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Title

Labour force transitions and mothers' and fathers' parenting stress: direct and cross-spousal influences

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the work commitments of fathers and mothers relate to the subjective stress of parenting. It uses data from the longitudinal Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey (N=13,969), selecting a subsample of 3007 couples with children under 17 years. Using fixed effects modelling of data over 15 waves it examines relationships between parenting stress and the labor force status and the labor force transitions of fathers and mothers, including both direct and cross-spousal associations. Mothers who work or transition to full time employment hours have less parenting stress. Conversely, fathers' transitions to shorter or no employment hours are associated with less parenting stress for both them and their partners. Fathers also have higher parenting stress when their partner transitions out of the labor force. Overall, results suggest more gender symmetry in paid work and to home duties can lower parenting stress of both genders.

Keywords

Employment, parenting, stress, transitions

Introduction

There is concern over the welfare of families in time-pressured modern economies (Dinh, Strazdins & Welsh, 2017). The entry of women into the paid workforce over the last half-century led to significant changes in the Western family, with most children now growing up in dual-earner households (ABS 2009; Bianchi et al. 2006; Coltrane and Adams 2008)(Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Despite this, there is evidence that parents now devote more time to childcare than in the 1960s, when most mothers were full-time homemakers (Bianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2006; Gimenez-Nadal & Sevilla Sanz, 2011; Sayer, 2016). The time pressures generated by family demand are particularly high when children are young and their care needs are most pressing (Bianchi et al., 2006). The early parenting years are also when financial pressures are high, and frequently coincide with the necessity to begin establishing a career, so are a crunch point when household time and money resources are particularly stretched (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Kleiner, 2014). What are the implications of employment for parents' emotional wellbeing and feelings that they successfully meet the demands of their family role? In this paper we investigate how the work commitments of fathers and mothers relate to the subjective stress of parenting.

Parenting Stress

Parenting is complicated and demanding. The responsibilities are varied, including meeting children's material requirements, such as for food, housing and security, as well as their emotional and psychological needs such as for attention and affection (Deater-Deckard, 2004; Avison, Ali and Walters, 2007). For some the demands can feel very taxing indeed, creating an associated subjective reaction that has been described as 'parenting stress' (Pearlin, 1983). Theoretical approaches to parenting stress have been informed by role strain theory (Nomaguchi and Johnson, 2016; Nomaguchi et al. 2017). Role strain is described as

on-going or enduring “hardships, challenges and conflicts, or other problems that people come to experience as they engage over time in normal social roles” (Pearlin 1983: 8). Parenting stress is usually conceptualised as a form of role overload whereby a parent perceives that the role demands exceed their capacity to meet them (Halpern-Meekin & Turney 2016; Anthony et al. 2005; Harmon & Perry 2011). But role strain can also take different forms. Some individuals may experience ‘role captivity’ in which they would “simply prefer to be and to do things outside the confines of the [current] role” (Pearlin 1983: 245). Strain also might occur due to inter-role conflict between sets of complementary roles, such as mother-father or parent-child relationships, or from incompatible demands of multiple roles, like work and family. Strain may also occur when roles sets change and this ‘role restructuring’ causes stress (Pearlin 1983).

Whatever its aetiology, parenting stress is deleterious for families. Research has shown it is associated with poorer developmental and behavioural outcomes for children (Creasey & Jarvis, 1994; Deater-Deckard 2004); family relationship quality (Crnic, Gaze & Hoffman 2005) and mothers’ wellbeing, mental health and life satisfaction (Avison, Ali & Walters 2007), attachment to children (Harmon & Perry 2011) and parenting quality (Crnic, Gaze, & Hoffman 2005). Parenting stress involves multiple components, such as feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities, feeling trapped and exhausted, finding parenthood more work than pleasure and experiencing strains in the parent-child relationship (Anthony et al. 2005; Abidin 1990). Stress manifested as adverse psychological reactions can be experienced as negative feelings about the parent themselves, or about their offspring (Deater-Deckard 2004).

