

Work–Family Conflict Among Athletic Trainers in the Secondary School Setting

William A. Pitney, EdD, ATC, FNATA*; Stephanie M. Mazerolle, PhD, ATC†; Kelly D. Pagnotta, MA, ATC†

*Northern Illinois University, DeKalb; †University of Connecticut, Storrs

Context: Work–family conflict (WFC) negatively affects a professional's ability to function at work or home.

Objective: To examine perceptions of and contributing factors to WFC among secondary school athletic trainers.

Design: Sequential explanatory mixed-methods study.

Setting: Secondary school.

Patients or Other Participants: From a random sample of 1325 individuals selected from the National Athletic Trainers' Association Member Services database, 415 individuals (203 women, 212 men; age = 36.8 ± 9.3 years) provided usable online survey data. Fourteen individuals participated in follow-up interviews.

Intervention(s): Online WFC questionnaire followed by in-depth phone interviews.

Main Outcome Measure(s): Descriptive statistics were obtained to examine perceived WFC. Pearson product moment correlations were calculated to examine the relationship between work hours, total athletic training staff, and number of children and WFC score. We performed analysis of variance to examine differences between the independent variables of sex and control over work schedule and the dependent variable of WFC score. The *a priori* α was set at $P \leq .05$. Qualitative data were analyzed using inductive content analysis. Multiple-analyst

triangulation and member checks established trustworthiness of the qualitative data.

Results: Mean WFC scores were 23.97 ± 7.78 for scale 1 (*family* defined as having a partner or spouse with or without children) and 23.17 ± 7.69 for scale 2 (*family* defined as individuals, including parents, siblings, grandparents, and any other close relatives, involved in one's life), indicating moderate perceived WFC. A significant relationship was found between the average hours of work per week and WFC scores: those with less scheduling control experienced more WFC. Two dimensions emerged from the qualitative methods that relate to how WFC is mitigated in the secondary school environment: (1) organizational—having colleagues and administration that understood the role demands and allowed for modifications in schedule and personal time and (2) personal—taking time for oneself and having a family that understands the work demands of an athletic trainer resulted in reduced perceived WFC.

Conclusions: A large number of work hours per week and lack of control over work schedules affected the perceived level of WFC.

Key Words: work–family interface, work–family balance, role conflict

Key Points

- Work–family conflict is experienced by athletic trainers in the secondary school setting, regardless of sex, family situation, or the number of children.
- Organizational support from administrators and coaches was perceived to help balance work and family obligations.
- Taking time for oneself and having a family that understands the athletic trainer's work demands also reduced work–family conflict.

Work–family balance has been documented in the literature^{1–3} to be an important retention factor for those individuals employed in the sport industry (eg, coaches, athletic trainers [ATs]). Capel¹ reported the lack of personal and family time as a reason to leave the athletic training profession, a concern echoed by the findings of a Women in Athletic Training Committee survey.⁴ In examining retention factors among collegiate coaches and administrators, Pastore et al² noted that they were more likely to remain in their current positions as a result of the fulfillment of work–family balance. Although the work–family interface has become increasingly popular among scholars, until recently, limited attention has been given to the construct for those professionals working within the sport industry.^{5–7}

Researchers have begun to examine work–family conflict (WFC) within the coaching profession^{5–7}; however, there is

a modest amount of WFC within the athletic training profession.^{8–11} Furthermore, the occurrence of WFC has only been examined within the collegiate setting,^{8–11} and the findings may not be transferable to all clinical settings. At the initiation of this study (March 2009), 14.5% of all National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) members provided athletic training services to secondary schools either directly or through outreach programs, making it one of the larger clinical settings for employment.¹² Additionally, the American Medical Association¹³ and the NATA^{14,15} have developed official and summary statements, respectively, that encourage all schools with sporting programs, including secondary schools, to have adequate athletic medical personnel (full-time ATs) on staff. Moreover, with states such as New Jersey promoting legislation to mandate onsite medical coverage by an AT, the number of ATs working in that clinical setting will only

increase.^{13–15} Thus, investigating issues such as WFC that can negatively affect the professional role is warranted in the secondary school setting.

Long work hours have been documented as a primary contributing factor to the occurrence of WFC within several professions,^{16,17} including coaching⁶ and athletic training.^{8–10} Other factors, such as control over work schedules^{8,9} and flexibility in work schedules,^{5,7–9} have been identified as mediators for individuals managing their professional and personal lives. The work–family interface is complex, and scholars^{5,6} have suggested that it must be examined via a multilevel framework that includes organizational factors (eg, work hours, scheduling), individual factors (eg, personality, values), and sociocultural factors (eg, society views, gender roles). The purpose of our study, therefore, was twofold. First, we sought to explore the existence of WFC among ATs working in the secondary school setting and to identify those factors that contribute to their WFC in this setting. Second, we wanted to gain insight and understanding as to those factors that mitigate WFC in the secondary school setting. The following questions guided our investigation:

1. To what extent do ATs in the high school setting perceive WFC?
2. Is there a connection between the level of WFC and various demographic variables (eg, sex, marital status, family-unit size)?
3. Does the high school work environment influence the occurrence of WFC?
4. What factors are perceived to mitigate the occurrence of WFC?

