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## Parenting Stress among Low-Income and Working-Class Fathers: The Role of Employment

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### Abstract

Contemporary norms of fatherhood emphasize the dual demands of breadwinning and daily involvement in childcare. Recent qualitative research suggests that working-class fathers find it difficult to meet these demands due to job instability and workplace inflexibility. Yet, little quantitative research has examined how employment characteristics are related to fathers' parenting stress, in comparison with mothers'. Analyses using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study ( $N = 3,165$ ) show that unemployment and workplace inflexibility, but not overwork, multiple jobs, odd-jobs, and nonstandard hours, are related to more parenting stress for fathers. Although these two factors are also related to more parenting stress for mothers, nuanced gender differences emerged: these are better predictors than other parental or child characteristics for fathers only, and the effect size of workplace inflexibility is greater for fathers than mothers. In sum, securing a job with flexible schedule is central to reducing fathers' parenting stress.

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The changing roles of U.S. fathers reflect increasing expectations for men to be involved in the daily care of their children, while continuing to be the primary financial providers (Lamb, 2000; McGill, 2014; Townsend, 2002). Whereas past research has largely focused on middle-class fathers, some studies have shown that the new norms of dual demands of fatherhood are in fact particularly relevant to working-class fathers (Williams, 2010a). Working-class fathers are less likely than middle-class fathers to ideologically emphasize gender equality, but they are more likely to be involved in daily lives of their children, in part because their spouse/partner tends to have a job that does not have a flexible schedule and they cannot afford nonparental care (Shows & Gerstel, 2009).

Under current economic and workplace circumstances, achieving the dual demands is not easy for working-class fathers. As low- and semi-skilled manufacturing jobs are replaced by automation or transferred overseas, economic prospects for men without a college degree have declined in the past decades (Levy, 1998). In addition, jobs that are available for men without a college degree typically do not offer flexible schedules that would allow them to attend to their children's needs (Heymann, 2000; Williams, 2010b). Qualitative studies have shown that working-class fathers feel considerable stress in the parenting role due to

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difficulties in keeping a job or negotiating accommodations in the workplace for their caregiving responsibility (Fox, 2009; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Williams, 2010a).

Yet, quantitative research that examined parenting stress among working-class fathers is scarce. Past research has largely focused on mothers. A handful of studies that compared fathers' and mothers' parenting stress have relied on samples of middle class couples (Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996), many of which focused on couples with children of special needs (Davis & Carter, 2008). We know little about the role of employment in influencing low-income and working-class fathers' parenting stress.

Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS) which focuses on low-income and working-class parents with preschool children, we examine the associations between employment characteristics and parenting stress among fathers with a specific focus on comparisons with mothers. The present analysis contributes to scholarships in multiple areas including parenting stress, fatherhood, and gender, work, family, and well-being by elucidating how employment characteristics are related to parenting stress among low-income and working-class fathers with a comparison with mothers.

## BACKGROUND

### Determinants of Parenting Stress

Role strain theory defines parenting stress as individuals' sense of difficulties in meeting expected demands of the parenting role (Pearlin, 1999). Individuals experience difficulties when the demands of parenting exceed the availability of resources to meet the demands (Abidin, 1992; Deater-Deckard, 2004). A higher level of parenting stress is related to parents' higher level of psychological distress (Avison, Ali, & Walters 2007) and children's poorer developmental outcomes (Creasey & Jarvis, 1994). Thus, it is important to decipher the factors that influence parenting stress. Empirical studies have investigated specific demands and resources associated with parenting mainly in three domains, including (a) child characteristics, such as temperament and health (e.g., Davis & Carter, 2008; McBride, Schoppe, & Rane, 2002), (b) parents' characteristics, such as parenting values (e.g., Deater-Deckard, 1996), and (c) contexts surrounding the parents, such as family income, marital status, family structure, race/ethnicity, and social support (e.g., Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011; Nomaguchi & House, 2013).

Prior research largely focused on mothers or middle-class couples. Although researchers have begun to investigate factors shaping working-class fathers' parenting stress, most have focused on family characteristics (Carlson & Turner, 2010; Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007; Tach, 2012), but not on employment characteristics. This is a critical gap in the literature because, as we will discuss below, employment characteristics greatly influence the demands and resources associated with parenting; and, according to contemporary norms of fatherhood, it is central in understanding fathers' parenting stress.

### Employment and Fathers' Parenting Stress

In the demands-resources model, employment can be conceptualized as a source of both resources and demands. Employment provides parents with economic resources to fulfill

material demands of parenting. In addition, employment provides social sources, such as coworker networks, and psychological resources, such as a sense of gratification and better self-esteem (Ross & Mirowsky, 1995) that help parents cope with the day-to-day stress of parenting. In contrast, overload or inflexible schedules can be a source of strain that prevents parents from carrying out their responsibility of caring for their children (Voydanoff, 2004).

Research on social stress suggests that whether specific employment characteristics are perceived as demands or resources in the parenting role depends on cultural norms associated with the parenting role (Pearlin, 1999). Current norms regarding fatherhood among working-class men include the ideal of breadwinning and the practice of involvement in daily care of children (Shows & Gerstel, 2009; Williams, 2010a). Thus, employment characteristics that prevent fathers from fulfilling these two goals will represent key demands or strains that may lead to more parenting stress.

