

Work-family Conflict, Children, and Hour Mismatches in Australia

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**Abstract**

This paper helps integrate research on work hours and work-family issues by examining whether work-family conflict is associated with a desire for more or fewer hours of work and whether that relationship is moderated by the age of children in the home. Using the first wave of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA), we find that family-to-work conflict does not make people want to change their work hours. Work-to-family conflict, however, is associated with a desire for fewer hours of work. We also find evidence of moderating effects: work-to-family conflict is more likely to make women want fewer hours when there is a young child in the home. We conclude that many working parents see work hour reductions as a way to cope with work-family conflict, but that people prefer different coping strategies depending on their gender and family situation.

## INTRODUCTION

Work-family conflict is wide-spread and harmful for workers and organizations (Allen, Herst, Bruck, and Sutton 2000; Galinsky, Bond, and Friedman 1993). It is associated with dissatisfaction and stress at work and home (Frone, Yardley, and Markel 1997), negative health outcomes (Frone, Russell, and Cooper 1997), absenteeism (Glass and Estes 1997; Goff, Mount, and Jamison 1990), and employee turnover (Anderson, Coffey, and Byerly 2002; Glass and Estes 1997). Consequently, researchers have been eager to find organizational practices that help reduce work-family conflict (Voydanoff 2004) and called attention to the relative scarcity of such practices (Glass and Estes 1997).

Individuals experiencing work-family conflict, however, do not wait passively for work-family conflict to decrease. Rather, they look for ways to satisfy the demands of work and family while minimizing work-family conflict (Barnett and Lundgren 1998; Kossek, Noe, and DeMarr 1999; Moen and Wethington 1992; Voydanoff 2002). Many authors, for instance, suggest that work-family conflict generates hour mismatches, i.e., it makes people want to increase or decrease the number of hours they work for pay.

In this paper, we use data from the first wave of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA) to study two issues. First, we examine how men and women experiencing work-family conflict want to change the number of hours they work. Discussions of work-life conflict often suggest that it leads to hour mismatches (Becker and Moen 1999; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Moen and Yu 2000), but few authors have examined the relationship using representative data (for exceptions see MacInnes 2005; Moen and Dempster-McClain 1987; Reynolds forthcoming). Second, we extend previous research by examining whether the connection between work-family conflict and hour mismatches is moderated by

gender or the presence of young children. Descriptive studies suggest that men and women and people in different phases of family life will want to cope with work-family conflict in different ways (Lee and Duxbury 1998; Schnittger and Bird 1990). By examining these two issues, our analysis helps synthesize insights from the work hour and work-family literatures, improve our understanding of work-family coping strategies (see Schnittger and Bird 1990; see Voydanoff 2002), and clarify how work-family conflict is related to the appetite for work.

## **BACKGROUND**

In the 1980s, many authors treated work-family conflict as a non-directional concept (see for example Moen and Dempster-McClain 1987), but more recent research distinguishes between work-to-family and family-to-work conflict (Frone, Russell, and Cooper 1992; Frone, Yardley, and Markel 1997; Greenhaus and Parasuraman 1999). Work-to-family and family-to-work conflict are conceptually and empirically distinct and have different antecedents and consequences (Frone, Russell, and Cooper 1992; Frone, Yardley, and Markel 1997). Work-to-family conflict occurs when work activities interfere with a person's ability to satisfy the demands of family life. A business trip, for instance, might prevent a parent from attending a child's soccer game. Family-to-work conflict occurs when family demands interfere with a person's ability to satisfy the demands of work. Staying up late with a sick child, for example, could make it difficult to be productive at work.

In the last few years, researchers have also begun to offer a more nuanced perspective on work hours by distinguishing between the number of hours people actually work and the number of hours they prefer to work. In the 1990s, following the publication of *The Overworked American* (Schor 1991), most studies of work hours focused on describing the number of hours people actually work (for a brief review, see Figart and Golden 1998). These studies were often

grounded in an economic tradition which assumes that actual and preferred hours are the same. In the words of Clarkberg and Moen, they assumed that “the link between preferences and behaviors was direct, unmediated, and unproblematic” (2001: 1118). More recently, however, researchers have shown that mismatches between actual and preferred hours of work are quite common in the United States and abroad (Clarkberg and Moen 2001; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2003).

Currently, there is little agreement among scholars regarding how work-family conflict and hour mismatches are related to one another. In large part, this is because most studies have focused on one concept or the other. Studies of hour mismatches often stress the importance of work-life conflict, but they seldom measure it (see for example Clarkberg and Moen 2001; Jacobs and Gerson 2000; Reynolds 2003). Studies of work-life conflict, in contrast, measure work-life conflict carefully but tend to overlook the difference between preferred and actual hours of work (Barnett 1998).

