Non-standard work schedules, work–family conflict and parental well-being: A comparison of married and cohabiting unions

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Abstract
Although a growing number of American parents work non-standard schedules, evidence on the consequences of such working patterns is inconsistent and limited to married samples. This study highlights the importance of considering potential differences between cohabiting and married parents in terms of the relationship between non-standard work schedules and parental well-being. Based on pooled data from the 1997 and 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (n = 2346), we find that in contrast to married parents who experience some positive associations of non-standard schedules and parental well-being, cohabiting parents are more likely to experience a negative relationship between non-standard work schedules and parental well-being. Additionally, for cohabiting parents (but not married), non-standard work schedules are related to increased work–family conflict, which is in turn associated with lower levels of parental well-being.

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1. Introduction
As the US moves toward a twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week economy (Presser, 2003), there is an increasing demand for employees to work non-standard schedules. By 1997, nearly seven out of ten Americans had ever worked some hours in the early morning, evening, or weekend, often termed “non-standard work schedules” or “shift work” (Presser, 1999). A large proportion (45.6%) of Americans working these non-standard schedules has children under the age of fourteen (Presser, 2005). The importance of understanding the relationship between non-standard schedules and parental well-being cannot be overstated as the number of parents with such work patterns is continually growing. However, there is a lack of consensus regarding the relationship between non-standard work schedules and parental well-being (see Presser, 2003; Deutsch, 1999) as this relationship varies depending on types of work schedules (e.g., evening shift, weekend shift, etc.) and the number of hours worked (Grosswald, 2003). Previous studies (e.g., Davis et al., 2008) on non-standard work schedules and parental well-being are primarily based on married samples and provide limited information on parents in other types of relationship unions (e.g., cohabitation) who are working non-standard schedules.

The relationship between non-standard work schedules and parental well-being may be different for married and cohabiting parents. In comparison to married parents, cohabitating parents tend to have fewer economic and social resources to balance the demands of their family and work lives (Eggebeen, 2005; Manning and Lichter, 1996; Morrison and Ritalo, 2000). This potential conflict may lead to decreased well-being for cohabiting parents working non-standard schedules.
Based on pooled data from the 1997 and 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), this study investigates the relationship among non-standard work schedules, work–family conflict, and a range of parental well-being measures (i.e., psychological distress, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction) with special attention given to potential variations between married and cohabiting unions.

2. Parents and the changing world of work and family

Since the 1950s, the organization of work in the US has undergone radical changes, including the increased prevalence of non-standard work schedules among US workers. Standard work schedules refer to fixed day schedules where at least half the working hours of most days fall between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.; and non-standard work schedules refer to all other work schedules including night, evening, or rotating schedules, variable hours, and weekend employment (Presser, 2003). While non-standard schedules were previously concentrated in the manufacturing sector, there are now strong indications that the service sector, the fastest growing sector of the economy, is moving to more staggered work schedules (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008; Presser, 2003).

The increase in non-standard work hours has been accompanied by another important labor force trend: the rapid increase in the number of working parents in the US. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008), the overall labor force participation rate of mothers with children under the age of 18 was 81.4% in 2007. The presence of preschool children in the household has been linked to a greater likelihood that women will work non-standard schedules, although this is not the case for men (Presser, 2003). While it is possible that some parents have chosen to work non-standard schedules in order to balance their work and family obligations, non-standard schedule demands are often determined by employers instead of employees (Presser, 2003; Lesnard, 2008).

In addition to these changes in the labor force, the US has also witnessed marked changes in family formation during the last few decades. One of the most striking changes in American families is the rapid growth of cohabitation along with an increase in the number of children raised in such families (Casper and Bianchi, 2001). In comparison to married parents, cohabitating parents are more likely to work non-standard schedules to meet financial needs (Presser, 2003). They are also more likely to live in poverty (Eggebeen and Lichter, 1991; Manning and Lichter, 1996), to report relationship strains (Skinner et al., 2002; Nock, 1995), and to experience psychological distress (Brown, 2000). Cohabiting parents working non-standard schedules are of particular concern to this study as they represent a growing segment of the US population, and they are more likely to belong to economically and socially disadvantaged groups (Lichter et al., 1992; Landale and Forste, 1991; Bumpass et al., 1991; Bumpass and Lu, 2000; Manning and Smock, 1995; Manning and Lichter, 1996).

