

Employment, Work-Family Conflict, and Parenting Stress Among Economically  
Disadvantaged Fathers

Kei Nomaguchi

and

Wendi Johnson

Department of Sociology

Bowling Green State University

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## ABSTRACT

Qualitative research suggests that economically disadvantaged fathers experience considerable stress due to difficulty fulfilling the breadwinning ideal and workplace inflexibility that ignores their childcare responsibility. Yet, quantitative research on how employment and work-family conflict are related to fathers' parenting stress, especially in comparison with mothers', is limited. Analyses using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study ( $N = 3,165$ ) show that current unemployment and greater work-family conflict, but not overwork, odd-jobs, and nonstandard hours, are related to more parenting stress for fathers. Similar patterns are found for mothers, except that work-family conflict is related to fathers' more than mothers' stress; and nonstandard schedule is related to less stress for mothers only. Current employment status and work-family conflict are the strongest predictors of fathers' but not mothers' stress. Results suggest that securing a job with flexible scheduling is important to reduce parenting stress among working-class parents regardless of gender.

Qualitative research on fatherhood has described two contrasting images of the role of fathers in contemporary U.S. society. One is the persistent belief in the primacy of employment for men's identity and the centrality of breadwinning to successful fatherhood (Townsend, 2002). The other is the emphasis on the importance of father-child close relationship for children's optimal development and the growing expectation for fathers to be involved in day-to-day care of children (Lamb, 2000). Many fathers today experience dual pressures—to be a good financial provider and to be an involved father (Fox, 2009, Williams, 2010). Fathers, especially those with young children, perceive fatherhood as “extremely hard” and “very demanding” (Fox, 2009; p. 240).

Changes in the U.S. economy in the past decades indicate that fathers with lower socioeconomic status (SES) may particularly face challenges in meeting both sides of paternal responsibilities. As low- and semi-skilled manufacturing jobs are replaced by automation or transferred overseas, economic prospects for men without a college degree have declined (Levy, 1998). Jobs that are available for these men typically do not provide family friendly arrangements such as flexible job schedules (Heymann, 2000; Williams, 2010). Recent qualitative studies have documented that working-class and low-income fathers, both resident and nonresident, are experiencing a considerable level of stress in the parenting role because of their struggle with providing enough financial support for children and difficulty in negotiating accommodations for caregiving responsibility in the workplace (Fox, 2009; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Williams, 2010).

Yet, little quantitative research has investigated how employment factors and difficulty in balancing work and family responsibilities—or work-family conflict—are related to fathers' parenting stress. Existing research on parenting stress has largely focused on child characteristics,

parental attitudes, and family characteristics as predictors (Crnic & Low, 2002). In addition, past research tended to focus on mothers, but much less on fathers. A handful of studies that compared fathers' and mothers' parenting stress used a sample of middle class couples (Creasey & Reese, 1996; Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996), many of which focused on couples with children of special needs (Calzada et al., 2004; Davis & Carter, 2008). We know very little about how employment and work-family conflict are related to parenting stress among economically disadvantaged fathers and whether the associations are unique to fathers as qualitative research suggests.

Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), which focuses on economically disadvantaged parents with preschool children, this paper examines how paid work factors and work-family conflict are related to parenting stress among fathers, with a specific emphasis on comparisons with mothers. We focus on paid work characteristics that are especially relevant to lower SES men, including nonemployment, job instability, doing odd jobs, having multiple jobs, being overworked, and working during nonstandard hours. The present analysis provides new insight into understanding economically disadvantaged men's experience of parenting stress, contributes to scholarship of parenting stress, and advances research on gender, work, family, and well-being.

## BACKGROUND

### *Determinants of Parenting Stress*

Although researchers have conceptualized parenting stress in various ways (Crnic & Low, 2002), a dominant approach is a demand-resource perspective that defines parenting stress as a sense of difficulties individuals experience in the parenting role because 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 adults' higher levels of psychological distress (Avison, Ali, & Walters 2007), poorer parent-child relationship quality (Hadadian & Mebler, 1996), and less developmental competence in children (Creasey & Jarvis, 1994; Crnic, Gaze, & Hoffman 2005). Thus, it is important to understand the factors that lead to parenting stress.

Abidin's (1992) model of parenting stress, the most influential model so far, conceptualizes that demands and resources associated with parenting stress are mainly found in three domains, including child characteristics, parent characteristics, and contextual factors surrounding the parent and child. Empirical research has largely focused on the first two domains—child characteristics such as temperament, illness, disability, or other special needs (Davis & Carter, 2008; McBride, Schoppe, & Rane, 2002), and parents' characteristics such as parenting beliefs (Deater-Deckard, 1996; Melson, Windecker-Nelson, & Schwarz, 1998). In contrast, much less research has investigated the third domains; contextual factors. As research in the sociology of social stress has documented, however, the demands and resources associated with the parental role are rooted in larger contexts, including social expectations of the parental role, marital relationship, paid work, and community. Moreover, these demands and resources are distributed unequally across social statuses, including SES, marital status, age, gender, and race or ethnicity (Pearlin, 1999). Researchers have begun to investigate how these social statuses shape parenting stress (Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996; Mulson et al., 2002; Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). Although employment is a key element of SES and work-family conflict is a major structural problem that today's parents face (Nomaguchi, 2009), little research has investigated employment factors and work-family conflict as predictors of parenting stress.

