

Perspectives on Parenthood and Working of Female Athletic Trainers in the Secondary School and Collegiate Settings

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Context: Female athletic trainers (ATs) are currently underrepresented in the collegiate setting. Parenting and family obligations may play a role in this underrepresentation.

Objective: To examine female ATs' perspectives on parenting and working in the secondary school and collegiate employment settings.

Design: Cross-sectional study.

Setting: Online survey.

Patients or Other Participants: A total of 1000 nonstudent, female certified ATs who were currently members of the National Athletic Trainers' Association.

Main Outcome Measure(s): An original survey was developed to assess perceptions related to motherhood and work responsibilities. Descriptive statistics were used to assess age, years of experience as a certified AT, employment position, and parent or nonparent status. A correlation matrix was conducted to determine factors among parent and nonparent status, perceptions of motherhood, and employment-setting decisions.

Results: Of the 1000 surveys sent via e-mail, 411 (41.1%) female ATs responded. Responses indicated that a majority of

the female ATs worked in the secondary school setting. Sixty-one percent of the respondents did not have children. Past female ATs' experiences indicated a perception that motherhood created more challenges or struggles (or both) in the work and family settings. Whether parents considered children a factor in employment-setting changes produced conflicting results: no significant correlations or differences were found among responses.

Conclusions: Parenting considerations had influences on both the home and employment settings. Although parents and nonparents had different views on the implications of parenting in the workplace, both groups agreed that parenting could affect the work environment and the choice to change employment settings and careers. Administrative decisions need to be considered in relation to parenting concerns. Mentoring that includes employment-setting choices relative to life goals should be provided to ATs, regardless of sex.

Key Words: life–work balance, work–family conflict, work flexibility

Key Points

- Female athletic trainers accounted for only one-quarter of athletic trainers in the collegiate setting.
- Flexibility in the work setting to allow for parenting was a factor cited by almost half of the female athletic trainers who had changed jobs because of their children.
- For female athletic trainers to succeed in both parenting and career obligations, an adequate support system was deemed essential.
- Encouraging institutions to adopt family-friendly work policies and providing mentoring of female athletic trainers may allow more female athletic trainers to remain in the collegiate setting.

Following employment trends in other occupational settings,^{1,2} the number of female certified athletic trainers (ATs) in the athletic training profession has grown since the inception of the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) in 1950. The number of female ATs has increased since the first woman joined the NATA in 1956, with female ATs currently constituting 48% of the NATA membership.³ In 2006, 97.5% of all National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) institutions employed certified ATs, yet less than one-third of those institutions had female ATs.³ Therefore, the question of employment equality is raised when we consider the growing numbers of total female ATs compared with the consistently low numbers of women working within the collegiate athletic training setting.³

National employment trends have focused on sex as an issue in reduced wages for women, which have been attributed to employment absence for caregiving and a consistent theme of family and work conflicts, resulting from the need to balance home and work priorities.^{4–7} Multiple demands on parents related to work and child-rearing responsibilities create time-constraint issues and adversely affect both the quality of work and the attention paid to family.^{4,6,7} Work overload and organizational expectations appear to have significant effects on work, thus interfering with family.⁸ According to female parents in other health care professions,⁹ a change in work environment that provides more flexibility for family and parenting responsibilities is an important factor in the decision to adjust either occupational setting or work

hours. Although employment in the collegiate athletic training setting often requires increased and irregular work hours, these additional workplace demands may, in fact, increase family interference or general work-family conflicts.¹⁰

Female ATs are currently underrepresented in the collegiate setting, comprising 27.4% of full-time staff.³ This skewed representation may be attributed to several issues, but clearly balancing professional responsibilities with parenthood is a key factor,^{11,12} considering that 86% of female ATs reported greater conflicts between professional and family responsibilities than did their male counterparts.^{4,11,12} Moreover, women may perceive a greater conflict between professional and family responsibilities because they typically serve as the family caretaker¹³ in addition to experiencing more difficulty when reentering the profession after an absence for family obligations.^{4,13} Similarly, 32% of female ATs surveyed perceived that family and personal life, lack of opportunities, the “good old boy” network, and salary were the greatest obstacles in their profession.⁵ Understanding the degree to which parenting and family obligations influence the limited representation of female ATs in the collegiate setting is, perhaps, an important first step in helping to address this troubling athletic training employment trend. Therefore, the purpose of our study was to investigate collegiate female ATs’ perspectives on parenting and employment.