3. Non-standard work schedules and parental well-being

A number of studies suggest the existence of a direct relationship between non-standard work schedules and parental well-being, but evidence regarding the direction of the relationship is inconsistent. A direct negative relationship between non-standard schedules and parental well-being may be the consequence of several conditions. First, non-standard work schedules usually result in physical and emotional exhaustion due to irregular sleep schedules (Mellor, 1986; Costa, 1996). Second, non-standard schedules can be related to low social integration as a consequence of a less social lifestyle (Copsey et al., 1986). Third, working a non-standard schedule may reduce feelings of parental success as it makes it difficult for parents to share time with, act as role models for, and monitor and discipline their children (Staines and Pleck, 1986; White and Keith, 1990; Presser, 1986, 1988, 1998, 2003). Each of these factors may be detrimental to parental well-being.

In contrast, there are also reasons to expect some positive effects of non-standard schedules on parental well-being, in particular when non-standard schedules are voluntary or when workers have some control over their schedules (Tausig and Fenwick, 2001). If working a non-standard schedule is a choice based on the expectation of a reward, financial incentives may mitigate the negative effects of non-standard schedules. Indeed, increased available financial resources can promote parental well-being (Mirowsky and Ross, 2003). Moreover, in a dual-earner couple one spouse may choose to work a non-standard schedule so that the adults can share parenting responsibilities and family work which may enhance feelings of parental well-being (Deutsch, 1999; Garey, 1995; Presser, 1998). As more parents in dual-earner families take jobs that require them to work non-standard schedules, the concept of “split-shift” parenting (i.e., with one spouse watching the children while the other is at work) is growing in popularity (Presser, 1999).

4. Non-standard work schedules, work–family conflict and parental well-being

In addition to a direct relationship between non-standard schedules and parental well-being, non-standard work schedules may also have some indirect links with parental well-being by interfering with family life. We define work–family conflict as the extent to which limited time, emotional/physical stress and strain, and high personal expectations for performance are experienced both at home and at work (Schneider and Waite, 2005). A substantial body of evidence has established that work–family conflict may lead to diminished well-being (Allen et al., 2000). For example, excessive work–family conflict is associated with lower job dissatisfaction (Adams et al., 1996), higher job turnover (Allen et al., 2000), decreased life satisfaction (Adams et al., 1996), lower parental satisfaction (Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998), increased levels of anxiety and irritability/hostility.
6. Analytic strategy

To capture the complex relationships between work schedule and parental well-being across union types, it is useful to have a modeling strategy that allows for estimating the indirect relationships of work schedule and work–family conflict

5. Variations between married and cohabiting unions

Previous research on the consequences of non-standard work schedules has primarily focused on married couples with children (Davis et al., 2008). A number of studies find that non-standard work schedules are related to an increase in marital instability (Presser, 2000) and a decrease in marital and sexual satisfaction (Colligan and Rosa, 1990; White and Keith, 1990). Few studies have examined how parents in other types of relationship unions such as cohabitation experience non-standard work schedules. Not only are cohabiting parents (especially mothers) more likely to work non-standard hours, they also tend to work more hours than married parents due to financial need (Henkens et al., 1993; Abroms and Goldscheider, 2002; Presser, 2000, 2003, 2005).

There are reasons to expect that cohabiting parents experience different levels of work–family conflict and parental well-being from working non-standard schedules in comparison to married parents. Positive effects of non-standard work schedules on parental well-being appear to occur mainly when couples share child care responsibilities or when non-standard schedule work offers necessary economic resources. We argue that these circumstances are less likely to exist for cohabiting parents in contrast to married parents. Married parents working non-standard schedules may achieve a better balance between work and family demands and thus lower levels of work–family conflict due to more flexible children-rearing tasks that can be distributed within dual-earner couples. However, it may be less so for cohabiters who are less likely to serve as care givers for their partner’s children (Abroms and Goldscheider, 2002). In addition, cohabiting parents are often reluctant to pool their income together (Brines and Joyner, 1999; Waite and Gallagher, 2000). Thus, a parent in a cohabiting relationship may not obtain the benefit of increased social and economic resources from their partner when working a non-standard schedule.

