



**When Your Work Arrangements
Work for You:
A Study of Employed Women with
School-aged Children**

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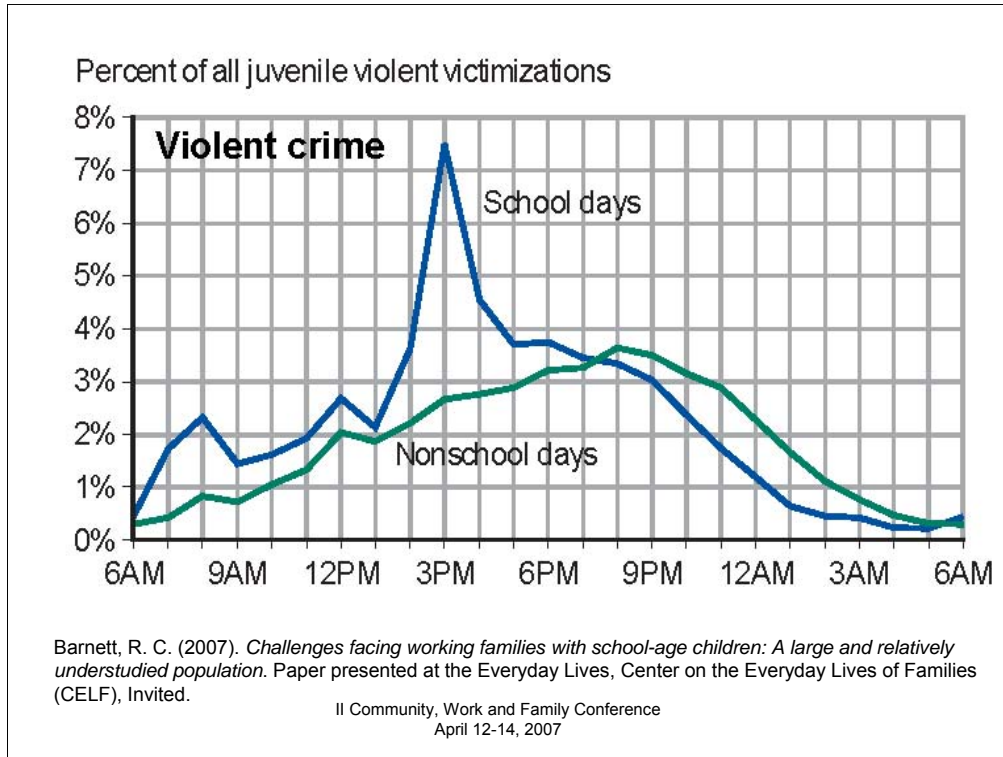
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The dilemmas of employed mothers of school-aged children have received much less empirical attention than those of their counterparts with preschoolers.

Yet employed mothers of school-age children face many challenges that are likely to have serious negative effects at home and at work.

For example, several reports suggest that school-aged children are vulnerable to many risks that may require mothers to be available during the workday.



For example, during the after-school hours, children are at considerable risk for such negative outcomes as truancy and after-school related problems (e.g., engaging in risky and antisocial behaviors) (Cohen, Farley, Taylor, Martin, & Schuster, 2002; Kurz, 2002; National Center for Schools & Communities, 1999; Newman, Fox, Flynn, & Christeson, 2000) that may cause employed mothers to be anxious and distracted at work.

Employed mothers are highly likely to adjust their work schedules in response to child-care and other family needs.

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Several studies suggest that because they tend to take primary responsibility for their children's welfare, employed mothers are more likely than employed fathers to adjust their work schedules (i.e., cut back at work, drop out) in response to such family needs as the birth of a child or the needs of school-aged children.

Is this employment pattern due primarily to the demands of child rearing or to inflexible workplaces?

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Perhaps the employment decisions of women with school-age children have more to do with the mismatch between their needs and the policies and practices at their workplaces than with the demands of their children *per se*.

In other words, when workplace arrangements are sufficiently flexible to meet the demands of employed mothers with school-age children, perhaps they will not have to radically adjust their work lives.

Overall Design of the Study

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The sample was part of a larger study of how parents of school-aged (i.e., in grades K-12) children in one Boston-area community coordinate their work schedules with their children's school, after-school, and transportation schedules.

