



# Longitudinal associations between work-family conflict and enrichment, inter-parental conflict, and child internalizing and externalizing problems



Andisheh Vahedi<sup>a,\*</sup>, Isabel Krug<sup>a</sup>, Matthew Fuller-Tyszkiewicz<sup>b,c</sup>, Elizabeth M. Westrupp<sup>b,c,d,e,1</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences, The University of Melbourne, VIC, 3010, Australia

<sup>b</sup> School of Psychology, Deakin University, Geelong, VIC, 3220, Australia

<sup>c</sup> Center for Social and Early Emotional Development, Deakin University, Burwood, VIC, 3125, Australia

<sup>d</sup> Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University, Melbourne, VIC, 3086, Australia

<sup>e</sup> Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne, VIC, 3010, Australia

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Work-family conflict  
Work-family enrichment  
Inter-parental conflict  
Internalizing and externalizing problems

## ABSTRACT

**Rationale:** Work-family conflict and enrichment refer to parents' challenges and benefits of combining work and family roles. Emerging evidence suggests detrimental effects of work-family conflict and facilitating effects of work-family enrichment on couple, family, and child functioning. This effect may be more pronounced in mothers, who must juggle different roles within the family and work context. To date, research has examined these relations as unidirectional, but reciprocal associations may be possible.

**Objective:** This study investigated the shape and direction of associations between maternal work-family conflict and enrichment, child internalizing and externalizing problems, and inter-parental conflict.

**Method:** Growth curve modelling used six waves of biennial data spanning ten years of childhood (4–5 to 14–15 years) for 2946 children and their employed mothers from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

**Results:** Results indicated bidirectional associations between the work-family interface and child outcomes; mothers' initial work-family conflict was associated with a quadratic increase in child internalizing (but not externalizing) problems over time. Child internalizing problems at 4–5 years predicted a linear decrease in mothers' work-family enrichment over time. However, work-family enrichment at 4–5 years was not associated with the change in either child internalizing or externalizing problems. Work-family conflict and inter-parental conflict at 4–5 years were not associated with change in one another. Initial work-family enrichment was associated with a quadratic decrease in inter-parental conflict, and initial inter-parental conflict was associated with a linear increase in externalizing problems; no evident reverse association was found.

**Conclusion:** Findings demonstrate the importance of the work-family interface in shaping family health outcomes. The primary direction of influence was from work-family factors to inter-parental conflict and child mental health problems. Thus, interventions aimed at promoting family-friendly work environments and policies would likely yield benefits for parents and their families.

## 1. Introduction

The vast majority of modern parents must juggle work and family responsibilities; they experience challenges and enriching opportunities associated with combining these roles, referred to as work-family conflict and work-family enrichment, respectively. Recent studies show that work-family experiences are associated with the quality of the

couple relationship and inter-parental conflict (Cooklin et al., 2015b; Dinh et al., 2017), as well as child mental health outcomes (Dinh et al., 2017; Hart and Kelley, 2006; Strazdins et al., 2013). However, research to date, has focused almost exclusively on unidirectional effects, examining how the work-family interface influences couple and child outcomes, and most of these have been cross-sectional (Cooklin et al., 2015b; Hart and Kelley, 2006; Strazdins et al., 2013). Nevertheless,

\* Corresponding author. Level 12, Redmond Barry Building, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, VIC, 3010, Australia.

E-mail addresses: [avahedi@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:avahedi@student.unimelb.edu.au) (A. Vahedi), [Isabel.krug@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:Isabel.krug@unimelb.edu.au) (I. Krug), [matthew.fuller-tyszkiewicz@deakin.edu.au](mailto:matthew.fuller-tyszkiewicz@deakin.edu.au) (M. Fuller-Tyszkiewicz), [Elizabeth.Westrupp@deakin.edu.au](mailto:Elizabeth.Westrupp@deakin.edu.au) (E.M. Westrupp).

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Westrupp was supported by Australian Communities Foundation through the Roberta Holmes Transition to Contemporary Parenthood Program at La Trobe University (Coronella sub-fund). This paper uses unit record data from Growing Up in Australia, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) which was approved by the Australian Institute of Family Studies Ethics Committee. LSAC is conducted in partnership between the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The findings and views reported are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DSS, AIFS, or the ABS. LSAC study design and data collection were funded by DSS. We thank all parents and children who took part in the study.

there may be bidirectional relations, in that work-family conflict or enrichment may interfere with or enhance family relationships and functioning; while equally, the functioning of the family (couple and children) may also interfere with or improve parents' ability to manage the work-family interface. We address this possibility using six waves of data from a large representative sample of Australian children, to test bidirectional associations between mothers' work-family conflict/enrichment, inter-parental conflict, and child internalizing/externalizing problems over 10 years of childhood and adolescence. We investigate associations for mothers in this paper given that mothers in Australia still perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid work at home in addition to paid work in the labor force compared to fathers (Craig and Sawrikar, 2009). Therefore mothers' work-family experiences are likely to be particularly salient in their interactions with their partner and child (Cooklin et al., 2015b).