Raising children is stressful for most parents, but research suggests it is especially so for mothers (Buddelmeyer, Hamermesh & Wooden, 2017). Reflecting this, there is a substantial

literature on maternal parenting stress, but relatively little equivalent research on fathers. Research on fathers and parenting stress tends to focus on their role in ameliorating mothers' parenting stress (Harmon & Perry 2011; Nomaguchi et al. 2017). This is likely because, historically, mothers have been the primary care-givers, and fathers' role has been mainly seen in relation to "their ability to procure resources and services that served to shelter mothers from parenting stress" (Harmon & Perry 2011: 176). Despite increased female workforce participation, men and women still experience the demands of work and family in contrasting ways, with women doing the bulk of childcare and housework and men devoting longer hours to paid work (see Bianchi & Milkie, 2010 for an overview). Social meanings and expectations attached to employment and to family work differ by gender (Ferree, 2010; West & Zimmerman, 2009). Family functioning and children's wellbeing is seen more as a reflection on women's competence as a 'wife and mother' than men's competence as a 'husband and father' (Bianchi, 2000: 95). Thus the research concentration on mothers aligns with attitudes that they are more responsible for hands-on parenting than fathers.

However, fathers have become more involved in active childcare over time (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Buddelmeyer et al., 2017; Author A). A 'new father' ideal (Hook & Wolfe, 2012; Pleck & Pleck, 1997) has seen fathers more engaged in children's lives. Changes in ideas about what constitutes the proper care of children has led to wide consensus that the amount and quality of the time parents devote to their children influences their healthy development and chances of success in life (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Lamb, 2004; Monna & Gauthier, 2008). While much of this discourse has focused on motherhood, the expectation of heightened time investment has increasingly been extended to fathers (Hays, 1998; Wall and Arnold 2007; Daly 2001). There has been an influential discourse on the benefits of father involvement (Badcock & Beer, 2000; Wall, 2010), which both reflects and encourages normative change from childcare being the province of women (Doucet, 2004; Lamb, 2004;

Russell & Hwang, 2004). Qualitative research suggests that men want to spend more time with their children and, given the opportunity, can provide similar quality care to mothers (Doucet, 2006)

These social shifts have implications for both genders' ability to manage parenting expectations and how best to support each other in doing so. Pearlin (1989: 242) noted that the interdependence of roles and role sets, like mothers and fathers, are potential sources (of support and) stress: "...one role is part of a larger role set or of a constellation of complementary roles, around which important interpersonal relations are structured". A life course perspective also recognises that individual lives are 'not lived in isolation' (Marshall & Mueller 2003), but rather are 'interwoven with the lives of significant others' (Elder & Giele 2009: 13). Thus, individuals are linked to the lives and outcomes of other individuals within their 'interpersonal contexts' (Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe 2003: 13). From these perspectives, each partner has likely has a role in ameliorating or exacerbating the parenting stress of the other.

Consistent with this intertwining, research has found that fathers' emotional support (Harmon & Perry 2011), and 'hands on' engagement with children in tasks that are 'less rewarding' alleviates maternal parenting stress (Nomaguchi et al. 2017). From a role strain theory perspective, this is because some of the caregiving role has been 'delegated' to fathers (Moen and Dempster McClain 1987). Role strain theory posits that strain can be reduced when social roles or components of them are delegated to someone else, such that mothers feel better when their partner shares the parenting role actively. No research to date has looked at the converse possibility that mothers' employment relates to fathers' parenting stress. Yet fathers as well as mothers may have their feelings of efficacy as parents influenced by the work and family contributions of their spouse. For example, in dual earner families, men's

parenting stress may be relieved through having ‘delegated’ part of the role of financial provider. We investigate the two-way cross-spousal influence of employment on parenting stress for the first time in this paper.

Previous research has found parents’ own employment to be a source of both demands and resources (Nomaguchi & Johnson 2016). It can provide access to social networks or psychological benefits, such as better self-esteem, which indirectly ameliorate parenting stress (Ross & Mirowsky 1995; Voydanoff 1994). Recent research shows the relationship between employment and parenting stress is gendered and classed: full-time employment is a resource for working-class men in fulfilling their parenting responsibilities, but for working-class mothers, part-time employment is more stressful than full-time employment (Nomaguchi and Johnson 2016). Both unemployment and precarious jobs have been found to be a source of parenting stress for fathers (Fox 2009). Mothers with inflexible employment arrangements are “more likely than fathers to feel more time deficit with their children—a form of parenting stress—when they have no schedule control at work” (Nomaguchi & Johnson 2017: 1539). This research into connections between employment and parenting stress has focused on vulnerable families and working-class parents. This leaves an important research gap, however, as the pressures and strains involved in balancing work-family commitments, and the risk of feeling seriously overstretched, are issues for the general population of families with young children, not only those with fewest resources (Dinh et al., 2017).

