Rethinking Work-Life Balance
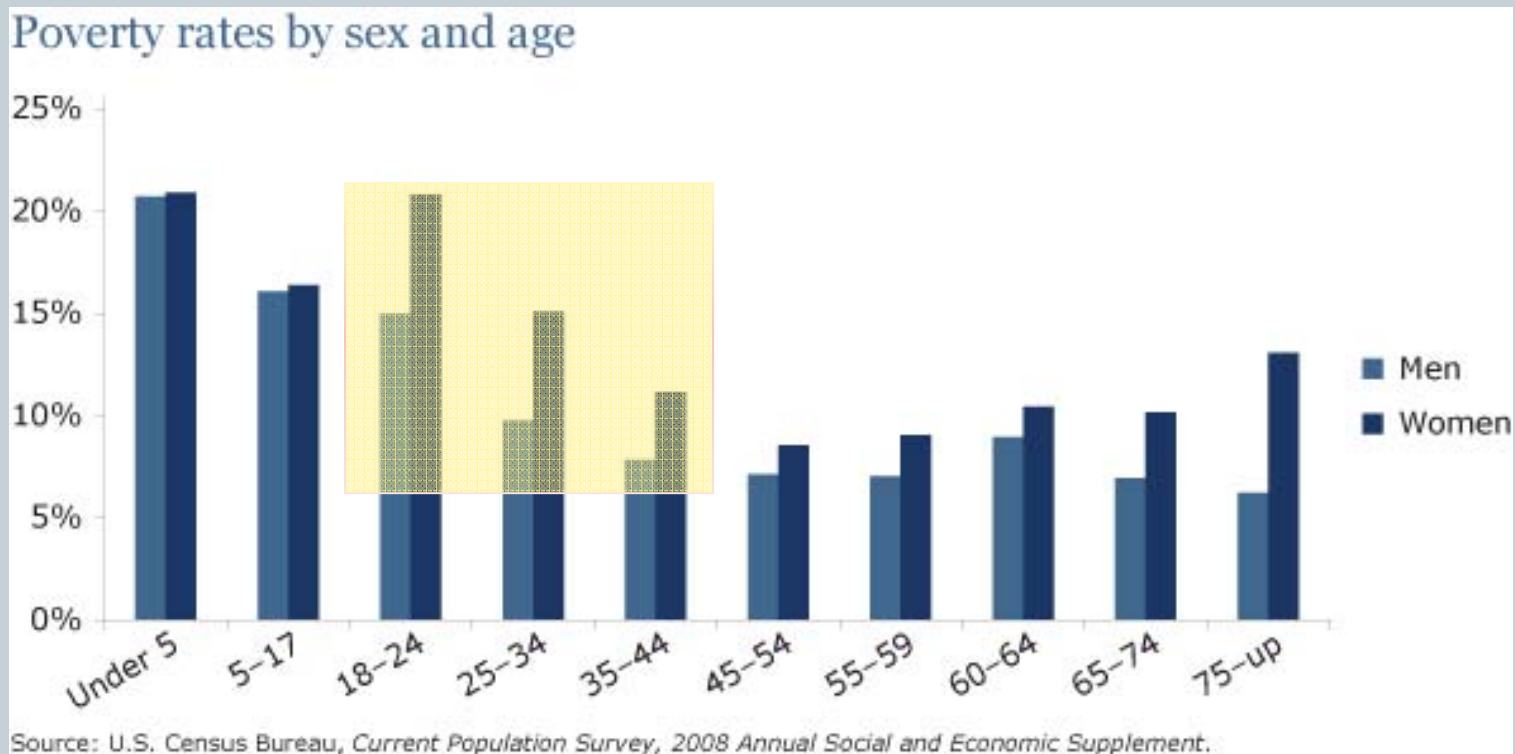
BARB SILVER

