



An exploration of the interface between community activism, work and family

Lisa Roberts

Supervised by: Carolyn Kagan

March 2010

An exploration of the interface between community activism, work and family

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the interface between community activism, work and family. Specifically it aimed to explore how people combine study work with community activism and family, and examine the similarities and differences between study work and paid work in terms of managing community activism, work and family. Four people in study work and two people in full-time employment who also had community activism and family commitments were interviewed about their experiences of coping with community activism, work and family. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Four major themes were identified. These included: support, work flexibility, values and volunteering flexibility. Findings suggest that the coping strategies used to manage work and family are the same used to cope with community activism regardless of whether in paid work or study. This exploratory qualitative study offers a novel account of peoples' experiences of coping with community activism, work and family. Findings are discussed in relation to the literature and suggestions for further study are provided.

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| KEY WORDS: | COMMUNITY ACTIVISM | WORK | FAMILY | COPING STRATEGIES | QUALITATIVE METHODS |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|

With more women in the workforce, more dual-earner families and more single-parent households, there has been an increase in the interest in the interplay between work and family (Lewis & Cooper, 2005). People with both work and family commitments may experience conflict between these roles due to coinciding incompatible pressures from both these domains resulting in unequal role participation (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). High participation in one role may lead to less participation in the other. This may be referred to as spillover. Googins (1991) defines spillover as positive and negative feelings, attitudes and behaviours that emerge in one domain and transfer in to another. In terms of work and family, it is dichotomised into work-family spillover (work demands affecting family) and family-work spillover (family demands affecting work) (Long Dilworth, 2004).

Greenhaus and Powell (2003) asked participants to choose between attending a work activity or parent's birthday party. The majority of their respondents (57%) chose the family activity over a work activity, showing that they are more likely to allow family responsibilities to interfere with their work life. They also suggest that the direction of interference between work and family roles and role-related behaviour may depend on simultaneous external pressures from both the work and family domain and the salience of the roles. Participants who viewed a particular role as very important were more likely to attend the activity within that same domain. However this study does not consider participants' values and it is suggested values represent what is important to us and hence are influential in most life decisions that people make including how important work is viewed in relation to other life roles (Patton, 2000).

Balancing work and family is complex which may lead to role strain (Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999). There is a need to strike a healthy balance between the two as both work and family experiences may serve as moderators of work-family fit and prevent work-family conflict (Voydanoff, 2002), for this people need to have adequate coping strategies in place. MacArthur & MacArthur (1998) define coping strategies as specific behavioural and psychological efforts that people employ to minimise the effects of stressful events.

Coping strategies may be separated in to two categories: problem-solving strategies where people actively do something to alleviate the stressful circumstances, and emotion-focused strategies which involve controlling the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful circumstances. Voydanoff (2007) extends coping strategies to include social support, which refers to positive affective experiences with relevant others, such as caring, listening and providing empathy (Shaffer et al, 2005). They have been found to be directly associated with decreased levels of work-family conflict (Frone et al, 1997). This type of support includes instrumental aid such as money and access to services, and may come from many sources including friends, relatives, neighbours, co-workers, self-help groups and human service professionals.

An extension of the issue of balancing work and family is the added domain of community activism. To date, little is known about how the work-family balance

effects community involvement, which is a key national policy (The Home Office, 2008).

Coping strategies employed by community activists to manage all their competing demands may include flexible work hours, reduced hours of paid work, and refusing overtime of paid work, doing less housework, utilisation of community services, availability of good quality childcare and friend, family and spouse support (Voydanoff, 2007). Individuals with young children are especially likely to use childcare services as a means of reducing work-family conflict (Frederiksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001). Rotondo et al (2003) suggest that individuals may have more coping strategies available to them within the family domain, than in the workplace due to people having more control within their domestic environment and less power in their employment.

Using semi-structured group interviews, Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2007) identified four work based and four family based coping strategies used to reduce conflict between work and family (see Table 1). These findings suggest that the parents who participated do have sufficient strategies to cope with work and family pressures. However due to the method of the data collection there is a risk that some parents may have given socially desirable answers and did not want to be perceived as being unable to cope due to social stigma (Bailyn, 1992).

