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The Socio-cultural Context of New Mothers' Mental Health

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The Socio-cultural Context of New Mothers' Mental Health



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Disclosure

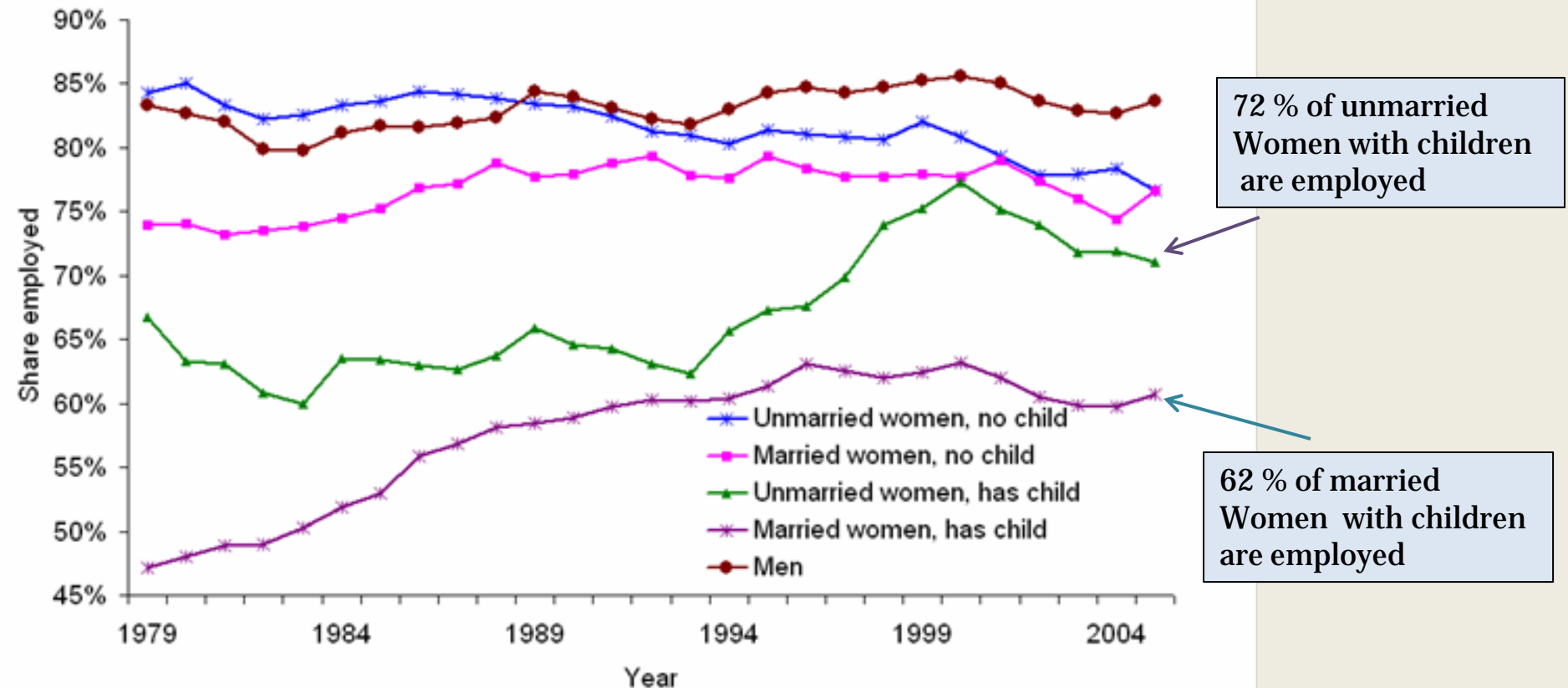


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One of the most dramatic demographic changes of the past half century: Women's employment rates



Figure 1. Employment rate, by marital status and presence of children, prime-aged women, 1979-2005