METHODS

Participants

A total of 1000 female ATs with current NATA memberships were randomly chosen from the NATA public database. Graduate certified students were not included based on part-time employee status. The university institutional review board awarded human subjects approval before data were collected, and consent was implied by responding to the survey.

Instrument

Data regarding female ATs’ experiences and perceptions of parenthood and athletic training employment were collected via an online survey.¹⁴ The survey is an original instrument that we created based on a review of the literature^{1–5,11–14}; it was evaluated for face validity by 5 female ATs with 1 to 15 years of experience in athletic training.¹⁴ Information regarding the content and style of the survey was assessed to eliminate errors, and 1 additional question regarding the respondent’s current level of employment was changed based on reviewer evaluations.

The survey was categorized into 5 sections based on previous research and validated instruments regarding the interaction between family decision-making processes and the workplace^{15–17}: (1) demographics, (2) parents, (3) nonparents who do not want to have children, (4) nonparents who are interested in having children, and (5) general opinions on working mothers in the collegiate setting. Question formats included multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and essay responses.

The demographic section collected information regarding age, sex, years of experience, relationship status, and whether the participant was a parent. In the section relating to parental status, participants with children were asked questions pertaining to employment-setting selection. In addition, respondents with children were asked about the number of children they had, career changes that occurred after having children, the use of child care, and how the respondent felt about being a working mother. The third and fourth sections of the survey queried all participants. Three questions were asked regarding employment-setting selection and perceived changes after becoming a parent or potential parent. The final section, which involved general opinions from both parents and nonparents on working mothers in the collegiate setting, requested that participants discuss past experiences regarding female ATs and parenting within the workplace (ie, bringing children to work) using essay-style and multiple-choice questions.

Contact information was obtained through the NATA using a broadcast system specific to research. Data were collated through an online survey distribution (survey monkey.com; Menlo Park, CA).¹¹ An initial e-mail was sent to potential participants that included an introductory letter and a direct link to the survey. Two weeks after the initial e-mail, a follow-up e-mail was distributed requesting participation in the study in order to boost responses. One week after the follow-up e-mail, no further surveys were accepted for the study.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic information to describe age, years of experience as a certified AT, employment position, and parent or nonparent status. Based on the data collected, χ^2 and factor analysis could not be conducted as a result of violation of the assumptions. Therefore, we calculated a correlation matrix to determine the perceptions among parents and nonparents regarding motherhood and employment-setting selection. Cross-tabulation was used to evaluate commonalities between groups. In addition, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to assess differences among NCAA Divisions I and II and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics/Division III and responses to career orientation, decision to have children, children’s effect on job setting, ability to be a female AT with children, decisions not to have children, and feelings regarding children and work as a female AT.

To assess the qualitative aspect of the survey via the open-ended questions, thematic mapping was used. Answers to each individual essay question were analyzed using a color coding system to mark similar responses and tabulate common themes. Themes were then reviewed to assess consistency among authors and were appropriately titled.

RESULTS

A total of 411 female ATs (41.1%) responded to the e-mailed survey. For 11 of the 1000 surveyed female ATs, automatic replies were generated indicating that the mailbox would not allow acceptance of the survey. Six responses were incomplete and were not counted; thus, 405 surveys (40.5%) were usable. The mean age of the respondents was 33.7 ± 8.12 years.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Female Athletic Trainers' Demographics (N = 405)

Characteristic	n (%) ^a
Job setting	
Secondary school	140 (34.6)
Collegiate setting	106 (26.2)
Industrial	5 (1.23)
Professional	7 (1.73)
Clinic/secondary school	27 (6.70)
Other combinations	21 (5.19)
Other	60 (14.81)
Relationship status	
Single	164 (40.50)
Married	182 (44.90)
Live-in relationship	40 (9.90)
Other	19 (4.70)

^a Not all participants answered all questions.

Work settings for the female ATs included the secondary school or clinical/secondary school setting (41%, n = 167) and any collegiate level (26%, n = 106) (Table 1). Married and single women represented approximately the same percentages of respondents, at 45% (n = 182) and 41% (n = 164), respectively. Females with children comprised 38.8% (n = 155) of respondents, whereas nonparents accounted for 61.2% (n = 250) of the population surveyed. Most of the women who were parents (76%, n = 118) had 1 or 2 children; 42% (n = 65) of those female ATs had changed job settings because of their children, and 65% (n = 101) reported a change in work hours subsequent to childbirth.