The sample was randomly drawn from the community's household census.

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Work Arrangements Fit

1. The way your work arrangements fit with your child(ren)'s schedule(s).
2. The flexibility available at your workplace to handle emergencies.
3. The flexibility available at your workplace to attend to family needs.
4. Your ability to work at home if necessary.
5. Your ability to bring child(ren) to work if necessary.

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Internal consistency in the full sample is very good for the work arrangements fit scale (Mothers: $\alpha = .77$; Fathers: $\alpha = .80$).

Hypotheses

1. High work arrangements fit will be related to low job disruptions.
2. High work arrangements fit will be related to low intentions to leave one's job within a year.
3. High work arrangements fit will be related to high job-role quality.

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In sum, in this random sample of 68 employed mothers of at least one school-aged child, we focus on the relationships between work arrangements fit and three outcomes – job disruptions, intentions to leave one's job within a year, and job-role quality.

Potential Moderators

- *Marital status* may moderate the relationships between work arrangements fit and outcomes.
- *Family income* may moderate the relationships between work arrangements fit and outcomes.
- *Work hours* may moderate the relationships between work arrangements fit and outcomes.

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Because of the paucity of literature in this area, we estimate the indirect effect of these moderators on the relationships linking work arrangements fit to each of the three outcomes.

However, we do not specify specific hypotheses.

Sample Characteristics

Families ($N = 145$):

Dual-earner 29

One main breadwinner 29

Single-parent 29

Employed mothers ($N = 68$)

Number of Children Range 1- 4

One child 27.9%

Two Children 45.6%

Age of Children Range 2 - 22

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As with other studies relying on public databases to develop their random samples, it is very difficult to determine a response rate.

Many people contacted refused to give demographic information, so we were not able to determine how many who did not respond were actually eligible to participate, nor does the household census provide information on presence of school-aged children.

Procedures

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Residents received letters describing the study and then screeners followed up by telephone to determine whether they were eligible and willing to participate.

Data were collected during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years.

Trained interviewers arranged 45-minute face-to-face quantitative interviews with parents at a time and place convenient to the participants.

In the case of two-parent families, mothers and fathers were interviewed separately and privately.

Parents also received a 15-minute mailed questionnaire to be completed in advance and returned at the time of the interview. Each parent received \$50 for participating.

Relationship Between Work Arrangements Fit and Job Disruptions

	Main Effects		
	B	β	(SE)
Work Arrangements Fit	-0.09 *	-0.24	-0.05
Marital Status	-0.13	-0.14	-0.12
Family Income	0.37	0.18	-0.24
Work Hours	0	0.03	-0.01
Negative Affectivity	0.39 **	0.38	-0.12
R2	0.3		
Adjusted R2	0.25		

Note. N = 68. For marital status, 0 = single (n = 28), 1 = married (n = 40).

* p < .05. **p < .01.

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As you can see, work arrangements fit is significantly negatively related to job disruptions. That is, as predicted in Hypothesis 1, the better the mother's work arrangements fit, the lower the level of job disruptions she reports.

Notice that work hours *per se* was not related to job disruptions.

As an indication of the size of the main effect of work arrangements fit on job disruptions, Cohen's *d* is -0.59, which is classified as a moderate-sized effect (Cohen, 1988).

Relationship Between Work Arrangements Fit and Intentions to Leave One's Job Within A Year							
	Main Effects			Moderation By Marital Status			
	B	β	(SE)	B	β	(SE)	
Work Arrangements Fit	-0.53 **	-0.42	-0.16	-0.70 ***	0.58	-0.18	
Marital Status	-0.34	-0.11	-0.44	-0.46	-0.35	-0.01	
Family Income	0.85	0.12	-0.88	1.28	0.22	-0.58	
Work Hours	-0.01	-0.07	-0.02	-0.01	-0.35	-0.01	
Negative Affectivity	-0.13	-0.04	-0.43	-0.17	-0.36	-0.24	
WAF x MAR STAT	--	--	--	-0.69 *	-0.34	-1.16	
R2		0.18			0.25		
Adjusted R2		0.12			0.17		

