

Research You Can Use

The Benefits of Child Health Programs for Businesses

Joni Sasaki, '06
Claremont McKenna College

Major, D., Cardena, R., & Allard, C. (2004). Child health: A legitimate business concern. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 9(4)*, 306-321.

Poor child health can negatively impact parents' lives at work. Business organizations should therefore consider family-friendly initiatives that may address this concern. This article examines four such initiatives – prenatal programs, lactation programs, sick child care, and flexible working arrangements – and considers implications for a business' health care expenses, face time, productive time, and employer attractiveness.

Scientific and company-reported evidence support prenatal programs as a means of reducing health care costs. Considering the lifetime cost of caring for a low-birth-weight baby can reach as high as \$500,000 while a prenatal class can be provided for as little as \$400, prenatal programs can be an important investment. Company-reported evidence also reports positive effects on employer attractiveness and a trend of reduced employee absenteeism in relation to the implementation of prenatal programs.

Research also supports lactation programs as a benefit for businesses. In these programs, mothers are encouraged to maintain breastfeeding once they return to work because breastfeeding is important in maintaining child health. Lactation programs have been shown to reduce health care costs and decrease employee absenteeism, as well as positively impact employee commitment, recruitment, and public image.

Sick child care is a helpful benefit for parents who may not have the option of missing work to provide care for their child. Because sick child care ranks among the most desirable employer-sponsored child-care benefits, there seems to be a positive relationship between the availability of sick child care and organizational commitment. Preliminary research on health care expenses shows that sick child care costs less than an absent employee, so such programs may be well worth a business' investment.

Flexible working arrangements are important to many working parents and are much more prevalent in business organizations than sick child care benefits. Research shows that flexible working arrangements have a positive effect on employee health and well-being, and they are associated with reduced child health care expenses and employee tardiness and absenteeism. Evidence suggests that flexible working arrangements are desirable, especially for working parents, and are connected to higher employee satisfaction and employer attractiveness.

These four initiatives represent preventative and reactive programs that may ultimately impact business outcomes. Research has shown that the effects of the programs are widely positive, thus legitimizing child health as a business concern.

Take-home message: In the long-run, it is in businesses own interest to offer child health programs for their employees.

Research You Can Use is a translation of selected research on topics related to the intersection of work, family, and children. The research articles were selected by students in the Psychology of Work, Family, and Children class (Psyc 116) in fall 2005. The information in the research articles were rewritten into plain language by student research assistants at the Berger Institute. The Berger Institute also has a brief listing of exemplary research that supports our conclusions about best practices for public policies, employers, communities, and working families. We invite you to log on for more information: <http://berger.cmc.edu>. *This was published in the Berger Institute newsletter, Spring 2006, vol. 6.*

About the Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children

The Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children is a non-profit research institute at Claremont McKenna College, a selective liberal arts college that is a member of the Claremont Colleges – a university consortium. The Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children provides data-based research on the challenges facing individuals, working families, and employers to improve the quality of family life and enhance productivity and the bottom line.

Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children
Claremont McKenna College
850 Columbia Avenue
Claremont, CA 91711
909.607.2928
Fax: 909.607.9672
bergerinstitute@cmc.edu
<http://berger.cmc.edu>