

*Generally, the value mothers place on paid work in their lives is closely matched to their labour force status.*

*But sometimes there is a mismatch.*

**JENNIFER RENDA AND JODY HUGHES**

*look at whether those mothers with a mismatch feel less in control of their lives in general.*



## *The value mothers place on paid work and their feelings of life control*

**T**he proportion of mothers participating in the paid workforce has increased dramatically over recent years, from 45.3 per cent in 1983 to 64.2 per cent in 2003 (ABS 2003). As a result, a great deal of research attention has been paid to the impact of mothers' employment on family life and on the wellbeing of children and parents (particularly mothers). Less attention has been paid to how mothers feel about paid work and specifically what happens when their actual hours of paid work don't match their orientation to paid work.

Research has demonstrated that mothers' work orientation (for example, the importance they place on career) is closely related to their actual labour force status (Hakim 2003; Probert 1996; Barlow and Duncan 2000; Himmelweit and Sigala 2003). But many mothers also experience a mismatch between the two. It seems likely that these mothers would have a reduced sense of wellbeing compared to those whose work orientation and labour force status are more closely matched. Several theories of subjective wellbeing consider happiness or life satisfaction to depend strongly on the extent to which aspirations or goals are met, or are in the process of being met (see Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith 1999).

Studies have found that women who stay home, despite having a strong preference for working,

experience lower self-esteem, less positive experiences of motherhood and higher rates of stress and depression than other women (Pistrang 1984; Hock and DeMeis 1990). On the other hand, these same studies did not find that women who were in paid work when they had a desire to be at home with their children had reduced wellbeing. However, Helms-Erikson, Tanner and Crouter (2000) found that among employed, partnered women, those who were more orientated towards paid employment were less depressed and experienced less marital conflict than those who were less orientated towards employment.

It is not surprising that no simple and straightforward picture is apparent in the relationship between mothers' wellbeing and the degree to which their work orientation and labour force status match, for many other factors are likely to influence wellbeing (see Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith 1999). One factor that seems to be important is the degree to which mothers feel in control of their lives. Indeed, sense of control – or similar concepts such as mastery, autonomy, competence and self-efficacy – has been seen as either one of the basic human needs (Maslow 1954; Deci and Ryan 2000), or as an important component of wellbeing (Bandura 1997; Ryff and Singer 1998). Reduced feelings of control have been linked to poorer health (Noor 2002), lower self-esteem (Phares 1976; Wang et al. 1999), poorer academic performance (Wang et al.



1999), higher levels of anxiety (Phares 1976), maladjustment (Allen 1997), lower levels of planning and problem solving (Wheaton 1983), and less effective coping methods (Menaghan 1983). A mother's sense of control over her life has also been linked to her children's wellbeing. For example, Rogers, Parcel and Menaghan (1991) found that mothers who feel a strong sense of control over their lives have children with fewer behavioural problems.

Control may mediate the effect on wellbeing of a mismatch between work orientation and labour force status (Avison 1995; Noor 2002). That is, not being able to achieve preferred work arrangements (which we assume are closely related to work orientation) may lead to lower levels of perceived control over life, which may in turn lead to lower levels of wellbeing. The opposite causal direction is also plausible. A low sense of control may lead to a mismatch between employment orientation and outcomes, as those who feel less control over their lives may be less likely to pursue their preferred working arrangements. This in turn may lead to decreased wellbeing.

Little research has been conducted on the relationship between work orientation, labour force status and control. The one study we are aware of (Avison 1995) found that employment positively affected women's sense of mastery overall, but the positive effects were overshadowed for women who were anxious about their family care-giving role. With this in mind, we further explore the relationship between work orientation, labour force status and control using data from the Australian Institute of Family Studies 2002 Family and Work Decisions survey. This survey included a nationally representative random sample of 2405 Australian mothers who receive a Family Tax Benefit (FTB) payment (either FTBA or FTBB) as a fortnightly payment through Centrelink (some of whom also receive an income support payment).<sup>1</sup> Half of the survey respondents

were lone mothers and half were couple mothers. Only respondents with at least one child aged less than 16 years, and with complete information on all survey items, were included in this analysis – providing a final sample of 1968.<sup>2</sup>

The survey includes a number of questions about mothers' employment situation, their attitudes towards paid work and family responsibilities, and their sense of mastery or control over their lives. Using these data, we first identify the degree to which mothers' work orientations match their actual labour force status. We then examine how discordance between work orientation and labour force status relates to mothers' sense of control over their lives. Both bivariate and multivariate analyses are presented. A summary of findings and policy implications are included in the final section.

