceived differently by men and women (Greenhaus, Parsuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz & Beutell, 1989; Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999; Minnotte, Stevens, Minnotte & Kiger, 2007; Sears & Galambos, 1992; Stevens, Minnotte, Mannon & Kiger, 2007; and Voydanoff, 1988). In addition, Roehling, Jarvis and Swope (2005) found that differences also extended to ethnicity, as Hispanics displayed a greater gender disparity in negative work-family spillover than Blacks and Whites, possibly due to acculturation.

### Statement of the Problem

In the early years of the Cooperative Extension system, many young unmarried women were employed as Home Demonstration agents. At that time, female agents were not allowed to be married (Chenault, 2006), as long hours in travel and teaching would result in the employees spending too much time away from home. Those requirements for female employees are not enforced today, but as Babkirk and Davis (1982) found, Extension agents still reported the time requirements of their jobs seemed overwhelming, despite improved transportation, technological advances, changing subject matter and clientele. Concurrently, the family structure was also undergoing a dramatic change, as dual-parent families with one income had become less common, being replaced by dual-

earner families, single-parent families, and families with a parent/step-parent arrangement. According to Hansen (1991), this led to an increased focus of attention on balancing work and family.

To balance the two areas, families must take defensive actions. Individuals and families erect numerous boundaries to separate and insulate them from outside influences and forces. These boundaries allow individuals to remove themselves from the stresses and responsibilities of one area of their life so they can focus on another for a period of time. Beavers (1985) discovered boundary disturbances between the family and the outside environment could be a source of conflict for couples. One problem he noted was that of investing so much in the outside world that the boundary was functionally destroyed. He explained how the couple could become crippled when the boundary was not restrictive enough for the couple to develop as an entity, and the outside forces pulled on the couple until they were torn apart. However, he also found boundaries that were too restrictive forced the couple to garner all of their emotional support from each other, which became suffocating and crippling when children came into the family. Frone, Russell and Cooper (1992) found the work-family border was not symmetrically permeable, with work interfering in family life more frequently than family interfering with work. Chesley (2005) found evidence to suggest the use of technology, particularly the use of cell phones, by working people blurred the work-family border to an even greater extent. She insinuated the persistent use of cell phones for communication was significantly linked to increased negative forms of spillover, increasing distress and decreasing family satisfaction.

Sorcinelli and Near (1989) examined another perspective of life in academia, and discovered university faculty often have unclear lines separating their jobs from the rest of their lives. They found vacations were often taken around conferences or work-related events. Faculty members also spent large amounts of time working at home, and they tended to socialize with other academicians. Although the overlap could be beneficial in several aspects, Sorcinelli and Near found it could also be stressful and could become all-consuming. This assertion has been supported by several studies that reinforced problems university faculty have with stress, burnout, depression and other issues.

#### Purpose and Research Questions

A career with Extension can be very rewarding, but also very demanding, as employees work to balance job stress and time demands with family goals and demands. Hawkins (1982) stated the very nature of Extension work brings some tension between the job and family. Babkirk and Davis (1982) stated members of the Maine Association of CES Faculty felt life priorities needed to be clearly established so employees could make decisions about personal and work time. Fetsch, Flashman and Jeffers (1984) reported 4-H agents in Kentucky expressed the need for stress and time management training as early as 1981, identifying 23 job responsibilities that were stressors. In their summary of studies on Extension employees, Fetsch and Kennington (1997) found stress and burnout reported in numerous states with some studies noting a direct relationship between Extension work and family problems.

To build on these studies and establish the current situation among Extension agents with 4-H responsibilities in the Southern Region, the following research questions will be addressed in this study:

Question 1: What are the relationships between job characteristics and marital satisfaction for Extension 4-H agents in the Southern Region?

Question 2: Are differences in job characteristics and marital satisfaction evident among Extension 4-H agents based on age, gender, marital status or the presence of children in the home?

Question 3: What coping mechanisms have been employed by Extension 4-H agents to ameliorate negative work-family interactions?

These questions will guide the research process so job characteristics that negatively affect marital satisfaction can be identified and quantified for 4-H agents, differences can be distinguished among agents, and coping mechanisms can be elicited. These will help 4-H agents understand how other agents have adjusted and adapted to work-family spillover, allowing mentors and staff development specialists to work with 4-H agents in the development and implementation of practices to handle the stresses they face. It will also help administrators understand the stresses under which 4-H agents work, opening dialogues that will lead to stronger families and a stronger Extension Service.

### Significance of the Study

Fetsch and Kennington (1997) reported that while research has been conducted on stress and burnout among employees in many fields, research with Cooperative Extension

faculty has been spotty. They found research related to the impact of employment on marital quality and family dynamics had been conducted in only seven states, with results showing statistically significant relationships. After each study, administrators worked with employees to clarify the needs and possible actions to take, and began to work toward addressing the issues. In a follow-up study of such a workshop in Maine, Babkirk and Davis (1982) reported employees willingly accepted guidance, and many implemented the workshop tips to address the conflicts in their home and work lives.

Nationally, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP, 1994) has adopted a vision statement that a career with Extension would be a career where “There is opportunity for balance between work and family life.” If the Extension System is to be a leader for positive change for individuals, families and communities, its employees must be able to find that balance. As Place, Jacob, Summerhill and Arrington (2000) found in a study of Extension employees in Florida, the ability to manage stress and work pressure benefited the employees, and also improved organizational effectiveness.

#### Definitions

**4-H agent-** 4-H is the informal youth education program administered by the Cooperative State research, Education and Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, with staff members assigned to work with volunteers and youth in each state (4-H, 2008). The staff members in the study are employed in full-time agent positions at the county or area level, are employed to work directly with

members and leaders in the 4-H program, and include agents from both 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions in the Southern Region.

**Marital satisfaction** – the degree of personal satisfaction an individual feels about the marriage, and the central variable in marital quality. Marital satisfaction is not simply a judgment made at one point in time, but represents a trajectory showing fluctuations in marital evaluations over time. It represents an evaluation where positive features are salient and negative features are relatively absent, and it describes an attitude towards the spouse and the relationship (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000). It will be assessed using the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

**Job characteristics** – characteristics that reflect the multi-dimensionality of a worker's job role. They include aspects such as work hours, travel demands, weekend work, and control over work hours and will be assessed from responses to the study instrument, which was developed from a 4-H Agent's job description (MSU-ES, 2002).

#### Assumptions

The following were assumptions for the study:

1. Extension agents who work with 4-H fill stressful roles, although individuals may interpret the stress in different ways and at differing levels.
2. The role of a 4-H agent is sufficiently consistent across the states in the Southern Region to allow comparisons of job characteristics and agents.

#### Limitations

The following were limitations of the study:

1. The population in the study was limited to full-time county or multi-county Extension agents with 4-H responsibilities. Results from the study will focus on these agents due to the consistency of the positions and job characteristics across the Southern Region.
2. Results were measured using responses from Extension agents with 4-H responsibilities, with reliability being determined from analysis of the completeness of the instrument used. Self-reporting has reactivity as a concern, specifically over-stating and under-stating the situation (Wills, Weiss & Patterson, 1974).
3. The study was a “moment-in-time” analysis, and as such assessed the current perceptions of agents in the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The family is one of the oldest institutions known to man, with marriage being considered a sacred vow in many cultures. The family unit was designed to provide a nurturing environment for the adult couple and their children, with the extended family providing the fabric connecting the past to the present, and providing emotional, financial and physical support when needed. Within this context, spouses and children mature as individuals, spouses grow as a couple, the family develops as a unit, and the society develops in a structure composed of families (Goode, 1964).

#### Vital Signs of a Healthy Marriage

The marriage has often been treated anthropomorphically, with counselors, educators and researchers discussing characteristics of vitality. In that vein, Smalley (1996) offered five vital signs that couples could measure to determine the “health” of their marriage. They were: (a) All feel safe to think for themselves, (b) all are encouraged to talk and know their words will be valued, (c) all enjoy a sense of safety and value in sharing their feelings, (d) all feel meaningfully connected, and (e) the personal “property lines” of all are respected. These indicators could be self-analyzed, and would help the couple assess the strength and vitality of their relationship.

Smalley's list gives a framework around which to gauge the interpersonal climate of the relationship. It allows detection of a one-sided relationship, one in which spouses and children are to be "seen and not heard," or a relationship that may foster either a sense of entrapment or actions of rebellion. The ideas promoted are founded on mutual respect, and promote honor and value among family members. The relationship where people have the freedom to think for themselves and feel safe to express their thoughts is a relationship where individuals can connect with a sense of individuality, yet with a sense of belonging. Conversations are not cut off before the members can express their ideas and know they are heard. Creativity is encouraged, differences are discussed, decisions are jointly made, and participation is not met with embarrassment. Contributory thoughts are shared, heard, and discussed. Participants seek not to end, but to encourage discussion. Decisions are made with the desire to strengthen rather than weaken the relationship.

The fourth vital sign is that all feel meaningfully connected, demonstrated by how comfortable spouses are to share their deepest feelings with each other. The desire for connection is a basic human need, and is so powerful that when people don't connect at home, they are likely to develop connections outside of the family or marriage relationship. Connecting among spouses is often expressed through conversations, looks and touches that demonstrate the spouses are valuing, listening, hearing, and thus connecting with each other.

As spouses share information from their deepest part, vulnerability emerges. The fifth vital sign of a good relationship is respect for each other's personal property. How a spouse treats property lines can show the true depth of the commitment. Jokes made at a

spouse's expense and lack of support for a spouse's wishes and decisions may damage or destroy spousal respect, especially when they are expressed in front of children, friends and others. The property lines define issues that are not discussed in public, and should be treated gently if discussed in private. Violations here can allow emotional infection to enter the relationship, creating sores and fevers that linger for days.

### Marital Models

In addition to measuring the "health" of a marriage, numerous models have been developed for analyzing marital quality and functioning (Boss, Dohrerty, LaRossa, Schumm & Steinmetz, 1993). Orden and Bradburn (1968) developed a marital happiness model that drew from research dating back to the early 1900's, and included dimensions of satisfaction and tension which they said functioned independently to produce marital happiness. Satisfaction measures included couple-level activities such as visiting friends together, entertaining, outside activities, intimate conversations and activities, and showing affection and appreciation for each other. Tensions were measured from responses to questions about friends, finances, physical and emotional feelings, extended family, time away from home, spousal employment, and personal habits. The model was developed with an instrument that could be self-scored and would result in scores for both dimensions. The differences in an individual's scores on the two dimensions gave a rating for the individual's perception of happiness in the marriage. Thus, a marriage rated "very happy" would be low in tension and high in satisfaction, whereas a marriage scored high in tension and low in satisfaction would be expected to fall into the "unhappy" category. These values represent the level of adjustment to marriage that the

couple had reached, with the association of adjustment and overall happiness being stronger for women than for men.

Beavers (1985) promoted a systems approach for marriage and couple therapy. He asserted marriage existed on several levels, including past inputs from family dynamics, current experiences, and personal beliefs and desires for the relationship. The system framework showed marriages do not exist in a vacuum, but are dynamic and responsive to the forces surrounding them. Six particular behaviors were identified that affected the health of the relationship: (a) A modest overt power difference, (b) the capacity for clear boundaries, (c) operating mainly in the present, (d) respect for individual choice, (e) skill in negotiation, and (f) sharing positive feelings. Beavers used the system to describe how a couple that approached marriage with mutual respect balanced their individual power, allowed individual autonomy and integrity with selective permeability, operated in the present, and showed care and cooperation as they worked to achieve both individual and common goals.

Bornstein and Bornstein (1986) described a behavioral-communications model. Their model examined spousal behavior within the relational context so the individual process was considered in light of the interactional process shaping it. They described behavior as serving both a literal and a representational purpose in the relationship, and as changes occurred within individuals the effects were felt throughout the relationship. The model pointed out the relational function of all behavior could be best understood by examining the outcome produced.

Bornstein and Bornstein (1986) also described a social exchange model of marital interaction. Assumptions made for the model were that individuals entered and stayed in

an intimate relationship only as long as the relationship was satisfying. Both rewards and costs were measured in maintaining the relationship, also being expressed in terms of reinforcement and punishment or satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The model helped the researchers explain why individuals with similar interests could find it easy to please each other since they received mutual pleasure from similar stimuli and activities. Considering this model in banking terms, one could see how couples could become distressed when the deposits (inputs of pleasure) were lower than the withdrawals (inputs of displeasure or removal of pleasure).

Gottman and Notarius (2000) described a mathematical model of marital interaction that invoked two interlocking nonlinear difference equations (one per spouse) that computed influence functions. Previous research reported couples can have several stable states that are self-regulating homeostatic set points for the system. These points represent phase states to which the spousal interaction is continually drawn. Interaction within the relationship can be measured, with the range of affects showing the power influences within the relationship. Asymmetry across the range of affects demonstrates an imbalance of power within the relationship.

Bradbury, Finchman and Beach (2000) described a demand/withdrawal pattern that had been developed to explain marital engagement. The pattern showed increasing demands by one spouse often led to increased avoidance by the other spouse. That response led to increased demands for engagement by the first spouse (often construed as nagging) and increased efforts for avoidance, and the cycle resulted in an eventual decline of marital satisfaction. This model, using observational data, was supported by

both longitudinal and cross-cultural studies, and explained responses to conflict within a variety of marriages.

Thompson-Hayes and Webb (2004) proposed a dyadic model of marital commitment that was developed from a dialectical perspective. Dialectic theory explains communication as a process of using discourse during times of change in order to maintain the relationship, so the model accentuated the importance of communication in the life of the marriage while predicting curvilinear change in commitment levels. This model allowed seven relationships to be identified among the variables that every marital dyad experiences, namely projected longevity, commitment, communication maintenance behaviors and marital quality. They proposed each needed to be maintained above a critical level for the marriage to survive.

Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen and Campbell (2005) approached marital quality from a life course perspective, presenting it as a developmental trajectory that over time has ups and downs. Examining data from individuals who were continuously married across three waves of data collection (1986-1994), they gauged how marital quality changed over the eight year span, revealing two constructs they called “Positive Marriage Experience” and “Negative Marriage Experience.” Using a multiple indicator linear growth model to allow growth parameters to be viewed as time-invariant covariates, they concluded that marital quality tends to decline over time, and is impacted more by age than marital duration. Parenting shapes the context of marriage over the life course and influences the nature of the trajectory of change in marital quality, more severely impacting marriages of younger people. Gottman and Notarius (2000) reported longitudinal studies showed 40% to 70% of couples experienced a drop in marital quality

within one year after the birth of the first child, with a concurrent increase in marital conflict by a factor of nine. They also found that during the first year couples tended to revert to stereotypic gender roles and felt overwhelmed by the amount of housework and child care, while fathers withdrew into work, and marital conversation and sex decreased enormously. Even though joy and pleasure with the baby increased following the birth, the researchers found the pre-baby marital system needed to be strong and healthy or the marriage would fall into distress within five years after the baby's birth.

### Modern Marriage and the World of Work

The life course perspective gives a picture of the hurdles couples must face in their journey, but today's marriages are faced with even greater challenges than those of their parents. For example, the past century has seen several dramatic changes in family structure. Dual-parent families have become less common, being replaced by single parent families, families with a parent-stepparent arrangement, and families with grandparents becoming parents again. Amato (2000) examined how families and marriages have broken down during the twentieth century. He found the rate of divorce near the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was only about 5% of first marriages, but the rate had changed to about half of the first marriages ending in divorce by the year 2000, with remarriage after divorce becoming common. He also found that second marriages had a greater likelihood of separation and about one of every six adults would endure two or more divorces.

Along with the changing family structure, Bianchi (2000) asserted the most revolutionary change in the American family in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the increase in the

labor force participation of women, particularly women with children. She reported the percentage of women in the workforce has increased from 32% to 50% in the past 20 years, and that percentage increased to 65% when mothers with children under the age of six were considered separately. Understanding many of today's families are blended families, Rogers (1996) investigated the association between married mothers' employment and their reports of marital conflict and marital happiness. Using data from the 1988 wave of the *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Merged Child-Mother*, Rogers determined that in mother-father marriages, full-time employment for the wife was associated with less marital happiness and more marital conflict, and the association grew stronger as the number of children increased. However, in mother-stepfather marriages, as the family size increased, the mother's full-time employment was associated with greater marital happiness and lower marital conflict, possibly due to the contribution of the mother's income and the easing of the family's economic strain. There also appeared to be a greater appreciation by the husband of the attempt by the wife to contribute to the family's economic base, and there was a mutual benefit of the couple's ability to maintain their economic independence and financial responsibility for the family.

Early Extension practices often conveyed the idea that the employment of women outside the home negatively impacted family members. To explicate current thought and motivations of women to work outside the home, Schoen, Rogers and Amato (2006) examined data from the first two waves of the *National Survey of Families and Households* (1987-88 and 1992-94). They examined marital happiness and full time employment, and employment and marital stability for couples in which the wife was

employed. They found feelings of low marital quality by females increased their labor force participation, but low feelings of marital quality by males did not lead to greater employment for their wives. The researchers concluded wives becoming employed or remaining employed decreased marital disruption and made the marriages more stable, but not necessarily happier or unhappier.

Other research has added to these findings. Sears and Galambos (1992) found women's work conditions were associated with stress, which was intercorrelated with marital adjustment. Rogers (1996) found mothers in mother-stepfather families were significantly more likely to be employed 40 hours or more per week and had smaller family sizes than continuously married mothers. Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish and Kim (2002) found at the individual level, women's employment did not destabilize marriages, but increased the risk of disruption in unhappy marriages. Wilcox and Nock (2006) found homemaking wives reported greater happiness with their husband's emotional work. Lavee and Ben-Ari (2007) investigated the work-family relationship at the daily level through the use of daily diaries, and found a mediating effect of personal emotional state on work experiences spilled over to one's mood at home, and found negative moods of the spouses led to increased dyadic distance. Broman (2001) reported race to be a significant predictor of family outcomes, with African-Americans having lower levels of the marital harmony and parental well-being, and the number of female-headed families increasing.

The physiological aspects of marital quality have also been researched, as the marriage union is affected by both partners, with the male is often being considered the more aggressive member of the union. Booth, Johnson and Granger (2005) focused their

work on links between testosterone levels, marital quality and perceptions of role overload. Their study tested a possible biosocial alternative to what has been considered previously as a socially influenced or personality determined behavior. They found neither husbands' nor wives' testosterone levels showed a direct connection with marital quality, but when role overload was included as a moderating event, effects were noticed. Higher testosterone levels were associated with lower levels of marital quality when perceptions of role overload were elevated, and higher testosterone levels were associated with higher levels of marital quality when perceptions of role overload were low.

Changing employment patterns and changing family structure have also brought changes in family management. When parents are dealing with external or internal issues that result in conflict or marital distress, energy and attention that should be given to children is diverted or shunted, and what is given can be empty or even toxic. Gottman and Notarius (2000) found linkages between parents with marital conflict or distress and children with problematic childhood outcomes such as depression, social withdrawal, lower academic achievement or poor health. Hamilton and Hamilton (2004) found when parents are in marital distress or their lives are over-committed so time at home is minimized, the "Five C's" of human development – competence, character, connection, confidence and contribution are relegated to the child to develop on his or her own.

Rogers (1996) examined differences in marital quality based on family structure. She found higher levels of marital happiness were reported by continuously married mothers than mothers in mother-stepfather families, although continuously married mothers also reported higher levels of marital conflict. She proposed affection flattened in remarriages so that the marriages became primarily pragmatic, and were neither highly

conflictual nor extremely happy. She also found mothers in stepfamilies were significantly more likely to be employed more than 40 hours per week, while continuously married mothers tended to have larger families and more education. In relation to the number of hours of employment, Rogers also found levels of marital happiness were significantly lower when mothers were employed 40 or more hours per week, although levels of marital conflict were not significantly higher when mothers were employed full-time, with the negative association between marital happiness and full-time employment being significantly stronger when the mother was in a mother-stepfather family. When the family size was relatively large (more than two children), Rogers found the role-strain to be an issue, as full-time employment for continuously married mothers detracted from marital quality, decreased marital happiness and increased marital conflict. The converse was true of mothers in mother-stepfather families, probably since the additional income helped ease the financial strain, and the mother's action of bringing income along with children to the new family had symbolic importance to the relationship.

Despite the growing body of studies showing threats to marital quality and dyadic closeness, the percentage of females in the workforce continues to increase, and the percentage of married couples in which both husband and wife are in the labor force continues to grow. The *2006 American Community Survey* (2006) reported per-state averages of married-couple families with both husband and wife in the labor force ranged from 43.4% to 63.9%, with the national average being 53.5%.

Changes in today's work force have given rise to dual career couples (Stevens, Minnotte, Mannon & Kiger, 2007). The dual career couple was first described by

Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) as a couple where both spouses pursued jobs that were personally fulfilling, required a high degree of commitment, and had internal career ladders. Both individuals were highly qualified and responsible, meaning changes had to be made in the family structure. Decisions could no longer be made based on what was only good for one spouse, but would be based on what was best for both spouses. Young and Long (1998) suggested many groups of dual-job couples exist, but they experience similar conflicts. These groups may be divided by socio-economic status separating non-professional couples from professional couples. Their approach to counseling has led them to assert dual-career couples experience similar stressors, but at different levels. They identified significant sources of conflict for dual career couples based on their origin as external or internal stressors. They discussed external stressors as role overload, role conflict, work/family spillover, family/work spillover, the division of child care and housework, the preparation and presence of children, and multicultural issues. Internal stressors included gender-role socialization, high achievement needs, little time for intimacy, and traditional masculine/feminine roles. Many of these stressors are experienced on a daily basis, while some reflect major decisions and changes. For example, if one spouse chooses to make a career change or receives a promotion that forces a career move, should the other spouse be expected to give up a job, or should the couple develop a commuter marriage?

Numerous problems and sources of conflict have been studied by researchers, but it is important to note many positive aspects of a dual career couple have also been identified. When both spouses are involved in careers, differing interests can introduce a variety of activities and experiences that can be enjoyed together. Conversations, outings

and vacations take on new meanings and offer chances for exchange of individual ideas for mutual pleasure. A working spouse is able to be supportive of and give career guidance to another spouse. The couple may be better off financially, meaning they can have a better quality of life with less anxiety about a fluctuating salary or decline in business. The couple may also find flexibility for one spouse to try a new venture while living temporarily off one income. Money can also offer some protection against expenses the couple will face with household maintenance, child care and transportation. Rogers (1999) found that changes in wives income slightly increased their marital harmony, with a positive effect showing in the wife's marital harmony more than husband's. In addition to an increased family income, she suggested wives benefited from the additional personal challenges that were brought through employment.

Roehling and Moen (2003) also identified advantages for dual-earning couples. They found men and women who were active in both the home and in the workforce had higher levels of psychological and physical well-being. They also had larger social-support networks, a greater sense of competency and a higher degree of economic security. The researchers also identified social supports that couples must find to maintain the dual-career lifestyle, namely day care/child care, after-school programs, paid maternity and paternity leave, and flexible work schedules.

The dual-career couple today also faces another hurdle in the process of building both their family and their career – that of caring for aging parents, which Hargrave (2005) asserts is a job few people have been trained to do. In addition to the generational monikers of Pioneer (born prior to 1946), Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1960), Generation X (born 1961 to 1975) and Generation Y (born 1976 to 1990) being labels for

employees (OzTam, 2009), employees may now be classified as part of the “Sandwich Generation,” which was identified by the American Psychological Association (APA) as employees aged 35-54 who must balance work, raising children and caring for aging parents (APA, 2008). The Boston College Center for Work and Family (2000) reported employees in this generation would find emotional and financial difficulties, as the rising costs of child care, higher education and long-term health care would make it hard for employees to ensure their financial security while caring for children and parents. Keene and Prokos (2005) stated the proportion of sandwiched workers has increased over the past decade, and they anticipated the proportion to increase in the aging population in the United States. In addition, they reported that numerous studies have shown women performed the majority of eldercare within the extended family, and when coupled with the increased movement of women into the labor force, there was an increasing concern that working women would not be available to perform eldercare.

### Job Characteristics and the Work-Family Interface

The concept of role stress from employment has received considerable attention in both popular and scholarly work since the early 1960's, with many different work roles and environments examined. Early works focused only on job stressors that related to the work environment, physical tasks and relationships to co-workers and supervisors. For example, Van Tillburg and Miller (1987) interviewed currently employed Extension agents in Ohio to determine what factors influenced agents to leave their jobs. Although the study asked numerous questions about job satisfaction, family roles and family expectations were not included in the questions. Kossek and Ozeki (1998) found most

studies related to policy did not even include measures of work/family conflict, but rather focused on how family demands interfered with work. Roehling and Moen (2003) described the stresses that the family role placed on employment as including times when a parent had to leave work to attend to a sick child, or a spouse bringing work home to complete during family time. They went on to suggest the breadwinner/homemaker family was the norm of the 1950's, resulting in the work and family domains being considered gender-specific domains. Winslow, Wolchick and Sander (2004) concurred with Roehling and Moen, suggesting part of the reason work-family conflict did not receive much prior research was that researchers often debated whether the conflict was exclusively or primarily a woman's issue.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined the work-family conflict as a conflict in which the role pressure from the work and family domains were mutually incompatible in some respect, making one more difficult by participating in the other. They identified three major aspects of the work-family interface from which conflicts could arise – time, strain and behavior. Also, Greenhaus and Beutell divided the aspect of time in the work domain into three components: (a) hours worked, (b) inflexible work schedule, and (c) shift-work; while time in the family domain was divided into: (a) young children, (b) spouse employment, and (c) large families. In the work domain, three items of strain were identified: (a) role conflict, (b) role ambiguity, and (c) boundary-spanning activities, while in the family domain, family conflict and low spousal support were identified. The behavior aspect primarily consisted of expectations for both domains. Their explanation was that conflict came when filling a role in one domain created a situation where the comparable role in the other domain could not be fulfilled. They found each component

produced pressure for the employee/spouse to participate, often at the same time, meaning one demand would be fulfilled while the other went unfulfilled. They specifically noted long and inflexible work hours, extensive travel and overtime interacted to produce strain-based conflict as well as time-based conflict, showing that some of these conflicts share common sources within the work domain. Behavior-based conflict was a little more difficult to define, but Greenhaus and Beutell summarized the literature by saying men in particular have trouble adjusting behaviors between the office and home, often bringing a managerial type behavior home or taking a fatherly behavior to work. Hughes, Galinsky and Morris (1992) would later extend the work on behavior-based strain by examining mood among employees. They found some job characteristics were associated with the creation of negative moods for employees which, in turn, influenced marital quality as the negative moods were taken home and affected companionship within the family.