HELEN MEDERER

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

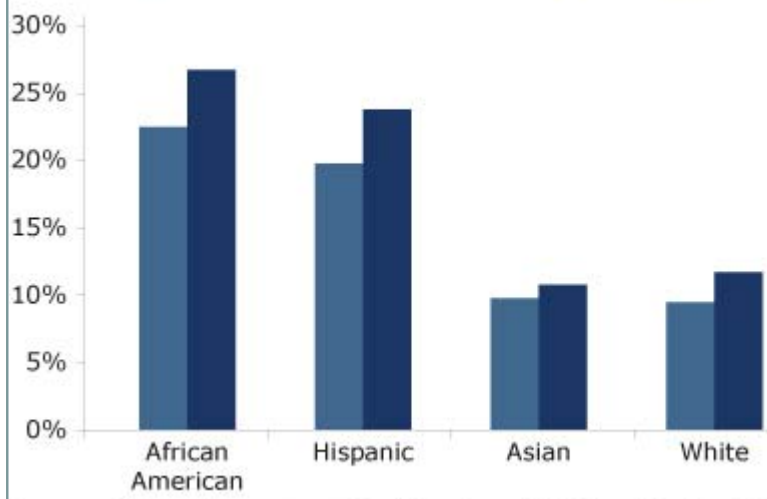**FEBRUARY 6, 2013**

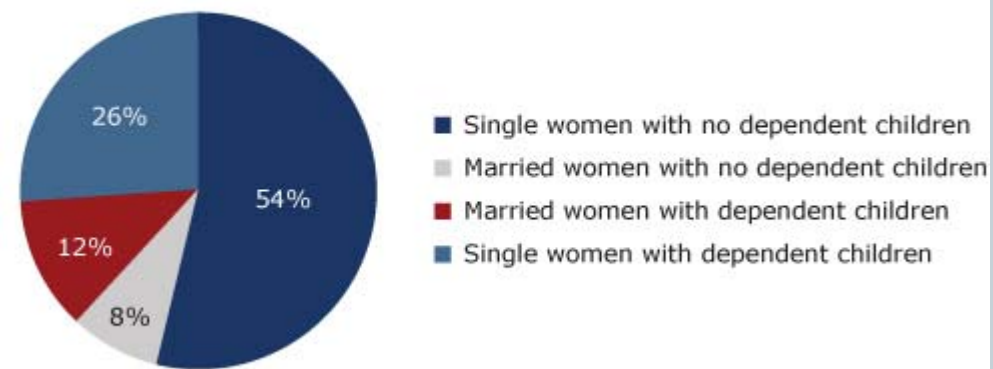# 23% of mothers are out of the workforce, compared to 1% of fathers

Poverty rates by sex and age

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.*

Percentage of men and women in poverty by race/ethnicity

30%	
25%	
20%	
15%	
10%	
5%	
0%	African American Hispanic Asian White

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.*

Women in poverty: family composition of household

26%

54%

12%

8%

- Single women with no dependent children
- Married women with no dependent children
- Married women with dependent children
- Single women with dependent children

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.*

- Caring economy
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B87oylDNInc
- Sequestration: head start cuts
- No sig diff bet single parents and other parents in any outcome variable
- About 43% of URI staff are parents of dependent children; 21% of those are un-partnered women vs. 10% of men

- Workplace – workforce mismatch
- Skilling up the workforce
- Voices in the shadow
  - Motherhood and parenting
  - Women and work
  - Aging
- Parental leave internationally (caring economy)
- Caregiving –by gender, class, race

What do you mean, "rethinking" ???

- How do you define Work-Life Balance?
- Who is responsible for it?
- How can you have more of it?

