MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT AND CHILDREN’S DEVELOPMENT

LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

Edited by

Adele Eskeles Gottfried
and
Allen W. Gottfried
MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT AND CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT
Longitudinal Research
PLENUM STUDIES IN WORK AND INDUSTRY

Series Editors:
Ivar Berg, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
and Arne L. Kalleberg, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

WORK AND INDUSTRY
Structures, Markets, and Processes
Arne L. Kalleberg and Ivar Berg

ENSURING MINORITY SUCCESS IN CORPORATE MANAGEMENT
Edited by Donna E. Thompson and Nancy DiTomaso

INDUSTRIES, FIRMS, AND JOBS
Sociological and Economic Approaches
Edited by George Farkas and Paula England

MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT AND CHILDREN’S DEVELOPMENT
Longitudinal Research
Edited by Adele Eskeles Gottfried and Allan W. Gottfried

WORKERS, MANAGERS, AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE
Emerging Patterns of Labor Relations
Edited by Daniel B. Cornfield
Dedicated to
Michael and Jeffrey
Contributors

Kay Bathurst, Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California

Martha J. Cox, Timberlawn Psychiatric Research Foundation, Dallas, Texas

Debra DeMeis, Department of Psychology, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York

M. Ann Easterbrooks, Department of Child Study, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts

Nancy L. Galambos, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Ellen Galinsky, Bank Street College of Education, New York, New York

Wendy A. Goldberg, Program in Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, California

Adele Eskeles Gottfried, Department of Educational Psychology, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, California

Allen W. Gottfried, Department of Psychology, California State University, Fullerton, Fullerton, California

Ellen Hock, Department of Family Relations and Human Development, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
Diane Hughes, Bank Street College of Education, New York, New York

Kathleen Lenerz, Department of Education, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California

Jacqueline V. Lerner, College of Human Development, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

Susan McBride, Graduate School, Wheelock College, Boston, Massachusetts

Margaret Tresch Owen, Timberlawn Psychiatric Research Foundation, Dallas, Texas

Anne C. Petersen, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania
In a review written in 1979, I noted that there was a paucity of research examining the effects of maternal employment on the infant and young child and also that longitudinal studies of the effects of maternal employment were needed (Hoffman, 1979). In the last 10 years, there has been a flurry of research activity focused on the mother’s employment during the child’s early years, and much of this work has been longitudinal. All of the studies reported in this volume are at least short-term longitudinal studies, and most of them examine the effects of maternal employment during the early years.

The increased focus on maternal employment during infancy is not a response to the mandate of that review but rather reflects the new employment patterns in the United States. In March 1985, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 49.4% of married women with children less than a year old were employed outside the home (Hayghe, 1986). This figure is up from 39% in 1980 and more than double the rate in 1970. By now, most mothers of children under 3 are in the labor force. This new pattern of employment among mothers of preschoolers has stimulated research partly because it is viewed as a social problem, just as employment of mothers of school-aged children once was, and there is considerable public concern as well as scientific interest in understanding its significance for children’s development. Partly, however, the new research thrust also reflects the increased availability of subject populations. Two decades ago, mothers of infants who were employed were hard to find, and, when samples of sufficient sizes could be located, they were so special—financially destitute or extremely committed to their professions—that it was difficult to sort out the effects of employment from the special characteristics of the sample. In some of the studies reported in this book, such as the one by Hock, DeMeis, and McBride, subjects are recruited directly from the maternity ward. Even 15 years
ago, it would have been impossible to recruit an adequate sample of
mothers planning to return to work within a year by this procedure.