Recent qualitative research suggests that job loss and job instability are a primary source of parenting stress for working-class fathers (Fox, 2009; Roy & Dyson, 2010). Fox (2009), focusing on resident fathers, contended that failure to achieve the breadwinner role makes it hard for fathers to deal with feelings of incompetence, not only as a provider, but also as a caregiver when they try to handle crying and tantrums of young children. For nonresident fathers, Roy and Dyson (2010) illustrated that fathers who struggled to maintain employment expressed their frustrations and disappointments saying that they would not be able to enjoy spending time with their children if they did not have the money to buy toys, sporting goods, or special treats.

To financially support their families, working-class fathers undertake a variety of strategies. Some fathers work long hours, sometimes by taking multiple jobs at a time (Williams, 2010a). Other fathers make extra money through under-the-table jobs doing household repairs, mowing the lawn, or providing transportation (Woldoff & Cina, 2007). Although these job characteristics—working overtime, taking multiple jobs or informal odd jobs, and working during nonstandard hours—are typically conceptualized as job demands (Minnotte, 2014), in the light of the breadwinning ideal, these characteristics may not lead to more parenting stress among fathers. Townsend (2002) reported that fathers tended to see long work hours as their way of caring for the family by providing children with a comfortable life. Fox (2009) reported that fathers who worked long hours were less stressed than fathers who were unemployed.

It is common for working-class fathers to work nonstandard hours—evening, night, or rotating schedules and weekends—in order to alternate child care with mothers, although some fathers work nonstandard hours due to a job requirement (Presser, 2003; Williams, 2010a). Regardless of their intentions, fathers who work nonstandard hours are more likely than fathers who work during the standard day shift to spend more time taking care of their children (Wight, Raley, & Bianchi, 2008). Because it allows fathers to fulfill the dual responsibilities of breadwinner and caregiver, working during nonstandard hours may not be related to parenting stress, even though it may be detrimental for the marital/partner relationship quality and general well-being (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007; Strazdins et al. 2006).

When work schedules are inflexible, fathers face considerable challenges in sharing child care responsibilities. Whereas control of one's work schedule is a key to successfully balance paid work and family responsibilities (Kelly, Moen, & Tranby, 2011), working-class jobs rarely provide employees with scheduling flexibility (Heymann, 2000). Williams (2010a) suggests that fathers are more vulnerable than mothers to workplace inflexibility because they are less likely to feel it appropriate to ask their supervisors to accommodate their child care responsibilities. Workplace culture continues to embrace the traditional masculine ideal (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010). Men feel pressure to demonstrate commitment to work by showing supervisors and coworkers that they place the first priority on work (Williams, 2010a). Yet, little quantitative research has examined the association between workplace inflexibility and parenting stress among working-class fathers.

### Comparisons with Mothers

Although fatherhood research discussed above tends to emphasize that the new norms of dual-demands has brought unique challenges to men, other research contends that fathers have become similar to mothers in the stressfulness of the dual demands of parenting (Nomaguchi, 2009; Winslow, 2005). For working-class women, in particular, the breadwinning role has been a normative part of motherhood (Sørensen & McLanahan, 1987). Thus mothers who are not employed tend to be "pushed out" of the labor force due to inflexible work schedules and difficulty in securing affordable, reliable childcare (Heymann, 2000; Scott, London, & Hurst, 2005). Additionally, because their children's fathers typically do not earn enough, mothers who do not work for pay tend to experience financial difficulty. Thus, not having a job may be related to a higher level of mothers' parenting stress just as it is for fathers. Like fathers, some mothers take multiple jobs at a time or work long hours to support the family (Scott, London & Hurst, 2005). Other mothers make ends meet by taking informal odd jobs such as cooking meals, cleaning a house, or babysitting for other families (Edin & Lein, 1997). It is common for working-class mothers to work nonstandard hours in order to alternate child care with their partner or relatives (Garey, 1999; Presser, 2003). As in the case of fathers, these employment characteristics may not be negatively related to parenting stress for mothers because these jobs at least provide some material and psychological resources (Edin & Lein, 1997). With regard to workplace inflexibility, although past research has shown that mothers 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 (Hill, Tranby, Kelly, & Moen, 2013), these studies tend to use a more affluent sample. It is unclear whether the same patterns apply to working-class mothers.

### THE PRESENT STUDY

Despite the qualitative evidence that working-class fathers today feel stressed because of job instability and workplace inflexibility, little quantitative research has investigated the associations between employment characteristics and parenting stress among low-income and working-class fathers in comparison to mothers. We addressed two research questions: (1) How are employment characteristics (e.g., unemployment, job instability, overwork, multiple jobs, informal work, nonstandard work schedule, and workplace inflexibility)

related to fathers' parenting stress?; (2) Are these associations unique to fathers compared with mothers? On the basis of the idea of the new norms of dual demands of fatherhood, we expected that unemployment and workplace inflexibility are related to more parenting stress among fathers; and although these employment characteristics are related to more parenting stress among mothers as well, the degree of the associations are greater for fathers than for mothers.