Non-standard work schedules may create even greater conflict with family life for cohabiting parents than married parents. In comparison to married parents, cohabiting parents are more likely to experience economic hardship (Bumpass and Lu, 2000) and less likely to receive support from friends or relatives (Eggebeen, 2005). This suggests fewer coping resources that can be mobilized to balance work and family obligations for cohabiting parents. In addition, as Nock (1995) and Waite and Gallagher (2000) argue, cohabiting couples are less likely than married couples to be committed, express happiness with each other, and engage in effective communication. As a result, working a non-standard schedule may exacerbate work–family conflict in a cohabiting relationship. Thus, we expect that non-standard work schedules are more likely to be related to a higher level of work–family conflict, which in turn may result in lower levels of well-being for cohabiting parents than married parents.

Taken together, this literature leads us to hypothesize that non-standard work schedules are related to work–family conflict, which in turn may affect parental well-being in different ways for cohabiting and married parents. The present study investigates the following hypotheses:

1. Non-standard work schedules are positively related to well-being for married parents, while they are negatively related to well-being for cohabiting parents.
2. For married parents, non-standard work schedules are related to less work–family conflict, which is in turn associated with higher levels of parental well-being. In contrast, for cohabiting parents, non-standard work schedules are related to more work–family conflict, which is in turn associated with lower levels of parental well-being.

Work and family demands can produce varying degrees of conflict when work roles and family roles compete for limited time and emotional resources (Hochschild, 1997; Schneider and Waite, 2005). In comparison to standard daytime work, non-standard schedule work conflicts more with family life because of the reduced amount of available time families can spend together. Staines and Pleck (1986) suggest the most severe problem is that the hours non-standard workers have available for family activities occur at times that are inconvenient for family life. Additionally, non-standard schedule workers are likely to feel a lack of energy (due to irregular sleep schedules), making it difficult to engage in shared activities with family (Presser, 2003).

A number of empirical studies have demonstrated increased levels of work–family conflict from non-standard work schedules (Staines and Pleck, 1986; Tausig and Fenwick, 2001; Grosswald, 2003; Davis et al., 2008). A study distinguishing different types of non-standard work schedules reveals that shift workers who work night, rotating, and split shifts all have significantly higher levels of negative work-to-family spillover than those working either day or flexible schedules even after controlling for socio-demographic characteristics (Grosswald, 2003). The increased level of work–family conflict from non-standard work schedules is more pronounced for parents (in particular with children under age thirteen) than nonparents (Davis et al., 2008) or when non-standard schedule work is accompanied by a lower level of schedule flexibility (Staines and Pleck, 1986).
related to parental well-being. Much of the previous work in this area focuses on identifying the association between work schedule and well-being, but to understand the possible mechanisms linking these variables, a structural equation modeling (SEM) strategy is useful (Kline, 2005).

There are several other advantages for using SEM to examine our hypotheses. SEM allows for the creation of latent constructs taking into account the measurement errors associated with the observed variables, in this instance, work–family conflict and parental well-being (Kline, 2005). Standard regression procedures suffer from ignoring the measurement errors associated with the observed variables which can lead to biased results. Using SEM should yield a more accurate estimation of the relationships between the latent constructs. Previous studies suggest that different dimensions of parental well-being (such as psychological distress, job satisfaction and life satisfaction) are all correlated with each other (Near, 1984). By using SEM, we can accurately investigate the hypothesized relationships after controlling for the correlations between different dimensions of parental well-being which are typically not achievable with a series of single multivariate regression approaches.

Additionally, there are multiple indices developed for SEM which can be employed for purposes of model evaluation and revision (Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Hu and Bentler, 1999; Sharma et al., 2005). In this study, we use multiple goodness-of-fit indices to evaluate model fit including Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). All models are estimated using Mplus software and missing data are taken care of by using Mplus missing value handling feature based on Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) method (Muthén and Muthén, 1998–2007). The FIML approach maximizes a casewise likelihood function using only those observed variables with the assumption that missing values are at random (Muthén and Muthén, 1998–2007).

