

Mothers' work–family strain in single and couple parent families: the role of job characteristics and supports

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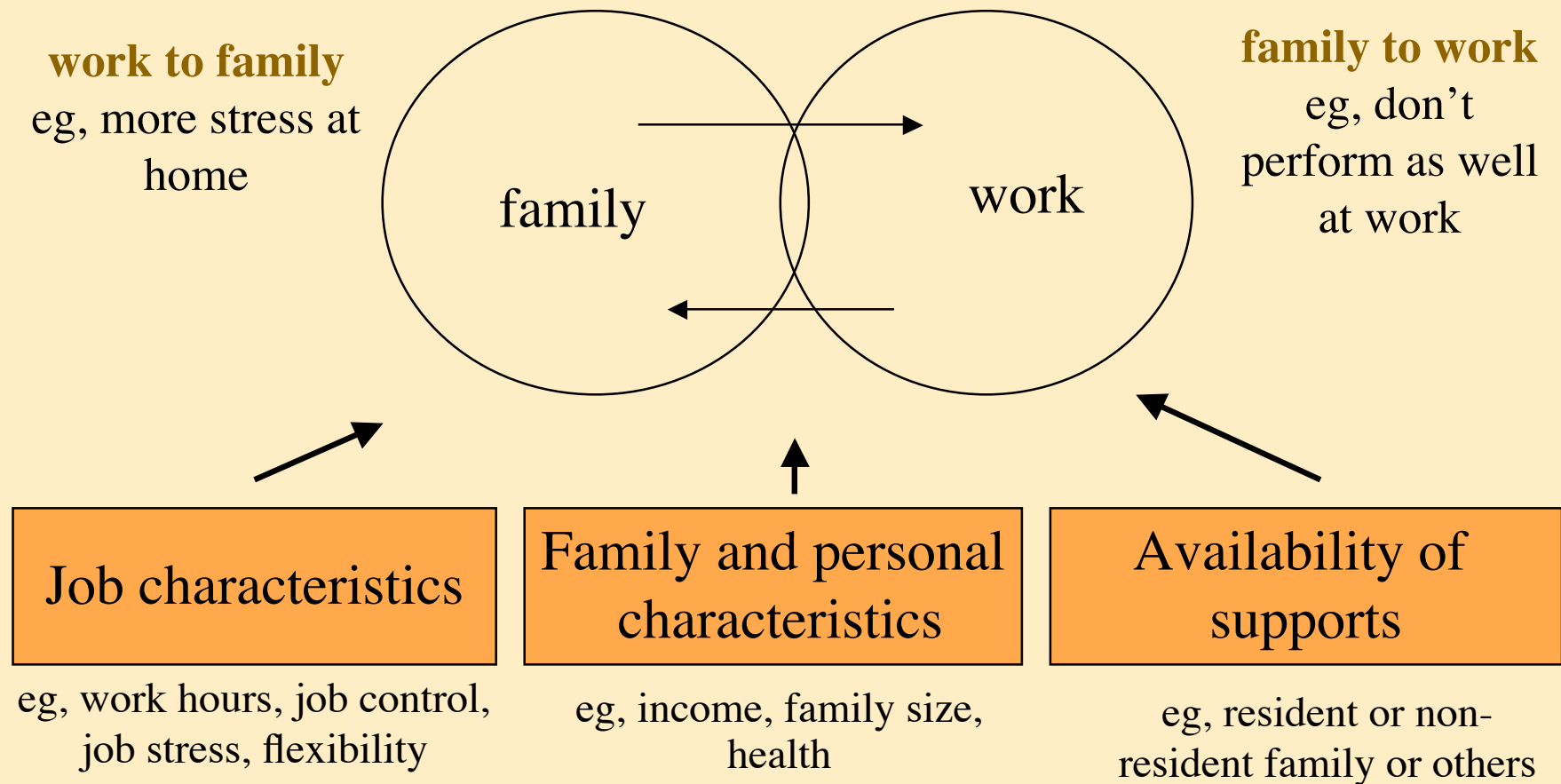
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Framework: Work-family strain