Another limitation in prior research is the overwhelming focus on mothers and middle-class couples. Researchers have begun to investigate factors shaping low-income fathers' parenting stress, mostly focusing on family factors, including engagement with children (Carlson & Turner, 2010), multiple partner fertility (Tach, 2012), and social support (Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007). These studies, however, did not compare these patterns to those of mothers, and thus it is unclear to what extent the results were unique to fathers. The present study expands prior research by focusing on paid work factors as predictors of parenting stress among lower SES parents and examining gender differences in the associations.

#### *Employment, Work-family Conflict, and Fathers' Parenting Stress*

Providing children with material support, such as shelter, food, clothes, health care, toys, school supplies, is a major responsibility of parents. Employment, or working for pay, is essential for most parents to fulfill the material demands of parenting. In addition, employment provides social sources, such as coworker networks, and psychological resources, such as a sense of gratification, and feeling esteemed (Mirowsky, 2011), that help parents cope with the day-to-day stress of raising children. Thus not working for pay can be a critical source of parenting stress. At the same time, when paid work becomes too demanding or too inconvenient including long work hours can be a source of strain that prevents parents from fulfilling other aspects of parenting demands, especially the responsibility of taking care of their children.

Unemployment and unstable employment have become a common experience among men without a college degree, as low- and semi-skilled jobs in the manufacturing sector have been eroding due to new technologies and globalization of the market (Levy, 1998). A series of recent qualitative studies have illustrated how low-income and working-class fathers are experiencing a high level of parenting stress because of their inability to fulfill the breadwinning

ideal. Fox (2009), who focused on resident fathers, contended that failure to achieve occupational success makes it harder for fathers to deal with the feeling of incompetence when they need to handle crying and tantrums of young children. For nonresident fathers, Roy and Dyson (2010) illustrated that those who were not employed or faced challenges in keeping employment expressed disappointment in their parenting role. In their study, fathers expressed their frustrations 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.

In order to fulfill the breadwinning ideal, fathers undertake various strategies. Some fathers work long hours, sometimes by taking multiple jobs at a time, which often include jobs in the evening, at night, or during weekends (Fox, 2009; Williams, 2010). Other fathers make extra money through under-the-table jobs doing household repairs, mowing the lawn, or providing transportation (Woldoff & Cina, 2007). How working overtime, taking multiple jobs or informal odd jobs, and working during nonstandard hours are related to parenting stress is unclear. Townsend (2002) argued that fathers tend to see long hours of work as their way of caring for the family by providing children with a comfortable life. Fox (2009) also reported that fathers who worked long hours were less stressed than fathers who were unemployed, although they were exhausted. Thus, overwork may not be related to fathers' parenting stress. In contrast, working in nonstandard hours may be related to more parenting stress because jobs with nonstandard schedules tend to be "bad" jobs with low pay and no benefits (Kalleberge, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000). Or it could be because working nonstandard hours was related to more depression (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007; Strazdins et al. 2006).

Work-family conflict is another work-related source of parenting stress for fathers that recent qualitative studies have emphasized (Fox, 2009; Williams 2010). Work-family conflict

refers to the extent to which individuals feel that the demands of paid work and family roles are incompatible so that participation in either role is difficult because of the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Nomaguchi, 2009). As discussed earlier, fathers today feel dual pressure to be the primary breadwinner and to spend time with their children (Fox, 2009; Williams 2010). These dual sources of pressure may be especially salient to working-class fathers for a few reasons. They have to share child care with mothers because they cannot afford to let their wife stay at home, but they do not trust non-family members to take care of their young children (Glass, 1998). Whereas scheduling flexibility is a key to lower work-family conflict (Kelly, Moen, & Tranby, 2011), those with low SES tend to have occupations that rarely provide employees with scheduling flexibility (Heymann, 2000). Quantitative data have shown that fathers experienced increased work-family conflict more than mothers over the past several decades (Nomaguchi, 2009). Yet, little research has examined the association between work-family conflict and parenting stress among economically disadvantaged fathers.

*Are Employment and Work-family Conflict More Important for Fathers' Than Mothers' Parenting Stress?*

Qualitative research such as that discussed above emphasizes unemployment as uniquely relevant to fathers' parenting stress because of the persistent, but increasingly unrealistic, emphasis on the breadwinning ideal of fatherhood (Fox, 2009; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Williams, 2010). In contrast, studies on paid work and mothers' well-being indicate that having no job may be related to parenting stress for mothers as well. For working-class women, particularly those in the Black community, the breadwinning role has been a normative part of motherhood (Winslow-Bowe, 2006; Sørensen & McLanahan, 1987). It is likely that most mothers who are currently not employed were "pushed out" of the labor force because of constraints to combine

paid work with child care including inflexible schedules or difficulty in secure affordable, reliable childcare (Scott, London, & Hurst, 2005; Williams, 2010). For working-class women, whose children's fathers typically do not earn enough, having no job means lack of economic resources. In addition, given the high prevalence of being or becoming a single mother, working-class women regard economic independence as crucial for security (Edin & Kefalas 2005). Thus not having a job may be as stressful for mothers as for fathers.

Like fathers, some mothers take multiple jobs at a time or work long hours to support the family (Scott, London & Hurst, 2005). Some mothers make ends meet by taking informal odd jobs such as cooking meals, cleaning a house, or babysitting (Edin & Lein, 1997). Other mothers work nonstandard hours in order to "tag team" or alternate child care with their partner or relatives (Garey, 1999; Presser, 2003). Studies have shown that longer work hours is related to work-family conflict (Nomaguchi, 2009), and parents who work nonstandard schedules are exhausted and depressed (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007; Strazdins et al. 2006). Less clear is how these employment factors are related to parenting stress and how the links vary for mothers and fathers.

