Work Characteristics and Family Routines in Low-Wage Families

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Overview

This presentation draws from a study which seeks to understand the relationship between employment characteristics on the maintenance of family routines in a sample of low-wage families.
Family Routines

- Routines defined as regularly performed activities which create habitual daily and weekly events

- Maintenance of consistent routines is linked to positive outcomes in children and families
  - Families:
    - Increased feelings of parental competence and parent-child harmony (Brody & Flor, 1997).
  - Children:
    - Better physical health (Fiese et al., 2002), higher social competence (Keltner, 1990), lower use of illegal drugs (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2007), and better overall well-being (Chase-Lansdale & Pittman, 2002).

- Scant research exists examining employment and the ability of low-income families to maintain routines

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Background

• Working parents occupy multiple roles including those of parent, employee, and spouse

• Literature has yielded two different perspectives when seeking to understand how these multiple roles affect parent well-being and quality of their family relationships
  • Role Enhancement and Role Strain
Background

• Role enhancement advocates suggest individuals with multiple roles have greater access to resources and opportunities, which promote growth and greater functioning (Barnett, 1998; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Voydanoff, 2002).

  • Resources include, “monetary income, heightened self-esteem, the power to delegate onerous role obligations, opportunities for social relationships, and challenge” (Barnett, 1999, pg. 152).

• Role strain theorists support each role a person takes on comes with its own obligations and demands, which may not be harmonious (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

  • Workers at risk to meet competing demands because of limited time, energy, and resources
  • Especially problematic for low-wage workers who must contend with fewer benefits and more constraints than high wage workers
  • Low-wage workers’ occupational environment may hinder families’ ability to maintain routines and subsequently negatively impact parent’s employment (Brody & Flor, 1997; Chase-Lansdale & Pittman, 2002; Huston, 2002)
Work Characteristics

- Workers’ ability to maintain family routines is affected by four characteristics

1. Wages
   - Additional income is positively related to maintenance of family routines in order to purchase goods and services to help maintain routines (Role enhancement theory)
   - Brody and Flor (1997) find that increased wages are positively related to the maintenance of family routines
     - Stimulate an increase in maternal self-esteem

2. Number of work hours
   - Increased work hours leads to higher income, a positive influence on family routines
   - Working too few or too many hours can hinder parents’ ability to carry out routines
     - Part-time workers may have more time, but not enough financial resources to establish consistent family routines
     - Taking on multiple part-time jobs to meet the family’s financial decreases working parent’s availability to sustain family routines (Bartnett, 1998).

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Work Characteristics

3. Timing of work hours
   - Working mothers with limited education tend to work nonfixed work schedules (Presser & Cox, 1997) as compared with women with greater education levels
     - Working parents with nontraditional hours are likely to rely on spouses or kin to maintain family routines or create routines around their work schedules (Roy, Tubbs, & Burton, 2004)

4. Job stability
   - Low-wage workers typically have shorter job tenure than higher-wage workers
   - Job stability contributes to the struggle of poor mothers to sustain consistent family routines (Roy, Tubbs, & Burton, 2004)
     - They are often “the last hired, first fired” in their jobs
   - Process of constantly finding and adjusting to new employment alters family routines

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Work Conditions

- Qualitative research studies demonstrate mothers find it difficult to simultaneously be a good mother and be employed full-time
  - Welfare to work mothers reported working provides many benefits, but they struggle to find time and energy to spend time with their children (London, et al, 2004)
  - Mothers then forgo job advancement opportunities despite the possibility of higher paying wages (Seefeldt, 2008)
- Other studies find mothers adjust to nontraditional work hours by creating family routines around their schedule (Roy et al., 2004; Tubbs, Roy, & Burton, 2005)
  - Permits financial earnings while maintaining family routines
Work Conditions

• Work conditions variously affect how parents balance their work and family roles

  • Role strain theorists anticipate families experiencing difficulties maintaining routines when faced with low-wages, long hours, non-traditional work hours, and instability

  • Ethnographic research of low-wage families finds that despite these employment characteristics, caregivers sacrifice their personal health to ensure sufficient time is spent with their families

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Existing Research Limitations

• Previous studies endeavor to understand the outcomes of sustaining routines in low-wage families, but:
  
  • Does not standardize the notion of maintained routines
  
  • Traditionally sample from current or former welfare recipients, which may yield inaccurate findings of low-wage workers

  • Samples have generally been limited to white or African American families
Study

• Author’s study seeks to address the aforementioned limitations

• Data collected from the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (L.A.FANS), 2002
  • Survey conducted to assess the lives of families living in both high- and low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles
  • Ideal data source because it examines low-income non-welfare recipient working families and Latino families