We controlled for characteristics that are related to both employment characteristics and parenting stress. These include several parental characteristics. Older parents are more likely to be employed (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005) and report less parenting stress (Garrison, et al., 1997; Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). Parents with higher levels of education are more likely to be employed and have more job flexibility (Jackson, Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn, & Blake, 1998), whereas they are more likely to report parenting stress (Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). Black fathers are less likely than white fathers to be employed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014) and more likely to report parenting stress (Nomaguchi & House, 2013). Depressed parents are less likely to be employed (Jackson, Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn, & Blake, 1998) and more likely to report parenting stress (Deater-Deckard, 2004). Marital status is related to employment status (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005) and to parenting stress (Cooper et al., 2009). Employment is related to the quality of coparenting relationship (Lindsey, Caldera, & Colwell, 2005), whereas coparenting quality is related to parenting stress (Florsheim, et al., 2003). In addition, we controlled for a few child characteristics. Poor child health is related to parents' especially mothers' ability to be employed (Heymann, 2000; Williams, 2010a) and is related to higher parenting stress (Deater-Deckard, 2004). Having a nonresident child may be related to more parenting stress (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). The number of children is related to employment status (Rindfuss & Brewster, 2000) and more parenting stress (Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). Finally, we controlled for frequency of engagement with children, because longer work hours is related to less time with children (Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004), whereas more time with children is related to less parenting stress (Nomaguchi, 2009).

## METHOD

### Data

Data were drawn from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS). Fielded between 1998 and 2000, the FFCWS is a stratified, multistage, probability sample of 4,898 children, of which 3,712 were born to unmarried parents (Reichman et al., 2001). Mothers were selected from 75 hospitals in 20 cities with populations of at least 200,000.

Approximately 5% of the sampled births were ineligible for the study, including those mothers who did not speak English or Spanish well enough to understand the survey; those who were putting the child up for adoption; and those who were too ill after giving birth to participate. The baseline interviews were conducted in the hospital soon after the child's birth (W1). Wave 2 (W2) interviews were conducted by telephone when the child was one year old; and wave 3 (W3) interviews were conducted when the child was 3 years old. Following prior research (Belsky, Woodworth, & Crnic, 1996; Meadows, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007), the present analysis focused on parenting stress at W3 when parenting

stress generally reaches its peak during early childhood (i.e., “terrible twos”) (Fagot & Kavanagh, 1993; Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). We selected fathers who participated in the 3-year interview (W3) ( $n = 3,299$ ; 67%). Because the main focus of this study was comparing fathers to mothers, we selected those whose focal child’s mother also participated in the 3-year interview ( $N = 3,165$ ; 64%). Attrition analyses indicate that White fathers were more likely to be retained at W3, as were those with higher education, and those who reported being married at W1. We examined whether patterns of results would differ for fathers who were excluded from the sample with no significant differences. Similarly, White mothers were more likely to be retained at W3, as were black mothers, those with higher education, and those married at W1. Patterns of findings for mothers who were excluded from the present analysis because fathers did not participate in the survey were substantively similar to what we found in the paper.

## Measures

*Parenting stress* was measured as a four-item mean scale assessed at W3 ( $\alpha = .63$  for fathers and mothers respectively) including: (a) “Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be”; (b) “I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent”; (c) “I find that taking care of my child(ren) is much more work than pleasure”; (d) “I often feel tired, worn out, exhausted from raising a family” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*).

Employment characteristics were measured at W3. *Current employment status* was measured as dummy variables. Following other research that used 60 hours as the cut-point for overwork for fathers (Crouter et al., 2001), five dummy variables were created including “not employed,” “employed part-time (< 35 hours per week),” “employed full-time (35 to 44 hours per week)” (reference), “employed full-time with extended hours (45 to 59 hours per week),” and “employed full-time with overwork (60 hours or more per week)”. For mothers, because very few worked 60 hours per week or more, four dummy variables were created including “not employed,” “employed part-time (< 35 hours per week),” “employed full-time (35 to 44 hours per week)” (reference), and “employed full-time with overtime (45 hours or more per week)”. *Weekly hours spent on informal odd jobs* was measured as a sum of hours per week fathers and mothers spent on (a) working off the books or under the table in someone else’s business, including housecleaning, household repairs, child care, or providing transportation or some other personal service; and (b) working in their own business, such as doing other people’s hair either in your home or theirs during the past 12 months. *Non-standard work schedule* was a dichotomous variable where parents who reported being employed were asked whether they worked evenings, nights, rotating shifts, or weekends (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*). *Multiple job holding* was a dichotomous variable where parents who reported working more than one job at a time during the past 12 months were coded as 1 and 0 otherwise. *Job instability* during the last three years was measured by dummy variables including no job, one or two (reference), or three or more jobs. *Workplace inflexibility* was the average of three questions ( $\alpha = .57$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .63$  for mothers) including: (a) “My shift and work schedule cause extra stress for me and my child”; (b) “Where I work, it is difficult to deal with child care problems during working hours”; (c) “In my work schedule I have enough flexibility to handle family needs (reverse coded)” (1 =

*never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *always*). We created four dummy variables including (a) never (reference), (b) sometime, (c) often or always, and (d) nonemployed.