Whether fathers and mothers differ in the link between work-family conflict and parenting stress is debatable. Williams (2010) suggest that fathers may feel more stressed when their job schedules are inflexible because men are less likely than women to feel it appropriate to ask their supervisors to accommodate their child care responsibilities. Workplace culture continues to embrace "hegemonic masculinity" or the traditional masculine ideal (Connell, 1987). Men must demonstrate commitment to work by showing others in the workplace that they place the first priority on work. In reality, however, working-class and low-income fathers have to share child care responsibilities with mothers. Consequently, fathers leave early from work or

come in late to pick up or drop off their children at school without telling their supervisors about the reason, for which they risk losing their job. In contrast, although few quantitative studies have examined the link between work-family conflict and parenting stress, related studies have shown that mothers are more likely than fathers to feel guilty when work spillover into family life occurs (Glavin, Shieman, & Reid, 2011) or when they feel they are not spending enough time with their children (Nomaguchi, Milkie, & Bianchi, 2005). These studies indicate the possibility that work-family conflict may be related to parenting stress more greatly for mothers than for fathers.

Past research on gender differences in sources of parenting stress is inconclusive. Studies largely focused on the effects of children who place extra demands on parents, such as those with a disability or chronic illness (Davis & Carter, 2008). A small body of studies that examine a nonclinical sample largely focused on middle-class, white, two-parent families (Creasey & Reese, 1996; Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996), examining gender differences in covariates with parenting stress at the bivariate level only. McBride, Schoppe, and Rane (2002) focused on differences between fathers and mothers in the effects of child temperament on parenting stress. The present analysis is one of the first attempts to examine gender differences in how employment related factors are linked to parenting stress while other factors are taken into account.

#### *Other Factors*

We control for factors that prior research suggests are related to the associations between employment factors and parenting stress. Older parents are more likely than their younger counterparts 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 (Jackson, Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn, & Blake, 1998), whereas they are

more likely to report parenting stress (Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). Black fathers are more likely to share child care with mothers (Glauber & Gozjolko, 2011; King, Harris, & Heard, 2004) and more likely to report parenting stress (Raphael, Zhang, Liu, & Giardino, 2010) than white counterparts. Depressed parents are less likely to be employed (Jackson, Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn, & Blake, 1998) and more likely to report parenting stress (Crnic & Acevedo, 1995). Having more young children is related to more work-family conflict (Voydanoff, 2004) and more parenting stress (Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). Marital status is related to employment status (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005) and may be related to parenting stress (Cooper et al., 2009). Employment is related to coparenting quality (Lindsey, Caldera, & Colwell, 2005), whereas coparenting quality is related to parenting stress (Florsheim, Sumida, McCann, et al., 2003; Nomaguchi, Brown, & Leyman, 2012). Having a nonresident child may be related to more parenting stress. Employment is related to less time with children (Hohmann-Marriott, 2011), whereas spending time with children may be related to less parenting stress, although prior research is inconsistent (Carlson & Turner, 2010).

## SUMMARY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Despite the growing qualitative evidence that economically disadvantaged fathers are feeling strained because of an inability to provide enough as well as difficulty in balancing paid work and family responsibilities, little quantitative research has investigated the influences of paid work factors and work-family conflict on parenting stress among low-income and working-class fathers and whether the associations vary for fathers and mothers. We address two research questions: (a) How are paid work factors (e.g., unemployment, job instability, overwork, multiple jobs, informal work, and nonstandard work schedule) and work-family conflict related to fathers' parenting stress?; (b) Are these associations different for fathers than for mothers?

## METHODS

### *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. 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; Galinsky, 1987; 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%).

### *Measures*

*Parenting stress* was measured as a four-item mean scale assessed at W3 ( $\alpha = .63$  for fathers and mothers respectively). Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following: (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. Because fathers work longer hours than mothers in general, overwork categories were defined differently for fathers and mothers. Thus for fathers, the dummy variables included not employed, employed part-time (less than 35 hours per week), employed full-time (worked between 35 and 44 hours per week) (reference), employed full-time with extended hours (worked between 45 hours and 59 hours per week), and employed full-time with overtime (worked 60 hours or more per week) for fathers. Other research has used 60 hours as the cut-point for overwork for fathers (Crouter et al., 2001). For mothers, dummy variables were not employed, employed part-time (less than 35 hours per week), employed full-time (worked between 35 and 44 hours per week) (reference), and employed full-time with overtime (worked 45 hours or more per week). *Weekly hours spent on informal odd jobs* as measured as a self-report. Fathers and mothers were asked whether they (a) worked 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) worked 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 measured as a dichotomous variable where fathers and mothers who reported working more than one job at a time during the past 12 months were assigned 1s and

others 0s. *Job instability* during the last three years was measured dummy variables including no job, one or two (reference), or three or more jobs.

