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The Differential Relationship Between Work-Family Conflict, Work Characteristics, And Psychological Distress Among Partnered And Single Mothers

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THE DIFFERENTIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT, WORK
CHARACTERISTICS, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG PARTNERED AND
SINGLE MOTHERS

by

Brooke Janae Kranzler
Bachelor of Science, University of North Dakota, 2013

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

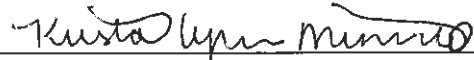
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Master of Arts

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This thesis, submitted by Brooke Janae Kranzler in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



Dr. Krista Lynn Minnotte



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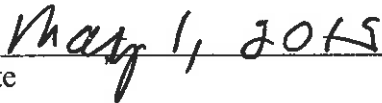


Dr. Elizabeth Legerski

This thesis is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.



Wayne Swisher
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies



Date

PERMISSION

Title The Differential Relationship between Work-Family Conflict, Work
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Department Sociology

Degree Master of Arts

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Brooke Kranzler
4-13-2015

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ABSTRACT

Women's increasing participation in the workforce and the growing number of single mothers in the U.S. have prompted work-family scholars to explore the unique struggles these mothers face. Most research indicates that single mothers experience both more work-family conflict, and worse mental health compared to their partnered counterparts. Limited research, however, has considered how work-family conflict and work characteristics differentially relate to the psychological distress of partnered and single mothers. Using the Job Demands-Resources model, this research explored partnered and single mothers' experiences of work-family conflict, work characteristics, and psychological distress using data from the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce ($N = 664$). Findings from the OLS regression indicated that among both partnered and single mothers, education and work-family conflict were significantly related to psychological distress. A significant relationship between job pressure and psychological distress was found only among partnered mothers. These findings and their implications were discussed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Chapter

The goal of this thesis is to examine whether the work-family conflict and work characteristics of partnered mothers and single mothers differentially relate to their psychological distress. Chapter One will introduce why studying this topic is important and explain the overall goal of this thesis. It will also describe what is currently known about how work-family conflict and work characteristics relate to psychological distress among partnered and single mothers. Finally, an overview of the next four chapters of this thesis will be presented.

Introduction and Goal of Thesis

There are increasing rates of labor force participation among mothers, with approximately 69.9% of all mothers in the United States employed in the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Another trend in the United States is the higher labor force participation rate of single mothers (74.2 %) compared to married mothers (67.8%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Taken together, these trends have prompted work-family scholars to explore issues faced by working mothers, including partnered and single mothers' unique work-family experiences. The implications of these trends for partnered mothers include an increased risk for psychological distress compared to women who are childfree (Matthews & Power, 2002) and more work-family spillover than fathers (Offer, 2014). The implications of these trends for single mothers include more stressful life events and chronic stress (Cairney, Boyle, Offord, & Racine, 2003), greater financial burdens (Dziak, Janzen, & Muhajarine, 2010; Hope, Power, & Rodgers,

1999; Wickrama et al., 2006), more work-family conflict (Baxter, & Alexander, 2008; Dziak et al., 2010), and poorer physical and mental health than their partnered counterparts (Afifi, Cox, & Enns, 2006; Wickrama et al., 2006). Given this background, one question that remains is whether different patterns emerge between partnered mothers and single mothers when examining predictors of their psychological distress.

Hochschild's (1989) famous work delved into how married couples coped with both partners in the workforce, reporting that working women still took on most of the housework and childcare responsibilities in what she called the "second shift." This second shift that falls primarily upon mothers can lead to conflict between a mother's work and family roles.

Hochschild's work, although still relevant today, failed to offer much insight into the ways single mothers cope with multiple roles or how these multiple roles may relate to mental health. Single mothers face unique challenges, including having no partner to help buffer work and family demands, which may influence the amount of psychological distress they experience. While other researchers have explored mental health outcomes among single mothers (Hope et al., 1999; Maclean, Glynn, & Ansara, 2004; Terrance, Veldhuizen, & Cairney, 2011), research comparing how partnered mothers' and single mothers' workplace characteristics and work-family conflict relate to psychological distress has been scarce.

It has been established in previous literature that single mothers experience both more work-family conflict (Baxter, & Alexander, 2008; Dziak et al., 2010; Nomaguchi, 2012) and poorer mental health than their partnered counterparts (Afifi et al., 2006; Burden, 1986; Dziak et al., 2010; Wade, Veldhuizen, & Cairney, 2011). Studies have also found that working mothers with high role conflict experience high psychological distress (Beauregard, 2011; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Glynn, Maclean, Forte, & Cohen, 2009; Tiedje et al., 1990). The differing level of

work-family conflict experienced by partnered mothers and single mothers has been used to account for differences in psychological distress these mothers report, with single mothers generally reporting more psychological distress than partnered mothers (Dziak et al., 2010; Hope et al., 1999). Some studies suggest, however, that the difference between partnered mothers and single mothers is merely a reflection of differences in financial situation (Dziak et al., 2010). Although, single mothers' financial situations play an important role in the disparities between single mothers and partnered mothers, it is only part of the picture (Baker, North, & The ALSPAC Study Team, 1999; Benzeval, 1998). Indeed, studies have typically failed to include work characteristics and work-family conflict when examining psychological distress among partnered and single mothers. By taking these factors into account, we can better understand why single mothers experience greater psychological distress.

Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to expand on the limited literature in this area by examining the relationship of work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, workplace characteristics, and psychological distress among partnered mothers and single mothers. This thesis examines these relationships in a nuanced way by comparing how partnered mothers' and single mothers' levels of psychological distress are impacted by both forms of work-family conflict (work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict) and workplace characteristics using the Job Demands-Resources Model. In doing so, comparisons can be made to see if different patterns emerge among partnered and single mothers. In order to study these relationships, this thesis will use secondary data from the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce using a subset of relevant cases ($N = 664$).