Table 1
Coping strategies of employed parents

| Strategy | Work | Family |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Super | Insisting work done single-handedly and perfectly | Insisting all family duties done single-handedly and perfectly |
| Good enough | Lowering work performance to less-than-perfect level | Lowering performance of family duties to less-than-perfect level |
| Delegation | Managing work by delegating to others | Managing family duties by delegating some to others |
| Prioritise | Doing only work with high priority | Undertaking only family responsibilities with high priority |

Work-family balance is defined as 'satisfaction and good functioning at work and home with a minimum of role conflict' (Clark, 2001, p.349) and she argues that workplace culture will have an effect on this. Hill et al (2001) suggest that perceived job flexibility is related to improved work-family balance. Flexible working time enables employees to better integrate work and family (Felstead et al, 2002). Social support in the work place may reduce work-family conflict. This may be in the form of understanding supervisors accommodating employees' needs for flexible work schedules, being tolerant of personal calls and offering empathic support when family problems arise (Batt & Valcour, 2003).

Voydanoff's (2007) broad-based analyses suggest that work and family life are embedded in the context of communities they operate in. Work, family and community are all interrelated (Voydanoff, 2001; 2005; 2007). Community structure has an affect on the people residing there. Community resources support working families in a number of ways and have direct and indirect outcomes (Barnett & Gareis, 2008). For example, people with young children may be more able to work if their community has infant day care resources, whereas individuals who are responsible for an elderly or sick relative may need access to different community resources such as social workers and community nurses. If a community has inadequate resources this will have a negative effect on individuals in the context of work and family. For example, if a low-employment area does not have satisfactory public transport to areas with greater job opportunities, individuals who do not have access to other transport will directly suffer because of this lack of resources. Providing transportation to distant jobs is necessary to mitigate the negative impact of unavailable local employment (Wireman, 2008).

This study use's Voydanoff's (2001) integrated model of work, family and community as the theoretical framework for this study (see Figure 1). This model uses Bronfenbrenner's (1989) theory of ecological systems.

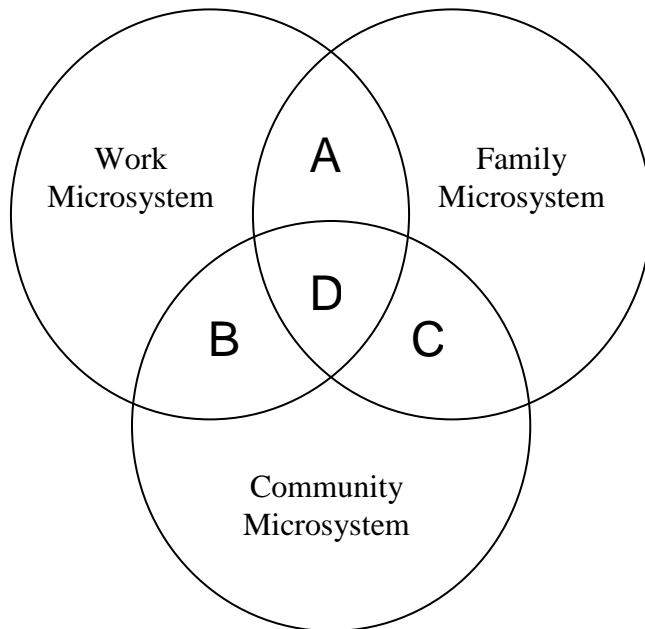


Figure 1: Integrated model of work, family and community (taken from Voydanoff, 2001).

Note: A = work-family mesosystem; B = work-community mesosystem; C = community-family mesosystem; D = work-community=community-family mesosystem

This model suggests that the contexts of work, family and community influence the demands, resources and coping strategies that are expected to impact work, family, and community role performance and quality and the well-being of individuals (Voydanoff, 2007). All aspects of community are of paramount importance in people's work and family lives (Bookman, 2004). Involvement in the community may draw on working parents' time but may add to household and family stability (Kagan, Lewis & Brennan, 2008).

Both Bookman (2004) and Voydanoff (2007) draw their analyses from U.S.A. experience. There is little known about experiences in Britain. Furthermore, the bulk of research discussed above is based on quantitative data and there is little detailed exploration of people's reported experiences.

To date, most research of the work and family domain has concentrated on dual-earner couples with children, looking at gender and life stage differences, work-family spillover, family-work spillover and the divisions of household labour and childcare. There is a distinct lack of knowledge about how this phenomenon integrates with community. Voydanoff (2001; 2005; 2007) has begun to address this by exploring the complex interconnections between the three domains. Her work is focused on the perspective of how community influences the work-family interface.

How study work is managed within the context of community activism and family is also a phenomenon missing from the literature.

In the light of the above, the aim of this study was to explore the three domains, using the perspective of how the work-family interface influences community activism. The main objective was to gain an understanding of how people who are voluntarily active in the community cope with the competing demands of work and family commitments. Specifically this study aims to:

1. Examine how people combine study work with community activism and family
2. Examine the similarities and differences between study work and paid work in terms of managing community activism and family

This research article may be submitted for publication in the journal of Community, Work and Family.