*Work-family conflict* was a three-item mean scale measured at W3 ( $\alpha = .57$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .63$  for mothers). Fathers and mothers were asked how often the following statement would be true: (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” (1 = *always*, 2 = *often*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *never*). The first two items were reverse coded such that higher scores reflect greater job-to-family conflict. 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 assessed by each parent’s report of their highest level of education at W1. Dummy variables were created indicating whether the parent has less than a high school degree, a high school diploma or equivalent (reference), some college or technical training, or a college degree or above. *Income-to-poverty ratio* was a FFCWS constructed variable for mothers and fathers 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; Meadows, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008) were coded 1s and others 0s. *Child’s gender* was a dichotomous variable (1 = *girls*, 0 = *boys*). *The number of children* under age 18 in household was a continuous variable measured at W3, ranging from 0 to 10. *Child’s health* was a categorical variable ranging from 1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent* measured

as a father's and mother'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. Parents were asked whether they had any other children (besides the focal child) who were not living with them. Those who responded affirmatively were then asked how many. If parents had previously answered that the focal child also did not live with him/her, then 1 was added to the total number of non-resident children. Then we created a dichotomous variable where those who had no nonresident children were assigned 0s and those who had at least one nonresident child were assigned 1s. *Parental engagement* 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. *Current relationship status* reflected the current union status of each parent whether it was with the parent of the focal child, or a new partner. *Quality of coparenting* with the focal child 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) "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*, 2 = *sometimes true*, 3 = *always true*). Mothers and fathers who did not see the child in the past month were coded 1.

Descriptive statistics for variables in the analysis are presented in Table 1 for fathers and mothers respectively. On average, fathers reported a slightly, but significantly, lower level of

parenting stress than mothers (2.1 vs. 2.2 with a range from 1 to 4). Fathers were less likely than mothers to report no employment (21.0% vs. 43.5%) and more likely to be working longer hours. More than half of fathers worked nonstandard hours (64.2%), whereas 36.1% of mothers did so. Fathers spent 5.4 hours on average doing informal odd-jobs, compared with 1.9 hours for mothers. About 16% of fathers worked two or more jobs at the same time during the past year, whereas 10.2% of mothers did so. Seven percent of fathers and 13% of mothers were consistently not employed during the past three years, whereas 18.4 % of fathers and 16.8% of mothers worked more than three jobs in the past three years. Fathers were more likely than mothers to report experiencing work-family conflict “sometimes” (33.8% vs. 24.1%) or “often or always” (18.3% vs. 9.1%). There were some gender differences in the sample characteristics. The average age was older for fathers than for mothers (28.0 vs. 25.5). Fewer fathers had some college education or a college degree than mothers. The number of children living in the household was fewer for fathers than for mothers (1.5 vs. 2.3). Fathers were more likely than mothers to have a nonresident child (59.4% vs. 9.1%).

[Table 1 about here]

### *Analytical plan*

Our analyses used seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) models. This strategy allows for the estimation of two or more equations simultaneously. SUR is particularly appropriate when error terms are likely to be correlated across models (Batton, 2004), as is likely to occur when analyzing couple-level data. Because fathers and mothers in the FFCWS data were couples or ex-couples, estimates obtained by separate equations using ordinary-least-squares (OLS) regression would perhaps be unbiased and consistent, but not necessarily efficient (Felmlee & Hargens, 1988). Consequently, SUR analyses provide the benefit of producing estimates that are

more efficient (Godwin, 1985). We examined zero-order associations between employment factors (i.e., not being employed, part-time work, overwork, multiple jobs, informal odd-jobs, nonstandard work hours, and work-family conflict) and parenting stress for fathers and mothers separately. 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 nonwork factors between fathers and mothers by using standardized coefficients.

Several variables had missing data. For most variables, a small percent of respondents had missing data, although one variable, fathers' report of the focal child's health, had 30.3% missing data. Missing data were multiply imputed using Stata's *ice* procedure to create 10 imputed datasets. Data analyses were conducted using *mi estimate* with the *cmdok* option after transporting the data by means of the *mi import* command (Cañette & Marchenko, 2011). In order to assess whether coefficients varied significantly by gender, we employed the *suest* procedure as also described by Cañette and Marchenko. Finally, standardized coefficients and r-squared statistics were obtained through the *mibeta* command.

## RESULTS

How were paid work characteristics and work-family conflict 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. For fathers and mothers respectively, 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 demographic, SES, and other family factors. For variables that showed significant associations with parenting stress, we examined differences in coefficients between fathers and mothers. The

third column present standardized coefficients to examine relative strengths of the influence of each variable on parenting stress.

[Table 2 about here]

We first examined zero-order associations. Fathers who were currently not employed reported more parenting stress than those who were currently employed and working for regular full-time hours (i.e., 35 to 44 hours). Fathers who were working part-time or working overtime (60 hours or more per week) did not show differences in the level of parenting stress from those who worked for regular full-time hours. Contrary to expectation, working nonstandard hours was related to less parenting stress for fathers. As expected, work-family conflict was related to more parenting stress. Consistently having no job during the past three years was also related to more parenting stress for fathers. 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. For mothers, very similar patterns were found. Those who were not currently employed, those who were not employed for the past three years, and those who reported a higher level of work-family conflict showed more parenting stress. Unexpectedly, working nonstandard hours was related to less parenting stress. Because these employment factors were closely related to other factors, such as levels of education, multivariate analysis would help better understand which employment-related factors would have significant influences on parenting stress when other factors were taken into account.

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 (i.e., 35 – 44 hours per week) ( $b = .240, p < .001$ ). The only other employment factor that appeared to be

related to fathers' parenting stress was work-family conflict. Compared to those who were employed and who reported "never" experiencing work-family conflict, fathers who were employed and reported experiencing work-family conflict sometimes ( $b = .203, p < .001$ ) or often or always ( $b = .346, p < .001$ ) reported a higher level of parenting stress.