Note. $N = 68$. For marital status, 0 = *single* ($n = 28$), 1 = *married* ($n = 40$).
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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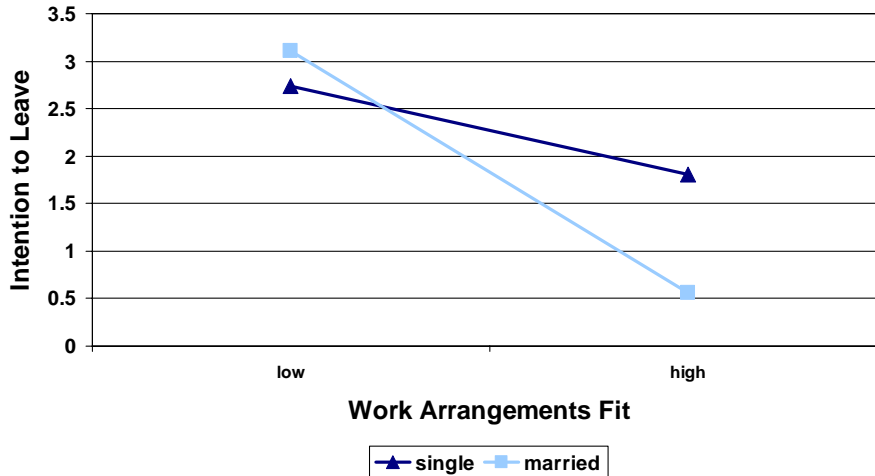
As you can see, work arrangements fit is a significant predictor of intention to leave one's job within a year. This finding supported hypothesis 2.

Again, work hours *per se* was not related to intentions to leave one's job within a year.

We also found that marital status moderated this relationship.

Cohen's d for this interaction is -0.90, classified as a large effect.

The Relationship Between Work Arrangements Fit and Intention to Leave One's Job within A Year Is Moderated by Marital Status



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Specifically, as shown in the Figure, the relationship between work arrangements fit and intention to leave is significantly stronger for married mothers than for single mothers.

Cohen's d for this interaction is -0.64 , classified as a moderate-sized effect.

Relationship Between Work Arrangements Fit and Job-Role Quality										
	Main Effects			Moderation by Work Hours			Moderation by Income			
	B	β	(SE)	B	β	(SE)	B	β	(SE)	
Work Arrangements Fit	0.37 ***	.50	(0.07)	0.26 **	.35	(0.08)	.35 ***	.47	(0.07)	
Marital Status	0.06	.03	(0.19)	0.04	.02	(0.19)	.12	.06	(0.19)	
Family Income	0.14	.04	(0.38)	0.13	.03	(0.37)	.20	.05	(0.38)	
Work Hours	-0.02 *	-.21	(0.01)	-0.02 **	-.26	(0.01)	-.02 *	-.20	(0.01)	
Negative Affectivity	-0.65 **	-.33	(0.19)	-0.65 **	-.33	(0.18)	-.65 **	-.32	(0.19)	
WAF x FAM INCOME	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.60 †	-.15	(0.36)	
WAF x WORK HRS	--	--	--	0.01 *	.25	(0.01)	--	--	--	
R ²		.54			.58			.57		
Adjusted R ²		.51			.54			.52		

Note. N = 68. For marital status, 0 = single (n = 28), 1 = married (n = 40).
† p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** < .001.
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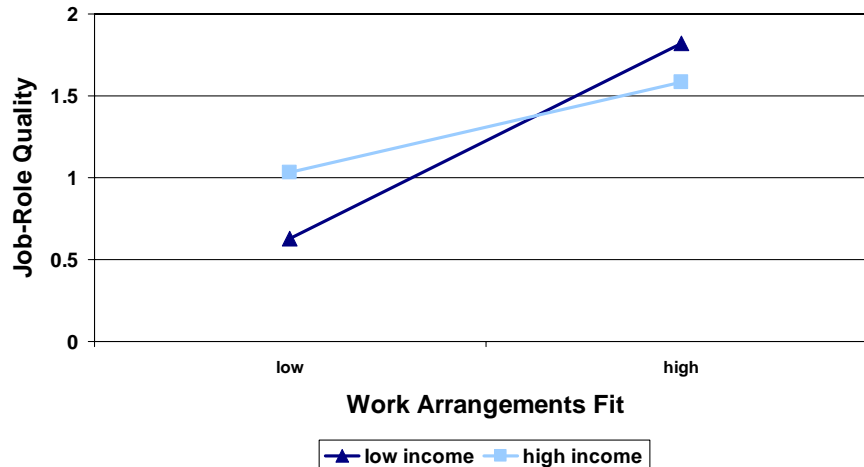
Hypothesis three was also supported. Work arrangements fits was a significant predictor of job role quality. The higher the fit, the higher the job-role quality.