The increased prevalence of longitudinal research is, to some extent,
a natural outcome of this new interest in infancy. How do you assess
the effects of maternal employment on infants? The behavioral repertoire
of infants is limited. The best measures must rely on inferences from a
very narrow range of behavior. The infant development scales have only
moderate predictive value. There are no preschool measures of cognitive
ability that predict well to later IQ scores. In the emotional domain,
Mary Ainsworth's strange situation measure of the security of the tod-
dler’s attachment has proven useful with some populations in predicting
to early childhood behavior (Sroufe, Fox, & Pancake, 1983), but even its
validity has been questioned when it is used with infants who have had
extensive experience with nonmaternal care (Clarke-Stewart, 1984). Is
the situation really "strange" when the baby has been accustomed to
new settings and substitute caretakers? Is independence in an infant
sometimes mistaken for insecure-avoidant behavior (Hoffman, 1984)?
Thus, in studying the effects of maternal employment on infants, it is
quite possible that there are effects that are not manifest until the child
is older and also that there are apparent effects in infancy that wash out
with maturation. It is only through longitudinal investigations that these
issues can be addressed.

For older children also, however, the importance of longitudinal
research has become apparent. What was once called child psychology
is now more commonly referred to as developmental psychology, re-
reflecting the increased sensitivity to the process of maturation and the
changes that occur with growth. The child who seems well-adjusted
according to his or her fifth-grade teacher ratings may appear quite dif-
f erent in the ninth grade when adolescent peer pressures and new aca-
demic demands may threaten previous self-esteem. Academic conform-
ity in elementary school does not necessarily predict adult achievement
patterns. A stress in childhood that is mastered may become a source
of strength when the child is an adult (Elder, 1984). Thus, even when
the dimension of interest can be adequately tapped in the child, it is
important to know what its significance is in the course of development.

A major advantage of the longitudinal approach in maternal em-
ployment studies, then, is that it makes it possible to observe both the
disappearance of early empirical relationships and the emergence of new
ones at a later point. Goldberg and Easterbrooks, in Chapter 5, for ex-
ample, found that maternal employment during toddlerhood predicted
to certain maternal attitudes at that stage but no longer characterized
these mothers when their children were of kindergarten age. On the
other hand, although employment status did not relate to attachment
security at toddlerhood, the number of hours the mother worked at that
time did relate to separation anxiety scores obtained 4 years later (posi­
tively for boys, negatively for girls). On the whole, however, few sleeper
effects emerged in these studies. Even where a wide span of years was
considered, as in the Lerner and Galambos chapter, latent patterns did
not emerge.

Another advantage of the longitudinal design is the opportunity to
examine change per se. Goldberg and Easterbrooks, for example, found
that children’s ego resiliency was higher if the mother did not change
her labor force activity over the years. In general, however, the studies
in this volume did not make their major focus change in work status.
In fact, a major advantage of longitudinal designs in maternal employ­
ment studies that has been cited over the years is the opportunity to
tap the family situations and the child’s behavior patterns before the
mother enters the labor force and then observe the changes that follow
this event. The idea here, of course, is to separate employment status
effects from mother’s predispositions. This advantage could not be re­
alized in the present book because most of these investigations were
looking at new mothers and the onset of employment during the child’s
infancy.

In addition to sharing the longitudinal method, the studies reported
in this book also share an awareness that maternal employment is not
so robust a variable that it can be linked directly to a child characteristic.
Maternal employment operates through its effects on the family envi­
ronment and on the child care arrangements. This is perhaps clearest
in the research reported in Chapter 2 by A. E. Gottfried, A. W. Gottfried,
and K. Bathurst. Maternal employment status is found to be related to
certain aspects of the home environment and these, in turn, relate to
child qualities. For example, these researchers find that the father’s in­
volvement in child care is likely to be higher when the mother is em­
ployed. The father’s involvement is positively related to the child’s social
competence at 6 years of age. Thus, to the extent that a mother’s em­
ployment increases the father’s involvement, as it often but not always
does, it has an indirect positive effect on the child’s competence. In the
Owen and Cox study, the data indicate that mothers who are employed
more than 40 hours weekly show a higher level of anxiety, and this, in
turn, is seen as affecting their interaction with the child. Very few of
the many analyses reported in this volume show direct effects of em­
ployment status. It is clear in all of this research also that the nature of
any effects vary depending on the timing, stability, and extent of the
employment; the temperament and attitudes of the various family mem­
bers; the stability of the nonmaternal care; and a host of other variables. Finally, these studies indicate that research which focuses exclusively on the potential negative outcomes of maternal employment is very limited. The data reported here suggest many positive effects for both sons and daughters, particularly in the form of ego enhancement.