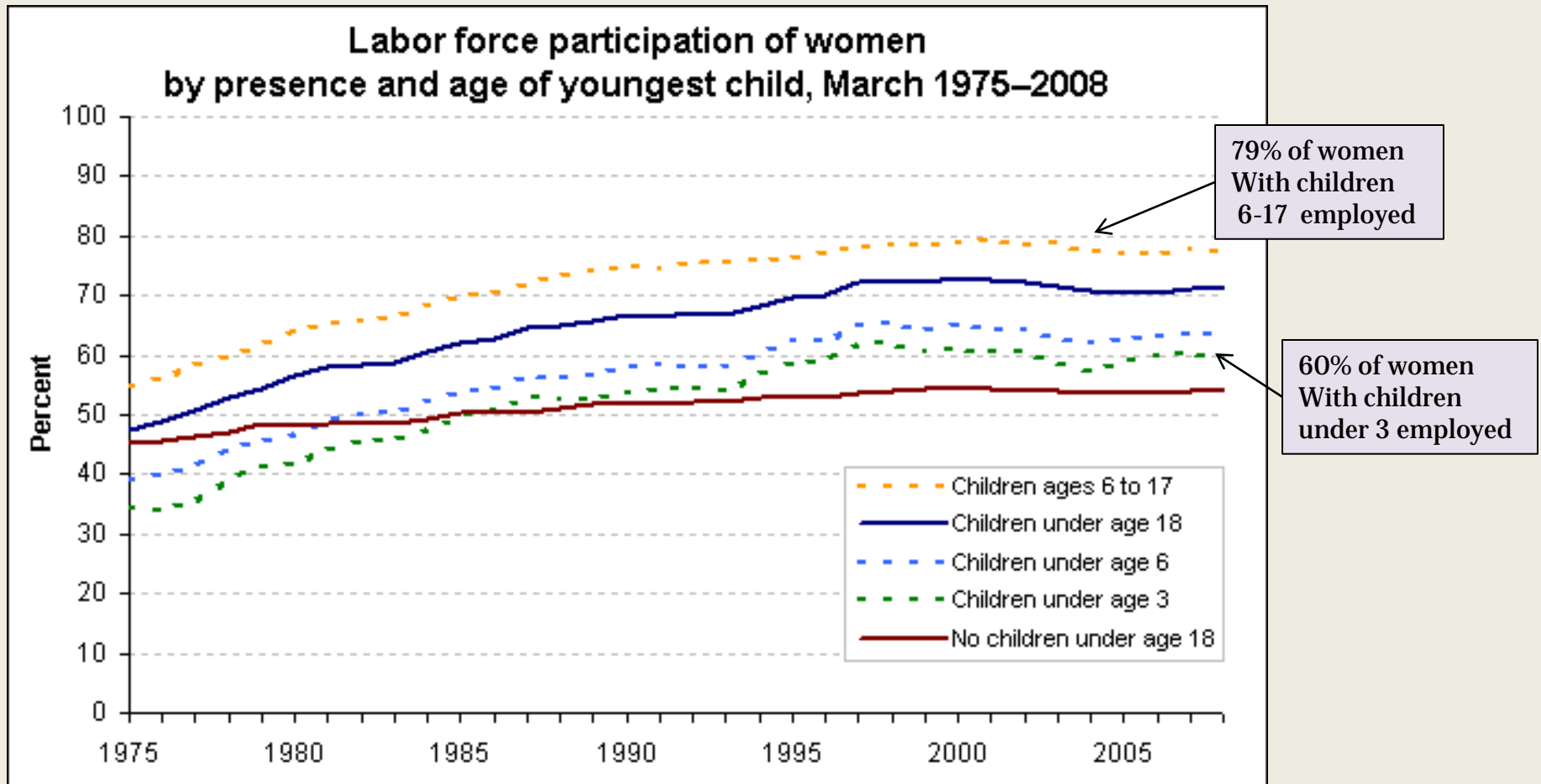


72 % of unmarried Women with children are employed

62 % of married Women with children are employed

Source: Author's analysis of the Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1980 to 2006.
Sample: Men and women aged 25 to 45.