### ***Mothers' work orientations and actual work arrangements***

In the Family and Work Decisions survey, mothers were asked to respond to a series of statements about the importance they placed on career, and the compatibility of motherhood and paid employment. These statements, adapted from questions included in the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's (NICHD) "Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development" (SECC), were:

- I can't picture having a fully satisfying life without a career.
- I want to advance to the top of my career, even if it involves some costs in other areas of my life.
- For children growing up, working mothers are good role models for leading busy and productive lives.

Each statement was measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 equals "strongly agree", and 5 equals "strongly disagree". The rankings on each of the three statements were summed together to derive a composite measure of the value (in terms of both their own careers and the perceived benefit to their children) each respondent places on participation in paid employment.<sup>3</sup> The scores were reversed so that low scores indicate low value placed on paid work and high scores indicate high value placed on paid work. The mothers were then divided into three roughly equally sized groups, with the bottom third labelled "low work orientation", the middle third "average work orientation", and the top third "high work orientation".

To describe actual work status, five labour force states, similar to those used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), were used. Those who were working 35 hours or more per week were defined as "full-time employed". Those who were working between 1 and 34 hours per week were defined as "part-time employed". Those who were not working, but were actively looking for work and available to start work within a month were defined as "unemployed". Those who were not working but would have liked to have been in paid work (either not actively

looking for work or actively looking but unable to start within a month) were defined as “marginally attached” to the labour force. Those who were not working and not interested in being in paid work were defined as “not attached” to the labour force.

	Low work orientation	Average work orientation	High work orientation	Total
Per cent				
Full-time employed	13.4	20.7	22.1	18.3
Part-time employed	37.3	44.4	43.1	41.3
Unemployed	5.9	8.3	11.1	8.2
Marginally attached	9.5	7.1	8.4	8.4
Not attached	33.9	19.5	15.2	23.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Observations (Total)	759	604	605	1968

Source: Family and Work Decisions survey, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2002.

	Low work orientation	Average work orientation	High work orientation	Total
Looking after children and home	77.1	70.5	67.0	72.7
Difficulty finding suitable work	13.5	21.3	26.6	19.0
Own health	11.0	15.0	11.3	12.2
Children's or others health	10.8	15.9	7.9	11.4
Studying	3.9	7.2	17.2	8.3
Lack of child care	6.1	7.2	11.3	7.8
Cost of child care	5.8	9.2	7.9	7.3
Already have enough money for family	7.7	8.2	4.4	7.0
Would not gain financially if working	5.5	7.2	7.4	6.5
Partner's wishes	6.4	6.3	3.0	5.4
Other	11.0	7.7	11.3	10.2
Total	158.8	175.8	175.4	167.7
Observations	362	207	203	772

Source: Family and Work Decisions survey, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2002  
Note: Columns sum to more than 100 per cent because respondents could give multiple reasons for not being in paid employment.

	Low work orientation	Average work orientation	High work orientation	Total
<b>Full-time employed *</b>				
Prefer fewer hours	44.4	45.2	43.2	44.2
Prefer same hours	47.5	46.0	46.2	46.5
Prefer more hours	8.1	8.9	10.6	9.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Observations	99	124	132	355
<b>Part-time employed **</b>				
Prefer fewer hours	12.4	12.1	10.0	11.5
Prefer same hours	60.0	54.5	46.3	53.8
Prefer more hours	27.6	33.3	43.6	34.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Observations	275	264	259	798

Source: Family and Work Decisions survey, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2002.  
Note: \*  $p=9.66$ ,  $\chi^2=0.574$  \*\*  $p=0.004$ ,  $\chi^2=15.470$ .

Mother's orientation towards paid work at a given point in time is obviously conditioned by various aspects of her life. However, for the purpose of this paper, respondents were considered to have a “mismatch” between their work orientation and labour force status if they were highly orientated towards paid employment but were not working, or if they had a low orientation towards paid employment but were working full-time. Part-time employment was considered separately as it is less clear whether it should be considered a match or mismatch (an issue revisited later in this paper).

