

## Fathers' work experiences effect children's behaviors via job-related affect and parenting behaviors

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### Summary

We suggest that fathers' work experiences (decision latitude, job demands, job insecurity and interrole conflict) indirectly influence children's behaviors (acting out, shyness and school competence) through their sequential effects on job-related affect (job satisfaction, negative job-related mood and job tension) and parenting behaviors (punishing, rejecting and authoritative behaviors). Data on work experiences, job-related affect and parenting behaviors were obtained from 189 fathers; teachers provided ratings of the children's behaviors. Path analysis provided support for the proposed model. Conceptual implications and suggestions for future research on fathers' employment and the links between work and family are discussed.

### Introduction

There is now extensive empirical support for the notion that work and family roles overlap (see Barling, 1990; Lerner, 1994). Most of this research has focused on the effects of maternal employment on children, and to a lesser extent on the effects of work on marital functioning. The research addressing maternal employment was driven by concerns that employed mothers' absences from the family would negatively affect their children. Thus, it is not surprising that research has not focused as much on the effects of fathers' employment on children's behavior, because they are expected to be employed, and their absence is regarded as 'normal' (Barling, 1990, 1991; Piotrkowski and Gornick, 1987). In this study, we investigate whether fathers' work experiences influence their children's classroom and social behaviors, and if so, how. In doing so, we will be guided by our research on work and family in general and maternal employment in particular, because (a) we predict that the process whereby parental employment affects children's behavior will be similar, regardless of parents' gender, and (b) process models explicating just how mothers' employment affects children, and how role experiences influence family functioning, have been developed, tested and validated.

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Two central assumptions have guided our previous research (see Barling, 1992, 1994). First, employment experiences rather than employment status affect family functioning. With respect to the effects of maternal employment, research has shown repeatedly that focusing on whether a mother is employed or not (i.e. her 'daily address'; Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1982) has no effect on children's behavior (Barling, 1990). In contrast, maternal employment experiences affect children's behavior (MacEwen and Barling, 1991). The second major assumption which has guided our previous research is that parental employment experiences do not spill over directly onto children's behavior. Instead, parents' work experiences indirectly influence children's behavior through their sequential effects on parents' job-related affect and parenting behaviors. Additional support for the two assumptions underlying this model (i.e. that employment experiences rather than employment status affects family functioning, and that any such effects are indirect) derives from research assessing employment and non-employment roles and family functioning. Specifically, non-employed mothers' homemaker role experiences indirectly affects their toddlers behaviors (Barling, MacEwen and Nolte, 1993), unemployment experiences influence marital functioning through their effect on depressive symptoms (Grant and Barling, 1994), and retirement role experiences indirectly affect marital satisfaction (Higginbottom, Barling and Kelloway, 1993). In addition, employment experiences affect marital functioning (Barlow and MacEwen, 1991; MacEwen, Barling and Kelloway, 1993) and mental health (Kelloway and Barling, 1991) indirectly.

Thus, we selected four work characteristics that reflect fathers' work experiences. First, we investigated the two components of Karasek's (Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990) job strain model, namely job decision latitude and job demands. Decision latitude encompasses task authority, which involves the freedom to determine how work gets done, and having input into decision making, and skill discretion, which includes using a variety of skills, learning new skills, and working creatively. In contrast, job demands include competing role requirements, and having too much work to do in a limited amount of time. While Karasek recommends that the two components of job decision latitude and job demands be combined into a single 'job strain' index, we chose to retain them as separate variables for several reasons. First, job decision latitude and job demands predict negative mood and anxiety differently (Warr, 1990b). Specifically, job decision latitude predicts negative mood (Hutt and Weidner, 1993), while job demands predicts tension. Second, there is no consensus as to the optimal method for combining latitude and demands. Some researchers prefer an interaction term (Schnall, Pieper, Schwartz, Karasek, Schluskel, Devereux, Ganau, Alderman, Warren and Pickering, 1990), others a difference score (Carrera, Evans, Palsane and Rivas, 1991). Third, the data are not conclusive as to whether combining decision latitude and job demands adds to our understanding of relevant outcomes over-and-above the two independent components.

