

**THE WORK–FAMILY INTERFACE:  
SPILLOVER, COMPLICATIONS,  
AND CHALLENGES**

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# THE WORK–FAMILY INTERFACE: SPILLOVER, COMPLICATIONS, AND CHALLENGES

EDITED BY

**SAMPSON LEE BLAIR**

*The State University of New York, Buffalo, USA*

**JOSIP OBRADOVIĆ**

*Catholic University of Croatia, Croatia*



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India – Malaysia – China

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# LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**Anja-Kristin Abendroth** is a Junior-Professor of Technical and Social Change in the Department of Sociology at Bielefeld University, Germany. She is currently one of the principal investigators of the project “Organizational Inequalities and Interdependencies between Capabilities in Work and Personal Life: A Study of Employees in Different Work Organizations” funded by the German Science Foundation. She is also a member of the research program “Digital Future” funded by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the German State of North Rhine-Westphalia. In 2013 she defended her dissertation, “Working Women in Europe: How the Country, Workplace, and Family Context Matter”, at the Faculty of Sociology/ICS at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Her research interests include digitalization of work, social inequalities, the interplay of work and family, and organizational and cross-national comparative research.

**Kadie L. Ausherbauer** is a Prevention Scientist and Family Therapist currently completing a doctoral program in Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota, USA. She is interested in family risk and resilience factors, particularly in how preventive intervention can ameliorate the impact of contextual risk factors that families face. One of Kadie’s goals is to use prevention science and intervention to invest in families, individuals, and communities who experience marginalization due to systemic social problems such as racism, classism, and sexism. Her other research projects have focused on parent–child relationship attributes that facilitate positive child development, preventive parenting intervention in military families, and self-regulation promotion in delinquent youth. Kadie manages a behavioral coding lab with a large grant-funded project on preventive parenting intervention. As a Family Therapist, Kadie has worked primarily with mandated clients in a variety of settings: residential treatment for adolescents in sex offender treatment, in-home family preservation for families involved in child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and currently in a residential chemical dependency treatment program for adult men. After providing direct care for under-served and high-risk families for nearly a decade, the need for effective, appropriate, and sustainable intervention and prevention drives Kadie’s research.

**Sarah A. Burcher** is currently completing a doctoral program in Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota, USA. She earned a master’s in Business Administration in Nonprofit Management from Lipscomb University and a Masters of Arts in Family Social Science from the University of Minnesota. Focusing on the intersection of family, work, and finance, current research topics include financial socialization and capability, career identity development, and work–family crossover, with a strong emphasis on the family system and the working-poor. Sarah is a Graduate Research Assistant working on qualitative

and quantitative research, with past projects examining emerging adults' family financial socialization and behaviors. She is also a Graduate Teaching Assistant for family resource management courses. One of Sarah's favorite activities is teaching a personal finance class to young mothers at a local alternative high school. Sarah began her career working in the nonprofit sector, including being Manager at a homeless shelter, Director at a lodging facility for cancer patients, Volunteer Recruiter, and Fundraiser. She served two terms with the AmeriCorps working with low-income families obtaining home ownership for the first time and connecting children with caring adult mentors. Additionally, Sarah was a Volunteer Instructor for a community adult job-training program. After nearly 10 years working with diverse families, she returned to academia to conduct research that empowers families and communities to break cycles of poverty. Whether her clients were cancer patients or homeless families, young or old, financially stable or living paycheck-to-paycheck, all were balancing family and work demands while interacting daily with the financial sector. Taking a critical perspective, Sarah believes that inequality exists and that the structures of power must be exposed and challenged.

**Nicola Carroll** was awarded a Ph.D. in Sociology for her comparative study involving lone mothers in a diverse range of situations. She became fascinated by historical changes in family life and the relationship between stigmatisation and resource allocation during this research. She is now an Associate Lecturer at the University of Huddersfield teaching on modules covering: social theory and cultural identity; health, identity, and social change; and research methodology. Her research interests span: families and personal relationships, welfare and citizenship, media representations of motherhood, and impacts of class inequalities on family life. Methodologically, she is interested in further pursuing non-stigmatising approaches to researching stigma and exploring non-classifying approaches to researching class.

**Tiziana Casciaro** is a Professor of Organizational Behavior and the Jim Fisher Professor in Leadership Development at the Rotman School of Management of the University of Toronto, Canada. Her research explores how structural and psychological forces jointly shape behavior in organizations. Her work on organizational networks, power dynamics, change implementation, and professional networking is published in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Management Science*, *Organization Science*, *Social Forces*, and *Social Networks*. Dr Casciaro has been recognized by Thinkers50 as one of the 30 thinkers most likely to shape the future of how organizations are managed and led. She regularly publishes in the *Harvard Business Review*, and her work has been featured in the *Economist*, *Financial Times*, *Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, *USA Today*, *Forbes*, *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *ABC*, *CBC Radio*, *Fortune*, and *TIME*. Professor Casciaro has served as Senior Editor at *Organization Science*. Recent awards include the Outstanding Publication in Organizational Behavior Award of the Academy of Management and the Rotman Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching. Tiziana received her B.A. in Business Administration from Bocconi University in Milan, and her M.S. and Ph.D. in Organization Science and Sociology from Carnegie Mellon University. Before joining the University of Toronto, she served on the faculty of the Harvard Business School.

**Delfino Vargas Chanes** is a Professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) since 2010. He obtained his doctorate in Sociology from Iowa State University, USA (Ph.D., 2000), master's degree in Sociology (1996) and Statistics (1994) both from the State University of Iowa, USA, with emphasis on statistical methodology for social research, with a degree in Mathematics (1982) from UNAM. He has been a researcher in the USA between 2001 and 2008 at different institutions: the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, University of Pennsylvania, and Arizona State University. His research interests are inequality and poverty, the development of advanced quantitative methodologies for social research. He is currently a full professor at UNAM. He has published more than 50 articles in various national and international refereed academic journals in the areas of statistics, medicine, psychology, sociology, administration, among others, two books. He has taught courses on structural equations modeling, longitudinal analysis, and the elaboration of surveys in different Mexican institutions such as El Colegio de México, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, Banco de México, and Universidad Anáhuac del Sur. He has carried out research work for CONEVAL, SEDESOL, and CONAPO, in studies aimed at measuring poverty and social measurement. He has directed more than 10 doctoral theses, 3 master's, and 3 bachelor's theses. He has obtained various awards such as *Cum Laude* at UNAM, an award for excellence for his doctoral dissertation at Iowa State University, and he is a recognized National Researcher by the National Council of Science and Technology.

**Jamie J. Chapman** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Westminster College, in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania, USA. She has a B.A. in History from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, an M.A. in Social Sciences from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Akron. She currently teaches courses related to Medical Sociology, Social Psychology, and Sociology of the Family at Westminster College. Dr Chapman's current research interests include investigating the experiences of work–family spillover among people working in caring occupations, as well as investigating the experiences of teaching and learning in prison settings.

**Lukasz Czarnecki** is a Researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in the University Program on Asian and African Studies from 2017. He holds Ph.D. in Sociology from University of Strasbourg (2015) and Ph.D. in Political and Social Studies from the UNAM (*Cum Laude*, 2012), Master in Law (2007) as well as International Relations (2004), both from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. He was a Research Professor in the School of Political and social Science (2015–2017), the School of Economics (2017), the School of Administration of the UNAM (2016), as well as the FLACSO (2015–2016) in Mexico City. He was a Coordinator of research in collaboration with the local government of Mexico City, Coordinator of projects on social construction of diabetes with collaboration with Mexican researchers. He was a Public Policy Adviser on social capital in government institutions and negotiated public actions between federal and states governments with regard to national program combating poverty PROSEPREA led by SEDESOL. He has published 2 books

and more than 30 articles in the national and international journals on poverty and inequalities. He is a member of the National Network of Researchers (SNI in Spanish) recognized by CONACYT in Mexico.

**Shannon N. Davis** is a Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at George Mason University, USA, and Vice President of the Southern Sociological Society. Her research has two foci. One vein of her work focuses on the creation of families and the negotiation of family life. Specifically, she is interested in how family members negotiate the intersection of paid and unpaid work in their daily lives and how gender inequality is reproduced in families. Recently, she began investigating the ways married couples are responding to the recent economic recession, and how these responses facilitate and undermine gender equality. The second, and related, focus of her research is on the construction and maintenance of beliefs about gender, or gender ideologies. She is also interested in the ways in which gender ideologies inform decisions about education, work, and relationships. Other recent research has examined the processes through which inequality is reproduced or undermined in higher education with an eye toward understanding the role that undergraduate research can play in changing the future of the professoriate.

**Marshal Neal Fetto** is a Family Demographer with research interests including families, gay, and lesbian relationships, and the intersection of work and family. He has earned his Ph.D. in sociology from Bowling Green State University, USA. He currently examines variation in gender differences in time allocations in paid work, housework, and leisure between same-sex and different sex couples. His work has been published in journals such as *Population Research and Policy Review* and *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*.