One of the variables that is considered throughout the book for its conditioning influence is the sex of the child. Previous research has suggested that maternal employment has a different effect on sons than on daughters. Where data have indicated differences between the children of employed and nonemployed mothers, they have generally shown the daughters of the employed mothers to be higher on cognitive ability, achievement, and mental health, whereas the pattern for sons has been more ambiguous. There have been several different interpretations of these results: (a) sex differences in temperament make girls more compatible with maternal employment than boys; (b) for daughters, the employed mother is a more competent and timely role model than the nonemployed mother; (c) the tendency to overprotect daughters in the traditional family is avoided in the employed-mother family because of the greater encouragement of independence, whereas this pattern may lead to the overgranting of autonomy to boys; and (d) the lesser traditionalism in the employed mother family is a particular benefit to daughters (Hoffman, 1980; 1984a,b). In the studies reported here, sex differences are not prominent. Owen and Cox did find that when the infants were 3 months old, though not later, employed mothers of girls and nonemployed mothers of boys were the most satisfied, a finding that matches previous results in studies of preschoolers (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1982; Hoffman, 1984a,b). However, there is no evidence here for lower cognitive performance by the middle-class sons of employed mothers sometimes reported in prior research. In fact, Goldberg and Easterbrooks found that in kindergarten, the most ego-resilient children were boys with employed mothers and girls with nonemployed mothers. The previous generalizations about sex differences in the effects of maternal employment seem, on the basis of this volume, to need reevaluation and new empirical investigation. Because of the significance of adolescence for achievement patterns, ego development, and self-esteem, it would be interesting to reexamine these relationships for older children, and, ideally for these same children when they are older.

In this volume, the editors have brought together six independent longitudinal investigations that pertain to the consequences for children of the mother's employment. The authors not only describe their own empirical findings, but each chapter also reviews the previous relevant
literature. Scientifically sound studies in this area, however, never produce unequivocal conclusions. In addition to limitations of design, measurement, and samples that are inescapable in real-life research, studies of maternal employment, if they are honest, must face the multidimensional qualities of the independent variable and the complexities of individual temperament, the family system, and the surrounding environment. These authors have done a solid job of reviewing the previous work and reporting their own findings and, as a result, there are no clear-cut, neatly packaged conclusions. Instead, there are valuable insights, important new data, and serious challenges to previous ideas. There is also reconfirmation of earlier conclusions, strengthened now by longitudinal data. Maternal Employment and Children’s Development: Longitudinal Research is a valuable addition to the research literature.

Lois Wladis Hoffman

Ann Arbor, Michigan

REFERENCES


Maternal employment has been referred to as a “social revolution” that has profound implications for the family and workplace (Kamerman & Kahn, 1981). Additionally, work and family are viewed as interrelated (Mortimer & London, 1984). The inclusion of Maternal Employment and Children’s Development: Longitudinal Research in the Plenum Studies in Work and Industry series provides an opportunity to address the interrelation of work and family roles, specifically with regard to the effects of maternal employment on children’s development. Although work certainly has profound impact on the family, the family has an impact on the workplace as well. The workplace will need to become increasingly responsive to family issues as mothers continue to enter the work force. Fathers’ increasing family responsibilities in the wake of maternal employment will also influence the need for family-oriented policies and programs in the workplace.

In this book, mothers’ employment status, the extent of their employment (e.g., hours of weekly employment), part- versus full-time employment, their pattern of employment stability, their occupational status, and their work-related attitudes are examined as to their contemporaneous and longitudinal impact on a wide variety of children’s developmental outcomes. Implications for corporate programs and policies, and for social policy, are advanced. A conclusion which emerges is that maternal employment is not only a gender issue but one that provides new challenges for the family, the workplace, and society as a whole.