There are only a handful of studies that provide information about how work-family conflict may influence the desire for more or fewer hours of work. On one hand, some case studies imply that work-family conflict (of either kind) leads to a desire for *more* hours of work (Hochschild 1997; Hochschild 2002; Kofodimos 1990). Analyses of other convenience samples, on the other hand, highlight how some people are “scaling back” their work hours and thus suggest that work-family conflict leads to a desire for *fewer* hours of work (Becker and Moen 1999). Large-scale studies of the relationship between work-family conflict and hour mismatches that could help establish the generalizability of these findings are rare. Using data from the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey, Moen and Dempster-McClain (1987) found that a non-directional measure of work-family conflict was positively associated with the desire for

fewer hours of work. Analyses of data from the 2002 British Social Attitudes Survey found a positive (but weak) relationship between work-to-family conflict and the desire for fewer hours of work (MacInnes 2005). Finally, analyses of the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce suggest that the relationship between work-family conflict and hour mismatches is more complex (see Reynolds forthcoming). In particular, work-family conflict seems to make women want fewer hours of work whether the conflict originates at home or at work, but it only makes men want fewer hours when it originates at work. Furthermore, there is some evidence that work-to-family conflict makes some men want more hours.

## **HYPOTHESES**

### **Work-Family Conflict and Hour Mismatches**

Although some authors have implied that work-family conflict can lead to a desire for more hours of work (Hochschild 1997; Hochschild 2002; Kofodimos 1990), we think that reaction is fairly rare. Rather, we expect that in most cases, work-family conflict will make people want to reduce the number of hours they work. This argument is consistent with the findings of both qualitative and quantitative studies (Becker and Moen 1999; Moen and Dempster-McClain 1987; Reynolds forthcoming). It is also logical given what we know about the causes of work-family conflict. Work-life conflict is often the result of role overload, i.e. having too many things to do and too little time in which to do them (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985; Voydanoff 2002). Although working more hours is likely to exacerbate work-family conflict, working fewer hours should help reduce it.

Furthermore, we expect that the desire for fewer hours of work will be more closely associated with work-to-family conflict than with family-to-work conflict. Previous studies have

typically not distinguished between these two types of conflict (Clarkberg and Moen 2001; Jacobs and Gerson 1998; Jacobs and Gerson 2001; Moen and Dempster-McClain 1987; Reynolds 2003). We argue, however, that when trying to solve a problem, people often look to the source of the problem for solutions (see Moen and Dempster-McClain 1987). Parents who are trying to reduce family-to-work conflict, for instance, may seek childcare arrangements that make family life less likely to interfere with work. When facing work-to-family conflict, on the other hand, people will look for solutions at work, including working fewer hours (see also Schnittger and Bird 1990).

### **The Moderating Effects of Gender and Family Structure**

According to the work-family literature, people pursue work-family adaptive strategies. In other words, they create plans of action to satisfy the demands of work and family and minimize work-family conflict at the same time (Barnett 1998; Kossek, Noe, and DeMarr 1999; Moen and Wethington 1992; Voydanoff 2002). In many cases, work-family strategies involve hour mismatches and, when possible, work hour adjustments (Clarkberg and Moen 2001). Work-family strategies, however, reflect the context in which they are created, and people choose adaptive strategies from the range of options that are available given their gender and life-stage and the cultural, economic, and other constraints they face (Moen and Wethington 1992).

We expect that the connection between work-family conflict and hour mismatches may be somewhat different for men and women. Researchers have documented many ways work and family life differ for men and women (for reviews, see Greenhaus and Parasuraman 1999), and two findings are particularly important for this analysis. First, women typically do a greater

share of the household labor than men (Coltrane 2000), and that additional work at home partially restricts the time women can spend in paid work (Greenhaus and Parasuraman 1999; Rothbard and Edwards 2003). Second, gender inequalities in the workplace tend to lower women's organizational commitment (DoddMcCue and Wright 1996; Marsden, Kalleberg, and Cook 1993), reduce the importance they place on promotion (Cassirer and Reskin 2000), and make them less likely than men to identify work as their central priority (Bielby 1992). Because men's and women's preferences are strongly influenced by the social structures they encounter (Barnett and Lundgren 1998; Moen and Wethington 1992; Moen and Yu 2000), we expect that work-family conflict will be more likely to produce a desire for fewer hours among women than among men. Working fewer hours will bring women closer to emulating the female caretaker role that many families and workplaces still expect and encourage them to fill (Williams 2000).

