

Current Research: Mothers Who Work
Ruth Houston Barrett
Sarah Catherine Stuchell

Current research is discovering that women's working is not harming the family, and in fact there are benefits to women's working, for themselves, for their marriages, and for their children. The following organizes and summarizes some of this recent research, as well as some classic research, that helps us to understand how this is so.

Mothers and Patterns of Work

- "While men's work life tends to follow a linear course, women's usually consists of starts, stops, menders, interruptions, revisions, and detours, as they accommodate to the others in their lives" (Shapiro, 1996, as cited in Carter & McGoldrick, 1999, p.108).
- Throughout early parenthood, women exhibit significant movement into and out of the labor force (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005).
- Women who take time off from full commitment to the paid workforce lose a great deal of ground in their power in their relationships, their work flexibility, and their financial options (Barnett & Rivers, 1996).
- Women, more so than men, use strategies such as self-employment to improve work-life balance (MacDonald, Phipps, & Lethbridge, 2005).
- Having a child does not appear to cause women psychological distress, but leaving the workforce does (Barnett & Rivers, 1996).
- Starting maternity leave or staying home to look after the family were associated with psychological distress for some women. Transitions from these roles to formal employment resulted in an improvement in mental health. (Thomas et al, 2005.)

Effects of Mother's Employment Quality and Stability

- Mothers in higher quality occupations have more stable employment and more extensive time spent employed (Menaghan, Mott, Cooksey, & Jekielek, 2005).
- Mothers in more stable employment arrangements are more apt to be in more advantaged family situations (Menaghan et al, 2005).
- Higher job quality has positive effects on home environments and on child cognitive outcomes (Menaghan, et al, 2005).

Mother's Work and Childcare

- Women who used more childcare for their children from birth through first grade tended to have higher wages and more hours of employment when their children were in the first grade. (N=1,364 children.) Effects were greater for more educated and non-poor mothers. (Bub & McCartney, 2004.)
- Study examined 191 low-income urban mothers, found mothers who receive childcare subsidies were 21% less likely to experience work-hour problems. Child-care subsidies do more than allow women to enter the labor force. Subsidies help make it easier for mothers in

low-wage labor both to comply with employer demands for additional work hours and to earn the needed wages that accompany them. (Press, Fagan, & Laughlin, 2006).

- Associations between mothers' work schedules and children's cognitive outcomes in the first 3 years of life for approximately 900 children from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care. Effects of mothers working nonstandard schedules tended to be negative, particularly if these schedules began in the 1st year of life, and particularly for measures of cognitive development at 24 months and expressive language at 36 months. Descriptive statistics suggested that these negative effects might be due to the type of child care used. (Han, Wen-Jui, 2005).

Mothers Must Work to Support their Families

- One third of women earn more than half of their family's income. (Lewin, 1997a, cited in McGoldrick, 1999).
- Two-fifths of women are the sole heads of their households (McGoldrick, 1999).

Mothers Who Work – Effects on Marriage Study by Rogers (1996)

- Question: Association between married mothers' employment and their reports of marital conflict and marital happiness in continuously married families with children and in mother-stepfather families.
- Data: 1988 wave of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Merged Child-Mother,
- Sample: 1,530 mothers (aged 23-30 yrs), all with employed husbands, and all with at least 1 child living in the household. 1,323 were in 1st marriages and 179 in remarriages.
- Findings:
 - For continuously married families with children, the findings indicate a nonsignificant trend that is consistent with role strain perspectives.
 - For mother-stepfather families, there is a significant trend in which mothers' full-time employment is associated with higher marital quality when there are more children in the household.

Attributions to "Working Mothers" vs. "Stay-at-Home Moms" Study by Shpancer, Melick, & Sayre, 2006:

- The present study was designed to find whether evaluations of maternal competence are linked to mothers' employment status and the quality of maternal care.
- Participants rated videotaped vignettes, depicting either high-quality or low-quality mother-infant interactions, on various dimensions of care quality.
- The videotaped mothers were described to one-half of the participants as "stay-at-home mothers" and to the other half as "working mothers."
- Analysis revealed a significant main effect of type of care on maternal evaluations. "At-home" mothers were rated as providing better care than 'working mothers.'