The rise of dual earner families means that rather than specialising in either the breadwinning or the homemaking role, both men and women are juggling the demands of work and home, and are also potentially affected by the role demands upon their partner. Also, managing work and family is a dynamic process, as couples readjust their labour supply due to family

needs or experience events such as unexpected job loss (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Greater strain may occur when roles change, because role ‘restructuring’ can cause stress.

Alternatively, a change may ameliorate parenting stress by diminishing role conflict, allowing more role delegation to a partner, or ending ‘role captivity’ (Pearlin 1989).

Therefore in addition to labour force status we examine work force transitions in to gain insight into how changes in roles relate to parenting stress for mothers and fathers, and for their partners, in the short term. Understanding the dynamics will provide better insights to how best to support working families mitigate the effects of parenting stress.

Institutional Context

The challenges of balancing work and family are to some extent dependent on workplace and social policies, so research into employment and parenting stress should be situated in context. This paper draws on information from Australia, which (alongside USA, UK, Canada and New Zealand) is usually classified as a ‘liberal’ welfare state, wherein work–family reconciliation and raising children are seen as largely private, not government, responsibilities (Gornick & Meyers, 2009; Lewis, 2009; Orloff, 2009). Despite recent growth in women’s employment, a particular feature of the Australian female labour force is a high incidence of part-time work (Charlesworth, Strazdins, O’Brien & Sims, 2011). At the same time, a high proportion of fathers of young children work over 50 hours per week. This means gender divisions of labour in young families are wide (Author A). Over recent decades there has been an expansion of formal early education and childcare, but demand continues to exceed supply in most areas and costs are very high (Adamson & Brennan, 2014). Housing is costly, especially in the major cities, with young families wishing to enter the property market taking on substantial mortgage debt, and increasingly pushed to the urban fringe, with long commutes to work (ABS, 2012). Wages have stagnated over the last decade, and

households are increasingly more reliant on the wages of both partners (ABS, 2012). As elsewhere, parenting has become more intensive and child-centred, with fathers as well as mothers part of this trend, and Australian parents of young children report very high levels of subjective times pressure (Author A).

Research focus and expectations

Against this backdrop, we investigate relationships between employment and parenting stress. We start from the principle that individual lives are interwoven with the lives of others within families (Elder & Giele 2009: 13). Balancing work and family is a joint couple endeavour, so we investigate how mothers and fathers' parenting stress is influenced by not only their own employment, but also by their partners'. We draw on a broad sample of fathers and mothers, because the pressures and strains involved in balancing work-family commitments are widespread (Dinh et al., 2017). We exploit the opportunity offered by our longitudinal data to examine the effects of transitions in labour force status on parenting stress for mothers and fathers, and for their partners. Given the historical and ongoing differences in fathers and mothers' work-care patterns, we conduct all our analyses separately by gender.

We expect to find stronger relationships between employment and parenting stress for women than for men. The gendered social organisation of work and care supports a theoretical expectation that mothers, more than fathers, will find their work affecting their concept of themselves as competent parents. From a role-conflict perspective, employment arrangements are likely an important determinant of mothers' parenting stress. Meeting the contemporary standards of heightened maternal involvement may exacerbate 'mother guilt' over difficulty balancing domestic and professional roles (Badcock & Beer, 2000; Hurst, 2008; Wall, 2010). On the other hand, homemaking can be difficult and isolating (Bergmann

2005). Mothers who become full time employed, for example, may benefit from lower role captivity than being a homemaker, or from lower role conflict than being employed part time.

We also expect that mothers' parenting stress will be more affected by their partner's employment than vice versa, because previous research has shown that women are more sensitive than men to spousal work characteristics. Women are more usually responsible for maintaining household harmony, managing smooth relationships, and performing the emotion work necessary to family life (Mattingly & Sayer, 2006; Strazdins & Broom, 2004). Recent studies have found that women's mood is more sensitive to their partner's work strain than is men's (Levine, Bonner & Klugman, 2014), and that mental labour in relation to work and family is more negatively associated with mothers', than with fathers', emotional wellbeing (Offer, 2014). Similarly, long male working hours increase their partners' feelings of being rushed or pressed for time (Author A), and male non-standard hours work is associated with their partners spending more time in domestic labour and childcare (Author A).