We also anticipate that the effect of work-family conflict will be especially strong among parents with young children. Work-family conflict may provide all parents with reasons to want fewer hours of work. Working fewer hours should help alleviate role conflict, and it should also help parents protect their children from the negative effects of work-family conflict. Parents with young children, however, may be especially likely to respond to work-family conflict by wanting fewer hours. Children need more attention when they are young, and in their early years, they grow and change more quickly than they do later in life. We expect that parents will be particularly interested in minimizing work-family conflict when their children are still in those early years.

## **DATA**

To test the hypotheses outlined above, we use the first wave of data from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, which contains detailed information

about paid work and work-family conflict. HILDA is a nationally representative panel study that began in 2001 when researchers conducted personal interviews with 13,969 Australians ages fifteen and older in 7,682 households. In wave one, the household response rate (approximately 66%) and the individual response rate (approximately 92%) were comparable to response rates for similar panel studies such as the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) and the British Household Panel Study (BHPS).

By using data from Australia, we may obtain some findings that are specific to that country. Compared to the United States, for instance, the proportion of women in continuous full-time employment over the life course in Australia is fairly small (10% versus 33%) (Stier, Lewin-Epstein, and Braun 2001). Part-time work is also more common among women in Australia, where workers often retain their health insurance and retirement benefits when they switch from full-time to part-time work (Drago, Scuttela, and Varner forthcoming). Finally, the proportion of households in which husbands and wives work similar numbers of hours is smaller in Australia than it is in the United States (Drago, Scuttela, and Varner forthcoming; Stier, Lewin-Epstein, and Braun 2001). These differences may influence the distribution and determinants of hour mismatches in the United States and Australia.

Hour mismatches and work-family conflict, however, are cross-national phenomenon, and we hope to provide a useful point of comparison for other large-scale studies of the relationship between work-family conflict and hour mismatches in the U.S. and abroad (MacInnes 2005; Moen and Dempster-McClain 1987; Reynolds forthcoming). Like the United States, Australia has seen increasing rates of divorce, declining marriage rates, and increases in the number of lone parent families and the labor force participation of women over the past forty years (Drago, Scuttela, and Varner forthcoming). Furthermore, both countries rely primarily on

private rather than public provision of child care (Gornick, Meyers, and Ross 1998; Meyers and Gornick 2003). If prevailing theories are correct in suggesting that hour mismatches are closely related to changes in family life and the resulting work-family conflict, then our findings should mirror those obtained in the United States.

For this analysis, we use a subset of the HILDA data: we focus on wage and salary employees who have parenting responsibilities for at least one child under 18 years of age. In part, our sample is a function of the survey design. Respondents only answered the questions about balancing work and family if they were working for pay and had a child under 18 years of age. Like other authors, we limit our analysis to wage and salary workers because the self-employed do not face the same kinds of employer-imposed constraints as regular employees when they try to adjust the number of hours they work (see Boheim and Taylor 2004; see Kahn and Lang 1992). The self-employed are also better able to reduce certain kinds of work-family conflict (Reynolds and Renzulli 2005). There were a total of 2,594 respondents who met these criteria regarding their employment and family situations. After accounting for missing data on the variables in our analysis, we are left with 1,759 cases.

## **MEASURES**

Our dependent variable comes from the question below, which we use to classify respondents into three categories: those who want more hours, fewer hours, and the same hours of work.

If you could choose the number of hours you work each week, and taking into account how that would affect your income, would you prefer to work

- 1) fewer hours than you do now
- 2) about the same hours as you do now
- 3) more hours than you do now?

Compared to other popular questions about hour mismatches, this one is especially good. Some survey questions impose too many constraints by forcing respondents (including salaried workers) to assume that their incomes will increase or decrease with their work hours.<sup>1</sup> Other questions fail to mention income at all and may encourage some respondents to report the number of hours they would work if it had no impact on their incomes.<sup>2</sup> The HILDA survey strikes a balance between these two extremes by encouraging *respondents* to assess how changing their work hours would affect their incomes.

Our key independent variables are work-to-family and family-to-work conflict, which we measure using two sets of variables. The variables for work-to-family conflict used a seven-point Likert scale to measure how strongly respondents agreed with the following questions:

1. Because of the requirements of my job, I miss out on home or family activities that I would prefer to participate in.
2. Because of the requirements of my job, my family time is less enjoyable and more pressured.
3. Working leaves me with too little time or energy to be the parent I want to be.
4. Working causes me to miss out on some of the rewarding aspects of being a parent.