- Participants whose mothers worked and who experienced non-parental care as children were more likely to report positive attitudes about daycare and maternal employment.
- Participants with less favorable attitudes toward maternal employment showed a more pronounced negative bias in rating high-quality working mothers.

Infants of Mothers Who Work – Are they harmed?

- Study tested theory that maternal time with an infant is important for mother-child relationships and children's development (Huston & Aronson, 2005):
 - Employment reduced time with infants, but mothers compensated for some work time by decreasing time in other activities.
 - Employed mothers scored slightly lower on maternal sensitivity.
 - Employment of mothers showed no effect on children's engagement with mothers, secure attachment, social behavior, or cognitive performances.

School Age Children of Mothers Who Work – Are they harmed?

Study by Moorehouse, 1991.

- Study relates maternal employment patterns to shared mother-child activities and to school outcomes for 112 first graders.
- When frequent activities occur, children whose mothers experience changes in hours or ongoing demands of full-time hours usually score as high in school competence as do children with mothers at home.
- Only when activities are infrequent do children in these situations have lower scores than children with mothers at home.

Adolescent Children of Mothers Who Work – Are they harmed?

Study by Hillman, Sawilowsky, & Becker, 1993:

- Study showed no significant effects of maternal employment on the risk-taking behavior of 389 9th-12th graders in 2-parent families.
- Mothers' work status was not shown to have a significant impact on issues related to Ss' academic functioning, resistance to peer pressure, access to drug or alcohol, or indicators of remarkable consequences of psychoactive substance use.
- Results are consistent with those of other researchers.

Benefits to Children of Mothers who Work

- The impact of mothers' working has positive effects for themselves and for their children (Barnett & Rivers, 1996).
- Daughters benefit most of all from their mother's working – they tend to be more self-confident, get better grades and be more likely to pursue careers themselves than children of non-employed mothers (Hoffman, 1989).
- For African-American mothers, working increases her daughter's likelihood of staying in school (Wolfer & Moen, 1996).

- High achievement of mothers seems to be even more predictive of high achievement of both their sons and daughters than is the high achievement of fathers (Losoff, 1974; Padan, 1965, both as cited in McGoldrick, 1999).
- Positive maternal work circumstances enhance children's wellbeing (Cooksey, Menaghan, & Jekielek, 1997).
- In a recent study of families with adolescents with Type I diabetes, maternal employment did not effect diabetes-specific family conflict, mother-adolescent conflict, or diabetic self-care (Dashiff, Bartolucci, Wallander, & Abdullatif, 2005).

Role Strain and Other Stressors for Mothers who Work

- For women, work and families involve conflicting demands. The dominant belief has been that women belong in the home, and women are often seen as depriving their families by working (McGoldrick, 1999).
- Major sources of stress in the workplace are sexual harassment, and pay and job discrimination, such as efforts to "mommy track" mothers out of their jobs (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Stacey, 1996).
- The lack of quality childcare, essential to dual-worker or single-parent families, continues to be a primary concern for families (McGoldrick, 1999).
- A hidden factor in reconciling work and family life is the additional work involved in physically, temporally, and spatially coordinating childcare, education, and work (Skinner, 2005).
- Young children create transportation and coordination difficulties, with more impact on maternal employment, than do the numbers of children in the family per se (Skinner, 2005).
- It is important to consider employed women's interpretation of their work roles when exploring work-family links (Helms-Erikson, 2000).

Health Benefits for Mothers who Work

- Women who work outside the home show fewer symptoms of physical and psychological distress (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Stacey, 1996).
- The more roles a woman occupies, the healthier she is likely to be: employed married parents have the best health profile, whereas people with none of these roles have the worst profile. Multiple roles may provide cognitive cushioning in the face of stress. (Arnetz, Wasserman, Petrinin, & Brenner, 1987.)
- Employed women are healthier than nonemployed women, and lack of employment is a risk factor for women's health (Arnetz, Wasserman, Petrinin, & Brenner, 1987).
- Women who are "full-time homemakers" tend to have lower self-esteem and lower sense of personal competence, even regarding their child care and social skills, than do mothers in the paid workforce (McGoldrick, 1999).
- Job-related social support has beneficial effects on women's health (McGoldrick, 1999).
- For African-American mothers, working improves her self-esteem (Hoffman, 1989).