7. Data and sample

Data are derived from the National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), which is a cross-sectional national survey conducted every five years since 1992 by the Families and Work Institute (Families and Work Institute, 2004). In this study, we pool the two most recently available NSCW survey data, 1997 and 2002, to increase the sample size. NSCW survey questions in 1992 were too varying in content and response categories to be included in this study. By surveying large, nationally representative samples of workers, the NSCW provides a range of high quality measures for work schedules, work–family conflict, and parental well-being. No other national datasets include such measures and have large samples of cohabiting parents working non-standard schedules.

The NSCW surveys represent samples of the US workforce including both wage and salaried employees and self-employed workers. Respondents were interviewed by telephone, each lasting approximately 45 minutes (Families and Work Institute, 2004). We restrict our analysis to 2346 married and cohabiting respondents who had at least one child under the age of eighteen at home when the survey was conducted in 1997 or 2002. An indicator for survey year 1997 or 2002 (1 = survey 2002; 0 = survey 1997) is included in all analyses to adjust for potential changes between survey years.

8. Measures

8.1. Parental well-being

Family and health scholars emphasize the importance of distinguishing different dimensions of parental well-being (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2002). For this study we use three different measures for well-being: psychological distress, life satisfaction, and job satisfaction. Our choice of well-being outcomes to examine in this study is based on the availability of relevant measures in the NSCW dataset as well as a consideration of different dimensions of well-being suggested to have potential links with work and family (e.g., Adams et al., 1996; Thomas and Ganster, 1995).

8.1.1. Psychological distress

Psychological distress is measured by a latent variable with higher values indicating higher levels of distress (i.e., lower levels of well-being). It is composed of three observed items, which are how often (scored from 1 “Never” to 5 “Very often”) the respondent has: 1) “felt nervous and stressed?”; 2) “felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?”; and 3) “been bothered by minor health problems such as headaches, insomnia, or stomach upsets?”

8.1.2. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is measured by a latent variable with higher values indicating higher levels of job satisfaction and is composed of two observed items: 1) “how satisfied are you with your job?” (scored from 1 “Not satisfied at all” to 4 “Very satisfied”); and 2) “would you take the same job again?” (scored from 1 “Definitely not” to 3 “No hesitation”).

1 The smaller the value of RMSEA, the better the model fit, with a value higher than 0.08 as a poor model fit (Browne and Cudeck, 1993). For CFI, a value of greater than 0.90 indicates a reasonably good model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Similarly, TLI indicates a good model fit with a value greater than 0.90 (Sharma et al., 2005).
8.1.3. Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction is measured by a latent variable with higher values indicating higher levels of life satisfaction and is composed of two observed items: “all things considered, how do you feel about your life these days?” and “all in all, how satisfied are you with your family life?” (scored from 1 “Very dissatisfied” to 4 “Very satisfied”).

8.2. Work–family conflict

Work–family conflict is measured by a latent variable with higher values indicating higher levels of conflict and is composed of six observed items. The six items (scored from 1 “Never” to 5 “Very often”) are the frequency the respondent feels: (1) not enough time for family because of job; (2) no energy to do things with family because of job; (3) not able to get things at home because of job; (4) family or personal life drains energy needed on job; (5) job keeps from concentrating on family or personal life; and (6) family or personal life keeps from getting work done on time.

8.3. Work schedule

The key predictor of this study is work schedule. It is measured based on a question asking respondents if they currently worked a regular daytime shift, a regular evening shift, a rotating shift, a flexible shift, or some other shift. Following Presser (1994, 2003), we define a standard schedule as a regular daytime shift (coded as 0; \( n = 1669 \)) and a non-standard schedule as all other schedules (coded 1; \( n = 677 \)). We include all non-standard schedule work into one category without further distinguishing different types of non-standard schedules due to a relatively smaller number of cohabiting parents working non-standard schedules (\( n = 60 \)) in the total sample.

8.4. Married and cohabiting unions

Relationship union works as a potential moderator in the relationships among non-standard work schedule, work–family conflict, and parental well-being. In this study we compare cohabiting parents (i.e., “living with a partner”, \( n = 160 \), coded 1) with married parents (\( n = 2186 \), coded 0). Among the total analyzed sample (\( n = 2346 \)), 617 of 2186 married parents and 60 of 160 cohabiting parents worked non-standard schedules.