**Janet Garcia-Hallett** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, USA, in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, and an Affiliate Faculty member of the Latinx and Latin American Studies Program. Her research is primarily focused on social justice issues across race/ethnicity and gender – particularly, the impact of incarceration on families and communities of color, the obstacles women face post-incarceration, as well as the racial-ethnic differences in policing strategies. Janet has received numerous awards for her work, including the Rutgers Dissertation Fellowship, the American Society of Criminology Graduate Fellowship for Ethnic Minorities as well as the Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship from the Society for the Study of Social Problems. She has recently published in *Feminist Criminology*, *Sociology Compass*, and the *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*.

**Ewa Giermanowska, Dr hab.**, is a Sociologist, employed at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw, Poland. Her research interests include sociology of work and organization, public policy concerning labor market and labor relations, sociological studies on the employment of young people, and people with disabilities. She is an Expert at the Ministry of Family, Labour

and Social Policy and a member of the Polish Sociological Association, Section of Sociology of Work. She is an author of expert opinions and analyzes for the government, local-government, non-governmental organizations, and scientific publications dealing with the research areas listed earlier.

**Joseph G. Grzywacz** is Chair and Norejane Hendrickson Professor of Family and Child Science at Florida State University, USA. His research focuses on the health-related implications of everyday work and family life, and is particularly focused on how these experiences contribute to health inequalities borne by those in poverty and racial and ethnic minorities. This research has been continuously supported by the National Institutes of Health for the past 15 years. Grzywacz has served as the Principal Investigator on grants from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute on Aging, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. He has published over 250 peer-reviewed articles, placing them in the flagship discipline-specific and interdisciplinary journals like *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *American Journal of Public Health*, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *Social Science & Medicine*, and *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. Grzywacz is a Fellow of the National Council on Family Relations.

**Aimee Hubbard** started her career at Mayo Clinic as a Wellness Coach, where she worked for over five years. She went on to complete her Master of Science in Family Studies and Human Services in Couples and Family Therapy at Kansas State University, USA. Currently, she is a doctoral student in the University of Minnesota's Department of Family Social Science, with an emphasis in Couples and Family Therapy. She presently serves as the Editorial Assistant for the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*. Her research interests focus on couples and the couple help-seeking process.

**Melissa Rector LaGraff** is a Doctoral Candidate in Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA. She received her B.S. in Human Ecology and M.S. in Child and Family Studies from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Prior to returning to graduate school to pursue her doctorate degree, she was a County Director and Family and Consumer Sciences Agent with University of Tennessee Extension where she provided educational programs and research-based information related to financial management, nutrition and food safety, health, and human development to adult and youth audiences. In addition to her experience conducting program evaluations of parenting education programs, her research examines how work-life influences parenting decisions and behaviors as well as how to improve family functioning through family policies and parenting education.

**Soyoung Lee** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University, USA. She is also a certified family life educator. Her major research focuses are (1) ethnically and culturally diverse families' experiences within larger community and global settings and

(2) family life education in order to support the changing needs of families and communities in a diverse society. As part of her research program, she has conducted research on Korean immigrants' adjustments in the USA, multicultural families and family policies in South Korea, parenting experiences among various ethnic groups, and effective teaching strategies in the fields of family science.

**Wen-Hsu Lin**, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Health and Welfare Policy, College of Medicine, National Yang-Ming University, Taipei, Taiwan. His research focuses on adolescent health and development and quantitative research methods.

**Miriam R. Linver** is currently a Professor of Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University, USA, and the Co-Director of the Institute for Research on Youth Thriving and Evaluation. Previously, she was a Senior Research Scientist at the National Center for Children and Families at Teachers College, Columbia University, USA. Dr Linver received her M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Family Studies and Human Development from the University of Arizona. She graduated from Brandeis University with a B.A. in Psychology and Anthropology. Dr Linver's research reflects Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm, focusing on the contexts of child and adolescent development. Dr Linver has expertise in the importance of parents and families; how school and out-of-school experiences matter; and flourishing and character development as key outcomes. She has served as a Guest Editor of several journal special issues, including *Parenting: Science and Practice* ("Parenting at HOME"), *Infant Mental Health Journal* ("New directions in young children's socio-emotional measures"), and *Research in Human Development* ("My life purpose is...": Assessment of youth purpose in context"). Dr Linver is the Co-PI on three current projects: (1) Character Virtue Development Evaluation Capacity Building Initiative, known as PACE; (2) Inspiring Youth Purpose through Reflection on the Laws of Life: Improving, Implementing, Evaluating, and Researching the Inspire>Aspire Poster Program; and (3) Boy Scouts of America National Character Initiative. She was previously the Co-PI on the John Templeton Foundation project, "Reflecting on the Laws of Life: A Systems Evaluation Planning Project and Process Evaluation."

**Sue H. Moon** is an Assistant Professor at the State University of New York Farmingdale's School of Business, USA. She completed her Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. In pursuing research at the intersection of gender, culture, and work-family, her work has appeared in publications such as the *Journal of Social Issues*, *Journal of Family Issues*, and *Human Resource Management Review*.

**Christin L. Munsch** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Connecticut, USA, specializing in family, work and occupations, gender, social psychology, and research methods. She earned a Ph.D. in Sociology from Cornell University and then completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford University's

Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research. Her work has been published in leading academic journals like *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, and *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

**Tyler W. Myroniuk** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at George Mason University, USA. His most recent research includes examinations of the relationships between village characteristics and migration behavior/perceptions, social participation and health, marriage and health outcomes of older adults, family composition and wealth, social connections and educational achievement, and household shocks and migration. His published work is set in Malawi, South Africa, India, and the USA and Europe.

**Kei Nomaguchi** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Bowling Green State University, USA. Her research interests include work and family, parenting, parents and children, and family and health. Most of her research concerns disparities in parental and child well-being across social statuses such as gender, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and family structure as well as variations across cohorts and life stages. Her work has been supported by the National Institute of Health and published in journals such as *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *Journal of Family Issues*, *Social Science Research*, and *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*.

**Madeleine Novich** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Manhattan College, USA. Previously, she was a post-doctoral fellow at Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice, where she completed her Ph.D. Her research primarily focuses on policing and perceptions of procedural justice and legitimacy among criminalized populations. Madeleine has received several awards for her work including the inaugural Division on Women and Crime Larry J. Siegel Graduate Fellowship, the Rutgers Dissertation Fellowship, and the Rutgers University Women and Gender Studies Research Grant. Her work has been published in *Feminist Criminology*, *Gender, Work & Organization*, *Race and Justice: An International Journal* and *Drugs: Education, Policy and Prevention*. She also recently co-edited a special issue of *Race and Justice: An International Journal* focused on youth and policing.

**Lindsey Trimble O'Connor** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at California State University, Channel Islands, USA. She earned her Ph.D. in Sociology from Washington State University in 2012 and worked as a postdoctoral research fellow at the Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University. She teaches and conducts research on gender, work, and social networks. Her work has been published in *Sociological Perspectives*, *Social Science Research*, *Gender & Society*, and *Work & Occupations*.

**Mariola Raclaw**, Dr hab., is a Sociologist, employed at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw, Poland. Her research interests include the sociology of population, sociology of family, public policy concerning family, population policy, sociological studies of old age and disability. She is a member of the Government Population Council and a member of the

Polish Sociological Association, Section of Family Sociology and Social Work Section. She is an author of expert opinions and analyzes for the government, local government, non-governmental organizations, and scientific publications dealing with the research areas listed earlier.

**Hassan Raza, Ph. D.**, is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Science and Social Work at Miami University, USA. His research is grounded in bioecological theory and social justice. The focus of his research is to examine individual characteristics and contextual factors that can help working women to decrease work–family conflict and maintain a healthy work–family balance while accounting for the diversity among working women at the within- and between-person level. He also conducts cross-cultural research to highlight the vulnerabilities of women living in developing countries. He uses quantitative, qualitative, mixed method, and action research techniques in his research. He has expertise in statistical modeling, such as multilevel modeling, structural equation modeling, and hierarchical linear regression modeling.

**Mareike Reimann** is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Sociology at Bielefeld University, Germany. She is currently a member of the research program “Digital Future” funded by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the German State of North Rhine-Westphalia. She is also part of the project “Organizational Inequalities and Interdependencies between Capabilities in Work and Personal Life: A Study of Employees in Different Work Organizations” funded by the German Science Foundation. In 2017, she defended her dissertation “Unmet Expectations in Employment Relationships. Investigating the Emergence of Psychological Contract Breach and its Consequences for Employee Health” at the Faculty of Sociology at Bielefeld University. Her current research interests include work–life interface, social inequalities, employment relationships, health, and digitalization of work.

**Shannon Leigh Shen, Ph.D.**, is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Texas A&M University-San Antonio, USA. She received her doctorate from Michigan State University. Her research areas include family, health, and aging, and she is interested in the intersections of the social and biological processes that link marriage and health. Her current work focuses on older adults and how chronic diseases and relationship quality affect their sexual lives. Her work is published in *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, and *Sociological Perspectives*.