Gratitude is extended to all the contributors for their efforts. Special thanks go to Lois Hoffman for kindly agreeing to write the Foreword. We are pleased to have Professor Hoffman contribute the Foreword. She has been a forerunner in the field of maternal employment research particularly as it pertains to children’s development.
We would like to acknowledge California State universities, Northridge and Fullerton, the Thrasher Research Fund, and the Spencer Foundation for supporting various phases of our research.

Adele Eskeles Gottfried
Allen W. Gottfried

Northridge, California

REFERENCES


PART I. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1
Maternal Employment and Children’s Development: An Introduction to the Issues ........................................ 3
Adele Eskeles Gottfried

PART II. LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

Chapter 2
Maternal Employment, Family Environment, and Children’s Development: Infancy through the School Years .......... 11
Adele Eskeles Gottfried, Allen W. Gottfried, and Kay Bathurst

I. Introduction and Conceptualization .......................... 11
II. Method .......................................................... 14
   A. Subjects ..................................................... 14
   B. Procedure.................................................... 15
   C. Measures..................................................... 16
   D. Cognitive Functioning...................................... 16
   E. Academic Achievement ................................... 16
   F. Temperament and Social Competence ................. 17
   G. Behavioral Adjustment .................................. 17
   H. Home and Family Environment ......................... 18
   I. Maternal Employment and Attitudes ...................... 20
III. Results ........................................................... 21
   A. Descriptive Analyses ........................................ 23
   B. Relationships between Maternal Employment, Children’s Development, and Home Environment: Contemporaneous Analyses ........................................... 25
   C. Prospective Analyses ........................................ 33
   D. Consistency Analyses ....................................... 47
   E. Maternal Occupation, Hours of Work, and Attitudes: Relationships with Development and Environment ........................................... 49
IV. Summary .......................................................... 51
V. Discussion .......................................................... 52
References ........................................................... 56

Chapter 3

The Influences of Maternal Employment across Life: The New York Longitudinal Study ......................... 59

Jacqueline V. Lerner and Nancy L. Galambos

I. Introduction ..................................................... 59
II. The New York Longitudinal Study (NYLS) .................. 60
III. The NYLS Data Set ............................................. 62
   A. Childhood Ratings ......................................... 62
   B. Adolescent Ratings ........................................ 65
   C. Early Adult Ratings ........................................ 65
   D. Maternal Variables ......................................... 66
   E. Contextual Variables....................................... 67
   F. Mother–Child Interaction Variables ...................... 68
IV. Approach to Data Analysis— The “Process of Influence” Model ........................................... 69
   A. Direct Effects: Analyses and Results for the First 5 Years ................................................ 70
   B. Relationships among Contextual, Maternal, Mother–Child Interaction, and Child Variables ........ 73
   C. Testing the “Process of Influence” Model ................ 76
   D. Findings from Adolescence and Early Adulthood .......... 79
V. Summary, Conclusions, and Directions for Future Research ........................................... 80
References ........................................................... 82
Chapter 4

Maternal Employment and the Transition to Parenthood ......... 85

Margaret Tresch Owen and Martha J. Cox

I. Rationale for the Present Study ............................... 88
   A. Employment, Attitudes, and Psychological Functioning 88
   B. Employment and Mother-Infant Interaction .......... 90
   C. Employment and Infant-Mother Attachment ....... 91
   D. Employment and the Sex of the Infant ............ 91

II. Method .......................................................... 92
   A. Subjects ..................................................... 92
   B. Procedures .................................................. 93
   C. Measures .................................................... 95

III. Results ........................................................... 103
   A. Maternal Attitudes regarding Employment ............ 104
   B. Maternal Psychological Health .......................... 105
   C. Maternal Investment in Parenthood ...................... 106
   D. Mother-Infant Interaction and Ratings of the Home Environment ........................................ 107
   E. Maternal Employment and the Quality of Infant-Mother Attachment .......................... 108
   F. Relations between Attachment and Correlates of Maternal Employment ........................ 109