8.5. Other socio-demographic covariates

We also control for basic socio-demographic variables in the analysis. These socio-demographic covariates include age (in years), gender (0 = male, 1 = female), race–ethnicity (non–Hispanic white (hereafter “white”), non–Hispanic black (hereafter “black”), Hispanic, and others (with “white” as the reference category), education (less than high school, high school graduate, some college, and college graduate with “college graduate” as the reference category), hourly earnings (in dollars), and the presence of children under age six at home (1 = Yes, 0 = No).

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for all variables analyzed including means and standard deviations of the observed indicator variables for latent constructs in the total sample. For the total analyzed sample, 28.9% were working non-standard schedules, 6.8% were cohabiting, 46.6% were women, and 44.0% had children under age six at home. College graduates accounted for 36.9% of the sample and those without a high school diploma accounted for only 5.1%. With respect to race–ethnicity, 80.2% of the sample were white, 8.1% were black, 6.6% were Hispanic, and 5.1% were from other groups. The mean age of the total sample was 38.89 and the median hourly earnings was 15.00 dollars.

9. Model specification

We estimate two models. The first model is for the total sample (i.e., including both the married and cohabiting). It depicts the general relationships among work schedule, work–family conflict, and parental well-being. The second is the multi-group analysis model (Muthén and Muthén, 1998–2007). It depicts the potential variations between married and cohabiting unions in these relationships.

The structural model estimated for the total sample is specified by the following equations:

\[
Y_1 = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}W + \beta_{12}Z + \sum \pi_{1j}X_j + \epsilon_1 \\
Y_2 = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21}W + \beta_{22}Z + \sum \pi_{2j}X_j + \epsilon_2 \\
Y_3 = \gamma_{30} + \gamma_{31}W + \beta_{32}Z + \sum \pi_{3j}X_j + \epsilon_3 \\
Z = \gamma_{40} + \gamma_{41}W + \sum \pi_{4j}X_j + \epsilon_4 
\]

\( Y_1, Y_2 \) and \( Y_3 \) represent the latent variables for psychological distress, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction respectively. \( Z \) represents the latent variable for work–family conflict. \( W \) indicates the dummy variable for work schedule. \( X_j \) stands for the vector of socio-demographic covariates controlled in the model including age, gender, race–ethnicity, education, hourly earning, the presence of children under age six at home, survey year, and union type. The structural parameters, \( \gamma \) and \( \beta \),
are the focus of our interpretation in this paper as they provide the basis for assessing the key relationships among work schedule, work–family conflict, and parental well-being. \( \xi_1 - \xi_4 \) are the residual terms. Correlations between parental well-being measures are modeled by a covariance matrix of:

\[
\begin{pmatrix}
\psi_{11} & \psi_{12} & \psi_{13} & \psi_{14} \\
\psi_{21} & \psi_{22} & \psi_{23} & \psi_{24} \\
\psi_{31} & \psi_{32} & \psi_{33} & \psi_{34} \\
\psi_{41} & \psi_{42} & \psi_{43} & \psi_{44}
\end{pmatrix}
\]

To test whether these relationships are different between married and cohabiting unions, we conduct multiple group analyses that allow both factor loadings and path coefficients to differ between the married and cohabiting groups (Kline, 2005). The multiple-group analysis model is specified similarly as the above equation for the total sample except that union type is used as a grouping variable in the multiple-group analysis instead of being controlled as a covariate.

10. Results

10.1. General relationships

We first estimate the model for the total sample to understand the general relationships among work schedule, work–family conflict, and parental well-being. The standardized factor loadings of the measurement model are reported in Appendix A. All of the factor loadings are statistically significant at the \( p < .001 \) level with the smallest value of .38 for the total sample. The structural parameters of the model (reported in Table 2) are the focus of our discussion as they indicate the estimates of the key relationships of this study.

