

# Work/family Policy and Women's Well-being

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# Women's Adult Roles and Mental Health

- Positive association between adult social roles and subjective well-being for *employment* and *marriage* [Kessler, Waite, Umberson]
- Both provide social connectedness, resources for managing stressors, and meaning and purpose in life for women

*But, despite the fact that the 2018 Census figures show that over 90% of American women eventually become mothers, motherhood is NOT associated with either better mental or physical health*

# Problematizing the Impact of Children on Mothers' Well-Being

Motherhood seems to have neutral or negative effects on indicators of adult well-being in the United States  
[McLanahan, Simon, K. Williams] –

- depression
- anxiety
- happiness
- perceived health

# Current Explanation of the Motherhood Penalty in Mental Health

Exposure to stress either cancels out or exceeds the emotional rewards of having children

Stress increases negative and decreases positive emotions

Researchers have identified a number of economic and psychosocial stressors to which mothers of young and adult children are exposed

# The Institutional Context: U.S. Motherhood

- More births in the U.S. are mistimed or unplanned than in any other industrialized country
  - i. Cuts to family planning and abortion; fights over insurance coverage
  - ii. Lack of comprehensive sex education
  - iii. Increasing income and health care inequality
- A rising proportion of all U.S. births are nonmarital births (including the majority of births to women in their 20's), resulting in a high risk of single motherhood at some point

# The Institutional Context: The 2nd Industrial Revolution

- Rise of service sector
- Mechanization and outsourcing of production
- Weakened job security; rise of temporary and contract employment
- Increasing wage inequality
- Diversification of work hours and work schedules
- Heightened skill requirements of jobs

# Consequences: The rise of PRECARIITY

- Enormous concentration of wealth and hollowed out middle-class
- Declines in real male earnings, esp. among less than college educated
- Greater numbers of families moving in and out of financial distress
- DRAMATIC INCREASE IN THE PROPORTION OF CHILDREN PRIMARILY DEPENDENT ON THEIR MOTHERS' EARNINGS :
  - **OVER 40 PERCENT** by 2014

# Economic Transformation and Relationship Quality

- Very long work hours or nonoverlapping work hours lead to declines in marital interaction, potential increase in conflict over domestic work and child care
- Yet income effects on marital quality also exist, which encourage longer work hours and multiple job holding
- Which effects predominate may vary at the individual and group level (Pedulla and Thebaud, 2015)
- Insecurity and contract employment increase the potential for rough periods of economic struggle (Warren and Tyagi, 2004)



# Generational Change and Desired Partner Characteristics (Whelan and Boxer, 2014)

- Men now prefer educated women who can contribute financially to marriage
- Women now prefer men who temper work commitment with household/family (esp. child care) time
- Both genders report institutional constraints on the achievement of desired divisions of labor, exacerbated by race and class divisions (Gerson, 2010)

# Labor Market Trends to Watch:

1. Increase in work hours in full-time employment
2. Increase in the number of “mother breadwinners”<sup>1</sup>
3. Increase in erratic work hours and 24/7 availability demands
4. Large wage and benefit penalties for less than full-time work

<sup>1</sup> over 77% of children live in households where mothers earn income

# The Policy Context: U.S. Exceptionalism

While other European and English-speaking countries have enacted major policy reforms acknowledging the necessity of employment among mothers, the U.S. has not responded with any significant initiatives at the Federal level.

- 1936 Fair Labor Standards Act [set minimum wage and hour laws]
- 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act [FMLA]
- Expanded Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC]
- Block grants for child care assistance

# The Policy Context: European Union

- Paid parenting leaves from 4-11 months, some exclusive to fathers
- 4-6 weeks of annual paid vacation
- Subsidized and state-sponsored pre-k for children 2-5 years in France, Nordic countries, and some of Eastern Europe
- Maximum weekly hour laws (Germany, France, Nordic countries)
- Right to reduced work hours (Nordic countries)
- “Right to ask” for schedule flexibility
- Paid sick leave (European Union mandate)
- National health care system with universal insurance

# Sources of Variation- Why U.S. mothers might fare worse

## *Demographic:*

- Higher levels of single parenthood and unplanned pregnancies
- Bigger child penalty on women's lfp and earnings
- More nonstandard work hrs
- Greater earnings inequality
- Wages of adult men have stagnated or declined