Method

Research Design

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study using a semi-structured interview design as the study explored lived experiences. Qualitative research asks questions about processes, such as 'How do people manage all of their competing roles?' (Willig, 2008) rather than looking for a causal relationship within quantitative data, which uses a positivist epistemology (Parker, 1994). Qualitative research enables investigation of meaning and experience of complex issues of participants (Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2006).

Participants

Five women and one man participated in the study. All participants were involved in volunteer work and had both family and work commitments. The participants were aged from 23 to 52 years of age. Four of the female participants were students at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and the other was a reader at MMU. The male participant was in full-time employment. Participants were given pseudonyms and numbered in interview order (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Participant pseudonyms and demographics

| | pseudonym | age (years) | place of residence (town & county/area &city) | family commitment | work commitment | average length of time spent volunteering (hrs per week) |
|----------|-----------|----------------|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | Jill | 52 | Blackley North Manchester | – Married with one adult child | Full-time student | 3 |
| 2 | David | 24 | Rusholme South Manchester | – Living with partner | Full-time employment | 12.5 |
| 3 | Rosie | 41 | Meltham West Yorkshire | – Living with partner and two young children | Full-time employment | 3.5 |
| 4 | Paula | 39 | Poynton Stockport | - Single mother of two young children | Part-time student | 3 |
| 5 | Rita | 23 | Hulme South Manchester | – Married | Full-time student and part-time employment | 8 |
| 6 | Lucy | 27 | Crewe- Cheshire | Married with two young children | Full-time student | 4.5 |

Instrument

A semi-structured interview schedule (see disc Appendix 2) was designed to explore people's experiences of their volunteering roles and other commitments. The questions were derived from reviewing literature on work and family and were split in to topic areas - coping strategies, spillover and community infrastructure. Interviews were used as they can permit exploration of issues that may be too complex for investigation within quantitative approaches (Burman, 1994). Advantages of semi-

structured interviews are that they allow greater flexibility and coverage of areas of interest which a more rigid structured interview may not; they allow increased rapport and empathy between the interviewer and the interviewee which tends to produce rich data (Smith and Osborn, 2008). Interviews too structured may intimidate participants and prohibit them to freely express themselves (Burman, 1994). Semi-structured interviews need to be prepared well allowing plenty of time for analysis and interpretation afterwards (Wengraf, 2001). After conducting a pilot interview, it was agreed that the schedule covered all appropriate areas and did not need adjusting. Qualitative research is done 'with' rather than 'on' the participants (Burman, 1994).

Procedure

For the purpose of the study, community activists were defined as those that carry out any type of volunteer work. Volunteer work is any action or labour done without monetary gain for the benefit of a single person, group or organisation (Wilson, 2000). All participants had to be community activists with both a work and family commitment to be eligible to take part. Boyatzis (1998), states that it is crucial to recruit the correct sample to study. Recruitment of participants volunteering in the community with both family/work commitments was done through emailing all students at MMU who were on the university volunteer register requesting those eligible to take part and recruitment posters (see disc Appendix 1) placed on information boards and in canteens within Manchester Metropolitan University. Finally snowball and convenience sampling were used as these techniques are neither time consuming nor costly (StatPac, 2009). Initial contact was made via email or telephone explaining the details of the study. For the purpose of the study, participants who are currently studying on an academic course were classed as working. All participants took part in the study of their own free will; no monetary incentive was offered.

All participants were briefed verbally and in written form (see disc Appendix 3) and were required to sign a consent form (see disc Appendix 4) prior to being interviewed. Actual consent forms were not included as they contain real names. Gaining informed consent from participants is essential for the ethical conduct of research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Consent forms contained a declaration explaining that the participants could withdraw from the study without prejudice, ensuring voluntary participation. This was particularly important as in-depth interviewing is more intrusive than other research methods and may open up sensitive issues of the participants (King, 1996). Participants were informed that they did not have to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with. All questions were answered by all participants. The interviews were individually conducted in a hired room in Manchester Metropolitan University and lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. At the conclusion of each interview, each participant was thanked for their time. Interviews were digitally recorded.

Data analysis

The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim (see disc Appendix 5). Analysis of the transcripts was carried out using thematic analysis, a process for

encoding qualitative information (Boyatzis, 1998). Analysis of the data included extensive reading and rereading of the transcripts looking for recurring themes following the thematic network method (Attride-Sterling, 2001) until themes emerged. Similarities and differences were identified. The main themes were compared with the reviewed literature to enable further interpretation and to explore how community activists manage their work and family commitments. The data analysis was supervised by the study supervisor.