Job insecurity reflects the degree to which employees perceive their jobs, or parts of their jobs, to be threatened. While job insecurity used to be a concern primarily for blue-collar workers, current realities are such that job insecurity affects workers and managers alike (Schwartz, Tsiantar, Miller, Thomas, McCormick, Friday and Washington, 1990). Although research on job insecurity is relatively recent, associations between job insecurity and psychological and physical outcomes have already been identified (e.g. Ashford, Lee and Bobko, 1989; Roskies and Louis-Guerin, 1990).

Although not an intrinsic job characteristic, conflict between work and family roles reflects a reality for numerous parents, both mothers and fathers. While a considerable amount of research on mothers has shown that interrole conflict predicts psychological and physiological strain (see Barling, 1990; MacEwen and Barling, 1991), potential consequences of fathers' interrole conflict have been largely ignored, even though husbands and wives may experience the same



levels of interrole conflict (Barling and Janssens, 1984; Herman and Gyllstrom, 1977; Holohan and Gilbert, 1979; Voydanoff, 1988). Moreover, the correlates of interrole conflicts are consistent for men and women (Barling, 1986a; Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992; Suchet and Barling, 1986). Consequently, we hypothesize that interrole conflict is a critical job-related experience for fathers, and investigate its direct and indirect effects on children's behavior.

Three aspects of job-related affect will be investigated that we hypothesize will mediate the effects of work experiences on parenting behavior. First, job satisfaction is a major indicator of psychological well-being (Broadbent, 1985; Warr, 1990a), and we predict that decision latitude will positively predict job satisfaction, and that job demands, job insecurity and interrole conflict will be negatively associated with job satisfaction. Moreover, job satisfaction is associated with the amount of time fathers spend with their children (Grossman, Pollack and Golding, 1988; Voydanoff and Kelly, 1984), and job satisfaction is also associated with more positive father-child interactions (Heath, 1976; Kemper and Reichler, 1976). Thus, we also predict that fathers' job satisfaction will be associated with positive parenting behaviors.

The second proposed mediator in the model is negative job-related mood. Unlike job satisfaction, however, we predict that only decision-latitude and interrole conflict will predict negative job-related mood. Research has shown that interrole conflict is a substantial and consistent predictor of negative mood (Barling and MacEwen, 1991; MacEwen and Barling, 1991). Results from previous research show work stress in general, and decision latitude in particular, are associated with the depression-enthusiastic axis of well-being. However, decision-latitude was not associated with the anxiety-comfortable axis of well-being (Warr, 1990b).

Job-related tension represents the third facet of job-related strain, and is consistent with Warr's (1990a) anxiety-comfortable axis. We suggest that because of their over-arousing properties, job demands, job insecurity and interrole conflict (but not decision latitude) will predict job-related tension. Support for this prediction derives from Warr's (1990b) study showing that job demands predict anxiety, while decision latitude does not.

Previous research linking parental work experiences with children's behavior has focused on both punishing and rejecting behaviors as mediators. Research shows that these two parenting behaviors mediate the job-family relationship differently. For example, cognitive overload predicts rejection, and affective strain predicts parental punishment and rejection (MacEwen and Barling, 1991). Thus, we predict that parental punishment predicts externalizing behaviors, while parental rejecting behavior predicts children's internalizing problems. In addition, consistent with our earlier findings (MacEwen and Barling, 1991), we predict that because of its over-arousing nature, interrole conflict will also exert direct effects on punishing and rejecting behaviors. Last, we predict that job satisfaction, an indicator of well-being, will negatively predict punishing behaviors. In turn, rejection leads to anxiety and withdrawal behaviors in children, while punishment leads to externalizing behaviors (Barling *et al.*, 1993; MacEwen and Barling, 1991; Patterson, 1982).