Table 2 shows the estimated standardized regression coefficients of work schedule and work–family conflict for predicting psychological distress (Column A), job satisfaction (Column B), and life satisfaction (Column C), respectively. Column D presents the estimated standardized regression coefficient of work schedule for predicting work–family conflict. Family union type and all other socio-demographic covariates are controlled for predicting work–family conflict and the three measures of well-being in the model. Correlations between different dimensions of parental well-being are also estimated. Standardized regression coefficients in Table 2 can be interpreted in the similar way that they are interpreted in conventional linear regression models. For example, the standardized regression coefficient of .739 for work–family conflict.
conflict on psychological distress in Table 2 can be interpreted as follows: Every one standard deviation increase in the level of work–family conflict is associated with .739 standard deviation increase in the predicted value of psychological distress after the socio-demographic covariates are controlled. Model fit indexes shown at the bottom of Table 2 suggest that the model fits the data very well.

Results in Table 2 suggest that non-standard work schedule is associated with lower levels of psychological distress ($B = -.103, p < .05$) and higher levels of life satisfaction ($B = .111, p < .05$) net the effects of all other covariates in the model for the total sample. Work–family conflict is associated with higher levels of psychological distress ($B = .739, p < .001$) and lower levels of job satisfaction ($B = .423, p < .001$) and life satisfaction ($B = -.611, p < .001$). Cohabiting parents have higher levels ($B = .235, p < .05$) of work–family conflict than married parents net the effects of work schedule and other socio-demographic covariates in the total sample.

Estimated effects of all other covariates in Table 2 are basically in the expected directions (see Jorm et al., 2005; Miech et al., 2007). Specifically, women experience more psychological distress than men, and they feel more satisfied with their jobs but less satisfied with life. Hourly earnings are positively related to job and life satisfaction. Parents with younger children have higher levels of life satisfaction than other parents. Those with less education tend to have higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of life and job satisfaction but less work–family conflict than college graduates. Blacks are less satisfied with job and life but they have lower levels of distress than whites. Hispanics have lower levels of job satisfaction than whites. Individuals in the other race–ethnicity group tend to have lower levels of job satisfaction than whites.

The residual covariance results (reported at the bottom of Table 2) suggest that there is a positive correlation between life and job satisfaction ($r = .375, p < .001$), while psychological distress is negatively associated with both job satisfaction ($r = -.276, p < .001$) and life satisfaction ($r = -.412, p < .001$).

10.2. Results from multiple-group analysis

Next, we consider potential union differences in the relationships among work schedule, work–family conflict, and parental well-being. To achieve this purpose, we conduct multiple-group analysis and report the results in Table 3. The standard-
Table 3
Standardized regression coefficients for estimated relationships among work schedule, work–family conflict, and parental well-being from multiple-group analysis (n = 2346).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Latent parental well-being constructs</th>
<th>Latent mediator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(A) Psychological distress B</td>
<td>(B) Job satisfaction B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Married (n = 2186)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-standard work schedule</td>
<td>–.107***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work–family conflict</td>
<td>.722***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residual covariance</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work–family conflict</td>
<td>.943***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life satisfaction</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological distress</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Cohabiting (n = 160)</td>
<td>–.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-standard work schedule</td>
<td>.915***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work–family conflict</td>
<td>.839***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residual covariance</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work–family conflict</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life satisfaction</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological distress</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model fit index</td>
<td>CFI = .980</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All socio-demographic covariates are controlled for predicting work–family conflict, life satisfaction, job satisfaction and psychological distress in the multiple group model.

Two-tailed test: *p < .05.
Two-tailed test: **p < .01.
Two-tailed test: ***p < .001.

ized factor loadings of the measurement model for the multiple-group analysis are reported in Appendix A. All of the factor loadings are statistically significant at the p < .001 level. The structural parameters of the model (reported in Table 3) are the focus of our discussion as they indicate the estimates of the key relationships of this study.

Panels I and II of Table 3 show the estimated relationships among work schedule, work–family conflict, and the three dimensions of parental well-being for the married and cohabiting groups respectively. Within each panel of Table 3, Columns A–C present the estimated standardized regression coefficients of work schedule and work–family conflict for predicting psychological distress and job and life satisfaction respectively. Column D presents the estimated standardized regression coefficients of work schedule for predicting work–family conflict. All socio-demographic covariates are controlled for predicting work–family conflict, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and psychological distress (not shown in the table). Model fit indexes reported at the bottom of Table 3 indicate that the model fits the data reasonably well.