Table 1 presents the labour force status and patterns of work orientation of respondents at the time of the survey.

Overall, there was a statistically significant relationship between the value respondents placed on paid work and their labour force status. Lower proportions of those with low work orientation were found to be in the labour force (that is, employed full-time or part-time, or unemployed) compared to those with high work orientation. Similarly, a substantially higher proportion of those with low work orientation were outside the labour force (marginally attached or not attached) compared to those with high work orientation.

However, there were also respondents who had a clear mismatch between their work orientation and employment circumstances. First, half (50.7 per cent) of the respondents who gave low value to paid employment were in fact employed (13.4 per cent full-time and 37.3 per cent part-time). Further, among those who were highly work orientated, 11.1 per cent were unemployed, 8.4 per cent were marginally attached, and 15.2 per cent were not attached to the labour force. That means that around a third (34.7 per cent) of mothers who were highly work orientated were not employed.

A mismatch between work orientation and labour force status may indicate that, for some mothers, other factors were more dominant than work orientation in their decisions regarding their level of workforce participation, such as financial need. For others, mismatch may reflect an inability to achieve desired labour force states, such as difficulty finding suitable work. It is useful to explore the reasons for mismatch, as they are likely to be important in determining its implications for mothers' wellbeing.

In order to do this we firstly compare the reasons given for not working by non-employed mothers with different levels of work orientation (see Table 2). We then turn to those who were working and examine desired hours of work in relation to work orientation (See Table 3).

Results in Tables 2 and 3 indicate that for many mothers, mismatch may result from an inability to achieve desired employment states particularly for highly work orientated mothers. When mothers who were not working were asked to give the reasons why they were not working (Table 2), those with high work orientation were more likely to point to barriers to employment than mothers with low work orientation. These include difficulty finding suitable work (26.6 per cent compared to 13.5 per cent) or childcare (7.8 per cent compared to 6.1 per cent) and the cost of childcare (7.9 per cent compared to 5.8 per cent). In

contrast, those who were less work orientated were more likely than those who were more work orientated to give choice based reasons for not working such as “looking after my children and home” (77.1 per cent compared 70.5 per cent) and “I already have enough money for my family’s needs” (7.7 per cent compared to 4.4 per cent).

The analysis of preferred work hours, presented in Table 3, looks at full-time and part-time workers separately. It shows no statistically significant difference between level of work orientation and preferred hours of work for those employed full-time. This may indicate that other factors, such as financial benefits, provide motivation for low work orientated mothers to maintain full-time work hours.

The relationship between level of work orientation and preferred hours of work was significant, however, among part-time employees. The proportion wanting to work more hours was higher among the highly work orientated compared with those who had low work orientation (43.6 per cent compared to 27.6 per cent), and conversely, the proportion wanting to work fewer or the same hours was smaller among the highly work orientated than among those with lower work orientation (10.0 per cent and 46.3 per cent respectively). These findings suggest that part-time hours may not be sufficient to allow many highly work orientated mothers to feel satisfied with their level of work force participation and that there may be barriers that prevent many of these mothers from being able to work longer hours.

Overall, these results confirm that mothers’ work orientations are related to their labour force status, but there are also many mothers who appear to experience a mismatch between the two. The results also provide some insight into reasons for mismatch for the two different groups (those highly career focused but not working and those low in career focus but working). This is likely to be important in determining the impact of a mismatch on mothers’ feelings of control over their lives.

### Mothers’ feelings of life control

We now turn to examine how a mismatch between work orientation and labour force status relates to mothers’ feelings of life control. We use the three career orientation categories from the previous section, but the variable we use for labour force status is slightly different. The number of respondents who were marginally attached is too small to provide useful results when examined in relation to the control and work orientation measures, therefore those who were marginally attached are combined with those who were unemployed on the grounds that both groups are seeking work in some sense.

Two measures of control have most commonly been used in the literature. The first is Rotter’s (1966) “locus of control” scale. Rotter defines “locus of control” as the degree to which a person sees life

outcomes as being contingent upon their own behaviour or attributes (“internal” locus of control) as opposed to forces outside of themselves such as fate or other people (“external” locus of control). The other key measure of control is known as the “sense of mastery” scale. Sense of mastery refers to the “extent to which one regards one’s



**Part-time hours may not be sufficient to allow many highly work orientated mothers to feel satisfied with their level of work force participation.**

own life chances as being under one’s own control in contrast to being fatalistically ruled” (Pearlin and Schooler 1978).