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L.A. FANS, 2002

• Employed a multistage sampling design to examine effects of neighborhoods on families and children

• **First stage**: census tracks were chosen in a stratified random sample based on the percent of census tracts living below the federal poverty line
  
  • 65 census tracks were selected for the study, with an over-sample of poor neighborhoods

• **Second stage**: researchers randomly selected households within each tract, with an over-sample of households with children under 18
  
  • Average of 41 households were selected and interviewed in each neighborhood in the first wave of data collection (2000-2001)

• **Third stage**: after collecting a complete list of all adults and children in the households, researchers randomly selected an adult to interview
  
  • If a child under 18 was present in the household, researchers also interviewed the caregiver

For more information on L.A. FANS: http://www.lasurvey.rand.org

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Current Study

• Author targeted households in which the randomly selected adult was also the primary caregiver

• Among the respondents, 91% completed the primary caregiver and parent questionnaire and 89% completed the household questionnaire (Peterson, et al., 2004)

• Sample consists of 235 low-wage households with children under 17 with complete data for variables used in the analysis

• *Low-wage worker* is defined as earning below the wage ordinance passed by Los Angeles County in 1999:
  • Requires employees must earn at least $8.36 per hour with health benefits, or $9.46 per hour without health benefits

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Study Measures

- *Maintained family routine* is defined as “an activity done at the same time per day at least five times per week”

- Four dichotomous variables were created to measure the number of times the primary caregiver reports the family:
  - Ate breakfast
  - Completed chores
  - Ate dinner
  - Went to bed at the same time of day

- Research suggests routines only have positive effects on children when performed consistently and predictably (Weisner, 1998)
  - Thus, a dichotomous variable is better grounded in theory than a continuous variable

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Study Measures

- *Work characteristics* are specified as
  - Wages
    - Assumed respondents to survey worked 52 weeks a year, five days a week, and 8 hours per day
  - Weekly hours worked
    - Reported by the primary caregiver in survey
  - Job stability
    - Operationalized as the number of days the caregiver worked at current job
  - Working multiple jobs
    - Caregivers reported number of jobs they currently have
Study Measures

• **Control Variables**

1. Family characteristics:
   • Marital status (married and single-parent)
     • Cohabiting couples (38 cases) excluded from the analysis as not enough research shows how caregiving responsibilities would be shared (Phillips, 2002)
     • Single-parent households used as the reference group
   • Number of children in household
     • More children in the household can increase conflict around a routine and make it harder to maintain (Lowe et al., 2005)
   • Race/ethnicity of caregiver and family
     • Research suggests African American and Latino families are less likely to maintain routines than white families (Flores et al., 2005; Phillips, 2002)
     • Author collapsed race/ethnicity into two categories for the purpose of this study: Latino and non-Latino
       • Non-Latino caregivers are the reference group in the analysis
Study Measures

2. Caregiver characteristics:
   • Maternal age
     • Respondent’s age in years
   • Maternal education
     • Respondent’s highest year of school completed
   • ‘Maternal’ and ‘caregiver’ are used interchangeably as 99.2% of caregivers in this sample are women
# Findings

Table 1. Descriptive data for routines, employment characteristics, family control variables, and maternal control variables (N=235)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Mean/Proportion</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast routine</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chore routine</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner routine</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed routine</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment characteristics</th>
<th>Mean/Proportion</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hourly wage</td>
<td>6.76</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>9.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly work hours</td>
<td>34.11</td>
<td>1.128</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days at current job</td>
<td>817.32</td>
<td>104.271</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works &gt; 1 job</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copyright Sheely 2011
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean/Proportion</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household composition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-parent</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maternal control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>34.35</td>
<td>.795</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>10.58</td>
<td>.381</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data are weighted to adjust for over-sampling by strata, for the household selection probabilities by tract, and for the tract-specific rates of over-sampling of households with children and of household non-response.

