

Why Do Mothers Experience More Work-Family Conflict When Children Are Younger?

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## ABSTRACT

Although researchers contend that having younger children is related to more work-family conflict, quantitative examination of job-related explanations for such association is limited. Using the Job-Demands Resources model, we investigate why work-family conflict varies by childrearing stage among mothers in a longitudinal study who continuously worked for pay across four waves when their children were 6 months old, 15 months old, in third grade, and in fifth grade ( $N = 405$ ). Analyses using fixed-effects models show that mothers report more work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict when their children are 6 or 15 months old than when their children are in fifth grade. These associations are largely explained by more job pressure, more perceived underemployment, and less supervisor support that mothers experience when their children are younger. These findings have implications for the theoretical development of work-family conflict as well as policy-making to help parents reduce work-family conflict.

Key words: family-to-work conflict, job demands resources model, life stage, longitudinal data, work-to-family conflict

Since the late 1980s, the majority of U.S. mothers return to work during the first year of their children's lives (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Both within and outside of academia, the stressfulness of juggling paid work with the care of young children has been discussed (e.g., Nomaguchi, 2009; Shulte, 2014). Work-family conflict, defined as individuals' perceptions that it is difficult to perform work (or family) responsibilities because of the demands of family (or work), is a major chronic stressor among employed adults, especially those with young children (Pearlin, 1989; Schieman, Milkie, & Glavin, 2009). Work-family conflict occurs bi-directionally—work responsibilities can interfere with family obligations (work-to-family conflict, WFC) and family obligations can interfere with work responsibilities (family-to-work conflict, FWC) (Michel et al., 2011). Both WFC and FWC have serious implications for individuals' health, job productivity, and the well-being of their family members, including their children (Grzywacz & Bass, 2003; Hill, 2005; Kelly et al., 2010). A variety of policies, such as paid parental leave, time or location flexibility, and affordable childcare, have been suggested as social or workplace policies that may help parents with young children reduce work-family conflict (Kelly et al., 2010; Moen, 2005; Williams, 2010). To inform policy makers as to which types of policies would effectively help employed parents with young children, it is important to identify specific factors that contribute to parents' work-family conflict during this life stage.

Although researchers often agree that adults with pre-school children tend to experience higher levels of WFC and FWC (Bellavia & Frone, 2005), surprisingly little empirical research has investigated as to why parents experience greater work-family conflict when their children are younger. Focusing on the family side of demands, researchers tend to argue that having children under age 6 is related to greater work-family conflict because younger children demand

parents' intensive physical and emotional labor (e.g., Voydanoff, 2004). Very few studies have examined explanations in the job domain. This is surprising because large volumes of studies have identified that paid work contexts shape people's experiences of work-family conflict (Bellavia & Frone, 2005; Schieman, Whitestone, & Van Gundy, 2006). Moreover, as Moen and colleagues (2013) noted, focusing on family demands as a primary source of greater work-family conflict for parents with very young children than others is problematic, because it ignores possible difficulties that workplaces may foster in balancing work and family life.

Prior research on variation in work-family conflict by childrearing stages suffers from several methodological limitations. First, comparison groups are unclear. Some studies found that employed adults with children under age 6 reported higher levels of WFC and FWC compared to all other employed adults (Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002; Voydanoff, 2004), or employed adults without any children (Hill et al., 2008; Mennino et al., 2005), or older employed adults with no children at home (Moen & Yu, 2000). In these comparisons, the effects of child age are mixed with the effects of parental status. In fact, very few studies have compared levels of WFC and FWC among parents across childrearing stages (Nomaguchi, 2009; 2012). Second, the majority of studies have used cross-sectional data, which fail to compare experiences of the same mothers. Because mothers typically move in and out of the labor force while they have young children (Moen, 2005; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; VandenHeuvel, 1997), the same mothers are not always included with samples of employed mothers. Research using both explicit comparison groups and longitudinal data is warranted.

Using longitudinal data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD), we examine differences in both directions of work-family conflict—i.e., WFC and FWC—among mothers by

childrearing stage. We compare four time points when children were 6 months old, 15 months old, in third grade, and in fifth grade, the only time points when the SECCYD asked mothers both about their work-family experiences and about their job characteristics. Drawing on the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Schieman, Milkie, & Glavin, 2009), we first examine how job demands and job resources differ across these four time points of childrearing stages. Second, we look at how these differences are linked to variation in WFC and FWC across the four time points. We focus on mothers, because information on fathers' job characteristics, WFC, and FWC in the SECCYD is limited.

#### *The Job Demands Resources Model of Work-Family Conflict*

The JD-R model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) has become a dominant perspective for understanding job-related factors that shape levels of WFC (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Glavin & Schieman, 2012; Schieman & Glavin, 2011). Simply put, the model contends that people experience “spillover” of job stress into family life when job demands are high and job resources are low. Job demands refer to the physical, socioemotional, and organizational aspects of a job that require sustained physical or mental effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Examples of job demands are a high job pressure, defined as perception that demands of one's job for time, energy, and stamina exceed one's capacities (Koltai & Schieman, 2015), interpersonal conflict, long work hours, and job authority (Glavin & Schieman, 2012; Koltai & Schieman, 2015; Schieman & Reid, 2008; Schieman, Milkie, & Glavin, 2009). Job resources refer to the physical, socioemotional, and organizational aspects of a job that are functional in achieving work goals or stimulate personal growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Used to cope with job demands, job resources play a critical role in reducing WFC. Career opportunities, supervisor support, scheduling flexibility, task significance (e.g.,

receiving psychological resources such as recognition, appreciation, life meaning), and job autonomy (or control over one's tasks) are known job resources that are related to less WFC (Almeida et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2014; Mennino et al., 2005; Schieman, Milkie, & Glavin, 2009; Voydanoff, 2004). As we will discuss more in detail in the next section, prior research has found that some job characteristics (e.g., manager positions) are related to both higher levels of demands and resources (e.g., Shieman & Reid, 2008), suggesting the need for careful operationalization of the JD-R model.

