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Program Review--Intentional Harmony: Managing Work and Life

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Program Review--Intentional Harmony: Managing Work and Life

Abstract

Intentional Harmony: Balancing Work and Life, a program developed by the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension, is designed to address the effects of work stress on the employee, partnerships, parenting, friend and family relationships, and personal health. The program is comprehensive, concise, and research-based. There is some empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the parenting unit. Additional research with random assignment of participants to experimental and control groups is recommended. An evaluation instrument is provided.

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The last several decades have seen many changes in the composition of the workforce, a change that alters family life. The percentage of married mothers in the labor force rose from 17% in 1948 to 61% in 1985 to 70% in 1995 (Cohany & Sok, 2007). By 2005, the percentage decreased 4-6% depending on the child's age. Factors influencing these changes include weaker labor market conditions, changes in cultural and societal attitudes about women working outside the home, and changes in personal preferences.

Stress can occur in the workplace, especially as work hours increase over time. While it is socially acceptable to discuss stress, which can aid in increasing resources, it is unacceptable to express inability to cope, which could make getting resources difficult (Harkness, Long, Bermbach, Patterson, Jordan, & Kahn, 2005).

Work affects partnerships. Work demands have been found to affect couples' relationships in terms of a crossover to the partner's emotional health (Crossfield, Kinman, & Jones, 2005). Stress in female partners and anxiety and depression in male partners are the ways work demands crossover between partners.

Work also has an effect on personal health. Work stress is associated with an increase in risk factors for heart disease and type II diabetes (Chandola, Brunner, & Marmot, 2006). Workers who smoke at higher intensity have a greater imbalance in efforts put out and subsequent rewards (Kouvonen, Kivimaki, Virtanen, Pentti, & Vahtera, 2005).

The cumulative effects of work-life imbalance are far reaching. Intentional Harmony: Managing Work and Life, a program developed and evaluated by Angela Wiley at the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension, addresses these issues.

Program Description

Intentional Harmony: Managing Work and Life includes five units:

1. Managing Work and Parenting

2. Managing Work and Your Partner
3. Managing Stress at Work
4. Managing Work and Your Physical Health and Managing Work and Your Well-Being
5. Managing Work and Extended Family and Friends. (An additional unit is for law enforcement--Managing Law Enforcement Work and Wellness.)

Each unit comes with PowerPoint presentation, handouts, literature review, facilitator's guide, participant workbooks, and a sample press release for marketing. Unit three lacks a sample press release; the "Managing Work and Your Physical Health" subsection lacks a literature review.

The curriculum costs \$399, which includes both paper and electronic copies of the materials plus PowerPoint presentations on CD-Rom. If both the curriculum and certification are purchased together for an additional \$250, the facilitator receives either online or self-directed training, certification, and access to the online Web site with new and updated materials.

Evaluation Conclusions

The Intentional Harmony: Managing Work and Life was reviewed using four evaluation criteria.

- Is the curriculum clearly research based? Yes. A literature review is provided with the five units. However, the "Balancing Work and Your Physical Health" subsection includes a list of recommended books in lieu of a literature review.
- Does the curriculum address employees' needs to improve work-life balance as identified in the research literature? Yes. It addresses both work stress in general and its relationship to parenting, partnerships, family and friends, and the individual. The material is sensitive to diversity, including information for LGBT parents, consideration of gender dynamics in the presentations, and written materials, and ethnically diverse graphics.
- Does it have empirical evidence of program effectiveness for improving the balance between employees' work and life? Some. The curriculum is highly research based and has one published study to date. Wiley, Branscomb, and Wang (2007) studied Unit 1, "Managing Work and Children." The study included an intervention group of women with children from a community sample and a control group of women with children who had participated in other Extension programming. Both groups completed pre-tests and post-tests at 4 weeks. Results indicate parents reported better work-life management at the 4-week follow-up, including a significant reduction in work interference with family life, improved parenting practices, and fewer problems with spillover, overload, time conflicts, organizational skills, and physical and emotional strain. Because this was a non-randomized sample and some demographics do not match between groups, future research could benefit from having randomized samples. Results of the study and future studies will be reported on the program's Web site <<http://www.worklife.uiuc.edu>>.
- Are the materials ready for busy Cooperative Extension agents and other educators to use? Yes. The materials are provided on CDs to allow for informational fact sheets, although materials need to be ordered or reproduced with permission from <<http://www.worklife.uiuc.edu/order.cfm>>. PowerPoint presentations have been developed, and a guide for each section is provided for the facilitator to use during PowerPoint presentation, which outlines how the slides are to be presented verbally. Some units provide a typical timeframe for presentation of slides. A literature review is provided for most units, increasing the facilitator's knowledge base.

Additional information, including how to order Intentional Harmony: Balancing Work and Life can be obtained at <<http://www.worklife.uiuc.edu>>. The curriculum, workbooks, or other materials can be ordered via email at <acespubs@uiuc.edu> or by phone at 1-800-345-6087, option 2.

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