Findings and interpretations

Four major themes relating to how community activists cope with the competing demands of work and family commitments were identified. These were support, work flexibility, values and volunteering flexibility. Table 3 illustrates the major themes and sub-themes identified from analysis of the participants' responses. These are discussed in detail with relation to the aforementioned literature in this section. Quotes from the participants are included throughout this section to allow the participants' own words to become a central part of the research.

TABLE 3

Themes and sub-themes relating to community activists coping with demands of work and family

| main themes | sub-themes |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Support | Social Support Formal Support |
| Work Flexibility | |
| Values | Role Saliency Altruism |
| Volunteering Flexibility | Amount of time spent volunteering Time of day spent volunteering |

From the participants' responses in this study, two major types of support that appeared significant and influential in their coping with their three competing roles were identified. These were social support and formal support.

Social Support

All participants reported receiving support from family and friends as influential in coping with their competing roles of volunteering, work and family. Findings are consistent with the literature and research in that it was found that access to social support enhances work-family balance and may reduce work-family conflict (Frone et al, 1997; Shaffer et al, 2005; Voydanoff, 2007) and can be extended to coping with community activism. This support included family members sharing household duties and friends picking up their children from school. As one participant illustrates:

“My husband’s very good and we do a lot of things fairly equally...I do most of the cooking but he washes up all the time...he does an awful lot of things like vacuuming...where as I...do the shopping.”

(Jill)

Emotional support from friends and family was also reported by some participants. Family and friends were reported to provide motivation, empathy and someone to turn to in times of need. As these quotes illustrate:

“I get a lot of motivation from my family, to say keep going, keep going; even though sometimes...you fall down...I think motivation is a huge thing.”

(Rita)

“My mum, she’s very supportive, I can go to her for anything and I know she’s always at the end of the phone.”

(Lucy)

These findings support the ideas of Shaffer et al (2005) that listening sympathetically and providing empathy may help to achieve work-family balance.

Social support at work may also reduce work-family conflict (Batt & Valcour, 2003). Findings correspond with the literature as Rosie, the participant in full-time employment with two young children illustrates:

“I think colleagues are hugely helpful...particularly women colleagues I’d say they know some of the issues about work and family and coping and stuff.”

(Rosie)

With regards to social support as a coping strategy for managing community activism, work and family, findings suggest that regardless of whether the participants are involved in study work or paid work, similar kinds of support are utilised.

Formal Support

As previously identified in the literature, community resources have direct influence on participants in the context of managing their work and family roles (Barnett & Gareis, 2008). Findings suggest coping with volunteering roles alongside work and family is also directly influenced by community resources. All participants with young children reported accessing formal childcare of some kind and that they would not have been able to partake in study work, paid work and/or volunteering without it. This shows that formal support is crucial in managing these often conflicting roles (Frederiksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001). As one participant illustrates:

“Childcare is a big issue because obviously you know if I didn’t have childcare I wouldn’t be able to do my volunteering or go to university or...have a job...a paid job because first and foremost I have to make sure my children are being looked after.”

(Lucy)

Securing access to child care is a main coping strategy for community activists who have children (Voydanoff, 2007) and findings support this. Findings suggest that the needs of community activists with young children are the same regardless of whether they are in paid work or study work. However limited daytime childcare leads to participants being limited to volunteering only in the daytime. Childcare for disabled children was also reported to be completely lacking in the community. Only one participant with children reported accessing social support from a friend to enable her to volunteer in the evening.

Lack of reliable local public transport was also reported to be a hindrance for some participants in terms of coping with their competing roles. Participants reported a need for direct buses to university and to their volunteering organisations as without them they either had to walk which took up too much time or they had to rely on unpredictable public transport. As Jill illustrates:

“A ten minute drive from home to where I volunteer...would take two different buses and getting the connection would be problematic so it would probably take me about an hour and a half on the bus which is why they order me taxis and then the taxis don’t turn up.”

(Jill)

Findings show that regardless of the type of family, work and volunteering commitments, participants have similar needs for community resources to help them successfully fulfil all of their competing roles. It was also found that formal support in the form of community infrastructure is not currently sufficient to support those needs.

Work Flexibility

Flexibility in both study work and paid work was reported by participants as enabling them to carry out all their community activist, work and family roles.