Little research investigating FWC has used the JD-R model. This is in part because earlier work has contended that, whereas demands and resources in the work domain predict WFC, demands and resources in the family domain are predictors of FWC (Frone et al., 1992). Yet, studies have increasingly suggested that demands and resources in the work domain also shape FWC (Byron, 2005; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Mennino et al., 2005; Nomaguchi, 2012; Voydanoff, 2005). In this vein, we suggest that the JD-R model may be useful in advancing understanding of the work side of potential sources of FWC. For example, a worker may not feel that her childcare demands affect her job performance if her work did not place much pressure on her. Empirical research has shown that with the same level of childcare demands, job pressure is related to greater FWC, whereas supervisor support, scheduling flexibility, and task significance have negative associations with FWC (Byron, 2005; Hill et al., 2008; Mennino et al., 2005; Nomaguchi 2012; Voydanoff, 2005). These results are consistent with the JD-R model. In contrast, prior research has shown inconsistent relationships between work hours and FWC. Some have found no relationship (e.g., Mennino et al., 2005; Nomaguchi, 2012); others have found that work hours is *negatively* related with FWC (e.g., Byron, 2005; Hill et al., 2008; Voydanoff, 2005). No explanation has been offered to account for the negative association. We

suspect that, in the case of FWC, longer work hours may mean that a mother is able to be away from childcare responsibilities, in short, she has more time available to get the same amount of her work done at work. In sum, although some job characteristics may not operate in the same direction as they do when predicting WFC, the JD-R model can be a useful framework in understanding sources of FWC.

#### *Variation in Job Demands and Resources by Childrearing Stage*

A life course perspective of work-family conflict contends that the amounts of job demands and job resources, and thus levels of WFC and FWC, vary throughout the life course (Moen, 2005; Moen, Waismel-Manor, & Sweet, 2003). Several studies used age as a marker of life stages and have found a curvilinear relationship: Workers in their late 20s to early 40s tend to report higher levels of job stress, WFC, and FWC than younger or older workers (Grzywacz et al. 2002; Schieman et al 2009; Tausig et al., 2004). Researchers tend to explain that during this life stage—i.e., in their late 20s to early 40s—workers are likely to shoulder more responsibilities at work while they are likely to have childrearing responsibilities. Given that childcare responsibility is a primary source of work-family conflict (Byron, 2005), we argue that childrearing stage, or age of children, is a better marker of life stage than mothers' age to understand mothers' experiences of work-family conflict (Hill, 2008; Moen & Sweet, 2004).

Very little research has explored variations in job demands and job resources by children's age and how such variations are linked to variations in WFC and FWC. Using a sample of IBM employees in 79 countries, Martinengo and colleagues (2010) examined differences in job demands and resources, WFC, and FWC across childrearing stages, including children's infancy, pre-school, and school-age years. Compared to mothers with school-age children, mothers with infants were (a) less likely to be managers, (b) less likely to have job

flexibility, and (c) less likely to report WFC and FWC. Average work hours did not vary between the two stages of childrearing. Similar to other studies that examined the association between children's age and WFC or FWC, which we discussed in the beginning of this paper, Martinengo and colleagues' (2010) data were cross-sectional. The sample size for mothers with infants was considerably smaller than the sample size for mothers with pre-school or school-aged children. This is perhaps because employed mothers with infants are a far more selective group than those with older children are. Indeed prior research has shown that mothers who go back to work while their children are infants are more likely than those who delay returning to work to have more resources in many respects, such as those who have more education, a professional job, a higher wage, and live with a spouse or partner (Frech & Damaske, 2012; Nomaguchi & Fetto, 2016). As such, it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons across mothers in different childrearing stages with cross-sectional data.

In this paper, we track the same group of mothers who were continuously employed across four time points—6 months, 15 months, third grade, and fifth grade—examine how WFC and FWC differ across these childrearing stages. Below, we discuss how job demands and job resources may vary by childrearing stage and how this may explain variations in WFC and FWC across childrearing stages.

We focus on three indicators of job demands that have been commonly examined in prior research—work hours, managerial position, and job pressure. First, we consider work hours, a measure of time demands. Mothers are less likely to work longer hours when their children are younger because mothers continue to shoulder greater children responsibilities than fathers, especially before their children enter school (Bianchi, 2011; Martinengo, Jacob, & Hill, 2010; Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009). This means that mothers on average have fewer time demands



of paid work at work when children were younger. As we discussed in the previous section, however, in the case of FWC, work hours may not reflect time demands, but time availability that mothers can spend on paid work. We will consider this possibility when interpreting the results for FWC. Second, we use managerial position as a measure of job authority. Although it is sometimes regarded as a job resource, job authority is related to greater responsibilities, higher pressure, longer work hours, and more interpersonal conflict at work (Schieman & Reid, 2008). Mothers are less likely to hold a managerial position—i.e., fewer authority demands on average—when their children are younger (Martinengo, Jacob, & Hill, 2010). Third, we consider job pressure, defined as the extent to which individuals feel that demands of their job on energy and stamina exceed their capacity (Koltai & Schieman, 2015). Job pressure is similar to the concept of role overload in the stress process model (Pearlin, 1989). In contrast to time and authority demands, mothers may experience greater job pressure when children are younger. The intensive and on-call nature of taking care of infants and toddlers, which tends to result in sleep deprivation and chronic fatigue (McQueen & Mander, 2003), may reduce mothers' capacity to fulfill regular tasks at work. It is also possible that as mothers tend to scale back their work hours when their children are younger, trying to complete the same level of workload within shorter hours may produce a higher sense of job pressure. In sum, how job demands vary by childrearing stage may depend on types of job demands mothers experience. Specifically, when their children are younger, mothers may have fewer job demands in terms of work hours and job authority but may experience more job demands in terms of psychological strain.