**Yi-Ping Shih, Ph.D.**, is an Assistant Professor at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taipei, Taiwan, specializing in research on cultural capital, parenthood, and cosmopolitanism. Her research is at the intersection of cultural globalization and domestic socialization. In her work she tries to understand how cultural elements and class advantages have been transmitted inter-generationally at home and in schools. Her recent publication includes “Social Class and Cosmopolitan Parenting in Taiwanese Families” in *Journal of Family Issues* and a book chapter “Redefining Cosmopolitanism: The Inter-Generational Transmission of Global Cultural Capital in Taiwan” in *Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in a Global World* (Brill).

**Heidi E. Stolz** is a Professor in the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, USA, where she also serves as the Co-Director of the Center for Parenting. She received her B.A. in Economics from Whitman College, B.Ed. in Secondary Education from the University of Puget Sound, M.A. in Human Development from Washington State University, and Ph.D. in Marriage, Family, and Human Development from Brigham Young University. Dr Stolz conducts basic research on mothering, fathering, and parenting, as well as applied research related to parenting education. She is a member of the National Council on Family Relations and a former two-term member of the Board of the National Parenting Education Network.

**Colleen Stuart** is an Assistant Professor at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, USA, and received her Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from the University of Toronto, Canada. Her research focuses on the connection between social structure, the pattern of relationships that exist among interdependent individuals, and women's careers. In a second line of research, she studies how structural changes to social systems force individuals to reconfigure their collaborative work.

**Brad van Eeden-Moorefield, Ph.D.**, is an Associate Professor and Director of the Ph.D. Program in Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University, USA. His research includes a strong commitment to understanding and strengthening marginalized families, with his most recent work focused on stepfamilies headed by same-sex couples. Much of this research focuses on identifying how factors in the social world (e.g., stigma, stereotypes, and policy) influence everyday family life and how both impact various indicators of individual (e.g., depression and happiness) and family well-being (stability). Recently, he published two books: *Designing and Proposing your Research Project* (with Dr Jennifer Brown) and *Urban and Contemporary Families at the Nexus of Research and Practice* (with Dr Scott Browning) and guest edited a Special Issue of *Family Relations* on intersectional variations in the experiences of queer families.

**Matthew Weinschenker** is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Fordham University, USA, and a Faculty Affiliate of the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program. His broad research interests are work-life issues and fatherhood. His recent research has focused on the impact of nonstandard employment scheduling on working parents and their family members. His publications have appeared in outlets including *Community, Work, and Family*, *Journal of Family Issues*, *Demography*, and *Sex Roles*.

**Chin-Chun Yi, Ph.D.**, is a distinguished Research Fellow at the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. She received her Ph.D. from the Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota, USA. Dr Yi's research interests include changing families in Chinese and East Asian societies, the intergenerational transmission of Value of Children, and the growth trajectories of youth from early adolescence to young adulthood. She has served as the principal investigator of research projects in family and youth studies, and leads the team composed of researchers

of different ranks. Chin-Chun Yi has been an active member of the ISA since 1990, and is the Current President of RC06 (2014–2018) as well as the ISA Executive Committee member of Research Council (2010–2014–2018). In addition to academic work, Dr Yi was appointed the National Policy Advisor for the President (2011–2016), the Commissioner and Honorary Advisor for Taiwan Provincial Government (1994–1998) when she initiated and established the child protection program in Taiwan. Chin-Chun Yi has also actively participated in social services and has frequently been invited to give advice to government agencies in Taiwan.

# FOREWORD

Around the globe, one of the common threads in the fabric of life which all people share is the fact that they spend most of their days in two distinct environments – the family and work. In order to support their families, individuals devote much of their time to provide for the needs of their loved ones. These efforts require considerable dedication, as work is often quite demanding, stressful, and even risky for one’s well-being. Throughout human history, though, individuals have fulfilled these roles and have toiled long hours in order to ensure that their families’ needs are met. The notion of a “labor of love” is often used to describe these efforts, as the love and devotion to one’s family is often what motivates one to work.

This dyadic relationship between work and family, though, creates an often mutually conflicting situation, individuals are working to provide for their loved ones, yet their work creates various forms of separation from those very same loved ones. The characteristics of work, which can create such complications are many, frequently place workers in a dilemma of mammoth proportions. In their various family roles, as spouses, parents, or otherwise, they want to fulfill their familial responsibilities in manners consistent with the love and affection maintained therein. The affectional environment of the family truly creates an enmeshed relationship network where bonds are based upon love, devotion, and the desire to ensure the well-being of other family members. The work environment, on the other hand, retains the qualities of a secondary group, in which relationships are more formalized, roles are more specialized, and production and performance are the essence of relationships.

Researchers have long recognized the potential for conflict between these two distinct entities, the family and work. Across a variety of sciences, researchers have focused upon the complications created by the intertwined nature of family and work. In the mid-1900s, such studies often had a decidedly patriarchal bias, focusing upon such issues as how maternal employment might be negatively associated with children’s well-being. By the late twentieth century, though, as dual-earner couples became the norm, studies began to adopt a considerably more comprehensive understanding of the work–family interface. Researchers began to focus on the impact of work upon not only the working members of families, but also upon how work could affect all family members and all family relationships. At the same time, researchers recognized the potential for family roles and responsibilities to impact job performance and the larger work environment.

This broader understanding of the work–family interface has yielded considerable understanding, yet it must also be viewed within the historical context. Simply put, both families and work are dynamic, and their various structures and roles continue to change, as time moves forward. Family structures and family roles have undergone considerable shifts over the past several decades.

Fluctuations in such basic characteristics as marriage, divorce, and fertility have prompted substantial change in family structures and familial norms. At the same time, the nature of work continues to change. On the global scale, jobs within the service sector have increased, along with the need for greater educational and skills attainment by workers. Technological change, in particular, has served to redefine both how and where work is performed. Such changes in work will, understandably, have consequences for the work–family interface.

In this volume of *Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research*, researchers focus upon the work–family interface. This is no easy task, given the dynamic natures of both work and family. The studies contained in this volume provide a very comprehensive examination of a wide range of issues within the work–family interface and offer considerable insight into the multiple facets of this uniquely interwoven pair of environments. As with previous volumes, a global perspective is also utilized herein, with research from around the world. This is particularly necessary in the study of work and family issues, as the perceptions, experiences, and even definitions of what constitutes a work–family matter varies from one culture to another.

Researchers who have focused upon the work–family interface have frequently directed their attention to the potential complications and consequences for the most vulnerable segment of families – the children. In “Stability in Mothers’ Work Hours in Early Childhood and Children’s Achievement in Kindergarten,” Kei Nomaguchi and Marshal Neal Fetto use data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study to examine the relationship between maternal employment and children’s cognitive development. They find that both maternal employment patterns during early childrearing years and children’s cognitive outcomes in kindergarten are shaped by family contexts that mothers are embedded in. The understanding of the larger context of the work–family interface is further examined by Ewa Giermanowska and Mariola Raclaw in “Social and Cultural Context of Family Policy and the Employment of Mothers of Small Children. The example of Poland.” Their study focuses upon how the creation and implementation of policies concerning the work–family interface commonly overlook the broader social and cultural context in which such policies reside. Although policymakers may often have the best of intentions, the needs of children, along with the needs of working parents, cultural themes need to be recognized as part of the development and implementation of public policy strategies. Beyond the cultural context, the socio-political context of the work–family interface also needs to be considered. In “Lone Mothers’ Negotiation of Competing Employment and Parenting Demands in the Contemporary British Context of “Worker Citizenship”,” Nicola Carroll examines a sample of lone mothers from northern England, with a specific focus upon their struggles in coping with the various stigmas. While the population of lone mothers is increasing, there remains a stigmatization at the cultural level, wherein they are perceived as being dependent upon welfare services, despite the clear evidence of their substantial presence in the workplace.

Of course, the work–family interface will involve all members of the family. While the majority of research on parents has focused upon mothers, there remains the need to examine fathers, as well. In “Perceived Work–Family Balance

and Engagement Behaviors of Fathers of Infants,” Melissa Rector LaGraff and Heidi E. Stolz examine how perceptions of the work–family balance may affect fathers’ relationships with their infant children. Although such perceptions did not appear to affect the overall engagement of fathers with their infants, fathers’ perceptions of the work–family balance did influence how often they told stories to their children, as well as how frequently they dressed their infants. These findings demonstrate the complex nature of the work–family interface, which can also extend beyond the family, and into the schools. In “Parental Involvement and Educational Performance among Taiwanese Adolescents: Comparing Dual-Earner and Single-Earner Families,” Yi-Ping Shih, Fu Jen, Wen-Hsu Lin, and Chin-Chun Yi examine how parental involvement in their children’s schooling may vary as a function of parental employment. Using a sample from the Taiwan Youth Project, they find that parental school involvement significantly affects the performance of children from dual-earner families, but not for those from single-earner families. Distinct experiences are shown for daughters and sons, suggesting that the work–family interface may also vary depending upon the sex of children.