Summary and Overview of Thesis

Chapter One introduced the importance of examining how work-family conflict and work characteristics relate to psychological distress among both partnered and single mothers. Chapter Two will introduce the theoretical framework guiding this thesis and will review the literature regarding psychological distress among partnered mothers and single mothers. Variables central to this thesis will be conceptualized and defined. The relationship between psychological distress and both forms of work-family conflict and work characteristics among partnered mothers and single mothers will be examined using quantitative research methods. These methods will be described in Chapter Three. Chapter Four will present the results from the statistical analyses. Finally, Chapter Five will discuss the results and put them into context of the previous literature and theoretical framework. A discussion of the thesis's limitations and suggestions for future research will also be addressed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this thesis is to examine whether work-family conflict and workplace characteristics differentially relate to psychological distress among partnered mothers and single mothers. This chapter includes a description of the theoretical framework that will guide this thesis, the Job Demands-Resources model, as well as a discussion of the relevant previous literature. Hypotheses and one research question guiding the analysis will also be proposed.

Theoretical Framework

Job Demands-Resources Model

This thesis is guided by the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R). The JD-R model organizes work characteristics into two categories: job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Job demands in this model refer to “those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). Specific job demands that have been studied include job pressure, job monotony, irregular shift work, and long work hours (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Consiglio, Borgogni, Alessandri, & Schaufeli, 2013; Schieman & Glavin, 2011). In contrast, job resources refer to “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational

aspects of the job that may do any of the following: a) be functional in achieving work goals, b) reduce job demands at the associated physiological and psychological costs, c) stimulate personal growth and development” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). Job resources that have been studied in previous literature include schedule control, supervisor support, coworker support, and job autonomy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Consiglio et al., 2013; Schieman & Glavin, 2011). The job demands and resources relevant to this thesis are job pressure, work hours, and job autonomy.

The JD-R model has frequently been used to study work-family conflict. Work-family conflict is “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). This conflict can occur in both directions, with work conflicting with family, and family conflicting with work. The relationship that work-to-family conflict has with job demands and resources has varied across studies. The most prevalent finding is that when job resources are low and job demands are high, more work-family conflict occurs (Bakker et al., 2011; DiRenzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2010). Previous literature has included role conflict, such as work-family conflict, as a job demand (Voydanoff, 1988). This thesis also conceptualizes work-family conflict as a demand for two reasons. First, the mental health outcomes that are associated with work-family conflict, including psychological distress, suggest work-family conflict is demanding (Kalliath, Hughes, & Newcombe, 2012; Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts, & Pulkkinen, 2006; Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002; Tiedje et al., 1990). Second, the difficulties mothers with work-family conflict face, such as feelings of time deficits with children and/or spouses, point to work-family conflict as a demand (Milkie, & Bianchi, 2005; Nomaguchi, 2012).

The JD-R model also proposes a dual process that is relevant to the study of psychological distress. The first process is the *health impairment process* that results when “poorly designed jobs or chronic job demands exhaust employees’ mental and physical resources and may therefore lead to the depletion of energy and to health problems,” including psychological distress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 313). The second process is the *motivational process* by which job resources “foster employees’ growth, learning and development” and “are instrumental in achieving work goals” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 313). This model proposes that job resources can buffer the effect of job demands, which would decrease the psychological distress from job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This also means that when job demands are high and job resources are low, more psychological distress is likely to occur (Brough et al., 2013). In terms of this thesis, when demands, such as work-family conflict, job pressure, and work hours, are high, psychological distress is also expected to be high. In contrast, when job resources, such as job autonomy, are high, psychological distress will be lower.

Background and Conceptualization

Psychological Distress

Psychological distress is defined as “feelings of depression, lack of interest in normal activities, feelings of nervousness, minor health problems, and problems sleeping” (Minnotte, Gravelle, & Minnotte, 2013, p. 409; Schieman & Glavin, 2011). Psychological distress tends to be greater among single mothers than partnered mothers (Barrett & Turner, 2005; Afifi et al., 2006; Burden, 1986; Dziak et al., 2010; Maclean et al., 2004). Single mothers also tend to experience more psychological distress than single fathers (Terrance et al., 2011). This thesis explores how work characteristics and both forms of work-family conflict differentially relate to

psychological distress among partnered and single mothers. In order to explore this relationship, five hypotheses regarding the independent variables' relationship to psychological distress will be formulated. Additionally, a research question about whether different patterns emerge between partnered mothers and single mothers will be presented.

Work-to-Family Conflict and Psychological Distress

As previously noted, work-to-family conflict occurs when work interferes with family life (Pاناتیک, Badri, Rajab, Hamidah, & Shah, 2011). An example of work-to-family conflict is long hours at work preventing a parent from spending time with their children. For this thesis, work-to-family conflict is considered a demand faced by working mothers that has psychological consequences. Past research has found that women who have multiple roles, including working mothers, have poorer mental health when their role conflict is high, indicating a positive association between work-to-family conflict and psychological distress (Kinnunen et al., 2006; Tiedje et al., 1990). Work-to-family conflict has been used to account for differences between single mothers' and partnered mothers' experience of psychological distress with single mothers experiencing more work-to-family conflict and more psychological distress than partnered mothers (Dziak et al., 2010). Given this positive association between work-to family conflict and psychological distress, the first hypothesis is:

H₁: Work-to-family conflict will be positively related to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress.