We focus on four indicators of job resources—scheduling flexibility, task significance, career opportunities, and supervisor support. Similar to the case of job demands, how mothers' job resources vary across childrearing stage may not be uniform for all aspects of job resources.

Recall that we focus on mothers who were employed continuously across the four time points when their children were infants and toddlers (6 and 15 months) as well as when their children were third and fifth graders. For this group of mothers, the level of scheduling flexibility may not differ greatly by childrearing stage, as scheduling flexibility is essential for mothers to be able to stay continuously employed. Childcare responsibilities could spill over into a regular work schedule at a moment's notice—children get sick; childcare plans may fall apart; parent's work schedules may change, e.g., husbands may get rotating work schedules; school events, medical check-ups, and extracurricular activities, which are often scheduled during the day, may present scheduling difficulties (Blair-Loy, 2003; Francis-Connolly, 2000; Williams 2010). Mothers with children, either very young or school-age, whose jobs do not provide scheduling flexibility are likely to use the “job-quit solution” to work-family conflict when child demands are heavy (Budig & Hodges, 2010; Williams 2010) and thus they are not in the sample of the present analysis. Task significance, another aspect of job resources, too, may vary little by childrearing stage among this group of mothers. Given the high cost of child care as well as the cultural belief in the importance of maternal care for a child's proper development (Hays, 1996), women do not return to work during the first year and stay working unless their work is meaningful (Damaske, 2011). Very little research examined how job flexibility and task significance vary by childrearing stage among mothers who worked continuously.

For other aspects of job resources, we expect that mothers with infants and toddlers may perceive less supervisor support or feel underemployed in their workplace. The culture of the U.S. workplace continues to regard the ideal worker archetype as someone who devotes herself to her employer without distractions by family responsibilities (Moen, 2005). Here, working long hours as well as sharing “face time” with supervisors and coworkers is highly valued as a

demonstration of such devotion (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010). Cutting back work hours, using flexible schedules, or working from home is seen as a sign of slowing down or giving up on a core career track (Stone, 2007; Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl 2013). This *flexibility stigma* (Williams et al., 2013) has been documented in several qualitative studies. Mothers with very young children reported their experiences of being assigned less challenging tasks, being passed over for standard promotions, and even facing demotions (Blair-Loy, 2003; Moen et al., 2013; Stone, 2007). Many mothers with young children wrestle with their own doubts about their choice of returning to work (Damaske, 2011). Feelings of being underemployed and receiving less supervisor support may fuel mothers' such doubts, which, in turn, increases stressfulness of juggling work and childrearing responsibilities (Blair-Loy, 2003; Stone, 2007; Williams et al., 2013). Quantitative studies that examined variation in feelings of being underemployed and supervisor support by childrearing stage are scarce.

#### SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, using longitudinal data from the SECCYD, we address the following three research questions: Among mothers who are employed across different childrearing stages, (1) how do levels of WFC and FWC differ by childrearing stage?; (2) how do job demands and job resources differ by childrearing stage?; and (3) do differences in job demands and job resources explain differences in levels of WFC and FWC by childrearing stage? All analyses control for several characteristics that are used in prior research on the association between WFC or FWC and children's age, including: family income, number of children, and relationship status (Grzywacz et al, 2002; Hill et al, 2008; Martinengo, Jacob, & Hill, 2010; Mennino et al., 2005; Moen & Yu, 2000; Nomaguchi, 2009; 2012; Voydanoff, 2004).

#### METHOD

### *Data*

The SECCYD is a longitudinal study of 1,364 children and their families, which was originally designed to study the association between children's early childcare experiences and developmental outcomes. This study began in 1991 when families of newborns were recruited from hospitals in 10 cities in 9 states in the United States (see NICHD ECCRN, 2005 for detailed information about the data). The SECCYD collected information about the focal child's primary parents' (which was the child's mother in almost all cases) experiences of WFC and FWC when the child was 6 months, 15 months, 36 months old and then in grade 3 and grade 5. Because questions regarding job demands and job resources were not asked in the 36-month survey, we focused on the four waves including 6 months (T1), 15 months (T2), third grade (T3), and fifth grade (T4). Supplemental analyses (not shown) suggested that the prevalence of WFC and FWC in 36 months was very similar to that in 15 months respectively.

The analytical sample was first reduced to the cases in which the mothers participated in all of the four waves ( $n = 926$ ); then further restricted to the cases in which the mothers were working for pay at least 1 hour per week in all of the four waves ( $N = 405$ ). The large reduction in the sample size is not surprising because prior research has shown that the majority of mothers move in and out of the labor force during childrearing years (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; Moen, 2005; Nomaguchi & Fetto, 2016). Mothers in this sample were more economically advantaged than mothers in the general population. For example, as shown in Appendix Table 1, 43% of mothers had a bachelor's degree or higher and 85% of mothers were non-Hispanic Whites. This is, in part, because mothers in the SECCYD were more economically advantaged than mothers in the general population (NICHD ECCRN, 2005). In addition, economically advantaged mothers are more likely to be continuously employed (Budig & Hodges, 2010; Frech & Damaske, 2012).