Lambert (1990) found most studies relied on three theories to characterize the processes by which work and families were linked: segmentation, compensation and spillover. The theory of segmentation treated work and home as separate spheres of life either because they were inherently independent or workers actively kept them that way. The theory of compensation viewed workers as seekers of greater satisfaction from their work or family life because they were dissatisfied with the other. She asserted spillover was the most popular view and explained it as employees carrying emotions, attitudes, skills and behaviors that were established in one domain to the other domain. She further explained many studies examined these theories independently, almost considering them as competing theories. Lambert's work, however, suggested that they should be

considered in conjunction to completely understand the processes found in the linkages. Greenhaus, Parsuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz and Beutell (1989) asserted much the same idea of linkage when they declared roles that conflict, are ambiguous or are overly taxing may also create increased time demands within the work domain, and could also interfere with role requirements in the family domain.

Other researchers considered similar approaches as they studied the work-family interface. Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrin (1996) approached their research using the premise that work-family conflict and family-work conflict were distinct but related forms of inter-role conflict. From this perspective, the conflict measured would reflect the degree to which competing role responsibilities were incompatible. Their primary focus was the actions of time and strain given to a specific role, with the explanation that time-based conflict occurred when the amount of time devoted to the work role interfered with performing family-related responsibilities, and strain-based conflict occurred when strain created by the work role interfered with performing family responsibilities. Specifically, they pointed to excessive work time making it difficult for one spouse to be available for family activities and responsibilities, or in the case of strain - irritability and anxiety created by work responsibilities interfering with the performance of family duties.

Mauno and Kinnunen (1999) explained the term “spillover” has been used in psychological literature to define the mechanism combining work experiences and marital functioning, whereby the reactions experienced in the work domain are transferred to the marriage domain, and vice versa. They explained many work characteristics had been identified that would create spillover effects, but the processes

had yet to be sufficiently specified. Voydanoff (1988) presented synonymous terms that could be found in earlier related studies, including work-family conflict, work-family role strain, family role strain, family-work role incompatibility, work-induced family strain, and impact of job on home and family.

Numerous studies have found females and males respond differently to work-family spillover, with many of the findings supporting Winslow's assertion that researchers debated whether the conflict was exclusively or primarily a woman's issue (Winslow, 2005). Voydanoff (1988) suggested the strength of work-family conflicts may be affected by gender roles and the extent of control individuals have over their work situation. Since traditional gender roles placed higher priority on work responsibilities for men and family responsibilities on women, work role characteristics tended to be more strongly related to work-family conflict among men while family characteristics were more important to women (Minnotte, Stevens, Minnotte & Kiger, 2007). Also, individuals who had more control over their own time at work seemed to exhibit less conflict due to time constraints. Voydanoff (1988) also found the work role characteristics most strongly related to work-family conflict for both men and women were: (a) the number of work hours, (b) the work load pressure, (c) working night shifts, (d) work-role conflicts, and (e) work-role ambiguity. Gender differences that became evident were women being more apt to control their schedules to buffer the family relationship while men made scarcity excuses that favored work responsibilities and avoided family responsibilities.

Using the three aspects of the work-family interface identified by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), Greenhaus, Parsuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz and Beutell (1989)

examined gender differences in response to the interface. They found no gender differences for strain-based conflict, but men reported higher levels of time-based conflict than women. The men had longer job tenure, and reported higher levels of job involvement, task complexity, task variety and role conflict. The men also traveled more extensively, reported more control over their work schedules, and placed a higher priority on their own careers than their spouse's careers. For men, the only job characteristics significantly related to time-based conflict were tenure and role stressors, while increased job involvement, increased job complexity, increased role overload and decreased job autonomy all were significantly related to increased time-based conflict for women. Age and job tenure were stronger predictors of strain-based conflict for men, while education and job involvement were the primary predictors of strain-based conflict for the women. The researchers also noted a man's strain-based conflict was likely to be high when he and his spouse both placed a higher priority on their own career than on their partner's career, and it was also high when he and his spouse both placed a lower priority on their own career than on their partner's career. Findings from the study were that men tended to accept the extra time, travel and job complexity as part of the job's requirements without allowing them to become time-based strains. Women, however, appeared to be more willing to protect their family time, and considered the increased job demands as threats. The conflicts related to the considerations of personal and spousal careers could be viewed as competition when both careers were rated high and as a lack of support when both careers were rated low. Both created strain-based conflict for the couples.

Sears and Galambos (1992) developed a path model of work effects, stress and adjustment for marital adjustment. They found work overload, low rewards and work

status contributed to women's work stress, explaining 54% of the variance in the work stress. In turn, the work stress and the women's work status were connected on a path to the women's global stress, explaining 21% of the variance of the global stress score. Paths were then analyzed to women's and men's marital adjustments, with the women's path reaching significance, and the combined effect of women's global stress and men's marital adjustment explained 27% of the variance in women's marital adjustment. The interactive effect was also computed for men, with the combined effect of women's global stress and women's marital adjustment explaining 25% of the variance in men's marital adjustment, but only through the women's marital adjustment.

Williams and Alliger (1994) found women displayed stronger spillover from family to work and from work to family than men. Based on interviews, the researchers found women reported higher levels of household responsibilities than men, suggesting that women had a higher combined work and family load than men; and therefore, they had less time and opportunity to recover from stressful roles. An alternative explanation was given: mood states may linger longer for women than for men as a result of cultural and biological factors. Overall, it was found that participants believed work interfered with family to a greater extent than family interfered with work.

Kossek and Ozeki (1998) conducted a meta-analysis to estimate the correlation between work/family conflict and individual job and life satisfaction for the populations studied prior to 1998. They identified variations in findings based on methodologies used in the studies. Specifically, they found researchers obtained different results for two main reasons - different measures were used, and different samples were studied. They found work/family conflict measures that specified the direction of the conflict performed

better than measures that mixed items assessing both directions. They also found studies of relatively homogenous participants limited the generalizability of the studies. They also identified a gap in the research from the studies they reviewed, namely studies that accessed role conflict did not examine policies, and those that investigated policies did not measure work/family conflict. They concluded that studies favoring the spillover hypothesis as the prevailing assumption tended to use scales that focused on negative implications of work demands toward the family.

Mauno and Kinnunen (1999) approached the relationship between job stressors and marital well-being using linkages to job exhaustion. The five areas of input they considered were job insecurity, job autonomy, time pressures at work, good leadership relations and work-family conflict. These jobs stressors impacted context-specific occupational well-being which they termed “job exhaustion” and in turn they found an association with over-all psychosomatic well-being. They showed psychosomatic well-being affected family well-being, which they termed “marital satisfaction.” Of the five job stressors studied, four were directly associated with job exhaustion. Time pressures at work and work-family conflict most strongly predicted job exhaustion, with job insecurity and poor relations with leadership also linked to job exhaustion. Job exhaustion in turn predicted psychosomatic symptoms, with beta weights of 0.73 for men and 0.74 for women, and the resultant model accounted for 45 to 51 percent of the variance in job exhaustion and 57 to 58 percent of the variance in psychosomatic symptoms for men and women, respectively. The psychosomatic symptoms also predicted marital satisfaction, with beta weights of -0.24 for men and -0.22 for women. However the explained variance in marital satisfaction was only 5% for men and 6% for

women. The researchers suggested job insecurity related to marital satisfaction via two mechanisms, namely job exhaustion and psychosomatic health. In addition, they substantiated results from numerous other researchers that well-being experienced by one spouse did not directly transmit to the other as marital satisfaction.

For the sake of perspective, numerous researchers considered marriage over the life course and found the two most difficult times for most marital happiness were the first seven years of marriage, followed by the birth of the first child to the couple. Grzywacz, Almeida and McDonald (2002) approached their analysis of the impact of work and family spillover with demographic subgroups as their focus, namely workers grouped by age, ages of children, and type of employment. They found advancing age (55 and older) was associated with more positive spillover from work to family. The relationship between negative work-family spillover and age was found to be curvilinear, with workers ages 25 to 44 having the highest levels of negative work-family spillover. Using daily interviews to record data from the participants, the researchers also found the odds of reporting one or more days of work-family stress gradually increased across the young adult and midlife stages, but declined after age 55. Women in their study reported more negative spillover from both work to family and family to work than men, but they also reported higher positive spillover from work to family, and the researchers noted women worked fewer hours than the men in the study. The lower educational-attainment participants reported lower levels of negative work-family spillover, and the highest paid participants reported the highest levels of positive work-family spillover. The researcher also found Blacks reported less negative spillover from work to family and from family to work, and also reported higher levels of positive spillover from family to work.

Participants with children under the age of 18 reported higher levels of negative family-work spillover than participants without children, and participants with children ages 6 to 18 reported less positive family-work spillover. Individuals who were separated reported more negative spillover from family to work than married respondents, while married respondents reported higher levels of positive family-work spillover. Considering only work-family spillover, increasing negative work-family spillover by one standard deviation increased the odds of reporting a stressful event in the family on the same day by 61% and the next day by 63%, and when the work stressful event-family stressful event combination occurred, the odds of reporting a stressful event at work the following day increased by 74%.

#### Marital Satisfaction

The growth in the use of “spillover” to describe the work-family interface has been accompanied by descriptors identifying whether the spillover is positive or negative. Many of those reports did not specifically mention marital satisfaction, though it was implied in relation to spillover. Brockwood (2007) suggested that for many studies spillover from work to family was inferred from the relationship of work-related characteristics and marital satisfaction. She also noted many studies directly related spillover to marital satisfaction by considering spillover as a mediator between work-related characteristics and marital functioning. She went on to say studies consistently found marital satisfaction and satisfaction at work were positively related to each other, with marital and job satisfaction driven primarily by the spillover of emotional states, implying arguments and stress at work were likely to lead to marital conflict.

According to Enochson and Wiseman (1999), research focusing on marital satisfaction has a long history dating back to late 1930's. Numerous factors have been hypothesized to contribute to a satisfying marriage, including communication, interaction, gender roles, conflict management, problem solving, intimate play, self concept, mutual enjoyment of activities, religiosity, mutual values, and sexual fulfillment (Brockwood, 2007). Marital satisfaction also played an integral role in assessing marital adjustment, which was determined by measuring dyadic satisfaction, dyadic consensus, dyadic cohesion and affectional expression (Spanier, 1976). The dyadic adjustment scale introduced by Spanier in 1976 consisted of 32 items designed for use with couples to measure marital adjustment, with four items measuring affection, five items measuring cohesion, ten items measuring satisfaction and thirteen items measuring consensus.

Orden and Bradburn (1968) introduced a theoretical model of the structure of marital happiness designed for therapeutic diagnosis, analysis and prediction. Their model viewed marital happiness consisting of two dimensions, with satisfaction and tension measures used to help predict happiness within a marriage. When participants were questioned about their marital happiness, over a third (36%) said they were "pretty happy," with only 3% reporting they were "not too happy." The skewing of the distribution towards "very happy" was not surprising to the researchers, for previous research had shown the majority of couples interviewed will say their marriage is "happy."

Orden and Bradburn (1968) constructed an index of satisfaction was constructed that included an inventory of activities that would indicate the positive side of the marriage. Some of these included having a good laugh, spending an evening chatting

with one another, doing something the other partner appreciated, being affectionate, taking a walk or taking a drive just for pleasure, going to a movie, the theater, dining in a restaurant and visiting with friends. They found a strong relationship between respondents who said their marriage was “happy” and those who checked a high number of the activities on the satisfactions list. In their concluding remarks they noted a slight tendency for males to be higher than females in self-reports of marital happiness, with both indicators being positively related to socioeconomic status.

Marini (1976) extended the work of Orden and Bradburn (1968) by exploring a model for marital happiness which consisted of three dimensions: (a) marital satisfaction, (b) marital tension, and (c) marital companionship. She found all three variables to be related to self reports of marital happiness, with the relationship between companionship and happiness greater than the relationship between satisfaction and happiness, but equal to the relationship between companionship and happiness. She concluded that marital happiness was found to be related to more than the two dimensions Orden and Bradburn had suggested, and that companionship should also be considered in marital happiness. Her study revealed the importance of spouses spending time together to maintain the marital relationship and a high level of marital satisfaction, with marital satisfaction consisting of pleasurable activities in which the couple participated jointly.

Marini’s work highlights a problem encountered with reviews of early marital studies, as marital happiness and marital satisfaction were often used synonymously in the literature to describe the degree of personal satisfaction an individual feels about the marriage (Voydanoff, 1988). Interposing the increasing divorce rate on previous findings, Donohue and Ryder (1982) attacked the concept as a whole, stating many of the

marital happiness and marital satisfaction measures were skewed, and they suggested the ideas of the dimensions of marital satisfaction, marital happiness, marital distress and marital quality be abandoned. Johnson, White, Edwards, and Booth (1986) attempted to define the concepts and bring sensibility to the discussions by using a confirmatory factor analysis to divide marital quality into five components - marital happiness, marital interaction, marital disagreement, marital problems, and marital instability. The components fell along two distinct dimensions, one of marital happiness and interaction and the other of marital disagreement, problems and instability.

Other researchers simply explored marital satisfaction in an effort to identify observable components of a marriage that would predict a couple's marital satisfaction. Hatch, James and Schumm (1986) investigated spiritual intimacy among spouses and found spiritual and emotional intimacy were significantly correlated. Spiritual intimacy was also significantly correlated with marital satisfaction, though it failed to have a direct impact upon satisfaction. The researchers concluded spiritual intimacy operated indirectly through emotional intimacy, except in the case where the spouses held the same religious beliefs. For wives, the only significant religious predictor for emotional intimacy and marital satisfaction was church attendance, but church attendance only predicted emotional intimacy for husbands. They suggested future research to discover if church attendance affected specific variables rather than the global outcome of marital satisfaction. Accordingly, they identified cases where a husband might profess to become more religious but continue to give priority to work rather than family, and a wife who becomes more involved in her religious practices but continues to nag her husband to an excessive amount.

Enochson and Wiseman (1999) considered body contact as the means of expressing affection and communicating acceptance, direction and comfort. It was understood differences existed in how males and females demonstrated these nonverbal communication, as females tended to touch more than males and attributed meaning based on where the touch occurred on the body, while males placed meaning on the mode of touch. Considering three types of touch – therapeutic, hugging, and casual holding, they found marital satisfaction to be significantly related to the similarities in touching between spouses, with these three types of touching accounting for 33.3% of the variance in marital satisfaction.

Miller (1976) used path analysis to develop a theoretical model of seven antecedents of marital satisfaction: (a) amount of anticipatory socialization, (b) ease of family of role transitions, (c) length of the marriage, (d) number of children, (e) amount of companionship, (f) family socioeconomic status, and (g) spacing of the children by age. For his study the direct effect of the three exogenous variables (socialization, length of the marriage and socioeconomic status) were not of interest, but the effects of these variables as antecedents were considered. Miller found the ease of role transitions explained 20% of the variance in marital satisfaction, while companionship explained 35% of the variance. Socialization directly influenced role transition and indirectly affected the other two exogenous variables. The length of the marriage directly affected the spacing of children, the number of children and role transitions. The family socioeconomic status directly affected companionship, and the number of children directly affected the spacing of children and companionship.

Kurdek (1998) followed a set of couples over a six year period to test previous findings that marital satisfaction declined over time. He found marital satisfaction for husbands and wives decreased over the first six years of marriage with the steepest drop occurring between years one and two. Interdependence variables held predictive value for men, whereas for wives the individual differences, interdependence variables and spousal discrepancy scores were predictive of satisfaction. He went on to say the interdependence variables were the most robust for predictive use. The interdependence variables were based on an investment approach to marriage, involving rewards and costs in the relationship. These included confidence, security, faith in the partner and the relationship, attachment and autonomy in the relationship, intrinsic motives and extrinsic motives for being in the relationship. His work also extended the period of risk to years one through four, with patterns of change during these years affecting the total six year period.

The investment model distinguished between two important characteristics of relationship satisfaction and commitment. The two types of commitments were considered to covary, so that whether or not the individuals were satisfied, they would report the intent to maintain their involvement if they felt psychological attachment. Variations in commitment were also expected to mediate decisions to stay or leave the relationship. The model followed interdependence theory arguing that individuals should be satisfied with their relationships until the point was reached where its costs exceeded the generalized expectations. The theory suggested if individuals shared many common interests with their spouse (rewards), if they seldom argued (costs), and if romantic expectations were met, then the individuals should be relatively satisfied with their

involvement in the relationship. Greater satisfaction with the relationship should also lead to an increased commitment to maintain the relationship. Rusbult (1983) found increases in rewards consistently led to greater satisfaction, but variations in costs did not significantly affect the level of satisfaction. This pattern of results was consistent for men and women, both for those who stayed in relationships and those who left, and for early stages of involvement. He also found greater satisfaction and investment along with more alternatives promoted higher levels of commitment, particularly for women. In addition, he found time increased the costs and commitments, but he proposed time was integral to and was accounted for in the measured variables.

Fincham, Stanley and Beach (2007) stated an important development in the study of marital satisfaction has been an effort to transform one-dimensional thinking about satisfaction into the two dimensions of positivity and negativity. The separate dimensions allow for understanding of individual differences based on levels in each dimension. In turn, they defined a “happy” individual as one who scored high in positivity and low in negativity, an “unhappy” individual as one who scored low in positivity and high in negativity, “ambivalent” meant a high score in both dimensions, and “indifferent” meant low in both of the dimensions. They showed support of spousal behavior was related to marital satisfaction and was more important than negative behavior in determining the perceived support by the other spouse, and suggested increased attention be focused on internal dyadic dynamics and deeper meaning within marital development. They felt it was critical that the conceptual framework of future marital research highlight the potential for self-regulatory transformative processes within the marriage, including processes by which couples change without obvious outside intervention.

## Corporate Responses to Work-Family Spillover

The early years of the Cooperative Extension system saw many young unmarried women employed as Home Demonstration agents. At that time, female agents were not allowed to be married (Chenault, 2006), as male and female agents put in long hours in travel and teaching, resulting in the employees spending much time away from home. Marshall (1992) reported that by 1940, 15% of married women were employed, and many companies had policies against hiring married women. She reported 17% of the offices in Los Angeles at that time had policies against hiring married women, and 6% of the employers required women employees to resign after they married. In Richmond, Virginia, 10% of the employers had policies of firing women employees if they married, and many others had policies that they did not hire married women at all. She reflected many changes in the employment of women resulted from World War II, and the decade of the 1950's saw an increasing number of women entering the labor force. By the 1960's, marital research was supporting that: (a) women with young children were less likely to work outside the home, (b) women with a higher educational attainment were more likely to work outside the home, and (c) there was a growing trend of grandparents raising children while the child's mother worked outside the home. Marshall went on to report that by 1978, over half (53%) of all mothers with children under the age of 18 were in the workforce, and married women represented the fastest growing population in the workforce. This trend continued until the end of the 1980's, when 63% of all married couples with earnings were considered dual-job families, and less than 19% of American families consisted of married couples with only one wage as their sole income.

Corporate policies, however, did not grow at the same rate as women in the workforce. Marshall (1992) showed that World War II affected employment in America as women were called into the workforce to replace males who were serving in military roles. Women were called upon to fill these roles to keep the economy strong, and to bolster production of goods that were needed for home and military use, and the women saw opportunities to provide economic security for their families. By 1950 it was estimated that 3,525 nursery schools and day-care centers existed in the US, with 1,530 being privately owned, 501 being community supported, but only 17 being company-sponsored. The decade of the 1960's did not see much change in these trends, as over 90 percent of working mothers arranged for their children to be cared for by a relative or a neighbor, with only 3% of the mothers using child-care facilities. The decade of the 1970's saw many changes in both the business and home sectors, as husbands and wives more equally shared family responsibilities, and workers began to turn down promotions so they could continue to have time for family and leisure activities. Researchers began to find spousal attitudes affected job decisions, relocation decisions and employee performance, and businesses began to explore benefit packages for employees with children such as on-site child care, resource and referral systems for child care, voucher systems for child care, pretax dollars for child care and sick child care. By the mid-1980's the number of businesses in the U.S. with policies or programs to help employees with children increased fourfold, with the U.S. Department of Labor urging businesses to help employees resolve conflicts between family and work. The wife's wage earning potential began to exert a stronger influence on the family's economic decisions, and women began enrolling in vocational training programs that were traditional male

programs. Resultantly, the category of “nontraditional” began to be used in research literature. Researchers during this decade also began to examine spillover from family to work, and continued to find employees turning down transfers and promotions to preserve family time. They also found companies provided flex-time, job sharing, personal days and sick days to care for sick children and other family challenges, paid maternity leave, parent education seminars, on-site day care, and a few offered paid paternity leave and telecommuting positions.

The decade of the 1990’s began to be known by human resource researchers as a paradox, as technology allowed employees to communicate anywhere and at anytime through cellular phones, faxing, video conferencing and virtual offices, but the work-family issues did not advance past the changes of the 1980’s. By 1994, Solomon (1994) found 60 percent of the companies studied by work/family experts across a variety of fields had formal policies or guidelines for some type of flexible work arrangements, and Flynn (1995) found 35% of employers studied provided leave policies that were more generous than those required by the Family and Medical Leave Act. The most common work-family benefit was child care assistance, with 84% of employers offering assistance in the form of dependent-care spending accounts and resource/referral services. Two-thirds of the employers studied also offered flexible scheduling, including flextime and part-time employment. Slightly more than a third of the employers offered job sharing, 21% offered compressed work schedules, 16% allowed employees to work at home, and 14% offered special summer scheduling. In addition to these, she found employers beginning to offer elder care assistance and employee assistance programs.

Concurrently, Frazee (1996) found male employees were willing to take an 18%

cut in hours worked and female employees a 23% cut in hours to have more personal time. Solomon (1994) specifically identified workers younger than 25, citing 60% of those workers were willing to sacrifice careers and jobs for family life. The paradox of the decade was that while companies offered these work-family policies, few employees availed themselves of these privileges, leading one to question whether the corporate leadership encouraged their employees to participate in ways other than child-care spending plans. Solomon concluded neither managers nor employees were trained to work with flexible arrangements, and she questioned if managers felt uncomfortable with telecommuting employees whom they could not watch at work.

Kossek and Ozeki (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of research studies that measured work-family conflict and job and life satisfaction, with the intent of assessing the relationships between work-family conflict, family adjustments, and organizational behavior and policies. They found prior studies assessed role conflict but did not examine work policies, or they examined policies but did not measure work-family conflict. They concluded prior research on work policies were less theoretically developed, more descriptive, and more focused on the impact policies had on work attitudes. They found most policy studies did not include measures of work-family conflict, but measured how employee demographics associated with family responsibilities (gender and the number of children), job satisfaction and other outcomes. They stated the assumptions tended to be that family demands interfered with work, and the researchers showed little interest in how work affected the family. Their search of human resources literature suggested there was a consistent relationship between access

to or use of work-family policies and job satisfaction, with a correlation of .28 for job satisfaction and .20 for life satisfaction to the extensiveness of work-family policies.

Many of these changes in work policies reflect what Popenoe (2007) referred to as “secular individualism”, which is a shift away from religious and social traditionalism and towards faith in personal independence and tolerance for diversified lifestyles. This shift has not only affected marriage and family arrangements, but has influenced young adults so they now delay entry into both the world of work and childbearing, they expect a high level of income, and they’re more apt to demand their personal needs be met by employers than were previous generations of employees.

Popenoe (2007) suggested the categories of Orthodox, Independents, and Progressives to identify today’s adults in the U.S. The Progressive adults embrace the secular individualism ideology, and are typically found in the Northeast, the Upper Midwest and the West Coast regions of the U.S., while the Orthodox (traditionalist) adults are found in the South, the Lower Midwest and the Mountain regions of the West. However, he noted that the self-interest of all today’s young adults still included the desire to have strong intimate relationships and to “do best” by their children. He asserted the need for all levels of society, including employers, to promote the institution of marriage, and make young people aware of the benefits that married life brings to spouses and children. This rebuilding of a strong marriage culture in the U.S., he stated, needs to include the promotion of marriage built around the self-interest of today’s young adults, and should include a cultural shift that supports stable, predictable and long-term relationships with others as the foundation for family life. Employers, then, need to

understand their employees and the pressures they face, with intentional efforts to promote healthy marriages while maintaining job productivity.