However, focusing only on negative mediators of the work-family relationship could result in a truncated perspective, and imply inappropriately that work experiences only exert negative effects on the family. Accordingly, we also focused on positive behaviors parents engage in with their children. Baumrind (1971) suggests that positive parenting requires a combination of psychological autonomy, acceptance and supervision, which she calls 'authoritative' parenting. We suggest that job satisfaction will predict authoritative parenting. In turn, authoritative parenting will be associated with school-related competence (e.g. Ryan and Grolnick, 1986; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch and Darling, 1992). Thus, we will investigate the indirect effects of fathers' work experiences on children's acting out behaviors, shyness and school competencies, and the model we have developed and will test is presented in Figure 1.

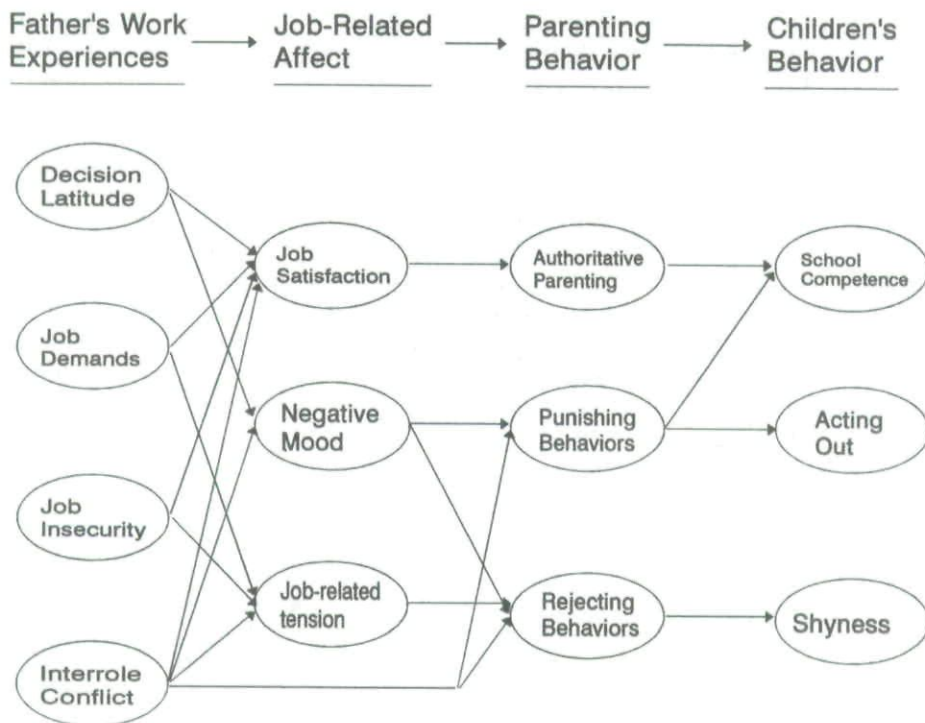


Figure 1. Proposed model linking fathers' work experiences and children's behaviors

One final issue will be addressed. Previous research on work and the family has often relied on a single source for the data, leaving inferences regarding the role of mono-method bias difficult to exclude. For this reason, we will follow Barling (1986b) in obtaining teacher reports of children's behaviors in an attempt to exclude such rival interpretations.

## Method

### *Subjects and procedure*

Twenty-five classrooms from 10 elementary schools were involved in this study. Random selection of schools, classrooms and respondents was not possible; hence, selection was based on the willingness of school principals and teachers to allow access initially, and on fathers' consent. The father's questionnaires were given to every grade four or five student in the class who had regular contact with a biological father, step-father or their mothers' common-law husband. Six hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed and 195 (30 per cent response rate) were completed and returned by the fathers. After the fathers signed and returned the consent form, teachers completed questionnaires on the children's behaviors. As an incentive to participate, fathers were told that there would be two \$50.00 draws for participating fathers. Teachers were also informed that two \$50.00 draws would be made, and participating teachers would have their names entered once for every child for whom they completed questionnaires.