Several control variables were included. *Parent's age* was a continuous variable assessed at W1. *Parent's race/ethnicity* was a categorical variable measured at W1 including White (reference), Black, Hispanic, and other race. *Education* was measured at W1 by four dummy variables including less than a high school degree, a high school diploma or equivalent (reference), some college, and a 4-year college degree or above. *Income-to-poverty ratio* was a FFCWS constructed variable measured at W3. *Depressed mood* was a variable constructed by FFCWS at W3. Mothers and fathers who met depression criteria based on the Composite International Diagnostic Interview Short Form (CIDI-SF) Version 1.0 November 1998 (Kessler et al. 1998) were coded 1s and others 0s. *The number of children* under age 18 in household was a continuous variable measured at W3. *Child's health* was a categorical variable ranging from 1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent* measured as a parent's report at W3. *Having a non-residential minor child* was a dichotomous variable measured at W3 indicating whether parents had any minor child living outside the household. *Engagement with children* was a four-item mean scale measured at W3 ( $\alpha = .80$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .74$  for mothers). Fathers and mothers were asked how many days per week they would (a) sing songs or nursery rhymes; (b) read stories; (c) tell stories; or (d) play inside with the child. Responses were categorized as 0 to 7 days. *Relationship status* reflected whether each parent was married (reference), cohabiting, dating, divorced/separated and currently single, or repartnered to another individual. *Quality of coparenting relationship* was an average of six questions at W3 ( $\alpha = .73$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .86$  for mothers), including: (a) "When (mother/father) is with (child), s/he acts like the father you want for your child"; (b) "You can trust (mother/father) to take good care of (child)"; (c) "S/He respects the schedules and rules you make for (child)"; (d) "S/He supports you in the way you want to raise (child)"; (e) "You and (mother/father) talk about problems that come up with raising (child)"; (f) "You can count on (mother/father) for help when you need someone to look after (child) for a few hours" (1 = *rarely true* to 3 = *always true*). Mothers and fathers who did not see the child in the past month were coded 1.

### Analytical plan

First, we examined zero-order correlations between employment characteristics and parenting stress for fathers and mothers separately. Then, for multivariate analyses, we used seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) models. Because we used couple-level data, there was a risk that fathers and mothers reports would be correlated. This was particularly likely for those parental dyads that remain coupled, as what affects one partner would likely have some effect on the other (e.g., employment status, nonstandard work hours). Thus, the error terms were likely to be correlated across models (Batton, 2004; Schwartz, 2006), which violates the assumption of independence in ordinary-least-squares (OLS) regression models. SUR estimates two equations simultaneously where the dependent variables share common, unmeasured causes that resulted in correlation among errors. Consequently, SUR analyses provide more efficient tests and produce unbiased tests of gender differences (Godwin, 1985). To examine gender differences in the associations between employment factors and parenting stress, we tested whether coefficients were significantly different between fathers

and mothers. Additionally, we compared the relative importance of each employment factor to non-employment factors between fathers and mothers by using standardized coefficients.

For most variables, a small % of respondents had missing data, although one variable, fathers' report of the child's health, had 30.3% missing data. Missing data were imputed using Stata's *ice* procedure to create 10 imputed datasets (see Royston, 2004). Results for analyses with and without the imputed data were substantively the same and we chose to present those using the imputed data.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for variables in the analysis are presented in Table 1. On average, fathers reported less parenting stress than mothers (2.07 vs. 2.24 with a range from 1 to 4). One-fifth (21%) of fathers and 43% of mothers were currently not employed. More than half of fathers worked nonstandard hours (64%), whereas 53% of mothers did so. Average weekly hours spent on informal odd-jobs were 6.34 hours for fathers and 2.81 hours for mothers. About 16% of fathers worked two or more jobs at a time during the past year, whereas 10% of mothers did so. Seven percent of fathers and 13% of mothers were consistently not employed during the past three years, whereas 18% of fathers and 17% of mothers worked three or more jobs in the past three years. Fathers were more likely than mothers to report experiencing workplace inflexibility "sometimes" (34% vs. 24%) or "often or always" (18% vs. 9%).

How are employment characteristics related to fathers' parenting stress? Are any of the associations unique to fathers compared to mothers? Table 2 presents the results. For fathers and mothers, the first column shows coefficients for zero-order associations between each variable and parenting stress. The second column presents unstandardized coefficients from SUR models which controlled for parental and child characteristics. We tested differences in coefficients between fathers and mothers. The third column presents standardized coefficients to examine relative strengths of the association between each variable and parenting stress.

We first examined zero-order associations for fathers. As expected, unemployed fathers reported more parenting stress than employed fathers working for regular full-time hours. Fathers who were working part-time or working overtime had little difference in levels of parenting stress from those who worked for regular full-time hours. Working nonstandard hours was negatively related to fathers' parenting stress. Consistently having no job during the past three years was positively related to fathers' parenting stress. Other job characteristics, including weekly hours spent on informal jobs and having worked two or more jobs at a time during the past year, were not related to fathers' parenting stress. Experiencing workplace inflexibility sometimes, or often or always, was positively related to fathers' parenting stress. For mothers, similar patterns were found with the exception that holding multiple jobs over the last three years was related to more parenting stress for mothers, although it was not related to fathers' parenting stress.