Student participants reported they were able to do their study work when they chose and were not in university for many hours a week and this helped them to cope with all their competing demands. These findings suggest that independent flexible working time may lead to improved work-family integration (Felstead et al, 2002) and can be extended to community activism. As participants report:

“The fact that I don’t work full time so as a student I’m only in university for four lectures a week...so I’m very much a master of my own time.”

(Jill)

“I suppose it’s because I’m free in the day...that enables me to continue...if I had a full time job I wouldn’t be able to do it.”

(Paula)

It was also found, as illustrated in the quotes above, that some student participants reported that if they were in full time work they would not be able to participate in community activism.

This study shows that people are able to work full-time and manage volunteer and familial roles successfully when they have work flexibility. As one employed participant illustrates:

“The nice thing about this job is that...it allows you to blend work and family...I regularly can take my kids to school and drop them off and then come in so at least I’ve seen them in the morning...the fact that I can come in at ten really helps.”

(Rosie)

These findings suggest that positive workplace culture and perceived job flexibility can contribute to work-family balance and reduce work-family conflict (Clark, 2001; Hill et al, 2001).

It is acknowledge that this study comprises of only two participants in full-time employment. David does not have any children which are arguably a more demanding family commitment than his present family commitment of a cohabiting partner. Although Rosie does have two children, a partner, full-time employment and volunteer roles, it is suggested that the superiority of the position she holds may be advantageous in managing all her competing roles, compared to an individual with similar commitments but in employment of lower status. As she reports:

“If I was working in the admin side I don’t know if their would be this flexibility so I think part of that is my position...nobody is keeping tabs on me...nobody’s monitoring to make sure I put the hours in...so some of that is probably about the luckiness of having this position I think to be honest with you, I’m sure people lower down would say of I wish there was more flexibility.”

(Rosie)

Values

What participants valued as important in terms of community activism, work and family appeared to have an effect on how they coped with all of their competing roles. Role salience and altruism were themes that emerged from the data.

Role Salience

How important a particular role is to an individual will have a direct effect on their level of participation within that role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003) and findings were consistent with this in terms of work, family and community activism. Individual differences were found in terms of role salience. Findings suggest that the student participants with young children viewed their roles as mothers as the most important of their multiple roles. This was apparent when they spoke of their children being ill. As they illustrate:

“I couldn’t go to my volunteering...because my kids weren’t very well and so obviously they couldn’t go school or the childminders and my husband you know does shifts and there was no-one else to have the kids and really I wouldn’t want anyone to have the kids when they’re ill.”

(Lucy)

“It would be the volunteer work that has to go first obviously.”

(Paula)

It is noted that the word obviously is used by both participants here. The use of this word clearly illustrates their perceived prioritisation of this role over all others. Complete lack of participation in volunteer roles when family demands were of more salience appears to be a coping strategy in place for these two participants. Greenhaus and Powell (2003) suggest that external pressures will exhibit direct interference on work and family roles. Findings of this study suggest that external pressures, in this case children being ill, may have a direct interference between community activist and family roles. The coping strategies used here are of the problem-solving type (MacArthur & MacArthur, 1998).

Although not questioning the importance of the mother role to the other two participants with children. Findings suggest that they view their volunteer roles as particularly salient which in itself appeared to be a coping strategy to enable them to

fulfil these roles more easily alongside their work and family commitments. When talking about her volunteer work, Paula reports:

"I just do it because I have made a commitment to them and no matter what else goes on I like to honour my commitments...so...if anything had to go it would probably be my household commitments that would come last."

(Paula)

Due to Paula viewing her volunteering as important she employs the coping strategy, priorities at home (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007), reporting that cleaning duties can be done later. Findings suggest that Rosie views volunteering as an ethical way of living, which suggests the importance of the community activist role. Volunteering was reported as being an activity done by her mother and she actively involves her own children. As she illustrates:

"It's a consciousness that you have...my mother always did things like that as well so it's come through I think, being in a family where that is done and we hopefully pass it on to our kids."

(Rosie)

Rita also reported her volunteering roles as salient which appeared to enable her to fulfil her competing roles. She reported that she had never turned down a volunteering job and had on occasion sacrificed leisure commitments to fulfil her role as a volunteer. She reports:

"A job's come up, I'd be like ok I'm not going to London, I'll just do my job, like this volunteer job because I feel like this is more important than going to London."

(Rita)

David reported that certain family commitments such as birthdays meant that he was unable to volunteer on those days. He reported that pressure from his family to spend time with them put a strain on him whilst volunteering. As he illustrates:

"Birthdays, family commitments obviously you can't volunteer on the days that you do have these commitments...whilst your out volunteering it's obviously not time spent at home...and therefore those people feel neglected by that which adds pressure on you thinking about that so therefore it can hinder your activism in the community...and slow you down from your aims."