METHODS

A sequential, explanatory, mixed-methods design¹⁸ with 2 phases was used for this study. This design allows the researchers to collect and analyze data quantitatively and then follow up with qualitative information to not only gain additional insight but also to confirm or disconfirm the study's findings.¹⁸ Phase I involved a cross-sectional survey of ATs in the secondary school setting to quantify their perceptions of WFC. Phase II involved collecting qualitative data from a purposeful sample of participants who completed phase I and served as a means to both confirm the phase I findings and investigate how ATs at the secondary level manage responsibilities in both their personal and professional lives. The study received institutional review board approval from Northern Illinois University and the University of Connecticut before data collection began.

Participants and Procedures

Phase I consisted of an online survey. The NATA Member Services Department provided a randomized list of 1325 e-mail addresses of secondary school NATA members whose primary work setting was secondary school; 1303 e-mails were deliverable. An initial e-mail invitation containing the survey Internet link was sent to these individuals. A total of 440 ATs (33.7%) volunteered to participate and accessed the online survey; of these, 415 surveys were usable for data analysis.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Data (N = 415)

| Demographic Characteristic | n (%) |
|--|------------|
| Sex | |
| Female | 203 (48.9) |
| Male | 212 (51.1) |
| Highest degree obtained | |
| Bachelor's | 160 (38.6) |
| Master's | 248 (59.8) |
| Doctorate | 4 (0.9) |
| Not specified | 3 (0.7) |
| Current job situation | |
| Full time | 338 (81.4) |
| Part time | 62 (14.9) |
| Clinical outreach | 11 (2.7) |
| Not specified | 4 (1.0) |
| Family situation | |
| Married or partnered | 270 (65.1) |
| Single, never married or partnered | 90 (21.7) |
| Living with significant other | 34 (8.2) |
| Divorced | 16 (3.9) |
| Not specified | 5 (1.1) |
| Children? | |
| Yes | 231 (55.7) |
| No | 183 (44.1) |
| Not specified | 1 (0.2) |
| National Athletic Trainers' Association District | |
| 1 | 30 (7.2) |
| 2 | 86 (20.7) |
| 3 | 59 (14.2) |
| 4 | 60 (14.5) |
| 5 | 20 (4.8) |
| 6 | 46 (11.1) |
| 7 | 35 (8.4) |
| 8 | 30 (7.2) |
| 9 | 27 (6.5) |
| 10 | 18 (4.3) |
| Not specified | 4 (1.0) |

At the conclusion of the WFC survey, interested individuals were invited to participate in phase II of the study, which involved confidential telephone interviews related to experience with WFC. Participants interested in the qualitative aspect of the study were instructed to provide confidential contact information (phone number and preferred time of day to be reached) to members of the research team. Because more individuals were interested in phase II than could be included, participants were randomly selected; we used data saturation to guide the total number of participants. Selected individuals were contacted with a consent form; once we received the consent form, we scheduled a formal interview and conducted it using a semistructured interview guide (Appendix). Table 1 provides a breakdown of the participants' demographic data.

Instrumentation

The online survey consisted of 2 sections. The first section contained 15 items pertaining to general demographic characteristics such as age, sex, years of experience, hours worked, and marital status. The second section contained two 5-item scales evaluating one's perceived level

Table 2. Work–Family Conflict Measures^a

| | Scale 1 | | Scale 2 | |
|---|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|
| | n | Mean \pm SD | n | Mean |
| The demands of my work interfere with my personal and family life | 337 | 4.88 \pm 1.70 | 411 | 4.82 \pm 1.66 |
| The amount of time my job requires makes it difficult to fulfill my family responsibilities | 337 | 4.51 \pm 1.68 | 411 | 4.33 \pm 1.66 |
| Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands of my job | 337 | 4.72 \pm 1.73 | 411 | 4.63 \pm 1.81 |
| Due to work related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities or miss out on family-related activities | 337 | 5.15 \pm 1.66 | 411 | 5.14 \pm 1.65 |
| There is a conflict between my job and commitment to those responsibilities and the responsibilities I have to my family | 337 | 4.67 \pm 1.69 | 411 | 4.35 \pm 1.72 |

^a Scale 1 defined *family* as having a partner or spouse with or without children. Scale 2 defined *family* as those individuals, including parents, siblings, grandparents, and any other close relatives, involved in one's life. Individuals could answer either scale or both scales, depending upon their current family situation. Each instrument was a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = *strongly disagree* through 7 = *strongly agree*.

of WFC based upon current family status. Scale 1 defined *family* as having a partner or spouse with or without children; scale 2 defined *family* as those individuals, including parents, siblings, grandparents, and any other close relatives, involved in one's life. Participants had the option to answer one scale or both scales, depending upon their family situation.

The survey, which was developed and validated by Netemeyer et al¹⁹ and Mazerolle et al¹⁰ in separate population groups, is scored along a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The 5 WFC items (Table 2) have previously demonstrated adequate internal consistency with a Cronbach α of 0.88 for working professionals¹⁹ and of 0.89 for ATs.¹⁰ Each 5-item scale was summed to provide a measure of WFC. With the current data, our verification of the instrument's reliability revealed a Cronbach α of 0.954 for scale 1 (*family* defined as having a partner or spouse with or without children) and 0.937 for scale 2 (*family* defined as those individuals, including parents, siblings, grandparents, and any other close relatives, involved in one's life).