The final sample, one in which information was available from father and teacher, was 189. The mean age of the fathers was 38.5 years ( $S.D. = 4.9$ ), and they had been employed at their current jobs an average of 10.5 years. Sixty-four per cent of the married fathers indicated that their wives were employed outside the home. One-third of the fathers held professional or semi-professional positions, 43.5 per cent were skilled labourers and 23.5 per cent had jobs that could be categorized as semi-skilled or unskilled. Of the fathers 15.9 per cent earned less than \$20 000, 59.6 per cent earned between \$40–60 000, 18.1 per cent stated that they earned between \$60–80 000, and 6.4 per cent earned more than \$80 000. This sample of married fathers indicated that they were very satisfied in their marriages ( $M = 8.6$  on a one-item scale, 'Please rate your level of marital satisfaction', where 1 = very unsatisfied, 10 = very satisfied).

There were 102 boys and 85 girls in the child sample (two unreported).

### Questionnaires

#### Fathers' work experiences

Job-decision latitude and job demands were measured with Schnall *et al.*'s modified version of the job strain questionnaire developed by Karasek (1979). All 21 items were scored on a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). Nine of the 21 items measured job-decision latitude (e.g. 'On my job, I am given a lot of freedom to decide how I do my work'). The remaining items measured job demands (e.g. 'My job requires working very fast'). Internal consistency for both scales were acceptable in Schnall *et al.*'s (1990) study (job-decision latitude = 0.88; job demands = 0.80).

We used Vance and MacNeil's (1990) 18-item measure of job insecurity. All items (e.g. 'I can be sure of my present job as long as I do good work') are scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Vance and MacNeil (1990) reported the coefficient alpha to be 0.70.

Kopelman, Greenhaus and Connolly's (1983) eight-item interrole conflict scale assessed the extent to which work interferes with family demands. Items (e.g. 'My work takes up time I'd like to spend with my family') were again scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Barling and MacEwen (1988) showed the internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity of the scale to be adequate.

#### Job-related affect

Job satisfaction was measured with Warr, Cook and Wall's (1979) 16-item scale. Fathers indicated their satisfaction or dissatisfaction on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = I'm extremely dissatisfied and 7 = I'm extremely satisfied), on extrinsic (e.g. 'your immediate boss') and intrinsic aspects (e.g. 'the recognition you get for good work'). Because the two subscales were substantially correlated ( $r = 0.75$ ), they were combined into an overall job satisfaction scale. Previous research supports the internal consistency of the overall scale (Warr *et al.*, 1979).

Negative mood at work was assessed using Quinn and Shepard's (1974) Depressed Mood at Work scale. This 10-item scale is scored using a 4-point Likert scale where the father indicated how often (1 = never, 4 = very often), for example, he felt 'downhearted and blue', or 'more irritable than usual' during the last month. The coefficient alpha was 0.77 in Quinn and Shepard's (1974) research.

House and Rizzo's (1972) seven-item job-induced tension subscale from their Anxiety-Stress Questionnaire was used. Responses are 'true' (2) or 'false' (1) and summed to yield a job-related

tension score (e.g. 'problems associated with my job have kept me awake at night'). Internal reliability was reported by House and Rizzo (1972) to be 0.83.

### *Fathers' parenting behaviors*

We used MacEwen and Barling's (1991) punishing and rejecting parenting subscales. The punishing scale consists of nine items, such as the extent to which the father has 'sent his/her child to his/her room' over the last month. The rejecting scale consists of seven items, such as the extent to which 'you have ignored your child when he/she wanted your attention' over the last month. Both scales were found to be internally reliable by MacEwen and Barling ( $\alpha = 0.82$  and  $0.72$  respectively).

An eight-item scale was developed to measure authoritative parenting behaviors consistent with Baumrind's (1971) description of an authoritative parent. Items were included to measure the four aspects associated with authoritative parenting styles; namely, consistency of rules, promoting individuality, praising the child, and open communication. For example, two of these items were (to what extent have you) 'given your child freedom to make his/her decisions', and 'praised your child for something he/she did' during the last month. The response format for all items measuring parenting behaviors was a 5-point scale, where 1 = never and 5 = always, and the father was to consider how often he had engaged in these behaviors over the last month.