Are these patterns unique to fathers compared to mothers? Results showed that mothers who were not currently employed also reported a higher level of parenting stress than mothers who worked for regular full-time hours ( $b = .161, p < .001$ ). And a statistical test indicated that there was little gender difference in the degree of associations between not currently having a job and parenting stress. Just as for fathers, experiencing work-family conflict sometimes ( $b = .083, p < .01$ ) or often or always ( $b = .297, p < .001$ ) was related to mothers' parenting stress. The statistical test for gender differences indicated that the larger coefficient for fathers' than for mothers' experiencing work-family conflict "sometimes" was significant. To interpret this gender difference, we calculated predicted means for parenting stress for four groups including (a) not employed, (b) employed, never experiencing work-family conflict, (c) employed, sometimes experiencing work-family conflict, and (d) employed, often or always experiencing work-family conflict, for fathers and mothers respectively. The figure suggests that whereas fathers generally experienced a lower level of parenting stress than mothers, fathers who "sometimes" experienced work-family conflict reported feeling as much parenting stress as mothers similarly situated. It appears that fathers' parenting stress is more susceptible to occasional experiences of work-family conflict than mothers' parenting stress. It is noteworthy that for both fathers and mothers, having no job was related to more parenting stress relative to those who were employed and reporting no work-family conflict ( $p < .001$ ; see Table 2), experiencing some work-family conflict was related to as much parenting stress as having no

job; and experiencing work-family conflict often or always was related to more parenting stress than having no job ( $p < .05$ ; statistical tests are available upon request).

[Figure 1 about here]

One more employment factor, working nonstandard hours, showed gender differences in its association with parenting stress. At zero-order associations, working nonstandard hours was related to more parenting stress for both fathers and mothers. After controlling for other variables, working nonstandard hours was no longer related to fathers' parenting stress, but it was related to a lower level of mothers' stress ( $b = -.064, p < .05$ ). For fathers, the significant association disappeared when the employment status variables including not employed, which was related to more stress, were included in the model.

It may be worth mentioning that a few other explanatory variables showed gender differences in the degrees of association with parenting stress. Frequency of engagement with children through activities was related to mothers', more than fathers', parenting stress. Figure 2 shows predicted means for parenting stress by the frequency of engagement for fathers and mothers. This gendered pattern is consistent with prior research (Milkie, Kendig, Nomaguchi, & Denny, 2010; 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 a lower level of education to feel trapped in the parenting role, perhaps because they also feel pressure to invest time in career. The present analysis suggests that this does not apply to fathers.

[Figure 2 about here]

Last, we produced the standardized coefficient for each explanatory and control variable to examine relative strengths in the influences of not employed and work-family conflict on parenting stress. The rank order of variables influencing parenting stress was somewhat different for fathers and mothers. For fathers, work-family conflict ( $B = .143$  for “sometimes” and  $B = .202$  for “often/always”) and having no job ( $B = .144$ ) appeared to be the strongest predictors, followed by their chronic depression and focal child’s general health. For mothers, chronic depression ( $B = .161$ ) and frequency of engagement with children ( $B = .152$ ) were the best predictors, followed by work-family conflict ( $B = .139$  for “often/always”) and having no job ( $B = .126$ ). These patterns suggest that fathers are more likely than mothers to experience parenting stress through difficulties in employment-related factors. In sum, the results show that having no job and experiencing some or more work-family conflict, but not other employment-related factors, were related to a higher level of parenting stress for fathers. These two employment-related factors were the best predictors of fathers’ parenting stress among all factors including demographic, SES, and family factors that were examined in the analysis. We found similar patterns for mothers, with a few gender differences. Work-family conflict was related to more fathers’ than mothers’ parenting stress; unlike for fathers lack of employment and work-family conflict were not best predictors for mothers’ stress; and working nonstandard hours was related to less parenting stress for mothers.

## DISCUSSION

Qualitative research has indicated that many working-class and low-income fathers with young children experience parenting stress because of the pressure to provide financial support, while economic opportunities for them have declined (Fox, 2009; Williams 2010). At the same time, expectations for fathers to be involved in children’s lives have increased, which adds even

more strains for working-class fathers, who tend to be hesitant to ask for family-friendly accommodations in the workplace (Williams, 2010). Yet, scholarship of parenting stress has rarely examined the role of employment factors and work-family conflict in influencing fathers' parenting stress. Although fatherhood research has emphasized the unique financial pressure that fathers experience, quantitative examinations of gender differences in the associations between paid work characteristics and parenting stress and gender differences in the relative importance of paid work characteristics in predicting parenting stress have been limited. The present analysis provides new insights for understanding gender, work, family, and well-being by investigating how employment factors are related to working-class and low-income fathers' parenting stress and to what extent these associations are unique to fathers in comparison to mothers.

As expected, fathers who are currently not employed showed a higher level of parenting stress than fathers who are employed. Unlike the emphasis on uniqueness of fathers' parenting stress due to the breadwinning ideal found in qualitative research, not having a job is related to a higher level of parenting stress for mothers as well. With men's growing economic insecurity and instability of marriage and partnerships (Cherlin, 2010), mothers may regard their own employment as a crucial source of financial resources for their children. Prior research, which tends to focus on middle-class mothers, indicates that stress due to not working for pay is largely through isolation or lack of social resources and loss of other sources of happiness (Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011; Stone, 2007) than because of the sense of inadequacy to meet the provider ideal. Further research should examine possible social class differences in the contexts through which not having a job influences mothers' and fathers' parenting stress.

