

Work –Family Challenges for Blue-Collar Parents
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The Work and Family Transitions Project is an ongoing, longitudinal study that examines how working-class parents cope with the transition to parenthood and the early return to paid employment. One hundred and fifty-three couples, all of whom reside in Massachusetts, have been followed since before their baby's were born until their child turned one year old. All parents in our study were employed full-time before the birth of their baby and planned on returning to full-time employment within 6 months of their baby's birth. All parents were employed in working-class occupations and none of the parents held a college degree. An explicit goal of this research was to examine how workplace policies and work conditions were related to both mothers' and fathers' mental health, the quality of their relationship, and ultimately, the socio-emotional development of their children.

Table 1 highlights the lack of "family friendly" policies to support new parents juggling work and family life. It is also important to note that even in the case where a policy exists, such as paid time off if one is sick or has personal issues, the benefit is not consistently used. In our study, we asked, "Does your company offer paid personal or sick time for family emergencies, like if you or your child is ill?" Close to 70% of both mothers and fathers report having this benefit; however, we then asked if they used this benefit. Only about 34% of fathers and 39% of mothers reported using the benefit. The question of why parents don't use this benefit is an interesting one. For many employees, using sick time is not officially sanctioned by supervisors despite having a formal policy "on the books." As one mother noted, "It's hard to get a day off. If you want a day off you put a request slip in and nine times out of ten it gets denied because of short staff." Often, since sick time benefits are rolled into personal time, it is expected that this time off be planned and scheduled, despite the fact that we can rarely know ahead of time when we, or a family member, will be ill.

As Figure 2 indicates, the consequences of a lack of supervisor support or flexibility at work is related to mental health outcomes for both women and men. The first graph in figure 2 shows that, above and beyond income, a lack of supervisor support is a key predictor of women's depression. Similarly for husbands, scheduling flexibility (like being able to take a day off when one's child is ill) as well as supervisor flexibility, reported at the time of mother's return to paid employment < predicted less depression when the baby was one year old.

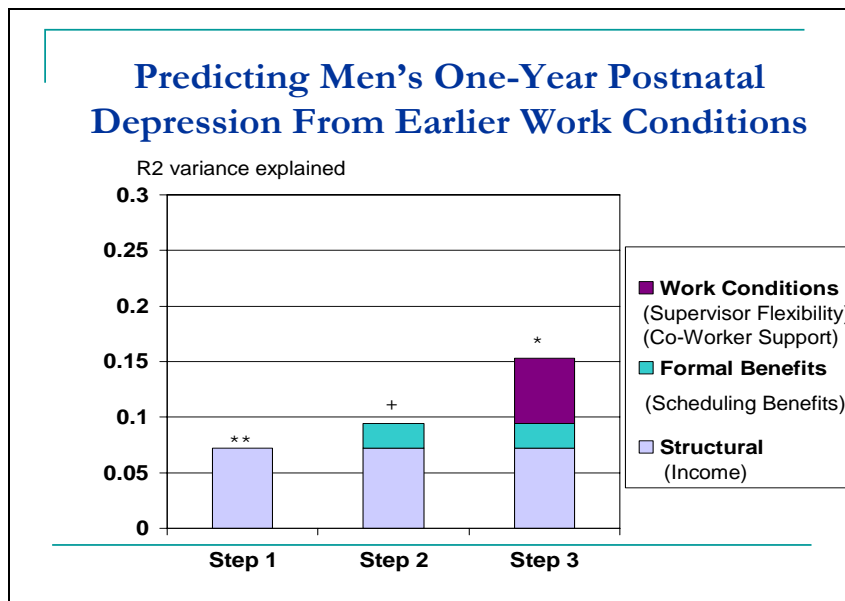
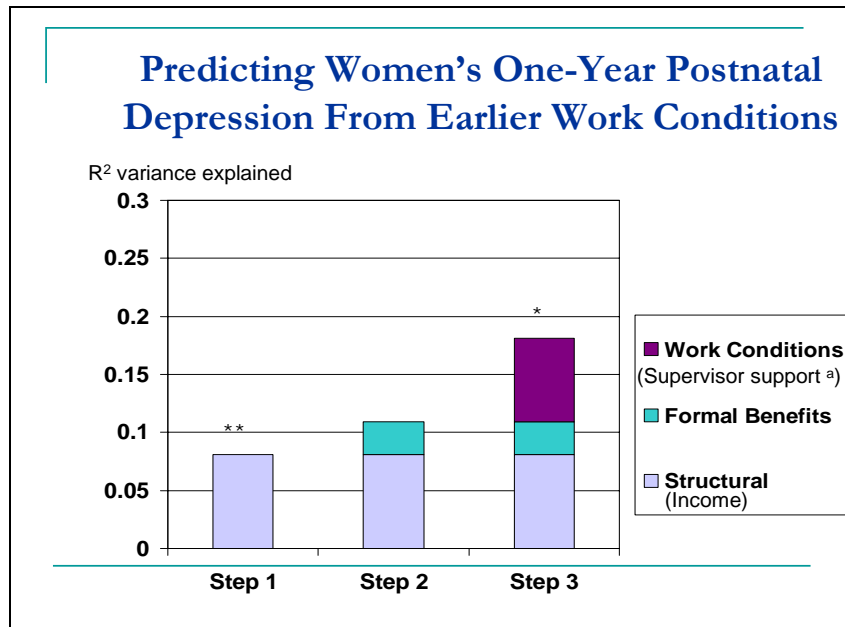
Table 1

Summary of Workplace Benefits and Policies Offered To and Used By Mothers and Fathers

Benefit	% of sample reporting their organization offers benefit*		% of sample reporting they actually use benefit*	
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
Schedule Benefits				
Paid personal/sick leave for family	69.1	68.7	33.8	38.8
Option to work at home	7.5	16.4	3.8	12.5
PT work with FT benefits	11.8	22.4	2.2	9.0
<i>Receive one or more of the above scheduling benefits</i>	<i>69.9</i>	<i>75.4</i>	<i>38.2</i>	<i>50.0</i>
Child care benefits				
Child care info/referral	20.6	18.0	2.9	5.3
Dependent Care Assistance Plan	22.1	24.6	1.5	3.0
Child care vouchers	5.1	4.5	0.0	0.0
Contributions to child care center	2.2	2.6	0.0	0.7
On-site child care center	8.1	8.3	0.7	1.5
Infant care @ on-site child care center	5.1	5.3	0.0	1.5
Subsidized child care center	4.4	0.8	0.0	0.0
<i>Receive one or more of the above child care benefits</i>	<i>33.8</i>	<i>35.1</i>	<i>5.1</i>	<i>8.2</i>

* Ns for individual variables varied from 133 to 136 for fathers and from 128 to 134 for mothers.

Figure 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Women's and Men's Time 5 Depression from Time 3 Work Factors ^a



⁺ p<.10, * p<.05, ** p<.01

^a Variables listed in parentheses were items that contributed significantly to that step of the regression analysis