The "working-parent" arrangement was enjoyable to 41% (n = 64) of female ATs with children, whereas 50% (n = 77) preferred to spend more time at home. Yet 87% (n = 134) did not wish to be full-time parents. Only 13% (n = 20) revealed an interest in full-time parenting. Parents needed more than 21 hours of child care per week (consisting of providers such as the other parent, grandparents, day care, nanny, or a combination of these providers). In fact, most respondents with children (62%, n = 95) used at least 2 different child-care providers (eg, day care, friends, family) to meet the needs of their individual circumstances.

A majority of nonparents (69%, n = 173) indicated that they wanted to have children. The main reason stated for not having children yet was that they were waiting to become financially established (45%, n = 112). Undecided nonparents (26%, n = 45) specified that their decision was due to financial resources or marital status.

Interestingly, women without children were split as to whether children would be a substantial factor, a negligible

Table 2. Frequency Distribution: Reasons Undecided Female Athletic Trainers Do Not Have Children (n = 107)

Reason	n (%) ^a
More career oriented	7 (6.5)
Unable	3 (2.8)
Not married yet	32 (29.9)
Haven't decided	8 (7.5)
Other	25 (23.4)
Multiple reasons	32 (29.9)

^a Not all participants answered all questions.

Table 3. Cross-Tabulation Between Having Children and Whether Children Have an Effect on Job Setting (n = 394)

Do Children Have an Effect on Job Setting?	Have Children?	
	Yes	No
Significant factor	61	88
Negligible factor	45	107
Not a factor	43	50

factor, or no factor in affecting their employment setting (Table 2). In addition, respondents who did not have children were equally distributed among the possible reasons for nonparent status, including the inability to conceive, the fact that they were not yet married, maintenance of a greater career focus than family orientation, and *multiple reasons* (Table 3).

Attitudes regarding the ability of a female AT to be both an AT and a parent indicate that the combination of parenting and working may be a challenge for both parents and nonparents alike. Although many (45%, n = 182) felt that motherhood and career could be accomplished simultaneously, they stated that energy levels tend to be insufficient for accomplishing both tasks. The respondents further indicated that both career and family could be adequately attended to with sufficient support (47%, n = 190). Responses to open-ended questions reflected relatively equal positive (n = 23) and negative (n = 20) comments of parents regarding employment challenges. Other female ATs (25%, n = 101) said that family might be neglected because of employment obligations or that the family commitment was too great to handle both sets of responsibilities well. According to a limited number of parents and nonparents alike (3%, n = 13), *work was usually neglected* (Table 4).

To ascertain whether differences in parenting employment perceptions existed among collegiate divisions, we assessed a number of factors. No differences among female ATs were noted ($P < .05$) between collegiate division and career orientation, opinion on being a working mother, employment factors regarding having children, perceptions of the ability to have children and be a female AT, and attitudes toward mothers working as collegiate female ATs.

In order to obtain a better understanding of female ATs' feelings regarding children, responses to essay questions were solicited to allow for more contextually nuanced responses. A total of 270 participants responded to questions on past experiences with female ATs, and 199 provided "final thoughts." Themes were established based on recurrent comments. Negative responses to questions on

Table 4. Cross-Tabulation Between Having Children and Ability to Be a Female Athletic Trainer and Mother (n = 393)

How Do You Feel About the Female Athletic Trainer Parent Set-Up?	Have Children?	
	Yes	No
There is too much time commitment from home and work to do both.	34	46
Both can be done well.	33	47
Work is usually the one neglected.	6	7
Family is usually the one neglected.	57	61
Both can be done, but energy levels tend to fall short.	74	108
With proper time management, both can be done.	64	126

Table 5. Frequencies Distribution of Essay-Style Questions

	n (%) ^a
Past female athletic trainers' experience (n = 270)	
Positive time organization	50 (18.5)
Struggles/challenges	62 (23.0)
Career decisions	41 (15.2)
Support system	8 (3.0)
Gender issues	2 (0.7)
Mixed feelings	24 (8.9)
Multiple responses	50 (18.5)
Final thoughts (n = 199)	
Work demands	35 (17.6)
Family demands	3 (1.50)
Gender concerns	7 (3.5)
Time organization	43 (21.6)
Child-care concerns	4 (2.0)
Multiple demands	56 (28.1)
Multiple thoughts	38 (19.1)
Outliers	13 (6.5)