For many families, the nature of the work, itself, can affect the manners in which difficulties may arise from the work–family interface. In “A Longitudinal Examination of Work–Family Conflict among Working Mothers in the United States,” Hassan Raza, Bradley van Eeden-Moorefield, Joseph G. Grzywacz, Miriam R. Linver, and Soyoung Lee examine both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict among employed mothers. Building upon bioecological theory, they demonstrate the role of nonstandard work schedules and relationship quality in working mothers’ experiences. Our understanding of the work-to-family conflict is further extended in “Motivation for Night Work and Parents’ Work-to-Family Conflict and Life Satisfaction,” by Matthew Weinshenker. Through analysis of a sample of parents who work a non-standard schedule, he demonstrates the importance of motivations for working such schedules, as these vary considerably in terms of affecting work-to-family conflict. When fathers and mothers work such schedules, but not for personal reasons, the potential for risk can be substantial.

The potential complications of the work–family interface are often interwoven with the factors of sex and race/ethnicity. In “Strategies for Balance: Examining How Parents of Color Navigate Work and Life in the Academy,” Madeleine Novich and Janet Garcia-Hallet examine a sample of mothers and fathers of color, focusing upon how they cope with the challenges of both professional and familial responsibilities. They find that such parents often adapt to these challenges through social and professional isolation, which can improve their abilities to function as parents, yet at a cost to their professional performance. The potential consequences are shown to have a greater impact upon mothers, as compared to fathers. Given the nature of the work–family interface, gender issues often arise. In “Diabetes as a Consequence of Work–Family Conflicts and Gender Violence in México,” Lukasz Czarnecki and Delfino Vargas Chanes focus upon how work–family conflicts can influence the onset of diabetes. Work conditions are shown to have a deleterious impact upon workers’ well-being, and particularly so for women. By framing diabetes as a social phenomenon, their

study yields implications for policy throughout Latin America. This relationship between work–family conflict and well-being is examined by Tyler W. Myroniuk and Shannon N. Davis in “Multi-Faceted Household Dependency, Work-Family Conflict, and Self-Rated Health in Five High-Income Countries.” Analyzing samples from Austria, France, Iceland, Switzerland, and the United States, their study uses the demand–resources framework to examine how dependency and work factors affect health and well-being. Work-family conflict appears to deleteriously affect health across all samples, suggesting that the policy implications of these findings may have utility across nationalities.

Many of the dimensions of work have been associated with the challenges of the work–family interface, including the core component of the timing of work. In “For Better or For Worse: Nonstandard Work Schedules and Self-Rated Health across Marital Status,” Shannon Leigh Shen uses a sample from the National Study of the Changing Workforce to examine how non-standard work schedules may affect health and well-being. In her analyses, she demonstrates that non-standard work schedules do, indeed, have a negative influence upon health, but that these harmful associations are most consequential among women who are cohabiting, divorced, separated, or widowed. Some of the challenges linked with the work–family interface involve the issue of spillover, wherein family roles and work roles often become intertwined. Jamie J. Chapman examines this concern in “How Do Nurses Perceive Role-Taking and Emotional Labor Processes to Influence Work–Family Spillover?” Through a qualitative analysis, she uses a foundation of interactionist role theory to examine how nurses deal with the complicated nature of their jobs, and particularly the empathic role-taking and emotional labor they perform. The very nature of their work places nurses in a rather delicate position, wherein the potential for work–family spillover can be quite high.

In some instances, the work–family interface may be affected by job performance, particularly with regard to achievements within one’s career. In “Penalty for Success? Career Achievement and Gender Differences in Divorce,” H. Colleen Stuart, Sue H. Moon, and Tiziana Casciaro approach this issue from a rather unique perspective, by investigating how exceptional job performance may affect the risk of divorce. Using data compiled from the success and marital histories of Hollywood actors, they find that winning an Academy Award is associated with greater marital instability, and that this risk is especially complicated for actresses. The respective meanings of work and family are not only created by working partners and parents, but are also carried over generations within families. In “‘I Really Don’t Have a Career. I just Work and I Like Doing My Work.’ A Qualitative Study on the Meaning of Work for Low-Income Women from a Family Perspective,” Sarah A. Burcher and Kadie L. Ausherbauer examine how the meanings and values concerning work are transmitted through generations. They identify a variety of themes created and maintained by employed women, and provide a novel and useful understanding of how work, itself, is perceived.

With technological advancement and increasingly urban populations, a growing number of workers no longer need to travel to a centralized site to perform their jobs. In “Telework and Work–Family Conflict across Workplaces:

Investigating the Implications of Work–Family-Supportive and High-Demand Workplace Cultures,” Anja-Kristin Abendroth and Mareike Reimann explore how the implications of telework for strain-based and time-based work–family conflict depend upon work–family-supportive and high-demand workplace cultures. Using a sample of German workers, they find that telework often yields complications and conflicts which are similar to more traditional forms of paid employment. Aimee Hubbard examines how perceptions of the work–life balance vary over time in her study, “Evaluating Relational Factors as Possible Protective Factors for Work–Life Balance via a Linear Mixed Effects Model.” Using data from the Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics, she finds that such perceptions tend to decline, on average, over time, yet may be affected by more intimate dimensions of relationships, such as sexual satisfaction. Her work again illustrates the complex nature of the work–family interface. Being a worker necessarily implies that one must approach the tasks with a particular frame of mind, as attitudes toward work will have great bearing upon the work–family interface. In “What I Think You Think about Family and Work: Pluralistic Ignorance and the Ideal Worker Norm,” Christin L. Munsch and Lindsey Trimble O’Connor examine how American workers accept ideal worker norms. In their analyses, they find that while women and men typically maintain that workers should dedicate themselves to their respective tasks, there remains a distinct dislike for work qualities which challenge or complicate their abilities to function within their familial roles.

Overall, these studies provide a very comprehensive and insightful understanding of the work–family interface. Beyond the present findings, the researchers also provide multiple suggestions for future research on this very important topic, as well as numerous recommendations for both practitioners and policymakers. We wish to offer them our most sincere appreciation for their efforts, and also express our thanks to the members of the editorial board, the external reviewers, and the wonderful staff at Emerald Publishing for their tremendous assistance.

Sampson Lee Blair  
Josip Obradović

# CHAPTER 1

## STABILITY IN MOTHERS' WORK HOURS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENT IN KINDERGARTEN

Kei Nomaguchi and Marshal Neal Fetto

### ABSTRACT

*Past studies suggest that full-time maternal employment may be negatively related to children's cognitive development. Most studies measure maternal employment at one time point, while mothers' work hours may not be stable during early childrearing years. Using data from the 2001 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort ( $N \approx 6,500$ ), the authors examine stability in mothers' work hours across four waves when children are 9 and 24 months old, in preschool, and in kindergarten, mothers' background characteristics associated to it, and its link to child cognitive development. Results show that the majority of mothers change work hours across the four waves. Analysis using multinomial logistic regression models suggests that mothers' older age, fewer children, and higher household income are related to working full time at all four waves compared to varying work hours across the waves; more children and less than high school completion are related to staying home at all four waves; and mothers' older age, being White, no change in partnership status, and holding a college degree are related to working part time at all four waves. Compared to mothers' changing work hours, mothers' stable work hours, full time or part time, at all four waves is related to children's better reading, math, and cognitive scores in kindergarten, whereas mothers' staying*

*home at all four waves is negatively related to these scores. These associations disappear when background characteristics are controlled for in ordinary least squares regression models. These findings underscore the role of background characteristics in shaping both mothers' stable employment and children's cognitive development.*

**Keywords:** Child cognitive development; gender; life course; longitudinal pattern; maternal employment; work–family balance

Since the mid-1980s, the majority of US mothers of children under age 6 have been in the labor force at any given year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). The increase in mothers' labor market attachment has led to concerns regarding its consequences for child development. A large volume of studies have produced inconsistent findings, suggesting that the effects of maternal employment on children may vary by work and family contexts (Goldberg, Prause, Lucas-Thompson, & Himsel, 2008; Waldfogel, 2002a). One of such contexts is the intensity of maternal employment or work hours. Reviews of the past studies have suggested that mothers' full-time employment appears to be *negatively* related to children's cognitive and behavioral development (Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2010; Waldfogel, 2002a), whereas mothers' part-time employment is *positively* related to children's achievement such as reading and math scores measured around kindergarten and early elementary school years (Goldberg et al., 2008).

This conclusion that maternal full-time employment can be negatively related to children's developmental outcomes poses a question: How common is it for US mothers to work full time throughout their children's early childhood? Studies that examined women born in the mid-1960s or earlier have shown that this is not common (Greenstein, 1995; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; Lu, Wang, & Han, 2017). Stable full-time employment is only possible when mothers have ample resources to balance work and child care responsibilities (Damaske & Frech, 2016). This is not surprising, given the lack of public policies in the United States to support parents to balance full-time employment with childrearing responsibilities (Bianchi, 2011; Moen, 2005). Although it is now often declared that employment is normative for mothers of young children in the United States (e.g., Glynn, 2016), it is unclear how common it is for more recent cohorts of mothers to work full time throughout several years when their children are young. Meanwhile, past research on the associations between maternal employment and children's developmental outcomes has typically measured maternal employment at one time point. If a majority of mothers change their market work hours across their children's early childhood years, measuring mothers' work hours at one time point may not capture the reality of how much mothers work and how stable their work hours are during their children's early childhood years. All in all, research is needed to reexamine how common it is for mothers with young children to work full time, part time, stay home continuously, or to change work hours over the period when their children are young, and how such maternal employment patterns are related to children's achievement in kindergarten.