For multivariate results, again we consider results for fathers first. Unstandardized coefficients from SUR models show that after controlling for other variables, those who were not currently employed showed a higher level of parenting stress than those who worked for full-time regular work hours ( $b = .228, p < .001$ ). The only other employment factor that appeared to be related to fathers' parenting stress was workplace inflexibility. Compared to those who were employed and reported "never" experiencing workplace inflexibility, fathers who were employed and reported experiencing workplace inflexibility sometimes ( $b = .188, p < .001$ ) or often or always ( $b = .328, p < .001$ ) reported a higher level of parenting stress. After controlling for other variables, working nonstandard hours was no longer related to fathers' parenting stress. A supplemental analysis (data not shown) indicated that the significant negative association shown at the descriptive level disappeared when unemployment was included in the model, suggesting that working nonstandard hours was related to less parenting stress than unemployment but was not different from working regular hours. The positive association between consistently having no job during the past three years and fathers' parenting stress at the descriptive level also disappeared when current unemployment was included in the model.

Are these patterns unique to fathers? Results suggest that unemployment was related to more parenting stress for mothers as well. A statistical test indicated that there was little gender difference in the degree of association between unemployment and parenting stress. Workplace inflexibility, too, was related to more parenting stress for mothers. The differences in coefficients between fathers and mothers for "some" workplace inflexibility were statistically significant, suggesting that the association between experiencing "some" workplace inflexibility and parenting stress was greater for fathers than for mothers. To interpret these results, we calculated predicted means for parenting stress for four groups including (a) not employed, (b) employed, never experiencing workplace inflexibility, (c) employed, sometimes experiencing workplace inflexibility, and (d) employed, often or always experiencing workplace inflexibility, for fathers and mothers respectively. Figure 1 suggests that whereas fathers generally experienced a lower level of parenting stress than mothers, there was no gender difference in parenting stress among those who "sometimes" experienced workplace inflexibility. It appears that fathers' parenting stress was more susceptible to occasional workplace inflexibility than mothers' parenting stress. For both fathers and mothers, having no job was related to more parenting stress relative to those who were employed and reporting no workplace inflexibility. But having a job that made them experience workplace inflexibility "often or always" was related to more parenting stress than having no job. The effect sizes for unemployment were .335 for fathers and .269 for mothers. These are both medium sizes, according to Cohen (1988). The effect sizes for workplace inflexibility were .276 (medium size) for "sometimes" and .482 (large size) for "often or always" for fathers, and .131 (small size) for "sometimes" and .456 (large size) for "often or always" for mothers. These effect sizes indicate a little stronger influences of workplace inflexibility for fathers' parenting stress than for mothers.

Last, the standardized coefficients suggest that the rank order of variables that were most strongly related to parenting stress varied for fathers and mothers. For fathers, the best predictors were workplace inflexibility ( $\hat{\alpha} = .132$  for "sometimes" and  $\hat{\alpha} = .191$  for "often or always") and having no job ( $\hat{\alpha} = .136$ ). For mothers, the best predictors were chronic

depression and frequency of engagement with children, followed by workplace inflexibility and having no job. It appears that fathers are more likely than mothers to experience parenting stress through difficulties in employment-related factors.

Although our focus is on fathers, it may be worth mentioning that we found one employment characteristic that did not matter for fathers' parenting stress but for mothers' stress in the multivariate analysis. Specifically, part-time employment was related to more parenting stress than full-time employment among mothers only. Research has shown that most part-time workers are women and part-time employment has been increasingly due to employers' needs for lowering costs rather than due to workers' voluntary preference (Kalleberg, 2000). Thus it is not surprising that part-time employment is related to greater parenting stress among mothers. Because the difference in the coefficients between mothers and fathers was not statistically significant, we are cautious in our interpretations.

A few control variables showed significant differences between fathers and mothers in the degree of their associations with parenting stress. Frequency of engagement with children was related to mothers', more than fathers', parenting stress. This gendered pattern is consistent with prior research (Nomaguchi, Milkie, & Bianchi, 2005). Hispanic fathers reported less parenting stress than white fathers, whereas there was no difference by ethnicity for mothers' parenting stress. Having a college degree was related to mothers' but not fathers' parenting stress. Nomaguchi and Brown (2011) found that mothers with a college degree are more likely than those with lower levels of education to feel trapped in the parenting role, perhaps because they feel pressure to invest time in career. The present analysis suggests that this does not apply to fathers. Finally, two variables showed different patterns for fathers and mothers, although the differences were not significant: Number of children was associated with more parenting stress for mothers, but not fathers; and being repartnered was associated with reductions in parenting stress for fathers only. These results should be interpreted cautiously.

In sum, unemployment and workplace inflexibility, but not other employment characteristics, were related to a higher level of parenting stress for fathers. These two employment characteristics were better predictors of fathers' parenting stress than other parental or child characteristics that were examined in this study, although they were not the best predictors for mothers' parenting stress. Fathers' parenting stress was more susceptible to "some" workplace inflexibility than mothers' parenting stress, although there was no gender differences in the association between "chronic" workplace inflexibility and parenting stress. The effect size for workplace inflexibility was greater for fathers than mothers.

## DISCUSSION

Drawing on the notion of dual-demands of contemporary fathers, recent qualitative research has highlighted two major sources of parenting stress for working-class fathers: the inability to provide financial support and the lack of family-friendly accommodations at work (Fox, 2009; Williams, 2010a). Yet, scholarship of parenting stress has rarely examined the role of employment characteristics in influencing working-class fathers' parenting stress.