This sample characteristic is adequate for the present analysis, because WFC has been called *stress of higher status*, as prior research has shown that people with higher levels of education, occupational status, or whites—i.e., those who are more economically advantaged—are more likely to report WFC (Schieman, Milkie, & Glavin, 2009; Schieman, Whitestone, & Van Gundy, 2006).

### *Measures*

*Work-to-family conflict* (WFC) was measured as the average of the following five questions ( $\alpha = .82, .85, .89, .89$  at T1, T2, T3, T4, respectively), including (a) “Working leaves you with too little time to be the kind of parent you want to be,” (b) “Working leaves you with too little energy to be the kind of parent you want to be,” (c) “Because of the requirements of your job, you have to miss out on home or family activities that you would prefer to participate in,” and (d) “Because of the requirements of your job, your family time is less enjoyable and more pressured” (1 = *not at all true*, 2 = *somewhat true*, 3 = *fairly true*, and 4 = *very true*).

*Family-to-work conflict* (FWC) was measured as the average of the following five items ( $\alpha = .65, .66, .65, .72$  at T1, T2, T3, T4, respectively): (a) “Thinking about your children interferes with your performance at work,” (b) “Because of your family responsibilities, you have to turn down work activities or opportunities that you would prefer to take on,” (c) “Because of your family responsibilities, the time you spend working is less enjoyable and more stressed,” (d) “When you spend time working, you’re bothered by all the things at home that you should be doing,” and (e) “During the time set aside for work, you feel resentful because you’d really rather be spending time with your family” (1 = *not at all true*, 2 = *somewhat true*, 3 = *fairly true*, and 4 = *very true*).

*Childrearing stage* was measured as the four waves of the SECCYD, including when the focal child was 6 months old, 15 months old, third grader, and fifth grader.

*Job demands.* Three indicators of job demands were examined. *Weekly work hours* was measured as mothers' self-report of usual work hours. *Occupations* were measured as three dummy variables including management, professional, and other (reference). *Job pressure* was measured as the average of three items ( $\alpha = .76, .77, .84, .80$  at T1, T2, T3, T4, respectively), including: (a) "Having to juggle conflicting tasks or duties?" (b) "Having too much to do?" and (c) "The job's taking too much out of you?" (1 = *not at all a concern*, 2 = *somewhat of a concern*, 3 = *of considerable concern*, and 4 = *of extreme concern*).

*Job resources.* We examined four indicators of job resources (or lack thereof). *Feeling underemployed* was measured as the average of three items ( $\alpha = .68, .68, .54, .55$  at T1, T2, T3, T4, respectively), including (a) "Having little chance for the advancement you want or deserve?"; (b) "Making less money than you feel you deserve?"; and (c) "Lack of respect at your workplace for people who do your job?" (1 = *not at all rewarding*, 2 = *somewhat rewarding*, 3 = *considerably rewarding*, 4 = *extremely rewarding*). *Supervisor support* was the average of four items ( $\alpha = .65, .67, .76, .78$  at T1, T2, T3, T4, respectively): (a) "Lack of support from your supervisors?" (reverse coded); (b) "Your supervisor's lack of appreciation for your work" (reverse coded); (c) "Your supervisor paying attention to what you have to say?"; and (d) "Your supervisor's respect for your abilities?" (1 = *not at all rewarding* to 4 = *extremely rewarding*).

*Task significance*, which has been called in different terms such as meaningful work or challenging work, was the average of the 9 items ( $\alpha = .87, .87, .91, .88$  at T1, T2, T3, T4, respectively), (a) "Doing work you consider important?"; (b) "The sense of accomplishment and competence you get from doing your job?"; (c) "Having an impact on other people's lives?"; (d)

“The job’s fitting your skills?”; (e) The appreciation you get?; (f) The recognition you get?; (g) Being able to work as part of a team or group? (h) “Being able to make decisions on your own?”; (i) “Having the authority you need to get your job done?” (1 = *not at all rewarding* to 4 = *extremely rewarding*) (Koltai & Schieman, 2015; Nomaguchi 2009; Voydanoff 2004). The last two items of task significance could indicate job autonomy, but factor analyses (not shown) demonstrated that these 9 items form one construct. *Job flexibility* was measured by one question that was phrased in slightly different ways between the first two waves and the latter two waves. In 6 months and 15 months, the question was: “How flexible are your work hours?” (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *only little; I can be gone if it’s an emergency*, 3 = *fairly flexible*, 4 = *completely flexible*). In third and fifth grades, mothers were asked: “How flexible would you say your job is in this situation?” (1 = *very inflexible*, 2 = *somewhat inflexible*, 4 = *somewhat flexible*, 5 = *very flexible*). Because the number of response categories were different, we standardized scores of each question.

*Control variables.* *Family annual income* was a constructed variable and measured in thousands of dollars. *Partnership status* was measured as three dummy variables including married (reference), cohabiting, and single. *The number of children* in the household was an ordered variable ranging from 1 to 8.

#### *Analytical Plan*

We first compared means for WFC, FWC, job demands, and job resources by childrearing stage. Second, because job resources tended to be closely related to job demands, we also examined multivariate analyses for variation in job resources by childrearing stage controlling for job demands (as well as other control variables). Finally, we examined multivariate analyses for variations in WFC and FWC by childrearing stage with a specific focus

on variations in job demands and job resources by childrearing stage as possible explanatory factors. For multivariate analyses, we used fixed-effects regression models (Allison, 2009; Johnson, 1995), which employed four waves of pooled data and resulted in  $N = 1,620$  person-year data. Fixed-effects models are similar to difference-scores models in that they focus on within person variation and examine the associations between *changes* in explanatory variables and *changes* in outcome variables (Allison, 2009). Thus, all variables in the analyses were measured in all four waves. Hausman tests indicated significant differences in the coefficients between random-effects and fixed-effects models (not shown). If there were very few unmeasured individual characteristics correlated with WFC or FWC, the estimates using random-effects and fixed-effect models would be very similar; the results of Hausman tests suggest the need for fixed-effects models (Allison, 2009). For the few variables with missing cases, we used PROC MI in SAS to create five replicates of the data set as suggested by Allison (2001).

