

Caring within the Family: Reconciling Work and Family Life

José Alberto Molina

Published online: 3 March 2015
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2015

The trade-off between time dedicated to family and time dedicated to work has generated an extensive literature, particularly with respect to women in general and, specifically, as regards mothers. To coincide with 2014 being the twentieth anniversary of the international year of the family, we began to work in the edition of a special issue on caring within the family, with special reference to the family–work conflict.

Thus, we extend here the literature on this topic with new and recent international evidence on different approaches and results, with the final aim being to provide policy recommendations in order to reduce socio-economic inequality among households. We included issues dealing with the work–family conflict that caregivers, in comparison with non-caregivers, may themselves experience as a result of their care responsibilities, with how conflicts between work and family shape the marital satisfaction of working men and women, with how the male breadwinner/female homemaker model is perceived cross-culturally by immigrant couples, and with the maternal gatekeeping of dual-earner mothers with pre-school-age children.

We also included issues on the time allocation of self-employed men and women, relative to paid employees and, particularly, on the key resources that rural, low-income mothers working non-standard hours require to meet their work–family demands. Other special aspects of caring within the family are the levels of parental involvement in the contexts of education and public health insurance.

The family–work conflict emerges in a variety of circumstances, depending on whether family members are,

primarily, altruistic or selfish. Becker (1981), and Becker and Barro (1988) established that altruism motivates the donor's concern for the well-being of the recipient, with no expectation of compensation.¹ The alternative approach, the exchange or self-interest motivation, developed by Cox (1987), Cox and Rank (1992) and Cigno (1993), is based on the fact that individuals obtain utility from transfers to children because they expect to receive some form of compensation in the future.

The number of working individuals with informal care responsibilities has risen in the developed countries in recent decades. However, there is little research that has used representative survey data to investigate the work–family conflict that caregivers, relative to non-caregivers, may themselves experience as a result of their care responsibilities. The characterization of this topic is particularly interesting, given that the former are burdened with an additional set of demands that stretch their already-scarce time and energy.

Paul Glavin and Amanda Peters examined the social distribution and mental health of those who provide unpaid health-related care to a family member or relative, with a particular focus on gender differences. The authors developed multivariate analyses, using data on Canadian workers, to extend prior research that has documented differences in the duties and experiences of men and women caregivers. They first revealed that, while caregiving is a fairly common activity among those in the labor force, this is especially the case among women. Second, the authors suggested that caregivers are fulfilling care responsibilities in addition to their existing paid work

J. A. Molina (✉)
University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain
e-mail: jamolina@unizar.es

¹ See Molina (2013), (2014) for recent evidence on altruistic behaviors.

obligations, rather than at the expense of labor force involvement.

The time constraints and workplace pressures faced by many workers are not left at the workplace door and, similarly, the negative experiences within the family do not magically dissipate upon entrance to the workplace. Thus, work and family each have the potential to negatively impact the other, leading to both family-to-work and work-to-family conflicts. Despite that scholars have conceptualized the work–family conflict as occurring when experiences in one domain negatively impact experiences in the other, these two conflicts, taken separately, have important implications for marital quality and, even though prior research has consistently linked both forms of conflict to decreased marital satisfaction, little is known about whether the joint experience of both forms have especially damaging impacts on outcomes, such as marital satisfaction.

Thus, while the toll that the stress inherent in navigating work and family can have on marriage is documented, little has been published on the impacts of the joint experience of these forms of conflict on family satisfaction.² To bridge this gap, Krista Lynn Minnotte, Michael C. Minnotte and Jordam Bonstrom investigated how conflicts between work and family shape the marital satisfaction of working men and women in the US. To that end, they used a US survey to establish that individuals experiencing high levels of both forms of conflict appeared to be the most at risk of reduced marital satisfaction; that is to say, work-to-family conflict's negative association with marital satisfaction was amplified when family-to-work conflict was also high.