### *Teachers' ratings of children's behavior*

The children's behaviors were assessed by their teachers using the acting-out (six items) and shy-anxious (six items) subscales from Hightower, Work, Cowen, Lotyczewski, Spinell, Guare and Rohrbeck's (1986) Teacher-Child Rating Scale. Teachers rated the child on each of the behaviors using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'not a problem', 5 = 'very serious problem'). Ten week test-retest reliabilities were 0.88, and 0.85 respectively (Hightower *et al.*, 1986), and Hightower *et al.* (1986) and Grolnick and Ryan (1989) obtained satisfactory internal reliabilities for the two subscales ( $>0.88$ ).

Teachers also completed Grolnick and Ryan's (1989) eight-item measure, which assessed three aspects of children's school-related competencies; namely, academic performance, motivation, and independence. Grolnick and Ryan (1989) reported that their factor analysis of this questionnaire revealed a one-factor solution. A principal components factor analysis with a varimax rotation also resulted in a one-factor solution in the present study (eigenvalue = 5.32). Therefore all items were summed to give a general measure of school competency.

## **Results**

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of all study variables are presented in Table 1. Because fathers' income is significantly and predictably associated with several variables



Table 1. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of all study variables\*

	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Income	2.56	0.98														
2. Decision latitude	34.62	7.14	23†													
3. Job demands	35.10	8.42	-18†	88												
4. Job insecurity	26.62	5.79	23†	10	80											
5. Interrole conflict	21.87	8.25	15	-02	-14	80										
6. Job satisfaction	78.74	15.87	14	49†	-19†	-50†	90									
7. Negative mood	18.67	4.36	-05	-28†	14	-17†	-48†	91								
8. Job tension	9.18	1.93	13	07	33†	06	-28†	-48†	77							
9. Authoritative parenting	30.89	4.53	-02	08	-05	-08	57†	-28†	-25†	72						
10. Punishment	18.65	5.44	-02	-13	10	-01	-11	-13	33†	-12	73					
11. Rejection	12.34	3.51	-06	-05	14†	-15†	38†	-28†	38†	20†	-10	83				
12. Act out	8.91	4.72	-18†	03	-01	-09	04	-03	07	02	-08	21†	73			
13. Shy/withdrawn	8.81	4.63	-04	-07	-14	-01	-06	-05	11	-09	-21†	04	09	92		
14. School competence	15.65	7.02	-22†	-11	06	-12	07	-06	19†	-03	-13	24†	15†	56†	89	
													11	21†	82	

\* Internal consistency coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) presented on the diagonal.†  $p < 0.05$ ; ‡  $p < 0.01$ .