Other undesirable job characteristics, such as overwork, measured by working more than 60 hours per week, working at nonstandard hours, or taking informal jobs, were not related to

fathers' parenting stress. Prior research has suggested that long work hours per se is not always related to poor father-child relationships, unless fathers felt overloaded (Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001). Fathers' subjective experiences of employment may be more important than objective measures of employment. One job-related factor that did not matter for fathers' parenting stress, but did matter for mothers' stress was nonstandard hours. Contrary to expectations, working nonstandard hours was related to less parenting stress. Research has documented that some mothers prefer to work nonstandard hours in order to arrange child care with their partner or other relatives (Garey, 1999; Presser, 2003). Wight, Raley, and Bianchi (2008) found that parents who work evening hours spend more time with their children than parents who work regular day hours. In addition, fathers are more likely to spend time with children alone when mothers work nonstandard hours than when mothers work regular hours (Nock & Kingston, 1988). These advantages of working nonstandard hours may reflect in less parenting stress among mothers.

Work-family conflict was related to fathers' as well as mothers' parenting stress. Both fathers and mothers who experience chronic work-family conflict report a higher level of parenting stress than their counterparts who are out of the labor force. In addition, we found that fathers' parenting stress is more susceptible to occasional (but not chronic) work-family conflict than mothers' parenting stress. This finding supports Williams' (2010) argument, although it is inconsistent with other research that found mothers' greater vulnerability to work-family conflict (Glavin, Shieman, & Reid, 2011). As Williams argued, fathers may experience more stress than mothers when they accommodate their work schedules to children's needs, because masculine norms in the workplace pull fathers into the traditional breadwinning role, ignoring the reality that working-class and low-income fathers need to share child care responsibilities with mothers.

We found no gender difference in the influence of chronic work-family conflict on parenting stress, however, for which we need an alternative explanation. Research suggests that individuals tend to feel more stressed when they face demands in the role for which they do not assume the primary responsibility (Nomaguchi, 2012; Thoits, 1991). It is possible that fathers who “sometimes” experience work-family conflict do not necessarily assume daily child care responsibility but occasionally need to pitch in when mothers are not available. Further investigation on the link between work-family conflict and parenting stress is warranted.

Another, albeit subtle, gender difference that we found is the relative importance of employment status and work-family conflict compared to other factors, especially family factors, in influencing parenting stress. These employment-related factors are stronger predictors for fathers’ parenting stress than background or family factors, whereas chronic depression and frequency of engagement with children were the strongest predictors of mothers’ parenting stress. In fact, frequency of engagement with their children was related to mothers’ more than fathers’ parenting stress. Contemporary parenting culture in the United States, as featured by the ideology of intensive mothering, emphasizes the importance of mothers’ time for children more than anybody else’s time (Hays, 1996). The findings of the present analysis, along with prior findings (Milkie, Kendig, Nomaguchi, & Denny, 2010; Nomaguchi, Milkie, & Bianchi, 2005), indicate that time deficit with children has a greater negative consequence for mothers’ well-being than fathers’

The present analysis has limitations that the future research should address. First, future research should investigate more detailed job quality. Among employed mothers with disabled children, Warfield (2001) found that those who reported that their work is interesting reported less parenting stress than those who did not report their job was interesting, suggesting that job

rewards can play the role of resources that parents can use to cope with demands of children at home. We were unable to examine more detailed job characteristics such as workplace culture. Second, the measure of work-family conflict focused on scheduling flexibility, which is known as a key to easing work-family conflict (Kelly, Moen, & Tranby, 2011). Prior research has suggested that work-family conflict is multi-faceted, including different directions (i.e., work-to-family and family-to-work conflict) and forms (i.e., time and strain) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Future research using more detailed measures of work-family conflict is merited. Third, the present analysis examined cross-sectional associations. Thus it is possible that the causal direction may be the opposite: a higher level of parenting stress may lead to dropping out of the labor force or perception of having a higher level of work-family conflict. There may be gender differences in causal directions, as stressed mothers may be more likely than stressed fathers to be able to quit their job. Finally, because our analysis focused on lower SES 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 how associations vary by SES and race/ethnicity.

The present analysis examined the role of employment and work-family conflict in influencing lower SES fathers' parenting stress with a specific focus on a comparison to mothers, an important but underexamined question. Fathers who are not employed report a higher level of parenting stress than those who are employed, but employed fathers who are experiencing a higher level of work-family conflict report more parenting stress than fathers who are not employed. Although these patterns are not unique to fathers, some gender differences are found. These two factors are stronger predictors than other factors for fathers, but not for mothers; and fathers appear to be more vulnerable to work-family conflict than mothers. Future research is

warranted in this nuanced area as the ideal fatherhood, while becoming more complex, has become less consistent with the reality that economically disadvantaged fathers face in the world of work.

