Work-life tension and its impact on the work hours of Australian mothers in paid work between 2001 and 2006

Ibolya (Ibi) Losoncz

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Background

• Dual aspirations of working parents
  - Caring for family/children
  - Participation in the labour market

• Research on work-life balance to date
  - Role identification
  - The impacts of “spill over”
    • Work ➔ Home
    • Home ➔ Work

• Being a working parent is the culmination of a range of dimensions
Background

‘It is beyond the power of the human intellect to encompass all the causes of any phenomenon.’

Leo Tolstoy

‘No it’s not, just add more variables.’

Anonymous colleague

Alternative approach – Cluster analysis
Content

1. Summary of earlier results from cluster analysis on Australian working mothers (Losoncz, 2008)

2. New results from longitudinal analysis of cluster membership, economic productivity and well-being
Data and Methods

Data source

• Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, Waves 1-6
• Target group – working mothers, n≈1,300

Measures

• To identify cluster membership
  List of 13 work-family statements on the impact on *self*, *work*, and *family* on a 7-point rating scale (Marshall & Barnett, 1993)

• To profile/describe clusters
  Measures of socio-demographic characteristics, home and work environment, job satisfaction, and health and attitudinal measures
Data and Methods (cont.)

Cluster Analysis – detects distinct groupings of people based on their characteristics

- Two stage analysis:
  1. **Partitioning**  Hierarchical procedures to identify number of clusters in each wave.
Data and Methods (cont.)

**Figure 1.** Mean scores for cluster three working mothers on work-life balance questions between 2001 and 2006

*Source: HILDA Waves 1 - 6*
Data and Methods (cont.)

Cluster Analysis – detects distinct groupings of people based on their characteristics

- Two stage analysis:
  1. **Partitioning**  Hierarchical procedures to identify number of clusters in each wave.
  2. **Fine tuning**  Re-assigning all respondents to the common seed-points of the clusters identified in Stage 1
Results

Figure 2. Working mothers - Six cluster solution

Source: HILDA Wave 5
Results (cont.)

Figure 3. Dimensions and distribution of six clusters of Australian working mothers

Source: HILDA Wave 5
Results (cont.)

Profile description of Cluster 1 – **Highly functioning and fulfilled**

- Most likely to want to work more hours (27% vs average 17%)
- Highest level of job control
- Lowest level of stress at work
- High job satisfaction
- Low hours in combined paid and unpaid work (53hrs/w vs 57 hrs/w)
- Lowest average working hours per adults in the family
- Highest satisfaction with family relationships and support
- Highest physical and mental health scores
- Positive experience of parenthood
- Non-traditional gender roles
- Highest score on Extraversion, Agreeableness, Emotional stability
Results (cont.)

Profile description of Cluster 2 – **Indifferent yet successful**

- Most likely to be married (84% vs 71%)
- Lower level of education
- Most likely to be self-employed or family worker
- Work shortest hours (21hrs/w vs 28 hrs/w)
- Most likely to work preferred hours
- Lowest level of work overload and stress at work
- High job satisfaction
- Highest hours in the domestic spheres (29 hrs/w vs 26 hrs/w)
- Low hours in combined paid and unpaid work (53hrs/w vs 57 hrs/w)
- Lowest average working hours per adults in the family
- Positive experience of parenthood
- Low Openness to experience and relatively high Emotional stability
Results (cont.)

Profile description of Cluster 3 – Aspiring and struggling

- Most likely to have two or more children under 15 years
- Most likely to be separated or divorced (19% vs 13%)
- Highly educated
- Most likely to be employees and permanent
- Works longest hours (33 hrs/w vs 28 hrs/w)
- High occupational status and job control
- Highest level of stress at work and work overload
- High hours in combined paid and unpaid work (62 hrs/w vs 57 hrs/w)
- Second highest average working hours per adults in the family
- Lowest satisfaction with family relationships and support
- Experiences parenthood as exhausting and hard
- Lowest physical and mental health scores
- Low Emotional stability and high Openness to experience
Results (cont.)