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Single and couple mothers

- **Single mothers don't have the opportunities for support of resident partner**
 - ◆ does this, on its own, make a difference to work-family strain?
- **Across all mothers, what factors are related to more (or less) work-family strain?**
 - ◆ are some factors more (or less important) for single versus couple mothers?
- **Are different characteristics of single and couple mothers important in understanding differences in work-family strain?**



Data: Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)

- **First wave of LSAC (2004)**
 - ◆ Spillover measures in self-complete questionnaire
- **Two cohorts of children born:**
 - ◆ March 2003-February 2004 (Infants)
 - ◆ March 1999-February 2000 (4-5 year olds)
- **Both cohorts combined**
 - ◆ Ages of children controlled in analyses
- **Analysis focused on the employed mothers**
- **Sample numbers**
 - ◆ 3,561 couple mothers (48% of couple mothers)
 - ◆ 289 single mothers (29% of single mothers)



Measures: Work to family

- ◆ **Because of my work responsibilities, I have missed out on home or family activities that I would like to have taken part in**
- ◆ **Because of my work responsibilities, my family time is less enjoyable and more pressured**

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| strongly disagree | disagree | neither agree nor disagree | agree | strongly agree |



Measures: Family to work

- ◆ **Because of my family responsibilities, I have to turn down work activities or opportunities that I would prefer to take on**
- ◆ **Because of my family responsibilities, the time I spend working is less enjoyable and more pressured**

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| strongly disagree | disagree | neither agree nor disagree | agree | strongly agree |



Analysis

- **Single/couple mother comparison of overall work-family strain**
- **Multivariate (OLS) with single-couple ‘main effect’ + demographics, job characteristics, supports**
- **Comparison of single with couple coefficients (interactions)**
- **Comparison of characteristics of single & couple mothers**



Explanatory variables

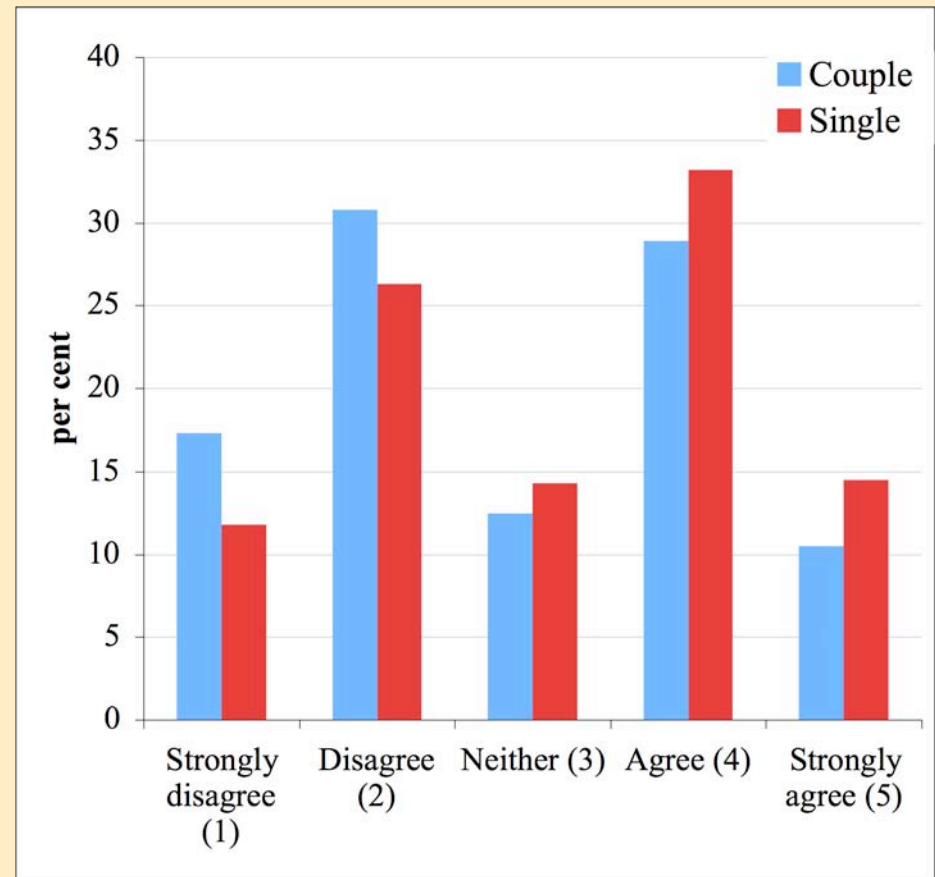
- **Single parent status**
- **Job characteristics**
 - ◆ hours worked, works weekends sometimes, works evenings/nights sometimes, flexibility of hours, job autonomy, employment contract, job security, broad occupation group
- **Demographics/Family characteristics**
 - ◆ age of youngest child, number of children, child with long-term medical condition; mothers' age, health status, main language; poverty indicator.
- **Supports**
 - ◆ household structure (grandparent or other adult lives with family), father cares sometimes, unmet need for help/support