The variables for family-to-work conflict measure how strongly respondents agreed with a similar set of questions:

1. Because of my family responsibilities, I have to turn down work activities or opportunities that I would prefer to take on.
2. Because of my family responsibilities, the time I spend working is less enjoyable and more pressured.
3. I worry about what goes on with my children while I'm at work.

We summed the answers to each set of questions to produce one measure for each type of conflict in which higher numbers represent more conflict. Both measures tap time-based conflict (i.e., conflict caused by inflexible schedules and the zero-sum nature of time) and strain-based

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<sup>1</sup> The 1985 and 2001 Current Population Surveys and the 1997 General Social Survey both include questions that impose such constraints.

<sup>2</sup> The National Study of Families and Households, the 1992 and 1997 versions of the National Study of the Changing Workforce, and the 1997 General Social Survey all rely on questions that do not mention income.

conflict (i.e., conflict caused by role demands and the resulting fatigue, irritability, anxiety etc.) (see Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). These are the two sources of work-family conflict that have been emphasized in the literature (see for example Frone, Yardley, and Markel 1997).<sup>3</sup>

Because hour mismatches are influenced by many factors besides work-family conflict (Reynolds 2003), our models include four groups of control variables. First, we control for the importance respondents place on work and family life. People prefer to use their time in ways that are consistent with identity-related preferences (Barnett and Gareis 2000; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991; Thompson and Bunderson 2001). Identity theory, for instance, suggests that time investment in a role increases with role salience (Rothbard and Edwards 2003). The theory of accommodation goes a step further by suggesting that the salience of one role can affect the time invested in other roles. In other words, people accommodate the demands of salient roles by intentionally reducing involvement in less salient roles in order to increase involvement in more salient roles (Lambert 1990; Rothbard and Edwards 2003). We incorporate the arguments of both theories by using ten-point scales to control for the reported salience of work and family at wave one.

Second, we control for how satisfied respondents are with their work and family lives. According to utility theory, people invest more time in satisfying roles (Rothbard and Edwards 2003). The theory of compensation suggests that satisfaction in one role can also affect time allocation in other roles and that people respond to dissatisfaction with one domain by intentionally re-allocating their time to a domain that provides more satisfaction (Edwards and

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<sup>3</sup> We do not report Cronbach's alpha for the measures of work-to-family or family-to-work conflict because the items are causes of work-family conflict rather than reflections of it. As a result, they do not have to be correlated in the way that Cronbach's alpha and other measures of reliability assume that they will be Streiner, D. L. 2003. "Being inconsistent about consistency: When coefficient alpha does and doesn't matter." *Journal of Personality Assessment* 80:217-222..

Rothbard 2000). Hochschild found evidence of compensation in her case study of Americo, where people shifted time from family to work pursuits because they found work more satisfying (1997). We control for job satisfaction and family dissatisfaction using ten-point scales.

Third, we include variables that help account for differences in the personal and family situations of respondents. We include dummy variables to identify lone-parents and members of dual-earner couples, who are said to be especially pressed for time. Breadwinners (i.e., employees who have a spouse or partner who is not working for pay) serve as the reference group. We control for the age of respondents using a term for age and age squared because middle-aged people are most likely to desire fewer hours of work (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). We also use a continuous variable to control for household income, because people who earn more money are typically more likely to desire fewer hours of work (Reynolds 2003). Finally, we use continuous variables to control for the age of the youngest child and the number of hours respondents spend on a series of household activities. Many work-family theories are based on the scarcity hypothesis, which suggests that time is a finite resource and that working more hours will leave less time for family and other activities (and vice versa) (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985; Marks 1977; Small and Riley 1990). If the scarcity hypothesis is accurate and few organizations accommodate family needs (Clarkberg and Moen 2001), having young children or household responsibilities should leave many people with a desire for fewer hours of work.

Fourth, we include controls for differences in the jobs respondents hold. We use a continuous measure of the actual number of hours that respondents work per week. Most people prefer to work in moderation (Jacobs and Gerson 2004: 65-66). People who work many hours often want to spend less time working, and people who work fewer hours often want to spend more time working. We control for the level of workplace stress, which could increase the desire

for fewer hours, as well as the amount of control respondents have over the timing of their work and their access to parental leave, both of which could alleviate the desire for fewer hours.

Finally, we control for the extent to which respondents agree that they have a secure future in their job. A lack of job security could make people want to increase the number of hours they work (Bluestone and Rose 1997). Table 1 presents additional coding information and means by gender for all the dependent and explanatory variables used in the analysis.