The measure of control used in this paper is derived from numerical rankings mothers gave to two statements, one taken from Pearlin and Schooler’s (1978) “sense of mastery” scale, and one from Rotter’s (1966) “locus of control”

scale.<sup>4</sup> The statements were:

- I have little control over the things that happen to me.
- Every time I try to get ahead something or somebody stops me.

Each statement was measured on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 equals “strongly agree” and 5 equals “strongly disagree”). Mothers’ rankings on both of the statements were combined into a composite measure of the degree to which they felt they had control over their lives as opposed to feeling that external forces were in control. The resulting measure is also on a 5-point scale with a lower score meaning less control.

Table 4 presents data on the level of control mothers felt they had over their lives by their level of work orientation and their labour force status. Particular emphasis is given to examining levels of control for those with a clear mismatch between

**Table 4** Level of control mothers feel over their lives by their labour force status and level of work orientation

	Low work orientation**	Average work orientation**	High work orientation**	Total**
<b>Mean Control Score</b>				
Full-time employed	3.39 (0.93)	3.57 (0.93)	3.44 (0.87)	3.47 (0.91)
Part-time employed **	3.64 (0.90)	3.55 (0.92)	3.30 (0.97)	3.50 (0.94)
Unemployed/ Marginally attached**	3.31 (0.96)	3.28 (1.04)	3.00 (1.01)	3.19 (1.01)
Not attached *	3.47 (1.06)	3.36 (0.92)	3.21 (0.92)	3.39 (1.00)
Total **	3.50 (0.97)	3.48 (0.95)	3.26 (0.96)	3.42 (0.97)
Observations	762	605	605	1972

*Source:* Family and Work Decisions survey, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2002.  
*Note:* \* p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01 (one-way ANOVA). The number in brackets is the standard deviation.

their level of work orientation and their labour force status (those highly career focused but not working and those low in career focus but working).

The first thing to note from Table 4 is that the differences between the groups are quite small. However, when we focus on labour force status alone, mothers who were employed (either full-time or part-time) expressed significantly higher levels of control over their lives than mothers who were not employed. This is consistent with the results of Avison (1995).

When work orientation was examined alone, those with high work orientation expressed the *lowest* feelings of control, and those with low work orientation expressed the highest. The reason for this finding is not clear. However it may relate to the characteristics of this survey sample which consists only of mothers with dependent children. For mothers with low work orientation, feelings of control may be centred more around family life than work life (Pistrang 1984), and they may feel high levels of satisfaction and control over their lives regardless of whether or not they are working. In contrast, for mothers with high work orientation, feelings of control may be more dependent on achievements in paid work, yet responsibility for children makes participation in paid work difficult. Such tension may result in lesser feelings of control over life generally.

On the whole, mothers who had a mismatch between their level of work orientation and their labour force status reported feeling less control over their lives than mothers whose work orientation and labour force status matched. The one exception to this is that those who were unemployed or marginally attached felt least in control of their lives regardless of their level of work orientation (including those with low work orientation). This may be because unemployment itself may be considered a mismatch, as it is defined as wanting work but being unable to find it. While we have defined any category of not working as a match with low career orientation, this may be less appropriate for those unemployed or marginally than for those who are not attached to the labour force.

Comparing the two "mismatch" groups, control scores were lower for those with high work orientation who were not working than for those with low work orientation who were working full-time. These findings correspond with the results from Hock and DeMeis' (1990) study on self-esteem, indicating that a mismatch between attitudes and outcomes related to employment and motherhood may have a greater negative impact for those orientated towards work but not working, than for those not orientated towards work but working.

It is also worth considering levels of control for those in part-time employment in each of the work orientation groups. Interestingly, among mothers with low work orientation, part-time employees expressed the highest levels of control. Part-time work may provide a means for mothers who are not highly work orientated to spend time with their families while also earning an income. This in turn may lead them to feel that they have more control over their lives than mothers who feel they have either to sacrifice income and other work related benefits (those not working) or to sacrifice time with their children (those working full-time).