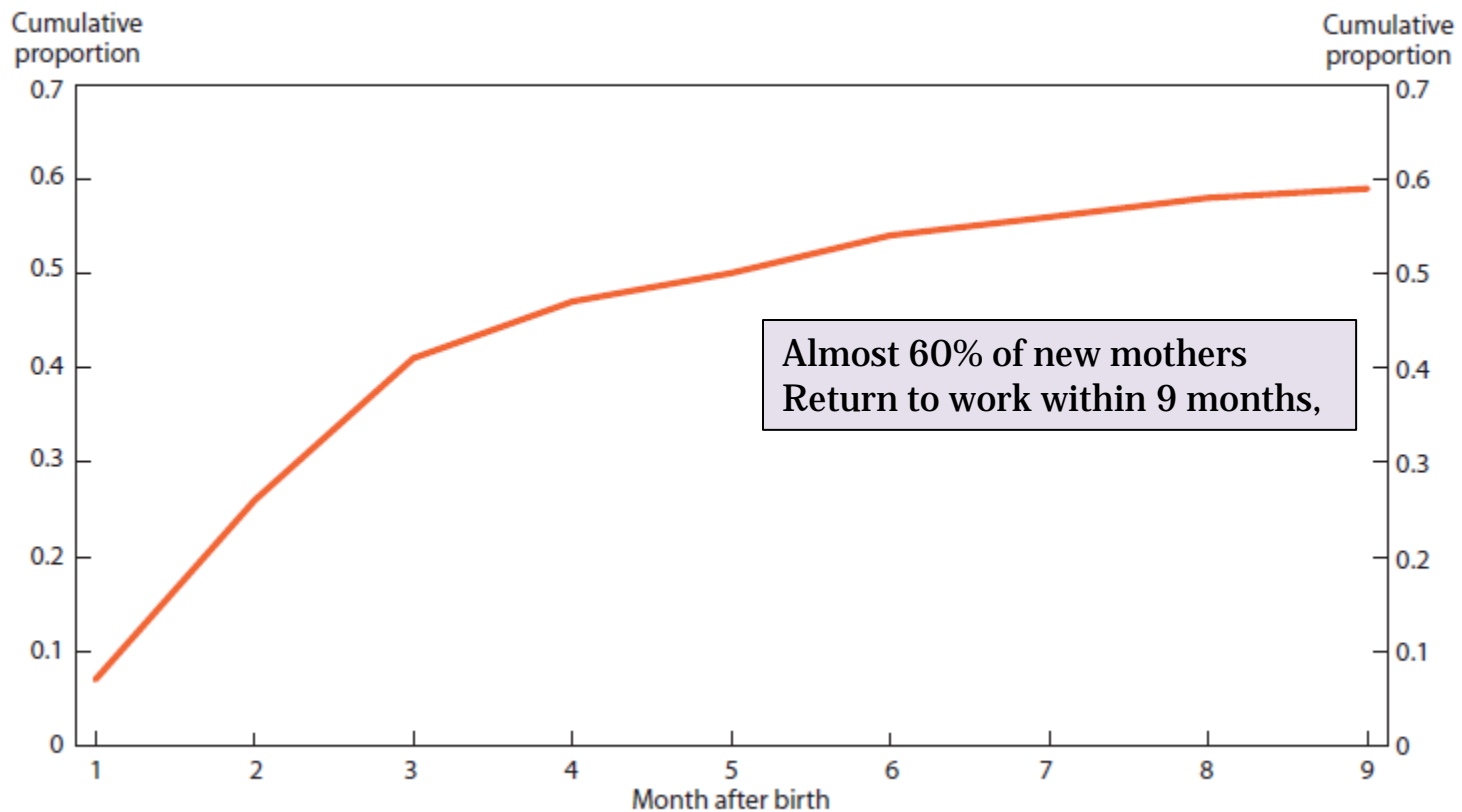
Employment rates of mothers with children



Mothers' employment rates across the transition to parenthood



Chart 1. Proportion of mothers at work after giving birth in 2001

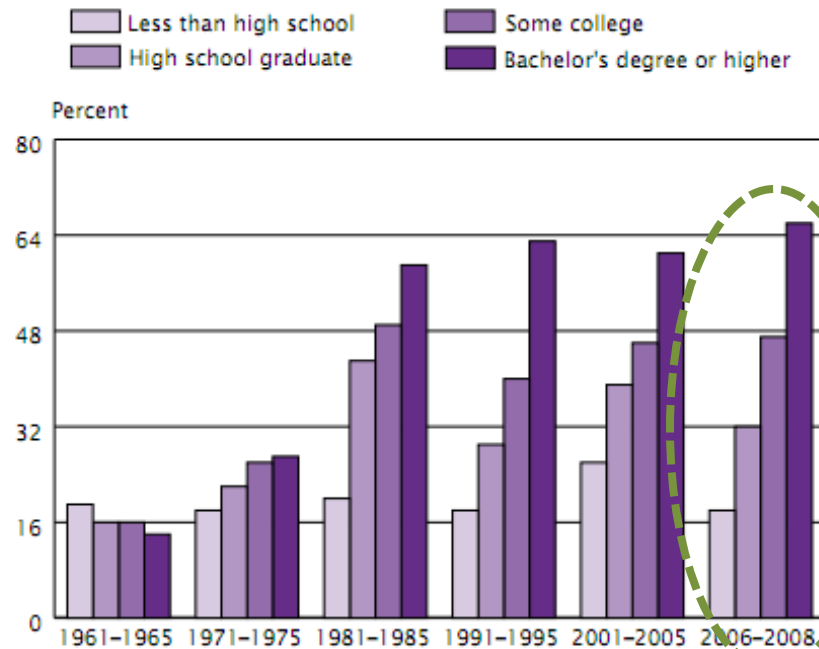


Almost 60% of new mothers
Return to work within 9 months,

SOURCE: Authors' calculations using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Birth Cohort of 2001, 9-month–Preschool Restricted-Use Data File, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Paid Leave by Educational Attainment

Figure 3.
Percentage of Women Who Received Paid Leave Before or After Their First Birth, by Educational Attainment: Selected Years, 1961-1965 to 2006-2008



Note: Paid leave includes all paid maternity, sick, and vacation leave, and other paid leave used before the birth and up to 12 weeks after the birth.

