Dual-Earner Parents, After-School Concerns, and Job Disruptions

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Today's parents, perhaps especially dual-earner parents, face increasing challenges in meeting work and child-rearing demands

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With the lengthening work day, many employees have work schedules that conflict with children's school schedules.

Most schools end between 2:00 and 3:00 pm, whereas parents may not arrive home from work until 6 p.m. or later.

The “after-school gap” is about 15-25 hours per week.

This gap likely contributes to parental concerns about their children’s welfare after school (PCAST).

Previous research suggests that PCAST is higher when parents work long hours and have little control over their work schedule and when their children spend more time unsupervised after school (Catalyst, 2006).

The guestion I address today, is, do these results emerge in a sample of full-time employed dual-earner couples?

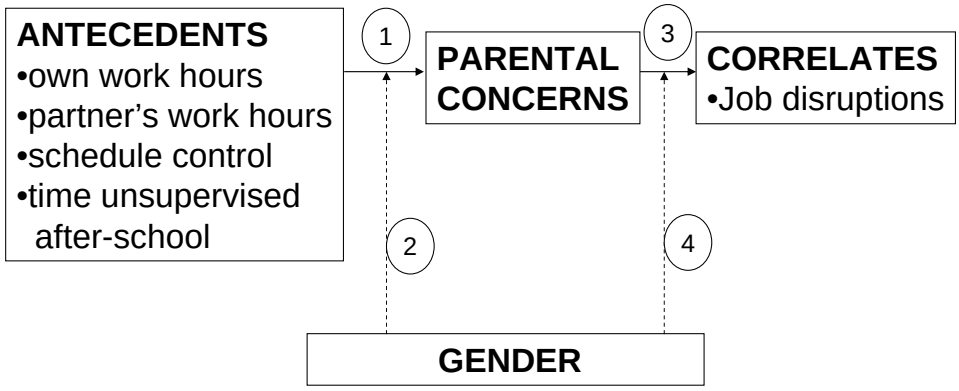
Hypotheses

1. In dual-earner couples, long work hours, both one's own and one's partner's, lack of schedule control, and children's unsupervised time after school will be related to higher parental concerns about after-school time (PCAST).
2. The relationships linking long work hours (one's own and one's partner's), lack of schedule control, and children's unsupervised time after school to PCAST will not be moderated by parent gender.
3. PCAST will be related to job disruptions.
4. The relationship between PCAST and job disruptions will not be moderated by parent gender.

❖

FIGURE 1

Analytic Model



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Procedures

- Participants were recruited from three Fortune 100 companies. Surveys were targeted to either all employees within the company or specifically to employees with minor children - although not necessarily school-age children.
- In 2 of the 3 companies, respondents were entered in a drawing to win one of fifteen $100 American Express gift cards as an inducement.
- The average overall response rate was 29.7 percent.
- The survey was administered online and took between 15-20 minutes to complete.

Sample (*N* = 1,755)

Work hours	45.8 hr/wk (SD = 7.06); mothers=45.2; fathers=47
Household income	$105,000 - $124,000 per/yr
Education	34.4% less than an associate's degree 28.2% associate's degree 7.0% bachelor's degree 30.5% at least some post-baccalaureate education

Measures

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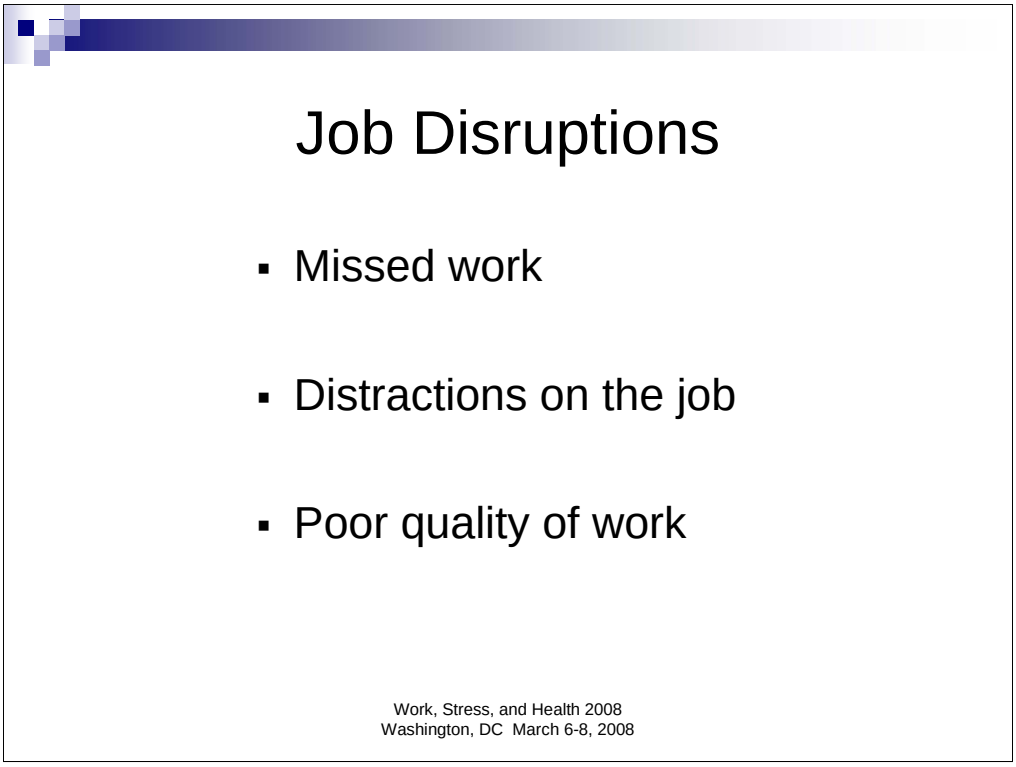
PARENTAL CONCERNS ABOUT AFTER-SCHOOL TIME (PCAST) 11 ITEMS