Family-to-Work Conflict and Psychological Distress

Family-to-work conflict occurs when family life interferes with work responsibilities (Pاناتیک et al., 2011). An example of family-to-work conflict is a sick child requiring a parent to take time off of work. Since family life conflicting with work life is likely to affect mothers'

mental health in a negative way, family-to-work conflict is considered a demand in this thesis. Past studies indicate family-to-work conflict is positively related to workers' psychological distress (Kalliath et al., 2012; Major et al., 2002; Panatik et al., 2011). Single mothers also tend to experience more family-to-work conflict than their partnered counterparts (Dziak et al., 2010). Additionally, single mothers' experience of family-to-work conflict has been used to account for their higher levels of psychological distress (Dziak et al., 2010). Overall, family-to-work conflict has been positively associated with psychological distress. The second hypothesis is presented in light of these findings.

H₂: Family-to-work conflict will be positively related to partnered mothers' and single mother's psychological distress.

Work Hours, Job Pressure, and Psychological Distress

The job demands that are examined in this thesis are work hours and job pressure. Work hours refer to the usual hours participants work per week in all jobs. For women, higher than average work hours are associated with greater psychological distress (MacDonald, Phipps, Lethbridge, 2005). This relationship may exist because long hours may not only cause emotional exhaustion, but also take away from leisure activities (Hughes & Parkes, 2007). Altogether, work hours have a positive relationship with psychological distress.

Another job demand likely to influence psychological distress is job pressure. Job pressure, sometimes called "job demands" in the literature, refers to "the psychological demands associated with having to work fast and hard, having a great deal to do, not having enough time, and having conflicting demands" in one's job (Barnett & Brennan, 1995, p. 261). Previous research has shown that higher job pressure is associated with a number of negative consequences, including higher levels of psychological distress (Barnett & Brennan, 1995;

Diestel & Schmidt, 2009; Hughes & Parkes, 2007). This relationship may exist because high job pressure may lead to emotional exhaustion and anxiety (Diestel & Schmidt, 2009). The positive relationships that have been found between work hours and job pressure and psychological distress inform the third and fourth hypotheses:

H₃: Work hours will be positively related to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress.

H₄: Job pressure will be positively related to partner mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress.

Job Autonomy and Psychological Distress

Job autonomy refers to “the degree to which employees are provided with the freedom and discretion to determine how to conduct their job” (Park & Searcy, 2012, p. 305). Job autonomy, sometimes referred to as “job control” in the literature, is a work characteristic found to reduce the amount of psychological distress experienced, and, for this thesis, it is considered a job resource. Studies have shown that higher job autonomy is associated with greater well-being among employees (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007; Park & Searcy, 2012). Higher job autonomy may be associated with lower psychological distress because it gives workers the “freedom and flexibility to manage their own workloads” (Park & Searcy, p. 307). Following these findings, the fifth hypothesis is formulated.

H₅: Job autonomy will be negatively related to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress.

Research Question

Because single mothers have no partner to help buffer the effects of work and family demands, the impact that work characteristics and work-family conflict have on their experience

of psychological distress may be different than partnered mothers. Compared to partnered mothers, single mothers tend to experience more work-family conflict (Baxter, & Alexander, 2008; Dziak et al., 2010), poorer physical and mental health (Afifi et al., 2006; Wickrama et al., 2006), greater financial burden (Dziak et al., 2010; Hope et al., 1999; Wickrama et al., 2006), and they tend to work in lower quality and lower paying jobs (Dziak, et al., 2010). Furthermore, workplaces operate on the assumption that the traditional two-parent family is the only family form, which creates obstacles for single mothers (Mannis, 1999). Research has also shown that some resources matter more for single mothers than they do for partnered mothers when predicting work-to-family conflict (Minnotte, 2012). Given these patterns, do certain job demands and resources matter more for partnered or single mothers when predicting psychological distress? This leads to the research question:

RQ₁: Do work characteristics and work-family conflict differentially relate to partnered and single mothers' experience of psychological distress?

Control Variables and Psychological Distress

This thesis also controls for age, education, income, and race. Age is important to include as a control variable because psychological distress is likely to vary across the lifespan (Keyes et al., 2014; Sacker & Wiggins, 2002; Schieman, van Gundy, & Taylor, 2001). Education is also important because higher education has been associated with less psychological distress (Brannlund & Hammarstrom, 2014).

Because single mothers' psychological distress is often linked to greater financial burdens (Dziak et al., 2010), it is important to include income as a control variable. This is especially important because financial hardship does not account for all of single mothers' higher experience of psychological distress (Hope et al., 1999). Finally, race was taken into account

because psychological distress likely varies across different racial groups (Bratter & Eschbach, 2005; Jackson et al., 2010).

Summary and Overview

In Chapter Two, the theoretical framework for this thesis, the Job Demands-Resources model, was described and used to explain the relevance of studying work-family conflict and job characteristics when examining the psychological distress among partnered and single mothers. Previous relevant literature was presented, with hypotheses and one research question formulated based on the findings. In Chapter Three, the method that will be used to test the hypotheses and address the research question will be explained. Additionally, a description of the dataset, sample, and the analytic strategy will be presented. Finally, Chapter Three will explain how each variable was measured.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the work-family conflict and workplace characteristics of partnered mothers and single mothers differentially relate to their psychological distress. In order to address this question, this study uses a nationally representative secondary dataset. In this chapter, a description of the data and sampling process will be provided first. Second, a description of the measurement of the main dependent variable, psychological distress, will be given along with descriptions of the independent and control variables. Finally, an explanation of the analytic strategy will be presented.

Data and Sample

In order to address the research question, a secondary dataset, the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce ($N = 3,502$), will be used. The 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) includes information from a representative sample of U.S. workers, with questions addressing both their work and personal lives. The survey is done every five years and uses a questionnaire developed by the Families and Work Institute. A total of 3,502 interviews were conducted between 2007-2008. Interviews were done via telephone using a random digit dialing method, with an overall response rate of 54.6 percent (Family and Work Institute, 2008). There were up to 60 calls made to each number until an eligible person was reached. Those eligible for the survey included people who met the following characteristics: working a paid job or operating a business that produces some sort of income, 18 years or older, living in the lower 48 states, and living in a household with a telephone (Family and Work Institute, 2008). People

who participated were given a cash incentive ranging from five to fifty dollars, depending on how many times the respondent refused to participate.