Neff and Karney (2007) expressed similar thoughts by stating marriages do not occur in vacuums, but take place within environments that either constrain or facilitate their development. When the environment contains numerous strains, they showed, marriages tend to suffer. The strains may be from external pressures (such as work-related stress), or pressures internal to the marriage in the form of financial difficulties, communication breakdowns or other relational issues.

#### Personal Coping Responses to Work-Family Spillover

Stephens and Gray (2004) identified eighteen signs of overload, and warned that if someone experiences more than three of the signs, changes need to be made. These changes, or adaptive coping methods, have been identified as coping patterns by Skinner and McCubbin (1982), coping responses by Pearlin and Schooler (1978), or coping strategies by the National Association of State Units on Aging (2001). Keene and Prokos (2005) summarized previous studies on balancing work and family responsibilities by pointing to individuals rather than employers to find ways to cope with the violation of personal time, control and marital relationships often encountered from spillover. Skinner and McCubbin (1982) noted the two systems that were most commonly identified as coping strategies among women were the development of a family system and the development of an external support system. The family system for women included defining the employment as favorable, compromising career aspirations, then prioritizing and compartmentalizing both work and family roles. The external support

system for women was comprised of getting outside help, developing a network of friends, and utilizing work arrangements of flexible scheduling or off-site work. With men, Parker (2009) approached balancing life and work for fathers by promoting practical tips for finding balance. They were: pace yourself; say no to the unimportant; take care of yourself; get a checkup; stop being a workaholic; simplify your life; find a family-friendly workplace (one with flex-time, benefits choices, agency contacts and referrals, and child-rearing trainings); eat together; join a father's support group; and start having a family night.

The categories of social, psychological and specific coping responses, as suggested by Pearlin and Schooler (1978), provide an intuitive framework for capturing responses employed by individuals to cope with work-family stressors, and though they may vary when they are implemented, the responses can be easily applied to most individuals and professions. For example, Pearlin and Schooler explained coping responses to life problems in terms of what resources were available and how they were utilized by individuals. Social resources are included in interpersonal networks of family, friends, fellow workers, neighbors and volunteer associations. For Extension employees, that would include family, co-workers, friends, and the battery of leaders, volunteers and members that comprise the 4-H program. The psychological resources are described as the individual characteristics people use to help themselves withstand threats posed by others or events around them, and they were grouped into self-esteem, self-denigration, mastery, denial, escapism, and confrontation. For Extension employees, these could take several forms, but they generally describe the attitudes that determine the actions employed by agents in the face of stress. The category of "specific coping responses"

included the behaviors, cognition and perceptions in which individuals engaged when they confronted stressors, and it represented what was done in response to the psychological resources of the employ.

From her work with 4-H volunteers, Fox (2000) identified strategies that had been employed by 4-H volunteers to balance work, family and volunteer roles as strategies that fell into the two broad categories of psychological (social support, adaptability/cohesion and changing expectations) and management (planning, priority setting, and delegation) strategies. For her, the psychological category included the psychological and social resources identified by Pearlin and Schooler, and she distinguished management concepts that are very familiar to Extension employees, those of planning, priority setting, and delegation. In their conceptual programming model, Boone, Safrit and Jones (2002) identified all of these components as aspects of adult education, especially that which is offered as educational programming through the Cooperative Extension Service.

Extension employees learn to utilize a variety of resources in conducting their programs. The in-service training programs, as suggested by White (1993), train new agents how to identify and use resources that may include people who serve as volunteers, teaching materials, equipment, or financial resources that can make travel, educational meetings and contest participation possible. With the training programs offered to equip Extension agents for successful work, these concepts fill the tool chest they use daily, and it should follow that they utilize the same concepts in other areas of life. However, as Purcell (2003) found, a high turnover rate (41%) also exists among Extension agents within the first five years of employment. This suggests employees may also cope with the stressors by finding other employment.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

The study utilized a correlational design to determine Extension agents' assessments of work and marital characteristics and the relationship between the two. The design allowed respondents to rate job-related variables that induce stress within marriages, along with personal and dyadic factors that can contribute to stress within relationships. Open-ended questions also allowed respondents to identify personal and family coping mechanisms they have employed to mediate the stressors and find balance between the work and family responsibilities.

The population for the study was the Extension agents who work with the 4-H program in the Extension Southern Region at the county or multi-county level. The Extension Southern Region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The study also included a pilot study of similar agents in Missouri, as it adjoined the Southern Region, and was considered to be similar in programming and staffing. In each state, after permission to work with the agents was secured, the group of agents was identified from the state's Extension website, and the list of agents was sent to the state 4-H office for verification and approval of agents to be

included in the study. The survey was structured so respondents could be divided into three groups based on relationship status: (1) never married, (2) married, single with a partner, and (3) separated, divorced or widowed. The independent variables measured included (1) job characteristics, and (2) demographics of the agent and spouse. The job characteristics were further defined as (1) number of states worked, (2) number of counties worked, (3) percent 4-H responsibilities, (4) membership of the program, (5) control over work decisions, (6) hours worked, (7) before-hours and after-hours work, (8) weekend work, (9) overnight job-related stays, (10) job-related travel, and (11) out-of-pocket expenses. The demographics for the agents and spouses included (1) agent's gender, (2) age, (3) ethnicity, (4) educational level, (5) length of service (6) agent's marital status, (7) first or later marriage, (8) spouse's employment, (9) income comparison, (10) number of resident children, (11) religious affiliation, and (12) religious practices. The dependent variable was marital satisfaction, and was evaluated with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test, yielding both a global (overall) score and a classification as "distressed" or "non-distressed" after completion.

### Population

The population selected for the study was full-time, county or area-level Extension agents employed by both 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities in the Southern Region of the United States to work with the 4-H program, with the pilot study group being composed of the Extension agent within the Missouri Extension system that worked with the 4-H program. The study population consisted of 1631 agents in the Southern Region and 52 agents in the pilot study. It should be noted that the title for

most of the Missouri agents was “Specialist,” even though they worked directly with 4-H members and leaders. Titles also varied from state to state, so the question pertaining to position title in the pilot study was modified to augment identification of agents with similar program, area and administrative assignments.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research prior to the initiation of the pilot study, and the procedural change made for the regional study was also reviewed and approved before the Southern Region study began (IRB # 08-172). Reviews and approvals were also secured from the University of Missouri-Columbia Institutional Review Board (IRB #1126238) prior to the pilot study, and from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (Protocol # 09-022 EP0902) prior to the initiation of the regional study. The IRB letters of approval can be found in Appendix A.

#### Instrumentation

Marital adjustment may be viewed in two distinct ways, either as a process or as a state of being. Defining it as a process implies there is a continuum the couple travels in the process of building the marriage, and a longitudinally designed study would measure that continuum. Defining it as a state assumes there is a continuum that would allow a “snapshot” to be taken of any point in time along the continuum. The snapshot evaluation would consider the characteristics and interactions of the relationship which were the focus of the study, with inferences made back to the continuum. (Spanier, 1976). Numerous studies have shown a continuum exists for marital development, and the process of snapshot evaluation is predicated upon the existence of a continuum as the

marriage grows and develops. Marital adjustment has been shown to be a process rather than an unchanging state, but it is a process that has points and characteristics that have been identified. Five characteristics were identified by Spainier that could be used to determine the outcome of the adjustment of the relationship – (1) troublesome dyadic differences, (2) interpersonal tensions and anxiety, (3) dyadic satisfaction, (4) dyadic cohesion, and (5) consensus on important matters.

Orden and Bradburn (1968) developed The Marriage Adjustment Balance Scale to assess the overall functioning of the marriage for therapeutic diagnosis, analysis and prediction. Their scale assessed marital happiness by measuring its two dimensions – marital satisfaction and marital tension. For their purposes an index of satisfaction was constructed that included an inventory of activities that would indicate the positive side of the marriage, including having a good laugh, spending an evening chatting with one another, doing something the other partner appreciated, being affectionate, taking a walk or taking a drive just for pleasure, going to a movie, the theater, dining in a restaurant and visiting with friends. They found a strong relationship between respondents who said their marriage was “happy” and those who checked a high number of the activities on the satisfactions list.

Sabatelli (1988) explained that since the 1960’s the concept of marital quality has become increasingly used within research and has been treated as a hybrid concept reflected from marital adjustment and marital satisfaction/happiness. This meant a high degree of marital quality would be reflected from the presence of companionship, good communication, the absence of conflict, and the presence of a high degree of satisfaction with the relationship and the spouse. He suggested happiness and satisfaction

represented the same concept and could be blended with marital adjustment into a more inclusive concept. He also stated this conceptualization and operationalization of marital quality was similar to past conceptualizations of marital quality. He concluded past research measures could be combined into one of two groups on whether they measured the objective and subjective characteristics of the marital relationship (marital quality) or only the subjective characteristics of the relationship (marital satisfaction).

Sabatelli (1988) went on to explain that any review of contemporary measures of marital adjustment must consider the Locke-Wallace Marriage Adjustment Test (LWMAT), for despite its age, it is still one of the most widely used instruments by contemporary researchers. This fifteen-item measure assesses the spouse's happiness with the other spouse and the marriage, the degree of agreement on marital issues, a level of companionship experienced, and the abilities to resolve conflicts constructively. The scale items are differentially weighted to maximize the discriminative power of the items, with the resultant score ranging from 2 to 158 points. Locke and Wallace (1959) computed a high reliability coefficient of .90, using the split-half technique with a correction by the Spearman-Brown formula. In their validation test, 96 % of the well-adjusted participants achieved appropriate scores on the instrument, indicating good test validity. Sabatelli (1988) concluded by saying the instrument is commonly thought of today as being the most validated instrument to evaluate marital quality, but it must be remembered that the total score is psychometrically dominated by the respondent's ratings of marital happiness, so the instrument will measure marital happiness/satisfaction more than anything else.

Because the focus of this study was how well agents balanced work and family responsibilities, the instrument included the LWMAT to measure marital satisfaction, with questions added to allow for analysis of job characteristics and demographics of agents. This allowed analyses to be performed that would determine balance by measuring the impact of individual job characteristics on marital satisfaction, and helped determine levels of the characteristics that were detrimental for agents and their families. The cut point on the LWMAT that was used for determining marital distress was 100, as was reported by Crane, Allgood, Larson and Griffin (1990) to be the traditional cutpoint used by researchers. A respondent with a score of 100 or more would be considered to have a relationship that was not in distress, while a score below 100 represented the respondent was in a distressed relationship. The instrument, with the divisions by marital status, can be found in Appendix C.

Data that was gathered was evaluated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical software (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002). Relationships of job characteristics were determined across all employees, and then the influence of each variable was calculated within the confines of the study group of agents in past or present relationships as identified by survey responses. Demographic information allowed for the identification of existent relationships between personal or dyadic variables that could influence or confuse the results by directly or indirectly impacting the dependent variable, which was the respondent's score on the LWMAT.

Work to family conflict was assessed using questions built from a 4-H Agent job description (MSU-ES, 2002). The demographic and work-related questions, such as "On average, how many weeknights did you work per week over the past 12 months," were

patterned after questions used by Place, Jacob, Summerhill, and Arrington's (2000) study of Extension agents in Florida. Work perception questions were patterned after questions from Bohlen and Viveros-Long's "Job-Family Role Strain Scale" (as cited in Shea, 1998), but were adapted to use for Extension personnel so that "There is not enough time in the day for me to meet all the demands of my job and my family." in the Bohlen and Viveros-Long scale, became "My work at night and on the weekends creates tension within my family." The other work-perception questions that were asked were: (a) My job keeps me away from my family too much. (b) I am able to maintain a good balance between job and family time. (c) My job allows me flexibility to balance my job and family time. and (d) My job creates financial difficulties for my family. These were to be answered on a five point Likert-type scale, with a score of 1 representing "strongly agree" and a score of 5 representing "strongly disagree."

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work and family conflicts as arising simultaneously, with time, role strain, and behaviors comprising the conflicts. Voydanoff (2005) identified weekly work hours, non-standard work hours, work pressure, control over work schedule, overnight travel, carrying work home, and the presence of children under 18 as contributors for work to family conflict. Taking these ideas into the world of an Extension agent meant developing an instrument that reflected many of the threats to the job-family balance faced by agents who work with the 4-H program.

The instrument was reviewed by a group of 4-H specialists who served as a panel of experts, with the main comment being to add electronic communications to the communicating question to reflect new technologies that are being used by 4-Hers such as Facebook and MySpace. The construct of job/family balance was measured by scaling

and averaging six items that had been identified from researchers in the marriage and family field, and included measures for how much control the agent had over the work schedule, how much time after hours was spent communicating with 4-H members and leaders, how many weeknights the agent averaged working, the agent's perceptions related to the job keeping them away from home, whether or not the agent believed night and weekend work creating tension, and the agent's feeling of the flexibility they had in their job. The variables were recoded to a five point scale, and scaled so a score of 1 would be the most favorable, with a score of 5 being the least favorable. The variable scores were then averaged to yield a score for comparison with the agent's perception of their ability to maintain a good job-family balance. The presence of children in the home was omitted from consideration, as just over one-fourth (27.3%) of the agents in the pilot study had resident children, and less than half (45.9%) of the agents in the regional study had resident children. Cronbach alpha analyses on the job-family balance construct were .65 for the pilot study, and .88 for the regional study.

### Data Collection

Comments were solicited from both the panel of experts and from state Extension administrators about the population for the study, with a consensus being given to focus on "full-time, salaried employees" and excluding employees who were hourly, such as many program assistants, associates and educators. The feeling was that agents would respond consistently across states, but hourly employees' responses would differ from agent responses based on factors that would limit the number of hours they could work in any pay period. The decision to include agents who might have a program assignment

other than 4-H also met with agreement, as several states require agents to work in more than one program area, such as agriculture or family and consumer science. Additionally, numerous states ask agents to provide supervisory or administrative leadership to a county Extension office and also work with the 4-H program.

The Director of the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Mississippi State University integrated the survey instrument into Sawtooth® software to prepare it for internet access and use, along with the notification e-mails that would be sent to the agents in the study. The server that handled the study mailings would also track completion, automatically send reminder e-mails, automatically send a note thanking each agent for completing the survey, and compile the data for downloading after the completion of the study period. The SSRC Director would also remove identifiers prior to downloading the data for analysis to ensure anonymity of respondents and confidentiality of responses.

A pilot study was conducted with 4-H agents (titled “Specialists”) within the Missouri Extension system. The Vice Provost and Extension Director for the University of Missouri was contacted for permission to survey the Missouri agents as the pilot study. With his permission given, the State Interim Director for 4-H was contacted and the IRB process begun. The list of potential agents for inclusion in the study was prepared and reviewed, with an understanding that the title of “Specialist” included county and multi-county level employees who had direct responsibility for the development and growth of county-based 4-H programs. IRB approvals had to be secured from both Mississippi State University and the University of Missouri, and once the IRB process was completed for both institutions, the employees were contacted about the study and were invited to

participate. Each person received an e-mail with an embedded link to the internet-based survey, with options to access the survey and immediately begin, access the survey and opt out of the study, or access the survey with the option of exiting and re-entering at a later time, if needed. Each question was presented separately, and participants had the option of skipping a question they did not wish to answer. The respondents were treated as a study group, having their data summarized and evaluated, but they were also asked to comment on the ease of use and clarity of questions in the survey. Results were reviewed, and modifications were made in several questions before the study in the Southern Region began. The changes suggested were for clarification of what was being asked in two of the questions (travel miles and resident children), and the changes were made and approved through the IRB approval process before the regional study began. Answers for several of the questions required recoding prior to analysis, so modifications in the provided answers of two questions (job title and resident children) were made to augment analysis.

For the regional study, Extension Directors in each state in the Southern Region were contacted for permission to include their agents in the study. Directors of both the 1862 and 1890 Extension programs were contacted, with permission being granted for all of the 1862 institution agents, and permission given for the agents from 1892 institutions that had 4-H agents employed. In most states, the agents working with 4-H were assigned to the staff of the 1862 institution, so there was no further distinction added to the survey to allow for separation of agents based on the assigned Extension system.

After notes of permission were given by the various state directors, the IRB process was begun. Each state's 4-H Program Leader was contacted and the study

explained, they were sent a list of agents and e-mail addresses that was generated from the state's Extension web-site. The lists were sent for review of accuracy and completeness, and the corrected agent lists were compiled for the study.

The IRB process for Mississippi State University included a procedural modification since this was a continuation of the study that was previously approved for the pilot study in Missouri. It was also determined that approval was needed from Auburn University to be able to include their employees in the study. The process included retraining with the CITI model, followed by an application and review by their board members. After IRB approval was secured from both Mississippi State University and Auburn University for the study, the survey was prepared by the SSRC Director as was done for the pilot study. The agents identified for the regional study were contacted by e-mail, with an explanation of the purpose of the study and an embedded internet link to the instrument included for ease of agent access. Two follow-up notifications were used to remind agents to complete the surveys, and one reminder notification was built in to the study for agents who had accessed the survey but had not completed and submitted the instrument. The data were analyzed using SPSS software, with the results being compiled and reported for the region.

The survey program handling the instrument was designed to generate notification e-mails based on dates and time that were scheduled. The software generated individual e-mails with unique coding for the purpose of self-tracking to allow for follow-up reminders to those who had not completed the survey. During the process of sending the e-mails for both the pilot study and the regional study, numerous e-mails were returned. After investigation, less than 3 percent of the returns were due to incorrect or incomplete

addresses. Several institutions apparently had filters that stopped incoming e-mails based on the number coming from the same address. These issues were discussed with the technical people at the specific institutions, and most of the issues were rectified before the first reminder notification (the second e-mail) email was sent. Based on respondent representation from the regional study, no institution was severely under-represented in the study.

### Data Analysis

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- Question 1: What are the relationships between job characteristics and marital satisfaction for Extension 4-H agents in the Southern Region?
- Question 2: Are differences in job characteristics and marital satisfaction evident among Extension 4-H agents based on age, gender, marital status, or the presence of children in the home?
- Question 3: What coping mechanisms have been employed by Extension 4-H agents to ameliorate negative work-family interactions?

Since the study group was the population of agents in the Missouri Extension system and all of the agents were included in the study, *z*-scores were considered for data analysis comparing the study group to the population of agents, but *t*-tests were the primary comparative method for the sub-groups of agents created through selected based on variable criteria, such as gender, status of the relationship, and age. Gravetter and Wallnau (2007) discussed using *t*-tests as alternatives to *z*-scores when the population mean was unknown, and also using *t*-tests for subgroup comparisons. This study invited

all of the members of the population of 4-H specialists in Missouri and all of the agents with 4-H responsibilities in the Southern Region to participate in either the pilot or the regional study, with a 50 percent response rate for the pilot study and a 46 percent response rate for the regional study. Since all of the population members did not participate in the studies, and the means and standard deviations are not known for the two populations, *t*-tests were expected to yield responses that were more conservative, thus providing a lower risk for finding significance that did not truly exist. Additionally, Gravetter and Walnau explained a *t* distribution more accurately approximated a *z* distribution as the degrees of freedom increase. The size of the pilot study gave credence to using the *t*-tests for analysis to reduce the risk of Type I error, and the desire for consistency would lead to their use in the regional study. In addition, an alpha level of .01 was selected to reduce the risk of family-wise error when comparing the groups.

For the first research question, descriptives were calculated for the study variables to evaluate frequencies of responses, with *t*-tests being used to compare mean differences for the never married agents and the study group of agents in a relationship. Pearson correlations were then computed for the variables to determine relationships between variables for the study group respondents. After transformation due to normality and linearity issues, multiple linear regression analyses were employed to determine a structural equation model for the relationships between job characteristics and marital satisfaction.

To answer the second research question, correlations, *t*-tests and an ANOVA were employed. The *t*-tests were performed to compare means for the respondents on the variables being considered – age, marital status, age, the presence of children in the

home, and race/ethnicity. The work-related variables and the LWMAT global score were used to ascertain comparative pictures for the study, with the “study group” including agents who were in current or past relationships to allow the determination of differences between agents based on relational status. Data were analyzed using SPSS software, and were tested at an alpha level of .01.

For question 3, open-ended questions allowed 4-H agents to identify and describe coping mechanisms they have adopted to help balance work and family responsibilities. These responses were tabled, compared to data responses, and then categorized for reporting.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Research Design and Population

The study utilized a correlational design to determine Extension agents' assessments of work and marital characteristics and the relationship between the two. The design allowed respondents to rate job-related variables that induce stress within marriages, along with personal and dyadic factors that can contribute to stress within relationships. Open-ended questions also allowed respondents to identify personal and family coping mechanisms they have employed to mediate the stressors and find balance between the work and family responsibilities.

The population selected for the study was full-time, county or area-level Extension agents employed by both 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities in the Southern Region of the United States to work with the 4-H program, with the pilot study group being composed of the Extension agents within the Missouri Extension system that worked with the 4-H program. The study population consisted of 1631 agents in the Southern Region and 52 agents in the pilot study.

#### Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted to evaluate the instrument and the process, and it included the population of agents in the Missouri Extension system. Sub-groups of

agents were created for comparisons in the study, so *t*-tests were used to answer the first and second research questions. The tests were performed to compare means for the agents to determine if differences existed between groups of agents composed of agents in relational distress, agents not in relational distress, and agents not involved in relationships. Pearson correlations were also computed for the variables to determine relationships between variables. Data were analyzed using SPSS software, and were tested at an alpha level of .01.

Fifty-two agents were invited to participate in the study, with 26 agents (50% response rate) adequately completing surveys to be included in reporting. Partially completed surveys were reviewed, and were included without missing answers being computed or assigned based on groupings. Three unanswered responses were discerned based on answers to other questions by the same respondent. The questions most frequently left unanswered related to college courses (6 unanswered), out-of-pocket money spent (4 unanswered), marital status (3 unanswered), miles driven (1 unanswered), and gender (1 unanswered). Twenty-one of the respondents reported themselves as married or divorced (80.77%), and they all adequately responded to the questions that pertained to marital interaction and satisfaction. It should be noted one respondent did not wish to comment on the final set of questions asking for a personal opinion of whether the job created difficulties with the marriage.

For the purposes of the pilot study, respondents who chose not to report their marital status were included in the study along with single respondents, so as to utilize their responses to work questions and demographic questions. The descriptive statistics

for the work-related study variables, excluding categorical and nominal data, were evaluated for normality and linearity.

Several of the statistics showed skewness and kurtosis problems that could affect analysis, including agent education, mate hours, children ages 6-12 and 13-18, number of counties, percent 4-H, number of 4-H members, after-hours work, miles driven and money spent. Because the population was unique and small, it was expected that many of the variables would demonstrate these issues, as hiring requirements for 4-H agents often lead to the selection of highly educated, highly motivated and highly competent employees, resulting in a unique population to be included in this study. The extended hours required for successful work efforts are often communicated to potential employees before they are hired, and many agents enter the workforce with a good understanding of these demands. In addition, the size of the population further reduced the variability and increased both skewness and kurtosis issues by yielding a small pool of respondents. These influences were especially evident in the number of counties worked (80.8% of the respondents worked in fewer than four counties), percent 4-H assignment (80.8% had a 4-H work assignment of ninety-percent or more), miles driven (88.5% reported driving more than 100 miles per month for job-related purposes), and education (92.3% reported attaining a Master's degree).

In addition to normality and linearity issues, consideration was given to not reporting variables where less than four respondents were identified for a given variable, thereby reducing the potential for identification of any respondent. These variables included number of counties assigned, percent 4-H assignment, gender, race, ages of resident children, religious affiliation and attendance. Where data were reported with

these variables, categories were used that would eliminate possible respondent identification.

The respondents in the pilot study were primarily female agents (84.6%), with 92.3% of the respondents being Caucasian. The agents were highly educated, with twenty-four agents (92.3%) holding Master's degrees. Nine agents (34.6%) were responsible for working in only one county. Sixteen of the agents (61.5%) had a work assignment that was 100 percent 4-H responsibility, with 21 (80.8%) having at least a ninety-percent 4-H work assignment. The 26 agents reportedly worked long hours per week ( $M = 52.54$ ,  $SD = 5.61$ ), as twenty of the agents (76.9%) reported working two or more nights per week ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = .76$ ), and twenty-three (88.5%) reported working two or more weekends per month ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = .49$ ).

Overall, agents appeared to have ownership of their 4-H programs, as the twenty-six agents felt responsible for controlling their own time ( $M = 53.12$ ,  $SD = 27.24$ ), followed by their 4-H members ( $M = 26.40$ ,  $SD = 19.70$ ), and their supervisors ( $M = 14.20$ ,  $SD = 10.87$ ) controlling their time. Thus, despite the number of hours, and weeknights and weekends away from home, agents appeared to have ownership of their programs and were happy with their work. Less than a third of the agents were less than happy with their work (30.8%), while about the same number reported being "quite happy" or "very happy" in their work (26.9%).

For the sake of investigation prior to the regional study, Pearson correlations were calculated to determine relationships between variables in the study, specifically considering the relationships between the job characteristics and marital satisfaction, which was represented by the LWMAT score for each respondent. Money spent was the

only work-related variable that demonstrated significant correlations with the global marital score, as it exhibited a large positive correlation with the LWMAT global score ( $r = .59, n = 17, p < .01$ , two-tailed,  $r^2 = .34$ ), possibly showing that happily married employees may be willing to spend more for their work.