Additionally, although qualitative research has emphasized a uniqueness of the challenges that fathers face in fulfilling the dual-demands of providing and caretaking, little quantitative research has tested this claim. The findings of the present analysis, as we will discuss below, show both similarities and differences between fathers and mothers, suggesting the increasingly nuanced nature of gender in understanding the well-being of parents.

As expected, fathers who are not currently employed report a higher level of parenting stress than employed fathers. Unlike the emphasis on uniqueness of the importance of the breadwinning ideal in shaping fathers' parenting stress, not having a job is related to a higher level of parenting stress for mothers as well. This is consistent with prior findings that used a more affluent sample (Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). Workplace inflexibility is also related to both fathers' and mothers' parenting stress. This finding is in line with other research findings that fathers' sense of work-family conflict has increased to the same level of mothers' in recent decades (Nomaguchi, 2009; Winslow, 2005). Other job characteristics, such as overwork, working multiple jobs or nonstandard hours, or taking informal jobs, were not related to fathers' as well as mothers' parenting stress. It may be that working-class fathers and mothers work long hours, have multiple jobs, or take informal jobs in order to earn enough to support the family or to avoid being fired, and thus they tend to feel that they are doing what they are supposed to do for their children (Williams, 2010a). In all, unemployment and workplace inflexibility are key employment characteristics that are related to parenting stress for both fathers and mothers.

Nevertheless, we found some indications that unemployment and workplace inflexibility play a more important role in shaping fathers' than mothers' parenting stress. First, unemployment and workplace inflexibility are the best predictors of parenting stress for fathers, whereas for mothers, other factors such as chronic depression and frequencies of engagement with children are as important or more important predictors of parenting stress. Second, fathers' parenting stress is more susceptible to occasional (but not chronic) workplace inflexibility than mothers' stress. Prior research suggests that parents tend to feel more stressed when they face demands in the role for which they do not assume the primary responsibility (Nomaguchi, 2012). It is possible that fathers who "sometimes" experience workplace inflexibility do not necessarily assume daily child care responsibility but occasionally need to pitch in when mothers are not available. As Williams (2010a) noted, these fathers may face challenges in asking their supervisors to provide them with accommodations for their child care responsibilities. Third, the effect size of workplace inflexibility is greater for fathers than for mothers. Finally, more fathers than mothers report a higher level of workplace inflexibility. All in all, these results are consistent with qualitative research that highlighted unemployment and workplace inflexibility as key sources of parenting stress for fathers in comparison to mothers (Fox, 2009; Williams 2010a).

These findings suggest policy implications for the needs to create workplace flexibility to promote the well-being of working-class fathers and mothers. In our findings, fathers and mothers who experience chronic workplace inflexibility report more parenting stress than their counterparts who are not employed, suggesting that just having a job does not help parents unless the job allows them to attend their child care responsibilities. Williams

(2010*b*) suggests that many working-class jobs—e.g., jobs in factories or hospitals and emergency services such as the police or the fire department—require employees to be on-sites for specific hours. Thus, policies such as job sharing and two-hour increments of personal time may provide employees in these occupations with flexibility to attend family responsibilities. Furthermore, to ease fathers' parenting stress, an additional change is warranted: employers must adjust their workplace culture to the reality that many low-wage and working-class men today have caregiving responsibilities (Williams, 2010*a*).

The present analysis has limitations that future research should address. First, we have little information about job quality. Warfield (2001) found that mothers who reported that their work was interesting reported less parenting stress than those who did not report their job was interesting. Minnotee (2014) also found that the extent to which nonstandard work hours are related to men's and women's sense of success in the parenting roles depended on the levels of workplace resources such as supportive colleagues. These studies suggest that job rewards can be resources that parents use to cope with demands of children at home. Second, the present analysis examined cross-sectional associations. It is possible that the causal direction may be the opposite, especially for mothers: a higher level of parenting stress may lead to dropping out of the labor force or reporting more workplace inflexibility, though we controlled for chronic depression. The length of intervals between waves in FFCWS was about two years, which we believe was too long to examine longitudinal models in the present analysis. Third, we focused on fathers and mothers who were both participating in the survey when their focal child was three years old. Those excluded from the sample were more disadvantaged—those who were Hispanic, less educated, and more likely to be separated or divorced from the other parent of the child. Although our supplemental analyses indicated that there was little difference in patterns of findings, our results might underestimate the levels of unemployment, workplace inflexibility, and parenting stress that working-class fathers and mothers experience. Finally, because our analysis focused on working-class men, many of whom were black and Hispanic, future research should examine how employment factors are related to men's parenting stress with a nationally representative sample and whether associations might vary by social class and race/ethnicity.

The present analysis examined the role of employment in influencing working-class fathers' parenting stress in comparison to mothers. Reflecting the new norms of dual-demands of fatherhood, unemployment and workplace inflexibility are key sources of parenting stress for fathers. Although these two factors are related to mothers' parenting stress as well, they are stronger predictors than other parental or child characteristics for fathers' stress only, and the effect size of workplace inflexibility is greater for fathers than for mothers. Future research is warranted to further investigate the increasingly nuanced role of gender in understanding the influences of employment on shaping parents' stress and well-being.