A subset of cases was selected for this study based on gender (female) and parental status (at least one child less than 18 years old in residence). Relationship status was a dummy variable with partnered mothers coded as “1” and single mothers coded as “0”. Partnered mothers included those who were married and cohabitating. Single mothers included all other arrangements consisting of divorced, widowed, and never married mothers. After selecting for gender, parental status, relationship status, and accounting for missing data (listwise deletion of missing data), the total number of cases used for this study is 664.

Measures

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study is *psychological distress*. This was measured using a combination of five questions used in previous scholarship (e.g., Minnotte et al., 2013; Schieman & Glavin, 2011). Of the five questions, the first three ask: “In the last month, how often have you: 1) Been bothered by minor health problems such as headaches, insomnia, or stomach upsets?; 2) Had trouble sleeping to the point that it affected your performance on and off the job?; and 3) Felt nervous and stressed?” These three questions had response choices of “never” (1); “almost never” (2); “sometimes” (3); “fairly often” (4); and “very often” (5). The last two questions ask “During the last month have you: 4) Been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless? and 5) Been bothered by little interest or pleasure in doing things?” The final two questions had response choices of “no” (1) and “yes” (5). The scores for this scale were summed and averaged. This scale has an alpha reliability coefficient of .74.

Independent Variables

Work-to-family conflict was measured using five questions used in previous scholarship (e.g., Minnotte, 2012; Minnotte et al., 2013; Schieman & Glavin, 2011). These questions asked: “How often have you not had enough time for your family or other important people in your life because of your job?”; “How often have you not had the energy to do things with your family or other important people in your life because of your job?”; “How often has work kept you from doing as good a job at home as you could?”; “How often have you not been in as good a mood as you would like to be at home because of your job?”; and “How often has your job kept you from concentrating on important things in your family or personal life?” These five questions had response choices of: “never” (1); “rarely” (2); “sometimes” (3); “often” (4); and “very often” (5). Lower scores indicate a lower level of work-to-family conflict. The scores for this scale were summed and averaged. The scale has an alpha reliability coefficient of .87.

Family-to-work conflict consisted of five questions that included: “How often have you not been in as good a mood as you would like to be at work because of your personal or family life?”; “How often has your family or personal life kept you from doing as good a job at work as you could?”; “In the past three months, how often has your family or personal life drained you of the energy you needed to do your job?”; “How often has your family or personal life kept you from concentrating on your job?”; and “How often have you not had enough time for your job because of your family or personal life?” These five questions had response choices of: “never” (1); “rarely” (2); “sometimes” (3); “often” (4); and “very often” (5). Lower scores indicate a lower level of family-to-work conflict. The scores for this scale were summed and averaged. The scale has an alpha reliability coefficient of .83.

Three workplace characteristics are included in the analysis: job autonomy, job pressure, and work hours. *Job autonomy* was measured using three items used in previous research and an additional fourth item new to the 2008 NSCW (e.g., Minnotte, 2012; Minnotte et al., 2013; Schieman & Glavin, 2011). The items asked to what extent participants agreed with these statements: “I have the freedom to decide what I do on my job”; “It is basically my own responsibility to decide how my job gets done”; “I have a lot of say about what happens on my job”; and “I feel I can really be myself on my job”. Responses for the four items were: “strongly agree” (1); “somewhat agree” (2); “somewhat disagree” (3); and “strongly disagree” (4). These items were reverse-coded to have higher scores indicate more job autonomy. The scores for this scale were summed and averaged. The scale has an alpha reliability coefficient of .76. *Job pressure* was measured using three items used in past scholarship (e.g., Minnotte et al., 2013; Schieman & Glavin, 2011) and an additional fourth item. Items asked participants to what extent they agreed to the following statements: “My job requires that I work very fast”; “My job requires that I work very hard”; “I have enough time to get the job done” and “My work environment is competitive and fast paced.” Responses for these four items were: “strongly agree” (1); “somewhat agree” (2); “somewhat disagree” (3); and “strongly disagree” (4). These items were reverse-coded to have higher scores indicate more job pressure. The scores for this scale were summed and averaged. The scale has an alpha reliability coefficient of .61. *Work hours* was measured as the usual work hours participants worked per week in all jobs.

Control Variables

The control variables used in the study are age, education, income, and race. *Age* was measured in years. *Education* consisted of five categories respondents could choose from that included: (1) less than a high school degree; (2) a high school degree or GED; (3) completed

some education after high school; (4) a 4/5-year college degree; and (5) a postgraduate degree. Participants' *income* was separated into three levels: (1) less than or equal to \$27,999; (2) \$28,000-\$79,999; and (3) greater than or equal to \$80,000. *Race* was coded as a dummy variable with whites coded as "1" and all other racial categories coded as "0".

Analytic Strategy

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the work-family conflict and workplace characteristics of partnered mothers and single mothers differentially relate to their psychological distress. First, descriptive statistics of all the variables in the analysis will be provided, along with *t* tests examining any significant differences in the means of partnered and single mothers. Second, a bivariate correlation matrix will be used, with separate correlations for partnered and single mothers. Finally, an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression will be used to test the relationships between psychological distress and the independent and control variables. Separate regressions will be estimated for partnered mothers and single mothers to see if the relationships vary between these two groups.