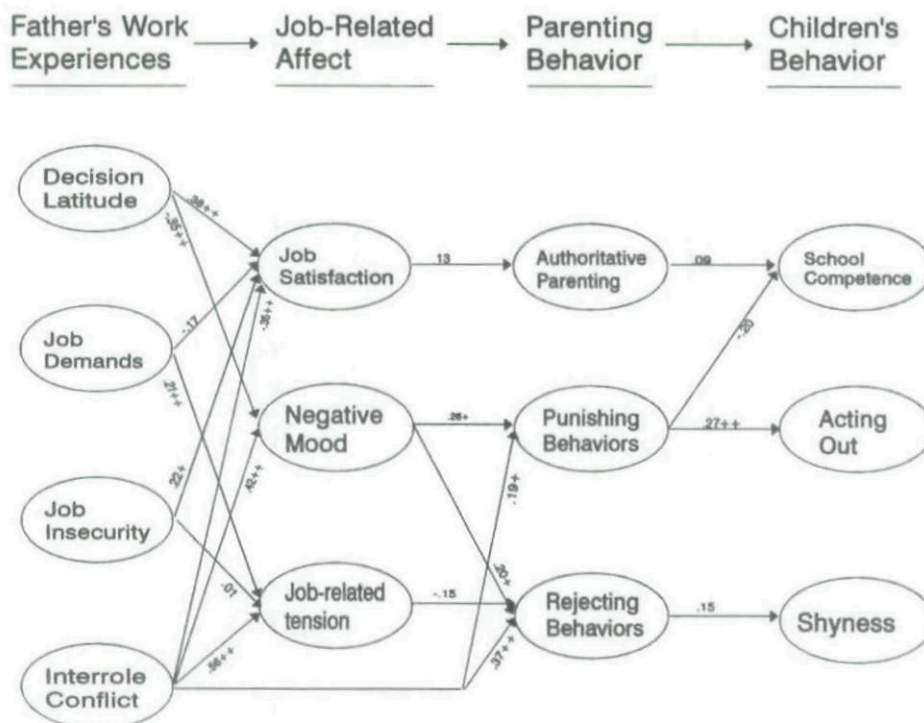


Figure 2. Results of the path analysis

(e.g. decision latitude, job demands, job insecurity and teacher ratings of children's school competence), fathers' income is controlled statistically in all analyses by entering it as the first step in all the regression equations.

The extent to which the proposed model provides an adequate fit to the data can be established in several ways using path analysis (Kerlinger, 1973). First, the beta weight associated with each of the predicted paths can be inspected. Second, the  $Q$  statistic (which varies between 0 and 1) and  $W$  statistic (which approximates the  $\chi^2$  statistic) will be used in assessing the goodness of fit of the whole model, both of which provide an indication of whether setting any of the paths to zero jeopardizes the maximum amount of variance explainable, i.e. whether excluding any of the paths threatens the integrity of the model.

First, inspection of the standardized beta weights provides strong support for the model (see Figure 2). None of the paths that were set to zero were significant. Of the predicted paths, only those from job demands to job satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.08$ ), job insecurity to job tension ( $\beta = 0.10$ ), job satisfaction to authoritative parenting ( $\beta = 0.15$ ), job tension to rejecting behaviors ( $\beta = -0.07$ ), rejecting behaviors to shyness ( $\beta = 0.12$ ) and authoritative parenting to school competence ( $\beta = -0.11$ ) were not significant. Second, the  $Q$  value was 0.74. Because the distribution associated with  $Q$  is unknown, any inferences are limited. However,  $W$ , which approximates a  $\chi^2$  distribution can be obtained from  $Q$ . For the proposed model,  $W$  was 53.40 ( $df = 42$ ),  $p > 0.05$ , suggesting that the paths that were set to zero did not threaten the integrity of the proposed model.



## Discussion

The results suggest that the proposed model provided a good fit to the data. Specifically, fathers' work experiences differentially affect their children's behavior through their effects on fathers' job-related affect and parenting behaviors. As such, the present results corroborate the socializing influence of the father. However, in establishing this process, the present results go further than similar research on mothers' employment by obtaining teacher rather than father reports of children's behavior, thereby minimizing the likelihood that response bias might account for the results.

The results of this study provide support for the two assumptions underlying this and similar research (e.g. Barling *et al.*, 1993; Grant and Barling, 1994; Higginbottom *et al.*, 1993; MacEwen and Barling, 1991), namely that work experience (rather than employment status) is the critical variable in understanding the link between work and family, and any effects of work role experiences on family functioning are primarily indirect.

The generalizability of the current findings is suggested for several reasons. First, the process by which fathers' work experiences affect children (i.e. work experiences influence job-related affect, which in turn influences parenting behaviors, and parenting behaviors influence child behavior) is similar to the way in which mothers' work experiences influence children's behavior (MacEwen and Barling, 1991). However, both these studies have examined *one* parent's work experiences in isolation, ignoring the question of what might emerge if mothers' and fathers' work experiences are similar or different. Future research might profitably assess the joint effects of mothers' and fathers' employment experiences on children. Second, the way in which parents' work experiences indirectly influence children's behaviors parallels the way in which homemakers' role experiences influence their toddlers (Barling *et al.*, 1993), retirement experiences influence marital functioning (Higginbottom *et al.*, 1993) and unemployment experiences lead to marital functioning (Grant and Barling, 1994). Third, fathers' income was controlled statistically in the present study.