## *Public Policy:*

- Generally lower quality and affordability of child care
- Higher costs of housing and education
- Long average work hours
- Less paid time off
- Legal discrimination against parents in employment and housing

U.S. is moving inexorably towards a society in which most of the costs of children are borne by their mothers with decreasing support from fathers and others



# Linking Precarity to Women's Mental Health

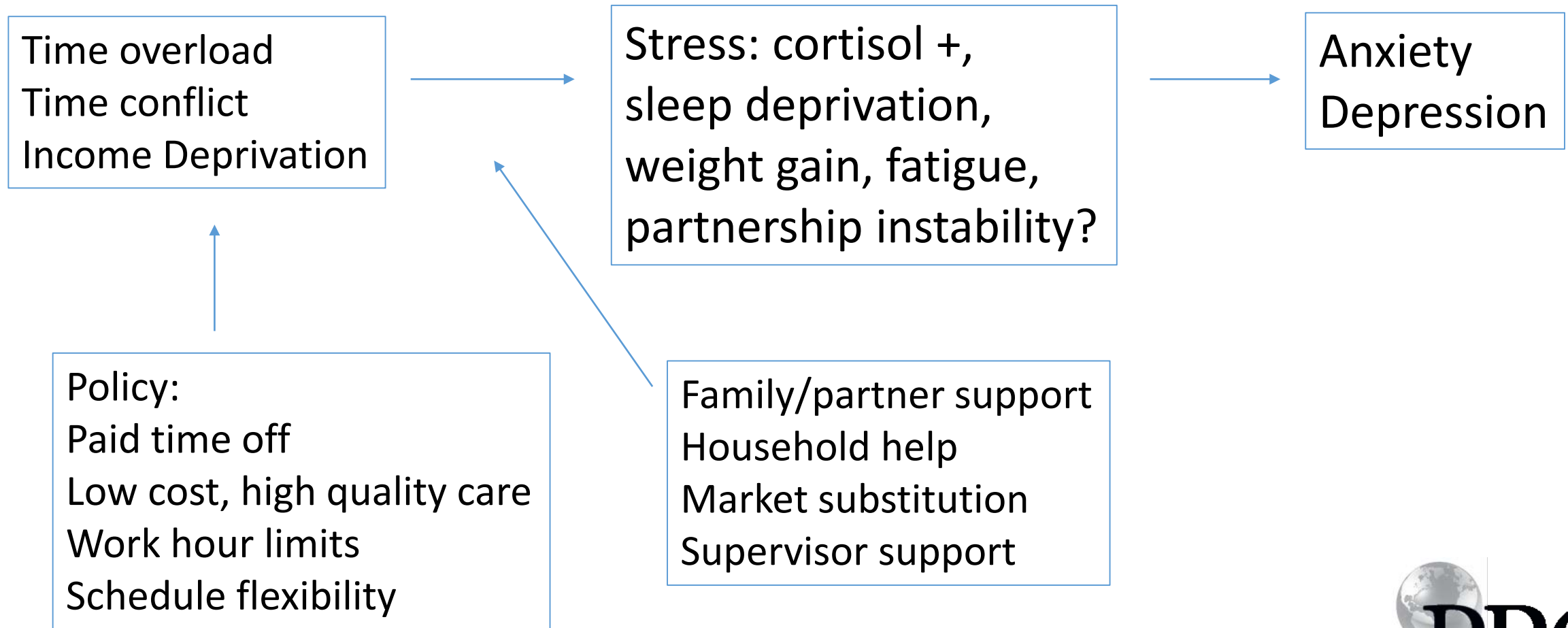
Two major time stressors:

- 1) time pressure and work overload; lack of free time
- 2) conflicting demands on time (schedule conflict between child care and work hours, for example)

One major negative feedback loop:

Financial Stress  Time Stress

# Modeling W/F Policy Effects on Mental Health

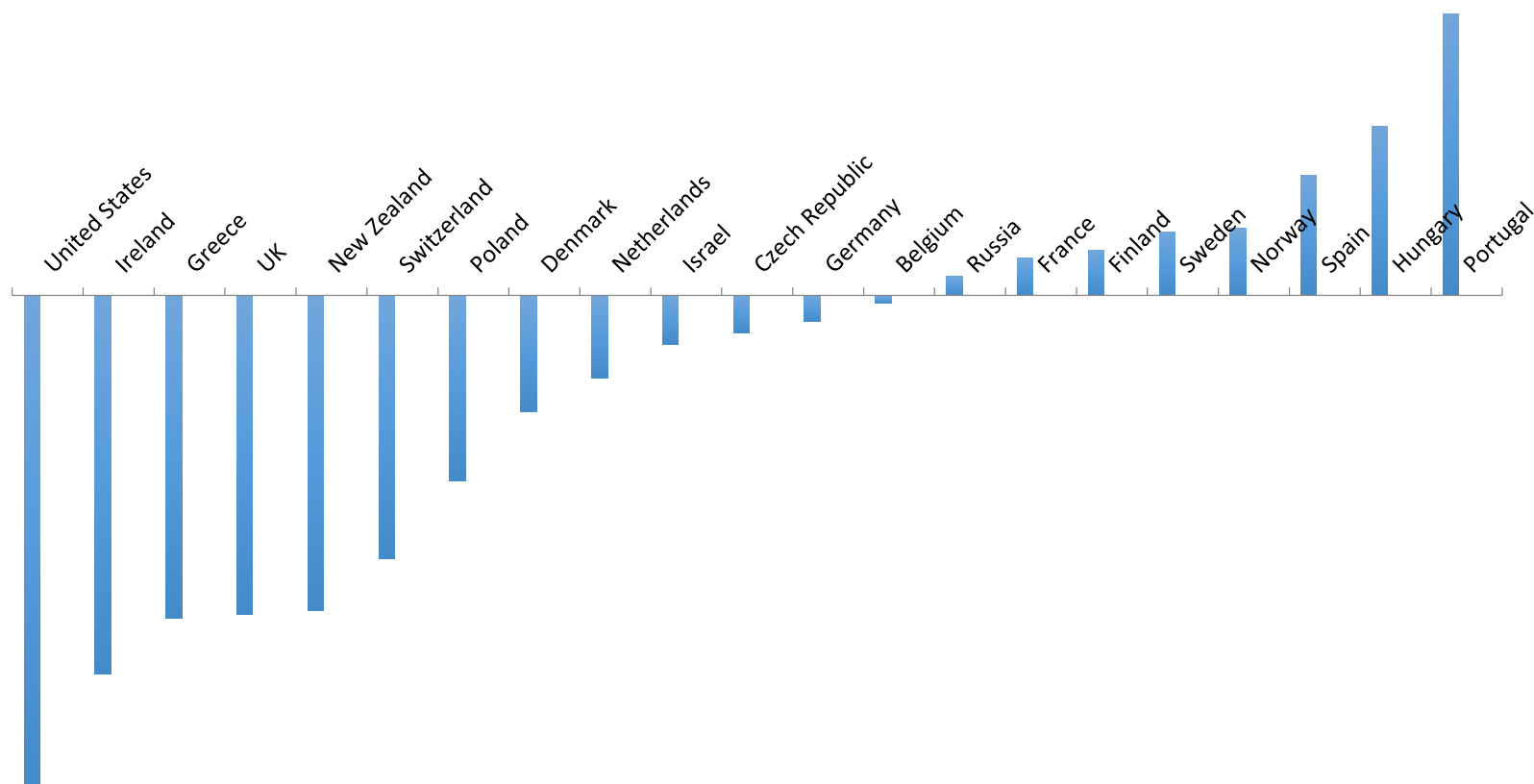




# Empirical Validation of the Model?

- Bianchi (2001): long work hours and sleep deprivation among mothers in the ATUS
- Milkman and Appelbaum (2013): California paid family leave shown to improve maternal employment and income, paternal involvement with children years later/Hyde (1994) sees fewer postpartum depressive symptoms with longer paid leaves
- Glass, Simon, and Andersson (2016): Countries with a stronger comprehensive policy package (especially longer paid sick and vacation leave, and govt. subsidized child care) had happier mothers than countries without

# Figure 1. Parent Effect on Happiness in 22 Countries



# Theorizing Social Class

Mothers with *high education and professional employment* have unique vulnerabilities (Schieman, Blair-Loy):

- Schedule control and autonomy at work compensate for long work hours; perks keep employees at work
- Technology allows remote working but blurs home & work, making workers always “on call”
- High penalties for childbearing on future career and earnings growth