In contrast, for those with high work orientation, feelings of life control were highest among those working full-time, followed by those in part-time employment. This suggests that for highly work orientated mothers, full-time employment is preferred. This is supported by the findings in Table 3, which show that a large proportion of part-time employed mothers with high work orientation would have preferred to work longer hours. This may not reflect a desire for longer hours so much as a desire for opportunities for career advancement and training that tend to be associated with full-time rather than part-time employment (Whittard 2003).

### ***Other factors in the relationship between mismatch and control***

The results discussed above suggest that a mismatch between mothers' orientation towards paid employment and their actual employment circumstances may be negatively related to their sense of control. However, other characteristics are also likely to impact on mothers' sense of control over their lives, and may interact with their labour force status and career orientation.

Thus in this section, regression analysis is used to estimate the impact of a mismatch on mothers' sense of control over their lives, controlling for the effects of other possibly confounding factors (Tabachnik and Fidell 1996).

Two regression models were examined (see Table 5). In the first model both labour force status and work orientation were included as separate independent variables in order to identify their unique contribution to mothers' sense of control. Also controlled for were other variables which the literature suggests might also be related to sense of control – including health, relationship status, partner's employment status, highest level of education reached, housing situation, age of youngest child, and country of birth (Noor 2002; Wang, Kick, Fraser and Burns 1999; Avison 1995; Rotter 1966). Ordinary least squares regression was used.

In the second model we included a set of explanatory variables that combined respondents' labour force status with their work orientation to create 12 groups (as presented in Table 5). This allows us to show how different combinations of work orientation and labour force status relate to sense of control, and in particular how the combinations identified as a mismatch relate to control. The same set of variables as in the first model was controlled for.

Each categorical predictor variable with more than two categories is represented by a series of binary dummy variables in the models. The overall significance of the relationship to control of each categorical predictor variable was determined (for results see notes for Table 5). The significance of each of the binary dummy variables that comprised the relevant categorical predictor variable was also tested (coefficients for the binary dummy variables are presented in Table 5).

*Results from the first regression model*, which included only the labour force status and work orientation variables as predictors, show that labour

force status was not significantly related to respondents' perceived levels of control when the other variables in the model were controlled for ( $F=2.17$ ,  $p=.089$ ). In the bi-variate analyses (presented in Table 4), both those employed full-time and those employed part-time had significantly higher levels of control than those who were not employed. The lack of statistical significance in the multivariate context may be due to the close relationship that

exists between labour force status and other variables included as control variables in the model (such as housing circumstances and health).

However, the results show that work orientation was significantly related to feelings of control for the mothers in this study ( $F=12.493$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The results in Table 5 show that reported levels of control were lowest for highly work orientated mothers. There was no difference in levels of control reported

**Table 5** Regression predicting mother's level of control

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coefficients (B)	Standard error	Coefficients (B)	Standard error
<b>Labour force status</b>				
Full-time employed	0.044	0.072	-	-
Part-time employed	0.094	0.058	-	-
Marginally attached/unemployed	-0.060	0.07	-	-
Not attached (omitted category)				
<b>Work orientation</b>				
Low work orientation	0.041	0.053	-	-
High work orientation	-0.217**	0.055	-	-
Average work orientation (omitted category)				
<b>Interaction of labour force status and work orientation</b>				
Full-time employed, low work orientation	-	-	-0.135	0.11
Part-time employed, low work orientation	-	-	0.084	0.08
Unemployed/marginally attached, low work orientation	-	-	-0.120	0.106
Not attached, low work orientation	-	-	-0.043	0.083
Full-time employed, average work orientation	-	-	-0.023	0.103
Unemployed/marginally attached, low orientation	-	-	-0.129	0.114
Not attached, average work orientation	-	-	-0.135	0.107
Full-time employed, high work orientation	-	-	-0.189	0.101
Part-time employed, high work orientation	-	-	-0.258**	0.083
Unemployed/marginally attached, high work orientation	-	-	-0.383**	0.108
Not attached, high work orientation	-	-	-0.281**	0.117
Part-time, average work orientation (omitted category)				
<b>Relationship and partner's employment status</b>				
Has employed partner	0.008	0.05	0.010	0.05
Has partner who is not employed	-0.050	0.091	-0.052	0.092
Does not have partner (omitted category)				
<b>Highest level of education reached</b>				
Less than year 10	-0.419**	0.101	-0.412**	0.102
Year 10 or 11	-0.301**	0.076	-0.293**	0.076
Vocation or trade qualification	-0.130*	0.072	-0.122*	0.072
Diploma	0.090	0.089	0.100	0.089
Degree or higher	0.195**	0.087	0.194**	0.087
Year 12 (omitted category)				
<b>Housing situation</b>				
Renting public housing	-0.271**	0.091	-0.262**	0.091
Renting privately	-0.106	0.068	-0.105	0.068
Buying home	-0.033	0.056	-0.033	0.056
Owns home outright (omitted category)				
<b>Age of youngest child</b>				
Less than 4 years	0.130*	0.068	0.130**	0.068
4-5 years	0.050	0.081	0.049	0.081
6-12 years	0.019	0.055	0.016	0.055
13-15 years (omitted category)				
<b>Country of birth</b>				
English-speaking background country	0.085	0.071	0.086	0.071
Non-English-speaking background country	-0.092	0.086	-0.097	0.086
Australia (omitted category)				
<b>Health</b>				
Poor health	-0.336**	0.073	-0.333**	0.073
Good health (omitted category)			0.010	0.05