However, and notwithstanding the historical centrality of men's breadwinning role, increasing father involvement means they are also likely subject to role conflict between employment and parenting (Collins, 2015). Their parenting stress may also be affected by their partner's employment, although the paucity of prior research means the expected direction of influence is not obvious. Theoretically, mothers joining the paid work force or increasing their work hours could ease men's subjective parenting stress by enabling them to share more of the responsibility for earning money to support the household. That is, if both spouses contribute to family finances, it could constitute role delegation for men, allowing them to enjoy more active involvement with their children, and thus less parenting stress. On the other hand, mothers' workforce participation could add to fathers parenting stress,

precisely because they would need to do more active care of children, and thus experience heightened role conflict.

Data and method

To explore this issue, we use data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The HILDA is a large household panel survey with a focus on three key research areas: family and household dynamics, income and welfare dynamics, and labour dynamics. The survey commenced in 2001 and there are currently 15 waves of data available. The reference population for the initial wave was all members in private dwellings across Australia. Using a multi-stage sampling approach, households were selected from a sample of 488 Census Collection Districts (CDs) comprising of 200-250 households. Within each CD, a sample of 22 to 34 dwellings was selected. From each dwelling (physical building), up to three households were selected; if four or more households occupied the one dwelling, all households were enumerated and a random sample of three households was selected (see Watson & Wooden 2001 for further specifics about sampling methodology). From the sampling frame, 11,693 households were identified and interviews with 7682 responding households were completed, resulting in 66 per cent household response rate for Wave 1. From 7682 responding households, 13,969 responding persons over the age of 15 were interviewed. The overall Wave 1 sampling frame is representative of Australian households, but there are some issues of 'representativeness' regarding specific populations: women are over-represented, but migrants of non-English speaking background, Indigenous Australians and unmarried couples are all under-represented (Summerfield et al. 2014). Data is collected at both a household- and individual-level using a range of survey instruments.

The analytic sample used in this research was constructed from the Combined Person Files from waves 1 to 15 to create a person-period data set such that each respondent has multiple

records—one for each wave in which they are observed. The analytic sample was restricted to all responding persons aged 15 years who participated in all waves. The analytic sample was further restricted to only include men and women who were in employment and in a relationship, either married or cohabiting with children under the age of 17. Parenting measures are only asked in relation to children that age and under. The analytic sample was unbalanced to include respondents who enter and exit over the course of the survey. The final sample comprises 3,007 couples. Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Measures

Parenting stress was constructed from the average of four items ($\alpha = .76$) administered in the Self-Completion Questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements in relation to children (<17 years) for whom they had parenting responsibility: (1) “Being a parent is harder than I thought”; (2) “I often feel tired, worn out or exhausted by meeting the needs of my children”; (3) “I feel trapped by my responsibilities being a parent”; and (4) “Parenting is much more work than pleasure”. Each measure has the same response categories across a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). These measures were adopted from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement and the derived scale is an established approach to modelling parenting stress (see for example Nomaguchi et al. 2017).

The key explanatory variable of interest in this research is labour force status for respondents and their partner (1 = employed fulltime; 2 = employed part-time; 3 =unemployed; and 4= not in the labour market). Several control variables that may have an independent relationship with parenting stress were included in the models. Tertiary qualifications were derived from respondent’s highest qualification (1 = obtained a bachelor’s degree or above). Marital status

was a dichotomous variable indicating 0 = married and 1 = cohabiting. Household income was included as continuous measured and scaled to \$10,000. Subjective time pressure was derived from the question: “how often do you feel rushed or pressed for time?” Responses ranged from 1 = almost always to 5 = never. To ensure our findings on parenting stress were separated out from levels of general and mental health, we included measures of the latter two factors, derived from the SF-36. Both measures are on a scale that ranges from 0 – 100 with 0 indicating poor general and mental health.