In order to specifically focus on work-family balance and better understand the correlations, a study group was formed based on marital status to exclude respondents who were single or chose not to indicate their marital status. Initial review of the study group responses indicated the data would represent a uniquely female response, as 84.6% of the respondents were female. If trends reported by Rogers (1996) were also shown to be true with 4-H agents, lower levels of marital happiness could be expected from this population. However, just under a third of the study group respondents (31.8%) reported being less than happy in their marriage, and the ratio appeared stable for both male and female respondents. Almost half of the married respondents (45.5%) appeared to have marriages that were in distress, with that determination being made from their responses to the LWMAT.

To determine group differences among the agents in the study group, they were divided into two groups (Distressed and Non-distressed) based on the LWMAT global score. A score below 100 on the LWMAT indicated an agent was in a distressed relationship, with a score of 100 or more indicating the relationship was non-distressed. Group means comparisons with two-tailed *t*-tests showed no significant differences between distressed and non-distressed respondents existing in the work-related variables.

In addition to the measurement of work characteristics, agents were asked for their opinions to five self-rated questions pertaining to their work: 1) how much the job

kept them away from home; 2) if nights and weekends created tensions at home; 3) how well they were able to balance family and work pressures; 4) if the job allowed them scheduling flexibility; and 5) if the job created financial difficulty for the family. Based on their responses, many agents agreed their jobs kept them away from home too much (80.0%) and nights/weekend work created tensions at home (52.4%), but the agents felt the job allowed them flexibility (71.4%) and they were able to maintain a good balance of family and work responsibilities (61.9%). When the agents were assigned to the categories determined by the LWMAT, the differences were not significant based on distress within the relationship.

Based on the analysis of the data for the pilot study, no significant work-related differences were seen among agents to account for differences in marital satisfaction. The analysis of the statistical methodology was reviewed for accuracy, and the determination to stay with an alpha level of .01 was made for the regional study as well. Reliability analysis was made for the balance construct in the study using Cronbach's alpha to determine internal consistency, which was determined to be .65.

The second research question asked about differences in job characteristics and marital satisfaction among agents based on several criteria. When the work-related variables were evaluated at an alpha level of .01, no statistically significant relationships were recorded with age being treated as a continuous variable.

Based on other research findings, age was considered as a categorical variable by generations, specifically the Sandwich Generation employees, who were classified as members by being between 35 and 54 years of age (APA, 2008). No significant differences were found at an alpha level of .01.

Based on the correlations and means comparisons, it appeared marital distress in this population could not be specifically attributed to work-related factors alone, but may be comprised of work, family and relationship issues. This would support the perceptions presented about the Sandwich Generation members. These individuals are receiving growing amounts of discussion, and apparently an increasing level of research. The APA (2008) reported nearly 40 percent of workers aged 35-54 reported extreme levels of stress, and 53.8% of those workers in this population reporting their relationship as distressed. In their study, the APA also reported 83 % of the sandwiched workers said their relationships with their spouse, children and family were the top sources of stress, and in the population of Extension agents in this study, the comparisons followed the same trend of relational stress coming more from internal factors (within the relationship) than external factors (work-related).

Agents were also asked to comment on the questions in the instrument to improve clarity of the questions or identify other areas that were not covered by the questions. No additional questions were suggested, though many individuals commented their responses would have been different when their children were younger.

The third research question related to coping mechanisms employed by agents to help them balance work and family issues. Keene and Prokos (2005) asserted the work-family balancing act was largely left to individuals to find coping mechanisms. Using the coping strategies Fox (2000) identified with 4-H volunteers, plus adding the category of “escape” (being unavailable to clientele when away from work) agent comments were analyzed and grouped. To emphasize the point made by Keene and Prokos, all of these strategies had been used by agents, with adaptation as the most popular strategy

employed by agents (31.6%), followed by changing expectations and planning (26.3% each), priority setting (15.8%) and delegation and social support (5.3% each).

The pilot study helped identify issues with several variables that were addressed in IRB protocols, such as revealing information that could lead to an individual's identification. Had the data set been larger, other analyses could have been performed, and others would have been reported. It also raised a question of causality, which needed further clarification in the regional study.

It should also be noted that numerous surveys were returned during the pilot study, as they were apparently stopped by a SPAM filter system, which limited the number of e-mails being sent by the same server. This issue was resolved with the follow-up e-mail, as the completion rate allowed the rest of notifications to go through. However, it is possible this action affected the response rate by reducing the number of contacts made with the first e-mail. In addition, the comments from agents about the survey and the study helped re-word two of the questions for the sake of clarity. As the surveys were reviewed, the length and ease of use appeared to be suitable, and the clarity of the presentation was acceptable to the agents who completed the instrument. The size of the study did not allow certain statistical methods to be used without groupings that were larger than intended, but that helped structure and organize the plan for analysis for the regional study.

## Regional Study

The study was comprised of Extension agents with 4-H responsibilities in the Southern Region, and included agents within both the 1862 and 1890 institutions. Subgroups of agents were created based on the variables being considered, with *t*-tests being used to compare the groups. Gravetter and Wallnau (2007) presented *t*-tests as alternatives to *z*-scores when the population mean was unknown. This study invited all of the members of the population of Extension agents with 4-H responsibilities in the Southern Region to participate, with a 46 percent response rate for the regional study. Since all of the population members did not participate in the regional study, and the means and standard deviations were not known for the two populations, *t*-tests were expected to yield responses that would provide a lower risk for finding significance that did not truly exist. To reduce the risk of family-wise error from using multiple *t*-tests, the data were analyzed using SPSS software, and was tested at an alpha level of .01.

Sixteen hundred thirty-one agents were invited to participate in the study, with 743 agents (46% response rate) responding, and 625 (a 38% adjusted response rate) adequately completing surveys to be included in reporting. Partially completed surveys were reviewed, and were included without missing answers being computed or assigned based on groupings if at least the first section (work-related data) was complete. Respondents who chose not to report their marital status were included in the study along with single respondents, so as to utilize their responses to work questions and demographic questions. The ten questions most frequently left unanswered by all respondents related to the number of resident children (277 responses), college courses

(550 responses), number of 4-H leaders (576 responses), number of 4-H members (586 responses), after-hours work (597 responses), weekends worked (598 responses), out-of-pocket money spent (598 responses), control of work schedule (605 responses), miles driven (605 responses), and race/ethnicity (605 responses).

Four hundred forty-six (72.9%) of the respondents were in relationships, with 45 (7.4%) being divorced, four (.7%) being separated, seven (1.1%) being widowed, and 110 (18%) respondents claiming to never have married. All of the respondents who were in relationships or had been in relationships adequately responded to the questions that pertained to marital interaction and satisfaction. With the exception of the LWMAT questions, the questions most often left unanswered by this group included mate's religious attendance (431 responses), whose salary was higher (471 responses), how many hours the mate worked per week (480 responses), mate's age (482 responses), who was older (482 responses), and opinions of how the job affected family-life (483 responses).

The descriptive statistics for the work-related study variables, excluding categorical and nominal data, were evaluated for normality and linearity, and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Selected Work-related Variables

	N	Mean	SD
Counties	625	1.22	.08
Percent 4-H	617	77.03	30.42
4-H clubs	615	18.60	22.96
4-H leaders	576	35.37	45.75
4-H members	586	496.37	631.78
Years 4-H agent	622	10.21	9.00
Years position	624	7.95	7.75
Work control - you	605	56.40	6.33
Work control - supervisor	605	16.87	16.25
Work control - 4Hers	605	22.58	19.96
Hours	617	52.84	7.90
Weeknights	612	2.12	.95
Weekends	598	1.81	.78
After-hours communicating	597	15.29	14.04
After-hours reports	597	14.56	12.58
After-hours county	597	31.31	21.02
After-hours district/state	597	15.50	12.97
After-hours national	597	3.82	6.00
After-hours in-service	597	8.34	8.24
After-hours other	597	11.11	7.08
Overnight	613	3.99	5.47
Miles	605	645.90	821.46
Money	598	87.01	142.21
Work happiness	624	4.61!	1.42

! scale was: 1 = Very unhappy; 2 = Quite unhappy; 3 = Somewhat unhappy; 4 = Happy; 5 = Somewhat happy; 6 = Quite happy; 7 = Very happy

Several of the statistics showed skewness and kurtosis problems that could affect analysis, including counties worked, number of 4-H clubs, leaders and members, years in current position, supervisor control over work schedule, hours worked per week, after-hours work, overnight stays, miles driven, and money spent. Because the population was unique, it was expected that many of the variables would demonstrate these issues. As was mentioned in regards to the pilot study, hiring practices for 4-H agents lead to the

selection of highly educated, highly motivated and highly competent employees, resulting in a unique population to be selected for this study. The resulting group for this study worked primarily in one county (93.8%), with a 100 percent 4-H assignment (54.3%), held a master's degree (64.3%), and reportedly averaged working 50 or more hours per week (77.8%), including two or more nights per week (73.9%) and two or more weekends per month (65.7%). Skewness and kurtosis issues were reviewed for each variable, and the variables were transformed as needed for statistical analysis.

In addition to normality and linearity issues, consideration was given to reporting issues where less than four respondents were identified for a given variable, thereby reducing the potential for identification of any respondent. These variables included the number of resident children and ethnicity. Where data were reported with these variables, categories were used that would eliminate possible respondent identification.

The respondents in the regional study were primarily female agents (69.9%), with a racial make-up of 92.7% Caucasian, 5.0% African American, and 2.3% Other. The agents were highly educated, with 402 agents (65.4%) holding Master's degrees and 12 (2.0%) holding doctorates. Five hundred eighty-five agents (93.6%) were responsible for working in only one county, with 28 agents (4.5%) working in two counties, and 11 agents (1.8%) working in more than two counties. Three hundred thirty-five of the agents (54.3%) had a work assignment that was 100 percent 4-H responsibility, with 374 agents (60.8%) having at least a 90 percent 4-H work assignment, with an average assignment being 77 percent ( $SD = 30.42$ ). The agents reportedly worked long hours per week ( $M = 52.84$ ,  $SD = 7.90$ ), as 452 of the agents (74.8%) reported working two or more nights per week ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = .94$ ), and 381 (74.2%) reported working two or more

weekends per month ( $M = 1.81, SD = .78$ ). The extra (over 40) hours per week were primarily spent at county events ( $M = 31.31, SD = 21.02$ ) or communicating with 4-H members and leaders ( $M = 15.29, SD = 14.04$ ). Agents also reported spending time after hours completing reports and paperwork ( $M = 14.56, SD = 12.58$ ), but did not specify if the work was done at the office or at home. Another big block of time was devoted to district and state events ( $M = 15.50, SD = 12.97$ ), as four hundred eleven agents (67%) reported averaging two or more overnight stays per month ( $M = 3.99, SD = 5.47$ ). These hours were apparently hours devoted to job performance, as in-service training only consumed about eight percent ( $M = 8.34, SD = 8.28$ ) of agent's time.

Agents in the study were younger than agents in the pilot study ( $M = 40.52, SD = 11.03$ ), as 195 (51.3%) of the respondents were under the age of 40. In terms of generations (OzTam, 2009), the respondents were fairly evenly split between the younger generations, with 222 members of Generation X (36.6%) and 204 Generation Y members (33.7%), followed by 175 Baby Boomers (28.9%) and 5 Pioneers (.8%). The average length of service was 10.21 years ( $SD = 9.00$ ), and agents appeared to have remained in positions for much of their career ( $M = 7.95, SD = 7.75$ ). An average 4-H program appeared to have one 4-H agent responsible for 18.60 clubs ( $SD = 22.96$ ) with 35.37 leaders ( $SD = 45.75$ ) and 496.37 members ( $SD = 631.78$ ). The agents reported driving over 645 miles per month for work ( $M = 645.90, SD = 821.46$ ), and spent over \$87 of their personal funds per month ( $M = 87.01, SD = 142.21$ ).

Overall, agents appeared to have ownership of their 4-H programs, as the agents reportedly were responsible for controlling their own time ( $M = 56.40, SD = 26.33$ ), followed by their 4-H members ( $M = 22.58, SD = 19.96$ ), and their supervisors

( $M = 16.87$ ,  $SD = 16.25$ ) controlling their time. Thus, despite the number of hours, and weeknights and weekends away from home, agents appeared to have ownership of their programs and were happy with their work. Less than a fourth of the agents were less than happy with their work (22.9%), while slightly more (31.9%) reported being “quite happy” or “very happy” in their work ( $M = 4.61$ ,  $SD = 1.425$ ).

Four hundred fifty-three (71.1%) of the agents were married at the time they completed the survey, with 11 being single with a partner (1.8%), four reported being separated (.7%), 45 (7.4%) reported being divorced, seven reported being widowed (1.1%), and 110 (18.0%) reported having never married. Sixty-three agents (12.9%) reported they had been married previously. Two hundred seventy-three of the agents (43.7%) had children living with them at the time the survey was completed. Five hundred thirty-four of the agents (93.5%) reported a religious affiliation for themselves, with over three-fourths (79.9%) reporting they attended worship services at least once per month, and 353 agents (63.8%) reporting attendance of at least once per week.

Four hundred sixty-five agents (95.0%) reported being in a relationship with someone of the same ethnicity, and 311 (73.2%) reported similar religious attendance as their mate. Two hundred fifty-two agents (52.3%) had mates who were older, while 76 agents (15.8%) were the same ages. One hundred forty-one agents (28.8%) reported having the same educational attainment as their mate, while 310 agents reported having a higher educational level than their spouse, and 38 agents (7.8%) reported a spouse with a higher level of attainment. Two hundred thirty-nine agents (50.7%) had a higher level of income than their spouse, and 355 agents (74.4%) reported working more hours than their mate.

For perspective, the “typical 4-H agent” from this study was a white female, 40 years of age, married for 15 years, happily married, but experiencing some marital stress, holding a master’s degree, of protestant beliefs and attending services more than once per month. She was married to a Caucasian male 43 years of age who held a bachelor’s degree, worked at least 44 hours per week, had a similar salary level as the employee, and they had no more than two children living at home. The agent had been a 4-H agent for more than 10 years, had been in her present position for 8 years, had a 77% 4-H assignment, worked in 1 county, and was responsible for 18 4-H clubs with 35 leaders and 496 members. She worked 52 hours per week, which included 2 nights per week and 2 weekends per month, and spent at least 4 nights per month away from home due to job responsibilities. She believed she controlled just over half (56%) her work schedule, with the 4-H members and leaders controlling 23% and her supervisors and administrators controlling 17%. For the extra hours (over 40) she worked, 50% were committed to 4-H events, with another 15% spent communicating with 4-H members and leaders and 14% spent completing reports and paperwork. The agent averaged driving 645 miles per month for work related duties, spent \$87 per month out of her own pocket, and was happy with her work.

### *Research Question 1*

The first research question asked “What are the relationships between job characteristics and marital satisfaction for Extension 4-H agents in the Southern Region?” The process first required determining if differences were observable between agents who were never married and those who were or had been in a relationship. The two groups were named “never married” and “study group” for the purposes of the study, and they had significant differences in several variables, as shown in Table 2. The agents in relationships were older [ $t(188.41) = -10.53, p < .01, d = 1.04$ ], had a lower percent 4-H work assignment [ $t(233.65) = 4.20, p < .01, d = .36$ ], a longer length of service [ $t(224.30) = -6.40, p < .01, d = .57$ ], had been in their present position longer [ $t(221.18) = -5.35, p < .01, d = .56$ ], drove more work-related miles per month [ $t(487.34) = -4.82, p < .01, d = .30$ ], and had a higher educational attainment [ $t(178.56) = -3.48, p < .01, d = .36$ ]. There were no significant differences between the two groups in the hours worked per week, weeknights and weekends worked per month, or out-of-pocket money spent per month for their work. The after-hours time was also divided similarly between the two groups.

Table 2 Significant Means Comparisons for the Never Married and the Study Groups

	Group	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	df	<i>d</i>
Your age	Never married	119	32.00	9.72	-10.53*	188.41	1.04
	Study group	487	42.60	10.32			
Percent 4-H	Never married	122	85.80	24.10	4.20*	233.65	.36
	Study group	495	74.87	31.43			
Years as a 4-H agent	Never married	124	6.20	7.42	-6.40*	224.31	.57
	Study group	498	11.20	9.09			
Years present position	Never married	124	1.87	1.43	-5.35*	221.18	.56
	Study group	498	2.83	1.77			
Miles	Never married	117	446.14	345.34	-4.82*	487.34	.30
	Study group	488	693.80	892.53			
Your education	Never married	121	4.55	.53	-3.48*	178.56	.36
	Study group	494	4.73	.50			

\*denotes significance at  $p < .01$

It appeared the respondents who are or were in relationships, due to age and experience, were picking up other duty assignments in addition to 4-H, were participating in more district and state events, and were self-regulating time away from home by cutting back on weeknight work when compared to the agents who were never married. Because three of these variables could be related to length of service (age, length of service, time in present position), they could show that, with time, agents are given extra duties, even if the duties are not 4-H.

In order to specifically focus on work-family balance, a study group was formed based on marital status, and it included the agents who were in current relationships (married or single with a partner) or a past relationship (separated, divorced or widowed) but excluded respondents who were never married or did not indicate their status.

Initial review of the study group responses indicated the data would represent a predominantly female response, as 69.92% of the respondents were female. If trends reported by Rogers (1996) also proved to be true with this group of 4-H agents, lower levels of marital happiness could be expected from this population. After analysis however, less than one-fifth of the study group respondents (19.0%) reported being less than happy in their marriage, and the ratio appeared stable for both male and female respondents. The responses were then evaluated based on the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT) score, which includes the opinion question of marital happiness, plus scores from a series of questions related to how specific relational stressors were handled. Pearson correlations were determined for the LWMAT score ( $M = 104.19$ ,  $SD = 34.85$ ) and the other study variables, and the significant correlations are given in Table 3. Six of the variables were positively correlated to LWMAT score [work happiness ( $r = .15$ ,  $n = 501$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .02$ ), mate educational level ( $r = .16$ ,  $n = 489$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .03$ ), your religious attendance ( $r = .12$ ,  $n = 453$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .01$ ), mate religious attendance ( $r = .21$ ,  $n = 431$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .04$ ), the belief that night and weekend work created tension at home ( $r = .22$ ,  $n = 486$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .05$ ), and the belief that the job created family financial difficulties ( $r = .15$ ,  $n = 485$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .02$ )] so that as they increased, the LWMAT score would increase. Work happiness, agent religious attendance, and the

belief that the job created financial difficulty at home showed small positive effects (small relationships), while mate educational level, mate religious attendance and the belief that nights and weekend work created tension at home had medium effects (medium correlations). The other three variables [years as a 4-H agent ( $r = -.12$ ,  $n = 498$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .01$ ), agent educational level ( $r = -.11$ ,  $n = 494$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .01$ ), and the belief that the agents could maintain a good job/family balance ( $r = -.19$ ,  $n = 483$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .03$ )] were negatively correlated with the LWMAT scores, indicating as they increased, the LWMAT score would decrease. These all showed small effects, except for the perception of maintaining balance, which had a medium correlation. Based on these it would appear work issues may not play a major role in marital distress, but may contribute through issues with how one manages time.

Table 3 Matrix of Significant Correlations of Variables with LWMAT Scores

Variable		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>M</i>										
	<i>SD</i>										
1	104.19	1	.22*	.22*	-.19*	.16*	.15*	.15*	.12*	-.11*	-.11*
2	2.58	1.10	.22*	1	.09	-.44*	.06	.20*	.29*	.08	.03
3	3.50	1.25	.22*	.09	1	-.09	.21*	-.02	-.02	.76*	.15*
4	2.98	1.08	-.19*	-.44*	-.09	1	-.06	-.22*	-.36*	-.02	-.03
5	3.71	1.14	.16*	.06	.21*	-.06	1	.01	.08	.10	.10
6	3.42	1.11	.15*	.20*	-.02	-.22*	.01	1	.29*	.07	-.03
7	4.63	1.44	.15*	.29*	-.02	-.36*	.08	.29*	1	.06	.04
8	3.73	1.14	.12*	.08	.76*	-.02	.10	.07	.06	1	.15*
9	11.20	9.10	-.11*	.03	.15*	-.03	.10	-.03	.04	.15*	1
10	4.73	.50	-.11*	.10	.04	-.05	.10	.02	.01	.08	.24

\*denotes significance at  $p < .01$

N was 489 for the correlations

Variables: 1. LWMAT score

2. Nights and weekend work creates tension at home #
3. Mate religious attendance
4. I can maintain a good job/family balance #
5. Mate educational level
6. The job creates family financial difficulty #
7. Work happiness !
8. Your religious attendance
9. Years served as a 4-H agent
10. Your educational level

# scale was: 1 = Strongly agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly disagree

! scale was: 1 = Very unhappy; 2 = Quite unhappy; 3 = Somewhat unhappy; 4 = Happy; 5 = Somewhat happy; 6 = Quite happy; 7 = Very happy

These variables were then evaluated to use in the development of a regression model related to marital distress among 4-H agents, as the data set was examined for issues related to linearity, normality and heteroscedasticity. None of the variables needed to be transformed for skewness or kurtosis issues, but several outliers were removed to resolve normality issues. These adjustments yielded a data set of 489 respondents, 48.8 % of who were single-county 4-H agents, with another 44.9% having either a 4-H multi-county assignment or a multi-program assignment that included 4-H.

The transformed data set was then used to build a regression model to explain the significant relationships of variables to the LWMAT global score. The regression models were developed using backward regression, and 4 models emerged. The first three models had  $R^2$  values of .16 (medium effect). Variables were removed based on an F value of .10, and the  $R^2$  value was used to determine which model to report. After work happiness was removed from model 1, the change in  $R^2$  was .002 for the second model. After the agent's religious attendance was removed, the change in  $R^2$  for the third model was .002. When the agent's perception of being able to maintain a good job/family balance was removed, the change in  $R^2$  was .005 for the fourth model, which was an increase over the change in calculating the previous models. The adjusted  $R^2$  did not change as the first three models were built, but was reduced by .003 when the fourth model was created. Model 3, then, was the last model considered and is the model given in Table 4.

The model explained 16.% ( $\Delta R^2=.16$ ) of the variance in the LWMAT scores for agents, and included no observable work-related response, three affective work-related variables (a belief that the job created family financial difficulties, a belief the agent

could maintain a good balance of job/work responsibilities, and a belief night and weekend work created tension at home), three agent-specific demographic variables (years as an agent and educational level attained) and two mate-specific demographic variable (mate religious attendance and mate educational attainment). For this population of 4-H agents, and in response to the first research question, it appeared work-related variables did not play as significant a role as other factors in causing marital distress, apart from the beliefs the agents formed in relation to nights and weekend work, the effect of work on the family finances, and a lowered sense of balance of job and family responsibilities. Educational attainment and religious practices have both been reported in literature as possible causes of marital stress, and this study added credence to those assertions. Additionally, dyadic factors were not included in the regression models, as they comprised the LWMAT score, so there would have been severe issues with redundancy. These factors, however, may provide the underlying answers as to the marital distress being experienced by the agents.

Table 4 Regression Model for Agents' LWMAT Score

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>CI</i> Lower	<i>CI</i> Upper
Constant	96.56	18.85	7.36	59.51	133.62
Your educational level	-8.11	3.44	-.11	-14.88	-1.34
Mate religious attendance	5.64	1.35	.19	2.88	8.19
Night and weekend work creates tension	5.02	1.69	.15	1.70	8.35
Mate educational level	4.27	1.45	.14	1.41	7.13
The job creates family financial difficulty	3.26	1.52	.10	.28	6.24
I can maintain a good job/family balance	-2.57	1.68	-.08	-5.87	.74
Years as a 4-H agent	-.52	.19	-.13	-.88	-.15
<i>R (R<sup>2</sup>)</i>	.394 (.16)				

The LWMAT also yields a global score that is useful for analysis as was done with the regression models. It is also useful as a group identifier to divide respondents into groups by level of distress, termed “Distressed” and “Non-distressed.” To analyze differences among the agents based on this grouping and to further clarify the answer to the first research question, the respondents were divided into two groups based on the LWMAT global score. Using a score of 100 on the LWMAT as the cutpoint, agents were classified into groups of “distressed” (scores below 100) or “non-distressed” (scores of 100 or more). Based on the scores, just over a third of the study group (36.7%) appeared to have relationships that were in distress, as compared to 19 percent who reported they felt less than “happy” in their relationship.

Group means comparisons with *t*-tests indicated significant differences between distressed and non-distressed respondents existed in three work-related variables, and these are reported in Table 5. Agents who were in a distressed relationship tended to believe nights and weekend work created tension at home [ $t(436) = -4.35, p < .01, d = .42$ ], they could not maintain a good job/family balance [ $t(481) = 2.66, p < .01, d = .26$ ], and they believed the job created financial difficulty with family finances [ $t(318.49) = -3.43, p < .01, d = .34$ ]. Together, these described agents who were in the midst of wrestling with the balance of time and responsibilities, and believed their jobs created stress that spilled over to their families.

Table 5 Significant Means Comparisons Based on Marital Stress

	Group	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	df	<i>d</i>
Nights/weekends - tension	Distressed	173	2.29#	1.08	-4.35*	484	.42
	Non-distress	313	2.74#	1.08			
Maintain balance	Distressed	171	3.15#	1.13	2.66*	481	.26
	Non-distress	312	2.87#	1.03			
Job creates financial difficulty	Distressed	172	3.18#	1.18	-3.43*	318.49	.34
	Non-distress	313	3.55#	1.05			

\*denotes significance at  $p < .01$

# scale was: 1 = Strongly agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly disagree

Additionally, one agent attribute and one mate attribute produced variables that showed significance. Agents who were in a distressed relationship tended to have a lower educational level [ $t(385.50) = 2.63, p < .01, d = .24$ ], and their mates attended fewer religious services and events [ $t(256.58) = -3.62, p < .01, d = .38$ ].