Source: Family and Work Decisions survey, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2002.

Notes: \*  $p<0.1$ , \*\*  $p<0.05$ .

Model 1:  $R=0.296$ ,  $R\text{ Square}=0.088$ , Adjusted  $R\text{ Square}=0.078$ ,  $df=21/1916$ .

Model 2:  $R=0.3$ ,  $R\text{ Square}=0.09$ , Adjusted  $R\text{ Square}=0.077$ ,  $df=27/1916$ .

Joint tests of significance were carried out for the categorical predictor variables in each of the regression models. The results are as follows:

Model 1: labour force status,  $df=3$ ,  $F=2.17$ ,  $p=0.09$ ; work orientation,  $df=2$ ,  $F=12.49$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Relationship and partner's employment status,  $df=2$ ,  $F=0.20$ ,  $p=0.82$ ; Highest level of education reached,  $df=5$ ,  $F=13.97$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Housing situation,  $df=3$ ,  $F=3.31$ ,  $p=0.02$ ; Age of youngest child,  $df=3$ ,  $F=1.51$ ,  $p=0.21$ ; Country of birth,  $df=2$ ,  $F=1.43$ ,  $p=0.24$ .

Model 2: Interaction of labour force status and work orientation,  $df=11$ ,  $F=3.18$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Relationship and partner's employment status,  $df=2$ ,  $F=0.22$ ,  $p=0.80$ ; Highest level of education reached,  $df=5$ ,  $F=13.58$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Housing situation,  $df=3$ ,  $F=3.09$ ,  $p=0.03$ ; Age of youngest child,  $df=3$ ,  $F=1.53$ ,  $p=0.21$ ; Country of birth,  $df=2$ ,  $F=1.52$ ,  $p=0.22$ .

by those with low and average levels of work orientation. This pattern is consistent with that found in the bi-variate analysis – namely, those with high levels of work orientation had significantly lower levels of control than those with either low or average levels of work orientation.

Looking at the effect of the other variables included in the model, having poor health, having lower levels of education, and renting public housing were also negatively related to control.

The results of the second regression model show that the set of variables combining labour force status and career orientation were also significantly related to control ( $F=3.183$ ,  $P<0.001$ ). For the omitted group we chose mothers who had average levels of work orientation and

**Responsibility for children makes participation in paid work more difficult, but achievements in paid work may be closely tied to feelings of control for those who place a high value on career in their lives.**

were working part-time, as this was the largest group of mothers in the sample, and because this combination was a clear example of a match between career orientation and labour force status against which to compare our mismatch groups. Results in Table 5 show that when comparing to this group, mothers who were highly work orientated but were not working full-time reported significantly lower levels of control. This included highly work orientated mothers working part-time as well as highly work orientated mothers who were not working.

In contrast, results show that mothers with low levels of work orientation who were working full-time did not have significantly lower levels of control than the omitted group. This finding strengthens the conclusion drawn from the bi-variate analyses that a mismatch between attitudes and outcomes related to employment may have a greater negative impact for mothers orientated towards work but not working, than for mothers not orientated towards work but working.