## Acknowledgments

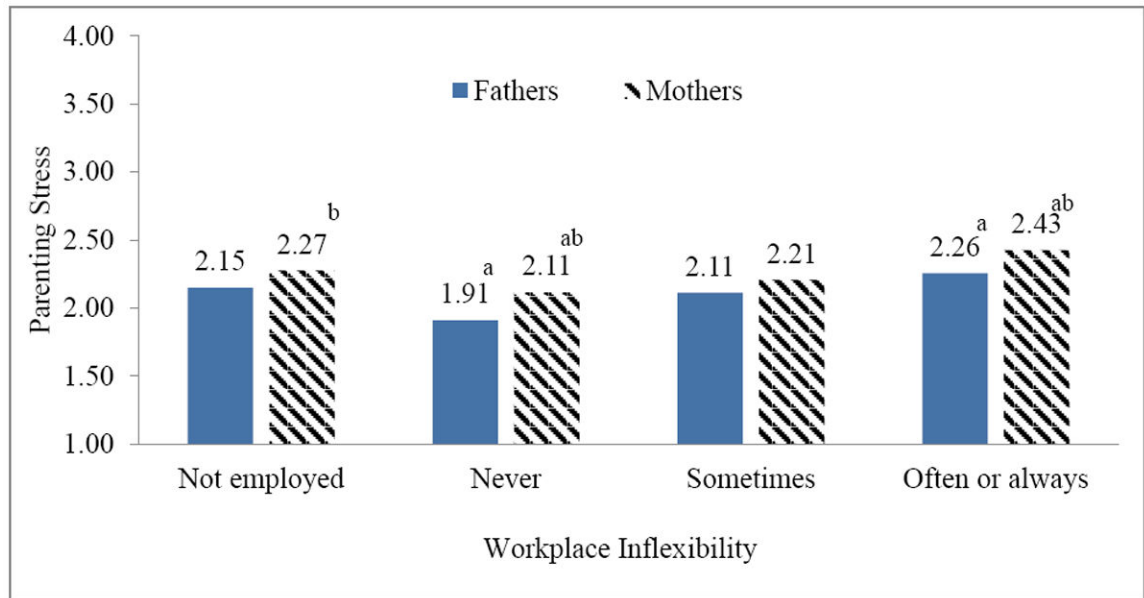
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**Figure 1.**  
 Predicted Means for Parenting Stress by Workplace Inflexibility for Fathers and Mothers  
<sup>a</sup>Differences from “not employed” are statistically significant.  
<sup>b</sup>Gender differences within category are statistically significant.

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**Table 1**

Means (SDs) for Variables for Fathers and Mothers (N = 3,165)

	Fathers		Mothers		
	2.07	(0.68)	2.24	(0.65)	***
Parenting stress ( <i>range: 1 – 4</i> )					***
Current employment status					
Not employed	0.21		0.43		***
Employed, part-time (1 – 34 hrs/week)	0.07		0.15		***
Employed, full-time (35 – 44 hrs/week)	0.37		0.32		***
Employed, full-time, extended hrs <sup>a</sup>	0.25		n/a		
Employed, overtime <sup>a</sup>	0.10		0.09		
Working non-standard hours	0.64		0.53		***
Informal work hours (0 – 40)	6.34	(15,48)	2.81	(10,27)	***
Worked two or more jobs last year	0.16		0.10		***
Job stability in the past three years					
Consistently not employed	0.07		0.13		***
Consistently employed –one or two jobs	0.74		0.70		
Worked multiple jobs	0.18		0.17		
Workplace inflexibility <sup>b</sup>					
Never	0.27		0.23		
Sometimes	0.34		0.24		***
Often or always	0.18		0.09		***
<i>Controls:</i>					
Age (15-53 / 15-43)	31.05	(7.33)	28.46	(6.13)	***
Education					
Less than high school	0.30		0.32		
High school diploma/GED	0.35		0.30		***
Some college	0.23		0.26		***
College degree	0.12		0.13		
Race/ethnicity					
White non-Hispanic	0.22		0.24		
Black non-Hispanic	0.48		0.46		

	Fathers	Mothers
Hispanic	0.26	0.26
Other	0.04	0.04
Income-to-poverty ratio (0 – 69.1)	2.68 (3.19)	2.12 (2.71) ***
Chronic depression	0.14	0.20 ***
Number of children in the household (0 – 10)	1.50 (1.44)	2.30 (1.32) ***
Focal child's general health (1 – 5)	4.46 (0.89)	4.49 (0.75)
Have a non-residential child	0.60	0.09 ***
Engagement with focal child (0 – 7)	3.76 (1.89)	5.13 (1.59) ***
Relationship status with the other parent		
Married	0.40	0.39 **
Cohabiting	0.25	0.23 **
Dating	0.06	0.06
Separated/Divorced	0.16	0.19 ***
Repartnered	0.14	0.13
Quality of co-parenting (1 – 3)	2.77 (0.33)	2.59 (0.52) ***

<sup>a</sup>Because fathers are more likely than mothers to spend longer time working for pay, “overtime” was defined differently for fathers (60 hours or more per week) and mothers (45 hours or more per week) with an additional category, “extended hours” (working 45 – 59 hours per week) for fathers.

<sup>b</sup>This variable consists of four categories including “not employed”.