Single-Couple Mother differences: Missing out at home

Because of my work responsibilities, I have **missed out** on home or family activities that I would like to have taken part in

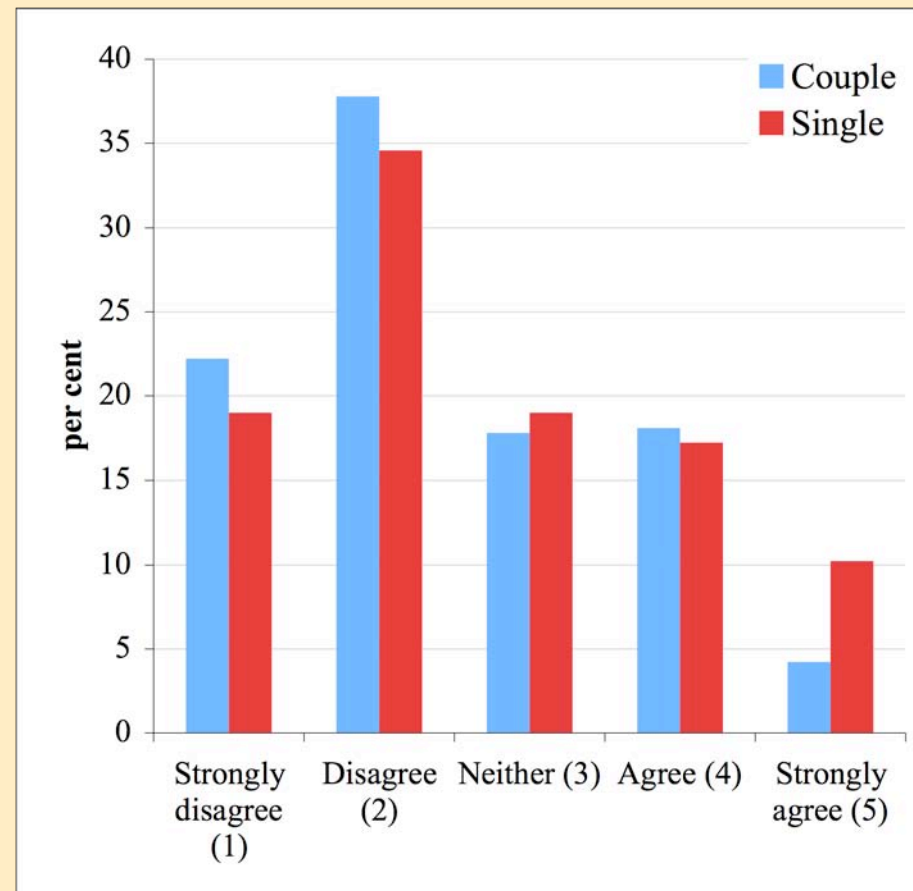
| | Mean |
|--|------|
| Couple | 2.84 |
| Single | 3.12 |
| <i>difference</i> <i>Single > Couple</i> | *** |



Single-Couple Mother differences: Family time less enjoyable

Because of my work responsibilities, my family time is less enjoyable and more pressured