Here, work hours was significantly related to job-role quality.

However, as you can see, there were also two significant moderating effects – family income and work hours.

Cohen's *d* for this interaction is +1.29, classified as a very large-sized effect.

The Relationship Between Work Arrangements Fit and Job-Role Quality Shows A Trend To Be Moderated by Family Income



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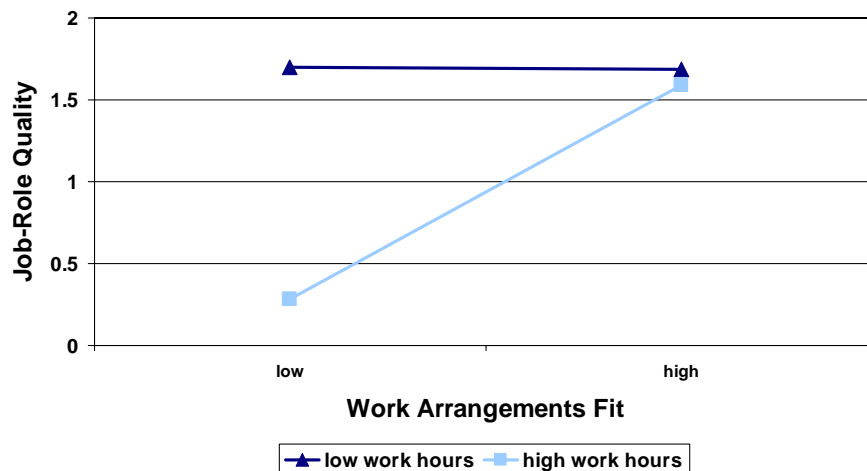
First, there was a trend for family income to moderate the relationship between work arrangements fit and job-role quality; $F_{change}(1,59) = 2.88, p = .095$.

As shown in this figure, the relationship between work arrangements fit and job-role quality is marginally stronger for mothers whose income is lower. For women whose high income provides them with some flexibility, work arrangement fit has less effect on job-role quality than it does for low-income women who do not have the flexibility provided by high income.

Cohen's d for this interaction is -0.42, classified as a moderate-sized effect.

Second, work hours moderated the relationship between work arrangement fit and job-role quality; $F_{change}(1,59) = 5.39, p = .024$.

The Relationship Between Work Arrangements Fit and Job-Role Quality Is Moderated by Work Hours



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As you can see, the relationship between work arrangements fit and job-role quality is significantly stronger for mothers who work longer hours, whereas for mothers who work shorter hours, there is essentially no relationship between work arrangements fit and job-role quality.

Under conditions of high work arrangements fit, mothers who work long hours have the same high levels of job-role quality as do their counterparts who work shorter hours. Cohen's d for this interaction is +0.62, classified as a moderate-sized effect.

Conclusions

- Mothers with high work arrangements fit reported fewer job disruptions, lower intention to leave their jobs within a year, and higher job-role quality than did mothers with low work arrangements fit. Thus, in this sample, work arrangements fit seems to serve as a safety valve with positive effects on three important work-related variables:
 - Job Disruptions
 - Intention to Leave Job Within a Year
 - Job-Role Quality

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- Because the sample was quite small, and all participants resided in one community, issues of generalizability arise.
- Future research should include a larger sample drawn from multiple communities that differ with respect to various aspects of community resource fit and family composition.

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- Nevertheless, the study yielded several significant findings that strongly suggest the utility of incorporating the notion of work arrangements fit into future studies of work-family issues.

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