Summary and Overview of Next Chapter

Chapter Three described the dataset used and the sampling process, the variables and how they were measured, and the analytic strategy to be used in this study. The next chapter will present the descriptive statistics, the *t* test analyses, correlations, and the OLS regression analyses.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This thesis examines whether work-family conflict and workplace characteristics differentially relate to psychological distress among partnered mothers and single mothers. The 2008 NSCW ($N = 664$) was used to explore the five hypotheses and one research question. First, this chapter will discuss the descriptive statistics and t test comparisons between partnered mothers and single mothers. Next, the bivariate correlations will be explained. Last, the OLS regression analyses will be presented.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the variables are shown in Table 1. The sample consisted of 74% partnered mothers and 26% single mothers. Partnered mothers showed low to moderate levels of psychological distress with a mean of 2.33 ($SD = .98$), while single mothers reported moderate levels of psychological distress with a mean of 2.74 ($SD = 1.12$), on a scale ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high). The means for psychological distress among mothers were significantly different, with single mothers having higher levels of psychological distress than partnered mothers ($t = 4.21$, $df = 270$, $p < .001$). Partnered mothers and single mothers also reported moderate levels of work-to-family conflict, with means of 2.60 ($SD = .85$) and 2.61 ($SD = .99$) respectively, on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Partnered and single mothers reported low to moderate levels of family-to-work conflict with means of 2.23 ($SD = .72$) and 2.29 ($SD = .82$) respectively, on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Partnered mothers and single mothers had moderate to high levels of job pressure with means of 2.78 ($SD = .64$) and 2.83 ($SD = .65$) respectively, on a scale ranging

from 1 (low) to 4 (high). Finally, partnered mothers and single mothers reported fairly high levels of job autonomy with means of 3.21 ($SD = .73$) and 3.14 ($SD = .76$) respectively, on a scale range from 1 (low) to 4 (high).

The average age of partnered mothers was 41 years ($SD = 8.86$) and of single mothers was 39 years ($SD = 9.81$). The mean for education among partnered mothers was 3.06 ($SD = 1.03$), while the mean for single mothers was 2.60 ($SD = .94$). This indicates that, on average, partnered mothers' highest level of education was some post-secondary schooling, while single mothers' highest level of education was a high school degree or GED. This difference in education was significant, with partnered mothers attaining, on average, a higher level of education than single mothers ($t = 5.14, df = 661, p < .001$). Partnered mothers worked, on average, 41 hours per week ($SD = 14.98$), while single mothers worked, on average, 40 hours per week ($SD = 12.62$). Partnered mothers' average household income was between \$28,000 and \$79,999 ($M = 2.19, SD = 1.37$) compared to single mothers reporting an average household income of less than \$28,000. This difference in income was significant, with partnered mothers earning, on average, higher household incomes than single mothers ($t = 15.14, df = 631, p < .001$). In terms of race, the majority of both partnered mothers (81%) and single mothers (53%) were white.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics* ($N = 490$ partnered mothers and 174 single mothers)

Variable	Partnered Mothers		Single Mothers		Scale Range
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Psychological distress	2.33	.98	2.74***	1.12	1-5
Work-to-family conflict	2.60	.85	2.61	.99	1-5
Family-to-work conflict	2.23	.72	2.29	.82	1-5
Work hours	40.97	14.98	40.28	12.62	
Job pressure	2.78	.64	2.83	.65	1-4
Job autonomy	3.21	.73	3.14	.76	1-4
Age	40.82	8.86	39.41	9.81	
Education	3.06***	1.03	2.60	.94	
Income	2.19***	.61	1.37	.56	
Race	.81		.53		

Paired sample *t* tests were performed on all non-dummy variables. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

Bivariate Correlations

Separate bivariate correlations were performed for partnered mothers and single mothers to see how the variables were related to each other. These are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Correlations among Key Variables* ($N = 490$ partnered mothers and 174 single mothers)

	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10
X1: Psychological										
distress	-	.43***	.38***	.001	-.21***	.15***	-.07	-.16***	-.13**	-.02
X2: Work-to-										
family conflict	.46***	-	.55***	.23***	-.26***	.35***	-.11*	.04	.02	-.002
X3: Family-to-										
work conflict	.43***	.59***	-	.10*	-.06	.19***	-.12**	.09	-.02	-.01
X4: Work hours	-.07	.22**	.14	-	-.01	.20***	.06	-.01	.15***	-.09
X5: Job autonomy	-.13	-.22**	-.03	-.02	-	-.13**	.05	.01	.09	-.003
X6: Job pressure	.16*	.28***	.16*	-.01	.04	-	-.09*	.02	.04	-.08
X7: Age	-.17*	-.02	.10	.34***	.01	-.19*	-	.08	.26***	.11*
X8: Education	-.13	.14	.09	.31***	-.03	.09	.21**	-	.38***	.10*
X9: Income	.03	.15	.17*	.37***	-.06	.12	.30***	.34***	-	.08
X10: Race	-.08	-.02	.13	.03	-.01	-.003	.28***	.15*	.12	-

Note: Correlations above the diagonal are for partnered mothers and those below the diagonal are for single mothers. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Psychological distress was significantly correlated with work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, job autonomy, job pressure, education, and income for partnered mothers. Among single mothers, work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, job pressure, and age were significantly correlated with psychological distress. There were significant and negative correlations between education ($r = -.16, p < .001$), income ($r = -.13, p < .01$), job autonomy ($r = -.21, p < .001$) and psychological distress for partnered mothers. There was a significant and negative correlation between age and psychological distress for single mothers ($r = -.17, p < .05$). Significant and positive correlations for both partnered mothers and single mothers were found between work-to-family conflict ($r = .43, p < .001$; $r = .46, p < .001$), family-to-work conflict (r

= .38, $p < .001$; $r = .43$, $p < .001$), job pressure ($r = .15$, $p < .001$; $r = .16$, $p < .05$), and psychological distress.