### **Conclusions and policy implications**

Previous studies have found that mothers' work orientation and labour force status tend to match, but in cases where they do not, measures of health and wellbeing tend to be lower (Helms-Erikson, Tanner and Crouter 2000; Hock and DeMeis 1990; Pistrang 1984). The above analyses showed a clear relationship between mothers' labour force status and orientation towards paid employment, but also identified a substantial number of mothers whose labour force status and work orientation did not match (13.4 per cent of mothers with a low work orientation were full-time employed and 34.7 per cent of mothers with a high work orientated were not employed). While mothers with a mismatch tended to report lower feelings of

control over their lives than the other mothers in the survey, only those who had a high orientation towards paid employment but were not working reported significantly lower levels of control. This pattern was still evident even when other factors that may influence this relationship were taken into account and controlled for in a multivariate context.

Previous studies have shown that mothers who report feeling low levels of control over their lives fare worse on measures of health and wellbeing, as do their children. Thus, targeting mothers who are not attached to the labour force but who have a high work orientation, with active labour market policies (such as paid maternity leave, provision of high quality affordable child care, tax incentives for secondary earners, and flexible working hours for both women and their partners) is likely to lead to a net increase in wellbeing for mothers and their families, particularly for those who were not in paid work due to perceived barriers to employment. These positive effects are likely to occur regardless of whether feelings of control are perceived to be changeable or fixed; and regardless of whether feelings of control are perceived to be the cause or result of a mismatch between labour force status and work orientation.

We also found in bi-variate analysis, that among mothers with low work orientation, reported levels of control were lower among those working full-time. Policies that support these mothers to reduce their hours of paid work (such as financial assistance to stay home and care for children, and access to quality part-time employment) may increase their feelings of control and family wellbeing. However, we should be cautious in drawing this conclusion because this group did not have significantly lower levels of control than more matched groups in a multivariate context.

It is also noteworthy that, when focusing on work orientation alone, mothers with high work orientation reported significantly lower levels of control than those with average or low work orientation. This finding is interesting and worthy of future research. As mentioned earlier, this finding may be specific to this survey sample which consists only of mothers with dependent children. Responsibility for children makes participation in paid work more difficult, but achievements in paid work may be closely tied to feelings of control for those who place a high value on career in their lives. This reinforces the potential benefit of policies that assist mothers with high career orientation in combining child rearing with paid employment.

Results surrounding part-time employment are also particularly interesting. Of mothers with low work orientation, it was part-time employees who expressed the highest levels of control. Therefore policies that increase opportunities to take up part-time employment (such as the option to reduce working hours after the birth of children, increased number of permanent rather than casual part-time



positions) may be beneficial for mothers with low work orientation.

In contrast to those with low work orientation, the results of the regression analysis show that for highly work orientated mothers, feelings of life control are relatively low amongst those working anything less than full-time. As suggested earlier, this may not reflect a desire for longer hours so much as a desire for opportunities for career advancement and training that tend to be associated with full-time rather than part-time employment. Therefore, policies that assist highly work orientated mothers in taking up (or continuing) full-time employment or longer part-time hours (such as the provision of affordable, high quality child care) and improvement in workplace factors (such as the quality of part-time work) may increase their feelings of control over their lives and their own and their children's health and wellbeing.

To conclude, these findings suggest that there is a relationship between mothers' sense of control over their lives and the degree to which their work orientation matches their actual labour force status. Due to the close relationship that has been found between control and wellbeing, policies that enhance mothers' abilities to achieve their preferred patterns of employment may have a positive impact, not only on mothers' feeling of control over their lives but also on their health and wellbeing.

Future research could explore the processes by which work orientation and labour force status are linked to feelings of life control, and the causal direction of such relationships. Future research could also explore why mothers who have low work orientation but are working full-time do not have notably lower levels of control. Research on how financial factors feature in these processes may also shed light on these issues.