Analytic strategy

To test associations between labour force status and labour force transitions and respondents and partners’ parenting stress, we estimate panel fixed-effects regression models. Fixed-effects regression model are appropriate when using panel data, like HILDA, which includes repeated observations over time. Fixed effects regression models allow for clustering of observations by individual and control for between individual variation (Singer and Willett 2003) by producing estimates that are net of all time-invariant observed and unobserved differences between individuals. The full model is represented notationally as:

$$PS_{it} = \beta_0 + \sum_k \beta_k X_{kit} + \varepsilon_{it}, v_{it} + \omega_{it}$$

where

$$\varepsilon_{it} = u_i + v_t + \omega_{it}$$

where subscripts I and t denote individual and time, respectively; PS represents parenting stress; B denotes regression coefficients; k denotes independent variables; e is the error term; u is the cross-sectional individual component of error; v is the timewise component of error; w is the random component of error; b0 is the intercept. The models are stratified by sex, because expectations of parenting roles and employment have been historically so different

for men and women. In Models 1A and 1B, a set of dichotomous variables estimates the relationship between respondents' labour force status and labour transitions, partner's labour force status and labour force transitions, and parenting stress. In Models 2A and 2B, statistical controls are included.

Results

In Tables 2 and 3, transitions in labour force status that occurred over the 14 waves of data are presented. The rows in the tables represent labour force status at T-1 and the columns represent labour force transitions that occurred by the following wave. Overall, men had more stable employment patterns with fewer transitions over time than women. The nature of transitions also varied by gender. Compared to women, men were proportionately more likely to leave full-time employment and become either unemployed or leave the workforce altogether. They were also more likely to move from unemployment to full-time work. Women, on the other hand, averaged more labour force transitions over the waves. They were more likely than men to transition from full-time to part-time work or vice-versa, and moved in greater numbers into full-time or part-time work after being out of the labour force altogether.

Insert Table 2 Here

Insert Table 3 Here

The results from the panel fixed-effect regression models of parenting stress are presented in Table 4. To show any prima facie relationships, Models 1A and 1B present the estimated coefficients for respondents' and partners' labour force status and transitions absent demographic controls.

No associations were found between fathers' parenting stress and their own, or their partner's, labour force status. In contrast, for mothers, their own and their partner's labour force status was significantly associated with parenting stress. Further, there was a 'gradient' in the estimated size of the associations. Mothers who were not in the labour force had the highest parenting stress, followed by unemployed mothers and then by mothers in part-time employment. The gradient in coefficient sizes suggests that the less a mother is attached to the labour market, the higher her level of parenting stress. This implies that more time spent in home duties are more stressful than increasing working hours. Compared to having an employed partner, mothers with a partner who was not in the labour force or who was unemployed were estimated to have higher parenting stress.

Regarding changes in labour force status, respondents' own transitions were not associated with parenting stress for fathers', but were for mothers. There was again a gradient in effect size: mothers who recently left the labour force had the highest parenting stress, followed by mothers who became unemployed and women who changed to part time employment.

Changes in partners' labour force status were not associated with mothers' parenting stress. In contrast, fathers with a partner who transitioned to unemployment or left the labour force altogether had significantly higher levels of parenting stress than fathers with a partner in the labour force.

These models suggest that, absent other influences, mothers' own labour force status and transitions, and her partner's labour force status, are all determinants of her parenting stress whereas only a partner's labour force transitions are determinants of parenting stress for fathers. However, the R² statistic for these models is 0.01, indicating that labour force attachment on its own explains very little of the sample variance in parenting stress for either fathers or mothers.

[Table 4 about here]

In Models 2A (fathers) and 2B (mothers), the coefficients for statistical controls were estimated alongside labour force status and transitions. The addition of the statistical controls substantially improved the predictive power of the models, such that they explained around 7 (R² 0.07) and 8 percent (R² 0.08) of the sample variance in parenting stress for fathers and mothers, respectively. Controls also changed the pattern and direction of some associations.

In Model 2A, significant associations indicated that net of controls fathers who were not in the labour force had lower parenting stress than fathers in full-time employment (the reference category). Similarly, fathers who transitioned to unemployment or part-time employment had lower parenting stress than fathers who entered full-time employment.

Associations between partners' labour force transitions and fathers' parenting stress were not as strong as in Model A1: the coefficient for partners' transition to unemployment was not significant and both the magnitude and significance of the coefficient for 'not in the labour force' were lower. Thus for fathers the Model 1 results were largely explained by differences in socio-demographic characteristics, which supplementary analyses (not shown) indicated was particularly driven by number of children.