The semistructured interview guide was based on the study's purpose and research questions, as well as preexisting literature on WFC in the athletic training profession^{8–11} and sport industry.^{5–7} All of the questions were constructed using the open-ended format to encourage reflection and discussion regarding the participant's experiences. We selected the semistructured format because it provided methodologic rigor but also allowed us flexibility in the event an unexpected theme emerged from data collection.^{20,21} Furthermore, when more than one researcher is involved in data collection, a semistructured interview format allows for consistency in collection methods as well as the production of reliable data.²² Before data collection, the interview guide was shared with 2 social science researchers to ensure the questions were appropriate and reflected our study's purpose. Feedback was digested by the researchers, and changes and edits were made to enhance the clarity and flow of the interview guide.

Data Analysis

We analyzed our quantitative data using SPSS (version 16.0; SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL). Participants' demographic data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, including means, SDs, frequencies, and percentages. Level of WFC

was examined with descriptive statistics, specifically mean responses to each question and the corresponding SD. The summed response to the 5 WFC items in each scale provides a measure of the extent to which WFC permeated the work–home interface of the ATs.

To examine the relationship between the level of WFC and the demographic variables of average work hours per week, total number of athletic training staff in work context, and number of children in one's care, we conducted a Pearson product moment correlation, with the a priori α level set at $P \leq .05$. An analysis of variance with the α level set a priori at $P \leq .05$ was conducted to examine whether a difference existed between the independent variables of control over work schedule, sex, having children, and having a flexible work schedule and the dependent variable of WFC score.

The qualitative data obtained in phase II were analyzed using an inductive content analysis, paralleling the basic, or generic, approach described by Merriam.²⁰ The process involves first examining the content of the interview transcripts and identifying concepts related to the research questions and purpose. These concepts were tagged with a conceptual label to capture their meaning. The conceptual labels, or codes, were then examined and thematized. Once emergent themes were generated from the data, each theme was compared and contrasted for the purposes of identifying whether higher-order and lower-order themes were evident. Trustworthiness of the qualitative findings was established using member checks and multiple-analyst triangulation, 2 strategies that are effective in establishing trustworthiness when combined.²³ Member checks, a critical step for establishing credibility,²⁰ were performed using interpretative verification.²³ Seven randomly selected participants were invited to examine the qualitative research findings and to verify that the findings were reasonable based on the information provided in the interviews. Of the 7 individuals invited, 6 responded and verified the qualitative results. Two researchers independently followed the aforementioned steps in data analysis to ensure that the results were interpreted accurately (multiple-analyst triangulation).²³ The researchers discussed findings and agreed upon the final themes before sharing the results with the participants.

RESULTS

Of the respondents, 203 (48.9%) were women and 212 (51.1%) were men. The participants were 37 ± 9 years old

Table 3. Interview Participants' Demographic Information

| Participant Pseudonym | Age, y | Sex | Years as Athletic Trainer | Years in Current Position | National Athletic Trainers' Association District | Highest Degree Earned | Family Situation | Employment Situation |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Alisha | 40 | Female | 13 | 15 | 1 | Bachelor's | Married or partnered | Full time |
| Carmine ^a | 42 | Female | 21 | 20 | 2 | Bachelor's | Divorced | Full time |
| Jonathan | 50 | Male | 26 | 27 | 2 | Master's | Married or partnered | Full time |
| Julie ^a | 30 | Female | 8 | 6 | 2 | Bachelor's | Single | Full time |
| Hanna | 26 | Female | 3 | 2 | 4 | Master's | Married or partnered | Full time |
| Lanna | 41 | Female | 18 | 13 | 4 | Bachelor's | Married or partnered | Clinic-outreach |
| Phillip | 52 | Male | 30 | 24 | 4 | Bachelor's | Married or partnered | Full time ^b |
| Bill ^a | 38 | Male | 13 | 9 | 4 | Master's | Married or partnered | Full time ^b |
| Jocelyn | 37 | Female | 16 | 4 | 4 | Bachelor's | Married or partnered | Full time |
| Forest ^a | 41 | Male | 14 | 11 | 6 | Master's | Married or partnered | Full time |
| Raymond ^a | 49 | Male | 20 | 2 | 7 | Masters | Married or partnered | Full time |
| Kevin | 33 | Male | 6 | 4 | 9 | Master's | Married or partnered | Part time |
| Jayna ^a | 28 | Female | 8 | 6 | 10 | Master's | Single | Full time |
| Jan | 28 | Female | 6 | 3 | 10 | Bachelor's | Married or partnered | Full time ^c |

^a Participated in the member-check process.

^b Full-time teacher with athletic training responsibilities.

^c Full-time instructor with no current athletic training responsibilities.

with 13 ± 8 years of experience as ATs. The majority (60%, $n = 248$) had obtained a master's degree.