Profile description of Cluster 4 – Indifferent and struggling

- Most likely to be single or widowed (11% vs 6%)
- Lowest equivalised household disposable income ($31,700 vs $34,800)
- Works second longest hours (31 hrs/w vs 28 hrs/w)
- Most likely to want to work less hours (50% vs 27%)
- Low level of job control, flexibility and work satisfaction
- Polarised occupational status
- Second highest level of stress at work and work overload
- High hours in combined paid and unpaid work (62 hrs/w vs 57 hrs/w)
- Highest average working hours per adults in the family
- Lowest satisfaction with family relationships and support
- Low physical and mental health scores
- Experiences parenting as exhausting and hard
- Traditional gender roles
- High level of Introversion
Results (cont.)

Profile description of Cluster 5 – **Treading Water**

Characteristics comparable to the total sample of working mothers on the measures of:

- Socio-demographic characteristics
- Work environment
  - Working hours
  - Occupational status
  - Nature and condition of work
  - Job satisfaction
- Paid and unpaid working hours
- Self-reported health and attitudinal measures
Profile description of Cluster 6 – Guilty Copers

Characteristics comparable to the total sample of working mothers on the measures of:

- Socio-demographic characteristics
- Work environment
  - Working hours
  - Occupational status
  - Nature and condition of work
  - Job satisfaction
- Home environment
- Self-reported health and attitudinal measures

But, highest score on Conscientiousness
Results (cont.)

**Figure 4:** Proportion of mothers exiting from paid work by cluster type

*Source: HILDA Waves 1 - 6*
## Results (cont.)

### Table 1: Reasons for exiting paid work by cluster type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main reason</th>
<th>Highly functioning and fulfilled</th>
<th>Indifferent yet successful</th>
<th>Aspiring and struggling</th>
<th>Indifferent and struggling</th>
<th>Treading water</th>
<th>Guilty copers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job was temporary or seasonal</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got laid off, etc.</td>
<td><strong>28.0</strong></td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td><strong>15.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfied with job</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td><strong>14.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To obtain better job or study</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td><strong>16.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own sickness, disability, injury</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td><strong>16.0</strong></td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td><strong>15.7</strong></td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td><strong>10.6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look after children, house or someone else</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td><strong>26.7</strong></td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td><strong>17.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td><strong>21.3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results (cont.)

Figure 5: Quartile distribution of decline in paid working hours from previous year by cluster type

Source: HILDA Waves 1 - 6
Results (cont.)

Figure 6: Self-reported physical health before and after exiting paid work by cluster type

Source: HILDA Waves 1 - 6
Results (cont.)

Figure 7: Self-reported mental health before and after exiting paid work by cluster type

Source: HILDA Waves 1 - 6
Results (cont.)

Figure 8: Self-reported physical health before and after reducing paid working hours (with more than 10%) by cluster type

Source: HILDA Waves 1 - 6
Results (cont.)

Figure 9: Self-reported mental health before and after reducing paid working hours (with more than 10%) by cluster type

Source: HILDA Waves 1 - 6
Results (cont.)

Figure 10: Equivalised household disposable income before and after exiting paid work by cluster type

Equivalised household financial year disposable income in 2007 dollars

Source: HILDA Waves 1 - 6
Results (cont.)

Figure 11: Equivalised household disposable income before and after reducing paid working hours (with more than 10%) by cluster type

Equivalised household financial year disposable income in 2007 dollars

Source: HILDA Waves 1 - 6
Discussion

• Typology of working mothers based on the multiple dimensions of their work and family life

• Long working hours, work overload and lack of support from others are consistently linked to work and family tension

• High work and family tension consistently related to poor health, and low satisfaction with work, family life and parenthood

• Mothers’ role preference is a stronger predictor than high work-life tension of withdrawing from paid work

⇒ Policies supporting work-life balance may have a different level of influence on mothers’ workforce participation, depending on their level of work role identification
Discussion (cont.)

• Magnitude of reduction in working hours is greater among mothers with high work-life conflict

• Notable improvement in self-reported mental health subsequent to leaving paid work or reducing paid working hours in the Indifferent and struggling cluster

• Mothers’ exit from paid work or reduction in paid working hours, on average, did not lead to a decline in household disposable income or an increase in household pension or benefits.

⇒ Areas of focus to support healthy work–life balance:

⇒ Support from others within and outside of the home

⇒ Manageable combined hours of paid and unpaid work for working mothers

⇒ Assisting fathers to adjust their working hours to achieve more balanced working hours by the family unit as a whole