For mothers, the patterns of association between their own labour force status, their own labour force transitions and parenting stress remained net of the statistical controls included in Model 2B. Results again showed that mothers either in or transitioning to part-time work, unemployment, or out of the labour force had higher levels of parenting stress than mothers in full-time employment. This once more suggests home duties bring more maternal parenting stress than paid work, and further shows the finding applies to women in a variety of sociodemographic circumstances. However, in this model, the direction of association with partners' labour force status was reversed from that found in Model 1B. Holding

sociodemographic characteristics constant, mothers with a partner who was not in the labour force, or who was unemployed or in part-time employment, had lower parenting stress than mothers with a partner in full-time employment (the reference category). Also in this final model, partners' labour force transition to part-time employment had a significant negative association with mothers' parenting stress. The implication is that all else equal (including household income), fathers being more available at home is beneficial to mothers' feelings about their parenting.

In summary, the results highlight important gender contrasts in the relationship between employment transitions and parenting stress. That, all else equal, fathers' transitions to part-time work or unemployment were associated with lower parenting stress may be because they are more available at home and relieved of fulltime breadwinning. That mothers' transitions to part-time employment, unemployment or out of the labour force were associated with higher parenting stress is likely because fewer working hours increased their responsibility for managing the home and caring for children. There was also a gender difference in associations between parenting stress and partners experiencing a labour force transition. Fathers with a partner who left the labour force had higher parenting stress, whereas mothers whose partner transitioned to part-time work had lower parenting stress. Thus, partners' employment transitions to fewer work hours had opposite effects on parenting stress by gender.

Discussion

Using 15 years of data from the Household, Income, Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, this research focused on the relationship between labour force status, labour force transitions, and parenting stress. Parenthood is a demanding role, with success highly dependent on parents' personal and material resources and the availability of adequate

support. For working fathers and mothers, especially in dual earner couples, managing family care and paid work commitments is complex and challenging (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). It requires ongoing adjustment as family and employment dynamics evolve (Pocock, 2003). This paper extended the literature by looking at cross-spousal effects and including labour force transitions in the analyses. Of interest was what happens when mothers and fathers experience a change in their work commitments and whether this affects either or both parents' ability to feel they are coping well with meet the demands of parenting. Following Nomaguchi (2017), we used a scale measure of parenting stress composed of several elements capturing aspects of how parents feel about their roles as fathers and mothers, and we draw on role strain theory to interpret our results.

As expected, we found gender differences in the impact of respondents' own labour force status and transitions, in that they were stronger predictors of parenting stress for mothers than for fathers. This is in contrast to previous research which found that employment-related factors better explain fathers' parenting stress than mothers' (Nomaguchi & Johnson 2014), but fits with the idea that women are more likely than men to feel responsible for providing care and to be actively juggling the competing demands of work and home (Bianchi, 2009; Buddelmeyer et al., 2017; Ferree, 2010). However, our results did not indicate that for women more working hours create more role conflict (Hurst, 2008; Wall, 2010), and thus are accompanied by higher parenting stress. Rather, maternal parenting stress was higher when work hours were lower. The implication is that the labour force is an important resource for mothers' wellbeing. Role captivity (Pearlin 1999) could also be relevant here. For example, mothers who become full time employed may benefit from feeling less captive in the caregiving role than those who are fulltime home makers or unemployed. This is in line with research which has found that not being employed is associated with higher psychological

stress for mothers because of the burdens and isolation of daily child caring activities (Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, 2012; Douglas & Michaels, 2005; Rich, 1977).

The results for part-time work may be because it involves greater role conflict than being employed fulltime (Mabuchi and Johnson 2016). Role conflict occurs when the demands of multiple social roles get in the way of fulfilling the demands of each (Coverman 1989).

Previous research has shown that part time working mothers experience particularly high levels of stress and subjective time pressure (Author A, Pocock, 2003; Rose, Hewitt & Baxter, 2013). This is likely because they are available to undertake more domestic labour and childcare-related activities and seek to perform across two roles. Fulltime employment means mothers have to delegate some of the childcare, whereas part time employed mothers substantially match the inputs of homebased mothers (Author A). It is also possible that problems with children precipitate mothers' labour force transitions, so that parenting stress is intrinsic to the decision to work fewer hours.