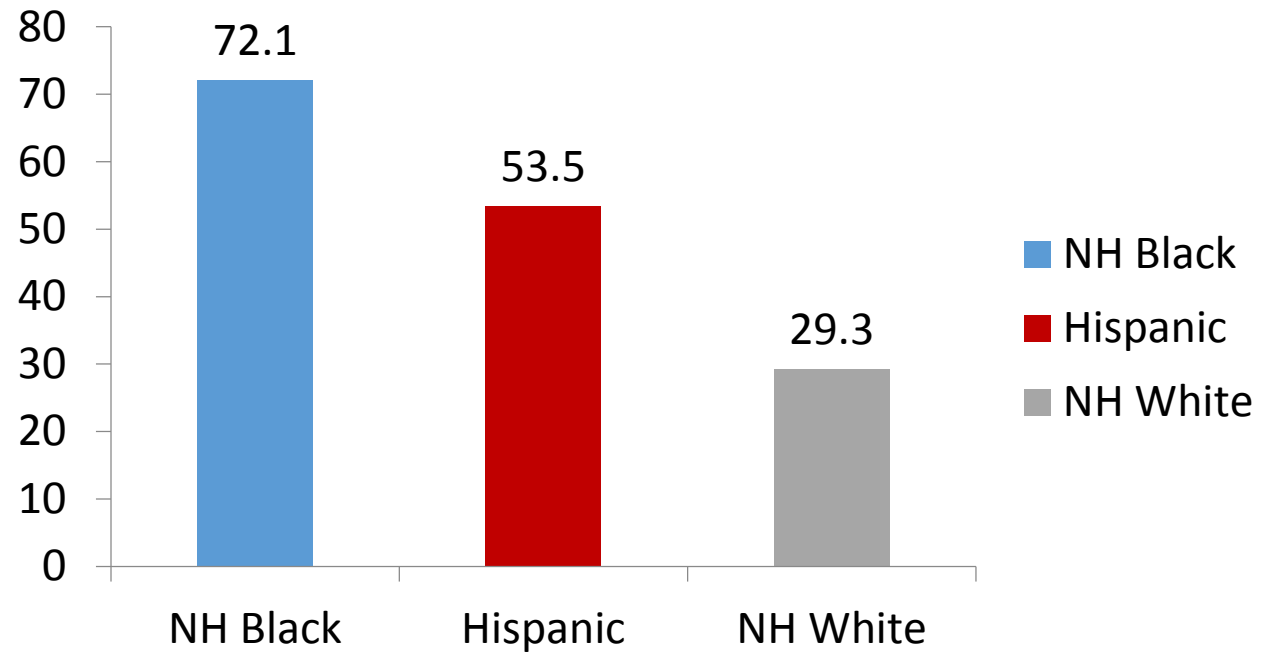
Mothers with *low education* disadvantaged in working conditions and benefits (Deitch & Huffman; Gerstel & Sarkisian; McCrate):

- Nonstandard and erratic work schedules; just in time scheduling practices (Susan Lambert)
- Less health insurance, paid time off, and job protection following childbirth or illness

# Theorizing Race & Immigration Status

- Race and Immigration status exacerbate work/family conflict
  - Federal protections (FMLA) limited by narrow definition of nuclear family members covered
  - Ethnic group differences in nonmarital fertility structure female breadwinning
  - Discrimination in housing and employment make it harder for workers to assert their rights when present
  - Lack of legal status leaves immigrant mothers without any job protections at work or even limited govt. income assistance

## Percentage of Births that are Nonmarital 2012 by Race-Ethnicity



Source: Martin, JA et al 2013. Births: Final Data for 2012. Wash DC: NCHS

# Different Policy Needs Across the Life Cycle

- Paid childbearing leave and employment supports are necessary for young women forming families
- Affordable high quality child care when children are small
- Schedule flexibility and adequate income growth as children get older
- Adequate paid time off for care of elderly parents or spouses in midlife and beyond



# Where Do We Go From Here?

Much we still do not know, tough questions ahead:

1. What are the epigenetics of vulnerability to time stress and task overload? Can cultural/community resources, including household extension, prove effective in providing social support?
3. Can we improve women's financial and emotional well-being without regulatory frameworks that decrease the penalties for reduced weekly work hours (part-time parity)?
4. Will fathers, esp. outside marriage, embrace the new fatherhood and participate in family care, or increasingly avoid family obligations to the detriment of mothers' time, energy, and well-being?