Using the four waves of the 2001 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (the 2001 ECLS-B;  $N \approx 6,500^1$ ), we first examine stability in mothers' work hours across the four time points when their focal children were 9 months old, 24 months old, in preschool, and in kindergarten. We are interested in estimating distributions of mothers across the following four groups, indicating intensity and stability in their work hours: mothers who (a) worked full time (35 hours or more per week) at all four time points, (b) worked part time at all four time points, (c) did not work at all four time points, and (d) changed work hours at least once across the four time points. Second, we examine how mothers' and children's background characteristics are related to their odds of falling into one of the four groups of employment patterns. Third, we examine how the four groups of maternal employment patterns are related to children's achievement in kindergarten measured by reading, math, and cognitive scores, while controlling for mothers' background characteristics and child characteristics. Findings of the present analyses have important implications for understanding the role of (in) stability in mothers' work hours during their children's early childhood years and its link to children's cognitive development.

## BACKGROUND

### *Stability in Mothers' Work Hours during Early Childrearing Years*

Work–family scholars have long argued that paid work activities over the course of US adults' lives are highly gendered (Bianchi, 2011; Presser, 1995). As Moen (2005) noted, the norm of continuous full-time work in the US workplace makes sense only when individuals have someone who can take over their family responsibilities. Without effective work–family policies, working for pay and raising children are incompatible for those who are primary caregivers of children (Presser, 1995). Despite increases in women's educational attainment and occupational aspiration, women continue to shoulder primary child care responsibilities and adjust their paid work hours around their children's needs (Bianchi, 2011). As a result, mothers' paid work pathways tend to be “a patchwork of self-orchestrated time outs to care for children” (Moen, 2005, p. 200).

Empirical studies using data from older cohorts have shown support for this argument. A few longitudinal analyses have found that mothers typically change employment hours after a childbirth. Examining the 1972–1976 Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Moen (1985) reported that women's employment is characterized by combinations of full-time and part-time work with periods of non-employment. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, VandenHeuvel (1997) found that the majority of mothers were neither continuously in the labor force nor continuously out of the labor force during the 8–10 years following their first birth. She argued that mothers' employment pathways cannot simply be categorized into a “[full-time] career” or a “homemaker” path, calling for the recognition of a “mosaic” of mother's employment sequences following a birth.

Similar patterns have been found among women in the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), who were born between 1957 and 1964, most of whom gave birth during the 1980s and the early 1990s (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Observing first-time mothers' employment hours in the NLSY79 every three months until the end of the child's fourth year, Greenstein (1995) reported that about a half of mothers were employed intermittently (51%), whereas only 9% were continuously employed full time, 19% were continuously employed part time, and 21% were continuously not employed. Also using the same data, Hynes and Clarkberg (2005) examined stability in employment status every 2 months from 12 months before and 24 months after a birth. They found that the majority of mothers (65%) showed substantial movement in and out of the labor force, whereas only 22% of mothers were continuously employed and only 13% of mothers were continuously not employed. In sum, these findings support the notion that change, rather than stability, is the modal pattern of women's employment while raising young children among the NLSY79 cohort as well as among older cohorts.

Whether paid work hours during early childrearing years have become more stable among more recent cohorts of US women – those who were born in the late 1960s or later – is unclear. Unlike the popular belief that employment is the norm among younger cohorts of mothers, empirical evidence suggests that the liberalization of adults' attitudes toward maternal employment as well as maternal labor force participation rates have been stalled since the mid-1990s (England, 2010) or since the 1952 cohort (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2011). Cross-sectional data show that, even within a single year, only a third of mothers with children under age 6 worked full time continuously in the 1998 Current Population Survey (Cohen & Bianchi 1999). Similar patterns have been found among mothers born between 1966 and 1975 in the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series Census data and the American Community Survey (Percheski, 2008). Examining mothers in the 2001 ECLS-B, most of whom were born in the late 1960s to the late 1970s, Han, Ruhm, Waldfogel, and Washbrook (2008) found that about 60% of mothers resumed paid work by the time their children were 9 months old. The authors did not examine stability in maternal employment for the next three waves of the study, which follows children to kindergarten. What percentage of mothers worked full time or part time at all four time points when the mothers were re-interviewed when their children were 24 months old, in preschool, and in kindergarten? What percentage of them did not work at all the four time points? How common was it for them to report different employment hours (i.e., full time, part time, or not working) across the four time points? The first goal of this chapter is to answer these questions using data from the 2001 ECLS-B.

#### *Background Characteristics Related to Stability in Mothers' Work Hours*

The second goal of this chapter is to examine how mothers' and children's characteristics are related to stability in maternal employment across the four waves, including working full time at all four time points, working part time at all four time points, non-working at all four time points, and changing work hours across

the four time points. Guided by prior research, we focus on mothers' socioeconomic status (SES), partnership status, race-ethnicity, and child demands.

*SES.* SES has a strong influence on maternal employment patterns primarily for two reasons. First, as classical economic theory contends, women with higher human capital – higher education, more job skills, and higher wages – are more likely to be continuously employed full time as the opportunity cost of not working for pay is greater (Desai & Waite, 1991; Frech & Damaske, 2012; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005). Second, higher levels of SES are related to more available resources for mothers to use to combine paid work with childrearing. Affluent mothers are more likely than economically disadvantaged mothers to secure quality child care and, thus, are less likely to drop out of the workforce or reduce work hours (Budig & England, 2001). In addition, higher SES mothers are more likely than lower SES mothers to delay motherhood for career opportunities (Frech & Damaske, 2012) and to have workplace resources and benefits – for example, scheduling flexibility, supportive co-workers and supervisors, and better promotion prospects – that help them to endure the stressfulness of juggling paid work with raising young children (Blair-Loy, 2003; Damaske, 2011). In contrast, other evidence suggests that mothers in all social classes reduce, more or less, their work activities during early childrearing years. Moen (1985) found that, although more educated women are more likely than less educated women to work full time, compared to their male counterparts, more educated women, too, are likely to reduce their work hours during their children's preschool years (Becker & Moen, 1999).

*Race and ethnicity.* Prior research has shown racial-ethnic differences in mothers' employment patterns. Overall, with other characteristics (e.g., SES) held constant, racial-ethnic minority mothers are more likely than White mothers to resume full-time work sooner after childbirth (Lu et al., 2017). Black mothers are more likely than White mothers to be continuously in the labor force (England, Garcia-Beaulieu, & Ross, 2004; Lu et al., 2017; VanderHeuvel, 1997). Although Black women are more likely than White women to be placed in less desirable jobs which provide fewer workplace resources and lower job security, Black women are more likely than White women to see working after childbirth as a normative part of motherhood (Lu et al., 2017). Hispanic and Asian mothers, many of whom are recent immigrants (or children of recent immigrants) who came to the United States seeking for employment opportunities, may be more likely than White mothers to have pro-employment attitudes (Greenman, 2011; Lu et al., 2017). In contrast, White mothers are more likely than Black, Hispanic, and Asian mothers to work part time (Frech & Damaske, 2012; Greenman, 2011; Lu et al., 2017).

*Partnership status.* How having a husband or partner at home influences stability in mothers' work hours is not straightforward. A spouse or partner could share child care responsibilities, allowing a mother to go to work; however, it could encourage a mother to reduce work hours if her spouse provided sufficient income. Some studies have shown that married or partnered mothers with young children are more likely than single mothers to be employed (Frech & Damaske, 2012), but are less likely to work full time (Budig, 2003). Other studies have shown

that married mothers are more likely to drop out of the labor force when their husbands work long hours and earn significantly more than they do (Cha, 2010; Shafer, 2011). In either case, changes in partnership status – union formation or dissolution – are likely related to changes in work hours.

*Child care demands.* Some children's characteristics reflect greater childrearing demands, which influence mothers' employment intensity and stability. Mothers with more children are less likely to be employed (Fox, Han, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2013; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005). Children in poorer health or who have a difficult temperament may hinder mothers' ability to go to work (Coley, Ribar, & Votruba-Drzal, 2011; Richard, Gaskin, Alexandre, Burke, & Younis, 2014). Some research has found that fathers with boys are more likely than fathers with girls to work longer hours (Lundberg & Rose, 2002), which may suggest that mothers with boys may be less likely to work continuously, because, as just mentioned above, women whose husbands work long hours are more likely to drop out of the labor force.

These background characteristics discussed above are related to child achievement scores (e.g., Augustine & Crosnoe, 2010; Goldberg et al., 2008; Waldfogel, 2002). Thus, these are important covariates in the third goal of this chapter, which we will discuss in the next section.