Notwithstanding the stronger associations for women, our findings suggest employment status, and more particularly transitions, also matter to fathers' parenting stress. Fathers who left the labour force, or transitioned to part-time work or unemployment, had lower parenting stress than men in full-time employment, which implies that the latter is a source of strain on fathers in fulfilling their parenting role. This finding is not consistent with Nomaguchi and Johnson (2014), who found that unemployed fathers had higher parenting stress than employed fathers. However, that research focussed explicitly on working-class fathers whereas this study has a more diverse sample. Also, since we examined employment transitions, not status only, our results could be indicating that leaving full time work feels particularly liberating in the short term. Again, role captivity may be a factor, with the necessity to provide financially, particularly if long hours are required, a potential source of

stress and tension for men (Hill, Märtinson, Ferris & Zenger Baker, 2004). When masculinity is primarily defined through paid work, men can suffer in terms of the quality of their relationships with their children and marginalisation from the daily activities of family life (Connell, 2003). Also, as Pearlin (1989) suggests, whether employment is a demand on or a resource for parents in relation to stress is context-dependent on cultural expectations of parenting roles. Thus unemployment may predict higher parenting stress among working-class men because it denies them the material resources to fulfil their role (Nomaguchi and Johnson 2014), whereas our sample includes those with more financial security and human capital, who may be more likely to subscribe to a ‘new father ideal’ and value more opportunity to engage with their children (Author A; Hook & Wolfe, 2012).

We expected that partners’ labour force status would predict parenting stress more strongly for mothers than fathers. The findings did underline the importance of fathers as a source of support in managing mothers’ parental stress, and by implication the relevance of men’s work hours to their partners’ wellbeing. Having a partner not attached to the labour force full-time was associated with lower parenting stress for mothers, consistent with previous research suggesting fathers’ active involvement in child care is important in relieving maternal parenting stress (Nomaguchi et al. 2017). Research has found that fathers with lower workforce engagement tend to have higher levels of involvement in their children’s personal care (AIFS 2012), so the current results are likely due to fathers’ ability to relieve mothers of some of the caring burden through having more time to engage with their children. The cross-spousal influence of male work hours is also consistent with previous research finding that men working long fulltime hours creates high subjective time pressure for both the men and their partners (Author A). We found no corresponding association between mothers’ employment status and fathers’ parenting stress. That is, the employment situations of men are strongly linked to parental stress outcomes for mothers but the reverse

(a female-to-male influence) was not apparent. This supports the previous research showing that women are more sensitive than men to partners' characteristics (Levine et al., 2014; Offer, 2014).

However, the findings of this research also show that some changes in a partner's labour force status can affect a parent's level of parenting stress and, more unexpectedly, that this is the case for both genders. For fathers, having a partner who transitioned out of the labour force was associated with higher levels of parenting stress. For mothers (consistent with the labour force status results above) we found the obverse relationship: mothers with a partner who transitioned into part-time employment had lower parenting stress. Although partners' employment transitions had opposite effects on parenting stress by gender, the reasons for both findings may be rooted in parents' need for help in their roles. In both cases, stress mitigation may arise from being able to delegate some role responsibility through sharing the load (Moen and Dempster McClain 1987). For fathers, having a partner leave the labour force may make them feel less helped in breadwinning, and therefore more stressed, whereas for mothers, having a partner transition to part-time work may make them feel more helped with child-related tasks, and therefore less stressed.

Conclusion

Taken together, the results of this study speak to the strains and pressures that work and family demands engender for both fathers and mothers. In Australia there is still considerable gender asymmetry in labour force participation (almost 86 percent of fathers in this sample were in full-time employment, compared to 44 percent of mothers), which is mirrored by gender differences in caring for children (Author A; Pocock, 2003). Our results suggest that more gender symmetry in time allocation to paid work and to home duties would be beneficial to both genders. That lower male working hours are associated with both them and

their partners experiencing less parenting stress, suggests that more men reducing their hours in market work would benefit family wellbeing. Furthermore, our results suggest that men benefit from women being employed, and women themselves feel less parenting stress when they are employed, particularly fulltime. There seems to be psychological and emotional advantage in moving from the confines of traditional gendered roles. In role captivity terms (Pearlin 1999), mothers' parenting benefits from feeling less captive in the caregiving role, and fathers' parenting benefits from feeling less captive of the breadwinning role. The implication is that more gender equality in employment participation and more gender-equal sharing of responsibility for running the home holds the key to more effective and enjoyable embrace of the parental role for both men and women.