## **ANALYTIC STRATEGY**

Our analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we examine t-tests that compare the characteristics of men and women in the sample. These tests provide information about how men and women differ in their desires for more or fewer hours and in the factors that we think will be related to hour mismatches. Second, we estimate multinomial logistic regressions for men and women that examine how work-to-family and family-to-work conflict are related to hour mismatches while controlling for other important factors. We use multinomial logistic regressions because our dependent variable has three categories that cannot be ranked. We estimate separate models for men and women so that all the coefficients are free to vary by gender and thus reveal any gender differences in the determinants of hour mismatches. Third, where there is evidence that the age of the youngest child is related to hour mismatches, we estimate an additional model to examine whether children also moderate the relationship between work-family conflict and hour mismatches.

## **RESULTS**

The t-tests in Table 1 show that men are more likely than women to want fewer hours, while women are more likely than men to want more hours. Men also report more work-to-family conflict than women. Both of these results are probably a reflection of higher average

weekly hours among men. Although the other variables in the table are not the focus of this analysis, they provide some interesting background information about the work and family experiences of men and women in the sample. Men place greater importance on their jobs, while women place greater importance on family life. Nevertheless, women report greater satisfaction than men with their jobs but more dissatisfaction with family life. Perhaps this is because compared to men, women have greater chances of being lone parents, do more housework, and report lower levels of job related stress. To examine the relationship between work-family conflict and hour mismatches while accounting for these differences, we turn to our regressions.

Table 2 presents odds ratios from multinomial logistic regressions that predict how work-family conflict and other factors are related to the odds of wanting more or fewer hours rather than the same hours. We begin by briefly describing the results for the control variables, which provide some insight into the way gender influences people's experiences of work and family life.

The determinants of hour mismatches are similar for men and women in several ways. Both men and women are less likely to desire a decrease in work hours as their job satisfaction increases. For women, a one unit increase in job satisfaction is associated with a 14.4% decrease in the odds of wanting fewer hours.<sup>4</sup> This result is consistent with the theory of utility, which predicts that people will invest more time in activities they find satisfying. The regressions also indicate, however, that higher levels of job satisfaction are associated with smaller odds of wanting more hours of work. In other words, contrary to the theory of utility, we find that people do not want to spend more hours at jobs they find satisfying. Perhaps this is because

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<sup>4</sup> Exponentiated coefficients less than one indicate a negative relationship. We interpret individual odds ratios using the formula  $100|\exp \beta - 1|$  and the approach described by Long Long, J. Scott. 1997. *Regression Models for Categorical and Limited Dependent Variables*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.. In this case,  $100|.856 - 1| = 14.4\%$  more likely.

doing so would make the job less satisfying and thus reduce the potential benefit. Indeed, the odds ratios for average weekly hours show that people prefer to work in moderation (see also Jacobs and Gerson 2004: 65-66). For men, every additional hour of work reduces the odds of wanting more hours by about 6% and increases the odds of wanting fewer hours by about the same amount. For women, every additional hour of work reduces the odds of wanting more hours by about 8% and increases the odds of wanting fewer hours by about 9%. Men and women are also similar in that they are more likely to desire fewer hours as job related stress increases.

### **Table 2 about here**

The results in Table 2 also reveal some gender differences. Women, for instance, are less likely to want fewer hours as the importance they place on paid work increases, but this variable does not reach statistical significance for men. Perhaps this is because there is greater variance in this variable among women. Men are more likely to want more hours of work when they are lone-parents than when they are breadwinners, but the results do not show the same significant effect for women. Since there are so few lone fathers in the sample, however, this result should be treated with caution. Finally, while women become increasingly likely to want more hours as the age of their youngest child increases, men's hour mismatches are less closely associated with the ages of children and more closely associated with household income. As household income increases, men become less likely to want more hours and more likely to want fewer hours.

Furthermore, the results in Table 2 provide support for many of our hypotheses about work-to-family and family-to-work conflict. We expected both kinds of work-family conflict to be associated with a desire for fewer hours of work, but we also anticipated that the effect of work-to-family conflict would be stronger. As shown in Table 2, we find that work-to-family

conflict is associated with a desire for fewer hours among men and women and that family-to-work conflict is not. These results echo findings of research using data from the United States (see Reynolds forthcoming) and suggest that people react to work-family conflict differently if it originates at work than if it originates at home.