While the model as a whole provide a suitable fit to the data, an examination of the individual paths in the model points to the substantial role of fathers' interrole conflict. First, it was the only work experience to significantly influence all three indices of job-related affect. Second, interrole conflict also exerted significant effects on both punishing and rejecting parenting behaviors. Third, the largest beta weights associated with the prediction of job-related affect and parenting behaviors are a function of interrole conflict. Yet most research in this area continues to limit its focus to the conflict between work and family of females. To gain an expanded understanding both of work-family conflict, as well as the effects of work experiences on family functioning, it is clear that fathers' work-family conflicts must be considered. This is consistent with findings suggesting that men and women experience similar levels (Barling and Janssens, 1984; Holohan and Gilbert, 1979; Herman and Gyllstrom, 1977; Voydanoff, 1988), and consequences (e.g. Barling, 1986a; Frone *et al.*, 1992) of interrole conflict.

While the results suggest the pivotal role of interrole conflict, job tension, rejection and shy/withdrawn behaviors fulfilled less of an important role in the proposed model, neither job tension, authoritative parenting nor parental rejection exerted any significant effects, and neither school competence nor shy/withdrawn behavior were significantly predicted by any of the parenting behaviors. One possibility for this is the limited variance in the job tension, authoritative and rejecting variables (see Table 1). Future research might use scales to measure these variables that have yielded more significant findings (e.g. MacEwen and Barling, 1991; Steinberg *et al.*, 1992). Moreover, since previous research has shown significant associations

between job overload and job tension (e.g. Broadbent, 1985; MacEwen *et al.*, 1993; Warr, 1990b), it would be premature to exclude these variables from the proposed model. Similarly, past research has also demonstrated the mediating role of cognitive distraction (Barling and MacEwen, 1991, 1993; MacEwen and Barling, 1991) and future research should assess whether cognitive distraction also mediates the work-family relationship.

The results obtained also support Warr's (1990b) contention that job decision latitude and job demands exert differential effects on well-being. Specifically, decision latitude predicted negative mood but not job tension, while job demands predicted job tension but not negative mood, replicating Warr's (1990b) findings. While we did not assess 'job strain' (i.e. the interaction of decision latitude and job demands; Karasek and Theorell, 1990), these results do provide some support for assessing their independent rather than interactive effects.

Nonetheless, same caution in interpreting the results is warranted. First, one assumption of path analysis is a fully-specified model, i.e. all possible variables are included in the model. Yet data from other research suggest that other work experiences (e.g. intra-role stressors; see Barling and MacEwen, 1992), and mediators (e.g. cognitive distraction; e.g. MacEwen and Barling 1991) were not included in the model. In addition, support for a specified model does not exclude the possibility that other models are equally or even more plausible, suggesting the importance of constructive replication studies. Third, because the data are cross-sectional, causal inferences are premature. Fourth, it is possible that the fathers in this study were atypical given that they were not experiencing high work stress levels, given the means on the decision latitude ( $M = 34.62$ , theoretical maximum = 41) and job insecurity ( $M = 26.62$ , theoretical maximum = 90). Likewise, the fathers manifested relatively low levels of punishing ( $M = 18.65$ , theoretical maximum = 45) and rejecting parenting behaviors ( $M = 12.34$ , theoretical maximum = 35). However, if this latter argument is plausible, then the results may be conservative, and if anything, the model may be underestimated. Lastly, it is possible that stable, dispositional traits account for the findings. For example, individuals high in positive affect, self-esteem might experience their work and parent-child interactions more positively, and report greater well-being. Future research should assess this possibility directly.

In conclusion, this study represents one of the first attempts to assess if, and how, fathers' work experiences influence children's social and school behaviors. The results showed that fathers' work experiences influence children's behaviors indirectly through their sequential effects of fathers' job-related affect and fathers' parenting behaviors, and both the roles of the father and the workplace in the socialization of children is demonstrated.

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