(David)

These findings suggest both his family and volunteer roles are important and thus experiences conflict between them. His experiences are consistent with research that external pressures will influence the direction of the conflict (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). David appears to have both family-volunteering conflict and volunteering-family conflict experiencing negative spillover (Googins, 2001) in both directions.

Altruism

In terms of undertaking their volunteering roles, participants reported the helping of others less fortunate than themselves. All of the female participants are helping others in some way within their volunteer roles. It appears that even if it may be a strain at times to manage all of their roles, the participants are committed to this activity and will continue to help others regardless. As they report:

“I think as long as I’m doing a little bit...and helping others because...they need volunteers.”

(Lucy)

“Because of my volunteering work and how seriously I regard it, I never ever let my volunteering jobs down.”

(Jill)

These findings identify another type of coping strategy that is not apparent in the literature, an awareness that people are in need. Knowing that people are in need of help and knowing that they, as individuals, are able to provide that help through volunteering, may in turn make it easier for them to accommodate and cope with a community activist role along side their work and family commitments.

Helping others in their community activism was not reported by David. His report suggests that he volunteers mainly for social networking purposes and possible employment opportunities. Findings suggest that an awareness that people are in need is not a coping strategy that David has employed to manage his competing roles. Therefore it is suggested that the context of the volunteering work that an individual is participating in, may influence the relevance of this coping strategy in helping individuals cope with competing roles.

Volunteering Flexibility

Volunteering work is not as rigid as mandatory work and therefore people can often participate in community activism within a time frame that suits them. Little time volunteering and the time of day spent volunteering were factors reported to have an effect on participants coping with their community activist, work and family roles.

Little time volunteering

In relation to their time spent on work and family commitments, time spent in volunteering roles was found to be relatively small for all participants. This appeared to make it easier for student participants to fit it in around their work and family commitments. As Jill reported, when talking about spending time with her adult son:

“The fact that I’m only volunteering two hours a week every other Tuesday, is not going to affect that at all. Nor is going to the art group on a Monday morning, so it doesn’t really overlap.”

(Jill)

A difference was found in participants with full-time work. Even though the time spent volunteering was relatively small for all participants, findings suggest that those in full-time work experience more negative spillover in comparison to those involved in academic studies. Reports suggest that the employed participants may over commit to their volunteering roles which in turn may have a negative impact on them successfully fulfilling their work and family roles. As they illustrated:

“My partner...he says what you do is you over commit yourself to things and then you can’t let anybody else down so the people that get let down are us which is true probably...I will sometimes put their needs secondary if I’m trying to help.”

(Rosie)

“If there’s a meeting...a volunteering session that’s run late...you know end up going to bed late which means I could get up late which means I could be late for work.”

(David)

Although all participants report little time is spent volunteering, the context of their work demands may affect the significance of this as employed work demands may be less flexible compared to study work which is usually independent and can be done in ones own time thus leading to better integration of work and family (Felstead et al, 2002) extending to community activism.

Another significant finding was that some participants reported that they were easily able to cancel their volunteering commitments if they had important family or work commitments that had to come first on occasion. As Lucy illustrates:

“As long as...I don’t just not turn up...as long as I let them know...they were fine with it...as long as I rang them up and let them know then they’re happy.”

(Lucy)

Findings support the notion that volunteering is a lot more accommodating of people’s other commitments compared to a more formal paid work environment.

Time of day spent volunteering

Findings suggest that in terms of volunteering, most participants undertake this role at a time of day that is suitable to them which allows for work-family-community activism integration. David reports volunteering at weekends and in the evenings when he was

free from work commitments. Rita reported that there was no overlap between her volunteering, work and family. For her it appears that volunteering may overlap with her leisure time instead as she reported cancellation of a trip to London. Student participants with young children volunteered in the daytime when their children were either at school or at a childminders. As Paula illustrates:

“I suppose it’s because I’m free in the day when the kids are at school that enables me.”

(Paula)

A difference found between the student participants with young children and the participant in full-time employment with two young children was that she took her children to the volunteering with her. These findings suggest that due to her daily work commitments she has no choice but to sometimes take her children with her or leave them in the care of a neighbour for her to successfully fulfil her volunteer roles. She does not have the option to carry out these roles when her children are at school because she is at work herself. As she reports:

“If you’re struggling you know and you’ve got something late on I’ve got to ...ask a neighbour or a friend to have them.”