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Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

	FATHERS		MOTHERS	
	M/P	S.D	M/P	S.D
Parenting Stress	3.2	0.1	3.5	0.1
Respondent's Labour Force Status				
Employed, Full-time	85.9		24.0	
Employed, Part-time	6.4		43.5	
Unemployed	2.3		2.3	
Not in the labour force	5.3		30.0	
CONTROLS				
Number of Children	2.1	0.1	2.1	0.1
Tertiary Qualifications				
Tertiary Qualification	70.7		66.5	
No Tertiary Qualification	29.3		33.5	
Household Income	11.3	0.1	11.3	0.1
Marital Status				
Married	86.7		86.7	
Cohabiting	13.3		13.3	
Subjective Time Pressure	2.43	0.01	2.14	0.01
SF-36 – General Health	71.9	0.28	73.7	0.72
SF-46 – Mental Health	76.5	0.24	75.3	0.23

Table 2: Pooled labour status transitions over 14 waves, fathers with children under the age of 17 (HILDA 2001 to 2014)

Labour Force Status	Transitional Labour Force Status			
	Employed, Full-time	Employed, Part-time	Unemployed	Not in the labour force
Employed, Full-time	14,356	382	147	161
Employed, Part-time	409	563	35	88
Unemployed	130	51	90	66
Not in the labour force	118	103	52	587
TOTALS	15,013	1,099	324	902

Table 3: Pooled labour status transitions over 14 waves, mothers with children under the age of 17 (HILDA 2001 to 2014)

Labour Force Status	Transitional Labour Force Status			
	Employed, Full-time	Employed, Part-time	Unemployed	Not in the labour force
Employed, Full-time	3,113	688	29	154
Employed, Part-time	916	6,002	90	714
Unemployed	43	127	78	128
Not in the labour force	203	1,102	197	3,743
TOTALS	4,275	7,919	394	4,739

Table 4 Fixed-Effects Models of Parenting Stress

Variable	1A		1B		2A		2B	
	FATHERS		MOTHERS		FATHERS		MOTHERS	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Respondent's Labour Force Status (Ref: Full-time)								
Part-time			0.08**					
Unemployed	0.03	0.04	*	0.02	0.00	0.04	0.09***	0.02
	0.02	0.06	0.12**	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.15**	0.05
Not in the labour force			0.18**		-			
	-0.02	0.05	*	0.03	0.09(*)	0.05	0.18***	0.03
Partner's Labour Force Status (Ref: Full-time)								
Part-time	0.01	0.02	0.08	0.02	-0.02	0.02	-0.08**	0.04
Unemployed	0.00	0.05	0.12**	0.05	-0.03	0.05	0.22***	0.06
Not in the labour force			0.18**				-	
	0.03	0.03	*	0.03	-0.03	0.03	0.21***	0.05
Respondent's Labour Force Transitions (Ref: Full-time (T-1))								
Part-time (T-1)			0.09**		-			
Unemployed (T-1)	-0.02	0.04	*	0.02	0.06(*)	0.04	0.06**	0.02
	-0.08	0.06	0.14**	0.06	-	0.11(*)	0.13**	0.05
Not in the labour force (T-1)			0.15**					
	0.02	0.05	*	0.03	-0.04	0.05	0.10***	0.03
Partner's Labour Force Transitions								
Part-time (T-1)	0.04	0.02	-0.06	0.04	0.00	0.02	-0.09**	0.04
Unemployed (T-1)	0.11**	0.05	-0.04	0.06	0.06	0.05	-0.07	0.06
Not in the labour force (T-1)	0.11***	0.03	-0.05	0.05	0.05*	0.03	-0.07	0.05
CONTROLS								

Number of Children			0.18** *	0.02	0.18****	0.02
Tertiary Qualifications			0.23** *	0.09	- 0.35****	0.11
Household Income Logged			0.15** *	0.01	- 0.11****	0.01
Cohabiting (Ref: Married)			0.03	0.06	-0.02	0.06
Subjective Time Pressure			0.13** *	0.01	- 0.21****	0.01
SF-36 – General Health			0.03** *	0.01	- 0.03****	0.01
SF-46 – Mental Health			0.10** *	0.01	- 0.09****	0.01
N (observations)	3,037	3,037	3,037	3,037	3,037	3,037
R2	0.01	0.01	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08