Regression Results

Separate OLS regression analyses were conducted to examine how workplace characteristics and work-family conflict differentially relate to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress. Table 3 displays the results of these analyses. The results show that about 26% of the variance in psychological distress among partnered mothers and about 27% of the variance in psychological distress among single mothers was explained by the control variables and the independent variables.

Table 3. *OLS Regression Predicting Psychological Distress* ($N = 490$ partnered mothers and 174 single mothers)

Variables	Partnered Mothers			Single Mothers		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Work-to-family conflict	0.35	0.06	0.30***	0.36	0.10	0.32***
Family-to-work conflict	0.32	0.07	0.23***	0.38	0.12	0.28***
Work hours	-0.01	0.00	-0.10*	-0.01	0.01	-0.11
Job autonomy	-0.15	0.06	-0.11**	-0.08	0.10	-0.05
Job pressure	0.02	0.07	0.01	0.01	0.13	0.01
Age	0.00	0.00	0.03	-0.01	0.01	-0.12
Education	-0.17	0.04	-0.18***	-0.19	0.09	-0.16*
Income	-0.07	0.07	-0.04	0.14	0.15	0.07
Race	-0.01	0.10	0.00	-0.13	0.16	-0.06
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²		0.26			0.27	

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

In order to test the five hypotheses and explore the research question, psychological distress was regressed on work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, work hours, job pressure, job autonomy, and the control variables. Before discussing the results of the proposed hypotheses, it is important to note that one of the control variables was significantly associated with psychological distress among both types of mothers. Education was negatively associated with psychological distress among partnered mothers ($\beta = -.18, p < .001$) and single mothers ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$). This means that mothers with higher levels of education reported lower levels of psychological distress. Hypothesis 1 stated that work-to-family conflict will be positively related to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress. This hypothesis was supported, with work-to-family conflict having a positive and significant relationship with psychological distress among both partnered mothers ($\beta = .30, p < .001$) and single mothers ($\beta = .32, p = .001$). Hypothesis 2 stated that family-to-work conflict will be positively related to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress. This hypothesis was also supported. Family-to-work conflict had a positive and significant relationship with psychological distress among both partnered mothers ($\beta = .23, p < .001$) and single mothers ($\beta = .28, p = .001$).

Hypothesis 3, work hours will be positively related to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress, was not supported. However, there was a significant and negative relationship found among partnered mothers' work hours and psychological distress ($\beta = -.10, p < .05$). This means that partnered mothers experienced less psychological distress the more hours they worked. Results showed that Hypothesis 4, which stated that job pressure will be positively related to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress, was not supported. Hypothesis 5, which stated that job autonomy will be negatively related to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress, was partially supported. Job autonomy did

not have a significant relationship with single mothers' psychological distress, but it did have a negative and significant relationship with partnered mothers' psychological distress ($\beta = -.11, p < .01$). This means that partnered mothers experienced less psychological distress the more job autonomy they reported.

Regarding Research Question 1, which asked whether work characteristics and work-family conflict differentially relate to partnered and single mothers' experience of psychological distress, the results suggest that job autonomy and work hours are areas of difference. According to the bivariate correlations, job autonomy relates to partnered mothers' level of psychological distress more than it does for single mothers. The OLS regression confirmed this finding, showing work hours, in addition to job autonomy, matter more for the psychological distress of partnered mothers compared to single mothers.

Summary and Overview

In this chapter, the results of the analysis exploring whether work-family conflict and workplace characteristics differentially relate to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress were presented. A negative relationship was found between education and psychological distress among partnered and single mothers. Positive and significant relationships were found between both forms of work-family conflict and psychological distress among partnered and single mothers. Additionally, negative relationships were found between work hours, job autonomy, and psychological distress only among partnered mothers. The results of this chapter will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Five. The results will also be related back to previous literature and the JD-R model. Finally, limitations of this thesis and suggestions for future research will be presented.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis was to examine whether work-family conflict and workplace characteristics differentially relate to psychological distress among partnered mothers and single mothers. Using the data from the 2008 NSCW ($N = 664$), this thesis analyzed five hypotheses and one research question regarding partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress. In this chapter, a summary of the results will be presented. The results will then be related back to the JD-R model and relevant literature. Next, implications of these findings will be discussed along with the limitations of this study. Finally, areas of future research will be suggested, followed by an overall conclusion.

Discussion of Results

Control Variables and Psychological Distress

Before discussing the relationships between work-family conflict, workplace characteristics, and psychological distress, it's important to discuss any control variables that were significantly related to psychological distress. The findings from the OLS regression showed that only one control variable was significantly related to psychological distress among both partnered mothers and single mothers—level of education. Education was negatively associated with mothers' psychological distress, with mothers who had higher levels of education reporting lower levels of psychological distress. This relationship was stronger for partnered mothers than it was for single mothers. The t tests concluded that partnered mothers also had significantly higher education than single mothers. This may partially explain why

partnered mothers had lower levels of psychological distress compared to single mothers. This finding is consistent with previous literature stating that mothers with more education report less psychological distress (Brannlund & Hammarstrom, 2014; Schieman & Glavin, 2011). The reason behind this finding may be that higher levels of education give mothers access to more resources, such as access to better jobs, which can help to reduce psychological distress (Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). Additionally, higher education provides access to resources unrelated to work, such as knowledge about the benefits of engaging in healthy behaviors and a better understanding of health information that may make higher educated mothers more likely to have better overall health, including mental health (Margolis, 2013). Such mothers may also have better coping skills that enhance their abilities to deal with stressors, leading to less psychological distress.