To examine our hypothesis regarding the moderating effect of young children, we estimated a second regression for women.<sup>5</sup> This second model includes an additional variable to capture the interaction between work-family conflict and the age of the youngest resident child (see Table 3). When an interaction is included in a regression, the coefficient for the main effect takes on a new meaning. Rather than indicating the general effect of that variable, the main effect indicates the effect that variable has when the other variable involved in the interaction is set to zero (Braumoller 2004). Our results, for instance, indicate that when the age of the youngest child is set to zero, every one unit increase in work-to-family conflict is associated with a 9.7% increase in the odds of wanting fewer hours. When the youngest child is one year old, the odds of wanting fewer hours are reduced by  $(1-.994)=0.6$  percent to 9.1%, a reduction that is statistically significant.

**Figure 1 about here**

The results confirm our expectations and show that work-to-family conflict is most strongly associated with a desire for fewer hours when women have young children. To clarify the meaning of the results, we graph the predicted probability of wanting fewer hours as work-to-family conflict increases for mothers with children of different ages (see Figure 1). As indicated by the positive main effect of work-to-family conflict and the negative effect of the interaction

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<sup>5</sup> We do not present an equivalent model for men because neither the age of the youngest child nor the interaction of that variable with work-to-family conflict was significant.

term, the association between work-to-family conflict and the desire for fewer hours becomes weaker as the age of the youngest child increases. Figure 1 demonstrates this through the steep upward slope of the line for mothers whose youngest child is less than one year old and the increasingly shallow slope of the lines for mothers whose youngest child is older. Using the formula below, we examined which ages are associated with a statistically significant net effect of work-to-family conflict.<sup>6</sup>

$$t = \frac{(\mathbf{b}_{\text{main}} + \mathbf{b}_{\text{interaction}})(\text{age of youngest child})}{\sqrt{s.e.^2_{\mathbf{b}_{\text{main}}} + s.e.^2_{\mathbf{b}_{\text{interaction}}}(\text{age of youngest child})^2 + 2Cov(\mathbf{b}_{\text{main}}, \mathbf{b}_{\text{interaction}})(\text{age of youngest child})}}$$

We discovered that the net effect of work-to-family conflict is statistically different from zero when the youngest child is eight years old or younger.

Taken as a whole, our findings are noteworthy for several reasons. First, they are consistent with existing evidence that work-to-family conflict is associated with a desire for fewer hours of work among men and women. Second, they are consistent with the argument that people react to work-family conflict in ways that are gendered and indicative of their family situations (Jacobs and Gerson 2004).

## Conclusions

In this paper, we addressed the need for research that examines how work-family conflict and hour mismatches are related. Though the research on work hours and work-family conflict are extensive, there is a paucity of research that synthesizes them. We, however, were able to integrate the literature on work-family coping strategies and hours by examining how work

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<sup>6</sup> The net effect is the sum of the coefficient for the main effect of work-to-family conflict and the coefficient for the interaction term multiplied by a given age. To determine when the net effect was statistically significant, we entered the values for the un-exponentiated coefficient of the main effect and the interaction term, their standard errors, and the covariance of the two coefficients into the formula and then calculated the t-statistic by substituting different values for the age of the youngest child Aiken, Leona S. and Stephen G. West. 1991. *Multiple Regression: Testing and Interpreting Interactions*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications..

family conflict is related to hour mismatches and whether the relationship depends on the age of children in the home.

We provide new information about how and when work-family conflict makes working parents want to change the number of hours they work. Our predictions regarding the effects of work-family conflict were largely supported. We expected work-to-family conflict and, to a lesser extent, family-to-work conflict to be associated with a desire for fewer hours of work. We found that work-to-family conflict led to a desire for fewer hours of work among men and women, but family-to-work conflict did not influence hour mismatches for either group. We also expected gender and the age of the youngest child in a family to moderate the effects of conflict. We found support for both of these predictions. Both men and women react to work-to-family conflict by wanting to reduce the number of hours they work, but among women the strength of the relationship varies considerably with the age of the youngest child in the household. In particular, work-to-family conflict is most likely to make women want fewer hours of work when there are young children in the household (i.e., children eight years old or younger).

Our results provide support for two central claims of the work-family and work hour literatures. First, when work responsibilities interfere with family life, people want to do something about it. In particular, they typically want to reduce the number of hours they work. People certainly have other reasons for wanting to reduce (or increase) the number of hours they work, but work-family conflict is clearly responsible for at least some of the “overwork” that other authors have documented (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Second, people’s preferred methods of coping with work-family conflict are reflective of the social structures around them in that they are gendered and reflective of family structures.