Defining Work-Life Balance

Work Life

Balance

Work Life

Fit

Work Life

Integration
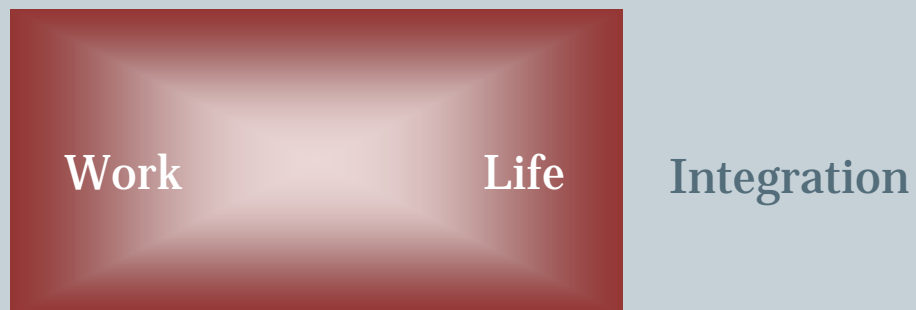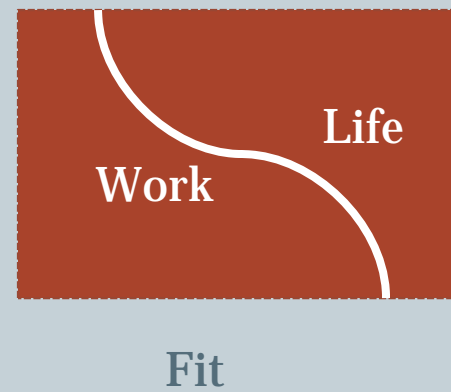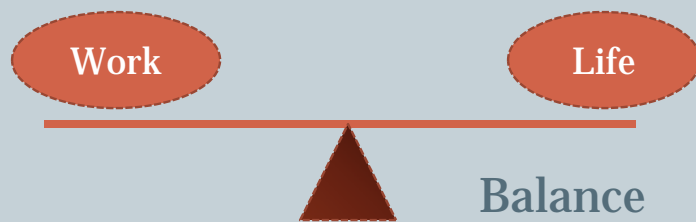
Work Intrudes into Family . . .

Work-Centrism

"Everybody's getting together after work to do some more work-- you in?"

How is WLB different today than in the past?

- **Workforce is different**
  - Age, gender, dual earner, cultural diversity, working longer and harder
- **Workplace is different**
  - Global economy, faster paced, constant electronic connections, service/information economy
- **Expectations are different**
  - Younger workers expecting more time for family/personal and more work-life supports from employers
  - Older workers expecting to stay in workforce longer
- **Ideal worker norm**
  - Available 24-7, no family responsibilities
- **National and URI initiatives**

What is WLB composed of?
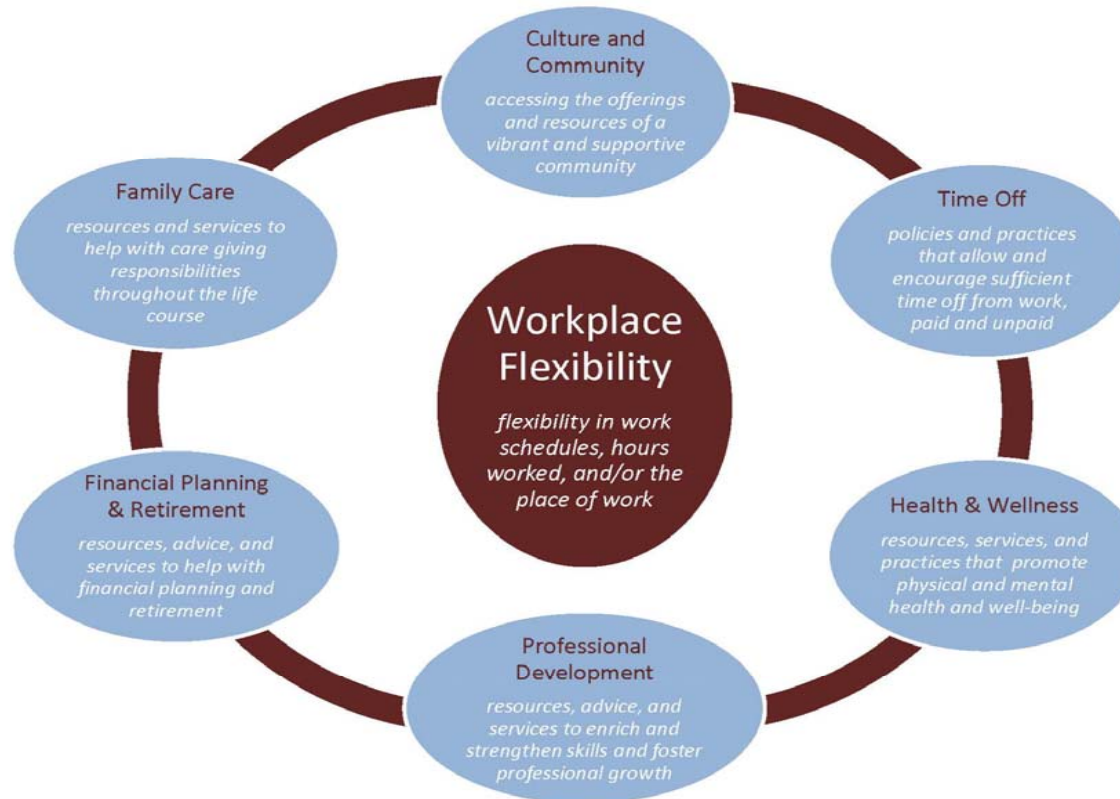
Workplace Flexibility - what is it?