For more clarification, we present path diagrams in Fig. 1 based on the results in Table 3 for the married and cohabiting groups respectively. From Fig. 1, we can see that, for the married group, non-standard work schedule is significantly associated with lower levels of psychological distress (B = –.107, p < .05) and higher levels of life satisfaction (B = .112, p < .05). This is consistent with our hypothesis that non-standard work schedule is positively related to well-being for married parents. Fig. 1 also shows that although higher work-family conflict is related to increased psychological distress (B = .722, p < .001) and decreased job satisfaction (B = –.418, p < .001) and life satisfaction (B = –.611, p < .001), non-standard work-schedule is not significantly related to work-family conflict for married parents (B = .070, p > .05).

Both Table 3 and Fig. 1 show that for cohabiting parents, the direct relationships of non-standard work schedule and the parental well-being measures are not statistically significant. However, as shown in Fig. 1, in cohabiting unions, non-standard work schedule is positively related to work–family conflict (B = .508, p < .001), which is in turn positively associated with psychological distress (B = .915, p < .001), and negatively associated with job satisfaction (B = –.462, p < .001), and life satisfaction (B = –.626, p < .001). This is consistent with our hypothesis that non-standard work schedule is positively related to work–family conflict for cohabiting parents, which in turn is linked to lower levels of parental well-being.

11. Discussion

Our study of a nationally representative labor force sample highlights the important role of union types in moderating the links among non-standard work schedules, work–family conflict, and parental well-being. In contrast to married parents who experience some positive associations between non-standard schedules and well-being, we find that cohabiting parents tend to experience a negative relationship between these measures which interfere with family life. Moreover, non-standard work schedules do not appear related to additional work–family conflict for married parents. However, in comparison to cohabiting parents working standard schedules, cohabiting parents working non-standard schedules suffer from higher levels of conflict between work and family life, which are linked to lower levels of parental well-being.
Past research suggests some negative consequences of non-standard work schedules on the well-being of married couples such as increased marital instability (Presser, 2000) and decreased marital and sexual satisfaction (Colligan and Rosa, 1990; White and Keith, 1990). While our work does not address these measures, we find that non-standard work schedules are positively related to well-being for married parents when considering the measures of life satisfaction and psychological distress. Non-standard work schedules may be a positive solution for married parents because they provide an option for parents to be more available for child care during the day (Garey, 1995, 1999). This may provide married dual-earner parents who work non-standard schedules with more flexible and economical children-rearing task distribution, which in turn may enhance well-being. This is more likely to be so for married parents rather than cohabiting parents because cohabiters are less likely to share the parenting responsibilities for their partners’ children (Abroms and Goldscheider, 2002).

For cohabiting parents, our results suggest more negative experiences with non-standard schedules. This is consistent with our expectation. Cohabiting parents usually have less access to social resources and family support (Eggebeen, 2005) to balance the demands of work and family in comparison to married parents, and they are more likely to struggle with child care arrangements. Future research should examine whether reduced social support for child care may explain the increased work–family conflict for cohabiting parents. Non-standard schedule work is usually more poorly paid and is related to lower job security and fewer benefits relative to other standard jobs (Presser, 2003) which may contribute to lower levels of parental well-being, especially for cohabiting parents.

As a growing number of parents choose to cohabit (Bumpass and Lu, 2000) and the prevalence of non-standard shift work continues to increase in the US (Presser, 2003), we would expect a greater number of cohabiting parents working non-standard schedules in the near future. Our findings of more negative experiences with non-standard schedules for cohabiting parents certainly raise concerns for such emerging trends in the changing family structures and work schedules in the US. Indeed, working non-standard schedules is a more prevalent type of employment condition for cohabitating parents than for married parents (Henkens et al., 1993; Abroms and Goldscheider, 2002; Presser, 2000, 2003, 2005). In our sample, almost 38% of cohabiting parents work non-standard schedules, while about 28% of married parents are in similar situations.

Although our conceptual framework suggests a structural relationship among work schedule, work–family conflict, and parental well-being, we cannot rule out the possibility that cohabitating parents with more conflict between work and family life are more likely to choose to work non-standard schedules. Our results are based on cross-sectional data, which cannot enable us to tease out the potential reversed influence of psychological characteristics on choice of work schedule. Longitudinal studies should be conducted in the future to examine potential selection processes of individuals who work non-standard schedules in order to better understand the consequences of non-standard work schedules on well-being.