We conclude that many working parents see work hour reductions as a way to help prevent work from interfering with family life. The presence of hour mismatches, however, indicates that the desire to work fewer hours often goes unfulfilled. Consequently, we believe it would be fruitful to examine the relationship between work-family conflict and hour mismatches using multiple waves of panel data. Such an analysis would reveal how often preferences for more or fewer hours are translated into actual behaviors and how long people hold onto their preferences when social structures prevent them from fulfilling their desires. Mismatches between actual and preferred work hours can be classified as frictional, structural, or cyclical, much like unemployment (Golden 1998: 534). If people who cannot reduce their hours eventually abandon their desires and become the equivalent of discouraged workers, our current estimates of how many workers desire more or fewer hours may be misleading.

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**Table 1: Means and Proportions by Gender<sup>a</sup>**

Variable	Description	Men N=815	Women N=944
<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
Wants fewer hours	1=yes, 0=no	0.37	0.25 *
Wants same hours <sup>a</sup>	1=yes, 0=no	0.52	0.58 *
Wants more hours	1=yes, 0=no	0.11	0.17 *
<i>Work-family conflict</i>			
Work-to-family conflict	Sum of four items. Higher numbers indicate more conflict.	16.65	14.46 *
Family-to-work conflict	Sum of three items. Higher numbers indicate more conflict.	9.95	10.43 *
<i>Role Salience</i>			
Job Importance	"How important is your employment and work situation in your life at the present time?" <sup>b</sup>	8.08	7.70 *
Family Importance	"How important is your family in your life at the present time?" <sup>b</sup>	9.66	9.81 *
<i>Role Satisfaction</i>			
Job Satisfaction	"All things considered, how satisfied are you with your job?" 0=completely dissatisfied 10=completely satisfied	7.46	7.81 *
Family Dis-satisfaction	Average of seven items coded 0=completely satisfied 10=completely dissatisfied (Alpha = .86).	1.65	1.99 *
<i>Personal/Family situation</i>			
Lone-parent	Employed, no partner/spouse	0.03	0.18 *
Dual-earner	Respondent and partner/spouse both employed	0.63	0.78 *
Breadwinner <sup>a</sup>	Respondent employed, spouse/partner not employed	0.34	0.04 *
Age	Respondent's age in years	39.51	38.70 *
Household income	Pre-tax income in tens of thousands of Australian dollars	8.05	7.53 *
Age of youngest resident child	Age of youngest resident child in years	6.07	8.02 *
Hours of household work	hours spent on household errands, housework, outdoor tasks, children, and older dependents on average workday	28.49	47.17 *
<i>Job situation</i>			
Average weekly hours	total hours at all jobs	45.57	28.46 *
Stress <sup>c</sup>	"I fear that the amount of stress in my job will make me physicall ill."	2.87	2.49 *
Control over timing of work	"I have a lot of freedom to decide when I do my work." <sup>c</sup>	3.44	3.28
Parental leave	Respondent can take maternal, paternal, or parental leave	0.79	0.85 *
Secure future in job	"I have a secure future in my job." <sup>c</sup>	4.94	5.00

<sup>a</sup>Reference category<sup>b</sup>Items coded 0=least important 10=most important.<sup>c</sup>Items coded 1=strongly disagree 7=strongly agree.

\* = t-test of independent means shows that the gender difference is significant at the .05 level or higher

**Table 2.** Odds Ratios from Multinomial Logistic Regressions Predicting the Desire for More or Fewer Hours of Work by Gender

	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	
	Wants Fewer Hours	Wants More Hours	Wants Fewer Hours	Wants More Hours
<i>Work-family conflict</i>				
Work-to-family conflict	1.063 **	1.013	1.040 *	0.991
Family-to-work conflict	0.999	1.046	0.972	1.014
<i>Role Salience</i>				
Job Importance	0.973	1.153	0.866 **	1.010
Family Importance	1.100	1.415	0.945	0.867
<i>Role Satisfaction</i>				
Job Satisfaction	0.898 *	0.797 **	0.943	0.856 *
Family Dis-satisfaction	0.981	1.009	1.047	0.950
<i>Personal/Family situation</i>				
Lone-parent (versus breadwinner)	2.263	8.191 **	0.672	1.728
Dual-earner (versus breadwinner)	1.197	1.135	0.598	0.733
Age	0.993	1.044	0.808	1.291 †
Age squared	1.000	1.000	1.003	0.996 †
Household income	1.047 *	0.849 **	1.023	0.970
Age of youngest resident child	1.001	1.009	1.000	1.074 *
Hours of household work	1.001	1.005	0.996	1.001
<i>Job situation</i>				
Average weekly hours	1.061 **	0.943 **	1.091 **	0.926 **
Stress	1.131 *	0.935	1.166 *	0.922
Control over timing of work	1.047	0.968	1.077	0.967
Parental leave	1.339	0.680	1.110	0.688
Secure future in job	1.002	1.002	1.024	0.959
<b>Chi-square</b>	246.0 **		385.8 **	
<b>N</b>	815		944	