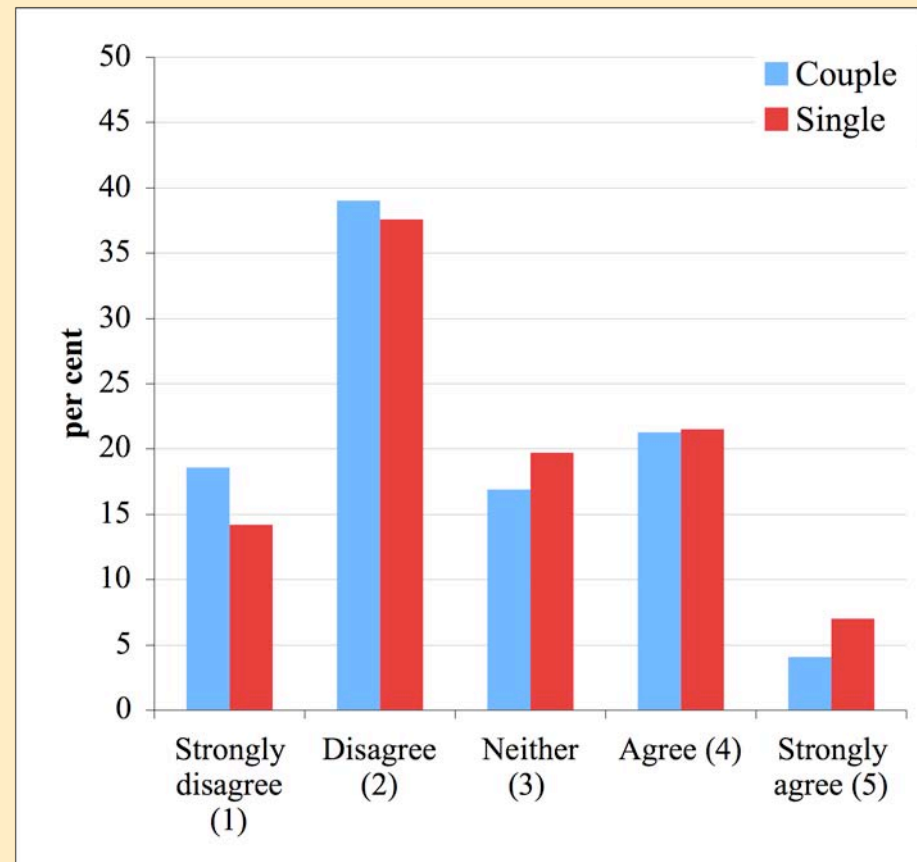
| | Mean |
|--|------|
| Couple | 2.44 |
| Single | 2.64 |
| <i>difference</i> <i>Single > Couple</i> | * |



Single-Couple Mother differences: Turn down work

Because of my family responsibilities, I have to **turn down work** activities or opportunities that I would prefer to take on

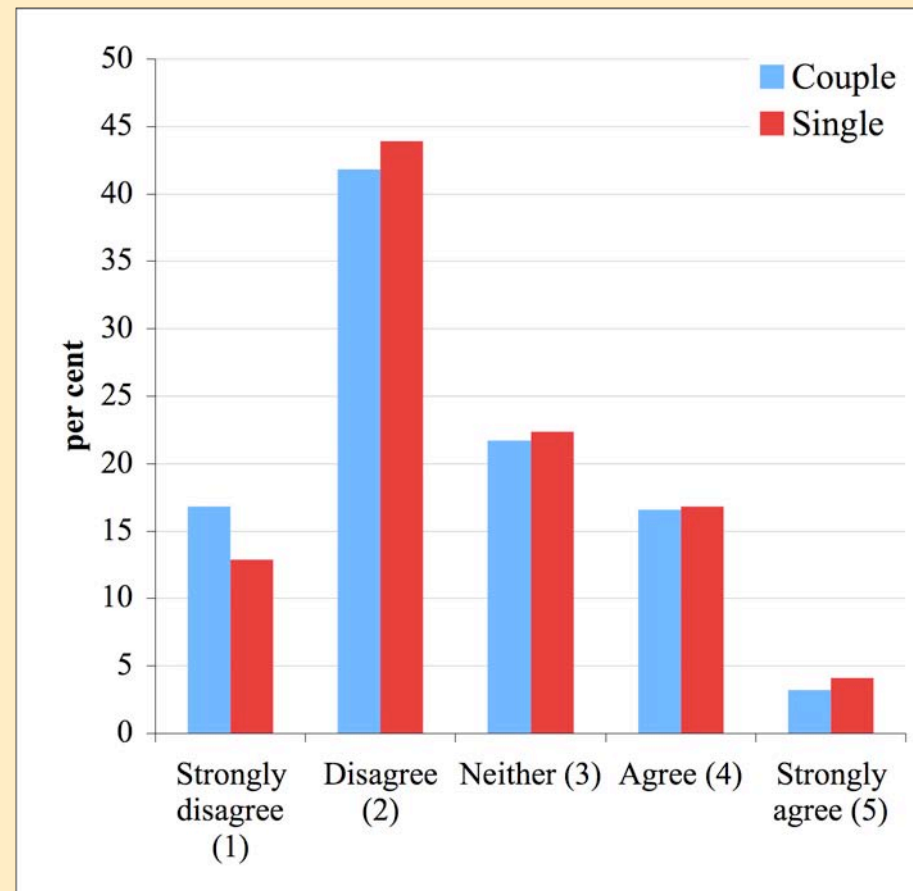
| | Mean |
|--|------|
| Couple | 2.53 |
| Single | 2.69 |
| <i>difference</i> <i>Single > Couple</i> | * |



