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A parental perspective of the work-life interface of college athletic trainers: A descriptive qualitative design

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Context: The collegiate athletic setting is often described as arduous (i.e. long hours, travel, pressure to win). This workplace climate has been found to increase conflicts experienced between work, home, and life roles. Guilt is a newer concept that has been related to work family conflict among athletic trainers. The concept, however, has yet to be fully explored from a descriptive, in-depth perspective. Thus, we aimed to better understand experiences of work-family conflict and guilt from intercollegiate athletic trainers who are parents.

Methods: We used a purposive sampling process to recruit athletic trainers working in the collegiate setting who were also parents. In total, 12 college athletic trainers (6=female, 6=male) participated in the study. All 12 were married (12 ± 7 years) with children (range 1-4; 2 ± 1). Participants were 39 ± 7 years old and had been working as a certified athletic trainer for 17 ± 7 years. Participants were asked questions regarding work-family conflict and guilt through a semi-structured interview. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and a phenomenological approach was employed to analyze the data. Data saturation was achieved, and a peer review and multiple analyst triangulation satisfied credibility.

Results: Our descriptive analyses revealed 3 main themes: 1) conflict and guilt, 2) guilt is bidirectional, and 3) management of guilt. *Conflict and guilt* were discussed as unavoidable as the role of athletic trainer and parent are equally demanding. Our participants described feelings of conflict and guilt because they wanted to spend time, equally, in each role. *Guilt was bidirectional* as each role was described as equally important to the athletic trainer. Participants described guilty feelings due to the demands of each role (parent and athletic trainer), creating interference between those roles. The management theme was specifically defined by three subthemes, which included creating a *separation* between work and parenting roles, the benefits of having a *supportive workplace*, and the importance of having co-workers and supervisors with *shared life experiences, such as the role of being a parent*.

Conclusion: Work-family conflict and guilt were reported by our participants largely in part due to the demanding nature of both being a parent and an athletic trainer. Life stage of the children has the potential to impact experiences of conflict and guilt, and thus should be further explored. Moreover, our findings suggest that guilt for the athletic trainer in the college setting, who places a high level of importance on their life and work roles, will likely experience guilt due to wanting to perform well in each. Athletic trainers felt they had several coping strategies to manage their conflict and guilt, but still recognized they experienced it regardless.