1. How difficult is it for you to contact your target school-aged child after school while you are still at work?
2. To what extent are you concerned that your target school-aged child's after-school arrangements will fall through?
3. To what extent are you concerned that your target school-aged child might get into trouble during the after-school hours?
4. To what extent are you concerned that your target school-aged child's after-school arrangements aren't meeting (his/her) needs?

Select Items

4 point scale

Target child = child whose name comes first alphabetically



We all know intuitively that PCAST has consequences for worker productivity and we have solid data linking PCAST to one aspect of productivity, namely job disruptions.

In this paper we ask whether this relationship emerges in a sample of full-time employed dual-earner parents.

Covariates

- Parent gender
- Parent age
- Target child gender
- Target child age
- Number of hours worked per week
- Number of hours partner worked per week
- Years of employment with their company
- Average length of commute home from work
- Number of children at home
- Target child's grade in school
- Number of hours per week the child spends unsupervised, in a formal after-school program, with the respondent's partner, and with another relative.
- Negative affectivity ❖

Results

Table 1

Antecedents of Parental Concerns about After-School Time

	Main Effects		
Variable	*B*	β	*SE*
Work Hours	**.010****	**.124**	**.003**
Schedule Control	**-.142*****	**-.227**	**.024**
Partner Work Hours	**.006***	**.088**	**.002**
Child Unsupervised Time	**.013****	**.113**	**.005**
Model R^2		.295	
Adjusted R^2		.271	

Note. N = 936. For parent and target child gender, 1 = *male*, 2 = *female*.
**p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

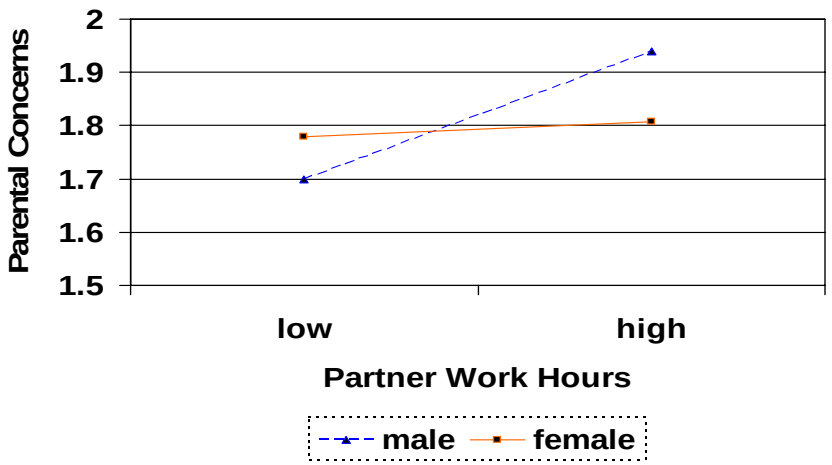
This table shows only those variables with significant main effects on PCAST.

As predicted, after-school concerns were linked to working long hours, having little schedule control, having a partner who works long hours, and having children who spend more time unsupervised after school.

Importantly, there were no moderating effects of gender on the relationships linking work hours, schedule control, or child's unsupervised time after school to PCAST.

FIGURE 2

The Relationship Between Partner Work Hours and Parental Concerns about After-School Time is Moderated by Parent Gender



However, among men, the longer their partner worked, the more concerns they reported.

Specifically, fathers whose partners worked more compared to fewer hours reported higher PCAST.

In contrast, women's concerns were essentially unaffected by their partner's work hours.

How can we understand this surprising result?

As noted, fathers work on average slightly longer hours than mothers.

As a result, they were less frequently home alone with their children after school.

In a previous study, maternal shift work schedule and consequent time children and fathers spent alone together predicted fathers' knowledge of children's activities and the children's spontaneous disclosure of everyday activities to their fathers.

Speculatively, parents who are more aware of what their children are doing after school may report fewer concerns.

If fathers are less aware and less close to their children than mothers, their after-school concerns are likely to increase as their partners work longer hours.

In addition, fathers who rarely spend time alone with their children may expect their partners to handle child-related responsibilities and be distressed when their partner's work hours schedule preclude this arrangement.

Table 2

Correlates of Parental Concerns about After-School Time

	Job Disruptions		
	B	*β*	*SE*
Parental Concerns	.181***	.195	.039
Model R^2	.24		
Adjusted R^2	.21		

Note. N = 936. For parent gender, 1 = *male*, 2 = *female*.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

As predicted, parents with higher parental concerns reported significantly greater job disruptions.

Thus parental concerns about after-school time are important to employers because they are associated with more frequent job disruptions.

Moreover, there was no moderating effect of gender on the relationship between parental concerns and job disruptions.

Conclusion

Thus, net of a range of covariates, PCAST appears to be an important stressor that has a significant linkage to job disruption among full-time employed dual-earner parents of school-age children.