^a Not all participants answered all questions.

parenthood and employment experiences with female AT mothers revealed several key points:

- 1) Many respondents struggled (eg, with time management).
- 2) Juggling parenthood and work was difficult.
- 3) Traditional gender-role issues caused concerns (eg, "fathers receive better treatment," "mothers should spend more time at home").
- 4) Career decisions were based on having children.
- 5) Combinations of these issues were cited.

Fifty-seven percent (n = 155) of the total responses indicated mixed feelings regarding the effectiveness and pleasure of work and parenting demands. Positive responses from nonparents on the topic of their experiences with female AT mothers included perceptions of female AT mothers' parenting support systems or mothers' organizational abilities. Negative open-ended responses from nonparents reflected a perception that bringing children to the workplace was inappropriate and that the parental focus on work might be lacking (31%, n = 62). Responses to the question about "final thoughts" indicated that 69% (n = 137) cited organizing the demands of both family and work as the key to success. Thoughts, concerns, and outliers comprised the remaining 31% (n = 62) of respondents and included factors regarding intragender and intergender inequities and concerns regarding proper child care (Tables 5 and 6).

DISCUSSION

The degree to which the smaller numbers of female ATs at the collegiate level is predicated on issues relating to employee sex is unclear. However, the fact remains that female ATs constitute only 27.4% of full-time staff.³ Indeed, 26.2% (n = 106) of our respondents were employed in the collegiate setting, a finding consistent with previous research³ on employment settings of female ATs. The smaller female AT population at the collegiate level (compared with that of male ATs) could reflect the challenge of a traditional athletic training environment with irregular hours, often exceeding 50 hours a week.⁷ An additional factor may be that

Table 6. Examples of Essay-Question Coding

	Examples of Common Responses
Past female athletic trainers' experience (n = 270)	
Positive time organization	"If I were younger, I would probably have one or two children. This because I have watched two of my female ATC friends do a great job. It can be done."
Struggles/challenges	"I wondered how they did it and felt that the children probably lost out when mom worked so much."
Career decisions	"It seems they have had to change jobs to one with less responsibility so that they could be home more with their children."
Support system	"I really believe there needs to be a great deal of teamwork/support in the home to be a successful ATC/mother."
Gender issues	"I've worked with both male and female athletic trainers who have children. I believe it is more difficult for the female athletic trainer to juggle the expected hours at work and at home."
Mixed feelings	"I've had some great women ATC mentor/friends who have successfully managed children and work, but I've also had many who have struggled with the challenge."
Multiple responses	"I am amazed that athletic trainers find the time to be parents. Those that I know have excellent time management skills and a lot of help from their support networks."
Final thoughts (n = 199)	
Work demands	"The collegiate setting requires athletic trainers in general to dedicate a great deal of time for practices and games."
Family demands	"It's hard. You have to find balance however you can Time management and protecting your time is key. Making time for family when you are home is important"
Gender concerns	"When it's your dream to have a family, why is it such a problem for women to have a family and viewed as okay for our male counterparts to have a family?"
Time organization	"It's just like any other career, you have to manage your time with your family and work."
Child-care concerns	"A supportive spouse definitely helps and/or access to a 'nanny.'"
Multiple demands	"I found it extremely difficult to manage both at Div[ision] 1 and therefore was forced to make a change of setting within Div 1 No support from male administration on conflict issues."
Multiple thoughts	"Know ahead of time there may be time issue. If both are your passions, you will find a way to make it happen satisfactorily."
Outliers	"Kids are not possible"; "no comment"

employers are reluctant to hire individuals who have been absent from the profession and are therefore perceived to not possess current knowledge, regardless of the female AT's actual degree of readiness.⁶

Research on other health care providers indicates that flexibility in the occupational setting to allow for parenting is a significant factor in the decision to change work settings and work hours: 45% of female ATs had made work changes because of their children.^{6,9} Consistent with previous results,^{6,7} changing obligations had prompted the female ATs with children that we surveyed to change their career objectives. Both parent and nonparent female ATs stated that a significant factor in maintaining both successful career employment and parenting obligations was the presence of an adequate support system. Multiple demands (work, family, and time management) were characterized as the greatest obstacles to success for both parent and nonparent respondents, and those demands were further cited as the most common employment difficulties in the collegiate setting.