Single-Couple Mother differences: Work time less enjoyable

Because of my work responsibilities, the time I spend working is less enjoyable and more pressured

| | Mean |
|--|-------------|
| Couple | 2.48 |
| Single | 2.55 |
| <i>difference</i> <i>Single > Couple</i> | <i>n.s.</i> |



Summary: Single-couple difference

| | Work-to-family spillover | | Family-to-work spillover | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | I have missed out at home | Family time less enjoyable | I have missed out at work | Work time is less enjoyable |
| Bivariate | Single>Couple dif=0.28 *** | Single>Couple dif=0.20 * | Single>Couple dif=0.16 * | Single=Couple dif=0.07 ns |

Multivariate: include job characteristics, demographics and supports variables

| | | | | |
|--|------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| After these controls: Single parent | 0.05 ns | 0.14 ns | 0.15 * | 0.04 ns |
|--|------------|------------|-----------|------------|



Multivariate results: demographics

| | Work-to-family spillover | | Family-to-work spillover | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | I have missed out at home | Family time less enjoyable | I have missed out at work | Work time is less enjoyable |
| Income poor | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| Poor health | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| Older children (4-5 years) | +++ | | | |

+ = increased spillover, +++ p<0.001



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Multivariate results: supports

| | Work-to-family spillover | | Family-to-work spillover | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | I have missed out at home | Family time less enjoyable | I have missed out at work | Work time is less enjoyable |
| Grandparent | | | | |
| Other adult | | | | |
| Father helps | | | | — |
| Unmet need for help | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ |

+ = increased spillover, +++ p<0.001

— = reduced spillover, — p<0.05



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Multivariate results: job characteristics (1)

| | Work-to-family spillover | | Family-to-work spillover | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | I have missed out at home | Family time less enjoyable | I have missed out at work | Work time is less enjoyable |
| More hours | +++ | +++ | | +++ |
| Weekends | +++ | | | |
| Evenings/nights | | + | ++ | ++ |
| More job security | | | | — |
| More job autonomy | — — — — | — — — — | | — — — — |

+ = increased spillover, + p<0.05, ++ p<0.01, +++ p<0.001

— = reduced spillover, — p<0.05, — — p<0.01, — — — p<0.001



Multivariate results: job characteristics (2)

| | Work-to-family spillover | | Family-to-work spillover | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | I have missed out at home | Family time less enjoyable | I have missed out at work | Work time is less enjoyable |
| Casual (vs permanent) | ---- | — | | — |
| Self-employed (vs permanent) | ---- | | | |
| Flexible hours (vs cannot change) | ---- | ---- | | -- |
| Highest status occs (vs lowest) | | ++ | +++ | |

+ = increased spillover, + p<0.05, ++ p<0.01, +++ p<0.001

— = reduced spillover, — p<0.05, — — p<0.01, — — — p<0.001



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Multivariate results: single-couple interactions

Interactions were largely non-significant: probably related to small n for single mothers.