To further distinguish and define the issues, the agents were evaluated based on the status of the relationship (past relationship or present relationship) and t-tests were performed to distinguish group differences. Significant differences were seen among seven work or demographic variables based on the status of the relationship, and these are reported in Table 6. Compared to agents who were currently in relationships, agents who were no longer in relationships (separated or divorced) tended to believe their supervisors controlled more of their time [ $t(485) = 2.47, p < .01, d = .37$ ], the agents were older [ $t(485) = 2.51, p < .01, d = .38$ ], had been in relationships with older mates [ $t(480) = 2.89, p = .00, d = .44$ ] who had lower educational attainment [ $t(487) = -3.71, p < .01, d = .57$ ] and who attended fewer religious services [ $t(429) = -3.72, p < .01, d = .68$ ], and they had more resident children under 6 years of age [ $t(118) = 3.09, p < .01, d = 1.03$ ] and between the ages of 6 and 12 [ $t(108) = 4.20, p < .01, d = 1.03$ ]. These indicated that while numerous variables were related to the agent's marital status, the only job characteristic that showed significant difference with a small effect, based on marital status was the perception of control exerted on the agent's work schedule by their supervisors and administrators.

Table 6 Significant Means Comparisons of Variables Based on Relationship Status

	Status	N	Mean	<i>SD</i>	T	df	<i>d</i>
Control of work schedule - supervisor	Past	48	22.08	18.48	2.47*	485	.37
	Present	439	16.23	15.20			
Your age	Past	48	46.13	9.45	2.51*	485	.38
	Present	439	42.22	10.34			
Mate age	Past	47	48.04	10.57	2.89*	480	.44
	Present	435	43.15	11.09			
Mate education	Past	47	3.13	1.19	-3.71*	487	.57
	Present	442	3.77	1.12			
Mate religious attendance	Past	32	2.72	1.22	-3.72*	429	.68
	Present	399	3.56	1.23			
Children under 6	Past	10	2.20	1.03	3.09*	118	1.03
	Present	110	1.45	.700			
Children ages 6-12	Past	11	2.18	.87	4.20*	108	1.33
	Present	99	1.41	.54			

\* denotes significance at  $p < .01$

### *Discussion for Research Question 1*

The first research question asked “What are the relationships between job characteristics and marital satisfaction for Extension 4-H agents in the Southern Region?” Based on the findings reported in Table 3, the correlations determined for job characteristics showed two variables as significant and negative in their influence (years as a 4-H agent and the belief the agent could maintain a good job/family balance), indicating they would increase as the LWMAT score decreased. Three other job-related variables were significantly correlated and positive in their influence (work happiness, the belief that night and weekend work created tension, and the belief that the job created financial pressure for the family), indicating they would increase as the LWMAT score increased.

A question of directionality needs to be raised for these findings. Based on the literature, the three perceptions of balance, tension from weeknight and weekend work, and financial pressure, could affect the marital satisfaction in the direction the correlations point. Based on their scale anchors of “1 = Strongly agree” and “5 = Strongly disagree,” the influences of these variables show relationships and directions that are consistent with findings in the literature reporting spillover from work to family or spillover from family to work. Directionality and influence from marital satisfaction to work perceptions could also explain these directions, as agents with a low level of marital stress might be more willing to agree they can maintain a good balance of job and family responsibilities, feel less tension from working nights and weekends, and do not feel financial pressures from financially investing in their work. The regression model of agents’ scores on the LWMAT also hinted that other factors may be influencing

the marital distress, as the regression model developed from the significantly correlated variables explained only 16% of the variance in the agent's scores of marital distress.

Based on these tensions, it cannot be concluded that hours, nights, weekends and financial investments in their work caused stress or distress, or if the agent's marital satisfaction spilled over to bring freedom and support for the agent to invest both time and money in their work.

To further distinguish and define the issues, the agents were evaluated based on the status of the relationship (past relationship or present relationship) and t-tests were performed to distinguish group differences. Significant differences were seen among seven work or demographic variables based on the status of the relationship, and those were reported in Table 6. Compared to agents who were currently in relationships, agents who were no longer in relationships (separated or divorced) tended to believe their supervisors and administrators controlled more of their time [ $t(485) = 2.47, p < .01, d = .37$ ], the agents were older [ $t(485) = 2.51, p < .01, d = .38$ ], had been in relationships with older mates [ $t(480) = 2.89, p < .01, d = .44$ ] who had lower educational attainment [ $t(487) = -3.71, p < .01, d = .57$ ] and who attended fewer religious service [ $t(429) = -3.72, p < .01, d = .68$ ], and they had more resident children under 6 years of age [ $t(118) = 3.09, p < .01, d = 1.03$ ] and between the ages of 6 and 12 [ $t(108) = 4.20, p < .01, d = 1.33$ ]. These indicated that while numerous variables were related to the agent's marital status, the only job characteristic that showed a significant difference based on marital status was the perception of control exerted on the agent's work schedule by their supervisors and administrators.

The literature identifies several of the variables as being related to marital distress, such as educational level and religious involvement. The direction of cause is not identified here as much as other variables that could contribute to marital distress. The fact that only one work-related variable is identified with distress in a past relationship suggests other factors could have contributed more to the marital distress and dissolution than just the work-related factors

### *Research Question 2*

The second research question asked “Are differences in job characteristics and marital satisfaction evident among Extension 4-H agents based on age, gender, marital status and presence of children in the home?” A general review of the data for the study group (those in past or present relationships) indicated there were differences, and some were discussed in relation to research question 1.

### *Marital status*

Based on *t*-tests, significant differences due to marital status between past and present relationships were shown among seven work or demographic variables, and these were reported in Table 6, and discussed in relation to the first research question. Compared to agents who were currently in relationships, agents who were no longer in relationships (separated or divorced) tended to believe their supervisors and administrators controlled more of their time, the agents were older, had been in relationships with older mates who had lower educational attainment and who attended

fewer religious services, and they had more resident children under 6 years of age and between the ages of 6 and 12.

The agents' scores on the LWMAT were significantly different, as the respondents who were no longer in relationships scored significantly lower on the LWMAT [ $t(499) = -11.20, p < .01, d = 1.68$ ] than did the agents who were currently in relationships. The mean for the 49 agents who were no longer in a relationship ( $M = 56.82, SD = 28.69$ ) was barely half the mean for the group of 452 agents currently in a relationship ( $M = 109.33, SD = 31.44$ ). In addition, when the responses were evaluated using scores on each of the relational variables, significant differences were found in all sixteen relationship areas.

### *Gender*

T-tests were used to determine differences between the variables based on gender. Group means comparisons with *t*-tests indicated significant differences between male and female respondents existed in four work-related variables, these are reported in Table 7. Female agents tended to have a higher percentage 4-H assignment [ $t(265.63) = -4.88, p < .01, d = .48$ ], they had served for a shorter period of time as a 4-H agent [ $t(275.27) = 2.94, p < .01, d = .30$ ], they drove fewer miles for work-related duties [ $t(475) = 3.32, p < .01, d = .33$ ], and believed less strongly the job created family financial stress [ $t(478) = -5.20, p < .01, d = .44$ ].

Table 7 Significant Means Comparisons Based on Gender

		N	Mean	SD	T	df	<i>d</i>
Percent 4-H	Male	155	64.65	33.89	-4.88*	265.63	.48
	Female	329	79.30	29.24			
Years as a 4-H agent	Male	154	12.97	9.47	2.94*	275.27	.30
	Female	333	10.33	8.66			
Miles	Male	151	899.60	773.92	3.32*	475	.33
	Female	326	608.08	939.82			
Job creates financial difficulty	Male	153	3.04#	1.13	-5.20*	478	.50
	Female	327	3.59#	1.068			

\*denotes significance at  $p < .01$

# scale was: 1 = Strongly agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly disagree

Roehling and Moen (2003) reported females still bear the burden of family responsibilities, even though males are beginning to assume them within their own homes. This study did not find significant differences between agents in the total hours worked per week, or the weekends worked per month, but the female agents drove fewer miles for their work than their male counterparts. What was not asked in this study was for agents to differentiate work assignments at events outside the county from events where they had youth participating, so no speculation is offered about how the genders differ in work assignments at those events. It should also be noted the groups did not significantly differ on work happiness.

Additionally, one agent attribute and two mate attributes produced significant differences. Compared to male agents, female agents had completed more college courses [ $t(431) = -2.75, p < .01, d = .28$ ], while their mates tended to have a lower educational level [ $t(483) = 4.47, p < .01, d = .31$ ], and the mates attended fewer religious services and events ( $t(290.50) = 4.36, p < .01, d = .18$ ) than the mates of the male agents. These could indicate the male agents graduated and moved into the workforce more quickly than the female agents, and their mates had higher educational attainments and higher level of involvement in religious activities.

It should also be noted the agents did not significantly differ on the LWMAT score based on gender [ $t(488) = -1.78, p = .08$ ], which was contrary to Rogers' (1996) assertion that females would tend to report a lower level of marital happiness.

### *Children*

Next, the consideration of the presence of children, the number of children, and groupings based on the number of children were reviewed. Pearson correlations were calculated to determine the relationships between the number of children and the other variables in the study. No variables were significantly correlated with the number of children at an alpha level of .01.

To discover if differences existed between agents due to children in the home, the agents were divided into groups based on the presence or absence of children in the home. Comparisons were then made using *t*-tests to ascertain group differences, with no significant differences being determined at the alpha level.

## *Age*

The question of age was reviewed in three ways to determine the most precise interpretation for the study group. Age was measured on a continuous scale, and as a continuous variable it was found to have a significant correlation to six variables, including four work-related variables, which are shown in Table 8. Positive correlations were found for time spent doing other job-related activities ( $r = .14$ ,  $n = 468$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .02$ ), years as a 4-H agent ( $r = .51$ ,  $n = 484$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .27$ ), and years in the present position ( $r = .47$ ,  $n = 486$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .22$ ), while negative correlations were found for percent 4-H assignment ( $r = -.22$ ,  $n = 481$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .05$ ). Other variables showing positive correlations included years married ( $r = .82$ ,  $n = 483$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .67$ ), and resident children under 6 ( $r = .33$ ,  $n = 120$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails,  $r^2 = .15$ ). Small effect sizes (small correlations) were found for percent 4-H assignment, and time spent after-hours doing other job-related duties. Medium effects (medium correlations) were found for years as a 4-H agent, years in the present position and resident children under 6 years of age. A large effect (large correlation) was found for years as a 4-H agent.

Table 8 Matrix of Significant Correlations of Variables with Age of Agent

Variable		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	<i>M</i>								
	<i>SD</i>								
1	42.45	10.30	1	.14*	.51*	.47*	.82*	.33*	-.22*
2	11.81	17.72	.14*	1	.02	.02*	.14*	.10	-.21*
3	11.08	8.99	.51*	.02	1	.85*	.44*	.02	-.11
4	8.58	7.80	.47*	.02	.65*	1	.41*	-.00	-.08
5	15.59	10.66	.82*	.14*	.44*	.41*	1	.37*	-.18*
6	1.53	.76	.33*	.10	.02	-.00	.37	1	.06
7	74.87	31.43	-.22*	-.21*	-.11	-.08	-.18*	-.06	1

\*denotes significance at  $p < .01$

N equals 458 for the correlations

- Variables:
1. Your age
  2. After-hours other job-related duties
  3. Years as a 4-H agent
  4. Years in present position
  5. Years married
  6. Resident children under 6
  7. Percent 4-H

Consideration was given to classifying agents according to incremental age groups or into generational groups. Age analyses for group differences on the LWMAT global score were apparent when the agents were grouped by 10-year intervals. Visual differences indicated the 20-29 group scored higher ( $M = 120.22$ ,  $SD = 28.50$ ,  $n = 58$ ) than the 30-39 group ( $M = 105.58$ ,  $SD = 33.18$ ,  $n = 141$ ), the 40-49 group ( $M = 99.19$ ,  $SD = 37.08$ ,  $n = 130$ ) and the 50-59 age group ( $M = 102.68$ ,  $SD = 33.88$ ,  $n = 145$ ). The LWMAT scores were the lowest for the agents in the 40-49 age group, with the agents in the 60-69 age group ( $M = 121.46$ ,  $SD = 28.23$ ,  $n = 13$ ) scoring the highest of the groups.

Differences on the LWMAT were also obvious when the four generational groups of Pioneer, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y were visually compared, as the Pioneer group scored the highest of the groups ( $M = 125.33$ ,  $SD = 16.50$ ,  $n = 3$ ), followed by the Generation Y group ( $M = 113.20$ ,  $SD = 31.31$ ,  $n = 119$ ), then the Baby Boomer group ( $M = 103.17$ ,  $SD = 34.22$ ,  $n = 166$ ), and the Generation X agent group ( $M = 101.76$ ,  $SD = 35.77$ ,  $n = 199$ ). These comparisons, even though based on different break-points by age, pointed to the same trend of marital distress being lower among the younger agents, then increasing for agents in their thirties and forties, but decreasing for the agents in their fifties and sixties.

The breakpoint for Generation Y and Generation X is close to the beginning of what is known as the Sandwich Generation that includes individuals age 35-54. Thus, consideration was also given to grouping agents according to the Sandwich Generation. This group comprised over half (54.8%) of the total number of respondents in this study and almost two-thirds of the study group (61.8%). Using that grouping, no significant difference was seen in the LWMAT score between the sandwich group and the other agents. However, when the younger and older agents were distinguished into separate groups, an ANOVA revealed significant differences between the groups. The Levene's test [ $F(2,471) = 2.23$ ,  $p = .11$ ] indicated homogeneity of variance, and the ANOVA [ $F(2,471) = 4.98$ ,  $p < .01$ ] indicated differences existed between the groups. Scheffe's post-hoc tests revealed the younger agents scored significantly higher on the LWMAT ( $M = 112.42$ ,  $SD = 31.69$ ,  $n = 140$ ) than the Sandwich Generation agents ( $M = 101.67$ ,  $SD = 34.88$ ,  $n = 280$ ). They also scored higher than the older agents ( $M = 108.50$ ,  $SD = 33.17$ ,  $n = 54$ ), though the difference was not significant.

This categorization of “Sandwich Generation” described employees who were at the stage in life where they were balancing work, raising children and caring for aging parents. However, agents in this category exhibited significant differences from “non-sandwich” agents on only four work-related variables, as can be seen in Table 9. Agents in the sandwich group tended to have served more years as a 4-H agent [ $t(588.68) = 9.00, p < .01, d = .73$ ], they had served more years in their current position [ $t(592.10) = 6.60, p < .01, d = .54$ ], they reported more time after hours devoted to national events [ $t(575.01) = 2.60, p < .01, d = .21$ ], and they reportedly spent less time after-hours at in-service training [ $t(454.59) = -3.02, p < .01, d = .26$ ] than other agents.

Table 9 Significant Means Comparisons Based on Membership in the Sandwich Generation

		N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	df	<i>d</i>
Years as a 4-H agent	Sandwich	324	12.88	8.33	9.00*	588.68	.73
	Not Sandwich	279	6.78	8.29			
Years in position	Sandwich	326	9.68	7.44	6.60*	592.1.	.54
	Not Sandwich	279	5.73	7.29			
After-hours In-service	Sandwich	313	7.34	6.55	-3.02*	454.59	.26
	Not sandwich	269	9.46	9.83			
After-hours national	Sandwich	313	4.30	6.48	2.60*	575.04	.21
	Not Sandwich	269	3.05	5.06			

\* denotes significance at  $p < .01$

Compared to other agents, means for the agents in the Sandwich Generation were higher than the other agents in many work-related variables, but as can be seen from Table 10, the levels of the work-related variables did not show statistical significance when considered individually. However, the additive effect of the increased hours, responsibilities in other program areas, overnights from home, and perceptions of tension due to their job was higher, and showed a significant difference for the sandwiched agents [ $t(604) = 2.670, p < .01, d = .22$ ] compared to the other agents. If the office time was not long enough for them to complete their tasks, work could eventually bleed over into time at home, so that even though the agent was home, the family time was crunched by clientele and work demands. The fact that these agents reported a lower amount of personal control over their work schedule may reflect their struggles.

Table 10 Means Comparisons of Work-related Variables for the Sandwich Generation

	Sandwich			Not Sandwich		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Counties	326	1.37	4.26	280	1.05	.28
Percent 4-H	321	74.24	31.82	277	80.20	28.69
Years as a 4-H agent	324	12.88	8.33	279	6.78	8.29
Years present	326	9.68	7.44	279	5.73	7.29
4-H clubs	317	19.16	25.98	279	18.01	19.36
4-H leaders	295	38.08	47.37	264	31.87	43.63
4-H members	300	512.42	635.62	269	476.13	624.45
Work - you	316	55.15	26.90	273	57.82	25.72
Work - supervisor	316	18.04	16.53	273	15.65	16.04
Work – 4Hers	316	22.05	19.86	273	23.21	20.29
Work - others	316	4.76	9.15	273	3.32	9.72
Hours	322	52.99	8.46	277	52.72	7.33
Weeknights	318	2.08	.89	275	2.16	.99
Weekends	309	1.77	.76	270	1.86	.80
Overnight	322	4.25	5.80	273	3.64	4.93
Communicating	313	15.75	14.09	269	14.72	14.27
Reports	313	15.04	12.85	269	13.58	12.02
County events	313	30.21	20.06	269	33.07	22.08
District/state events	313	15.73	13.61	269	15.32	12.40
National events	313	4.30	6.48	269	3.05	5.06
In-service	313	7.34	6.55	269	9.46	9.83
Other job activities	313	11.63	17.04	269	10.79	17.32
Miles	319	713.40	879.60	268	575.55	765.37
Money	315	96.61	116.76	268	74.45	168.28
Work happiness!	326	4.65!	1.46	280	4.58	1.40
Job – away	292	2.33 #	1.03	187	2.24	.96
Nights and weekends	292	2.59 #	1.14	187	2.57	1.06
Maintain balance	289	2.94 #	1.10	187	3.03	1.03
Job flexibility	289	2.78 #	1.17	189	2.87	1.12
Job –family finances	292	3.41 #	1.05	186	3.46	1.20

! scale is: 1 = Very unhappy; 2 = Quite unhappy; 3 = Somewhat unhappy; 4 = Happy; 5 = Somewhat happy; 6 = Quite happy; 7 = Very happy

# scale is: 1 = Strongly agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly disagree

### *Discussion for Research Question 2*

The second research question asked “Are differences in job characteristics and marital satisfaction evident among Extension 4-H agents based on age, gender, marital status and presence of children in the home?”

#### *Marital Status*

Compared to agents who were currently in relationships, agents who were no longer in relationships (separated or divorced) tended to believe their supervisors and administrators controlled more of their time [ $t(485) = 2.47, p < .01, d = .37$ ], but that was the only work-related variable showing significance. Their scores on the LWMAT were significantly different, as the respondents who were no longer in relationships scored significantly lower on the LWMAT [ $t(499) = -11.20, p < .01, d = 1.68$ ] than did the agents who were currently in relationships.

These findings suggest agents' work patterns and time did not significantly differ due to marital status. The agents not in relationships appeared to fill more time with work-related tasks, but the times were not significantly more than those agents who were in relationships. The fact that significant differences existed based on the LWMAT global score indicated the past relationships were in distress, but the job should probably not be blamed entirely for the dissolution of the relationship. Indeed, other variables were identified in the responses (religious attendance and educational levels) that could have contributed to the dissolution of the relationship.

## *Gender*

Group means comparisons also indicated significant differences between male and female respondents existed in four work-related variables. Female agents tended to have a higher percentage 4-H assignment [ $t(265.63) = -4.88, p < .01, d = .48$ ], they had served for a shorter period of time as a 4-H agent [ $t(275.27) = 2.94, p < .01, d = .30$ ], they drove fewer miles for their work [ $t(475) = 3.32, p < .01, d = .33$ ], and they believed less strongly the job created family financial stress [ $t(478) = -5.20, p < .01, d = .44$ ]. These findings seemed to support Roehling and Moen's (2003) assertions that females may often reduce their work-time to care for their families, and even though the male and female agents did not significantly differ in total hours worked per week, weekends worked per month, or the time spent at district and state events, means for the female agents were lower on all three variables, so it appeared the female agents were trying to balance work and family responsibilities through holding weekends for family or depending on leaders to transport and chaperone youth at district and state events. It should be noted the groups did not significantly differ on work happiness, indicating agents of both sexes appeared to be satisfied in their jobs.

It should also be noted the agents did not significantly differ on the LWMAT score based on gender.

### *Children*

Next, the consideration of the presence of children, the number of children, and groupings based on the number of children were reviewed. Based on correlations, no significant correlations were found with the number of children, using an alpha level of .01.

Agents were then divided into groups to ascertain if differences existed among agents based on the presence of resident children. Group comparisons were made with groups based on the presence or absence of children in the home, with no significant relationships being found.

### *Age*

In relation to age, several considerations were made, as age was viewed as a continuous variable, in 10-year interval groups, by generations, and by membership in the Sandwich Generation which included agents between the ages of 35 and 54.

As a continuous variable, age was found to have a significant correlation to six variables, including the LWMAT score and four work-related variables. The positive correlations were found for the variables of time spent doing other job-related activities, the number of years served as a 4-H agent and the number of years in the present position, while a negative correlation was found for the variables percent 4-H assignment. Other variables showing positive correlations included years married, and resident children under 6. Taken alone, these would indicate that as an agent grows older, more time after-hours will be spent on other job-related duties, and the percent 4-H assignment should decrease. Though these correlations reveal possible conclusions for general

relationships, they seem to relate more to experience with the organization, and don't sufficiently answer the question being asked of differences in work characteristics and marital satisfaction related to age.

To further develop an understanding of the current situation in the Southern Region, age was considered by classifying the respondents according to 10-year incremental age groups and into generational groups. When analyzed by the interval categories, group differences were seen on the LWMAT, as agents in the 60-69 age group scored the highest, while agents in the 20-29 year old group scored higher than the 30-39 age group, and the 50-59 age group, and the agents in the 40-49 age group scoring the lowest. When the agents were grouped into the generational groups of Pioneer, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y, group differences were also found, as the Pioneer group scored the highest, followed by the Generation Y group, the Baby Boomers, and the Generation X group. Both analyses pointed to differences found through the analysis of correlations for age and the study variables, but did not give a clear enough answer to the research question.

When the younger agents, Sandwich Generation agents, and the older agents were distinguished into three separate groups, an ANOVA elicited significant differences between the groups. The Levene's test [ $F(2,471) = 2.23, p = .11$ ] indicated homogeneity of variance, and the ANOVA [ $F(2,471) = 4.98, p < .01$ ] indicated differences existed. Scheffe 'post-hoc tests revealed the younger agents scored significantly higher on the LWMAT ( $M = 112.42, SD = 31.69, n = 140$ ) than the Sandwich Generation agents ( $M = 101.67, SD = 34.88, n = 280$ ). They also scored higher than the older agents ( $M = 108.50, SD = 33.17, n = 54$ ), though the difference was not significant.

These findings led to the consideration of agents based on classification into groups by membership in the Sandwich Generation of agents who are between 35 and 54 years of age. Compared to other agents, means for the agents in the Sandwich Generation were higher than the other agents in many of the work-related variables, and were reported in Table 10. Though the levels of the work-related variables did not show statistical significance when considered individually, the additive effect of the increased hours, responsibilities in other program areas, overnights from home and perceptions of tension due to their job was higher, and did show a significant difference between the sandwiched agents and the other agents [ $t(604) = 2.670, p < .01, d = .22$ ]. If the office time was not long enough for tasks to be completed, work could follow the agent home, so that even though the agent was home, the family time was still being replaced by clientele and work demands.

This classification of agents into the “Sandwich Generation” seemed to best explain the trend of marital distress increasing through the middle age years, then decreasing as the agent moved into the fifties and sixties age group. Members of the Sandwich Generation balance work, raise children and care for aging parents. Although this study did not ask about care given to extended family, the agents in this group appeared to match the rest of the description of the members of the Sandwich Generation by virtue of their having a high level of marital distress and a high level of work stress, which was comprised of extra time spent on the job (including after-hours work), extra responsibilities in addition to 4-H, overnight stays, and tension created at home due to the job requirements.

### *Research Question 3*

The third research question asked “What coping mechanisms have been employed by Extension 4-H agents to ameliorate negative work-family interactions?” Keene and Prokos (2005) asserted the work-family balancing act was largely left to individuals to find coping mechanisms, and in this study, the agents were asked to share what strategies they had employed to balance their responsibilities. The framework used to interpret the responses included the strategies that Fox (2000) had identified in her work with 4-H volunteers, plus the strategy of escapism (leaving town or being unavailable to clientele when at home). As a result, the strategies that were used for grouping and interpretation were social support, adaptability/cohesion, changing expectations, planning, priority setting, delegation, and escape. Out of 379 responses to an open-ended question, priority setting (26.65%), planning (26.39%) and social support (26.12%), were the strategies most often reported as being utilized, followed by adaptation (16.89%), changing expectations (10.82%), escape (10.55%) and delegation (3.96% each). These responses indicated the quality of Extension employees, as many were trying to apply the same techniques to balance their personal life issues as they utilized to organize their work time and efforts. The comment most often stated was “learn to say no,” which was often followed by a comment that it was easier to say that to someone else than to do it yourself!