#### *Stability in Mothers' Work Hours and Children's Achievement in Kindergarten*

Finally, we examine how the four maternal employment patterns – mothers worked full time, worked part time, or did not work at all four points, or changed work hours – are related to children's reading, math, and cognitive scores in kindergarten. Although some research has emphasized possible reasons for positive effects of maternal employment on children, such as more income and better cognitive stimulation provided at high-quality center care, much research has focused on the negative effects of maternal employment on children either through reducing the amount of time mothers spend with their children or reducing the quality of mothers' interactions with their children due to increased exhaustion or stress (Baum, 2003; Desai, Chase-Lansdale, & Michael, 1989; Nomaguchi, 2006). Empirical findings are inconsistent and suggest that the association may depend on work characteristics (e.g., timing, intensity, and continuity of employment) as well as family characteristics (e.g., age and gender of children, mothers' partnership status, and quality of non-maternal care) (Goldberg et al., 2008; Waldfogel, 2002a).

One such characteristic, which has often been discussed, is the intensity of employment or hours per week mothers spend on paid work. Reviewing past studies, Waldfogel (2002a) concluded that full-time maternal employment during the first year of a child's life is related to poorer child cognitive development at age four and in early elementary school years. For maternal employment after the first year, studies found that mothers' part-time work is beneficial for child cognitive and academic outcomes compared to mothers' full-time work (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2008). In short, prior research indicates that full-time maternal employment could be negatively related to children's developmental outcomes.

Despite the notion that mothers' time allocations to paid work are not static across all childrearing years (e.g., Moen, 2005), few studies have examined how

stability in mothers' work hours is related to child developmental outcomes. Instability in maternal work hours may be detrimental for children's cognitive development. As discussed earlier, prior research has shown that instability in maternal work hours often reflects mothers' lack of resources to balance work and childrearing responsibilities (Frech & Damaske, 2012). Quitting a job as well as going back to work subsequently may cause instability in family income, daily routine, increases in mothers' parenting stress, and poor mother-child interactions (Coley & Lombardi, 2014; Hill, Morris, Castells, & Walker, 2011; Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2016). Learning materials such as the number of books and educational toys children have at home are related to better cognitive development (Waldfogel, 2002b). The frequency of parent-child literacy activities, such as reading to children and library visits, is positively related to children's literacy and math scores (Whitehurst et al., 1994). Mothers who are under financial stress or who are in the transition to a new workplace may find it difficult to spend time looking around educational materials for their children, reading to them every day, or visiting the library with them occasionally.

Of note, some studies have shown that mothers' stable employment is related to better cognitive outcomes for children (Hill et al., 2011; Johnson, Kalil, & Dunifon, 2012; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008; Pilkauska, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2017). Yet, these studies are different from the present analyses for two reasons. First, these studies focused exclusively on low-income, often single, mothers. Whether these findings can be generalized among mothers and children in the general population is unknown. Empirical research that used a representative sample of children and their mothers is warranted. Second, the measures of maternal employment are different. These studies focused on unemployment which refers to the cases when mothers were laid off, fired, or quit a job due to dissatisfaction of their job conditions, while excluding the cases when mothers made a voluntary job change or exit (Johnson et al., 2012). In the present analysis, we are not interested in distinguishing whether mothers are not working voluntary or involuntary. As Bianchi (2011) noted, it is unclear whether we could call it voluntary when mothers quit working for pay to take care of their children when there is a strong cultural belief that children need their mothers' care for proper development (Hays, 1996).

## THE PRESENT STUDY

Using data from the 2001 ECLS-B, this chapter investigates stability in mothers' work hours across four time points during the first six years of their children's lives and its association with children's achievement in kindergarten. We have three research questions. First, what are the distributions of mothers across the four employment patterns including (a) working full time at all four time points, (b) working part time at all four time points, (c) not working at all four time points, and (d) changing work hours across the four time points? Second, how are mothers' and children's background characteristics related to the four employment patterns? We examine mothers' SES, race/ethnicity, partnership status, and

child care demands, largely because these characteristics are important control variables in our third research question. Thus, we do not aim to address the issue of selection into the four employment groups when we examine these associations. Third, how are the four employment patterns related to children's achievement in kindergarten? In addition to mothers' and children's background characteristics associated with both mothers' employment patterns and their children's outcomes, as we just mentioned, we include the number of summer interviews (June to August) as a control, because some occupations may require workers to put in more or fewer hours during the summer than the rest of the year.

## METHOD

### *Data*

The 2001 ECLS-B is a longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of children born in 2001 conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (<https://nces.ed.gov/ecls/birth.asp>). Information was collected when children were about 9 months old (2001–2002), 24 months old (2003–2004), in preschool (2005–2006), and in kindergarten (2006–2007). Of the approximately 10,700 families who were interviewed in the 9-month survey, about 9,850 families were reinterviewed in the 24-month survey and then about 8,950 families completed the preschool survey. With an about 15% reduction of the sample and about 50 cases who dropped out of the study due to ineligibility (e.g., death or moving out of the area), about 7,050 families were reinterviewed in the kindergarten 2006 survey. About 25% of children were not yet in kindergarten in 2006 and they were reinterviewed in 2007. For those who were not in kindergarten in 2006 but in 2007, we used data collected in the 2007 survey. Of the approximately 7,050 families, we selected families of which the primary parents were biological or adoptive mothers in all four waves. With these procedures, the analytical sample for the present study was  $N \approx 6,500$ . Because the ECLS-B included oversamples of Asian and Pacific Islander children, Native American children, twins, and children from low-SES families, the analyses presented in this chapter were weighted to adjust the sample to be nationally representative.

### *Measures*

*Children's achievement.* We examined children's reading, mathematical, and cognitive skills in kindergarten. These skills were measured by using test items recommended by the American Institutes for Research (for detailed information about these measures, see [Najarian, Snow, Lennon, & Kinsey, 2010](#)). Children's *reading skills* were assessed on six constructs including English language skills, phonological awareness, letter and let-sound knowledge, print conventions, word recognition, and vocabulary. The assessment items were drawn from several common standardized tests, such as the PreLAS 2000 ([Duncan & De Avila, 1998](#)), Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Third Edition ([Dunn & Dunn, 1997](#)), and Preschool Comprehensive Test of Phonological and Print Processing ([Lonigan, Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 2002](#)). Children's *mathematical skills* were assessed using

items from the Test of Early Mathematical Ability-3 (Ginsburg & Baroody, 2003). Children's *cognitive skills* were measured by the "Let's Tell Stories" subset of the PreLAS 2000, which had two story items including "Shoemaker and Butterfly." The field interviewer told children each of the two stories while pointing to a series of pictures. After each story was completed, children were asked to retell the story using the pictures as a prompt, if needed.

*Stability in mothers' work hours.* In the ECLS-B, mothers were asked whether they were currently working for pay and how many hours per week they were usually working. We divided work hours into three categories, including not working for pay (0 hours of work), working part-time hours (1–34 hours per week), and working full-time hours (35 hours or more per week). Because we were interested in hours of work, not employment status, those who were employed but on leave were coded as not working. Only a very small share (7.6%) of mothers were on leave in either of the four interviews (1.9% in 9 months, 2.4% in 24 months, 2.2% in pre-school, and 2.0% at kindergarten). Then, we created four employment patterns across the four time points, including (a) worked full time (35 hours or more per week) at all four time points, (b) worked part time (less than 35 hours per week) at all four time points, (c) did not work at all four time points, and (d) changed work hours at least once across the four time points.

Mothers' background characteristics and child characteristics were mostly measured at the 9-month interview. Mother's *age* was measured in years. Mother's *education* was measured as five dummy variables including less than high school completion, high school diploma, some college, college degree (reference), and graduate education. *Family income* was a categorical variable composed by the ECLS-B which ranged from \$5,000 or less to \$200,000 or more. We used a midpoint translation, in which we assigned respondents the midpoint value of each category (i.e., \$2,500 for \$5,000 or less). Using a Pareto estimation, respondents with family incomes ranging from \$200,000 or more were assigned values of \$311,464. We coded it in thousands. Mother's *race-ethnicity* was measured as five dummy variables including White (reference), Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other race. Mother's *partnership status* was measured as three dummy variables including married (reference), cohabiting, and single. *The number of partnership status changes* across the four time points was measured as an ordered variable ranging from 0 to 3. Child's *gender* was a dichotomous variable where girls were coded 1 and boys were coded 0. Child's *birth order* was an ordered variable. *Additional children* by the child's kindergarten year was measured as a dichotomous variable where mothers who had any additional children were coded as 1 and mothers who had no additional children were coded as 0. Child's *temperament* at ninth months was the average of eight items ( $\alpha = 0.63$ ) (0 = *never*, 1 = *used to be*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *most times*) which was adapted from the Infant/Toddler Symptom Checklist6 (DeGangi, Poisson, Sickel, & Wiener, 1995). Child's *health* at nine months (for the analyses of the association between background characteristics and stability in employment hours) and at kindergarten (for the analyses of children's achievement) was measured by the question asking mothers about the child's general health ranging from 1 = *poor* to 4 = *excellent*. For the analyses of

children's achievement, we controlled for child's *age* in months at the time of the kindergarten interview. *The number of summer interviews* (June to August) was measured as a continuous variable. Descriptive statistics for variables except for mothers' work hours are shown in [Table 1](#). Descriptive statistics for mothers' work hours will be presented later.