The ideology of the separate spheres representing the behaviors of spouses within the family, once dominant in the mainstream culture of the developed countries, appears to have lost its dominance in recent decades in a reality where a majority of developed families are dual-earner. Few studies have examined how this model of the separate spheres, specifically the male breadwinner/female homemaker model, is perceived cross-culturally by immigrant couples. Yu examined the intersecting relationships of family, cultural, and economic factors and their effects on Chinese wives' perceptions of the traditional family model in two different socio-institutional backgrounds. The author indicated that over half of the sample of Chinese immigrant wives in the US reported that they became stay-at-home mothers after immigration, and most believed that becoming a stay-at-home mother had stabilized their marriages. The traditional gender role for women was, in fact, not as strongly condemned by the Chinese immigrant wives as it would be if they were still in China. Among

urban Chinese couples, wives, as well as husbands, firmly believed that the male-breadwinner ideal would destabilize, rather than stabilize, their marriages.

In the context of the work-to-family conflict that occurs when the demands of employment spill negatively into the home, Daphne Pedersen and Gabe Kilzer explored the potential relationships between both parents' work-to-family conflict and the maternal gatekeeping of dual-earner mothers with pre-school-aged children. This paper provided evidence on the motherhood gap, that is, the wage gap that has been estimated as being between 5 and 15 % per child, depending in part on marital status (Molina and Montuenga 2009). The authors used two theories to propose competing hypotheses about the influence of mothers' work-to-family conflict on maternal gatekeeping. From US data, the results provided greater support for the identity theory, as a positive association between women's work-to-family conflict and maternal gatekeeping, in contrast to the role theory which suggested that mothers' work-to-family conflict may be negatively associated with gatekeeping in order for women to preserve personal resources when faced with role strain.

It is well-known that women spend more time on housework activities than do men (Burda et al. 2008; García et al. 2011), but relatively little is known about this circumstance among self-employed individuals. The greater flexibility and the independence that comes with self-employment, in combining market work and housework responsibilities, have both been confirmed by a range of empirical studies (Giménez-Nadal et al. 2012).

Thorsten Konietzko presented some analyses based on German data, in order to investigate the time allocation of self-employed men and women, compared to paid employees, and the impact of time spent on housework activities on the hourly and monthly earnings of those same self-employed. Results indicated that the time spent on housework activities did not adversely affect the earnings of self-employed individuals in Germany. Particularly, the gender differences in time allocation did not contribute to the explanation of the gender earnings gap in self-employment. One reason may have been the potential flexibility and the independence of self-employment in combining market work and housework responsibilities. It appeared that self-employed individuals have a greater degree of flexibility for spontaneous re-arranging of daily routines so that no conflict between market career and family occurs.

It is well-established that work is an integral part of life in the developed countries and balancing work and family life can be a difficult task for many families. However, this task is made even harder to accomplish when a mother is of low-income, lives in a rural area, and is working non-standard hours. This is because rural families often have

² One exception on caregiver satisfaction is Marcén and Molina (2012).

more limited access to community resources and supports, and they generally travel greater distances to find work opportunities and affordable child care, thereby adding to time away from home.

Mary Jo Katras, Erin Hiley Sharp, Elizabeth M. Dolan and Laura Andrew Baron added qualitative analyses to the existing literature on work and family balance, by focusing on the key resources that rural, low-income mothers working non-standard hours require to meet work–family demands. Through their own words, these mothers showed how critical informal resources were to their ability to meet these demands and balance work and family. Thus, accessing resources from family and friends, and creating a social support network were critical, while an understanding and flexible work environment was another pivotal resource rural for such low-income mothers. The resource of time was also important, in the sense of the decision-making process of coordinating their employment hours, and those of their spouses, with their children’s hours.

Recent decades have ushered in dramatic changes in women’s family and work experiences. Particularly, socio-demographic and economic changes have exacerbated the work–family conflict for all women, mothers and those without children. Some employers have responded to these large-scale changes by providing their employees with flexible work arrangements, subsidized childcare, job-protected maternity leave, paid sick days, health insurance, and other so-called “family-friendly” or “fringe” benefits. However, despite the growing importance of these benefits to women’s and their families’ well-being, we know very little about the rural–urban gap in access to these kinds of benefit.