Similarities between parent and nonparent responses were evident when respondents were asked if work was the area of life that was most often neglected (Table 4). Perhaps of equal importance, family was identified as the portion of life more often neglected by both parents and nonparents (21% [$n = 57$] and 15% [$n = 61$], respectively). Our results are comparable with general employment data⁸ regarding work and family interference, indicating that work overload and organizational expectations had a significant effect on work and, thus, interfered with family.⁸ Although employment in the collegiate athletic training setting often necessitates increased and irregular work hours,⁶ these additional work demands may, in fact, interfere with family or increase general work-family conflict.⁸ Ultimately, work-family conflict pressures may contribute to female ATs' decisions to seek employment-setting changes.

Responses from female AT parents indicate that parenting requires great organizational skills, is challenging, and often results in family neglect, yet a majority do not want to be full-time parents (87%, $n = 134$). Understandably, parents had both positive and negative responses to combining work and parenting. Equal positive and negative responses of parents were indicated on open-ended questions regarding parental and employment challenges. Specifically, multiple-demand concerns of parents, which included time constraints or child-care concerns (or both), constituted the highest chosen response (28.1%, $n = 56$). Multiple competing demands between employment and family, as illuminated in the research^{6,7} on the general population, seem to have the greatest effect on the decisions of female ATs with children to alter employment settings or hours. Although employers may find mitigating the multiple demands of parents difficult, perhaps providing flexibility and support can mollify the effect of nonwork factors on the athletic training room environment. Because athletic training work hours often include evenings and weekends, employer flexibility may include alternative staffing strategies (as opposed to traditional team assignments), modification of travel and assignment of evening and weekend schedules, provision of on-site child-care alternatives, or possibly allowing children in the work environment. Of course, employers must weigh the appropriateness, practicality, and liability of implementing a flexible work environment in their institutions, but openness to creative solutions may foster a more hospitable and equitable work environment. An extenuat-

ing factor in an employer's willingness to accommodate the needs of parents may be the ready availability of ATs desiring employment in the collegiate setting. Employers will continue to hire qualified ATs who can manage the requirements of the job regardless of parenting status.

Consistently, parents stated that parenting time commitments, similar to the multiple demands within time constraints, influenced employment and family (77%, $n = 115$). Parents enjoyed the working-parent situation (87%, $n = 19$), yet 78% ($n = 116$) indicated that neither work nor family can be "done well" in conjunction with the other. In another study,⁴ 68% of parents reported difficulty balancing both career and family. These results conflict with those of previous research⁵ indicating that 86.3% of female ATs felt that females had a greater conflict between work and family, and 32% perceived family/personal life as the greatest conflict with work. Reasons for the conflicting results could be the many demands placed on an AT, the difficulty in pinpointing one specific area that causes more conflict than another,¹⁷ or family/employment conflict indirectly related to greater work commitment (ie, fewer hours devoted to the relationship than to work).⁸ Furthermore, these conflicting results regarding family and employment perspectives may contribute to female ATs' confusion in determining the best environment in which to address their personal and professional needs. We noted no differences in perceptions on parenting among collegiate divisions, which may indicate that the collegiate setting entails similar female AT parent and work issues, regardless of collegiate division. Similarly, female ATs considering employment in the collegiate setting based on parenting demands may be able to make employment decisions based on the collegiate setting as a whole, rather than by division. Further research may provide additional information that female ATs can use with regard to employment-setting selection.

Comparing the decisions of parents in the present study with results from previous studies^{6-9,11,13} yielded similar conclusions and may indicate that changes in work setting and hours after having children are related to the inability of employers to accommodate the needs of parents in their chosen work settings. For example, 43% of female medical students regarded flexibility as an essential component of the work environment or changing hours and setting based on family responsibilities.⁹ Flexibility was the main reason for female physicians' career choices.⁹ Given the responses pertaining to flexibility, it was surprising that parental responses to career decision and employment-setting selection in our investigation conflicted with the flexibility concept. Most of the parents we surveyed indicated that children were not the major reason for which they changed job setting (59%, $n = 88$). In addition, 68% ($n = 101$) stated that they changed hours, and 45% ($n = 65$) said they changed their job setting after having children. Contradictory to previous answers given by our participants, parents perceived that energy levels tended to be insufficient with regard to time demands (49%, $n = 74$). Parents indicated that multiple time demands and family-employment conflict were major contributors or the impetus for changes in employment settings, yet they stated that children were not a major issue for the change, which may represent a disconnect in comprehending the complex relationship between work and family commitments. The lack of candid