Differences in means between fathers and mothers are statistically significant at

\*  $p < .05$ ,

\*\*  $p < .01$ ,

\*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed test).

**Table 2**

Results of Seemingly Unrelated Regression Models Predicting the Associations Between Employment Factors and Parental Stress for Fathers and Mothers (N = 3,165)

	Fathers						Mothers					
	Zero Order		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Zero Order		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\hat{\alpha}$	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\hat{\alpha}$
Current employment Status												
Not employed	0.173***	0.036	0.228***	0.049	0.136	0.136***	0.027	0.175**	0.067	0.136	0.067	0.136
Employed, part-time	0.094	0.051	0.050	0.050	0.018	0.062	0.036	0.078*	0.034	0.045	0.034	0.045
Employed, full-time	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Employed, extended hrs	0.009	0.032	-0.003	0.032	0.001	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Employed, overtime	0.003	0.045	-0.053	0.046	-0.024	-0.008	0.043	-0.037	0.041	-0.016	0.041	-0.016
Work non-standard hours	-0.103***	0.028	-0.043	0.037	-0.029	-0.118***	0.023	-0.014	0.063	-0.011	0.063	-0.011
Informal work hours	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.016	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.014	0.001	0.014
Work two or more jobs	-0.011	0.033	-0.008	0.033	-0.005	-0.005	0.039	-0.034	0.038	-0.018	0.038	-0.018
Job stability past three years												
Consistently not employed	0.101*	0.048	0.060	0.048	0.025	0.096**	0.034	0.026	0.036	0.012	0.036	0.012
Worked one or two jobs	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Worked multiple jobs	0.044	0.032	-0.003	0.033	0.001	0.083**	0.032	0.019	0.031	0.011	0.031	0.011
Workplace inflexibility												
Never	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Sometimes	0.192***	0.032	0.188***	0.032	0.132	0.121***	0.033	0.085** <i>a</i>	0.032	0.059	0.032	0.059
Often or always	0.362***	0.037	0.328***	0.037	0.191	0.377***	0.045	0.292***	0.044	0.130	0.044	0.130
Controls:												
Age	-0.003	0.002	-0.001	0.002	-0.014	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.032	0.002	0.032
Education												
Less than high school	0.080*	0.032	0.065	0.034	0.041	0.125***	0.029	0.068*	0.029	0.051	0.029	0.051
High school diploma	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Some college	-0.110***	0.033	-0.082*	0.034	-0.052	-0.059	0.031	-0.042	0.030	-0.027	0.030	-0.027

	Fathers						Mothers					
	Zero Order		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Zero Order		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\hat{\alpha}$	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\hat{\alpha}$	<i>SE</i>
College graduate	-0.037	0.040	0.002	0.047	0.001	0.059	0.038	0.152*** <i>b</i>	0.045	-0.081		
Race/ethnicity												
Non-Hispanic White	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Non-Hispanic Black	-0.002	0.033	-0.064	0.037	-0.047	0.071*	0.029	0.057	0.031	0.044		
Hispanic	-0.028	0.036	-0.112** <i>b</i>	0.039	-0.072	0.060	0.033	0.027	0.034	0.018		
Other race/ethnicity	0.165*	0.068	0.104	0.068	0.032	0.094	0.062	0.088	0.059	0.029		
Income-to-poverty ratio	-0.013***	0.004	-0.004	0.004	-0.021	-0.012**	0.004	-0.001	0.005	-0.007		
Chronic depression	0.233***	0.036	0.151***	0.037	0.078	0.307***	0.029	0.251***	0.028	0.157		
Child's general health	-0.058*	0.022	-0.042*	0.019	-0.055	-0.102***	0.016	-0.055***	0.015	-0.065		
No. of children	0.008	0.009	0.016	0.010	0.035	0.038***	0.009	0.025**	0.009	0.051		
Non-residential children	0.040	0.025	0.029	0.030	0.019	0.046	0.042	-0.003	0.042	-0.001		
Engagement	-0.031***	0.007	-0.022***	0.007	-0.061	-0.072***	0.007	-0.057*** <i>c</i>	0.007	-0.142		
Relationship status												
Married	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Cohabiting	0.064*	0.031	0.039	0.033	0.026	-0.012	0.030	0.009	0.032	-0.005		
Dating	0.114*	0.053	-0.006	0.057	-0.001	0.039	0.051	-0.001	0.050	0.002		
Single	0.080*	0.041	-0.045	0.046	-0.023	0.041	0.033	-0.065	0.038	-0.042		
Repartnered	0.035	0.043	-0.120*	0.055	-0.062	0.113**	0.037	0.014	0.044	0.006		
Co-parenting relationship quality	-0.199***	0.038	-0.153***	0.041	-0.079	-0.168***	0.023	-0.128***	0.027	-0.107		
Constant			2.672***	0.164				2.729***	0.143			
R-square			0.082					0.122				
Adj. R-square			0.073					0.114				

Note: Differences in coefficients between fathers and mothers are statistically significant at

*a*  $p < .05$ ,

*b*  $p < .01$ ,

.100' <  $p$  < .001  
\*\*\*  
'10' <  $p$  < .01  
\*\*  
'50' <  $p$  < .05  
\*  
'100' <  $p$  < .001  
c

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