Those ATs with children comprised 231 (55.7%) of the participants in the study. Additional demographic information for those participants in phase I of our study can be found in Table 1. A total of 14 individuals (8 women, 6 men) participated in phase II of the study. Participants in phase II averaged 38 ± 9 years of age with 14 ± 8 years of experience as ATs. Comparable with phase I, 3 (21.4%) of the participants were single and 6 (42.8%) had master's degrees.

Mean WFC scores were 23.97 ± 7.78 for scale 1 (*family* defined as having a partner or spouse with or without children) and 23.17 ± 7.69 for scale 2 (*family* defined as those individuals, including parents, siblings, grandparents, and any other close relatives, involved in one's life), indicating a moderate level of WFC (Table 2). The most highly rated items in both scales were "The demands of my work interfere with my personal and family life" and "Due to work related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities or miss out on family related activities."

For scale 1, female participants' WFC scores were slightly lower (23.59 ± 7.69) than those of the males (24.25 ± 7.85). For scale 2, female participants' WFC scores were also slightly lower (22.67 ± 7.52) than those of the males (23.63 ± 7.82). However, we found no difference between males' and females' perceived level of WFC for either scale 1 ($F_{1,336} = .610$, $P = .435$) or scale 2 ($F_{1,410} = 1.6$, $P = .207$).

When comparing ATs with children to those without children, we identified no difference in either the scale 1 WFC scores ($F_{1,335} = 3.304$, $P = .07$) or the scale 2 WFC scores ($F_{1,408} = 1.753$, $P = .186$). Those with children, however, had slightly higher mean WFC scores for scale 1 (24.5 ± 7.7) than did those without children (22.91 ± 7.8). Similarly, those with children had slightly higher mean WFC scores for scale 2 (23.6 ± 7.71) than did those without children (22.58 ± 7.66).

We noted no difference in the scale 1 WFC scores ($F_{3,328} = .328$, $P = .805$) or the scale 2 WFC scores ($F_{3,402} = 1.11$, $P = .345$) among the various family situations (married or partnered; single, never married or partnered; living with significant other; divorced; not specified). Our correlation analysis revealed a weak positive relationship ($r = 0.10$) between number of children and level of WFC on scale 1 that approached significance ($P = .065$); the scale 2 correlation, however, was substantially weaker ($r = 0.079$).

An examination of scheduling flexibility revealed a difference ($F_{2,335} = 13.47$, $P \leq .01$) in scale 1 WFC scores. The Scheffe post hoc analysis demonstrated that those who always had scheduling flexibility had lower WFC scores (19.51) than did those who sometimes had scheduling flexibility (23.78) and those who never had scheduling flexibility (27.79). We also found a relationship between the average work hours per week and WFC scores on scale 1 ($r = 0.294$, $P = .01$) and scale 2 ($r = 0.311$, $P = .01$). Participants in phase I reported averaging 47.14 ± 14.3 hours of work per week.

Demographic information for those who participated in phase II, which involved in-depth interviews, is provided in Table 3. Our qualitative analysis revealed that managing WFC and balancing one's work life and personal life was associated with both organizational and personal dimensions (Figure). The following discussion describes each emergent dimension and its themes. Quotes are provided to support our findings, and pseudonyms are used to protect participant identity.

Organizational Dimensions

The organizational dimensions theme explains the relationship between fulfillment of work-life balance through the workplace or organizational policies (or both). This dimension is summarized by interpersonal support from administration, fellow ATs in the work setting (if more than one), and coaches. The interpersonal support from these groups allowed for scheduling flexibility,