Table 7. 2009 National Athletic Trainers' Association Female Athletic Trainers Employment Data (N = 11 165)^a

Employment Setting	Age Range, y						Total
	20–25	26–30	31–35	36–40	41–45	46+	
Amateur/recreation/youth sports	2	10	14	11	3	11	51
Business/sales/marketing	2	16	28	9	10	8	73
Clinic	343	1335	985	526	331	255	3775
College/university	294	1091	693	362	221	296	2957
Health/fitness/sport clubs	13	64	61	32	24	7	201
Hospital	21	101	97	65	41	39	364
Industrial/corporate	6	43	70	52	17	11	199
Military/government	9	55	42	28	14	11	159
Other	69	288	285	164	103	97	1006
Professional sports	3	26	17	8	1	6	61
Secondary school	188	739	662	325	204	201	2319
Total	950	3768	2954	1582	969	942	11 165

^a Student, retired, and unemployed female athletic trainers were not included.

self-reflection on parenting issues and reasons for a change in employment setting may result in reluctance on the part of both employer and parent to create or request flexibility in dealing with family and employment conflicts.

Other factors involved in career or employment-setting changes should be evaluated to fully understand why female ATs tend to change occupational settings after having children. In addition, we did not investigate salary gaps and burnout. A national concern for women as employees, salary gaps may also affect the female AT and female AT parent. Burnout is a factor in athletic training as a profession, but a direct link to parenting as an additional stressor should be studied to determine if the additional layer of responsibility affects the degree of burnout and subsequent occupational setting changes. Currently, female ATs provide conflicting results on the relationship of parenting to employment-setting selection and change, which indicates that an intricate relationship may exist among variables that were not explored in this study.

Nonparental Perspectives on Working Female ATs

Nonparents represented 61% ($n = 250$) of the total population surveyed, with the majority (77%, $n = 193$) of those individuals categorized as young professionals (0–5 years of experience) and the smallest population categorized as female ATs with 11 to 15 years of experience (15%, $n = 37$). The balance of respondents in the younger professional category mirrors NATA membership data (2009) for female ATs in the collegiate setting ($N = 2983$), indicating that most female ATs were between 26 and 30 years of age ($n = 1091$) (Table 7) (NATA, written communication, October 19, 2009). The decrease in female ATs in the collegiate setting with age verifies that women are increasingly exiting the collegiate setting after the age of 30, a trend also visible in other employment settings. Parental issues may be one reason for female ATs leaving the collegiate setting, yet the departure from employment by female ATs in all athletic training employment settings with increasing age may indicate a larger issue in athletic training that deserves further investigation. A better understanding of female AT demographics and parental choices beyond the age of 30 may provide further information as to why some individuals maintain employment in athletic training and others do not.

The majority of nonparent females stated that they wanted to have children (69%, $n = 173$) or were planning a family in the future, with most of those responses indicating that they are waiting until they have established a family-friendly home life or career. Overall, the current study indicates that 81% ($n = 328$) of female ATs either want to have children or have children, which is slightly higher than national findings, which indicate that 75% to 80% of females will be mothers.^{6,16} The high percentage of female ATs who plan to have children coupled with the low number of female ATs in the typical childbearing and motherhood age range may further validate the suggestion that individuals who have children or are parents may not be present in the collegiate setting.

Nonparents indicated that children would be a negligible factor or not a factor at all in their job-setting choice (62%, $n = 254$) (Table 6). Again, this information conflicts with research⁶ indicating that flexibility, children, and family life were important factors in the choice of occupational setting. The difference in perspective from nonparent to parent female AT may reflect inadequate awareness of the complex negotiation between professional and family responsibilities for female ATs⁴ or a lack of mentoring for nonparent female ATs regarding career choices. Because most female ATs surveyed plan to become parents, it would be prudent to address these important mentorship issues in both the educational setting and with ATs' employers. Nonetheless, while the need for flexibility was voiced by parent female ATs, perhaps young professional female ATs have created a new paradigm for juggling parent and work expectations that could be incorporated into current and future athletic training employment settings.