Rebeca Glauber and Justin Robert Young used longitudinal US data to estimate fixed effects models to characterize rural–urban inequalities in women’s access to family-friendly benefits. The authors concluded that access to family-friendly benefits was limited for all women, and it was particularly so for women in rural areas. The results showed that less than 10 % of urban *or* rural women had access to flexible scheduling over the entire course of their mid-careers. Less than 30 % of urban *or* rural women had access to maternity leave over the entire course of their mid-career.

One particular aspect of caring within the family is parental involvement in their children’s schools. School-based involvement is defined as parent’s active participation in any school setting, such as parent-teacher meetings and extracurricular events, which provides parents with behavioral interaction opportunities with teachers and other parents. In this context, it is relevant to examine how different kinds of family structure are associated with differential levels of parental involvement in the school lives of their children.

Scott M. Myers and Carrie B. Myers used a US survey to estimate a baseline ordinary least squares regression model to calculate the differential levels of parental involvement across different family structures. Their results indicated that married, biological parents have the highest levels of variety and frequency of involvement in school-based activities and events. It also appeared that the physical presence of a second adult, even one that is non-biological, was beneficial in terms of frequency of parental involvement. Additionally, the authors found that all measures of family resources (economic, human, social, and cultural capital) played a role in explaining the greater involvement of married biological-parent households.

In this same educational context, and despite that recent decades have brought about a noticeable change in the role of women in the labor market, most women continue to do more of the childcare and housework than do men. However, the evidence of the work–family conflict among adolescents who live at home is practically non-existent.

José Ignacio Giménez-Nadal and Raquel Ortega analyzed dedication to family by undergraduate students, comparing this evidence with that obtained on the time dedicated to society and to friends. Using Spanish data, the authors estimated OLS models to first analyze the decisions of whether to contribute, or not, and how much time students contributed to the family. In this analysis, the authors differentiated by academic area. Results showed no significant differences in contribution of time to family across fields of study, but students of Health contributed more of their time and income to NGOs, and students of Arts and Philosophy contributed more of their time to society, relative to students of Economics and Business. The authors also found a negative relationship between contribution of time to friends and studying Arts and Philosophy, and that Economics students were no less altruistic regarding the time devoted to helping friends.

The US has experienced an expansion in public health insurance during recent decades, particularly for low- and middle- income families. These insurance expansions have improved health coverage and access to care for children, but have also produced adverse social welfare effects, including, among others, whether children’s enrollment in public insurance has consequences for their parents’ use of health care. Alan C. Monheit and Jessica Vistnes analyzed whether this enrolment improved the material well-being of families. The results revealed that uninsured single mothers who enrolled their children in public coverage used more medical care services than did their counterparts in families where all members were uninsured. These findings suggested that the public coverage expansion for children may have exerted a positive spill-over effect on single mothers’ use of health services that increased their private welfare as well as their social welfare. The social

welfare gain appeared, in part, from the single mothers' increased use of preventive health care services, and prescription drug use for mental health problems.

In this same context of health insurance, fringe benefits provided by employees are usually more valuable than the cash equivalent in wages, but with one clear exception: Employer-provided health insurance provision and job satisfaction have been found to be negatively related. Knowing that health insurance continues to make up an increasing portion of employee compensation in the US, Scott Adams and Benjamin Artz used a representative data set of workers with a comprehensive set of workplace, family, economic, and demographic variables, in order to establish that there was a puzzling negative relationship between health insurance and job satisfaction. In other words, workers with health insurance were actually happier with their pay. The authors concluded that dependence on a particular job for employer-provided health insurance generated disutility for workers. There were a number of workers who were identified as being highly dependent on their jobs because of the health insurance provided and the lack of an alternative source of coverage. These included workers who were not eligible for Medicare, not eligible for parental coverage in any state, less likely to be eligible for Medicaid, and not wealthy enough to purchase coverage on their own. In particular, middle-income and middle-aged workers were even more dissatisfied with their jobs that included health insurance, when they had children.