IV. Discussion ....................................................... 111
   A. Processes of Maternal Employment’s Influence in Infancy ........................................ 111
   B. Role Satisfaction and Maternal Employment during the Infancy Period ........................ 113
   C. Conclusions ................................................. 114

V. Summary ........................................................ 116
References ................................................................ 117

Chapter 5

Maternal Employment When Children Are Toddlers and Kindergartners ........................................ 121

Wendy A. Goldberg and M. Ann Easterbrooks

I. Introduction: Maternal Employment When Children Are Young ........................................ 121
II. Our Research ................................................... 125  
   A. Sample ...................................................... 126  
   B. Procedures .................................................. 128  
   C. Measures .................................................... 129  
III. Results ........................................................... 134  
   A. Mothers' Reasons for Working or Not Working outside the Home ................................................... 134  
   B. Relation of Maternal Employment to Children's Socioemotional and Socio-Personality Development .... 135  
   C. Relation of Maternal Employment to Children's Social-Cognitive Development ................................................. 139  
   D. Relation of Maternal Employment to Parental Attitudes, Behavior, and Emotions ............................ 140  
   E. Sleeper Effects of Maternal Employment on Children's Development ................................................. 142  
   F. Stability and Change in Maternal Employment from Toddlerhood to Kindergarten ............................. 144  
IV. Summary ........................................................ 145  
V. Discussion ....................................................... 147  
References ....................................................... 151

Chapter 6

Maternal Employment and Sex Typing in Early Adolescence: Contemporaneous and Longitudinal Relations ................. 155  

Nancy L. Galambos, Anne C. Petersen, and Kathleen Lenerz

I. The Life-Span Developmental Perspective .................. 156  
II. The Influences of Maternal Employment on Sex Typing in Adolescents: A Review ............................ 158  
   A. Direct Links ................................................. 159  
   B. Processes of Influence ..................................... 163  
III. The Early Adolescence Study ................................ 167  
   A. Plan of the Study ........................................... 167  
   B. Features of the Sample and the Data ................... 168  
IV. Analyses ........................................................ 175  
   A. Cross-Sectional Results .................................... 175  
   B. Longitudinal Results ....................................... 180  
V. Summary ........................................................ 182  
References ........................................................ 185
Chapter 7

Maternal Separation Anxiety: Its Role in the Balance of Employment and Motherhood in Mothers of Infants  ................................................................. 191

Ellen Hock, Debra DeMeis, and Susan McBride

I. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 191

II. The Importance of Maternal Separation Anxiety .............................................................. 193
   A. The Sociocultural Influence ............................................................................................ 194
   B. The American Situation: Maternal Employment ......................................................... 195
   C. Maternal Employment: Conflicts about Separation ...................................................... 196
   D. The Development of the Maternal Separation Anxiety Scale ....................................... 197

III. The Importance of Employment Preference ....................................................................... 199

IV. Maternal Separation Anxiety and Employment Preference ............................................ 202
   A. Purpose ............................................................................................................................ 202
   B. Instruments ...................................................................................................................... 202
   C. Procedure ....................................................................................................................... 205
   D. Subjects .......................................................................................................................... 206
   E. Results ............................................................................................................................. 208
   F. Discussion ....................................................................................................................... 213

V. Maternal Separation Anxiety and Choices regarding Nonmaternal Care ................................. 216
   A. Purpose ............................................................................................................................ 216
   B. Procedures ....................................................................................................................... 218
   C. Subjects .......................................................................................................................... 218
   D. Results ............................................................................................................................. 219
   E. Discussion ....................................................................................................................... 223

VI. Summary ............................................................................................................................. 225

References .................................................................................................................................. 227

PART III. MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT: INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS, CORPORATE APPLICATIONS, AND SOCIAL POLICIES

Chapter 8

Balancing Work and Family Lives: Research and Corporate Applications ........................................ 233

Diane Hughes and Ellen Galinsky

I. Changing Demographics ....................................................................................................... 233