## References

- ABS (1983), *Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families*, Catalogue No. 6224.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.
- ABS (2003), *Data Cubes, June, table fm1*, Catalogue No. 6203.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.
- Allen, B. (1997), *Personality Theories: Development, Growth and Diversity*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, USA.
- Avison, W. (1995), "Roles and resources: The effects of family structure and employment on women's psychosocial resources and psychological distress", *Research in Community and Mental Health*, vol. 8, pp. 233-256.
- Bandura, A. (1997), *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*, Freeman, New York.
- Barlow, A. & Duncan, S. (2000), "Supporting families? New labour's communitarianism and the 'rationality mistake': Part 1", *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 23-42.
- Borman, G. & Rachuba, L. (2001), "Academic success among poor and minority students: An analysis of competing models of school effects", *Report No. 52*, Centre for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA.
- FaCS (2003), *Annual Report*, Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra.
- Diener, E., Suh, E., Lucas, R. & Smith, H. (1999), "Subjective wellbeing: Three decades of progress", *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 125, no. 2, pp. 276-302.
- Hakim, K. (2003), *Models of the Family in Modern Societies: Ideals and Realities*, Ashgate, England.
- Helms-Erikson, H. Tanner, J., Crouter, A. & McHale, S. (2000), "Do women's provider-role attitudes moderate links between work and family?", *Journal of Family Psychology*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 658-670.
- Himmelweit, S. & Sigala, M. (2003), "Choice and the relationship between attitudes and behaviour for mothers with preschool children: Some implications for policy", *Harveke Research Institute Working Paper No. 23*, University of South Australia, South Australia.
- Hock, E. & DeMeis, D. (1990), "Depression in mothers of infants: The role of maternal employment", *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 285-291.
- Maslow, A. (1954), *Motivation and Personality*, Harper, New York.
- Menaghan, E. (1983), "Individual coping efforts: Moderators of the relationship between life stress and mental health outcomes", in Kaplan, H. (ed.) *Psychosocial Stress: Trends in Theory and Research*, Academic Press, New York.
- Noor, N. (2002), "Work-family conflict, locus of control, and women's wellbeing: Tests of alternative pathways", *The Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 142, no. 5, pp. 645-662.
- Pearlin & Schooler (1978), "The structure of coping", *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, vol. 19, pp. 2-21.
- Phares, E. (1976), *Locus of Control in Personality*, General Learning Press, Morristown, New Jersey.
- Pistrang, N. (1984), "Women's work involvement and experience of new motherhood", *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 46, pp.433-447.
- Probert, B. (2002), "Grateful slaves or self-made women: A matter of choice or policy", *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 17, no. 37, pp. 7-17.
- Rotter, J. (1966), "Generalised expectancies for internal versus external locus of control", *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, vol. 80, no. 1, pp. 1-28.
- Ryff, C. (1998), "The contours of positive human health", *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 9, pp. 1-28.
- Tabachnik, B. G. & Fidell, L. S. (1996), *Using Multivariate Statistics*, 3rd edn, Harper Collins, Northridge.
- Wang, L., Kick, E., Fraser, J. & Burns, T. (1999), "Status attainment in America: The roles of locus of control and self-esteem in educational and occupational outcomes", *Sociological Spectrum*, vol. 19, pp. 281-298.
- Wheaton, B. (1983), "Stress, personal coping resources, and psychiatric symptoms: An investigation of interactive models", *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, vol. 24, pp. 208-229.
- Whittard, J. (2003), "Training and career experiences of part-time women workers in a finance sector organization: persistent remnant of the 'Reserve Army'?", *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 537-557.

## Endnotes

- 1 In the 2002-2003 financial year just over 2 million families received fortnightly FTB payments through Centrelink, accounting for 93 per cent of all FTB recipients (FaCS 2003).
- 2 227 respondents were excluded because of missing values: 133 respondents were missing on labour force status, 67 on career orientation, 42 on control, and 15 on more than one of these measures.
- 3 The validity of combining these three statements as a measure of work orientation was tested using the alpha statistic ( $\alpha=0.59$ ). Consideration was given to using just the first two more career focused questions, but the reliability was greater with the three measures included ( $\alpha=0.57$ ).
- 4 A further two questions from the sense of mastery scale were included in the survey, but were not included in the control measure. The alpha scores were found to be higher when only the two questions were included ( $\alpha=0.55$ ) compared to when all four questions were included ( $\alpha=0.45$ ). Also, the findings were similar when using the two items or all four items, but the trends were clearer when only two items were included. The validity of the control measure was tested, using self-reported health measures. Past research has found a strong relationship between measures of control and health outcomes (Noor 2002; Phares 1976). Results from the current research also showed a strong, statistically significant relationship between these variables, with the average control measure being 2.80 for those with poor health, 3.20 for those with good health, and 3.65 for those with excellent health ( $f=13.485$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Jennifer Renda and Jody Hughes are researchers in the Family and Society research program at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) in the implementation of the Family and Work Decisions Study.