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables and by childrearing stage in the pooled data. Showing similar information, Figure 1 displays WFC and FWC averages across the four time points. Mothers reported less WFC when their children were in fifth grade than they did when their children were 6 and 15 months old. There were no significant differences in WFC among the three time points of 6 months old, 15 months old, and in third grade as well as between third and fifth grades. Mothers reported less FWC when children were in third and fifth grades than they did when children were 6 months or 15 months old. No significant differences in FWC were found between 6 and 15 months or between third and fifth grades, respectfully. Next, we examined how levels of job demands and job resources vary by childrearing stage.



Mothers, on average, worked fewer hours when their children were 6 months or 15 months old compared to when their children were in fifth grade. Larger shares of mothers were managers when their children were in fifth grade than when their children were 6 months or 15 months old. Mothers reported experiencing more job pressure when their children were 6 months old or 15 months old than they did when their children were in third and fifth grades. Mothers also reported more feeling underemployed in their workplace and receiving less support from their supervisors when their children were 6 months old or 15 months old than they did when their children were in third or fifth grade. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in the average levels of mothers' perceptions of job flexibility and task significance by childrearing stage.

[Table 1 and Figure 1 around here]

Prior research has shown that job resources are closely related to job demands. For example, job authority (e.g., managers) has a positive association with task significance and job flexibility, but is also related to long work hours and higher overload (Shieman & Reid, 2008). Thus, to better understand variation in job resources by childrearing stage, we examined multivariate analyses where job demands and control variables—family characteristics—were held constant (Table 2). Even after controlling for job demands and control variables, mothers reported more feeling underemployed and feeling less support from supervisors when their children were 6 months old or 15 months old compared to when their children were in third or fifth grade. For task significance and job flexibility, recall that there was little difference by childrearing stages at the bivariate level. When job demands and family characteristics were controlled for, mothers reported higher levels of task significance and job flexibility when their children were 6 months old or 15 months old than when their children were in third or fifth grade.

These multivariate findings were important when we interpreted the results for variation in FWC by childrearing stage below.

[Table 2 around here]

Next, we examined whether differences in job demands and job resources explain differences in WFC and FWC by childrearing stage. For both WFC and FWC, we examined five models. Model 1 included childrearing stage only. Model 2 added control variables. Model 3 added job demands to Model 2. Model 4 added job resources to Model 2. Lastly, Model 5 included all variables. We first looked at WFC. Table 3 presents results of fixed-effects models predicting the association between childrearing stage and WFC. Model 1 duplicates the patterns of the results at the bivariate level that were shown in Table 1. Model 2, which added control variables, shows that the number of children living in the household were positively related to WFC. When the number of children was controlled for, differences in WFC between 6 months and fifth grade grew. This was largely because mothers tended to have more children in the household when the study child was in the fifth grade than when he or she was 6 months old (see Table 1). As shown in Model 3, work hours and job pressure were positively related to WFC. With the inclusion of all job demand indicators, the coefficient for fifth grade was no longer significant, suggesting that job demands, especially job pressure (see Table 1), explains the lower WFC mothers reported when their children were in fifth grade than when their children were 6 or 15 months old. Model 4 examines the effects of job resources. Whereas feeling underemployed was positively related to WFC, job flexibility and task significance were negatively related to WFC. Supervisor support was not related WFC. Model 4 suggests that job resources, particularly the lower level of feeling underemployed (see Table 1), explained the reduced levels of WFC that mothers reported when their children were in fifth grade than they did when their children

were infants or toddlers. In the full model (Model 5), differences in WFC by childrearing stage were explained by variation in job demands and job resources across the four stages.

[Table 3 around here]

Turning to FWC (Table 4), again the results of Model 1 provided the same information as those seen at the bivariate level in Table 1. Differences between 6 months and third or fifth grade became greater after controlling for family income, the number of children, and mother's relationship status (Model 2). This was, again, largely because the number of children was positively related to FWC, and mothers tended to have more children when their study child was in fifth grade than when he or she was 6 or 15 months old. Model 3 added job demands to Model 2. Whereas job pressure was positively related to FWC (Model 3), work hours were negatively related to FWC, consistent with prior findings (e.g., Byron, 2005; Hill et al., 2008; Voydanoff, 2005). To understand the negative association between work hours and FWC, we conducted supplemental analyses (not shown), which suggest that the association between work hours and FWC became negative and significant only after controlling for job pressure. Job pressure was positively related to work hours (not shown), presumably because people may increase work hours when they have more work to do. Mothers with young children, however, tend to cut back, not increase, their paid work hours to attend their children's needs (Bianchi, 2011). Working fewer hours may lead mothers to experience more FWC because it is harder to get the same amount of workload done when they work fewer hours. Similar to WFC, job demands, particularly job pressure, explained lower levels of FWC when children were in third and fifth grades than those when their children were younger. Turning to job resources (Model 4), feelings of underemployed were positively related to mothers' FWC. In contrast, job flexibility and task significance were negatively related to FWC. Unlike the case of WFC, job resources did not

explain away the higher levels of FWC mothers experienced when children were younger (Model 4). When both job demands and job resources were controlled for (Model 5), the coefficient for fifth grade became significant again. Recall that analyses in Table 2 showed that when job demands were controlled for, mothers reported higher levels of task significance and job flexibility when their children were infants than when their children were in fifth grade. In Model 3, the negative association between fifth grade and FWC was suppressed because we only controlled for job demands. When all job characteristics were held constant, mothers reported less FWC when their children were in fifth grade than when their children were infants.