Significant effects on spillover included, for single mothers:

- ◆ Flexible hours stronger effect for missing out on family activities - reduced negative spillover
- ◆ Being in highest status occupations stronger effect on missing out on family activities (increased negative spillover)
- ◆ Having the father help sometimes reduced agreement that work opportunities missed.



Distribution differences (1)

| | Couple (%) | Single (%) |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| Has poor health | 6.6 | 10.5 |
| Financially 'just getting along', 'poor' or 'very poor' | 28.1 | 53.9 |
| Main language is not English | 9.9 | 7.1 |
| A child has long-term medical condition | 22.5 | 33.3 |
| Youngest child aged <1 | 37.4 | 16.1 |
| Aged 1 | 15.4 | 9.4 |
| Aged 2-3 | 14.8 | 12.8 |
| Aged 4-5 | 32.4 | 61.8 |
| 1 child in the family | 25.1 | 36.8 |
| 2 children | 47.7 | 40.7 |
| 3 or more children | 27.2 | 22.6 |



Distribution differences (2)

| | Couple (%) | Single (%) |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Has unmet need for help/support | 20.4 | 19.5 |
| A grandparent lives with the family | 3.3 | 12.6 |
| Other adults (not older siblings) live with the family | 2.1 | 13.6 |



Distributional differences (3)

| | Couple | Single |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Usually work 1 to 15 hours per week | 37.2 | 34.2 |
| 16 to 24 hours | 26.1 | 26.9 |
| 25 to 34 hours | 14.3 | 14.6 |
| 35 hours or more | 22.4 | 24.3 |
| Sometimes works weekends | 54.2 | 52.1 |
| Sometimes works evenings or after 6pm | 52.1 | 42.6 |
| Permanent employee | 48.7 | 51.7 |
| Casual employee | 19.5 | 30.8 |
| Fixed-term or other employee | 5.7 | 7.7 |
| Self-employed | 26 | 9.8 |



Distributional differences (4)

| | Couple (%) | Single (%) |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Can change work times: flexible hours | 56.9 | 47.2 |
| Can change times with approval | 26.0 | 35.5 |
| Cannot change work hours | 17.1 | 17.3 |
| Manager, administrator, professional, associate professional | 47.3 | 31.4 |
| Tradespersons, related workers; advanced clerical service workers | 15.1 | 10.0 |
| Intermediate clerical, sales service workers, intermediate production & transport workers | 22.9 | 34.9 |
| Elementary clerical, sales service workers, labourers & rel. workers | 14.8 | 23.7 |
| Level of job security (least=1 to highest security= 5) | 3.0 | 2.7 |
| Autonomy at work (least control =1, most control = 6) | 3.7 | 3.6 |



Summary: distributional differences

- **Demographics**

- ◆ single mothers more likely to have poor health, poor financially, child with medical condition, older children - all linked with more strain

- **Supports**

- ◆ Unmet need had strong association with spillover but same level for single & couple
- ◆ Other differences were not associated with strain



Summary: distributional differences

● Job characteristics

- ◆ similar hours, working weekends, job autonomy - while associated with strain do not explain single-couple difference
- ◆ some differences ‘advantage’ single mothers
 - couples more likely in higher status occupations, more likely work evenings/nights
- ◆ some ‘advantage’ couple mothers
 - couples more likely self-employed, greater hours flexibility, greater job security



Overall summary

- the difference in the experience of work–family strain between single and couple mothers was not large
- factors associated with strain were similar for couples, singles, with some exceptions.
- differences in demographics (health, poverty) important.
- other job factors (eg flexible hours) also important.



Employment differences

- The potential work–family strain may be more of a barrier for single mothers than it is for couple mothers to their take-up of employment.
- Those in paid employment may have similar experiences of work–family strain because those that face potentially excessive strain withdraw from or do not enter employment.



Conclusion

- **Work–family strain of employed mothers is much more strongly determined by employment characteristics, demographics, and selected supports variables, than it is by single parent status.**
- **Having a resident partner does not automatically reduce work–family strain.**
- **Having a resident partner is associated with a higher likelihood of being employed.**
- **It is possible that potential work–family strain has a stronger impact on those with no partner, which contributes to decisions about staying out of employment.**





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