(Rosie)

Findings suggest that due to the heavy demands of having young children and being in full-time employment it may be harder for people to volunteer at times suitable for them compared to people with less demanding commitments. For those individuals with more demanding commitments, there may be more spillover of work, family and community activist commitments.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how people who are voluntarily active in the community cope with their competing demands of work and family commitments. The findings suggest that the coping strategies used to cope with work and family demands as previously mentioned in the literature (Barnett & Gareis, 2008; Felstead et al, 2002; Frederiksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001; Voydanoff, 2007) are also used when people are coping with the third demand of community activism. These are support, work flexibility, values and volunteering flexibility. Findings show that these coping strategies are the same whether a person is managing study work or paid work. Social support was found to be one of the most important and necessary coping strategies and was used within both work and family domains. Findings suggest that this kind of support may be an essential strategy in successfully coping with multiple life situations. The study found that being in paid work may be more demanding in terms of managing work, family and community activist roles in comparison to those involved in study work. To achieve an enhancement in community activism in the UK these findings suggest that national flexible working policies may be an initiative to consider.

This study offers novel findings but it is acknowledged that there were only two employed participants. An expansion of this study may be to have equal amounts of participants in study work and paid work. As this is the first study exploring community activism, work and family, there are many questions that still need to be asked. How do shift workers cope with these three competing roles? How can employers better accommodate community activist workers? Are night workers voluntarily active in the community? How can social support be promoted to expand community involvement? What about people in retirement? Would they view volunteering flexibility as a coping strategy in the absence of work demands? People's lives and situations change all the time and possibly so do their roles and coping strategies. This study has begun to explore a phenomenon that has many opportunities for further research.

Reflexivity

I was interested in exploring how people who are voluntarily active in the community cope with the competing demands of work and family commitments because I too am one of these people. I am a student with a co-habiting partner and am currently training to be a volunteer drug worker. Before this study was conducted, no research had been done examining how people cope with these three competing roles, and as I have sometimes struggled to cope with them myself, I felt that this was an area of interest that needed to be examined. I believe that volunteering in the community and helping others is extremely rewarding, helps promote social justice and something everyone should try and participate in as much as they possibly can. I am aware that other researchers may not have the same social interests and morals as me and therefore may have differing views on the relevance and importance of this study. People in society today may feel that their lives are too hectic that they have not got time to participate in voluntary activities. I feel that this research may help to increase wider participation in community involvement as if it is distributed to a wider audience it may educate people and show them that by using coping strategies appropriate to their individual life situations they can make a positive contribution to a more communal society.

I am aware that my interpretation of the data may differ from the individual views of the participants. They may interpret it on an individual level where as I have interpreted it more in relation to the reviewed literature. As I believe that all people should volunteer I may have interpreted the data specifically looking for coping strategies to prove that people can participate in community activity. A collaboration between the participants and I may have allowed for a more diverse interpretation of the data through the sharing of beliefs, attitudes and knowledge in relation to the research question.

The assumption that human beings are unique, adaptable and resourceful had a profound effect on the research question. The assumption that all people are unique and lead individual lives, led me to recruit a diverse range of participants. I believed that just one account from one participant would be insufficient in researching a question that affects many people. Believing that people are adaptable, resourceful

and are able to cope with demanding situations had a direct effect on the research question. If this was not assumed, it is clear that this particular study would not exist.

As this research question is exploring people's lived experiences I am aware that quantitative methods would not have been able to address it. For example, without knowing what people's experiences of coping with community activist, work and family are, it would be impossible for a researcher to devise a questionnaire or a research area.

The research question is evaluative and qualitative semi-structured interviewing allows for collection of complex, rich data with a purposive sampling of participants. Thematic analysis of this data has led to the production of novel findings concerning the coping strategies of individuals with community activist, work and family commitments.

References

- Attride-Sterling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1, 385-405.
- Bailyn, L. (1992). Issues of Work and Family in Different National Contexts: How the United States, Britain, and Sweden Respond. *Human Resource Management*, 31, 201-208.
- Barnett, R. C., & Gareis, K. C. (2008). Community: The Critical Missing Link in Work-Family Research. In A. Marcus-Newhall, D. F. Halpern, & S. J. Tan. (Eds.). *The Changing Realities of Work and Family* (pp. 71-84). West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Batt, R., & Valcour, P. M. (2003). Human resource practices as predictors of work-family outcomes and employee turnover. *Industrial Relations*, 42, 189-220.
- Bookman, A. (2004). *Starting in our own backyards*. New York: Routledge.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1989). Ecological Systems Theory. *Annals of Child Development*, 6, 187-249.
- Burman, E. (1994). Interviewing. In P. Banister, E. Burman, I. Parker, M. Taylor, & C. Tindall. (Eds.). *Qualitative Methods. In Psychology* (pp. 49-71). Berkshire: Open University Press.