The Female AT Employment Environment

Previous investigators^{6,11} have noted that a negative stereotype still exists for working mothers, yet why and how the stereotype is manifested and maintained within society is not clearly understood. College-aged students gave more favorable evaluations to résumés from men and women without children than to résumés from women with children.¹¹ Mothers are still perceived as individuals who should be at home with the children, and fathers should be the breadwinners, relinquishing control in raising the

child.⁷ The void of female ATs within the typical age range of parents may be due to the unfavorable hiring or environment relative to parenting stereotypes.

Issues regarding gender equity and barriers for women have been perceived differently by men and women.⁷ It is important to understand gender equity in the context of the current employment population, in which approximately 50% of the workforce is female and 81% of those individuals desire to parent or participate in parenting.¹ Many responses from nonparent female ATs appeared to indicate negative views of female AT mothers, perhaps representing a form of intragender inequity, which is consistent with the literature.⁴ Negative reactions from coworkers were another cause of increased stress for mothers. This was noted by the female ATs we surveyed and in the literature⁴ as a key reason for leaving a profession.

Both positive and negative essay responses regarding bringing a child to work discussed the necessity of a good time-management protocol and communication among all parties regarding the effects on the environment. Negative responses indicate that children in the collegiate setting are a distraction and a hazard. Continued investigation into this specific area within athletic training would be beneficial to understanding how athletes and ATs perceive children in the workplace, in order to better accommodate working parents while maintaining the integrity and standards of a health care facility.

Common positive responses about past female AT experiences can be conveyed by the following quote: "I have a lot of respect for any of the female [athletic] trainers with children that I have encountered. It is a big balancing act between family and work. The field of athletic training does not have the typical 9–5 hours." The female ATs appeared to understand the struggles and challenges involved in working and parenthood (23%, $n = 62$). To effectively combine parenting and working, research^{7,9,18,19} indicates the need for a good social support system, organizational support from work, job flexibility, and maintained interest within the given setting.

"Final thoughts" provided by the participants indicated that the most common perspective ($n = 56$, 28%) was explained by the following excerpt:

It really all depends on the work set-up and flexibility at work. I believe a mom has to be clear about her priorities and stick to her guns. In general, athletic trainers have to educate that we are people too and need normalcy in our lives. There should be certain guidelines regarding practices and games that have to be followed in terms of scheduling. It is NOT easy to be a working mom and especially not easy to be a working athletic trainer with odd and extensive hours. We take care of everyone else and tend to neglect ourselves. It leads to burnout.

The relationships among parents, nonparents, supervisors, and institutions need to be further explored to identify productive working environments for those employed in the collegiate setting. Different approaches to flexibility, scheduling, and support should be investigated to aid employees and employers in providing a positive work environment, so that athletic training services are optimal.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to achieve a greater understanding of the experiences and perceptions of female ATs with regard to parenting, workplace challenges, and employment choices in the collegiate setting. The limited number of women in collegiate athletic training settings, coupled with the lower number of female ATs with children, is concerning yet predictable based upon national employment data. The choices of mothers to change hours or work settings may be based on complex dynamics, including irregular and overtime hours, inhospitable or inflexible work environments, the lack of understanding by nonparents, and pernicious societal stereotypes. Mentorship of female ATs may need to include realistic perspectives on combining parenting and work in the collegiate setting, in addition to an understanding of individual institutional policies regarding job requirements, so that parents or future parents can choose a work setting wisely. Factors that support athletic training as a family-friendly career should be further investigated.

Whether parenting has a significant effect on female AT career choices, especially with regard to the collegiate setting, remains unclear. Understanding female AT employment-setting choices, as well as nonparent perspectives, may aid in assessing whether perceptual or environmental (or both) changes are needed regarding parenting issues among all athletic training employment settings. Although we have demonstrated only a basic understanding of what the general population of female ATs perceives about parenting and athletic training, future researchers should identify and clarify the conflicting variables. We sought to capture female ATs' perspectives, but more investigation is needed to explore race, single-parent versus 2-parent households, sexual orientation, and athletic-division differences. Finally, male ATs' viewpoints on the relationships between parenting issues and career obligations should be studied to establish similarities and differences between the sexes.

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