For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW3%28S&A-1%29.pdf.

Source: 1961-1965 to 1981-1985: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-165 (*Work and Family Patterns of American Women*), Table B-9; 1991-1995: P70-79 (*Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 1961-1995*), Figure 4; and 2001-2003: Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 2.

Between 2006-2008, 17% of women without a high school degree and 31% of women with only a high school degree received any paid leave before or after birth compared to 47% of those with some college and 65% of those with a college degree.

The Transition to Parenthood



- The transition to parenthood is one of the most studied phenomena in the psychological and sociological literature.
 - However, much less attention to the second transition of returning to full-time employment
- Parents' mental health topic of key concern in this literature
 - BOSTON—Gov. Deval Patrick has given final approval to a bill designed to help new mothers struggling with postpartum depression. The law requires Massachusetts health insurers to submit annual reports on their efforts to screen for postpartum depression (August, 2010)

Employment and the Transition to Parenthood



- **Despite the enormous research base on the topic we know little about**
 - How employment conditions affect new parents' mental health across the transition
 - How employment conditions affect infant development
- **How this transition is experienced within unique social contexts**
 - Social class
 - Race and ethnicity
 - Sexual orientation



An Important Niche: the Working-Class in the U.S.

Social Class in the United States

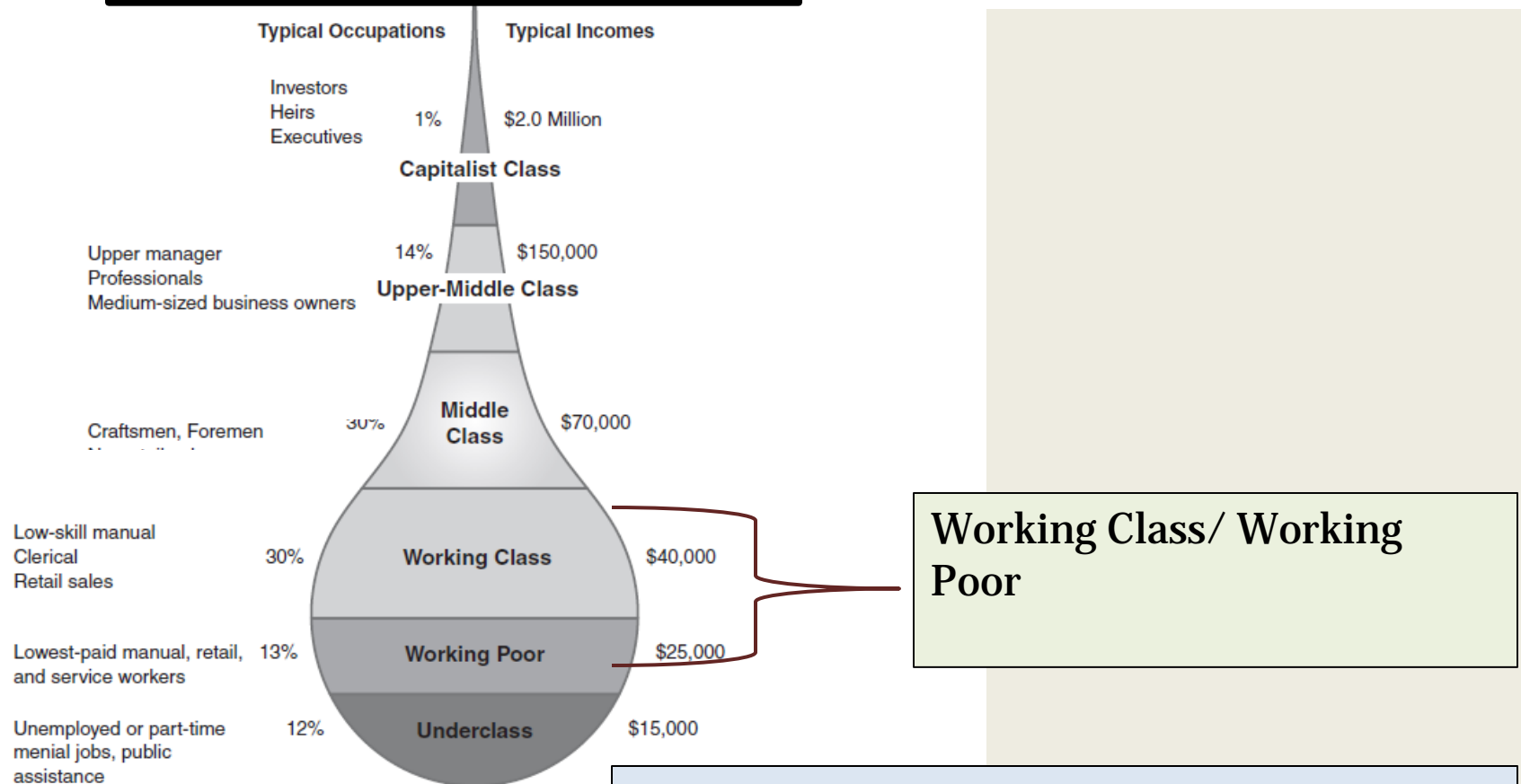


Figure 1.1 Gilbert-Kahl Model of the Class Structure

Low-Wage Work: A Unique Socio-Ecological Niche



- Low-income occupations have been characterized as
 - mind-numbing, monotonous, and boring.
- Low wage workers, especially those becoming new parents, may be more at risk for negative outcomes.
- At the same time we ask: Is it really the case that all low-wage work is “bad” work?
 - Probably not
 - Important to consider conditions of low-wage jobs that lead to most positive outcomes



Research on Low-Wage Work



- Much of the research on how work affects parental well-being has focused on work hours and schedules or on policies that afford parents time away from work...
 - Parental/family leave
 - Sick time
 - Personal time
 - Flexible time
- However, low wage workers spend a lot of time at work
- How are work conditions such as urgency, autonomy, supervisor and co-worker support related to parent well-being and relationships?