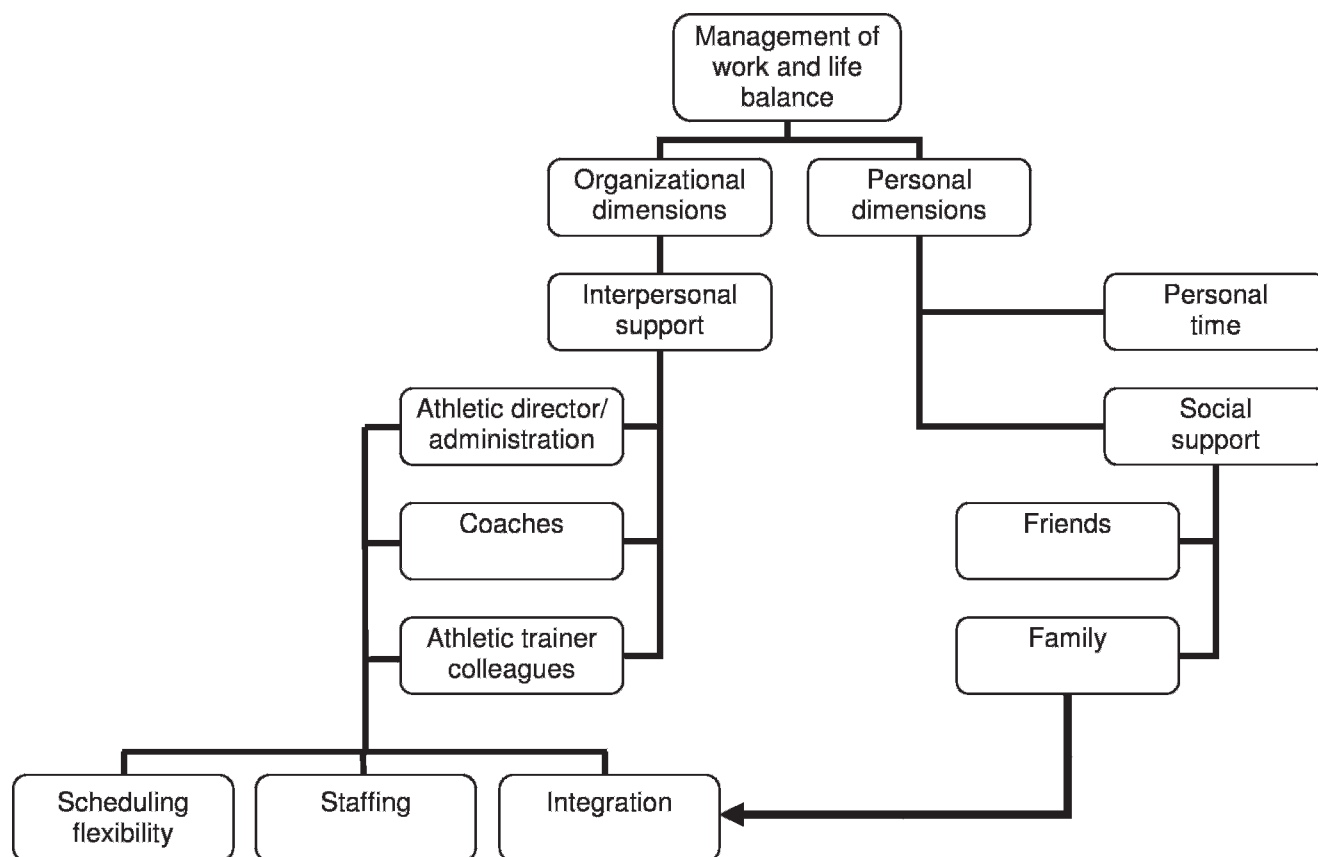


Figure. Work-life balance for athletic trainers in the secondary school setting.

staffing, and integration of personal-work life. In the following section, we present each factor that encompasses the organizational aspect of work-life balance.

Support from Administrators and Coaches. Having a supportive athletic director helped the participants to balance work and personal responsibilities. For example, Carmine stated:

I would say personally, I'm very lucky with my athletic director, [he is] very supportive ... [he] wants everything covered obviously if it comes to be that we both have, you know, personal issues and we can't be at something he's okay with that ... he understands we both have families, and he's very flexible with it. I've seen other administrators in the area who are ... expecting a lot more hours ... they want to let [the teams] practice at night, and expect the trainer (*sic*) to be there at night while they decide to practice. Like I said, we've been very lucky with that.

Similarly, Julie corroborated this finding when she said, "my athletic director, who is my direct supervisor, is really understanding about if I need to take a sick day or a personal day as long as 1 of the 2 of us [ATs] can arrange coverage; he's fine with that, he's very supportive of that."

Administrator support was very important to a majority of the participants in phase II, but just as important were support and understanding from the coaching staff, particularly because they set practice and game schedules. Lanna commented on how understanding and support was

garnered from both coaches and the athletic director when she said, "... most coaches at the high school have their own families so they tend to be a little more sympathetic. I have a really great athletic director and so when I would come to him, he was pretty sympathetic about needing some time here or there"

Support from administration and coaches facilitated the use of several strategies by ATs to manage WFC. These strategies involved staffing and scheduling flexibility and family integration into the work context.

Scheduling Flexibility and Staffing. A level of flexibility with their schedules in the high school setting allowed participants to gain some balance between work life and family life. This flexibility was garnered in 2 major ways in the secondary school setting: (1) atmosphere and mindset of the setting and (2) number of staff members. Jayna discussed how she was able to work with her athletic director and modify her schedule to have personal time a couple of mornings a week, which speaks to both the aforementioned theme and the atmosphere of the secondary school setting:

Mondays and Fridays, I don't work in the morning so I have those times for myself ... sometimes I'll go in a little bit earlier and ... work out ... for myself and get some stuff done so I'm ready to go; school's over at 2:30 so I have to be kind of ready to go by 2:00.

The flexibility found in scheduling at the secondary school level, as a result of the atmosphere, was echoed by Bill

when he stated, “I like the fact that at the high school level ... I seem to have some control over my hours still, although not as much as I like to at times, but I still can have pretty flexible hours if I need.”

For those participants with a second team member, work scheduling flexibility was improved and more realistic than for those without an additional staff member. Carmine discussed the improvements in his life balance when his administration added a second AT:

Oh, it's night and day; it's amazing! I mean, having done it all [myself] for about 12 years and being the sole provider and trying to be everything to these athletes because they're so used to it—you know, to be at every event and be there every single day, well or sick The difference of hiring a second person and having that [scheduling] option is you know, like, irreplaceable. You know with my kids, now, if one of our kids is sick, he has kids as well, you know, we call each other, we don't have to call anybody else, you know, we call each other and say “Look, so and so is sick; I can't be in today,” or “I'm going to be late,” or “I need to, you know, chaperone this,” or “go to the doctor,” or, you know, so yah, it's been amazing. It's a huge difference.