[Table 4 around here]

## DISCUSSION

Very few studies have investigated job-related factors that shape variation in employed mothers' both directions of work-family conflict—both WFC and FWC—childrearing stage. Following the same group of employed mothers across four waves—when their children were approximately 6 months old, 15 months old, in third grade, and in fifth grade—of the SECCYD, we examined whether disparities in job demands and job resources would be related to disparities in WFC and FWC by childrearing stage. Our analyses produced several key findings that contribute to the theoretical development of predictors of WFC and FWC. Our findings also inform policy makers about workplace factors that are making it more stressful for parents with young children to fulfill their dual demands of work and family responsibilities.

Mothers, on average, reported lower WFC when their children were in fifth grade than they did when their children were infants or toddlers. This finding is consistent with prior findings that parents with children under age 6 report greater WFC than parents with school-age children (Nomaguchi, 2009). Our analyses were more refined than prior ones, providing a

stronger case as we examined the same mothers' experiences in different childrearing stages. In addition, moving beyond prior research, we found that mothers reported higher WFC when their children were younger largely because they experienced more job pressure, more feelings of underemployment, and less supervisor support when their children were infants or toddlers than they did when their children were in fifth grade. Similarly, mothers reported higher FWC when children were infants or toddlers than when their children were in third or fifth grade, in part because of higher job demands they experienced when their children were younger.

Why do mothers experience more job pressure when their children are younger than they do when their children are in fifth grade, even though fewer mothers held managerial positions and worked full-time hours when their children are younger? One reason, we suspect, is that while mothers with younger children cut back hours, the amount of duties they have in their job may not decrease much. Thus, mothers may be under more time pressure because they have to complete their work within a limited amount of time. Alternatively, as suggested by the stress process model (Pearlin 1989), it could be that the intensive and on-call labor of taking care of infants and toddlers may reduce mothers' capacity to fulfill regular tasks at work. Future research should investigate the mechanisms through which childcare demands produce job stress and what may help reduce the spillover effects.

With regard to variation in job resources by childrearing stage, our findings that mothers felt more underemployed and perceived less supervisor support are consistent with prior qualitative research that finds mothers experience less supervisor support and feel underemployed when they have very young children (i.e., Blair-Loy, 2003; Stone, 2007). In these studies, mothers with high profile jobs identified negative events in the workplace, such as missing standard promotions or being assigned less challenging tasks, as shaping their decisions

to quit and become a stay-at-home mother. Parenting in the U.S. emphasizes the importance of intensive time investment in childrearing for children's proper development and may foster feelings that being away from their children is less worthy than remaining in the workforce—especially when mothers are underemployed or lack job opportunities in the workforce (Damaske, 2011; Hays, 1996). In sum, our findings augment prior evidence based on qualitative studies by providing quantitative evidence.

Our findings have important implications for policymaking. First, as job pressure appears to be a key stressor that intensifies WFC and FWC for employed mothers (and perhaps for employed fathers too) when children were younger, policies that would help reduce job pressure, such as paid parental leave policies and flexible work schedules, would be helpful. Progressive companies have extended their paid parental leave benefits to cover 18 weeks, 6 months, or even one year (Smolkin, 2016). Yet, our findings suggest that mothers experience job pressure throughout their child's infancy and toddlerhood. Moreover, we found that mothers' WFC does not decline significantly until their children reach fifth grade. Child development experts tend to contend that third graders continue to require close attention and involvement of primary caregivers in their daily routines, whereas fifth graders begin to gain independence from their parents (U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Together, these results suggest that rather than policies that are fixed to the period right after birth or adoption, alternative parental leave policies may allow parents to choose when they take leave.

Second, paid parental leave policies or other flexibility benefits may not be effective in reducing parents' work-family conflict if the use of these benefits is associated with loss of career opportunities. We found that mothers perceive less support from supervisors when their children are younger, presumably the life stage when they would need this support the most. In

addition, mothers are more likely to feel underemployed in their workplace when their children are younger, possibly due to missing promotions or demotions, as qualitative research has documented (Blair-Loy, 2003; Stone 2007). More workplaces have been introducing flexible work benefits. Yet, employees, especially men, do not utilize them because of fears of being seen as uncommitted to their careers; thus strengthening of the marginalization of mothers who use such benefits to balance work and family (Williams et al., 2013). Changing workplace culture is necessary so that reducing work hours, using flexible schedules, or taking a leave is considered as a part of the “ideal worker” archetype. Yet, recent studies suggest that the process of changing workplace cultures is complex. For example, examining the association between requests for flexible work and judgements of employees using a vignette, Munsch (2016) found that fathers get more support and respect compared to mothers when they request flexplace (flexibility in work location) to accommodate childcare. This “fatherhood bonus” may not help reduce mothers’ perceived underemployment or less supervisor support relative to their male counterparts.