The Work and Family Transitions Project



- **Our research focuses on how work conditions, such as:**
 - Structural dimensions of working-class jobs (e.g. hours, schedules),
 - Workplace policies (e.g., leaves, flexibility)
 - Conditions of jobs (e.g., autonomy, urgency, supervisor support)
- **Predict family outcomes such as:**
 - Parental well-being (e.g., depression, anxiety, overload,)
 - Marital and close romantic relationship quality
 - Children's developmental outcomes (e.g., emotional and cognitive).

The Work and Family Transitions Project



➤ WFTP#1

- How does the transition to parenthood coupled with parents' early return to paid employment influence the mental health and marital relationships of working-class, first-time parents?
 - 153 Couples (mothers and fathers) interviewed in their homes five times across the first year of parenthood

Interview Schedule: WFTP

Birth of
Baby

Prenatal
Interview

1-month
Postnatal
Interview

Return
To Work
Interview

6-Month
Interview
(mail)

One Year
Follow-up
Interview

Prenatal Interview	1-month Postnatal Interview	Return To Work Interview	6-Month Interview (mail)	One Year Follow-up Interview
➤ Well-Being	➤ Well-Being	➤ Well-Being	➤ Well-Being	➤ Well-Being
➤ Marriage	➤ Marriage	➤ Marriage	➤ Marriage	➤ Marriage
➤ Work	➤ Work	➤ Work		➤ Work
➤ Gender Ideology	➤ Gender Ideology	➤ Gender Ideology		➤ Gender Ideology
➤ Social Support	➤ Social Support	➤ Social Support		➤ Social Support
	➤ Child Temperament		➤ Child Temperament	➤ Child Temperament

153 Two parent families

Sample Characteristics :WFTP #1

Phase 1	Husbands (n= 153)	Wives (n=153)
Age	27.2 (4.9)	25.6 (3.8)
Education	HS/Ged or less 22.3% Tech training 62.3% Assoc Degree 12.1%	HS or less 24.1% Tech training 53.3% Assoc Degree 22.1%
Income	29,500	24,400
Work Hours	47.2	40.0
Yrs Married/ Cohabiting	3.4	

Work Conditions and Mental Health of Blue-Collar, Dual-earner Parents



- A primary aim of our research is to consider how social-contextual factors shape processes within families and the well-being of parents and children.
 - Our first goal was to determine if variability existed in subjective experiences of work, such as job autonomy, job urgency, and supervisor support and co-worker support
- The second goal, was to examine how these dimensions of work predicted working parents' depression across the first year of parenthood.

Perry-Jenkins, M., Goldberg, A., Smith, J. Z., & Logan, J. (2011) Working-class jobs and new parents' mental health. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73(5),1117-1132.