Another participant, Forest, discussed the level of scheduling flexibility that comes with having additional staff versus working in isolation. He articulated that this “is my first time to have an assistant and it's been kind of neat to be able to walk away and say, hey I want to go do this and you got it. So for the last 2 years, it's been that way”

Family Integration. The concept of family integration was mainly discussed by ATs with families and was defined for this group as the opportunity to incorporate family time into the workday. When supported by administration and coaches, ATs can bring family members, such as children, to practice or game coverage and interact with and care for them. For example, Jonathan stated, “when my kids were in elementary school, they literally walked from their elementary school 5 blocks to [my school] and spent the afternoon in the [athletic] training room. If they got their homework done quickly enough, they were able to go out and sit and watch games [with me].”

Family integration into the work context required support not only from administration and coaches but also from the family. Forest explained how his wife was instrumental in transporting his children to the school to be with him: “My wife is very supportive of me. I get my kids up here for, like, pregame meal before football games or basketball games or [they] come see me and we'll eat dinner together before I go back to work”

Personal Dimensions

Personal dimensions refer to those factors that allowed the secondary school AT to meet personal interests and obligations that were not dependent on or provided within the workplace. These factors included making time during the day for personal responsibilities and social support from both family and friends.

Address Personal Time. Participants explained that to balance work life and family life, you must be sure to address personal needs by ensuring you have time for

yourself. When asked what advice she would give to those working in the secondary school setting to lessen WFC, Jayna stated: “You have to learn to say no. You can't be [at the school] all the time. Now, when we have days off I'm not there all the time ... you just have to say ‘no’ and you have to kind of watch out for yourself because not everybody will.” Jocelyn supported this by saying “... take time out for yourself because, when I first got started, it was just all about athletic training and then, now I realized if you have the time off you may as well take it because it's meant for yourself to have that.”

Social Support. Obtaining social support from both family and friends was a key factor in balancing work and personal time. For example, Jocelyn explained how her husband helps to manage caregiving at home when she is busy with her role: “he just kind of picks up the slack during football so whatever I don't get done, he just kind of picks up and does it.” Raymond explained how he received support from his wife to balance home responsibilities: “I wouldn't be able to [balance work and home life] without her. She runs the work in the house, she takes care of the details, she just tells me when to show up—and I do.”

Social support was not only related to helping and/or covering specific family roles but also to obtaining a level of understanding from one's spouse or partner. For example, when asked how he was able to balance work and family life, Forest explained that it comes from a high level of understanding of the profession that his wife has:

I think [for] most of it my work comes first, and my wife is very understanding of that. She's been very supportive. I mean she gets frustrated at times, but she's been with me since in high school, so I mean she's been around athletic training from the get go and she understands the hours and understands that we're not going to get paid a whole lot, but we're going to be okay, but she's been very supportive of what I do.

Friends also provided social support and understanding to ATs in this study. For example, Julie stated “... my friends are pretty understanding and because I don't have to come in to work until usually between 11:00 and 12:00, sometimes we get together for breakfast or an early lunch ... or if I'm not working in an evening, we might get together then.”

DISCUSSION

The purpose of our study was to gain a better understanding of WFC within the secondary school setting. Specifically, we hoped to discover what factors, if any, lead to WFC for this group and what, if anything, can be done to improve life balance for the secondary school AT. Overall, we found that, as is the case for ATs in the collegiate setting, WFC can occur, but through support networks, which encompass work and home, a balanced lifestyle is feasible for the secondary school AT.

Regardless of sex, family situation, or number of children, participants in the current study experienced moderate levels of WFC. These results corroborate previous WFC research⁸ that found that ATs working in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I setting experienced WFC regardless of sex or family status.

However, this finding was not substantiated by previous studies^{24,25} on other working professionals. Those working professionals, particularly women with young children, experienced more WFC,^{24,25} yet for our group of ATs, those demographic factors were not an influence.

A multitude of factors could explain this finding, but the most logical centers on the age of the data. Much of the sex and family status data were collected in the 1990s and may not fully illustrate the current dynamic in the workplace or at home. Furthermore, the customary roles of breadwinner and homemaker are no longer associated with traditional gender roles; many males are beginning to assume more of a role in household duties, thus possibly explaining the lack of gender differences.²⁶

The ATs in the current study who had more control over their work schedules reported less WFC than did those without that degree of control; this finding was verified by the qualitative data analysis. This result also authenticates the work of previous researchers,⁸ who noted that lack of scheduling flexibility and control over work schedule were contributing factors to WFC among both ATs and coaches working in the Division I setting.⁵⁻⁷ Distinct, however, from the collegiate setting, the secondary school setting appears to provide the AT with more flexibility and control. On many occasions, the phase II participants indicated that the flexibility afforded by the secondary school setting allowed them to meet personal and family responsibilities when necessary. This is consistent with organizational research^{7,10,27} demonstrating that providing flexible time to working professionals reduced experiences of WFC.