- Flexibility: *the ability to adjust when, where, and/or how you work to better meet personal/family responsibilities while meeting work obligations*

- Flex time and flex place

- Management of work time

- Organization of career

Workplace Flexibility - why is it important?

- *Equity/diversity issue*
- *Workers' rights issue*
- *Business case*
- *Addressing barriers*
  - *cost, fear of abuse, difficult to manage, loss in productivity*
- *Supervisory support ←→ implementation gap*

URI Work-Life Staff Survey

- 824 – 44.3%
- 72% female
- 92.8% white, 2.6% African American, 1.8% Asian
- 72.5% married/partnered
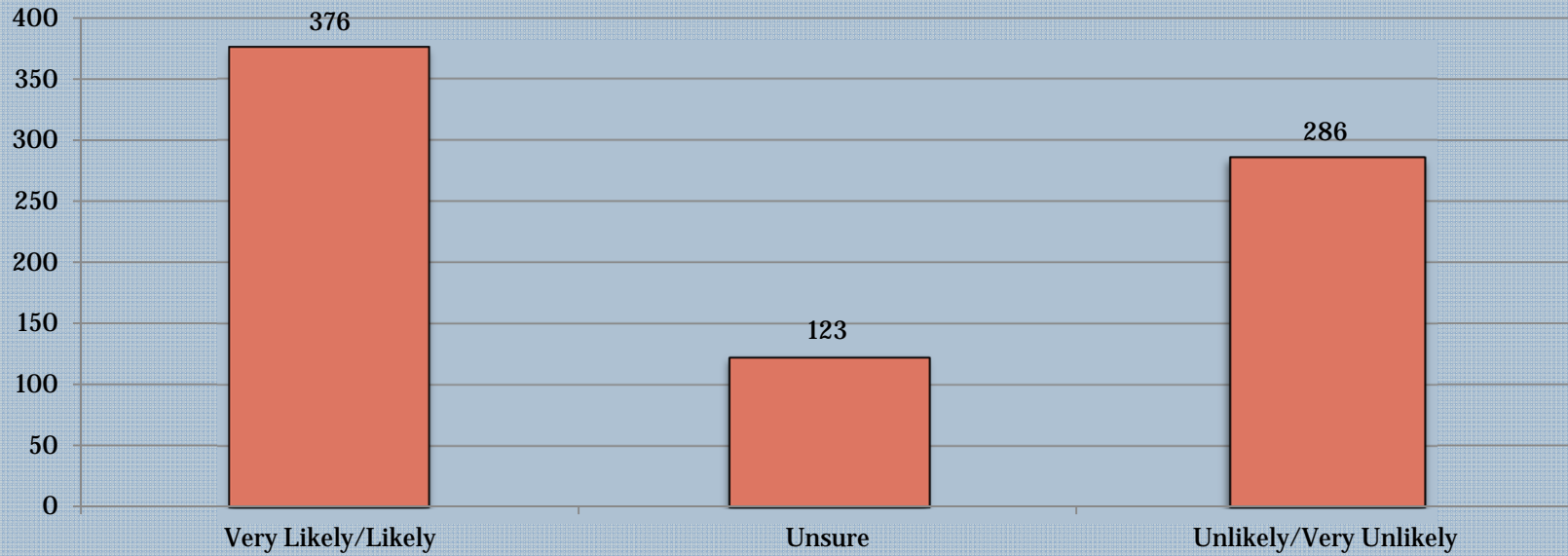- 68% women and 71% men had employed partner