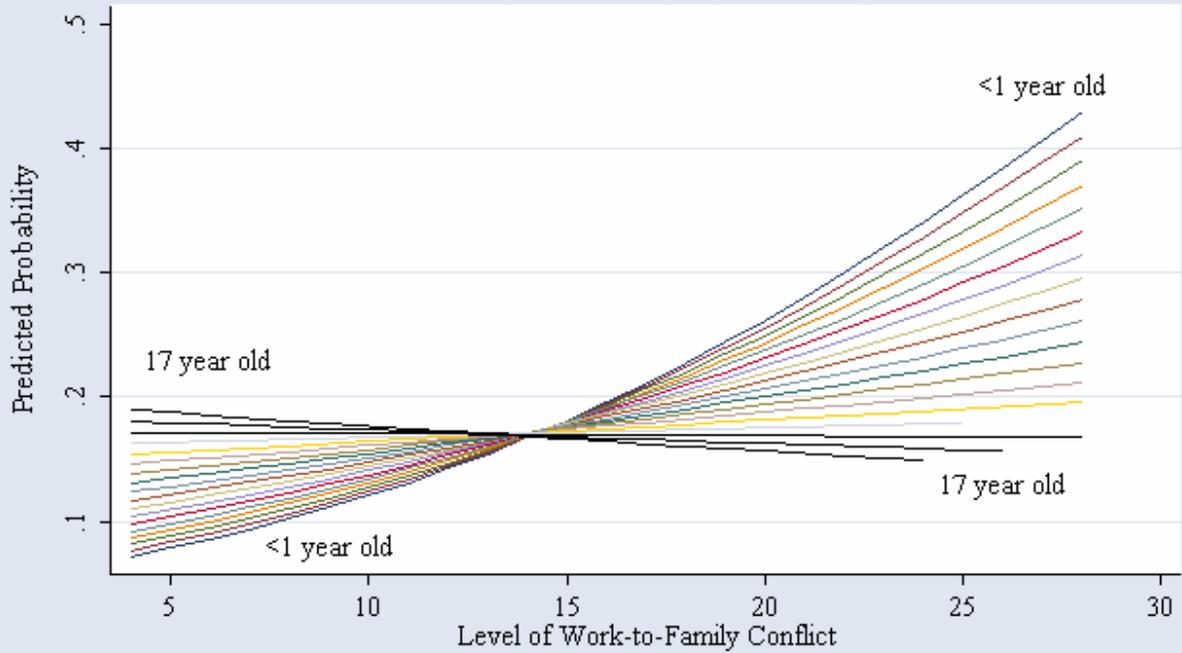
† p < 0.1; \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01

**Table 3.** Odds Ratios from a Multinomial Logistic Regressions Predicting the Desire for More or Fewer Hours of Work among Women

	Wants Fewer Hours	Wants More Hours
<i>Work-family conflict</i>		
Work-to-family conflict	1.097 **	0.975
Family-to-work conflict	0.972	1.013
<i>Role Salience</i>		
Job Importance	0.857 **	1.011
Family Importance	0.939	0.864
<i>Role Satisfaction</i>		
Job Satisfaction	0.943	0.860 *
Family Dis-satisfaction	1.044	0.955
<i>Personal/Family situation</i>		
Lone-parent (versus breadwinner)	0.697	1.709
Dual-earner (versus breadwinner)	0.609	0.725
Age	0.816	1.291 †
Age squared	1.003	0.996 †
Household income	1.020	0.971
Age of youngest resident child	0.996	1.001
Hours of household work	1.091 **	0.926 **
<i>Job situation</i>		
Average weekly hours	1.171 *	0.921
Stress	1.082 †	0.964
Control over timing of work	1.114	0.686
Parental leave	1.027	0.958
Secure future in job	1.103 †	1.047
<i>Interaction</i>		
Work-family conflict X age of youngest resident child	0.994 *	1.002
	<b>Chi-square</b> 391.0 **	
	<b>N</b> 944	

† p < 0.1; \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01

Figure 1. Probability of Wanting Fewer Hours at Different Levels of Work-to-Family Conflict by Age of Youngest Child



Note: Each line represents an additional year in age, ranging from <1 to 17. The lines for ages 14, 16, and 17 do not extend to 28 on the x axis to indicate that respondents with children those ages did not report that much conflict.