Mazerolle et al⁸ also found that the hours worked to address job responsibilities were an antecedent of WFC. Similarly, we identified a positive relationship between the hours worked per week and WFC scores. Hours per week addressing athletic training obligations was a key qualitative finding related to role conflict in a study²⁸ examining role strain among dual-position ATs and physical educators in the secondary school setting. Moreover, Pitney et al²⁸ found that hours worked per week in athletic training was the only predictor of total role strain. In a separate study investigating the professional commitment of the AT, Pitney²⁹ showed that secondary school ATs took time to rejuvenate or handle the hours worked and made sure to take time away from their work-related responsibilities, indicating that hours worked had the potential to affect the ATs' quality of life or commitment to their positions.

The current study revealed how various aspects of the secondary school organization can mitigate perceived WFC. Participants explained that perceived support from administration and coaches was critical in balancing their work-related responsibilities and their personal lives. In most instances, the balance was achieved by modifying the work schedule, integrating family into the work context, or addressing staffing issues. In the sport context, Dixon and Sagas⁷ found that organizational support reduced WFC. Similarly, ATs working in the secondary school setting who had support from administration tended to have less perceived role strain.²⁸ Participants in phase II of our study identified the support they received from the administration and coaches as rather "family friendly," meaning that the ATs could integrate their families into the work setting and take time to address personal needs that arose. In a

recent work-life balance study, Mazerolle³⁰ identified integration as a strategy used by ATs working in the collegiate setting; integration has been suggested previously not only for the collegiate setting^{10,31} but also for other working professionals as a means by which to reduce WFC.²⁶ These findings underscore the importance of an organizational support structure that values family-friendly policies as a way to reduce WFC.

Our participants discussed the need to create or maintain personal time so that they could take care of themselves or their families, or both. Setting boundaries to carve out time for oneself to limit the consuming nature of a particular professional role has been implicated as an important aspect of maintaining professional commitment²⁹ and reducing role strain.²⁸ In a study of professional commitment among ATs working in the secondary school setting,²⁹ participants explained the necessity of having adequate time away from a role to care for oneself and emotionally recharge. Pitney et al²⁸ found that ATs who proactively worked with administrators and coaches to make clear what they had time to do tended to perceive less role strain. Setting boundaries and prioritizing roles and responsibilities are often recommended by work-life scholars and experts³² and are easily accomplished by saying "no," calling on coworkers, and applying integration.³⁰ As in the collegiate setting, having a coworker (or several coworkers) with whom to share work responsibilities allowed the secondary school AT to achieve a balance and assume some control over the work schedule. Interestingly, however, the concept of integration, which has been previously recommended for the collegiate AT, took on a different meaning at the secondary school level. For the collegiate AT, integration meant taking the "down time" during the workday to exercise, do laundry, or spend time with a spouse. The secondary school level provided a more traditional family-friendly environment, allowing the AT to interact with his or her children while working. Regardless of the setting, establishing boundaries and priorities appears to allow the AT to achieve a balanced lifestyle.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

Our findings demonstrate that WFC is experienced by ATs in the secondary school setting, regardless of sex, family situation, or number of children. These results confirm previous WFC results among ATs. Organizational support from administrators and coaches was perceived to help ATs to balance work and family obligations, allowing for scheduling flexibility and coverage by other staff, as well as family integration into the secondary school context. Organizational leaders in the secondary school setting who wish to reduce WFC among their staffs should consider creating family-friendly policies and exploring their staff's perceptions of the level of support they receive. Additionally, considering the expansion of staff and allowing for scheduling flexibility are advised, as is monitoring the hours worked per week by ATs in the secondary school setting.

Athletic trainers in the secondary school setting are advised to further develop interpersonal skills in order to negotiate with administrators regarding modifications of schedules, personal time release, and family integration into the work setting in order to mitigate WFC.

Our study cannot be generalized to all athletic training settings. For those ATs working in a clinical outreach setting, the influences of WFC may be much different. Although we included some participants who were employed in the clinical outreach setting, our purpose was not to examine workplace differences or the influence of dual responsibilities. Future researchers should investigate differences among those ATs employed directly in the secondary school setting versus those employed in the clinical outreach setting.

A one-time, cross-sectional survey has its own limitations, in that we were not able to obtain a full understanding of WFC influences over the course of an individual's career or even over a 1-year period. Longitudinal research is warranted to further understand the influences that career progression and changes in family status have on perceived WFC.

