

The Convergence of Work and Family: How the Location of Work Influences Childbirths in the United States

In recent decades in the United States, work-from-home arrangements have become increasingly common. From 1997 to 2010, the proportion of the workforce in the United States that worked from home at least one day per week increased by 35% (United States Census Bureau 2013). The Silicon Valley executive, the computer programmer, the freelance graphic designer, the virtual assistant, the startup founder, the daycare provider, and the seamstress can potentially all arrange to work from home on any given day of the week.

The separation of work from the household brought by the Industrial Revolution has been posited to be the root of work-family conflict and a major problem of modernity. If the trend is reversing and more and more workers are removing the physical boundary between work life and home life, what are the implications of this convergence on families and women's social and economic position? In this paper I ask, how does working from home influence parents' decisions regarding both childbearing and how do those decisions vary by the gender of the parent who works from home?

Literature

There is an extensive literature on work and family and how the intersection of these two institutions leads to the perpetuation of economic and social disadvantages for women. Most of the work-family research, while acknowledging the connection of work and family, focuses either on the setting of the workplace or the setting of the family. However, I argue that work and family cannot be disentangled.

One subset of the work-family literature focuses primarily on gender inequalities in the workplace. Historically, most workplace organizations were not structured to be gender neutral, but rather they demand a "masculine" worker with no responsibilities outside of the workplace

(Acker 1990). Although this is no longer the reality for most men or women, organizational structures have not sufficiently adapted and therefore keep women in subordinate positions or push them out entirely (Blair-Loy 2003; Cha 2010). Correll et al. (2007) found that mothers are perceived as more incompetent in the workplace and are recommended lower starting salaries than nonmothers and that employers discriminate against mothers but not fathers or childless women. These results support a large body of research that shows that mothers are more disadvantaged in the workplace than fathers and that mothers consequently experience more work-family conflict (Bianchi and Milkie 2010). To further understanding of gendered inequalities at work, my research examines whether the institutional norms and practices that disadvantage women carry over when the workplace is in the home.

Another subset of the literature shows how work-family focuses on gender inequality in the household. Although women have moved into positions and activities formerly exclusive to men, men have largely not moved into spheres formerly exclusive to women. From 1965 to 2010, women's time in housework declined and men's time in housework increased (Bianchi et al. 2012), but men have not increased their housework enough to compensate for women's increase in labor force participation (England 2010). However, if paid work is increasingly being performed in the home, what happens to the gendered relationship between paid and unpaid work?

A small body of research has begun to examine how the location of work influences gender inequalities in the home. For example, a study using data from the Australian Time Use Survey found that the place of work was an important predictor of parents' time. Mothers who work from home spend less time in paid work and more time in childcare compared to mothers who work outside the home, but fathers who work from home do not use their time differently

than fathers who do not work from home (Craig and Powell 2012). Another study using the Australian Time Use Survey found that men who work from home are able to maintain boundaries between employment and other activities more than women are (Powell and Craig 2015). The authors argue that although working at home may allow some women to better balance paid and unpaid work, overall, working at home reinforces the gendered division of labor inside and outside the home.

Data and Methods

In this paper, I use longitudinal data from the 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2017 waves of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), a longitudinal household survey in the United States, and event history analysis to predict how the location of work impacts transitions to parenthood and then transitions to having subsequent children. I will use the PSID's longitudinal data and multilevel regression to estimate both how individuals change over time and how these changes vary across individuals. By using longitudinal data, I can see how both the location of work and the number of total children changes over time and the temporal order of those changes in relation to each other. I will examine both how working from home predicts the event of a birth and how a birth in a family predicts the event of working from home.

Expected Findings

First, I examine the relationship between working from home and childbearing. I predict that individuals who work from home are more likely to have a child than those who do not work from home. However, individuals planning to have a child may begin to work at home in an attempt to prevent work-family conflict. I also predict that individuals who work from home and have at least one child are more likely to have another child than parents who do not work from

home. I also predict that the relationship between the location of work and having children is stronger for women than for men.

In preliminary analysis of the data, I have found that of partnered men who worked from home in 2017, 3% had a birth in 2016, and of partnered men who did not work from home in 2017, 5.8% had a birth in 2016. Next, of partnered men who worked from home in 2015, 4.7% had a birth in 2016, and of partnered men who did not work from home in 2015, 5.8% had a birth in 2016. These preliminary descriptives suggest that working from home and childbearing are not associated regardless of the direction of temporality.

However, the relationship may be stronger for women. For partnered women who worked from home in 2017, 16.5% had a birth in 2016, and of partnered women did not work from in 2017, 5.5% had a birth in 2016. Then, of partnered women who worked from home in 2015, 15.2% had a birth in 2016, and of partnered women who did not work from in 2015, 5.6% had a birth in 2016. The preliminary data suggests that women who work from home are more likely to have a birth, and that women who have recently had a birth are more likely to work from home.

Contributions

This work contributes to the study of gender, work, and family in sociology by focusing on the understudied issue of how the location of work shapes the intersection of gender, work, and family. The basis of work-family tension is the separation of production from the household, but if trends in home-based work are changing, it is important to examine the changing relationship between work, family, and gender inequalities.

This project also speaks more broadly to the future of work and how changing nature of work has the potential to either transform or maintain the gendered norms and practices of traditional workplace organizations. As workers gain flexibility and control over where they can

perform their work, it becomes increasingly important to understand the implications of the location of work on the family, as well as on women's social and economic opportunities.

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