Why do you work part-time?
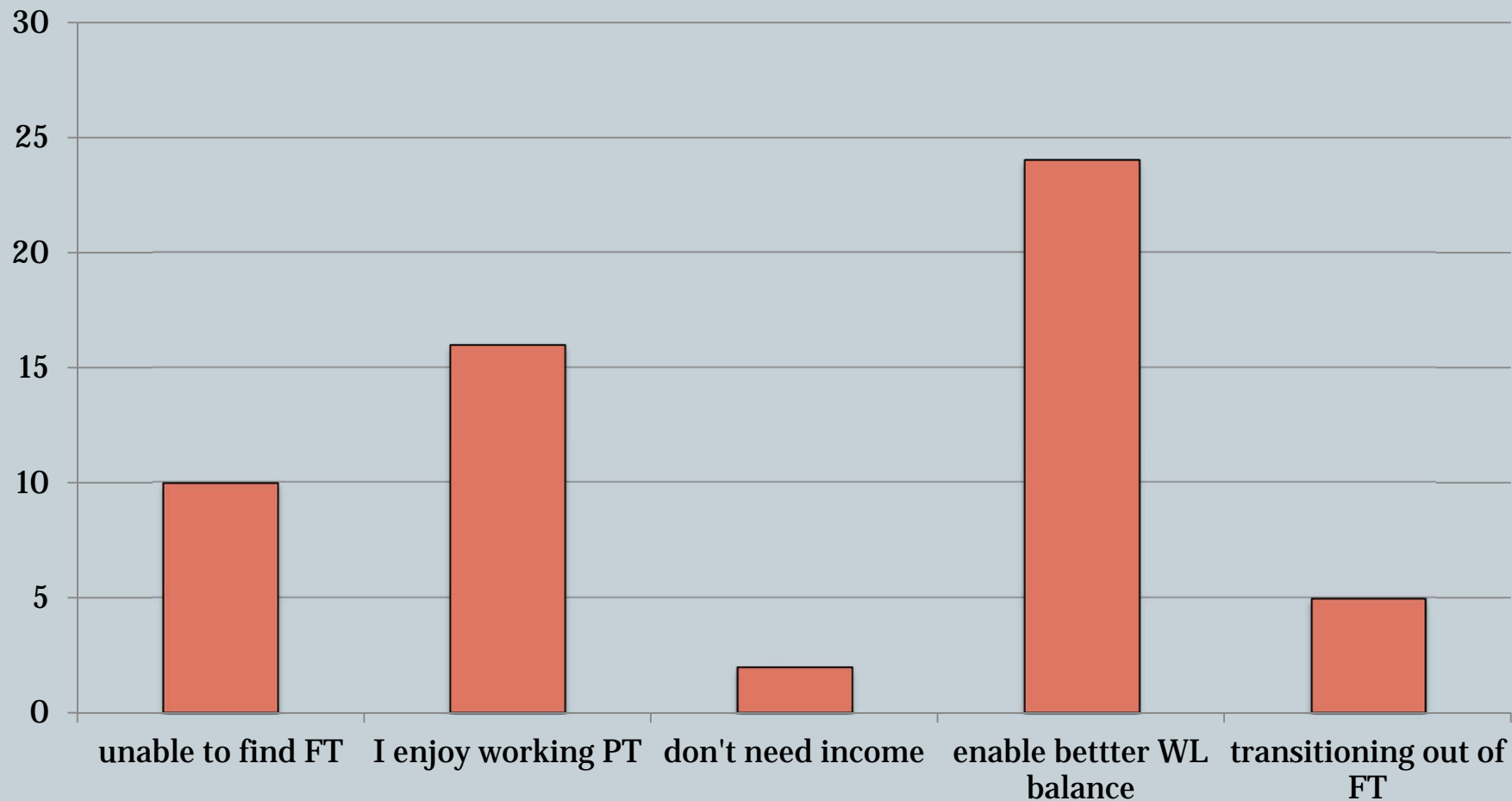
URI Work-Life Survey