Many agents commented how difficult and consuming the work often became, but families and family-related events seemed to be a general priority among the agents. Numerous agents noted they had no suggestions to offer, as they had not found one themselves. Even some single agents commented they had not been able to cultivate

many friendships outside the circles of co-workers and clientele, and did not know how agents with families coped.

Of the agents who did identify strategies, many (27.18%) of the agents listed several strategies, not just one. For example, many stressed the need to plan and put everything (family and work events) on one calendar, but they followed with the comment that the family activities needed to be considered as top priority so they would not be scheduled over or cancelled for a work event.

One strategy of particular interest to agents was developing and maintaining a support structure that included family, co-workers, friends, and even clientele. Communicating with these groups and depending on their understanding and support were important considerations. Many expressed the blessings of having understanding and supportive families, and the agents often commented they included their families in 4-H when possible. Others commented their work at home seemed to never be completed due to their work schedule and they often depended on children and spouses to help with the household duties. Even though family members tried to understand, sometimes that was not enough, as several agents pointed to their work and work schedules as contributing factors in their separations and divorces. Agents often penned comments from children that said they wondered why their parent (the agent) seemed to care more for other children than they did their own, and some children even grew up despising 4-H and the Extension system for keeping their parent away from home. Agents also identified a double-edged sword of having their children in the 4-H program, for though they had time with the child while at the event, they still had to care for and supervise other youth. In addition, if the agent's child happened to excel or win a

competition, accusations of favoritism often followed. The benefits seemed to prevail, however, and many agents commented on the wealth of experiences they and their families received from participating in 4-H as a family.

Agents also placed emphasis on building a strong support structure of other Extension members. The main group consisted of members of the county staff where the agent worked, as these co-workers covered for each other when emergencies arose, they held each other accountable for keeping families informed and holding family events up as important, and they helped each other plan and conduct events. The other members of this group were the people in supervisory or administrative roles, as importance was placed on communicating needs and schedules with supervisors, especially when conflicts with planned events occurred. Supervisors who tried to be understanding received praise from agents, but comments also indicated some supervisors talked about the importance of families and family time, but their actions did not always communicate the same priorities to agents when concerns or conflicts arose.

The other members in this group were the 4-H leaders and members themselves. The agents stressed the importance of communicating to clientele that the families of Extension employees were as important as the families with whom the agents worked, a fact which many of their leaders respected. Most expressed the benefits of planning and priority setting with family activities, and they used this as a backdrop to tell clientele when something was scheduled. It was also commented that clientele should never see the calendar, as they would try to fill any open time slots!

Flex-time and other scheduling adaptations were given by many agents as coping strategies. Flexible scheduling is often discussed among Extension staff, as it is utilized

by many companies to either control budget spending by reducing overtime, extend office hours, or to benefit employees (possibly to increase productivity). Even though several states apparently offer flexible scheduling or flex-time to Extension employees (based on agent responses), the average work week for the study respondents was still 52.84 hours per week. Numerous agents commented how beneficial the practice had been for them, and some even wondered if 4-day work weeks should be considered. The other adaptation given by many agents was working at or from home. Many commented they took reports and paperwork home so they would not spend so much time at the office and could spend it with their family or complete the work without clientele interruptions. Others did the same with e-mails and phone calls that were not handled at the office. These agents apparently saw benefits from taking work home, but others disagreed. These agents preferred to stay at work until they finished all of the work for the day, taking no work home so their time could be completely devoted to their families.

Akin to that thought was the strategy of escapism, and it could be argued that it is actually an adaptation. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) discussed it as a separate potential psychological resource, but stated it had no apparent coping function. Fox included time off as a “Healthy Living Management Strategy” (Fox, 2000), but did not include the strategy in her study. Based on the responses in this study, escapism was employed by agents in three ways – being unavailable to clientele while at work so work could be completed, being unavailable while at home so time at home would be family time, and by being unavailable by leaving town on days off. Many agents said technology such as cell phones, internet and other instant communication methods made them available all day, every day, so escaping was the only way they could protect the family time.

However, many hastened to say they knew the work would be awaiting them when they got to the office the next day, and work would be piled up if they left town for several days. So, Pearlin and Schooler may have been correct to suggest escapism offered no real coping function apart from taking time to relax and maintain personal health.

The comments on changing expectation were probably the most poignant, as several agents simply expressed thoughts such as “deal with it” or “get used to it” or other such sentiments that declared the time and conflict issues were to be expected, and had to be accepted. These were occasionally accompanied by the sentiment of being glad there was still a job with support monies! Others pointed accusing fingers at agents who were from another generation, claiming they were not willing to put in the time and effort it took to get the job done and satisfy the clientele. Still others praised spouses and children for reducing home demands by assuming the responsibilities for chores at home, even to the point of quitting work for a while to stay home and raise young children.

Finally, delegation was mentioned as a strategy, at times referring to co-workers, often to support staff, and then to volunteer leaders and 4-H members. Extension agents are trained to recruit and equip 4-H leaders to conduct a 4-H program, most often at the club level. However, when the reports are generated and a performance review is held, the agents feel they are the ones under the microscope, being held to account for the 4-H program. So to make that experience pleasurable, they are often compelled to do the work themselves rather than delegating to volunteers, except in the case of emergencies. It was interesting to read the comments of agents who had delegated programming responsibilities to volunteers, and had successful programs to report. This strategy, though reported the least, may hold potential for many agents.

### *Discussion for Research Question 3*

The third research question asked “What coping mechanisms have been employed by Extension 4-H agents to ameliorate negative work-family interactions?” In their responses to the open-ended questions, many agents stated their jobs kept them away from home too much, and nights/weekend work created tensions at home. Many employees commented on the changing stress patterns they found as their own children grew older, noting the family pressures were difficult when the children were young, but eased as the children grew. With time, the agents found other pressures, such as caring for aging parents, becoming real pressures for them to handle. But for the most part, the agents felt their jobs allowed them flexibility and they were able to maintain a good balance of family and work responsibilities.

The agents were very resourceful, employing numerous strategies in their quest to balance work and family responsibilities. Seven different strategies were used in some manner to avert pressures or deal with issues before they became problems. It also appeared agents were using techniques related to building a support base, planning and prioritizing as strategies to find work/family balance, and these are strategies they also employ in planning and carrying out their 4-H programs. Additionally, agents appeared to see the strategies not as stand-alone strategies, but they found synergism in combining strategies as needed. This meant agents would plan and then prioritize; they felt comfortable delegating to members of their social support system; they involved their families in 4-H and benefited from the interface of social support, planning and prioritizing; they adapted to their roles and, with renewed enthusiasm, communicated

positively about their work to their supporters; they learned to escape from work so they could give undivided attention to their families; and they established their priorities first, then changed their expectations to match their priorities. Many also expressed the role of faith in God as they established their priorities in both their family and their work.

It appeared many of the agents in this study had worked through issues related to balancing work and family, and found both successes and failures. It also appeared that most agents are committed to continue to work through them to find success in both realms. So, in answer to the third research question, agents believed that job-related issues often conflicted with family issues, and the result was often stress or distress at home so that the relationships were injured or possibly destroyed. Seven strategies were considered for grouping responses, and many agents employed one or more strategies to help them and their families identify the issues and find ways to relieve the stress. Of the seven strategies considered in the study, priority setting was most often utilized, followed by planning, social support, adaptation, changing expectations, escape and delegation.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The early years of the Cooperative Extension system saw many young unmarried women employed as Home Demonstration agents. At that time, female agents were not allowed to be married (Chenault, 2006), as the long hours in travel and teaching would result in the employees spending too much time away from home. Those requirements for female employees are not enforced today, but as agents in this study reported, the time requirements of their jobs still seem to be overwhelming for Extension agents with 4-H responsibilities, despite improved transportation, technological advances, changing subject matter and clientele. Beavers (1985) discovered boundary disturbances between the family and the outside environment could be a source of conflict for couples, for if too much time and energy was invested in the outside world, the boundary would be functionally destroyed, crippling the couple as the outside forces pulled the couple apart. Chesley (2005) found evidence to suggest the use of technology, particularly cell phones, blurred the work-family border to an even greater extent, and often led to increased marital distress and decreased family satisfaction. Sorcinelli and Near (1989) discovered university faculty often have unclear lines separating their jobs from the rest of their lives, taking vacations around work-related conferences and events, spending large amounts of time working at home, and socializing with other academicians. Although

the overlap could be beneficial in several aspects, they found it could make the job become all-consuming.

In much the same way, Extension employees can find the boundaries blurred in their relationships, as clientele demands can seem suffocating, and technology makes agents accessible all day, every day. An Extension Committee on Organizational Policy report (ECOP, 1994) identified a “workaholic culture” among Extension agents, and balancing work and family needs was seen as the number one human resource issue facing the Cooperative Extension System at that time. As a result, a vision statement was also adopted that stated Extension would be a career where “There is opportunity for balance between work and family life.”

Fetsch and Kennington (1997) reported that while research had been conducted on stress and burnout among employees in many fields, research with Cooperative Extension faculty was spotty. They found research related to the impact of employment on marital quality and family dynamics had been conducted in only seven states, with results showing statistically significant relationships. So to establish the current situation among agents with 4-H responsibilities in the Southern Region, and to assess if the agents truly had opportunities for balance between work and life, the following research questions were addressed:

Question 1: What are the relationships between job characteristics and marital satisfaction for Extension 4-H agents in the Southern Region?

Question 2: Are differences in job characteristics and marital satisfaction evident among Extension 4-H agents based on age, gender, marital status or the presence of children in the home?

Question 3: What coping mechanisms have been employed by Extension 4-H agents to ameliorate negative work-family interactions?

These questions guided the research process to allow job characteristics that negatively affected marital satisfaction to be identified and quantified for 4-H agents, differences to be distinguished among agents, and coping mechanisms to be elicited. The agents who encountered marital distress at the highest levels were members of the Sandwich Generation. This group is labeled “Sandwich” because its members find their careers sandwiched between raising children and caring for aging parents, and this group comprised over half (54.8%) of the respondents in this study. Though the number of agents in distressed relationships was just over a third (36.7%) of the total agents who were in relationships, almost two-thirds of those agents (61.8%) were in the Sandwich Generation. This classification seemed to best explain the identities of the agents who were experiencing marital distress.

#### *Research Question 1*

The first research question asked “What are the relationships between job characteristics and marital satisfaction for Extension 4-H agents in the Southern Region?” The process first required identifying differences that were observable between agents who were never married and those who were or had been in relationships. The agents who were or had been in relationships were older, leading to the conclusion the agents’ age and length of service were the primary influences for the variables that showed statistical significance. When combined with agent comments, it appeared many of these agents had adopted a self-protection approach to either felt or unfelt pressure from their

families, as they worked slightly fewer hours and fewer weeknights per week than the agents who had never married.

One part of the study instrument was a test for marital distress known as the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT), which gives participants a global score over a variety of relational criteria to assess if the relationship is in distress, and also makes use of a cutpoint to divide respondents into categories of “distressed” or “non-distressed” (Locke & Wallace, 1959). When the agents in relationships were considered as a study group, it appeared that, on average, the group members were not in marital distress, based on their LWMAT scores. Pearson correlations showed three work-related variables had significant negative correlations to marital distress score (years as a 4-H agent, agent educational level and the belief the agent could maintain a good job/family balance) and three showed significant positive correlations (work happiness, the belief that night and weekend work created tension, and the belief that the job created financial pressure for the family). A regression model showed that factors other than job characteristics may more strongly influence marital distress, as the model contained three perceptions about work, but also included agent attributes (length of service and educational attainment) and mate attributes (educational attainment and religious attendance).

The LWMAT score may also be considered categorically, as the cutpoint of 100 is often used to separate scores into groups, as scores below 100 identify relationships as “distressed” relationships, and scores of 100 or more identify relationships that are “non-distressed” relationships. When the study group was considered with this classification, the two groups showed significant differences in three work-related

variables (the belief that nights and weekend work creates tension, a belief the agent could maintain a good job/family balance, and the belief that the job created financial pressure for the family), signifying that the agents in distressed relationships felt their jobs had negative impacts on their relationships. Because the other work-related variables were not significantly different between the two groups, it appeared the job characteristics were not influencing marital distress as much as marital distress was influencing the perceptions of job characteristics. In support of the conclusion, other factors that have been shown to play roles in the dissolution of relationships showed significance between the two groups, suggesting that the work may not have been the sole factor in the marital distress experienced by the agents.

To further distinguish and define the issue, the agents were compared based on the past or present status of their relationship, with significant differences being seen among seven variables. Only one of the variables related to the job, and it was a perception of the control their supervisors exerted. Since the other variables were agent and mate attributes, it appeared influences other than the job could have led to the break-up of the past relationships.

### *Research Question 2*

#### *Marital Status*

The second research question asked “Are differences in job characteristics and marital satisfaction evident among Extension 4-H agents based on age, gender, marital status and presence of children in the home?” Compared to agents who were currently in relationships, agents who were no longer in relationships scored significantly lower on

the LWMAT, but only one work-related variable showed significance. Significant differences were found in six non-work variables, indicating the job characteristics were not entirely responsible for the dissolution of the past relationships, nor could they be identified as the main culprits for causing marital distress.

### *Gender*

Group means comparisons indicated significant differences between male and female respondents existed in four work-related variables; (a) female agents tended to have a higher percentage 4-H assignment; (b) female agents had served as a 4-H agent for a shorter period of time; (c) female agents drove fewer miles for their jobs, and (d) female agents believed less strongly that the job created family financial stress. Agent comments suggested delegation was a coping strategy many female agents employed, and many of the female agents also noted they limited the number of weekends they scheduled for 4-H events. It appeared many of the female agents were regulating their work-time to allow for family time, as other studies had suggested.

### *Children*

Considerations of the presence of children, the number of children, and groupings based on the number of children were examined. Based on Pearson correlations with an alpha level of .01, no significant correlations were found between the variables in the study and the number of resident children when age was considered as a continuous variable. When the agents were divided into groups based on the presence of resident children, no significant differences were found based on the presence of resident children.

## *Age*

In relation to age, several considerations were made, as age was viewed as a continuous variable, in 10-year interval groups, by generations, and by membership in the Sandwich Generation, which included agents between the ages of 35 and 54.

As a continuous variable, significant correlations were found for six variables, including the LWMAT score and four work-related variables. These seemed to indicate that as the age of the agent increased, marital distress increased, more time after-hours was spent on other job-related duties, and the percent 4-H assignment decreased.

Consideration was given to classifying agents according to incremental age groups or into generational groups. Age analyses for group differences on the LWMAT global score were apparent when the agents were grouped by 10-year intervals, as the LWMAT score decreased from the agents in their twenties and thirties to the agents in their forties, then increased through the agents in their fifties and sixties. Visual differences also revealed a similar trend when the agents were considered by generations, as the LWMAT score decreased from the Generation Y group to the Generation X group, then increased through the Baby Boomer group until it peaked with the Pioneer group.

When the agents were considered by the description of the Sandwich Generation, differences were found between them and the other agents. The LWMAT scores were significantly lower for the sandwiched agents when compared to the other agents.

Though the levels of the work-related variables reported in Table 10 did not show statistical significance when considered individually, the additive effect of the increased hours, responsibilities in other program areas, overnights from home and perceptions of tension due to their job showed significant difference, as the sandwiched agents' scores

were significantly higher. This age classification seemed to best capture the trend of marital distress increasing through the middle age years, then decreasing as the agent moved through their fifties and into their sixties, and it described employees who were at the stage in life where their careers were sandwiched between raising children and caring for aging parents.

### *Research Question 3*

The third research question asked “What coping mechanisms have been employed by Extension 4-H agents to ameliorate negative work-family interactions?” Many agents commented how difficult and consuming the work often became, but families and family-related events seemed to be a general priority among the agents. Though several of the agents had no suggestions, and some just said “good luck,” many of the agents appeared to be actively applying coping strategies to their lives. The most commonly reported strategy was priority setting, followed closely by planning and social support, then adaptation, changing expectations, escape and delegation. These responses indicated Extension employees were using tools that have served Extension agents well in their careers for many years, and found these same techniques could help balance their personal life issues as well as they could organize their work time and efforts. The comment most often stated was “learn to say no,” which was often followed by a comment that it was easier to say that to someone else than to do it yourself!

Of the agents who did identify strategies, many of the agents listed several strategies, finding synergism in using several together. For example, many stressed the need to plan and put everything (family and work events) on one calendar, but they

followed with the comment that the family activities needed to be considered as top priority so they would not be scheduled over or cancelled for a work event. Other strategies that were linked were planning and prioritizing; delegating to members of their social support system; social support, planning and prioritizing with their own family; adaptation and social support; escape and social support; prioritizing and changing expectations to match their priorities.

Many agents expressed the blessings of having understanding and supportive families and said they often depended on children and spouses to help with the household duties. Horror stories also swirled around agents whose spouses had pointed to the agent's work and work schedules as contributing factors in their separations and divorces, and whose children wondered why their parent (the agent) seemed to care more for other children than they did their own.

Many agents commented they included their families in 4-H when possible, but they also the inherent problems of having to split time at 4-H events between their child and other youth they were supervising, plus dealing with accusations and snide remarks if the agent's child happened to excel or win a competition. The benefits seemed to prevail, however, and many agents commented on the wealth of experiences they and their families received from participating in 4-H as a family.

The support structure varied between agents, but included their family members, other Extension co-workers, the county staff where the agent worked, friends, 4-H leaders and members, and their supervisors.

Flex-time and other scheduling adaptations were given by many agents as coping strategies. Flexible scheduling is often discussed among Extension staff, as it is utilized

by many companies, and based on agent responses, even some state Extension systems. Despite its availability, however, the average work week for the study respondents was still 52.84 hours per week. Taking work home received mixed comments, as some agents benefited from the extra times at home, while others preferred to stay at work until they finished all of the work for the day so their time could totally be family time.

Akin to that thought was the strategy of escapism, as it was employed by agents in three ways – being unavailable to clientele while at work so work could be completed, being unavailable while at home so time could be devoted to family, and by being unavailable by leaving town on days off. Many agents said technology such as cell phones, internet and other instant communication methods made them available all day, every day, so escaping was the only way they could protect the family time. However, many hastened to say they knew the work would be awaiting them when they got to the office the next day, and work would be piled up if they left town for several days. The comments on changing expectation were probably the most poignant, as several agents simply sentiments that the time and conflict issues were to be expected, and were often accompanied by a comment of being glad they had a job. Some agents pointed accusing fingers at agents from other generations, claiming they were not willing to put in the time and effort it took to get the job done. Still others praised spouses and children for reducing home demands by assuming the responsibilities for chores at home, even to the point of quitting work for a while to stay home and raise young children.

Finally, delegation was mentioned as a strategy, at times referring to co-workers, often to support staff, and then to volunteer leaders and 4-H members. Since Extension agents are trained to recruit and equip 4-H leaders to conduct a 4-H program, it was

surprising agents did not use this strategy more. However, the agents felt they were going to be evaluated, so they needed to do the work.

In their comments, many agents stated that their jobs kept them away from home too much, and nights/weekend work created tensions at home. Many also commented on the changing stress patterns that they found as their own children grew older, noting the family pressures were difficult when the children were young, but eased as the children grew. With time, the agents found other pressures, such as caring for aging parents, becoming real pressures for them to handle. But for the most part, the agents felt their jobs allowed them flexibility and they were able to maintain a good balance of family and work responsibilities.

The agents proved to be resourceful, employing numerous strategies in their quest to balance work and family responsibilities. It also appeared agents used many of the same strategies and techniques with their family lives as they employed with their work, and found they were strategies that worked in both arenas. Many also expressed the role of faith in God in both establishing priorities and approaching their work expectations with faith.

It appeared many of the agents in this study had worked through issues related to balancing work and family, and found both successes and failures. It also appeared that most agents were committed to continue to work through the issues to find success in both realms. So in answer to the third research question, agents believed that job-related issues often conflicted with family issues, and the result was often distress at home so that the relationships were injured or possibly destroyed. Many agents employed one or more strategies to help them and their families identify the issues and find ways to relieve

the stress, with familiar tools - prioritizing, planning, and building a strong social support system, as the main strategies utilized.

These will help 4-H agents understand how other agents have adjusted and adapted to work-family spillover, allowing mentors and staff development specialists to work with 4-H agents in the development and implementation of practices to handle the stresses they face. It will also help administrators understand the stresses under which 4-H agents work, opening dialogues that will lead to stronger families and a stronger Extension Service.

The stories of children growing up to despise 4-H and the Extension system are haunting, as are the stories of spouses who have left because agent's weren't home enough, or did not have any energy, enthusiasm, affection or love left to give when they got home. Several agents described the turnover rate among 4-H agents as high in their state, even to the point of agents with more than just a couple of years of work were considered to be experienced agents, even "older" agents. The average length of service for agents in this study was 10.21 years ( $SD = 9.00$ ), with the median being 7.50 years, and the mode at 2.00 years. This could reflect that younger agents participate in on-line surveys more than older agents, or it could indicate a high turnover rate for Extension agents within the first ten years of service. The latter conclusion would be in line with Purcell's findings in Georgia (2003) of a 41% turnover rate among Extension agents in the first 5 years of employment.

## Conclusions

Large amounts of time and money are invested in new employees within the Extension system, as is true with most companies. Despite these efforts, the turnover rate is still high for the first ten years, as new employees become disillusioned with the work, find the time commitment extreme, find a job that offers more money or better benefits, or decide to pursue other priorities. It was expected in this study to find this group also had the highest level of marital distress, but another group of agents appeared to experience marital distress at a higher percentage and at a greater level. This group was the Sandwich Generation.

Members of the Sandwich Generation are identified by having their career sandwiched between raising children and caring for aging parents. This sandwich effect means they have tension on one side from their family at home, tension on the other side from their parents, and tension in the middle from their jobs. It often seems there is no way to escape having tension in their lives, and the agents must find a way to deal with the resultant pressures to find balance in handling the pressures and responsibilities. They often have difficulty finding the precise source of the tension, for it seems to surround them.

Additionally for Extension employees, every week is filled with programs, phone calls, club meetings, presentations, field days, contests, trainings, e-mails, and other activities that seem to fill every minute of every day. As a result, it often seems as though the job never gets done, and it goes home with the agent. As expected, the agents in the study had jobs that were very similar, despite being from different states, and the

agents reported 50 hours a week or more constituted a normal work week, regardless of their marital status. The week typically included several nights of work, possibly including the weekend, and it might involve an overnight stay away from home. As a result, finding statistically significant correlations between individual job characteristics and marital distress was difficult, as all agents seemed to experience similar time demands and claimed similar personal ownership of their schedules.

The agent's marital status, however, did bring several differences to light, as the perceptions of the effects those job characteristics had on the family showed statistical significance with negative effects, and agents in past relationships also pointed blame at supervisors for exerting undue pressure on the agent's work schedule. But as a whole, the actual job characteristics that were examined in the study did not exhibit statistically significant correlations individually with marital distress.

In addition to being evaluated based on marital status, agents were also grouped according to gender, the number of children at home, race, and age. The female agents in this study had a higher percentage 4-H assignment, worked fewer hours per week, worked fewer weekends per month, and spent less time after hours at district and state events than the male agents. Based on comments made by the agents, the female agents may have been balancing their work and family responsibilities by holding weekends open for family time, as many stated they limited the number of weekends they worked.

One disturbing situation was seen in the regional study. African American agents tended to exhibit a higher level of marital distress than other agents, a finding that supported the work of Broman (2001). There were no mean differences on the work-related variables that were statistically significant, but significant differences were

measured on four perception variables, as these agents perceived their jobs kept them away from their families and created tension within the home more than the other agents. This is a situation that should probably be investigated at a deeper level with some qualitative research that might elicit answers this study did not uncover.

Age was the area this study seemed to uncover as a major factor in marital distress among agents. Understanding that less than a third of the agents in this study were experiencing marital stress, it was interesting age and marital distress were significantly correlated, but with a negative correlation. Age was first considered as a continuous variable, and correlations were found with six work related variables. However, these correlations did not sufficiently answer the questions being asked, as the variables that were identified could have roots in other variables.

When agents were considered by age groups, differences were found between the age groups, but statistical significance was not found for many of the variables. What did emerge was a picture of how the age of the agent related to the work-related variables, and showed that some variables decreased as the age of the agents increased, while other variables would increase as the age of the agents changed. Agents in their forties appeared to be serving in more of a program management than a program building role, as they tended to report the highest number of overnight stays per month, after-hours time allotted to communicating with 4-Hers, after-hours time allotted to district, state and national events, and the most out-of-pocket money spent for work purposes. However, they also reported the lowest number of 4-H clubs, the lowest amount of time after-hours spent at county events, and the least amount of after-hours time allotted to in-service training. Their county programs appeared to have slowed in new growth, but they

showed quality over quantity in that youth were apparently attending district, state and national events. When agents in their fifties were added into the consideration, it was found this group of agents had the highest percentage of agents working in multiple program areas, and they reported the highest amount of time after-hours completing reports, the lowest amount of control over their programs, and the lowest level of work happiness.

The description of members of the Sandwich Generation includes individuals who are experiencing a time bomb with their career being sandwiched between raising children on one side and caring for aging parents on the other side, typically thought of as individuals between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-four. The detonator of this bomb for Extension agents is that these pressures outside of work are met with more pressure when the agent begins the work day. Pressures from leaders and members to meet their needs are often compounded by constant interruptions as the agent tries to prepare for programs, or even while trying to meet somebody else's needs. In addition, if agent comments identifying "older" or "experienced" agents are true, the agents who would be tapped as mentors for new agents would come from this age group. Thus, another organizational need would be added to the agent's already full platter that now includes raising children, tending to their clientele's needs, maintaining office hours, presenting programs, completing reports, attending to organizations needs, and caring for aging parents.