Overall, our findings suggest a merit of using the JD-R model in understanding FWC as well as WFC, although conceptualizations of some job characteristics, such as work hours, may differ between FWC and WFC. Yet, job-related factors examined in the present analysis only partially explained the lower level of FWC when children were in fifth grade compared to when children were 6 months old, suggesting that other factors including family-related factors need to be explored as well. Qualitative research suggests that parenting culture that emphasizes the importance of mothers’ heavy involvement in children’s daily lives is one of such factors (Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013). Other qualitative research shows that the difficulty in arranging after-school care or child care when schools are closed may also play an important role in influencing parents’ FWC as well as WFC (Gerstel & Clawson, 2014). As suggested by Moen

and colleagues (Moen & Sweet, 2004; Moen & Yu, 2000), examining differences in demands and resources in both job and family domains across career stages, as well as family life stages, would be beneficial for further understanding of mothers' and fathers' experiences of integrating work and family life.

Present analyses have limitations that future research should address. First, although collected in 10 cities in various regions of the U.S., the sample was not nationally representative of employed mothers with children of equivalent ages. Future research that utilizes a representative sample would be ideal. Second, the present analysis focused on experiences of a cohort of mothers whose children were 0 to 11 years of age roughly from 1991 to 2002. Although there have been no remarkable changes in mothers' employment patterns or in social policies to support working parents since then (Boling, 2015; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009), studies using more recent data are warranted. Third, we focused on mothers because of data limitations, but it is important to examine both mothers and fathers, as prior research has shown that fathers today experience WFC as much as mothers do (Nomaguchi, 2009). Finally, the present analysis was unable to examine mothers' experiences when their children were between 2 and 8 years old as well as when they were older than fifth grade due to data limitations. Based on anecdotal evidence, Slaughter (2015) has contended that work-family issues intensify when women, especially those who postponed having children earlier in their careers, have teenagers when they have opportunities to hold more prestigious but more demanding positions. More research is necessary to understand specific issues of integrating work and family life for mothers (and fathers) with teenagers.

In conclusion, although researchers tend to agree that mothers experience more work-family conflict when their children are younger, little research has examined how job demands



and job resources, key determinants of work-family conflict, may be associated with variation in work-family conflict throughout different childrearing stages. The present analysis suggests that mothers are more likely to feel both directions of work-family conflict (work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict) when their children are infants or toddlers than when their children are in fifth grade, largely because they are more likely to experience a higher job pressure, feel more underemployed, and perceive less supervisor support when their children are younger. Introducing more time-flexible paid parental leave policies and changing “ideal worker” norms would help reduce stress and promote better health and productivity of employed mothers.

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Table 1. Means (Std.) for Variables for the Total Sample and by Childrearing Stage ( $N = 405, 1620$  person-years)

	Total sample			Childrearing Stage							
	Range			6 months		15 months		Third Grade		Fifth Grade	
Work-family conflict											
WFC	1 – 4	1.93	(0.72)	1.95	(0.69)	1.99	(0.73)	1.92	(0.74)	1.86	(0.74) <sup>*b</sup>
FWC	1 – 4	1.47	(0.49)	1.54	(0.51)	1.52	(0.50)	1.42	(0.46) <sup>**b</sup>	1.40	(0.48) <sup>***c</sup>
Job demands											
Weekly work hours	1 – 91	36.34	(11.87)	34.63	(11.85)	35.79	(11.20)	37.02	(12.71) <sup>**</sup>	37.90	(11.46) <sup>***b</sup>
Occupation											
Management	0 – 1	0.15		0.13		0.14		0.15		0.18	*
Professional	0 – 1	0.28		0.27		0.27		0.30		0.29	
Non-professional	0 – 1	0.57		0.60		0.59		0.55		0.53	*
Job pressure	1 – 4	1.83	(0.78)	2.00	(0.72)	1.96	(0.72)	1.71	(0.83) <sup>***c</sup>	1.65	(0.78) <sup>***c</sup>
Job resources											
Feeling underemployed	1 – 4	1.66	(0.70)	1.82	(0.73)	1.82	(0.73)	1.47	(0.61) <sup>***c</sup>	1.54	(0.64) <sup>***c</sup>
Supervisor support	1 – 4	3.15	(0.71)	3.01	(0.68)	3.04	(0.70)	3.27	(0.70) <sup>***c</sup>	3.29	(0.71) <sup>***c</sup>
Task significance	1 – 4	2.93	(0.69)	2.94	(0.63)	2.97	(0.64)	2.89	(0.77)	2.92	(0.71)
Job flexibility	-1 – 1	-0.02	(0.97)	-0.04	(0.96)	-0.05	(0.92)	-0.02	(1.00)	0.01	(0.98)
Controls											
Family income (in thousands)	0 – 450	69.92	(52.04)	56.96	(38.39)	56.59	(40.44)	79.15	(57.79) <sup>***b</sup>	86.98	(60.68) <sup>***c</sup>
Number of children	1 – 8	2.04	(0.93)	1.80	(0.91)	1.82	(0.92)	2.26	(0.87) <sup>***b</sup>	2.27	(0.90) <sup>***c</sup>
Relationship status											
Married	0 – 1	0.82		0.85		0.84		0.80	*** <sup>a</sup>	0.78	*** <sup>a</sup>
Cohabiting	0 – 1	0.05		0.05		0.05		0.03		0.05	
Single	0 – 1	0.14		0.10		0.11		0.16	*** <sup>a</sup>	0.17	*** <sup>a</sup>

Differences from 6 months were significant at <sup>\*</sup> $p < .05$ ; <sup>\*\*</sup> $p < .01$ ; <sup>\*\*\*</sup> $p < .001$  level.

Differences from 15 months were significant at <sup>a</sup> $p < .05$ ; <sup>b</sup> $p < .01$ ; and <sup>c</sup> $p < .001$  level.