### *Analytical Plan*

First, we examined distributions of mothers across the four groups indicating intensity and stability in their work hours over the four waves when children were 9 months old, 24 months old, in preschool, and in kindergarten. Next, using the multinomial logistic regression models, we examined whether mothers' and children's characteristics were related to the four patterns of mothers' work hours. Finally using ordinary-least-squares (OLS) regression models, we examined how the four patterns of mothers' work hours were related to children's reading, math, and cognitive scores in kindergarten without or with controlling for mothers' and children's background characteristics. Some variables in analyses had a

**Table 1.** Weighted Means (SD) for Children's Achievement and Mothers' and Children's Characteristics ( $N = 6,500$ ).

Child achievement at kindergarten		
Reading score	44.03	(31.83)
Math score	44.08	(20.96)
Cognitive score	3.46	(1.46)
Mother's age at nine months	28.41	(11.71)
Mother's education at nine months		
Less than high school completion	0.18	
High school diploma	0.28	
Some college	0.28	
Four-year college degree	0.16	
Graduate education	0.09	
Family income in thousands at nine months	51.48	(123.98)
Mother's race/ethnicity		
White	0.57	
Black	0.14	
Hispanic	0.23	
Asian	0.04	
Other race	0.02	
Mother's partnership status at nine months		
Married	0.68	
Cohabiting	0.14	
Single	0.18	
The number of partnership status changes by kindergarten	0.31	(0.96)
Child's gender (1 = girl)	0.49	
Child's birth order	2.02	(1.88)
Additional child by kindergarten	0.46	
Child's temperament at nine months	1.15	(0.81)
Child's health at nine months	4.48	(1.16)
Child's health at kindergarten	4.41	(1.33)
Child's age in month at kindergarten	68.20	(8.17)
Number of summer interviews	0.60	(0.97)

small percentage of missing cases. We used multiple imputation methods using *ice* (Royston, 2006) in Stata, with five iterations described by Allison (2001). As Stata does not produce estimates for  $R^2$  when using multiply imputed data, following Harel (2009), we calculated  $R^2$  values by transforming the  $R^2$  values produced from regression models conducted on each of the five individual imputed data sets into standard scores ( $z$ ). These values were averaged and transformed into an  $R^2$  value.

## RESULTS

### *Stability in Mothers' Work Hours during Early Childrearing Years*

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for mothers' work hours across four waves. When we looked at distributions of mothers by three categories of employment hours for each wave, as most studies did, the percentage of mothers who were employed appeared to have increased steadily from 53.0% in nine months to 62.8% in kindergarten. Only 33.3 % of mothers worked full time when their children were nine months old. The percentage of mothers who worked full time increased to 42.5 % when their children were in kindergarten.

These static statistics mask dynamics in mothers' time allocations to paid work across the four time points. When we examined mothers' employment patterns longitudinally, less than half of mothers (42.0 %) did not change work hours at all four waves; the rest of the mothers changed work hours from one wave to the next once (30.3 %), twice (21.8 %), or three times (5.9% ) across the four time points. Only about 18 % of mothers worked full time at all four time points, 3.6% of mothers worked part time at all four time points, and 20.4% of mothers did not work at all four time points. The majority (58.1%) of mothers changed their employment hours at least once across the four time points.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for Mothers' Work Hours During the Focal Child's Early Childhood ( $N = 6,500$ ).

	9 months	24 months	Preschool	Kindergarten
	%			
Worked	53.04	54.90	59.21	62.78
Did not work	46.96	45.10	40.79	37.22
Worked, part-time hours	19.79	20.19	19.63	20.30
Worked, full-time hours	33.25	34.71	39.58	42.48
<i>Stability and change in mothers' work hours from nine months to kindergarten</i>				
Number of Changes (0–3)	%			
0	41.97			
1	30.27			
2	21.83			
3	5.93			
Stability and change	%			
Worked full time, all four waves	17.97			
Worked part time, all four waves	3.55			
Did not work, all four waves	20.42			
Changed work hours	58.06			

*Characteristics Associated with Stability in Mothers' Work Hours*

Our second goal was to examine how mothers' and children's characteristics would be related to stability in mothers' work hours. Table 3 presents results from multinomial logistic regression models that examined this question. We used the group of mothers who changed work hours as the reference because this group was the largest category. Mothers' higher family income and older age were positively related to working full time at all four waves compared with mothers' changing employment status across the four time points. In contrast, mothers' less than high school completion, the focal children's higher birth order, and mothers' having an additional child by the time the focal child was in kindergarten were all negatively related to mothers' working full time at all four waves. White mothers, mothers who did not change their partnership status, and older mothers were

**Table 3.** Multinomial Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Stability in Mothers' Work Hours ( $N = 6,500$ ).

	Changed Work Hours <sup>a</sup>					
	Worked Full time All Waves		Worked Part time All Waves		Did Not Work All Waves	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
<i>Mother's characteristics</i>						
Mother's age	0.055	0.010***	0.086	0.019***	0.021	0.011
Mother's education <sup>b</sup>						
Less than high school	-0.910	0.252***	-0.479	0.603	0.996	0.189***
High school	-0.065	0.181	-0.989	0.348**	0.118	0.163
Some college/trade	-0.031	0.152	-0.309	0.279	-0.117	0.149
Graduate education	0.061	0.162	-0.380	0.301	-0.243	0.219
Family income (nine months)	0.003	0.001***	-0.001	0.002	0.000	0.002
Mother's race/ethnicity <sup>b</sup>						
Non-Hispanic black	0.230	0.150	-0.885	0.271**	-0.602	0.177***
Hispanic	0.140	0.135	-0.910	0.358*	0.113	0.154
Non-Hispanic Asian	0.079	0.128	-0.860	0.262***	0.226	0.145
Non-Hispanic other	-0.078	0.333	0.172	0.521	0.413	0.271
Mother's partnership status <sup>b</sup>						
Single	0.266	0.199	-0.760	0.520	-0.344	0.171*
Cohabiting	-0.015	0.187	-0.657	0.560	-0.201	0.164
Number of partnership status changes	0.069	0.097	-0.645	0.279*	-0.607	0.107***
<i>Child's characteristics</i>						
Child's gender	-0.011	0.115	0.106	0.187	0.126	0.089
Child's birth order	-0.192	0.054***	-0.128	0.114	0.181	0.043***
Additional children	-0.299	0.104**	0.303	0.250	0.564	0.099***
Child's temperament	0.041	0.081	-0.019	0.186	-0.024	0.088
Child's health	0.004	0.062	0.169	0.190	0.034	0.063
Number of summer interviews	0.068	0.066	-0.261	0.139	0.061	0.082
Intercept	-2.573	0.513***	-4.966	1.110***	-2.505	0.418***

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; and \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Note. <sup>a</sup>Omitted response group.

<sup>b</sup>Omitted response groups are: college degree, non-Hispanic white, and married.

more likely than non-White mothers, mothers who changed their partnership status, and younger mothers to work part time at all four waves, respectively. Finally, mothers with less than high school completion were more likely than mothers with a college degree to stay home at all four waves, whereas Black mothers were less likely than White mothers to stay home at all four waves. Single motherhood and the number of partnership status changes were negatively related to mothers' staying at home at all four waves, whereas the focal children's higher birth order and mothers' having an additional child by the year when the focal child was in kindergarten were both positively related to mothers' staying at home at all four time points. In sum, mothers' age, education, family income, race/ethnicity, partnership status and transitions, and the number of children appeared to be key factors that were related to maternal employment patterns.

#### *Stability in Mothers' Work Hours and Children's Achievement in Kindergarten*

The third goal of this chapter was to examine the association between stability in mothers' work hours and child achievement in kindergarten, including reading, math, and cognitive scores. In [Table 4](#), we presented results from OLS regression models using mothers who changed employment hours as the reference group. In supplemental analyses (not shown), we rotated the reference group to examine differences across the four patterns of work hours. Two models were conducted for each measure of children's achievement scores without or with covariates in the models, respectively. For reading score, without including background characteristics in the model (Model 1), compared to children whose mothers changed work hours, children whose mothers worked full time or part time at all four waves were more likely to have higher reading scores. When mothers' and children's background characteristics were controlled for (Model 2), the positive association between mothers' working part time or full time at all four waves and children's reading score was no longer significant. Supplemental analyses (not shown) showed that, mothers' working full time at all four time points was positively related to children's reading scores compared to mothers' staying at home at all four time points. Very similar patterns were found for children's math scores. Compared to mothers' who changed employment hours, mothers' working full time or part time at all four time points was positively related to children's math scores without controlling for mothers' and children's background characteristics (Model 1) but the positive associations disappeared when mothers' and children's background characteristics were controlled for (Model 2). According to supplemental analyses (not shown), similar to the findings for reading skills, mothers' staying at home at all four time points was negatively related to children's math scores compared to mothers' working full time at all four time points. Finally, for children's cognitive scores, when background characteristics were not controlled for, as found for reading and math scores, mothers' staying at home at all four waves was negatively related, whereas mothers' working full time or part time at all four waves was positively related to children's cognitive scores (Model 1). When background characteristics were held constant (Model 2), the negative association between mothers' staying at home at all four waves and children's

**Table 4.** Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models for the Association Between Stability in Mothers' Work Hours in Early Childhood and Child's Achievement in Kindergarten ( $N = 6,500$ ).