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Descriptive Findings

• Most low-income caregivers in sample maintain breakfast (64.5%), chore (62.5%), dinner (69.0%), and bed (85.5%) routines

• Sample appears to have employment characteristics of low-wage labor markets which should influence their ability to maintain routines, including low wages and less than full-time employment

• Average hourly wage of mothers in the sample was extremely low ($6.76/hour) compared to the national average ($15.80/hour) in 2001 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002)

• Sample for this study was predominately (73.4%) Latino
### Multivariate Models

#### Employment characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Chores</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
<th>Bedtime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wages</strong></td>
<td>-.141</td>
<td>-.257*</td>
<td>-.323**</td>
<td>-.462**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.131)</td>
<td>(.151)</td>
<td>(.137)</td>
<td>(.199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly hours worked</strong></td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>-.024*</td>
<td>-.044*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.016)</td>
<td>(.016)</td>
<td>(.014)</td>
<td>(.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Days at current job</strong></td>
<td>.0003</td>
<td>.0003*</td>
<td>.0003**</td>
<td>.0002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0002)</td>
<td>(.0002)</td>
<td>(.0002)</td>
<td>(.0002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Works &gt; 1 job</strong></td>
<td>-.069</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>-.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.405)</td>
<td>(.403)</td>
<td>(.412)</td>
<td>(.529)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Family controls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Chores</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
<th>Bedtime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Married</strong></td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.365)</td>
<td>(.382)</td>
<td>(.391)</td>
<td>(484)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children</strong></td>
<td>-.241**</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.120)</td>
<td>(.134)</td>
<td>(.134)</td>
<td>(.193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latino</strong></td>
<td>-.773</td>
<td>-.261</td>
<td>-.893*</td>
<td>-.322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.534)</td>
<td>(.554)</td>
<td>(.524)</td>
<td>(.618)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Maternal controls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Chores</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
<th>Bedtime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>-.202</td>
<td>-.202</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.202)</td>
<td>(.202)</td>
<td>(.021)</td>
<td>(.023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td>-.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.050)</td>
<td>(.050)</td>
<td>(.054)</td>
<td>(.058)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>2.555*</td>
<td>1.576</td>
<td>5.363**</td>
<td>5.864**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.530)</td>
<td>(1.781)</td>
<td>(1.563)</td>
<td>(2.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wald x²</strong></td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>15.25</td>
<td>21.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P-value</strong></td>
<td>.355</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pseudo R²</strong></td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Data are weighted to adjust for over-sampling by strata, for the household selection probabilities by tract, and for the tract-specific rates of over-sampling of households with children and of household non-response.

*p < .10

**p < .05

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Multivariate Models

• Four logic regression models were run to examine the association between the maintenance of routines and employment characteristics (Table 2)
  • Regressed each family routine (breakfast, chore, dinner, and bed) on the same set as employment, family, and maternal control characteristics
Overall, employment characteristics are not strongly related to the maintenance of routines in low-income families.

The models predicting breakfast, chore, and dinner routines were not significant, however, exploring the effects of employment characteristics across the models yielded pertinent findings:

- Higher wages decreased the odds of maintaining routines across the models.
- Job stability consistently increased odds of having consistent routines.
- Working more hours was negatively associated with the nighttime routines of dinner and bedtime routines.
- Having more than one job did not increase the maintenance of routines among caregivers.
Study Conclusions

• Study found that low-wage caregivers in this study successfully maintained breakfast (64.5%), chore (62.5%), dinner (69.0%), and bedtime (85.5%) routines, regardless of work characteristics.

• Supporting role strain theory, the study found that working more hours and hourly wages are negatively correlated to the maintenance of a bedtime routine.

• This finding is supported by a similar study conducted by Phillips (2002), which also found that low-income, full-time workers were less able to maintain reading routines with children than part-time workers.
Unmeasured Work Characteristics

- The negative relationship between wages and the maintenance of routines does not support the role enhancement perspective which suggests mothers with greater means should keep more consistent routines

- Potential explanations include:
  - Nonstandard shifts are associated with higher wages (Kostiuk, 1990)
  - Higher paying jobs place more demands on workers, which may strain caregivers' ability to balance work and family
  - Seefeldt (2008) found in a study of many mothers forgo higher paying jobs in order to not sacrifice time with their children
  - Timing of shifts and responsibilities associated with employment are important variables to consider in future studies

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Study Limitations

• Variables in the regression analysis did not explain much of the variation in maintaining family routines
  • More factors need to be included to explain why some families maintain routines and others do not
  • Future studies should include non-traditional work hours and occupational prestige for explanation

• The generalizability of results may be limited as the sample is predominately Latino and drawn from a specific geographic area

• A causal relationship cannot be established between the variables, due to the cross-sectional nature of the study

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Policy Implications

• Despite facing challenging work environments, most mothers in this study successfully maintained family routines.

• Results of this study confirm ethnographic studies of low-income families that parents will find time to spend with their children.

• Policies should be created and implemented to support the value low-wage parents place on spending time with their families.

• Furthermore, policies are needed to decrease negative employment and mental health consequences related to supporting family routine maintenance.
References