### 1.1. Mothers' work-family experiences

In recent decades, the rate of employment for mothers in Australia has increased (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011), which has had an important impact on a number of aspects of family life (Baxter et al., 2007). Findings from previous Australian studies indicate that having a young child has greater impact on mothers' compared to fathers' patterns and rates of employment (for a review, see Birch, 2005). The current study uses data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), which is a comprehensive and nationally-representative study of childhood development in Australia, tracking two cohorts of children from birth and kindergarten age to adulthood. Findings from previous research using LSAC data indicated that the rate of employment for Australian mothers whose youngest child was aged 4–5 years was 60% while fathers' rate of employment at the same family life stage was 92% (Baxter et al., 2007). In the same study mothers and fathers reported both negative and positive experiences in combining work and family responsibilities. However, mothers' participation in the workforce has not been accompanied by reductions in child care and household responsibilities (Von Doussa, 2006). Therefore, Australian mothers are more likely to take on child care responsibilities, and their work-family experiences may have greater impacts on family functioning and child outcomes (Westrupp et al., 2016). Consequently, the current study focusses on maternal work-family experiences and associations with child adjustment and family functioning.

### 1.2. Theoretical framework

The intersection between work and family can be understood in relation to a population health perspective. Population health refers to the relative distribution of health outcomes within large groups of individuals, with a key focus on identifying patterns in relation to determinants of health, as well as policies and interventions that link health determinants to health outcomes (Kindig and Stoddart, 2003). Health determinants include a combination of social, environmental, and behavioral factors, which contribute to health inequalities at a population level (Hämmig et al., 2014). The workplace environment is considered to be one of the major sources of health inequalities (Hämmig and Bauer, 2013). For example, a lack of autonomy, job insecurity, and long and inflexible work hours are associated with high levels of work-family conflict and poor mental health in parents (Cooklin et al., 2015a).

The increased rate of women's participation in labor markets means that a higher proportion of workers have primary caring responsibilities and may experience challenges in combining these responsibilities with paid work. In this way, mothers' work and family lives, their interactions with their family members, and consequently their child's developmental trajectories may be influenced by cultural and workplace trends and government policies that influence the workplace environment. In this study we conceptualize mothers' work-family experiences

as social determinants of health through which broad level social policies and practices may filter down to affect child mental health.

The nature of associations between the work-family interface and child mental health can be understood from the conservation of resources perspective (Hobfoll, 1989), where work-family experiences and influences on individuals are thought to be reciprocally reinforcing. According to this theory, parents can be described as having finite resources, such as time and energy. When parents' resources are depleted persistently over time they are vulnerable to experiencing 'loss spirals'. For example, work-family conflict as a stressor leads to poor well-being, and poor well-being in turn reinforces more resource loss and work-family conflict over time (Matthews et al., 2014). Likewise, 'gain spirals' are also possible, such that individuals with enriching work-family roles experience improved well-being, which in turn triggers further resource gains (Matthews et al., 2014). However, the notion of loss and gain spirals in relation to work-family experiences and child outcomes have not been examined yet.

It is possible that child factors influence parents' experiences of work. For example, parents of a child with a mental health problem may need to invest additional time and energy resources to manage child behavior or other problems within the family or to access support services for the child. In combination with other family responsibilities, these commitments may result in depleting parent resources, in turn reinforcing parents' experience of work-family conflict, and reducing the potential for work-family enrichment. In contrast, parents' experience of work-family enrichment may be reinforced by rewarding family commitments. For instance, warm, positive parent-child relationships in context of high functioning children with good mental health may facilitate parents' ability to combine work and family responsibilities, with positive effects crossing over by reinforcing positive mood and interpersonal interactions in the work realm. Longitudinal research is needed to test this possibility.

### 1.3. The work-family interface: a determinant of childhood mental health

Recent studies utilizing LSAC data have found associations between the work-family interface and child global and mental health. Mothers' work-family experiences have been found to be associated with childhood internalizing and externalizing problems cross-sectionally at 4–5 years (Strazdins et al., 2013), and longitudinally (Dinh et al., 2017) via poor parent mental health, parenting irritability, and poor quality parental relationship (Dinh et al., 2017; Strazdins et al., 2013). Likewise, Westrupp et al. (2016) found reciprocal associations between work-family conflict and maternal psychological distress over eight years, and poor child global health (entered as a covariate) was associated with both high maternal work-family conflict and psychological distress.

Scholars have also utilized samples from other countries, and these findings have indicated the presence of associations between maternal work-family experiences and child mental health. For example, Hart and Kelley (2006) used a sample of 1–4 year old American children and found that mothers' (but not fathers') work-family conflict was concurrently associated with child internalizing and externalizing problems. Likewise, drawing on a sample of 3–6 year old Portuguese children, Vieira et al. (2016) found that mothers' work-family conflict and enrichment were cross-sectionally associated with child internalizing and externalizing problems through mother-child interactions. However, the direction of association between the work-family interface and child mental health requires further investigation. This is important because if child factors are found to influence mothers' work-family experiences, then considering those child factors in the context of policy, intervention, and workplace practices may help mothers in modern society function better in managing both their work and family responsibilities.

The possibility of reverse (i.e., mutual) association between child factors and the work-family interface has scarcely been investigated.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7327553>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7327553>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)