Measures



Work Conditions

- **Assessed at three time points**
- **Centered at Time 1**
 - Job Autonomy
 - Job Urgency
 - Supervisor Support
 - Co-Worker Support

Mental Health

Depressive Symptoms (CES-D)

Assessed at five time points
Centered at Time 5

Interview Schedule: WFTP

Birth of Baby

Prenatal Interview

1-month Postnatal Interview

Return To Work Interview

6-Month Interview (mail)

One Year Follow-up Interview

Six Year Follow-up Interview

153 Two parent families

➤ Well-Being	➤ Well-Being	➤ Well-Being	➤ Well-Being	➤ Well-Being	➤ Well-Being
➤ Marriage	➤ Marriage	➤ Marriage	➤ Marriage	➤ Marriage	➤ Marriage
➤ Work	➤ Work	➤ Work		➤ Work	➤ Work
➤ Gender Ideology	➤ Gender Ideology	➤ Gender Ideology		➤ Gender Ideology	➤ Gender Ideology
➤ Social Support	➤ Social Support	➤ Social Support		➤ Social Support	➤ Social Support
	➤ Child Temperament		➤ Child Temperament	➤ Child Temperament	➤ Child Temperament / socio-emotional dev
					➤ Parenting

Replication: 207 families, primarily single mothers

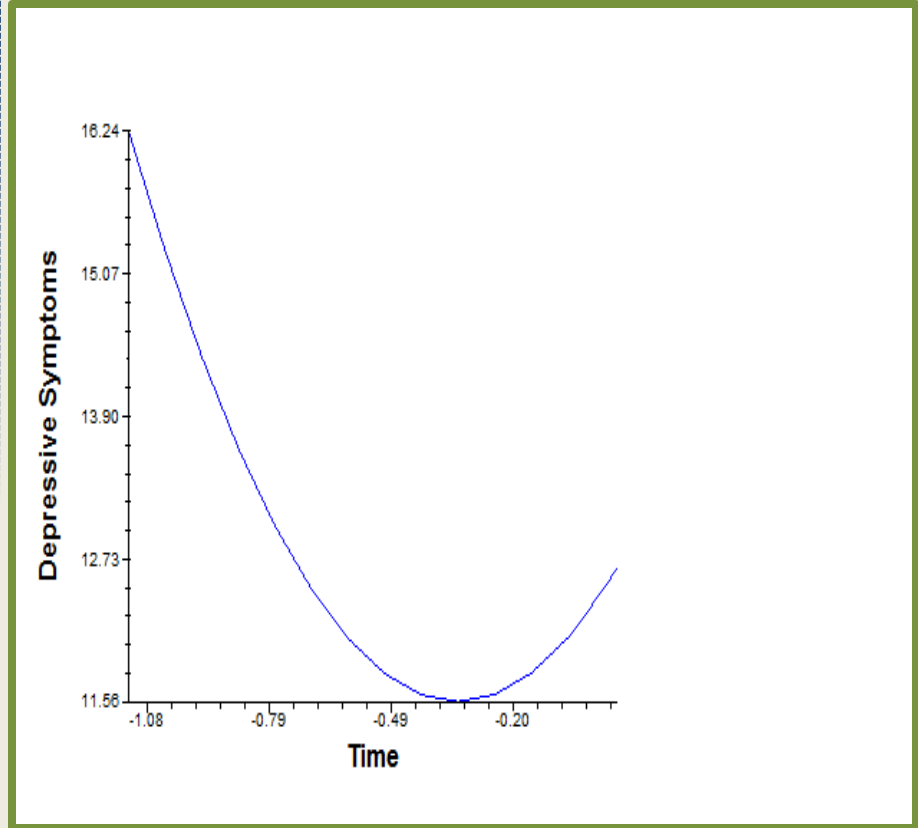
Is there variability in blue-collar workers' experiences of their jobs?