Based on the findings and the agent comments, agents are searching for answers, and are willing to try a variety of strategies or tips until they find something that works for them. There seems to be a sense that younger agents are getting trained to do their

jobs, but as a whole, the agents do not feel equipped to handle the stresses that come from outside their work and add to their work stress. Many are trying by using tools they know, such as prioritizing, planning and building a resource base of social support, but the solution seems elusive.

This group of agents who are sandwiched will continue to grow as Americans live longer, and this group comprises a major block of agents with 4-H responsibilities in the Southern Region. Most employees will move through this stage in life during their career, and it appears Extension would benefit from preparing its employees for the stresses that they will encounter. Ironically, agents within our system present programs for clientele related to some of the issues our own agents are facing. So, in addition to equipping younger agents to be successful in their careers and updating agents through subject-matter training, consideration should be given to preparing agents to handle life, just as we prepare our own clientele.

### Recommendations

Keene and Prokos (2005) very candidly stated that it is the responsibility of the individual to find ways to cope with the family-work balance. With that as the backdrop, there are two types of recommendations that should be considered: first, personal responsibility; and second, organizational responsibility.

### *Personal Actions*

The responses of the agents to the question of what they found that worked for them focused on practices with which agents were familiar, and consisted of tools they used when they worked with their clientele. Those comments and suggestions are

offered, along with recommendations from literature, and are presented as ten recommendations for individuals and ten recommendations for the organization.

1. Identify personal stressors. Previous research with 4-H agents found 23 stressors that agents dealt with in their work. As identified in this study, agents experienced many of the same stressors across the Southern Region, but agents do not respond to the stressors in the same way. Therefore, a large laundry-list of work-related stressors that are significantly related to marital distress for all agents cannot be produced. The findings appear to show the impacts are based on an individual's perceptions of how significantly the stress affects their relationships. Therefore, rather than adopt someone else's list of stressors, agents need to identify the stressors that bring them relational distress. By identifying those stressors, a personal action plan can be developed.

2. Identifying the stressors also allows identifying the inter-role conflict that can be expected. For example, the 4-H calendar is filled with contests that are district, area, state, and national level contests, and the dates are often set months in advance. Based on experiences and registration in project areas, agents can predict which events they will attend with youth or leaders, at which events they will have a work assignment, and which ones will require an overnight stay. Knowing these events may cause conflicts with the family calendar, they can be used to build a family calendar to avoid scheduling conflicts. Numerous agents commented how this helped in communicating plans to the family, and making arrangements for family or household responsibilities to get done.

3. Consider family involvement in 4-H. Some agents commented that they dealt with the inherent inter-role conflict 4-H brings to agents by involving their families in 4-H, with their children as participants and their spouses as volunteers. For them, it meant time

with family, the family grew to understand the agent's job, and the experiences they shared together were memories they would cherish. Describing it, one agent wrote that a common question at home was, "What are we doing 4-H this weekend?"

However, other agents discussed the negative aspects of involvement, as an agent's child was only one of many youth for whom the agent was responsible at events, and the agent either endured criticisms of favoritism by giving their child too much attention, or accusations of favoritism from their own child if they spent too much time with the other youth. In addition, if the agent's child happened to excel or possibly win, accusations of cheating or favoritism were directed at the agent.

4. Develop an attitude of empowerment, or self-reliance. If an agent chooses to let others dictate what is on the calendar, there will be plenty of people that will join in that effort. From responses, many agents said they struggled with the job filling their days, commanding their time and pushing the agents to the point of burn-out until they determined to push back. What they found that helped them push back included:

a. Put family first (some also said, "Put God first, then family."), before the job.

That does not mean to neglect work and responsibilities to the organization or clientele, but the perspective of prioritizing helps put the rest of the day in focus.

b. Put family activities and work activities on the same calendar.

c. Learn to say "No." The attitude of empowerment is a strong foundation on which to stand and from which to work. According to the comments, Extension agents stated that they would readily tell someone "No." if a work-related event was on the calendar, but seemed to feel guilty if the conflict was family-related. Empowerment allows agents to place family activities on the calendar with the same importance as

work-related activities, then protect the time that is scheduled, whether the activity is work-related or family-focused.

5. Make time for personal care. Several agents described discussions with their doctors, who warned them about the effects stress was having on their health. Others told of how they were forced to rest due to health reasons because they failed to heed their doctor's advice. The thoughts that were raised about staying healthy focused on eating right, exercising, and getting plenty of rest. The agents admitted it was often difficult due to travel and time demands, but making time for personal care means taking time for rest, exercise and proper health care.

In addition to physical health, don't neglect financial health, especially employees who are the Sandwich Generation. Taking time to periodically review finances, even meeting with a financial planner when needed, will help couples prepare for when they are paying for children to attend college, and are also considering health care for parents. Both are expensive, and if they occur at the same time, the results can be devastating.

6. Recognize personal coping strategies. Unhealthy habits and behaviors that are used to deal with stress may put a patch over the stress, but not actually deal with or alleviate the stress. Some of the behaviors can also lead to other problems such as hypertension, addictions, displaced anger or burnout.

7. Maintain the family support structure. This differs from involving the family in 4-H and putting the family first, by focusing on the important aspects of keeping the relationships strong within the marriage and with the children.

Agents mentioned blocking off time for family as the major way they built the family support base. Scheduling family events on the family calendar helped keep the

priority of the family in focus, but agents also mentioned date nights and family weekends as things they intentionally scheduled to build and maintain the family support structure. These comments were often accompanied by escapism, as agents told how cell phones made them accessible all day, every day, so they would not take calls from clientele during family time, but would return them at a later time. In that way, the family received undivided quality time.

Another aspect of the family structure involved spouses sharing career goals with each other. Many agents told how they made the decision to delay having children because they or their spouse had career goals that included moving, furthering one's education or a change in responsibilities. It was suggested by the agents that these discussions need to be held frequently, as goals can change across the life process due to a myriad of influences and other decisions.

8. Agents should share family and career goals with their supervisor. In addition to sharing and planning with a spouse, it was also suggested that time should be taken to talk with the agent's supervisor or administrator. Those individuals can be an agent's best advocate when support is needed, and they can provide insights to help analyze situations and desires. Administrators within Extension also struggle with work and family issues, and may have insight to share from personal experience. Fortunately, several agents told they had talked with their immediate supervisors, and found them to be understanding and supportive of the agent's efforts to maintain both career and family goals. However, organizational goals may not always allow work assignments to be skipped or agents to miss an event. The discussions with the supervisor can help at times,

but obligations that are a part of the job must be completed for the sake of the organization and the sake of the clientele.

9. Agents need to educate themselves on managing time, managing stress, strengthening marriages, and caring for aging parents.

Stephens and Gray (2004) identified eighteen signs of overload, and warned that if someone experiences more than three of the signs, changes need to be made.

Numerous books, seminars and planners were suggested by agents, stating that the tools helped them understand why and how management of time affected stress, and how the management of stress created (frees up) time. Some of these books and tools came from Extension, but many were from outside sources.

The same can be said of strengthening your marriage. White (1993) identified subject matter, communications, teaching methods, coalition building, using new technologies and evaluating program areas as areas that should be included in in-service training. Based on comments, agents also wanted to see Extension's commitment to families through emphases on how to make marriages work. Numerous sources for materials are available, and some were mentioned, including resources within the Extension system, such as the National Extension Marriage and Relationship Education Network ([www.nermen.org](http://www.nermen.org)).

The final area for education was dealing with aging parents. Hargrave (2005) described care-giving as a job very few people are trained to do, and individuals are usually thrown into the role without a master craftsman being there to train them. Along with the absence of coaching during the on-the-job training, comes an absence of appreciation from the one for whom care is being given. For many Extension agents, this

often means providing care from a distance, as agents are often separated from parents by many miles. Understanding the concepts and processes of aging will help agents prepare for becoming a parent to their parents.

10. Delegate. Within the 4-H program, volunteers are recruited and trained for a variety of tasks. Often, these individuals bring a set of skills and talents along, looking for opportunities to use them. Many agents commented how much the volunteers were able to do, once the agent gave them the opportunity. Agents often delegate to support staff, and sometimes to co-workers, but a strong volunteer base often goes over-looked. Master volunteers and middle-management volunteers may need to be considered (or re-considered) by agents, but even our current club leaders are capable of shouldering more responsibilities with the county program, and possibly with district and state events.

### *Organizational Recommendations*

Fetsch and Kennington (1997) suggested that the overall cost of stress to the national economy was as high as \$150 billion a year due to absenteeism, diminished productivity and spiraling medical costs. In addition, 14% of occupational disease worker's compensation claims at that time were related to stress.

Within the Extension organization, efforts have been made to identify and address many of the issues agents face. From comments and suggestions in the literature, ten organizational recommendations are made.

1. Counseling. Supervisors are charged with managing employees, and as such, should be devoting time to hearing from agents what goals and aspirations they have about career and family, and what they need to achieve those goals. Guidance can be offered at

times when agents can listen and process the information, which is preferable to a reprimanding phone call after an event which the agent missed. As the manager, a working knowledge of resources is a beneficial tool that can be used to provide agents with help when they need it. Several agents also commented new work was constantly being brought in, but older programs were never removed. It seemed agents often felt pressure to continue doing what they had been doing, plus add new programs and time to an already full schedule. Guidance on planning and priority setting would be helpful.

2. Education. The Extension system has a number of internal resources that can equip agents to identify and manage time and stress, and other resources that focus on strengthening family relationships, whether it is a marriage or a caregiving relationship. Previous studies with Extension employees and comments from this study indicated agents would attend these types of trainings, and would benefit from the hints conveyed. So, from orientation forward, agent education needs to be implemented to equip agents to manage time and stress issues they will face. In addition to Extension specialists and agents, university faculty may also prove to be a valuable resource for educating employees within the larger land-grant system.

3. Make use of existing technologies. It appears most people prefer face-to-face visits and trainings, but the push for time and reduced travel dollars are forcing individuals to consider other types of training and other types of degree programs. As distance educational technologies improve, and they become more readily available, their uses need to be considered. Internet-based trainings have become common for many fields, including Extension, and have opened even another avenue for in-service training.

Cooperative agreements across states (and even across the nation) are providing avenues

of training for agents on a variety of topics. Marriage, family, time management, stress management, and care-giving, can and should be added to the topics.

4. Consider the economic situations of the employees. In current literature, employers that are considered “family-friendly” offer employees family benefits, including dependent-care options and family leave options. None of the agents mentioned pre-tax benefits, even though previous studies indicated it was readily available.

Numerous comments were made, however, relative to how little agents are paid. This is not a new topic for consideration, but should be a topic that is periodically revisited in light of rising costs-of-living, equity and other issues that impact family finances, particularly travel costs and reimbursement. Few agents identified additional work (moonlighting) as an option for additional income.

Agents in the study averaged spending over \$87 per month, out-of-pocket, and twenty-one percent thought the job created difficulty with their family finances. The amount that was reimbursed for travel expenses often took up to six weeks to receive, according to several agents, which meant credit cards were accruing finance charges before the agent had the money to pay the bill for traveling. Additionally, this may be an area where technology can help reduce costs, as meetings can be planned with interactive technology and cost less for both the employee and the employer.

5. Flexible scheduling and work arrangements. The issue of flexible scheduling and scheduling of the work week has received much attention in literature and current press. Numerous studies have shown that flexible scheduling increases employee morale and employee retention. According to agent comments, some states have a formal policy, while others have an informal policy, or no flexible scheduling at all. Agents that had

access to flexible scheduling (typically an hour off for an hour worked over 40 hours per week) commented on how useful it was, and they did not report any abuses of the system. There were even comments that some consideration had been given to 4-day work weeks of 10 hours per day, particularly in the summer when children were out of school. However, there were also comments that other agents objected to the policy, and put peer pressure on agents not to use the flexible scheduling.

For the most part, agents were very complimentary regarding their system's leave policies, including how their supervisor would try to accommodate their needs for leave. Many, however, regretted having to use personal leave to spend time with a sick child, or even time at home during school holidays.

6. Utilize volunteers at district /state events. Several agents discussed the benefits of delegating responsibilities to volunteers at all levels. Many district and state events already use volunteers as organizers, advisors, rules committees and judges. A continuation of these practices is encouraged.

7. Coordinate scheduled events. Several agents commented on the overnight stays that were a part of their job. Many expected the travel and worked their schedules around the events, but comments on events being back-to-back, and events requiring two or more overnight stays following each other by just a few days brought stress to families, especially those with small children. Events sometimes must be rescheduled, but it seemed master calendars were sometimes circumvented when events were scheduled.

8. Watch for over-utilized agents. The literature in the personnel sector has reported stories from individuals who had never married, but were at the point of making up a family so they would get fewer work assignments. The single employees in these articles

reported stories of fellow employees leaving to attend school plays, and bosses leaving early for family events, forcing other employees to finish the work that had been started before the office could be closed for the day. Comments were also made that co-workers were omitted from an after-hours work list because they had children. Fortunately, those comments did not come from Extension agents, but could they? Agent work lists, especially at the district and state levels need to be reviewed to ensure no agents are excessively taken away from their jobs while others never get selected for tasks, for whatever reason. Trainings may need to be held to equip other agents to work events so the workload is spread equally.

9. Recognition for work efforts. Employees have long complained about the lack of recognition. While it is true employees have jobs to do and they should be expected to perform their duties, recognition bolsters morale and encourages agents to continue to “do what it takes to get the job done.” Several comments were made from agents who wondered if they were noticed when they did something right, or only when they did something wrong?

10. Be available during critical times. Life is not always easy, nor is it always fun. People get sick and family members die. Schedules do not always allow administrators to visit with employees after the birth of a new baby, or even after the death of a spouse. But cards can be mailed, phone calls can be made, notes can be texted, and e-mails can be sent. When the agent knows someone cares, they have a tendency to exceed expectations to please their supervisor. Many agents praised their immediate supervisors for being intentional about talking to the agent about their family, and for being available when the

agent's world was rocked by grief. Extension employees often talk about being a part of a family, and some agents commented they found that to be true.

### Future Research

Research on stress and the effects of stress within the confines of the Extension system have increased over the past decade. However, based on agent comments from this study, agents have not been made aware of findings or strategies to help balance work-family conflicting responsibilities, possibly due to agent turnover and the influx of new agents. Based on the literature, having a control group for new research would shed new light, could improve eliciting and understanding the issues and their relationships, and would improve the generalizability of the findings. Also, while the return rate was considered good for internet-based surveys, other methods of administering instruments (such as group settings) may increase the completion rate.

Based on the findings from this study, several areas need additional research.

1. The most effective time in an agent's career for time and stress management training. A study could compare the effects of providing these trainings during new agent orientation, providing them during follow-up orientation offerings, and providing time and stress management training during agent training offered later in the agent's career.
2. Some studies have been general for all agents, generally in one state. This study focused only on agents with 4-H responsibilities across the Southern Region. Future research could focus on agricultural agents, family and consumer agents, multi-county or area agents, specialists, or administrators to clarify issues that are population-specific.

3. This study, along with other studies, focused on the employees and their input. Further research could include spouses, either in a comparative study with agents, or in a study with spouses by agent's program area.

4. Further research could span periods of time of a month, a year, or multiples of years. Diary studies are being used in other fields to chart responses daily over several weeks to determine differences, and could find value with agents for a short-term study. Phone studies monthly to track agents over a year would give a different picture, as would a longitudinal study over several years that would capture life events and career events.

5. Future research could help define the issues related to race/ethnicity, as differences were seen in marital satisfaction. Larger samples would help develop a better understanding of relationships within the Extension community, how the work-family balance impacts these employees, and how different cultures handle the stresses.

6. Future qualitative research would prove invaluable in securing insight not captured in agent responses to two open-ended questions. This could be done only with agents, or with agents and spouses to give a dyadic picture of the issues.

7. Future research is needed in three areas of concern that were raised in this study – the effects of extreme hours, extreme numbers of nights and weekends worked, and the effects of extreme numbers of overnight stays on both the agent and the family. Twenty-six percent of the respondents reported average work weeks of 60 hours or more, with three percent averaging 70 hours or more per week. Six percent reported they worked four or more weeknights each week, with two percent reporting they worked all five weeknights each week. Three percent said they worked four or five weekends per month. Assuming there is overlap in these reports, these numbers could point to a small

percentage of agents who worked almost every day over the past twelve months. In addition, 11 percent of the respondents reported averaging ten or more overnight stays per month.

These are extremes that might be expected for a short time, such as around livestock or horse shows, but not over a year. However, if budgets continue to be reduced and staff numbers continue to decrease, will agents find themselves working 60 or more hours or more each week? If so, research will be needed to identify what kind of agent will be needed (personality, skills, training, etc.) to work these extreme hours, and what effects those hours would have on health, burnout, and stress with spouses and children.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVALS



September 29, 2008

Joseph Rhea  
1726 Woodside Circle  
Tupelo, MS 38801

RE: IRB Study #08-172: Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities as an Extension 4-H Agent  
(pilot phase)

Dear Mr. Rhea:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 9/29/2008 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

**Please note that the MSU IRB is in the process of seeking accreditation for our human subjects protection program. As a result of these efforts, you will likely notice many changes in the IRB's policies and procedures in the coming months. These changes will be posted online at <http://www.orc.msstate.edu/human/aahrpp.php>.**

Please refer to your IRB number (#08-172) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at [cwilliams@research.msstate.edu](mailto:cwilliams@research.msstate.edu) or call 662-325-5220.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Williams".

Christine Williams  
IRB Compliance Administrator

cc: Dr. Walter Taylor

**Office for Regulatory Compliance**

P. O. Box 6223 • 70 Morgan Avenue • Mailstop 9563 • Mississippi State, MS 39762 • (662) 325-3294 • FAX (662) 325-8776

Figure A1 Mississippi State University Letter of Approval for Pilot Study



**Campus Institutional Review Board**  
University of Missouri-Columbia

**Research Involving Collaborative Institutions and Multi-Center Sites**  
Policy Number 2876.33

Reviewed by: Michele Reznicek, Campus IRB Compliance Officer  
Reviewed by: Janelle Greening, Quality Assurance Associate  
Reviewed by: Campus IRB Membership

Effective Date: December 12, 2007

Board Review:

Signed   
IRB Chair

Date December 12, 2007

Administrative Review:

Signed   
Associate Vice-Chancellor for Research

Date December 12, 2007

Figure A2 University of Missouri IRB Letter of Approval for Pilot Study



February 19, 2009

Joseph Rhea  
1726 Woodside Circle  
Tupelo, MS 38801

RE: IRB Study #08-172: Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities as an Extension 4-H Agent

Dear Mr. Rhea:

Thank you for your recent submission of the protocol modification for phase 2 of your study. In reviewing the modification, it was determined that your study must be approved via expedited review in accordance with 45 CFR 46.110 #7, rather than as previously approved via administrative review. The approved modification form is attached.

You are granted permission to continue your study as approved effective immediately. Please note the study will now require annual continuing review. The study is next subject to continuing review on or before 2/15/2010, unless closed before that date.

If additional time is needed to complete the project, you will need to submit a Continuing Review Request form 30 days prior to the date of expiration. Any modifications made to this project must be submitted for approval prior to implementation. Forms for both Continuing Review and Modifications are located on our website at <http://www.orc.msstate.edu>.

**The MSU IRB is in the process of seeking accreditation for our human subjects protection program. As a result of these efforts, you will likely notice many changes in the IRB's policies and procedures in the coming months. These changes will be posted online at <http://www.orc.msstate.edu/human/aahrpp.php>.**

Please refer to your IRB study number (#08-172) when contacting our office regarding this project.

We wish you the very best of luck in your research and look forward to working with you again. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at [jmiller@research.msstate.edu](mailto:jmiller@research.msstate.edu) or call 325-2238.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan E. Miller".

Jonathan E. Miller, CIP  
IRB Officer and Assistant Director

cc: Dr. Walter Taylor

**Office for Regulatory Compliance**

P. O. Box 6223 • 70 Morgan Avenue • Mailstop 9563 • Mississippi State, MS 39762 • (662) 325-3294 • FAX (662) 325-8776

Figure A3 Mississippi State University IRB Letter of Approval for Regional Study



AUBURN  
UNIVERSITY

Office of Human Subjects Research  
307 Sanford Hall  
Auburn University, AL 36849

Telephone: 334-844-5966  
Fax: 334-844-4391  
hsubjec@auburn.edu

February 19, 2009

MEMORANDUM TO: Joseph Richard Rhea, Jr.  
Mississippi State University Agricultural Extension

PROTOCOL TITLE: "Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities as an Extension 4-H Agent"

IRB AUTHORIZATION NO: 09-022 EP 0902

APPROVAL DATE: February 7, 2009  
EXPIRATION DATE: February 6, 2010

The above referenced protocol was approved by IRB Expedited procedure under 45 CFR 46.110 (Category #7):

"Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

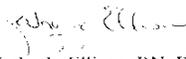
You should report to the IRB any proposed changes in the protocol or procedures and any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others. Please reference the above authorization number in any future correspondence regarding this project.

If you will be unable to file a Final Report on your project before February 6, 2010, you must submit a request for an extension of approval to the IRB no later than January 21, 2010. If your IRB authorization expires and/or you have not received written notice that a request for an extension has been approved prior to February 6, 2010, you must suspend the project immediately and contact the Office of Human Subjects Research for assistance.

A Final Report will be required to close your IRB project file. You are reminded that you must use the stamped, IRB-approved information letter when you consent your participants.

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Human Subjects Research at 844-5966.

Sincerely,

  
Kathy Jo Ellison, RN, DSN, CIP  
Chair of the Institutional Review Board  
for the Use of Human Subjects in Research

cc: Dr. Gary B. Jackson  
Dr. Walter N. Taylor

Figure A4 Auburn IRB Letter of Approval for Regional Study

APPENDIX B  
DIRECTOR PERMISSION REQUEST FOR PILOT STUDY

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Mississippi State University in Agricultural Extension Education. As part of the dissertation requirements for my degree, I am researching how 4-H agents in the Southern Region balance work and family responsibilities. The concept grew out of my twenty-five year Extension career, which included service as a county 4-H Agent, a County Director, an area agricultural agent and as a District Director. I was fortunate to work with and supervise some excellent career 4-H agents, but due to the turnover rate for 4-H agents in our system, I watched many leave for other employment.

The main objective of my dissertation is to determine the current work-family climate for 4-H agents in the Southern Region. The secondary objective is to provide a forum for experienced agents to share solutions for having both quality programs and quality families. The research proposal has been reviewed and approved by my dissertation committee and Dr. Walter N. Taylor, Major Professor and Director of Dissertation.

I am requesting your permission to ask your county-based and area-based 4-H agents to participate in this research effort. I have developed a survey that should require 15-20 minutes of their time to complete. The survey is internet-based, has been reviewed by a committee of Mississippi State University faculty and is currently being pilot-tested in another state. The study will comply with Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board guidelines to ensure confidentiality of both the respondents and the responses. As soon as the pilot-study is completed, I will send you a copy of the survey instrument for your review.

With your permission, I will contact your state 4-H Program Leader to begin the process of identifying and contacting 4-H agents. The results from the survey will be sent to you when they have been compiled and analyzed.

I will call you after the first of the year to see if you have questions that I may answer unless I have already heard from you via return e-mail. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dickie Rhea

[erhea5@msn.com](mailto:erhea5@msn.com) or 662-790-5986

APPENDIX C  
PARTICIPANT E-MAIL NOTIFICATION FOR PILOT STUDY

Dear Extension Colleague:

I began my career with the Mississippi State University Extension Service in 1981 as a 4-H Agent in south Mississippi. I found 4-H to be one of the most rewarding components of Extension work, but also one of the most demanding. 4-H Agents invest countless hours and energy into molding and shaping youth into the leaders of tomorrow, while at the same time growing and managing a family of their own. The pressures and time constraints become part of an agent's life, often turning into a balancing act.

I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Mississippi State University in Agricultural Information Science. As part of the dissertation requirements for my degree, I am researching how 4-H Agents in the Southern Region balance work and family responsibilities. The main objective of my dissertation is to assess the current work-family climate for agents, with the secondary objective being to provide a forum for agents who have "weathered the storms" to benefit younger agents by sharing their solutions for having both quality programs and quality families. This research effort has been approved by my doctoral committee and Dr. Walter Taylor, my major professor and dissertation director ([wntaylor@ais.msstate.edu](mailto:wntaylor@ais.msstate.edu)).

I am requesting your participation in this research effort, and am asking you to complete a survey that should require 20-30 minutes of your time to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or discontinue your participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The survey is internet-based, and may be accessed by clicking on the link provided ([link](#)). Individual responses and results will be kept confidential. The instrument and process have been reviewed by a committee of Mississippi State University faculty and comply with Institutional Review Board guidelines. Please note since this study is being conducted through a state entity, records are subject to disclosure if required by law. For additional information regarding your rights as a research subject, please feel free to contact the MSU Regulatory Compliance Office at 662-325-5220.

The survey contains questions that pertain to your 4-H program, your work responsibilities, your marriage, and your family responsibilities. Please answer them as accurately as possible, based on your perception of your situation. The questions pertaining to your 4-H program and work are not intended to require the retrieval of work reports, but please be as accurate as possible. You may also skip any question that you would prefer not to answer. Participant e-mails will not be linked to responses, so all answers are confidential, and only the summarized results being published.