Work-Family Conflict, Workplace Characteristics, and Psychological Distress

For both partnered and single mothers, work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict were significantly and positively related to their levels of psychological distress. In terms of the research question, the results suggest there were no differences in how work-family conflict related to partnered and single mothers' psychological distress. Consistent with previous literature, it was found that as the level of work-family conflict increased among mothers, so did their levels of psychological distress (Kinnunen et al., 2006, Tiedje et al., 1990). The relationship between work-family conflict and psychological distress may occur in situations in which mothers are forced to prioritize work over family responsibilities and vice versa, which may come at a cost for both partnered mothers and single mothers (Beauregard, 2011). However, unlike findings in previous literature suggesting that work-family conflict would affect single mothers more, work-family conflict seems to be similarly influencing both partnered mothers'

and single mothers' psychological distress, even though single mothers reported significantly higher levels of psychological distress (Dziak et al., 2010). This suggests that among partnered mothers, having an additional partner might not necessarily operate as an added bonus when accounting for work-family conflict's relationship to psychological distress. This may be because, even though these working mothers have partners, they still take on most of the responsibility when it comes to housework and childcare (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012; Hochschild, 1989; Ozer, 1995; Voydanoff, 1988).

The results showed one unexpected finding relating to work hours. Though partnered and single mothers worked similar hours, work hours were significantly and negatively associated with partnered mothers' levels of psychological distress, but were not significantly related to single mothers' psychological distress. In other words, the more hours partnered mothers worked, the less psychological distress these mothers reported. Regarding the research question, these findings suggest that work hours do differentially relate to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress. The negative relationship found among partnered mothers is inconsistent with previous research showing that more work hours result in higher levels of psychological distress (Hughes & Parkes, 2007; MacDonald et al., 2005). These results, however, might be partially explained by the findings from a study conducted by Hochschild (2001) on work and family life. In her book, *The Time Bind*, she finds that there is a reversal of home and work: home has become a place of stress and demands that need to be met and work has become a haven to mothers, offering a place to stimulate and motivate them and give them a sense of belonging (Hochschild, 2001). This idea of family life becoming more demanding than work life might explain why we see this negative relationship between work hours and psychological distress among partnered mothers. Additionally, the reason work hours may only

be significantly and negatively related to partnered mothers' psychological distress is because, though most mothers work out of necessity to provide for their family, single mothers may not have as much freedom to find rewarding and satisfying work as partnered mothers do (Gottlieb, 1997). This might make work less enjoyable for single mothers, and, therefore, less of a haven for single mothers, and might also mean that partnered mothers enjoy the types of jobs they are doing more than single mothers.

Reverse causality might also come into play in explaining the relationship between partnered mothers and psychological distress. Partnered mothers with high levels of psychological distress might have the ability to cut back in hours at work since they have a partner to help support them, whereas single mothers do not have that option since they are solely responsible for their family income. In other words, some partnered mothers with high levels of psychological distress might be absent from the workforce because they have a supplemental income from their partner that allows them to take time away from work. Single mothers do not have that option, which may reflect why longer work hours are not related to lower levels of psychological distress for them. Finally, one other explanation for partnered mothers' negative relationship between work hours and psychological distress might have to do with work identity. Partnered mothers might experience less psychological distress with more hours worked because they have stronger work identities than single mothers do. This might make them better able to reconcile any distress caused by the demands of intensive mothering and working because they identify more with their work roles and gain a sense of satisfaction from their competence in the workplace (Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014).

Job pressure, although it was significantly and positively related to both partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress in the bivariate correlations, was no longer

significant in the OLS regression. This would suggest that, in terms of the research question, there are no differences in how job pressure relates to psychological distress among partnered and single mothers when other work characteristics are controlled for. This finding is somewhat unexpected since past literature has shown that higher levels of job pressure are related to higher levels of psychological distress (Barnett & Brennan, 1995; Diestel & Schmidt, 2009; Hughes & Parkes, 2007). This may indicate that other factors play a larger role in the relationship between job pressure and psychological distress. One such factor might be social support. In an Australian study among hospital nurses, it was found that social support from both supervisors and colleagues lowered their job stress (Bartram, Joiner, & Stanton, 2004). The presence of job autonomy might also help buffer the effects of job pressure by allowing partnered and single mothers to manage their own workloads (Park & Searcy, 2012).

The results from this thesis indicated that job autonomy was significantly and negatively related to partnered mothers' level of psychological distress, but was unrelated single mothers' level of psychological distress, even though both mothers similarly experience job autonomy. Relating back to the research question, the results would suggest there are differences in how job autonomy relates to psychological distress among partnered and single mothers. This finding is partially consistent with past research stating that more job autonomy is related to lower levels of psychological distress (Mauno et al., 2007; Park & Searcy, 2012). It appears that having control over their job matters more to partnered mothers than it does to single mothers. Similar to findings from Folkman's (1984) study, for single mothers, exerting control may not be related to less psychological distress because it may create costs in other areas or go against a their usual and preferred way of doing things. Because these single mothers are the sole caregivers, they may prefer less autonomy at work since they are obligated to be fully autonomous when they are

at home where they make all the decisions. It might be easier and less burdensome for single mothers to have someone else delegate and organize job tasks. The types of jobs partnered and single mothers hold might also play a role in explaining why job autonomy only matters for partnered mothers' psychological distress. Since partnered mothers have more education, higher household incomes, and partner support, this may allow them to take the time to find fulfilling jobs. Because of this, they may also be in job positions that they enjoy more and allow for more job autonomy. Single mothers, although they might be in positions that allow job autonomy, may not enjoy them as much as partnered mothers because they may have less time to search for a job that they enjoy. Since they are the sole providers of their household, single mothers may not be able to afford to take as much time in the job seeking process. This could explain why job autonomy seems to matter less to single mothers when predicting their psychological distress.