- For both mothers and fathers at Time 1 (the prenatal interview) there was significant variability in reports of
 - Job autonomy
 - Job urgency
 - Supervisor Support
 - Co-worker support
- In addition, for mothers and fathers there was significant change over time in:
 - Job urgency (+)
 - Supervisor Support (-)
 - Co-worker support (-)
 - For fathers only, job challenge (+) changed over time

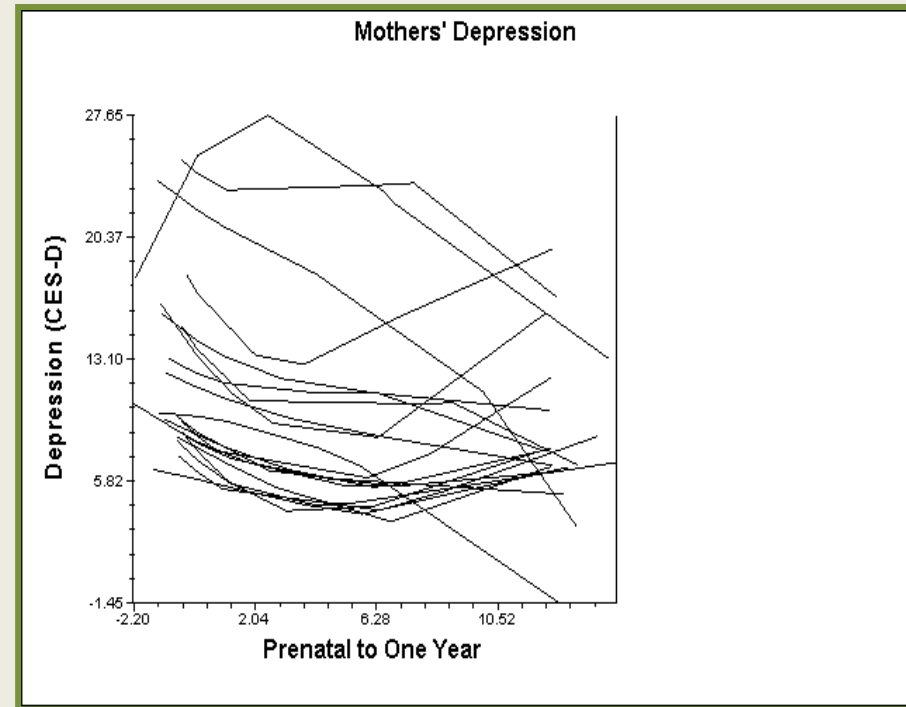
Is there variability in mothers' and fathers' reports of depressive symptoms?

- For both mothers and fathers at Time 5 (one-year postnatal interview) there was significant variability in reports of depression.
- In terms of change in depression, curvilinear trend only significant for mothers.



Was there variability in mothers' and fathers' reports of depression?

- For both mothers and fathers at Time 5 (one-year postnatal interview) there was significant variability in reports of depression.
- In terms of change in depression, this was only significant for mothers



Primary Research Questions



- Our primary questions focused on how Time 1 work conditions and changes in work conditions across the first year predicted both levels of depressive symptoms at Time 5 and change in depressive symptoms across the first year for mothers and fathers.

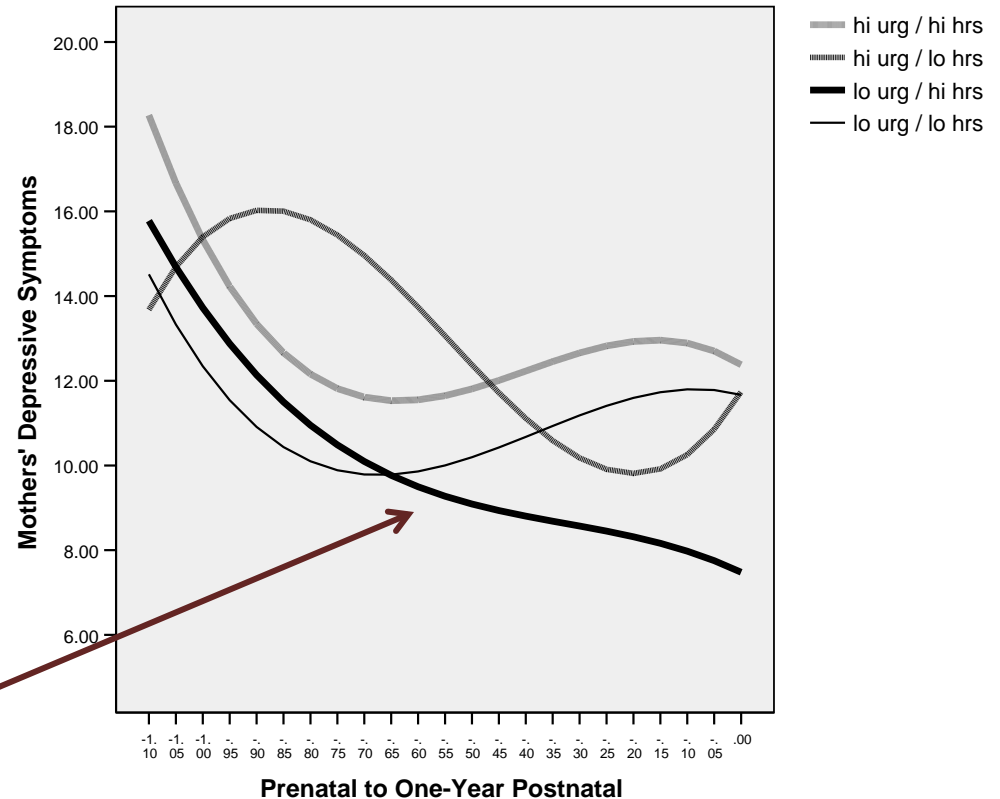


Work Conditions and Mental Health



■ *Job Urgency* is the experience of having too much to do in too little time, stress, lack of control