Thank you for the good work you do for and with the youth in your area, and thank you for participating in this research effort. Together, we can truly "make the best better" within Extension and within the Southern Region.

Please do NOT respond to this automated e-mail. If you would prefer not to participate in this survey and do not want to receive any more e-mails concerning this

survey, please proceed to the first item of the survey and select the option: “I do not want to participate.”

If you have any questions about the study or the survey, please e-mail me at [erhea5@msn.com](mailto:erhea5@msn.com), call me at 662-620-7520.

Sincerely,

Dickie Rhea, 1726 Woodside Circle, Tupelo, MS 38801

APPENDIX D  
DIRECTOR PERMISSION REQUEST FOR REGIONAL STUDY

Tupelo MS 38801  
December 9, 2008

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Mississippi State University in Agricultural Extension Education. As part of the dissertation requirements for my degree, I am researching how 4-H agents in the Southern Region balance work and family responsibilities. The concept grew out of my twenty-five year Extension career, which included service as a county 4-H Agent, a County Director, an area agricultural agent and as a District Director. I was fortunate to work with and supervise some excellent career 4-H agents, but due to the turnover rate for 4-H agents in our system, I watched many leave for other employment.

The main objective of my dissertation is to determine the current work-family climate for 4-H agents in the Southern Region. The secondary objective is to provide a forum for experienced agents to share solutions for having both quality programs and quality families. The research proposal has been reviewed and approved by my dissertation committee and Dr. Walter N. Taylor, Major Professor and Director of Dissertation.

I am requesting your permission to ask your county-based and area-based 4-H agents to participate in this research effort. I have developed a survey that should require 15-20 minutes of their time to complete. The survey is internet-based, has been reviewed by a committee of Mississippi State University faculty and is currently being pilot-tested in another state. The study will comply with Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board guidelines to ensure confidentiality of both the respondents and the responses. As soon as the pilot-study is completed, I will send you a copy of the survey instrument for your review.

With your permission, I will contact your state 4-H Program Leader to begin the process of identifying and contacting 4-H agents. The results from the survey will be sent to you when they have been compiled and analyzed.

I will call you after the first of the year to see if you have questions that I may answer unless I have already heard from you via return e-mail. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dickie Rhea

[erhea5@msn.com](mailto:erhea5@msn.com) or 662-790-5986

APPENDIX E  
EXTENSION SYSTEMS IN THE SOUTHERN REGION

	1862 Institutions	1890 Institutions
Alabama	University of Alabama	Alabama A & M University
		Tuskegee University
Arkansas	University of Arkansas	University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
Florida	University of Florida	Florida A & M University
Georgia	University of Georgia	Fort Valley State University
Kentucky	University of Kentucky	Kentucky State University
Louisiana	Louisiana State University	Southern University
Mississippi	Mississippi State University	Alcorn State University
North Carolina	University of North Carolina	North Carolina A & T State University
Oklahoma	University of Oklahoma	Langston University
South Carolina	Clemson University	South Carolina State University
Tennessee	University of Tennessee	Tennessee State University
Texas	Texas A&M University	Prairie View A & M University
Virginia	Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University	Virginia State University

APPENDIX F

4-H PROGRAM LEADER REQUEST FOR REGIONAL STUDY

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Mississippi State University in Agricultural Extension Education. As part of the dissertation requirements for my degree, I am researching how 4-H agents in the Southern Region balance work and family responsibilities. The concept grew out of my twenty-five year Extension career, which included service as a county 4-H Agent, a County Director, an area agricultural agent and as a District Director.

The main objective of my dissertation is to determine the current work-family climate for 4-H agents in the Southern Region. The secondary objective is to provide a forum for experienced agents to share solutions for having both quality programs and quality families.

The study includes a survey that should require 20-30 minutes to complete. The survey is internet-based, and it has been reviewed by a committee of Mississippi State University faculty and pilot-tested in another state. The study will comply with Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board guidelines to ensure confidentiality of both the respondents and the responses.

On \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ gave me permission to proceed with the research in your state, and instructed me to contact you to identify agents for the study. My primary aim is to include full-time salaried agents who work with the 4-H program in each state in the Southern Region.

Understanding titles vary from state to state, I am attaching a list of employees that I have prepared from \_\_\_\_\_ website. The list includes employees that appear to have 4-H responsibilities and work in county or multi-county settings in \_\_\_\_\_. It also includes program associates and program assistants, in the event these employees should be included. Please advise me if they should be included, as employees who are hired to work set hours per week will probably answer the questions in the survey differently from salaried employees.

Please review the list for accuracy (4-H responsibilities, retirement, separation of employment, etc.). The list was developed in Excel, and employees may be deleted or added as needed. Please note county names are included strictly for the purposes of ensuring the inclusion of all the appropriate employees, and they will be removed prior to dissemination of the survey.

I remember February being filled with 4-H activities, so my goal is to have the survey available for agent access for a 3-week period (February 1 - February 21) to allow adequate time for completion. I will be sending the survey link to the agents via e-mail from a server at Mississippi State University, so please review the list for completeness and appropriateness of agents that are identified.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [erhea5@msn.com](mailto:erhea5@msn.com), or call me at 662-790-5986. For other questions about the study, you may also contact my MSU advisor, Dr. Walter Taylor, at [wntaylor@ais.msstate.edu](mailto:wntaylor@ais.msstate.edu).

Thanks, Dickie Rhea

APPENDIX G  
PARTICIPANT E-MAIL NOTIFICATION FOR REGIONAL STUDY

Dear Extension Colleague:

Extension agents who work with 4-H invest countless hours and energy into molding and shaping youth into the leaders of tomorrow, while at the same time growing and managing a family of their own. Balancing the pressures and time constraints become part of an agent's life. During my career with the Extension Service in Mississippi, I have experienced and watched others struggle with this balancing act.

The purposes of this survey are to assess how 4-H agents balance the responsibilities of work and family, and to compile a list of useful ideas that agents have found to help them have both quality programs and quality families. This information is being collected as part of my doctoral dissertation at Mississippi State University, and the study has received approval from your Extension Director and State 4-H Leader. These solutions will benefit agents who are searching for answers, and also help staff development personnel prepare new agents for success.

The survey should require 20-30 minutes of your time to complete, and it contains questions that pertain to your 4-H program, your work responsibilities, your marriage, and your family responsibilities. Please answer them as accurately as possible, based on your perceptions of your situation. The questions pertaining to your 4-H program and work ask for estimates and are not intended to require the retrieval of work reports, but please be as accurate as possible. You may skip any question that you would prefer not to answer, and all answers will be kept confidential, with only the summarized results being published.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or discontinue your participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The survey is internet-based, and may be accessed by clicking on the provided link when you are ready to begin. Individual responses and results will be kept confidential. The below weblink for the survey (and therefore your survey response) is linked to your e-mail address so that we can send e-mail reminders to those who have not completed (nor opted out of) the survey. This link will be removed from your response before the data is accessed by the researchers for analysis. Please note since this study is being conducted through a state entity, records are subject to disclosure if required by law. The instrument and process have been reviewed and approved by the Mississippi State Institutional Review Board, (IRB study #08-172). For additional information regarding your rights as a research subject, please feel free to contact the Mississippi State University Regulatory Compliance Office at 662-325-2238.

If you are an Auburn University participant, the Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from February 7, 2009 to February 6, 2010. Protocol #09-022 EP 0902. For additional information regarding your rights as a research subject, please feel free to contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or Institutional Review Board by phone at 334-844-5966 or e-mail at [hsubject@auburn.edu](mailto:hsubject@auburn.edu) or [IRBChair@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBChair@auburn.edu).

Thank you for the good work you do for and with the youth in your area, and thank you for participating in this research effort. Together, we can truly “make the best better.”

If you have any questions about the study or the survey, please e-mail me (Dickie Rhea) at [erhea5@msn.com](mailto:erhea5@msn.com), or call me at 662-620-7520. For technical support related to the survey, you may contact the Social Science research Center at 662-352-9726 or [webmaster@ssrc.msstate.edu](mailto:webmaster@ssrc.msstate.edu).

If you agree to participate in the study and are ready to begin the survey, please follow this link to the survey

[http://sru.ssrc.msstate.edu/sw/wchost.asp?st=ext\\_p&id=59&pw=WRNW8I](http://sru.ssrc.msstate.edu/sw/wchost.asp?st=ext_p&id=59&pw=WRNW8I).

If you would prefer not to participate in the survey and do not want to receive any more e-mails concerning this survey, please proceed to the first item in the survey and select the option: “I do not want to participate.” The survey will be accessible until March 31, 2009.

Sincerely,

Dickie Rhea

APPENDIX H  
STUDY INSTRUMENT

Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities as an Extension 4-H Agent  
A Doctoral Research Study by Dickie Rhea  
Mississippi State University

Dear Extension Colleague:

Extension agents who work with 4-H invest countless hours and energy into molding and shaping youth into the leaders of tomorrow, while at the same time growing and managing a family of their own. Balancing the pressures and time constraints become part of an agent's life. During my career with the Extension Service in Mississippi, I have experienced and watched others struggle with this balancing act.

The purposes of this survey are to assess how 4-H agents balance the responsibilities of work and family, and to compile a list of useful ideas that agents have found to help them have both quality programs and quality families. This information is being collected as part of my doctoral dissertation at Mississippi State University, and the study has received approval from your Extension Director and State 4-H Leader. These solutions will benefit agents who are searching for answers, and also help staff development personnel prepare new agents for success.

The survey should require 20-30 minutes of your time to complete, and it contains questions that pertain to your 4-H program, your work responsibilities, your marriage, and your family responsibilities. Please answer them as accurately as possible, based on your perceptions of your situation. The questions pertaining to your 4-H program and work ask for estimates and are not intended to require the retrieval of work reports, but please be as accurate as possible. You may skip any question that you would prefer not to answer, and all answers will be kept confidential, with only the summarized results being published.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or discontinue your participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The survey is internet-based, and may be accessed by clicking on the provided link when you are ready to begin. Individual responses and results will be kept confidential, and responses will not be linked to e-mail addresses. The below weblink for the survey (and therefore your survey response) is linked to your e-mail address so that we can send e-mail reminders to those who have not completed (nor opted out of) the survey. This link will be removed from your response before the data is accessed by the researchers for analysis. The instrument and process have been reviewed and approved by the Mississippi State Institutional Review Board, (IRB study #08-172). For additional information regarding your rights as a research subject, please feel free to contact the Mississippi State University Regulatory Compliance Office at 662-325-2238.

If you are an Auburn University participant, the Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from February 7, 2009 to February 6, 2010. Protocol #09-022 EP 0902. For additional information regarding your rights as a

research subject, please feel free to contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or Institutional Review Board by phone at 334-844-5966 or e-mail at [hsubject@auburn.edu](mailto:hsubject@auburn.edu) or [IRBChair@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBChair@auburn.edu).

Thank you for the good work you do for and with the youth in your area, and thank you for participating in this research effort. Together, we can truly “make the best better.”

If you have any questions about the study or the survey, please e-mail me (Dickie Rhea) at [erhea5@msn.com](mailto:erhea5@msn.com) or my advisor (Dr. Walter Taylor) at [wntaylor@ais.msstate.edu](mailto:wntaylor@ais.msstate.edu). For technical support related to the survey, you may contact the Social Science research Center at 662-352-9726 or [webmaster@ssrc.msstate.edu](mailto:webmaster@ssrc.msstate.edu).

If you agree to participate in the study and are ready to begin the survey, please follow this link to the survey :

[URL to be included]

If you would feel uncomfortable answering questions about your work or home life, or you would prefer not to participate in the survey and do not want to receive any more e-mails concerning this survey, please proceed to the first item in the survey and select the option: “I do not want to participate.” The survey will be accessible until March 31, 2009.

Sincerely,  
Dickie Rhea

**Section 1 - Questions about your job**

- 1) Do you currently work with the 4-H program and wish to participate in this survey?  
(Yes; No; I work with 4-H, but I wish to opt out of this survey.)
  
- 2) What best describes your current work assignment? (please note “agent” is not capitalized to allow for state differences in titles between agent-educator-specialist titles)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Single-county 4-H agent, associate agent or assistant agent  
\_\_\_\_\_ Multi-county 4-H agent, associate agent or assistant agent  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4-H program assistant/associate/technician/support  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4-H/County Extension director or coordinator  
(may also include an adult Ag or FCS job assignment)  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4-H/Adult Agriculture agent  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4-H/Family and Consumer science agent  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4-H/Community Resource Development agent
  
- 3) In what state (or states) are you assigned to work? (list of states provided)
  
- 4) How many counties are you assigned to work? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 5) What percent of your work is assigned to 4-H responsibilities? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 6) For how many active 4-H clubs are you directly responsible? \_\_\_\_\_  
How many leaders and members are involved in those clubs?  
Leaders \_\_\_\_\_  
Members \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 7) How many college undergraduate and graduate **courses** have you completed in child development, youth development, youth education or extension education? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 8) How many years have you served as a 4-H agent? \_\_\_\_\_  
How many years have you been in your present position? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 9) In the past 12 month, what percentage of your WORK SCHEDULE was controlled by the following people:  
\_\_\_\_\_ Percent of WORK SCHEDULE in your control.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Percent of WORK SCHEDULE decided for you by your supervisor/administrator.  
(Include contest work assignments, trainings, meetings, evaluations, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Percent of WORK SCHEDULE controlled by your 4-H members and leaders.  
(include phone calls, electronic communications, county events and meetings scheduled by leaders and members, and district or state events where your 4-H members and leaders were participating)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Percent of WORK SCHEDULE controlled by someone not listed above.  
What is this person’s relationship to you? \_\_\_\_\_

(Your answers must total 100 %.)



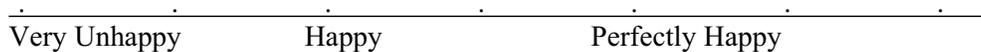
**(Section for agents who are married, separated or single with a live-in partner)**

Please answer the following questions related to your current relationship.

Note:

The following set of questions is taken from “Short marital-adjustment and prediction tests: Their reliability and validity,” by H. J. Locke and K. M. Wallace, 1959, *Marriage and Family Living*, 21(3), p. 252.

16) Circle the dot on the scale that best describes the degree of happiness, everything considered, of your present marriage? The middle point “happy” represents the degree of happiness that most people get from marriage, and the scale gradually ranges on one side to those few who are very unhappy in marriage and, on the other, to those few who experience extreme joy or felicity in marriage.



State the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your mate on the following items. Please check **each** column.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Agree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
17. Handling Family Finances						
18. Matters of Recreation						
19. Demonstration of Affection						
20. Friends						
21. Sex Relations						
22. Conventionality (right, good or proper conduct)						
23. Philosophy of Life						
24. Ways of Dealing with In-Laws						

**For each of the following items, check one response:**

- 25) When disagreements arise, they usually result in:
- (a) husband giving in \_\_\_
  - (b) wife giving in \_\_\_
  - (c) agreement by mutual give and take \_\_\_

- 26) Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?  
 (a) all of them \_\_\_  
 (b) some of them \_\_\_  
 (c) very few of them \_\_\_  
 (d) none of them \_\_\_
- 27) In leisure time do you generally prefer:  
 (a) to be "on the go" \_\_\_  
 (b) to stay at home \_\_\_
- 28) Does your mate generally prefer:  
 (a) to be "on the go" \_\_\_  
 (b) to stay at home \_\_\_
- 29) Do you ever wish you had not married?  
 (a) frequently \_\_\_  
 (b) occasionally \_\_\_  
 (c) rarely \_\_\_  
 (d) never \_\_\_
- 30) If you had your life to live over again, do you think you would:  
 (a) marry the same person \_\_\_  
 (b) marry a different person \_\_\_  
 (c) not marry at all \_\_\_
- 31) Do you ever confide in your mate?  
 (a) almost never \_\_\_  
 (b) rarely \_\_\_  
 (c) in most things \_\_\_  
 (d) in everything \_\_\_

### Section 3 – Background Information

- 32) What is your gender?  
 Female \_\_\_\_\_  
 Male \_\_\_\_\_
- 33) What was your age on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_
- 34) What was your mate's age on his/her last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_
- 35) What is your ethnic background?  
 Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_  
 African-American \_\_\_\_\_  
 Asian-American \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hispanic-American \_\_\_\_\_  
 Native American \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

36) What is your mate's ethnic background?

- Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_
- African-American \_\_\_\_\_
- Asian-American \_\_\_\_\_
- Hispanic-American \_\_\_\_\_
- Native American \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

37) Is this your first marriage?

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_

38) How many years have you been married to your current spouse? \_\_\_\_\_

39) What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school \_\_\_\_\_
- High School \_\_\_\_\_
- Associates \_\_\_\_\_
- Bachelors \_\_\_\_\_
- Masters \_\_\_\_\_
- Doctorate \_\_\_\_\_

40) What is the highest level of education your mate has completed?

- Less than high school \_\_\_\_\_
- High School \_\_\_\_\_
- Associates \_\_\_\_\_
- Bachelors \_\_\_\_\_
- Masters \_\_\_\_\_
- Doctorate \_\_\_\_\_

41) How many hours per week is your mate currently employed? \_\_\_\_\_

42) Whose salary is higher?

- Yours \_\_\_\_\_
- Your mate's \_\_\_\_\_

43) Do you currently have any of YOUR children living (residing) with you? (yes; no; no comment)

(Do not include step-children – those born to your mate and someone other than yourself.)

If so, how many of each age group live (reside) with you?

- a) Under 6 years of age \_\_\_\_\_
- b) 6 to 12 years of age \_\_\_\_\_
- c) 13 to 18 years of age \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Over 18 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

44) Do you currently have any step children living (residing) with you? (yes; No; Unsure; No Comment)  
 (Include children born to your mate and someone other than yourself.)

If so, how many of each age group live (reside) with you?

- a) Under 6 years of age \_\_\_\_\_
- b) 6 to 12 years of age \_\_\_\_\_
- c) 13 to 18 years of age \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Over 18 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

45) What is your religious affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

46) Approximately how often do you attend religious services or functions?

- Never \_\_\_\_\_
- Less than once per month \_\_\_\_\_
- Once or twice per month \_\_\_\_\_
- Once per week \_\_\_\_\_
- More than once per week \_\_\_\_\_

47) What is your mate's religious affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

48) Approximately how often does your mate attend religious services or functions?

- Never \_\_\_\_\_
- Less than once per month \_\_\_\_\_
- Once or twice per month \_\_\_\_\_
- Once per week \_\_\_\_\_
- More than once per week \_\_\_\_\_

49) Please check the answer that best describes your opinion for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure	No Comment
My job keeps me away from my family too much.							
My work at night and on the weekends creates tension within my family.							
I am able to maintain a good balance between job and family time.							
My job allows me the flexibility to balance my job and family time.							
My job creates financial difficulties for my family.							

#### **Section 4 – Helpful ideas and suggestions**

50) Based on your experience as an Extension employee, please share ideas that you have found to be helpful for managing the time and responsibilities both work and family require.

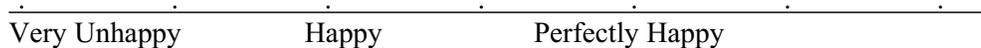
51) Based on your experience as an Extension employee, please share your thoughts on how your employment has impacted your marriage or family.

**(Section for agents who are divorced or widowed)**

Please answer the following questions related to your past relationship.

Note: The following set of questions is taken from “Short marital-adjustment and prediction tests: Their reliability and validity,” by H. J. Locke and K. M. Wallace, 1959, *Marriage and Family Living*, 21(3), p. 252.

16) Circle the dot on the scale that best describes the degree of happiness, everything considered, of your past marriage? The middle point “happy” represents the degree of happiness that most people get from marriage, and the scale gradually ranges on one side to those few who are very unhappy in marriage and, on the other, to those few who experience extreme joy or felicity in marriage.



State the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your mate on the following items. Please check **each** column.

	Always Agreed	Almost Always Agreed	Occasionally Agreed	Frequently Disagreed	Almost Always Disagreed	Always Disagreed
17. Handling Family Finances						
18. Matters of Recreation						
19. Demonstration of Affection						
20. Friends						
21. Sex Relations						
22. Conventionality (right, good or proper conduct)						
23. Philosophy of Life						
24. Ways of Dealing with In-Laws						

**For each of the following items, check one response:**

25) When disagreements arose, they usually resulted in:

- (a) husband giving in \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) wife giving in \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) agreement by mutual give and take \_\_\_\_\_

26) Did you and your mate engage in outside interests together?

- (a) all of them \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) some of them \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) very few of them \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) none of them \_\_\_\_\_

- 27) In leisure time did you generally prefer:  
 (a) to be “on the go” \_\_\_\_  
 (b) to stay at home \_\_\_\_
- 28) Did your mate generally prefer:  
 (a) to be “on the go” \_\_\_\_  
 (b) to stay at home \_\_\_\_
- 29) Did you ever wish you had not married?  
 (a) frequently \_\_\_\_  
 (b) occasionally \_\_\_\_  
 (c) rarely \_\_\_\_  
 (d) never \_\_\_\_
- 30) If you had your life to live over again, do you think you would:  
 (a) marry the same person \_\_\_\_  
 (b) marry a different person \_\_\_\_  
 (c) not marry at all \_\_\_\_
- 31) Did you ever confide in your mate?  
 (a) almost never \_\_\_\_  
 (b) rarely \_\_\_\_  
 (c) in most things \_\_\_\_  
 (d) in everything \_\_\_\_

**Section 3 – Background Information**

- 32) What is your gender?  
 Female \_\_\_\_  
 Male \_\_\_\_
- 33) What was your age on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_
- 34) What was your mate’s age on his/her last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_
- 35) What is your ethnic background?  
 Caucasian \_\_\_\_  
 African-American \_\_\_\_  
 Asian-American \_\_\_\_  
 Hispanic-American \_\_\_\_  
 Native American \_\_\_\_  
 Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 36) What was your mate’s ethnic background?  
 Caucasian \_\_\_\_  
 African-American \_\_\_\_  
 Asian-American \_\_\_\_  
 Hispanic-American \_\_\_\_  
 Native American \_\_\_\_  
 Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

37) Was this your first marriage?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

38) How many years had you been married to your spouse? \_\_\_\_\_

39) What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school \_\_\_\_\_

High School \_\_\_\_\_

Associates \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelors \_\_\_\_\_

Masters \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate \_\_\_\_\_

40) What is the highest level of education your mate had completed?

Less than high school \_\_\_\_\_

High School \_\_\_\_\_

Associates \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelors \_\_\_\_\_

Masters \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate \_\_\_\_\_

41) How many hours per week was your mate employed? \_\_\_\_\_

42) Whose salary was higher?

Mine \_\_\_\_\_

My mate's \_\_\_\_\_

43) When together, did you have any of YOUR children living (residing) with you? (yes; no; no comment)

(Do not include step-children – those born to your mate and someone other than yourself.)

If so, how many of each age group lived (resided) with you?

a) Under 6 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

b) 6 to 12 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

c) 13 to 18 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

d) Over 18 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

44) When together, did you have any step children living (residing) with you? (yes; No; Unsure; No Comment)

(Include children born to your mate and someone other than yourself.)

If so, how many of each age group lived (resided) with you?

a) Under 6 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

b) 6 to 12 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

c) 13 to 18 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

d) Over 18 years of age \_\_\_\_\_

45) What is your religious affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

46) Approximately how often do you attend religious services or functions?

- Never \_\_\_\_\_
- Less than once per month \_\_\_\_\_
- Once or twice per month \_\_\_\_\_
- Once per week \_\_\_\_\_
- More than once per week \_\_\_\_\_

47) What was your mate's religious affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

48) Approximately how often did your mate attend religious services or functions?

- Never \_\_\_\_\_
- Less than once per month \_\_\_\_\_
- Once or twice per month \_\_\_\_\_
- Once per week \_\_\_\_\_
- More than once per week \_\_\_\_\_

49) Please check the answer that best describes your opinion for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure	No comment
My job kept me away from my family too much.							
My work at night and on the weekends created tension within my family.							
I was able to maintain a good balance between job and family time.							
My job allowed me the flexibility to balance my job and family time.							
My job created financial difficulties for my family.							

**Section 4 – Helpful ideas and suggestions**

50) Based on your experience as an Extension employee, please share ideas that you have found to be helpful for managing the time and responsibilities both work and family require.

51) Based on your experience as an Extension employee, please share your thoughts on how your employment has impacted your marriage or family.

**(For agents who have never married)**

**Section 3 – Background Information**

16) What is your gender?

Female \_\_\_\_\_

Male \_\_\_\_\_

17) What was your age on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_

18) What is your ethnic background?

Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_

African-American \_\_\_\_\_

Asian-American \_\_\_\_\_

Hispanic-American \_\_\_\_\_

Native American \_\_\_\_\_

Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

19) What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school \_\_\_\_\_

High School \_\_\_\_\_

Associates \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelors \_\_\_\_\_

Masters \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate \_\_\_\_\_

20) What is your religious affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

21) Approximately how often do you attend religious services or functions?

Never \_\_\_\_\_

Less than once per month \_\_\_\_\_

Once or twice per month \_\_\_\_\_

Once per week \_\_\_\_\_

More than once per week \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 4 – Helpful ideas and suggestions**

22) Based on your experience as an Extension employee, please share ideas that you have found to be helpful for managing the time and responsibilities both work and family require.

23) Based on your experience as an Extension employee, please share your thoughts on how your employment has impacted your marriage or family.