In relation to the Job Demands-Resources model, the results of this thesis suggest that there are job demands and job resources that are important in predicting partnered and single mothers' psychological distress. For both partnered and single mothers, education's negative relationship to psychological distress suggests education was acting as a resource. It may be that education motivates mothers in a way that buffers the relationship that job demands has on their levels of psychological distress by providing them with ways of achieving their goals and securing higher incomes. When relating work-family conflict back to the JD-R model, we can see that work-family conflict acted as a demand in the health impairment process, in which job demands exhaust resources and result in mental health problems. Work-family conflict may have exhausted these mothers' resources, such as the amount of time spent at work or home, and resulted in more psychological distress.

When considering work hours, among partnered mothers, work hours did not act as a job demand, instead it appeared to act as a resource resulting in less psychological distress. Rather than being a part of the health impairment process of the JD-R model as previous literature suggests, for partnered mothers, work hours seems to have operated as a part of the motivational process relating to less psychological distress. Job pressure, which was expected to operate as a job demand relating to higher levels of psychological distress among both types of mothers, did not appear to have any relationship to these mothers' psychological distress when other work characteristics were controlled for. Finally, job autonomy seems to have acted as a resource in the motivational process relating to less psychological distress only among partnered mothers, with it having no effect on single mothers' psychological distress. Looking at the two processes of the JD-R model, the motivational process and the health impairment process appear to be operating differently among partnered and single mothers. Because differences were found in how job demands and job resources relate to partnered and single mothers' levels of psychological distress, the JD-R model might be more useful if it took into account family structure when examining outcomes. The JD-R model might also be more useful if it took into account individual characteristics, such as workers' identities.

Implications

The main goal of this thesis was to examine whether work-family conflict and workplace characteristics were differentially related to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress. A key finding is that work-family conflict similarly relates to both partnered and single mothers' psychological distress. Appropriate actions by both workplaces and working mothers should be taken in order to reduce work and family conflicts and improve these mothers' levels of psychological distress. Workplaces might implement more "family-

friendly” policies that make the roles of both mother and worker more compatible, such as flexible scheduling and dependent care benefits (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Beauregard, 2011). In addition to workplace policies, informal factors, such as managerial and coworker support, can also help alleviate work-family conflict and its associated costs (Anderson et al., 2002; Beauregard, 2011; Shimazu, Shimazu, & Odara, 2005). It may be the case that a shift in cultural norms may need to take place in order to resolve work-family conflict, with less emphasis on individual responsibility to family, less emphasis on women being the sole caregivers, and more emphasis on men’s involvement with children and housework (Lewis, 1997; Beauregard, 2011). In terms of work hours, single mothers might have a stronger attachment to work if they have better work schedule fit and do not have to work out of necessity (Gareis & Barnett, 2002; Gottlieb, 1997). In order for this to happen, there would have to be more managerial support and programs targeted to single mothers to help supplement their income. Finally, findings regarding the JD-R model suggest that it may need extending. The JD-R model had some limitations when examining psychological distress among working mothers that are important to note, including a lack of accounting for both family type and work identity relating to job characteristics and psychological distress. Including these in the JD-R model could provide a more complete understanding of the differences found between partnered mothers’ and single mothers’ psychological distress relating to work characteristics.

Limitations

A few limitations of this thesis should be mentioned. Because this study was cross-sectional, causality between variables cannot be determined, we can only note that the variables are associated with each other. In order to determine causality, longitudinal research would have to be done. It might be the case that higher levels of psychological distress are causing the higher

levels of work-family conflict rather than the opposite being true, by making the transition between work and family roles more difficult. Another limitation of this study is the smaller sample size of single mothers compared to partnered mothers. Had the sample size of single mothers been larger, more relationships may have been significant for single mothers. Since this thesis is quantitative, the use of qualitative methods, such as interviews with working mothers and observations of their work and family lives, may provide a deeper and more insightful look into the unique experiences these mothers have relating to their levels of psychological distress. Finally, not knowing the types of jobs held by these mothers limits the conclusions we can draw from the study regarding the differences found between partnered and single mothers' psychological distress relating to work characteristics.

Suggestions for Future Research

In order to gain a better understanding of the differential relationships between work-family conflict, workplace characteristics, and psychological distress among partnered and single mothers, adding in more workplace characteristics would provide a richer examination of their experiences. Workplace characteristics that might be added are managerial support, coworker support, irregular work hours, role ambiguity, and emotional demands. Other factors that might be beneficial to include in future research on working partnered and single mothers' psychological distress are the presence or absence of workplace policies, such as "family-friendly" policies and the strength of these mothers' work identities. Additionally, the specific types of jobs these mothers hold, the age and number of children they have, and, for partnered mothers, the amount of hours worked by their partner might also be worth examining. Future research might also examine whether work-family conflict and workplace characteristics differentially relate to other dependent variables among partnered and single mothers, such as job

and life satisfaction. Finally, an examination of the consequences psychological distress and its differential relationships with work and family factors have on various family structures could also prove useful.

Conclusion

This thesis analyzed the differential relationship between work-family conflict, workplace characteristics, and psychological distress among partnered mothers and single mothers. Because working partnered and single mothers face unique challenges when balancing work and family life, it is important to look at the ways these challenges relate to their psychological distress. Comparative studies looking at how workplace characteristics and work-family conflict differentially relate to partnered mothers' and single mothers' psychological distress are limited and the results of this study help to further understand where these differences lie.

The primary contribution of this thesis to the existing literature is the finding that among both partnered and single mothers, work-family conflict similarly influenced their levels of psychological distress. This finding is important because it shows that having a partner does not necessarily reduce the impact of work-family conflict on psychological distress. Another key finding was that work hours and job autonomy mattered more for partnered mothers in predicting psychological distress. Altogether, in regard to the main research question, there seems to be differential relationships between workplace characteristics and psychological distress among partnered and single mothers, but similar processes in terms of work-family conflict and psychological distress.

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