Table 2. Fixed Effects Models Predicting Association Between Childrearing Stage and Job Resources (N = 405, 1620 person-years )

	Feeling underemployed		Supervisor support		Task significance		Job flexibility	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Childrearing stage <sup>a</sup>								
15 months	.006	.044	.017	.047	.017	.047	.017	.047
Third grade	-.225	.047*** <sup>d</sup>	.165	.051** <sup>c</sup>	-.135	.051** <sup>c</sup>	-.135	.051** <sup>c</sup>
Fifth grade	-.130	.048** <sup>c</sup>	.165	.051*** <sup>c</sup>	-.111	.051* <sup>b</sup>	-.111	.051* <sup>b</sup>
Job demands								
Work hours	.005	.001**	-.001	.002	.002	.002	.002	.002
Management <sup>a</sup>	-.321	.050***	.153	.054**	.115	.054*	.115	.054*
Professional <sup>a</sup>	-.183	.039***	.126	.044**	.180	.042***	.180	.042***
Job pressure	.300	.022***	-.278	.024***	-.064	.024**	-.064	.024**
Controls								
Family income	-.002	.000***	.000	.000	.002	.000***	.002	.000***
# of children	-.013	.018	-.015	.022	-.008	.020	-.008	.020
Cohabiting <sup>a</sup>	.059	.076	.005	.087	-.107	.081	-.107	.081
Single <sup>a</sup>	.137	.050**	-.051	.056	-.037	.054	-.037	.054

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>Omitted reference categories are: 6 months, non-professional, married.

Differences in the coefficients from 15 months were significant at <sup>b</sup> $p < .05$ ; <sup>c</sup> $p < .01$ ; <sup>d</sup> $p < .001$ .

Table 3. Fixed Effects Regression Models Predicting the Association Between Childrearing Stage and WFC (N = 405, 1620 person-years).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Childrearing stage <sup>a</sup>										
15 months	.041	.051	.039	.051	.044	.045	.043	.048	.044	.044
Third grade	-.033	.052	-.049	.053	.057	.048	.028	.052	.057	.047
Fifth grade	-.100	.051* <sup>b</sup>	-.111	.054* <sup>b</sup>	.014	.048	-.046	.052	.008	.047
Job demands										
Work hours					.013	.001***			.012	.001***
Management <sup>a</sup>					-.017	.049			.042	.049
Professional <sup>a</sup>					-.023	.040			.006	.040
Job pressure					.388	.023***			.347	.024***
Job resources										
Feeling underemployed							.219	.028***	.103	.027***
Supervisor support							-.057	.033	.035	.029
Task significance							-.075	.029*	-.128	.027***
Job flexibility							-.119	.018***	-.073	.017***
Controls										
Family income			-.001	.000	-.002	.000***	.000	.000	-.001	.000***
Number of children			.066	.021**	.087	.018***	.068	.020***	.086	.018***
Cohabiting <sup>a</sup>			.027	.088	-.020	.077	.035	.084	-.009	.076
Single <sup>a</sup>			.044	.057	-.055	.051	.002	.054	-.063	.050

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>Omitted reference categories are: 6 months, non-professional, married.

Differences in the coefficients from 15 months were significant at <sup>b</sup> $p < .01$ .

Table 4. Fixed Effects Regression Models Predicting the Association Between Childrearing Stage and FWC ( $N = 405$ , 1620 person-years).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Childrearing stage <sup>a</sup>										
15 months	-.018	.035	-.018	.035	-.003	.032	-.016	.034	-.003	.032
Third grade	-.119	.034*** <sup>b</sup>	-.146	.036*** <sup>c</sup>	-.052	.034	-.109	.036*** <sup>b</sup>	-.054	.034
Fifth grade	-.146	.034*** <sup>c</sup>	-.179	.036*** <sup>c</sup>	-.065	.035	-.148	.036*** <sup>c</sup>	-.071	.035*
Job demands										
Work hours					-.003	.001**			-.003	.001**
Management <sup>a</sup>					.030	.035			.053	.036
Professional <sup>a</sup>					.027	.028			.041	.028
Job pressure					.254	.016***			.241	.018***
Job resources										
Feeling underemployed							.105	.020***	.049	.020*
Supervisor support							-.028	.021	.031	.020
Task significance							-.034	.020	-.062	.019**
Job flexibility							-.034	.013**	-.021	.012
Controls										
Family income			.001	.000*	.000	.000	.001	.000**	.000	.000
Number of children			.028	.014*	.032	.013*	.029	.013*	.032	.013*
Cohabiting <sup>a</sup>			.068	.058	.076	.055	.063	.058	.075	.055
Single <sup>a</sup>			.054	.038	.035	.036	.032	.038	.030	.036

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>Omitted reference categories are: 6 months, non-professional, married.

Differences in the coefficients from 15 months were significant at <sup>b</sup> $p < .01$ ; <sup>c</sup> $p < .001$ .

Appendix Table 1. Sample Characteristics of the Analytical Sample ( $N = 405$ )

	<i>M</i>	<i>Std.</i>	Range
Mother's age at birth	29.56	(4.95)	18 – 43
Mother's education			
< high school	0.02		0 – 1
High school diploma	0.20		0 – 1
Some college	0.35		0 – 1
College degree	0.25		0 – 1
Advanced degree	0.18		0 – 1
Mother's race-ethnicity			
White	0.85		0 – 1
Black	0.09		0 – 1
Hispanic or other race	0.06		0 – 1
Mother's relationship status at birth			
Married	0.86		0 – 1
Cohabiting	0.05		0 – 1
Single	0.09		0 – 1
The focal child's gender (1 = girls)	0.49		0 – 1
The focal child's birth order (1 = first child)	0.46		0 – 1

Figure 1. Mothers' Work-Family Conflict by Childrearing Stage