REFERENCES

1. Capel SA. Attrition of athletic trainers. *Athl Train J Natl Athl Train Assoc.* 1990;25(1):34–39.
2. Pastore DL, Inglis S, Danylchuk KE. Retention factors in coaching and athletic management: differences by gender, position, and geographic location. *J Sport Soc Issues.* 1996;20(4):427–441.
3. Pastore DL. Male and female coaches of women's athletic teams: reasons for entering and leaving the profession. *J Sport Manage.* 1991;5(2):128–143.
4. Women in Athletic Training Committee. Survey of men and women in athletic training. <http://www.nata.org/committees/wat/survey/htm>. Accessed April 26, 2004.
5. Dixon MA, Bruening JE. Perspectives on work–family conflict in sport: an integrated approach. *Sport Manage Rev.* 2005;8(3):227–253.
6. Dixon MA, Bruening JE. Work–family conflict in coaching. I: a top-down perspective. *J Sport Manage.* 2007;21(3):377–406.
7. Dixon MA, Sagas M. The relationship between organizational support, work–family conflict, and the job-life satisfaction of university coaches. *Res Q Exerc Sport.* 2007;78(3):236–247.
8. Mazerolle SM, Bruening JE, Casa DJ. Work–family conflict, part I: antecedents of work–family conflict in National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I-A certified athletic trainers. *J Athl Train.* 2008;43(5):505–512.
9. Mazerolle SM, Bruening JE. Sources of work–family conflict among certified athletic trainers, part I. *Athl Ther Today.* 2006;11(5):33–35.
10. Mazerolle SM, Bruening JE, Casa DJ, Burton LJ. Work–family conflict, part II: job and life satisfaction in National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I-A certified athletic trainers. *J Athl Train.* 2008;43(5):513–522.
11. Milazzo SA, Miller TW, Bruening JE, Faghri PD. A survey of Division I-A athletic trainers on bidirectional work–family conflict and its relation to job satisfaction [abstract]. *J Athl Train.* 2006; 41(suppl 2):S73.
12. National Athletic Trainers' Association. Membership statistics. <http://www.nata.org/members1/documents/membstats/2009%2003.htm>. Accessed April 29, 2010.
13. American Medical Association. Official statement on guidelines for medical coverage for secondary schools. http://www.nata.org/members1/canworc/ss/ama_recommendation.pdf. Accessed September 7, 2007.
14. National Athletic Trainers' Association. Official statement on secondary schools. <http://www.nata.org/statements/official/secondaryschool.pdf>. Accessed September 7, 2007.
15. Almquist J, McLeod Valovich TC, Cavanna A, et al. Summary statement: appropriate medical coverage for the secondary school-aged athlete. *J Athl Train.* 2008;43(4):416–427.
16. Frone MR, Yardley JK, Markel KS. Developing and testing an integrative model of the work–family interface. *J Voc Behav.* 1997;50(2):145–167.
17. Major VS, Klein KJ, Ehrhart MG. Work time, work interference with family, and psychological distress. *J Appl Psychol.* 2002;87(3): 427–436.
18. Creswell JW. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches.* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2003:16–19.
19. Netemeyer RG, Boles JS, McMurrian R. Development and validation of work–family conflict and family-work conflict scales. *J Appl Psychol.* 1996;81(4):400–410.
20. Merriam SB. *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education.* 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 1998:11, 12, 74, 204.
21. Creswell JW. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2007.
22. Seidman I. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences.* 3rd ed. New York, NY: Teachers College Press; 2006.
23. Pitney WA, Parker J. *Qualitative Research in Physical Activity and the Health Professions.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics; 2009:63–65.
24. Duxbury L, Higgins C, Lee C. Work–family conflict: a comparison by gender, family type, and perceived control. *J Fam Issues.* 1994; 15(3):449–466.
25. Greenhaus JH, Beutell NJ. Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Acad Manage Rev.* 1985;10(1):76–88.
26. Rapoport R, Bailyn L, Fletcher J, Pruitt B. *Beyond Work–Family Balance.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2002:26–28.
27. Babin BJ, Boles JS. The effects of perceived co-worker involvement and supervisor support on service provider roles stress, performance and job satisfaction. *J Retailing.* 1996;72(1):57–75.
28. Pitney WA, Stuart ME, Parker J. Role strain among dual position physical educators and athletic trainers working in the high school setting. *Phys Educ.* 2008;65(3):157–168.
29. Pitney WA. A qualitative examination of professional role commitment among athletic trainers working in the secondary school setting. *J Athl Train.* 2010;45(2):198–204.
30. Mazerolle SM. Enhancing work and life balance in athletic training. Paper presented at: 62nd annual meeting of the Eastern Athletic Trainers' Association Convention; January 8–11, 2010; Boston, MA.
31. Mazerolle SM, Bruening JE. Work–family conflict, part 2: how athletic trainers can ease it. *Athl Ther Today.* 2006;11(6):47–49.
32. Robinson J. *Work to Live.* New York, NY: Berkeley Publishing Group; 2003.

Appendix. Interview Guide.

1. Please provide some information about your professional career.
2. Have you ever worked in another clinical setting besides the high school setting? What is so appealing about the high school setting for you compared to other clinical settings?
3. Describe the balance between your personal life and your work life.
4. Have you experienced challenges finding a balance between your personal and professional life?
 - If so, share an instance when you have faced this challenge.
 - If not, what has allowed you to maintain this balance?
5. Discuss if working in the high school setting provides a suitable working environment to achieve a balance between your work and home life.
6. How does your administration (HS AD)/supervisors (clinic) help or hinder in finding a balance between work and home?

7. In what way have co-workers helped or hindered your ability to maintain life balance?
 8. In what way has your spouse/partner helped or hindered your ability to maintain life balance?
 9. How do you and your spouse/partner divide the labor/home responsibilities?
 10. If a new athletic trainer was just about to enter this work setting, what advice would you give him/her to help them maintain a balanced life?
- Abbreviation: HS AD indicates high school athletic director.

Address correspondence to William A. Pitney, EdD, ATC, FNATA, Department of Kinesiology & Physical Education, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115. Address e-mail to wpitney@niu.edu.