	Reading Score						Math Score						Cognitive Score					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2			
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE		
<i>Mother's work hours</i>																		
Did not work, all waves	-1.438	0.659*	-0.097	0.615	-1.270	0.472**	-0.371	0.400	-0.178	0.047***	-0.102	0.042*						
Worked part-time, all waves	4.749	1.407***	0.616	1.311	3.751	1.041***	0.296	0.950	0.146	0.072*	-0.021	0.073						
Worked full-time, all waves	2.916	0.639***	1.104	0.581	1.414	0.419***	-0.008	0.387	0.112	0.032***	0.042	0.032						
<i>Mother's characteristics</i>																		
Mother's age			0.063	0.050			0.025	0.027			-0.004	0.004						
Mother's education																		
Less than high school			-7.476	0.988***			-5.905	0.591***			-0.319	0.065***						
High school			-4.902	0.735***			-4.110	0.521***			-0.215	0.045***						
Some college/trade			-1.970	0.625**			-1.612	0.431***			-0.106	0.036**						
Advanced degree			2.747	0.752***			1.936	0.552***			-0.039	0.040						
Family income			0.031	0.007***			0.027	0.004***			0.002	0.000***						
Mother's race/ethnicity																		
Black			0.493	0.716			-1.931	0.514***			-0.152	0.033***						
Hispanic			-1.960	0.734**			-2.437	0.451***			-0.425	0.050***						
Asian			3.193	0.731***			1.059	0.426*			-0.258	0.039***						
Other race			-2.521	1.809			-3.017	1.380*			0.017	0.071						



cognitive scores remained significant, although the positive association of mothers' working full time or part time at all four waves and children's cognitive scores was no longer significant. Supplemental analyses (not shown) showed that mothers' staying at home at all four time points was negatively related to children's cognitive scores compared to mothers' working full time at all four time points.

## DISCUSSION

Although the association between maternal employment and child cognitive development has been studied widely, little research has examined the association focusing on stability in mothers' work hours across several years during their children's early childhood, using longitudinal data from a nationally representative sample of children. Using data from the 2001 ECLS-B, we examined stability in mothers' work hours across four time points during their children's first six years and how it relates to children's achievement in kindergarten. The present analysis has three key findings that make contributions to scholarly debates and policy discussions on the influences of maternal employment on child outcomes.

First, our findings suggest that the majority (58%) of mothers in the 2000s changed their time allocations to paid work across the four points during their children's early childhood. Only 18% of mothers reported working full time across all four waves. This suggests that, although *point-in-time participation* in the labor force has become the norm among contemporary US mothers with young children, *full-time participation over the course of childrearing period* is not. This distinction is important to emphasize when discussing the current trend in mothers' time allocations to paid work when their children are young. Overstating mothers' attachment to market work is misleading and may end up creating a policy that ironically makes mothers' lives more difficult. For example, since the 1996 welfare reform, mothers are required to work full time, year-round in order to receive benefits (Blank, 2007). Our findings, along with prior findings (e.g., Cohen & Bianchi, 1999), suggest that the full-time, year-round labor force participation model, especially for poor mothers, is out of touch with the reality.

Second, stability of mothers' work hours is shaped by their background characteristics. Mothers' older age, having fewer children, and higher family income are related to working full time at all four time points. Having more children, no high school diploma, and a partner living in the household are related to staying home at all four time points. Being older, White, and stayed in the same partnership status are related to working part time at all four time points. These findings are generally consistent with prior findings that family structure (i.e., the number of children and partnership status) and SES (education and family income) play a critical role in shaping maternal employment patterns during their children's early childhood (Frech & Damaske, 2012; Hynes & Clarkberg 2005). The patterns of these findings indicate more resources (e.g., family income and older age) and fewer child care demands (e.g., fewer children) are related to full-time employment at all four time points.

Third, at the descriptive level, mothers' working full time or part time at all four waves was positively related to child academic achievement in kindergarten – higher reading, math, and cognitive scores – compared with mothers' changing work hours across the four time points at the descriptive level. Yet, after controlling for background characteristics, these differences are no longer significant. These findings are inconsistent with prior research that assessed maternal employment hours only at one time point, which showed poorer academic outcomes among children of mothers who were employed full time during the first year of their children's life (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2010). We suspect that many of the mothers who worked full-time hours during the first year of their children's life in these studies probably changed their work hours over the next several years when their children were still young.

Mothers' not working in any of the four time points was related to poorer reading, math, and cognitive scores, compared to mothers' working full time at all four time points as well as mothers' changing paid work hours across the four time points. After controlling for mothers' background characteristics, these differences disappear for reading and math scores, but remain significant for cognitive score. Prior research has shown that stay-at-home mothers do not spend all day attending children (Bianchi, 2000) and are not always able to provide children with structured activities (Hsin & Felfe, 2014). Longer hours of mother-child unproductive time are negatively related to achievement scores (Hsin & Felfe, 2014). Children whose mothers are stably employed are more likely than other children to be in center-based care or preschool (Smith, 2002) where, although it depends on quality of care, children follow a daily routine with structured, age-appropriate, stimulating activities (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2000).

Mothers' working part time at all four time points does not differ from mothers' working full time at all four time points in its associations with children's achievement scores. This finding is inconsistent with prior conclusions that mothers' part-time employment is related to better child achievement outcomes compared to mothers' full-time employment (Goldberg et al., 2008). Recall that only about 4% of mothers in the present sample worked part time at all four waves. Prior research examined maternal employment at one time point. We suspect that these differences in measurements might be a reason for inconsistent findings.

These findings suggest an important reality of maternal employment patterns, focusing on stability of employment, that policymakers should be aware of. Unlike the widespread notion that employment is part of motherhood in the contemporary United States, full-time work on a regular basis – a typical principle for eligibility for various benefits – appears to be far from the norm among mothers with young children. Our findings suggest that only about one-fifth (18%) of mothers work full time at all four time points from when their children are nine months old to when their children are in kindergarten. As recent research has shown (Damaske & Frech, 2016), mothers need resources to keep their employment while raising children. For example, we found that having two or more children is related to lower odds of mothers' working full time at all four time points, whereas higher family income is related to higher odds of mothers'

doing so. These findings make sense, given the high child care cost in the United States: one estimate of the average cost of full-time care in child care centers for children aged 0–4 was \$9,589 per year, which was higher than the average cost of in-state college tuition (Schulte & Durana, 2016). For many families, it is difficult to pay child care for two or more children. More efforts should be made to increase the availability of affordable child care centers or family day care homes with adequate quality.

The present analysis has limitations that future research should address. First, we only looked at four time points due to data limitations. It would be ideal if we were able to know more detailed maternal employment history, for example, whether mothers worked full time, year-round, for multiple time points. Second, while the majority of mothers changed work hours, we did not examine variation among this group of mothers. For example, it is possible that the effects of mothers' changing work hours on children may depend on whether mothers altered their work hours voluntarily to attend their children's needs or mothers were forced to change their work hours by their employers (e.g., downsizing and layoffs). However, reasons for mothers' quitting a job or cutting back hours are often ambiguous (Bianchi, 2011). Because of cultural expectations for mothers to be primary caregivers of their children, mothers tend to mention the needs of their families as a primary reason for their decisions to change their paid work activities, even when they did so for other reasons (Damaske, 2011; Stone, 2007). Third, we focused on full-time *hours*, not full-time status. Some mothers may be able to reduce work hours while keeping their full-time job if their employers offered benefits such as parental leave or flexible work hours.

Despite the limitations, the present analysis makes an important contribution to the scholarships on maternal employment patterns and the association between maternal employment and child outcomes. First, it shows that the majority of mothers change their work hours during their children's early childhood. In other words, unlike popular belief, stable full-time employment is far from the norm of mothers with children who are younger than school-age. Second, stable maternal full-time employment appears to be possible only when mothers have greater resources and fewer child demands, such as being older, having a higher level of family income, and having fewer children. Third, mothers' stable full-time or part-time employment in early childhood appears to be related to children's academic advantages in kindergarten, but the observed association is mostly confounded by mothers' and children's background characteristics. Future research should take social inequality in mothers' ability to maintain employment into account when examining the association between maternal employment and child outcomes.

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## NOTE

1. Following ECLS-B guidelines, all sample sizes are rounded to the nearest 50 and therefore do not produce precise counts.

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