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Table 1. Means (SDs) or Percentage Distributions by Parent Gender (N = 3,165)

	Fathers		Mothers		
	<i>M (SD)</i> or %	% Missing	<i>M (SD)</i> or %	% Missing	
Parenting stress ( <i>M</i> ) (range: 1 – 4)	2.1 (0.7)	8.3	2.2 (0.7)	***	2.0
Current employment status (%)		0.7			0.4
Not employed	21.0		43.5	***	
Employed, part-time (1 – 34 hrs/week)	7.4		15.3	***	
Employed, full-time (35 – 44 hrs/week)	36.6		32.1	***	
Employed, full-time, extended hrs <sup>a</sup>	25.3		n/a		
Employed, overtime <sup>a</sup>	9.6		9.0	***	
Working non-standard hours (%)	64.2	0.4	36.1	***	0.2
Informal work hours ( <i>M</i> ) (0 – 40)	5.4 (11.7)	2.9	1.9 (5.5)	***	1.3
Worked two or more jobs last year (%)	15.6%	0.3	10.2%	***	0.1
Job stability in the past three years (%)		2.8			2.8
Consistently not employed	7.2		12.9	***	
Consistently employed – one or two jobs	74.4		70.3		
Worked multiple jobs	18.4		16.8		
Work-family conflict (%) <sup>b</sup>		1.1			0.6
Never	26.7		23.1		
Sometimes	33.8		24.1	***	
Often or always	18.3		9.1	***	
<i>Controls:</i>					
Age ( <i>M</i> ) (15-53 / 15-43)	28.0 (7.2)	10.0	25.5 (6.1)	***	0.0
Education (%)		1.0			0.1
Less than high school	30.0		31.6	***	
High school diploma/GED	35.2		29.7		
Some college	22.6		25.6	***	
College degree	12.2		13.1	**	
Race/ethnicity (%)		10.9			0.7
White non-Hispanic	25.6		24.2		
Black non-Hispanic	43.1		46.3		
Hispanic	26.9		25.5		
Other	4.4		4.0		
Income-to-poverty ratio ( <i>M</i> ) (0 – 69.1)	2.7 (3.2)	0.0	2.1 (2.7)	***	0.0
Chronic depression (%)	14.2	0.2	20.2	***	0.1
Focal child's gender (%) (1 = girl)	47.8	0.0	47.8		0.0
Number of children in the household (0 – 10)	1.5 (1.4)	0.0	2.3 (1.3)	***	0.4
Focal child's general health ( <i>M</i> ) (1 – 5)	4.6 (2.7)	30.3	4.5 (0.8)		1.3
Have a non-residential child (%)	59.4	0.5	9.1	***	0.2
Engagement with focal child ( <i>M</i> ) (0 – 7)	3.8 (1.9)	8.3	5.1 (1.7)	***	0.0
Current relationship (%)		0.0			0.0

Married	41.4		40.0		
Cohabiting	31.4		28.7		
Dating	10.7		12.1		
Single	16.3		19.2	**	
Quality of co-parenting with mother of focal child ( <i>M</i> ) ( <i>I</i> – <i>3</i> )	2.8 (0.3)	10.0	2.6 (0.5)	***	5.5

*Note:* <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”. Among those who were currently employed only, the distributions were 33.9% never, 42.9% sometimes, and 23.2% often or always for fathers, and 41.0% never, 42.8% sometimes, and 16.2% often or always for mothers.

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 ( $N = 3,165$ )

