

Work and childbearing in the XXI century: when large work autonomy meets high job demands

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Short abstract (word count: 200)

We aim to investigate the role of growing job demands and increasing work resources for women's fertility choices in labour markets that are undergoing rapid transformations due to globalization and digitalization. Specifically, we examine whether women who face demanding jobs are more likely to delay or abandon parenthood. Drawing on the job demands-resources framework, which posits that job resources can buffer the negative effects of job demands on workers' lives, we explore whether the availability of various resources can alleviate the negative association between job demands and childbearing. Job demands are assessed as a multidimensional construct measured by both work 'extensification' (work hours) and 'intensification' (job complexity), while job resources encompass autonomy over where and when to work. The study employs event history models for first and second births and uses panel data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics Survey in Australia (HILDA). Our preliminary findings indicate parity differences: Childless women are more likely to have children when their jobs are complex or full-time, while mothers with demanding jobs are less likely to have another child. In a latter case, working from home or work-time autonomy outweighs - to some extent - the negative link between job demands and subsequent childbearing.

Extended abstract:

The world of work has undergone tremendous changes over the last three decades. These changes, mostly driven by globalization and technological development, are reflected in the growing demand for highly skilled workers in quickly expanding high-tech occupations as well as high-level specialized services (e.g. legal, financial, or health-related). At the same time, the increasing pressure on companies to innovate in the global economy and adjust to the continuously changing environment has resulted in organizational changes based on

high-commitment policies (e.g. performance-related pay, project work) which on the one hand provide workers with more job resources such as autonomy, but on the other increase pressure on employees to constantly upgrade their skills and perform at high standards (Korunka & Kubicek, 2017; Piva et al., 2005). Consequently, workers in the twenty-first century are more flexible in where, how, and when they work (Kelly et al., 2017), but at the same time are more responsible for their work (Van Echtelt et al., 2009). This responsibility together with good perspectives for professional growth, which are increasingly offered to highly skilled workers, in particular in knowledge-intensive organizations, make them trade the standard 8-hour work contract with fixed working hours for unregulated, often longer, working time and blurred boundaries between paid work, family life and leisure (Kvande, 2009, 2017). As such, a rise in job resources goes hand in hand with a rise in job demands.

Much previous research has considered the role of job demands and resources in workers' lives. In the theoretical considerations, they were typically embraced under the job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti et al., 2001). According to this framework, job demands are defined as those attributes of the job that require an effort, either physical, mental, or organizational, and generate psychological and/or physical costs, thus negatively impacting employees' well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Karasek, 1979; Siegrist, 1996). The most typical to the modern way of work are job demands related to the so-called 'work extensification' reflected by increased and spread all-day working hours, as well as 'work intensification' such as time pressure, job complexity, intensified learning, and emotional requirements (Demerouti & Bakker, 2023; Green, 2004; Korunka & Kubicek, 2017; Paškvan & Kubicek, 2017). Job resources, in turn, embrace aspects of a job that motivate employees, stimulate their learning and professional development, and most importantly are able to reduce the physical and mental costs of job demands (Bakker et al., 2023). Possible job resources are, for instance, access to training or family-friendly policies, or work autonomy. The latter may imply autonomy over the work conduct (job control), over the work time (schedule control, flexi-time), and over the workplace (workplace control, flexi-place) (Karasek, 1979; Voydanoff, 2004; Wheatley, 2017).

In line with this theoretical concept, numerous studies showed the negative consequences of job demands on workers' physical and mental health (Fairris & Brenner, 2001; Gonzalez-Mulé & Cockburn, 2021; Wichert, 2001), job satisfaction (Green, 2004; Green & Tsitsianis, 2005) as well as their work-life balance (Boxall & Macky, 2014; White et al., 2003). They also proved that this negative link is particularly strong if employees are not

provided with work resources necessary for meeting high work demands (Demerouti & Bakker, 2023; Karasek, 1979; Kelly et al., 2011). In this context, work autonomy has the potential to weaken the negative consequences of job demands on workers' lives. It has been indeed proven that work autonomy can increase work-life balance, lower work-family conflict, and reduce the level of job-related stress (Annink & Den Dulk, 2012; Boxall & Macky, 2014; Grönlund, 2007; Kalleberg et al., 2009; Kelly et al., 2011). Nonetheless, it may also result in longer working hours and higher work-load (Chung, 2022; Mennino et al., 2005) as well as blurring of the boundaries between paid work and family life (Allen et al., 2013; Lott, 2020), thus intensifying the negative consequences of job demands on workers' lives (Schieman et al., 2009).

While there has been extensive research on the role of work autonomy and job demands in various aspects of workers' lives, very little attention has been paid to the consequences of these changes for partners' fertility choices. Few studies which addressed this problem have looked either at the role of work autonomy (either schedule control, e.g. Sinyavskaya and Billingsley (2015), or the possibility to work from home, e.g. Osiewalska et al. (2022)) or job demands (Ariza et al., 2003), but rarely both (for exceptions see Begall and Mills (2011)). Job demands were usually assessed with simple measures, such as long working hours (Ariza et al., 2003) or job strain (Begall & Mills, 2011), but the studies did not consider job demands as a multidimensional concept which covers measures of both work 'extensification' (work hours) and 'intensification' (learning demands, time pressure, job complexity).

We fill this research gap by conducting a comprehensive study of the link between job demands, work autonomy and childbearing. We draw on the job demands-resources framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Within this framework job resources buffer the negative consequences of job demands for workers' lives (so-called "buffer hypothesis", Bakker et al. 2023). We thus formulate the following expectations. First, we expect that women who have demanding jobs will be more likely to postpone entry to parenthood or even abandon it. Second, we anticipate work autonomy, and in particular schedule control, to alleviate the negative consequences of job demands on childbearing. In other words, we presuppose that the negative link between job demands and childbearing will hold for women with low job resources, but weaken or disappear for women having high levels of resources at work.

We test our hypothesis with the use of the panel data Household, Income and Labour Dynamics Survey in Australia (HILDA) which covers the period between 2001 and 2020. We

select women at reproductive age (18 to 44) and apply event history models for the transition to the first birth. Our key explanatory variables are measures of job demands, which include a number of work hours, and job complexity (My job is complex and difficult; I have to work very intensely in my job). Job resources are measured by autonomy over when work is done (My working times can be flexible; I have a lot of freedom to decide when I do my work), and where work is done (Workplace entitlements: Home-based work). In all our models we control for women's age, period, country of birth, partnership status, education, career orientation, and household income.

Our preliminary findings indicate that the link between job demands and childbearing differs by parity. Mothers with demanding jobs are less likely to have another child (in line with H1), while childless women are more likely to have children when their jobs are complex or full-time (in contrast to H1), either because they postpone motherhood until they reach high position at work or because they decide for motherhood to escape the complex work environment. Once mothers face the challenge of balancing work and care, they are less likely to have another child if they have demanding jobs. In such cases, working from home or having moderate working time autonomy can be helpful (in line with H2). High flexibility in working hours, in turn, exacerbates the negative effects of job demands on childbearing (in contrast to H2). We will examine these relationships further to be able to present the complete set of findings at the conference.

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