Finally, in the general context of health, it is well-known that rural residents are at a disadvantage in obtaining access to health care services, even though the evidence suggests that they are more likely to report poorer health than their urban counterparts. Rural children are also at high risk of being uninsured and having poor access to health care services. Since the mother is most likely to be the caregiver for her child, this suggests that the level of maternal and child health care consumption for both the mother and her child may occur jointly. Swetha Valluri, Sheila Mammen and Daniel Lass provided new insight into the factors that facilitate the use of health care services by rural, low-income mothers and their children. Particularly, the authors treated pediatric and maternal health care use as a joint decision-making system and treated these decisions in a simultaneous equations model. The results indicated that when the parents are ethnically non-white, the result was fewer pediatric care visits, and the mother's consumption of health care increased with the number of her chronic conditions but not with the number of chronic illnesses of her child. These mothers also made fewer visits as their income increased and the findings showed the positive role of depression in maternal care use.

Acknowledgments This paper was partially written while the author was Visiting Fellow at the Department of Economics of Boston

College (US), to which he would like to express his thanks for the hospitality and facilities provided. This paper has benefited from funding by the Spanish Ministry of Economics (Project ECO2012-34828).

References

- Becker, G. S. (1981). *A Treatise of the family*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Becker, G. S., & Barro, R. J. (1988). A reformulation of the economic theory of fertility. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 103(1), 1–25.
- Burda, M., Hamermesh, D. S., & Weil, P. (2008). The distribution of total work in the EU and US. In T. Boeri (Ed.), *Working hours and job sharing in the EU and USA: Are Europeans lazy? Or American crazy?* (pp. 13–91). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cigno, A. (1993). Intergenerational transfers without altruism: family, market and state. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 9(4), 505–518. doi:10.1016/0176-2680(93)90036-T.
- Cox, D. (1987). Motives for private income transfers. *Journal of Political Economy*, 95 (3), 508–546. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.unh.edu/action/showPublication?journalCode=jpoliecon>.
- Cox, D., & Rank, M. R. (1992). Inter-vivos transfers and intergenerational exchange. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 74 (2), 305–314. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2109662>.
- García, I., Molina, J. A., & Montuenga, V. (2011). Gender differences in childcare: Time allocation in five European countries. *Feminist Economics*, 17(1), 119–150.
- Giménez-Nadal, J. I., Molina, J. A., & Ortega, R. (2012). Self-employed mothers and the work-family conflict. *Applied Economics*, 44, 2133–2148.
- Marcén, M., & Molina, J. A. (2012). Informal caring-time and caregiver satisfaction. *European Journal of Health Economics*, 13, 683–705. doi:10.1007/s10198-011-0322-2.
- Molina, J. A. (2013). Altruism in the household: in-kind transfers in the context of kin selection. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 11(3), 309–312. doi:10.1007/s11150-013-9214-9.
- Molina, J. A. (2014). Altruism and monetary transfers in the household: inter- and intra-generation issues. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 12(3), 407–410. doi:10.1007/s11150-014-9259-4.
- Molina, J. A., & Montuenga, V. (2009). The motherhood wage penalty in Spain. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 30, 237–251. doi:10.1007/s10834-009-9153-z.

José Alberto Molina received his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Zaragoza (Spain) in 1992. He joined IZA as a Research Fellow in September 2006. Professor Molina has been Visiting Fellow at FEDEA (Madrid, Spain), at Warwick University (UK), at the University of Rhode Island (USA) and at the Boston College (USA). He is currently Associate Editor of *Applied Economics*, *Applied Economics Letters*, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* and *Review of Economics of the Household*. The main research area of Professor Molina is microeconomics and, particularly, household and population economics, labor economics and well-being. His work has been published in *Economic Modelling*, *Economics of Education Review*, *Empirical Economics*, *European Journal of Health Economics*, *Feminist Economics*, *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, *Journal of Policy Modelling*, *Journal of Population Economics*, *Journal of Transport Economics and Policy*, *Kyklos*, and *Review of Economics of the Household*, among others.