Working Wives – Economics and Power

- Economic independence for women appears to be crucial protective factors for
 - Abuse – Women’s economic dependence is the greatest factor in their returning to abusing husbands (Aguirre, 1985).
 - ❖ Husbands or boyfriends commit at least 29% of violent crimes against women (McGoldrick, 1999).
 - ❖ The number of women murdered by their intimates in the USA during the Vietnam War was 51,000 – almost as many as were killed in the war (58,000) (McGoldrick, 1999).
 - ❖ Recent intimate partner violence is associated with women working fewer months (Riger, Staggs, & Schewe, 2004).
 - Divorce – Economic dependence creates a seriously problematic power imbalance that threatens marriage altogether (McGoldrick, 1999).
 - Poverty and powerlessness in old age (McGoldrick, 1999).
- Money buys power in marriage – the privilege to make decisions about whether to stay or leave, what the family will purchase, where they will live, and how the children will be educated (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983, 1991, as cited in McGoldrick, 1999).

Mothers and Household Labor

- The majority of household labor is done by women – it is largely seen as her responsibility (McGoldrick, 1999).
- In 1989, women averaged an extra month of 24-hour workdays each year (Hochschild, 1989). This is three months of 8-hour workdays per year! Over 30 years, this is 7.5 years of extra fulltime labor.
- Even for dual career couples, the transition to parenthood tends to lead to a reversion to a more traditional division of household roles, with women doing the lion’s share of housework and childcare (Carter, 1996; Hochschild, 1989)
- Mothers of preschoolers work 17 hours per week more than fathers, and mothers of school-age children work 6 hours per week more than fathers (Barnett & Rivers, 1996).
- Women’s greater hours of unpaid work contribute to women’s experiencing more stress than men experience. Of that work, hours spent on eldercare and housework are more stressful than those spent on childcare. (MacDonald, Phipps, & Lethbridge, 2005).
- First-time parents report postpartum changes in employment, childcare, and housework (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005):
 - Time devoted to work responsibilities increased 64% for mothers and 37% for fathers.
 - Women decreased employment by 10.7 hours per week on average, while men decreased 0.2 hours per week.
 - Couples perceived less housework sharing and less satisfaction with work sharing after childbirth.
 - Mother’s postpartum satisfaction with housework sharing was associated with partner satisfaction, childcare time, and less involvement in housework.

Women and Care of Elder Parents

- Traditionally, women have been held responsible for all family caretaking: husbands, children, their parents, their husband's parents and any other sick or dependent family member (McGoldrick, 1999).
- "The sandwich generation" cares for both children and elder parents.
- One-fifth of women aged 55 to 59 are providing in-home care to elderly relatives (McGoldrick, 1999).
- Over half of women with one surviving parent will eventually be the parent's caretaker (McGoldrick, 1999).
- Over half of women age 45 to 64 are in the labor force, and most are working full time (McGoldrick, 1999).
- Twelve percent of elder caregivers are themselves over age 75 (McGoldrick, 1999).

Monica McGoldrick

- Director of the Family Institute of New Jersey
- Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at the Robert Wood Medical School
- Visiting Professor at Fordham University School of Social Work
- Masters Degree in Russian Studies, Yale University, 1966
- MSW, Smith College School for Social Work, 1969
- Honorary Doctorate from Smith College
- Recipient, Annual Award of the American Family Therapy Academy for Distinguished Contribution to Family Therapy Theory and Practice
- International lecturer
- Books:
 - *Revisioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture and Gender in Clinical Practice*, 1998.
 - *You Can Go Home Again: Reconnecting with Your Family*, 1995.
 - *Ethnicity and Family Therapy, 2nd Edition*, 1996.
 - *Genograms in Family Assessment, 2nd Edition*, 1998.
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