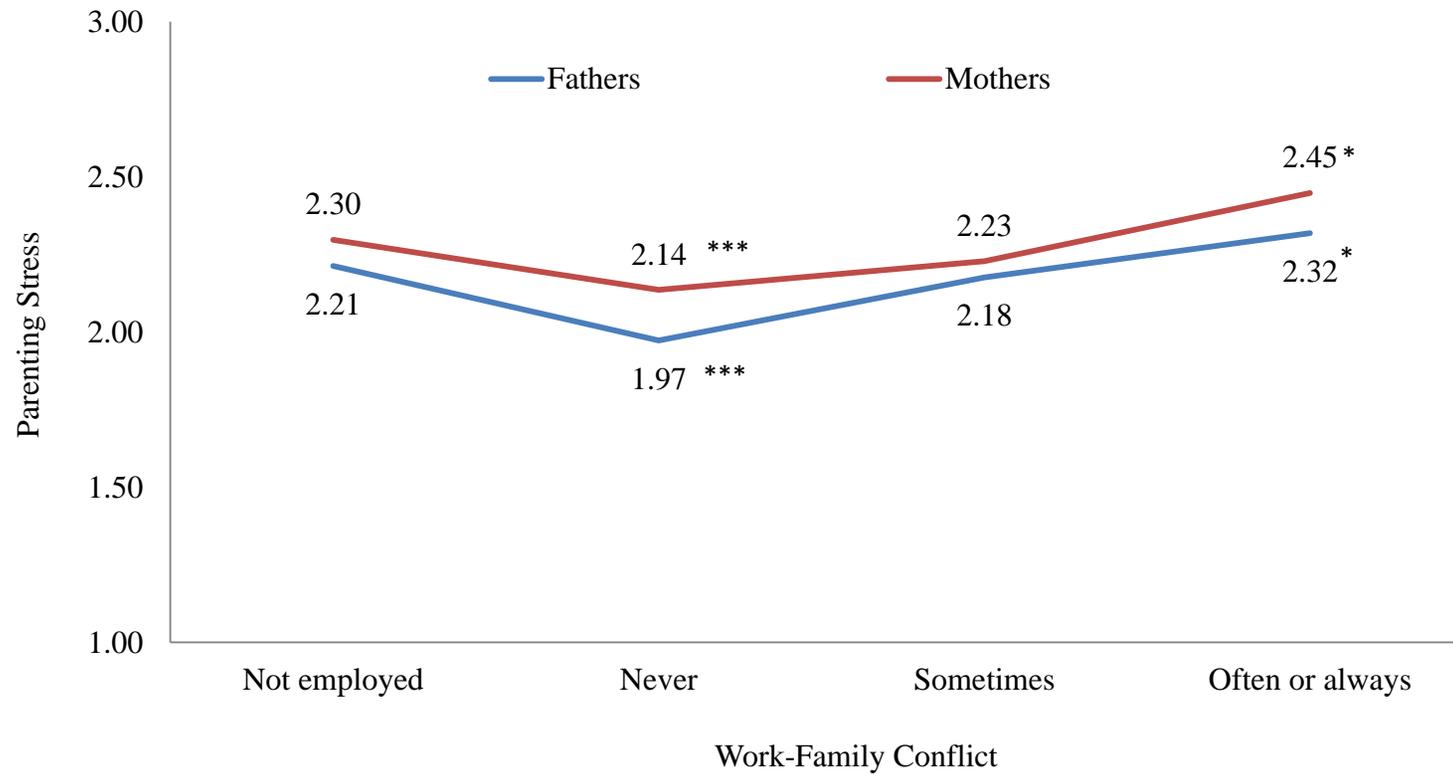
	Fathers					Mothers				
	Zero Order		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Zero Order		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\hat{a}$	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\hat{a}$
Current employment Status										
Not employed	0.178***	0.035	0.240***	0.048	0.144	0.141***	0.027	0.161***	0.036	0.126
Employed, part-time	0.097	0.052	0.052	0.047	0.020	0.061	0.040	0.089**	0.035	0.051
Employed, full-time	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Employed, extended hrs	0.013	0.031	0.001	0.031	0.002	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Employed, overtime	0.005	0.044	-0.057	0.045	-0.025	-0.007	0.043	-0.021	0.042	-0.009
Work non-standard hours	-0.108***	0.025	-0.044	0.034	0.030	-0.081***	0.024	-0.064* <sup>a</sup>	0.031	-0.047
Informal work hours	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.005	0.004	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.009
Work two or more jobs	-0.004	0.034	-0.011	0.034	-0.007	0.011	0.038	-0.019	0.038	-0.011
Job stability past three years										
Consistently not employed	0.124*	0.056	0.094	0.050	0.036	0.102**	0.036	0.036	0.036	0.017
Worked one or two jobs	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Worked multiple jobs	0.050	0.032	0.004	0.035	0.004	0.075*	0.033	0.009	0.032	0.005
Work-family conflict										
Never	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Sometimes	0.054*	0.028	0.203***	0.031	0.143	-0.035	0.027	0.092** <sup>a</sup>	0.032	0.064
Often or always	0.232***	0.035	0.346***	0.038	0.202	0.227***	0.041	0.312***	0.044	0.139
Controls:										
Age	-0.002	0.002	-0.002	0.002	-0.017	0.001	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.027
Education										
Less than high school	0.078*	0.032	0.052	0.034	0.032	0.124***	0.030	0.070*	0.030	0.052
High school diploma	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Some college	-0.111***	0.033	-0.074*	0.035	-0.048	-0.060	0.031	-0.039	0.031	-0.024
College graduate	-0.045	0.040	0.002	0.048	0.001	0.057	0.038	0.149*** <sup>b</sup>	0.045	-0.080
Race/ethnicity										
Non-Hispanic White	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Non-Hispanic Black	-0.021	0.031	-0.072	0.039	-0.055	0.067*	0.029	0.052	0.031	0.041
Hispanic	-0.025	0.034	-0.115*** <sup>a</sup>	0.043	-0.075	0.053	0.033	0.016	0.034	0.010
Other race/ethnicity	0.122*	0.061	0.084	0.064	0.028	0.084	0.063	0.078	0.060	0.026
Income-to-poverty ratio	-0.013***	0.004	0.004	0.004	-0.017	-0.012**	0.004	-0.001	0.005	-0.003

Chronic depression	0.263***	0.037	0.191***	0.040	0.099	0.316***	0.028	0.257***	0.029	0.161
Child's gender	-0.016	0.025	-0.014	0.024	-0.010	-0.044	0.023	-0.033	0.022	-0.025
Child's general health	-0.096***	0.024	-0.076***	0.019	-0.090	-0.106***	0.015	-0.055***	0.015	-0.066
No. of children	0.007	0.008	0.019	0.010	0.042	0.035***	0.009	0.027**	0.009	0.054
Non-residential children	0.044	0.025	0.020	0.029	0.012	0.060	0.042	-0.028	0.045	-0.012
Engagement	-0.032***	0.007	-0.017**	0.036	-0.048	-0.073***	0.007	-0.058*** <sup>c</sup>	0.008	-0.152
Current relationship type										
Married	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Cohabiting	0.070*	0.029	0.037	0.031	0.025	0.012	0.028	0.001	0.030	0.001
Dating	0.072	0.049	-0.026	0.049	-0.012	0.102**	0.038	0.035	0.040	0.019
Single	0.080*	0.037	-0.023	0.043	-0.011	0.046	0.032	-0.057	0.036	-0.039
Co-parenting quality	-0.198***	0.038	-0.126**	0.044	-0.067	-0.177***	0.024	-0.135***	0.025	-0.109
Constant			2.728***	0.165				2.806***	0.124	
R-square			0.095					0.131		
Adj. R-square			0.086					0.123		

*Note:* Differences in coefficients between fathers and mothers are statistically significant at <sup>a</sup>  $p < .05$ , <sup>b</sup>  $p < .01$ , <sup>c</sup>  $p < .001$ .

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Figure 1. Predicted Means of Parenting Stress by Work-Family Conflict for Fathers and Mothers



Note: Differences from "Not employed" are significant at \* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Figure 2. Predicted Means of Parenting Stress by Engagement for Fathers and Mothers