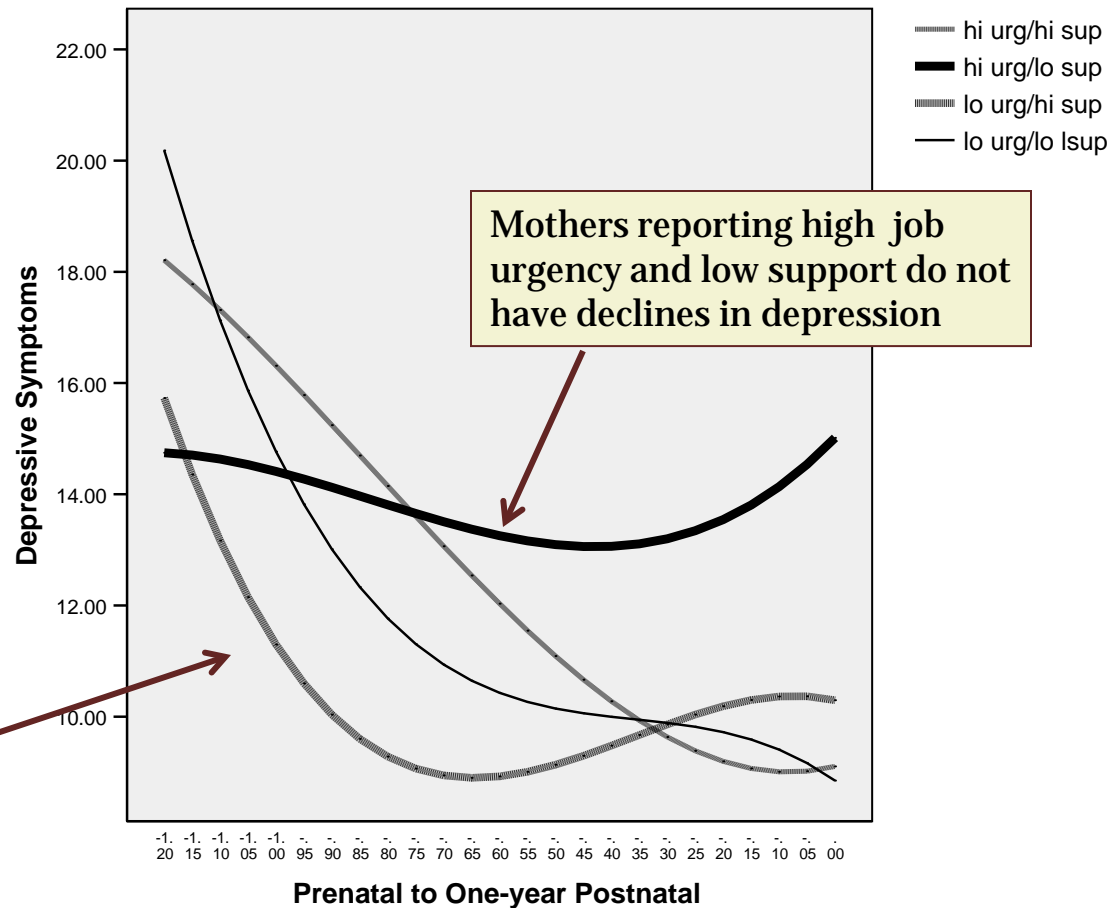
Mothers experiencing the steepest declines in depression are moms working full-time in low job urgency



Work Conditions and Mental Health



- Supervisor support buffers job urgency



Conclusions



- The social context of new parenthood is important to consider in our understanding of pre- and post-natal depression.
- Employment is an important site for interventions and supports for new parents.
 - The majority of current interventions focus on managing parenting stress, relationship conflict, mental health WITHIN the family...basically learning how to cope
 - It is time to examine how conditions of low wage work, and all work for that matter, make it such a struggle for new parents to manage jobs and family life and to consider workplace policies that could make a difference

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