Clark, S. C. (2001). Work Cultures and Work/Family Balance. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 58, 348-365.

Felstead, A., Jewson, N., Phizacklea, A. & Walters, S. (2002). Opportunities to work at home in the context of work-life balance. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 12, 54-76.

Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I., & Scharlach, A. E. (2001). *Families and work: New directions in twenty-first century*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Frone, M. R., Yardley, J. K., & Markel, K. S. (1997). Developing and testing an integrative model of the work-family interface. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 50, 145-167.

Googins, B.K. (1991). *Work/family conflicts: Private lives-public responses*. New York: Auburn House.

Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. (2003). When work and family collide: Deciding between competing role demands. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, 90, 291-303.

Hill, J. E., Hawkins, A. J., Ferris, M., & Weitzman, M. (2001). Finding an Extra Day a Week: The Positive Influence of Perceived Job Flexibility on Work and Family Life Balance. *Family Relations*, 50, 49-58.

Kagan, C., Lewis, S., & Brennan, E. M. (2008). Building Community Supports for Work-Life Integration. In J. M. Rosenzweig & E. M. Brennan (Eds.). *Work, Life, And The Mental Health System Of Care: A Guide for Professionals Supporting Families of Children with Emotional or Behavioural Disorders* (pp. 325-349). Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

King, E. (1996). The use of self in qualitative research. In J. T. E. Richardson (Ed.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for Psychology and the Social Sciences*. (pp. 175-188). Leicester: BPS Books.

Lewis, S., & Cooper, C. L. (2005). *Work-Life Integration: Case Studies of Organisational Change*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Long Dilworth, J. E. (2004). Predictors of Negative Spillover from Family to Work. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25, 241-261.

MacArthur, J. D., & MacArthur, C. T. (1998). *Coping Strategies*. Retrieved 6 November 2009 from <http://www.macses.ucsf.edu/Research/Psychosocial/notebook/coping.html>

Parker, I. (1994). Qualitative Research. In P. Banister, E. Burman, I. Parker, M. Taylor & C. Tindall (Eds.). *Qualitative Methods In Psychology* (pp.1-16). Berkshire: Open University Press.

Patton, W. (2000). Changing career: the role of values. In A. Collin & R. A. Young (Eds.). *The Future of Career* (pp.69-82). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Research Methods Knowledge Base. (2006). *Qualitative Measures*. Retrieved 9 November 2009 from <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qual.php>

Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (2nd Edn). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Rotondo, D. M., Carlson, D. S., & Kincaid, J. F. (2003). Coping with multiple dimensions of work-family conflict. *Personnel Review*, 32, 275-296.

Shaffer, M. A., Joplin, J. R. W., Francesco, A. M., & Lau, T. (2005). Easing the Pain: A Cross-Cultural Study of Support Resources and Their Influence on Work-Family Conflict. In S. A. Y. Poelmans (Ed.). *Work and Family: An International Research Perspective* (pp. 319-342). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.). *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (2nd Edn, pp. 53-80). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Somech, A., & Drach-Zahavy, A. (2007). Strategies for coping With Work-Family Conflict: The Distinctive Relationships of Gender Role Ideology. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 12, 1-19.

StatPac. (2009). *Sampling Methods*. Retrieved 9 November 2009 from <http://www.statpac.com/surveys/sampling.htm>

The Home Office. (2008). *Unlocking the talent of our communities*. Retrieved 7 November 2009 from <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/712089.pdf>

Voydanoff, P. (2001). Incorporating community into work and family research: A review of basic relationships. *Human Relations*, 54, 1609-1637.

Voydanoff, P. (2002). Linkages between the Work-family Interface and Work, Family and Individual Outcomes: An Integrative Model. *Journal of Family Issues*, 23, 138-164.

Voydanoff, P. (2005). The effects of community demands, resources, and strategies on the nature and consequences of the work-family interface: An agenda for future research. *Family Relations*, 54, 583-595.

Voydanoff, P. (2007). *Work, Family, and Community: Exploring Interconnections*. New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Voydanoff, P., & Donnelly, B. W. (1999). Multiple Roles and Psychological Distress: The Intersection of the Paid Worker, Spouse, and Parental Roles with the Role of the Adult Child. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 61, 725-738.

Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2nd Edn). Berkshire: Open University Press.

Wilson, J. (2000). Volunteering. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 215-240.

Wireman, P. (2008). *Connecting the Dots: Government, Community and Family*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.