Additionally, our sample includes 160 cohabiting parents and 60 of them worked non-standard schedules. Although these numbers are small, our sample is nationally representative of working families in the US (Families and Work Institute, 2004).

Fig. 1. Path diagrams of non-standard work schedule, work–family conflict, and parental well-being from multiple-group analysis.
Nearly seven percent of working parents with children in our sample are cohabiting, which is comparable to national statistics. According to the 2000 Census, 7.7% of coupled parents with children under the age of 18 are cohabiting with an opposite-sex partner (US Bureau of the Census, 2003). Despite the fact that the proportion of cohabiting couples with children in our sample is similar to national estimates, the actual number of cohabiting parents in the NSCW data limits our ability to further examine detailed classification of non-standard work schedules (such as evening shift, weekend shift, etc.), as well as social group (such as gender and race) differences in these relationships.

Another limitation of the present study is that the outcome measures are somewhat limited with respect to child outcomes and other measures of parental well-being in the NSCW data. Having a parent who works a non-standard schedule, particularly if the parents are cohabiting and lack adequate social and financial support, could be especially detrimental to young children. Future study needs to consider if parents’ non-standard work schedules affect child well-being differently across family structures. Finally, we are unable to identify couples using the current data. Future studies should consider how one’s non-standard work schedules may affect the partner’s well-being. Indeed, to gain a more fine-grained understanding about non-standard work, it would be especially useful if datasets obtained information on who are in the household, their work schedules, and their relationship to the other adults and children in the home.

12. Conclusion

Over recent decades, the US has witnessed a growing diversity in work schedules and the organization of work and family life. The movement toward a twenty-four-seven economy erodes Americans’ traditional work schedules of eight hours per day from Monday to Friday (Presser, 2003). As a growing number of American parents work non-standard schedules, there continues to be major concerns and debates regarding the consequences of such work patterns on parental well-being. While some researchers argue that non-standard work schedules provide flexible work arrangements for both employers and employees and enhance economic advantages (Maurice, 1975); others emphasize the negative consequences of such work arrangements (Presser, 1999, 2003). Our results highlight the complexity of this issue and suggest that the impact of non-standard work on parental well-being may be different for married and cohabiting families. Employment on non-standard schedules may provide benefits to married parents who share parenting responsibilities, but it could present major challenges to cohabiting parents in balancing their work and family obligations. Cohabiting parents working non-standard schedules certainly warrants more social attention as they continue to comprise a growing segment of the US population. They have already been facing economic and social constraints and may be more susceptible to suffering from recent changes in work schedules.

Acknowledgment

This research was supported by Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for the Center on Parents, Children, and Work (#2003-6-20).

Appendix A

See Table 4.

Table 4
Standardized factor loadings for total sample and multiple-group analysis (n = 2346).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent construct</th>
<th>Standardized measurement model loadings</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Full model</td>
<td>Multiple group model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological distress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be bothered by minor health problems*</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel nervous/stressed</td>
<td>0.77 ***</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel unable to control important things</td>
<td>0.67 ***</td>
<td>0.89 ***</td>
<td>0.80 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall job satisfaction*</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take same job again</td>
<td>0.81 ***</td>
<td>0.93 ***</td>
<td>0.80 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall life satisfaction*</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family life satisfaction</td>
<td>0.70 ***</td>
<td>1.23 ***</td>
<td>0.68 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job-family conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No time for family because of job*</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No energy for family because of job</td>
<td>0.75 ***</td>
<td>1.13 ***</td>
<td>0.73 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work keeps from getting things done at home</td>
<td>0.67 ***</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.77 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life drains energy needed by job</td>
<td>0.55 ***</td>
<td>0.65 ***</td>
<td>0.60 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose concentration on job because of family</td>
<td>0.57 ***</td>
<td>0.69 ***</td>
<td>0.65 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family keeps from getting work done on time</td>
<td>0.38 ***</td>
<td>0.42 ***</td>
<td>0.36 ***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-standardized loadings are set up to be 1 for model identification and no significance tests are conducted.
*** Two-tailed test: p < .001.

References