Figure 4. Likelihood of elder care responsibilities in next 5 years

The more work-life conflict (2.1) experienced:

- more hours worked,
- higher the intention to leave,
- higher sense of overwork,
- higher perceived stress
- less control of work schedule,
- less satisfaction with current work schedule,
- less overall job satisfaction,
- less organizational commitment,
- less supervisory and organizational support

Top 5 most helpful work-life supports for URI employees

- Daily flextime   4.6
- Regular, scheduled flextime   4.46
- Sick bank   4.4
- Compressed work week   4.35
- Paid parental leave   4.24

1=strongly disagree
5=strongly agree

Employees with some flexibility (46.8%) report:

- Higher incomes, education, and more supervisory responsibilities
- Greater satisfaction with their work schedule
- Greater sense of control over their work schedules
- Greater satisfaction with their child care arrangements
- Greater job satisfaction
- Greater organizational commitment
- Greater supervisory WL support
- Less sense of overwork
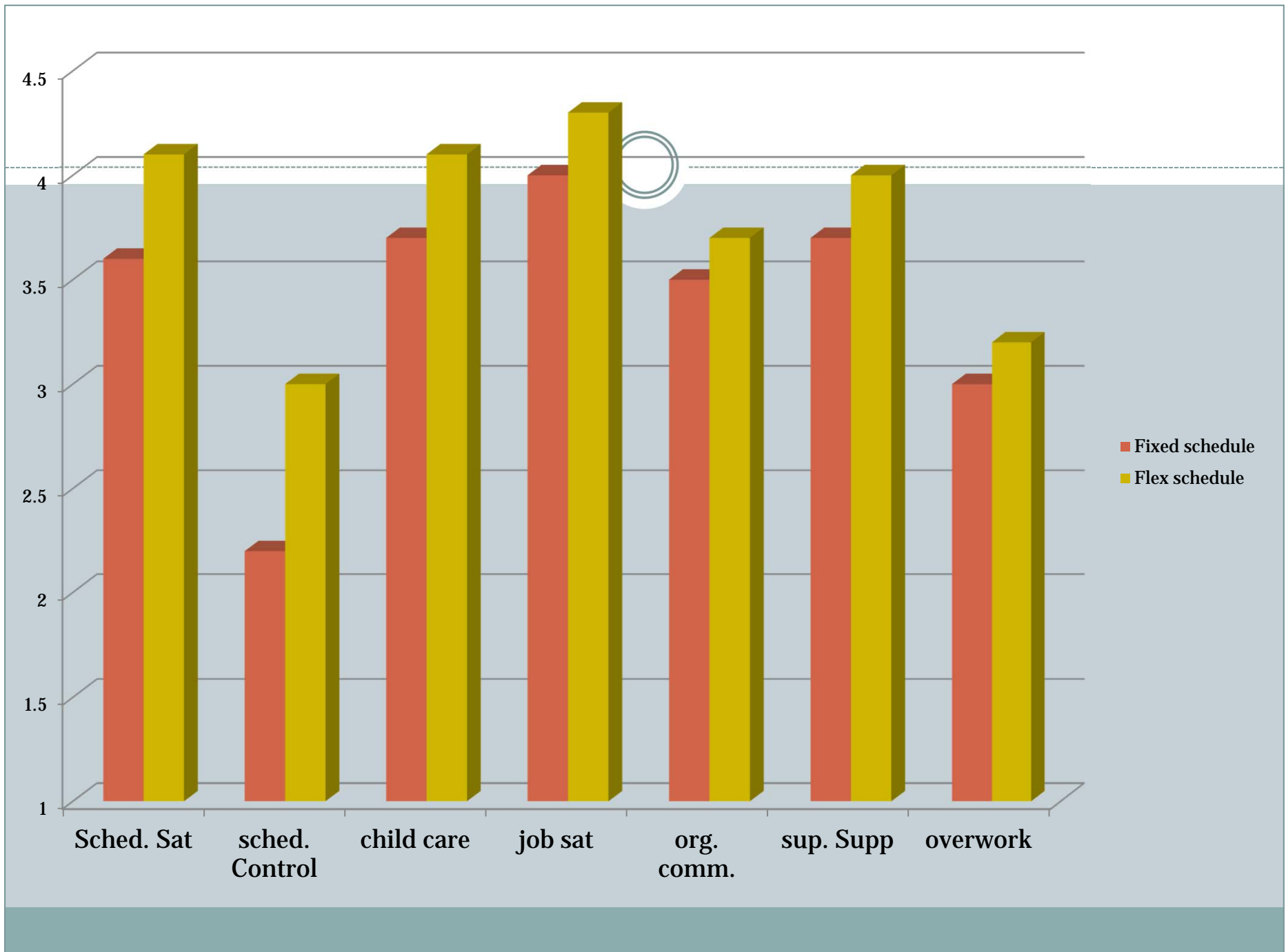
If they were to leave their jobs, employees on a fixed schedule were more likely to leave because:

- To transfer to another job at URI
- Inadequate flex work options/practices
- Work-family conflicts
- Being treated unfairly
- Illness
- Retirement (those on fixed schedules are older)

URI employees say:

- *I wish my supervisor didn't think that flex time is just a fad/waste of time.*

- *As much as I would love to work a flex schedule, those who are in positions where it is not practical seem to notice who does what when . . . They are always noticing when you come in late but never notice when you are working at home or come in at 5 a.m.*

- *It's not worth the backlash from those who don't have a flexible schedule.*

- *I found out when going out on maternity leave that my office tried to be supportive. However, leading up to the time I was out and afterward they continually make me feel bad for taking the leave. I also feel like they have postponed a promotion because I used this benefit.*

URI employees say:

- *I think URI does a great job promoting work-life balance. I also think there is a somewhat antiquated philosophy of some employees/managers that prevents staff from requesting a more flexible work schedule. Personally, I feel that if you do your job well and it is a position that can have the necessary flexibility it is a win-win for employer as well as employee.*

- *My supervisor is extremely supportive of balancing home/work needs. Not all URI supervisors I've dealt with have been as good.*

- *I am allowed to work as many hours as needed to do my job and have a lot of flexibility in my schedule*

How can you organize your work and life better?

- Know what is available to you – do your homework

- Consider asking your supervisor for some type of flexible work arrangement – do your homework

- Encourage a culture of coverage – support co-workers, be a model and promote a supportive work climate/environment

- www.uri.edu/worklife

Proposing a flexible work arrangement

- Is your job suitable?
- Is your work style conducive to your proposed arrangement?
- Think through the details.
- Talk with other employees who have participated in an alternative work arrangement.
- Make your business case. What are the cost/benefits?
- Partner with your manager.
- Understand your manager's style.
- Develop a communication plan.
- Prepare a written proposal that is consistent with your manager's work style.
  - Address the why, what, where, and how; include a communication plan.
  - Discuss how the manager can evaluate the effectiveness of the arrangement – pilot it.
  - Formalize agreement in writing

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One Wish

What one thing would you like to see change in your workplace that would help you get your work done more effectively and increase your job satisfaction?