

## Marriage, children, and women's employment: what do we know?

*Estimates of the level of women's full-time employment are greatly affected by the choice of reference period and universe; as States attempt to move poor mothers from welfare to work, a tendency may arise to overestimate how much mothers of young children actually work for pay*

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and  
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One of the well-known economic trends of the past several decades is an increase in women's labor force participation, particularly among married women with children. Although the trend is well established, there is no consensus as to its causes or consequences. With regard to causes, some argue that constraints such as low male earnings have propelled women into the marketplace, while others highlight expanding opportunities for women. Consequences are also contested, and the changing economic role of women is central both to debates about fairness and gender equity and to debates about family values and children's well-being.

In this article, we reexamine the *extent* of involvement in paid work for women in general and married women in particular, for both substantive and methodological reasons. Our substantive interest grows out of a renewed focus on paid work and child care that is related to welfare reform. Although welfare reform has concentrated attention on single women with children, we argue that married mothers' allocations of time to paid work also are central to the welfare debate, as these women often appear as a de facto comparison group. Hence, it is important to have a clear picture of both how much married mothers currently work for pay and how much that has changed over time. We develop our argument

about the interrelationship of married women's labor market activity and welfare reform in the next section.

The data we use, from the March Current Population Surveys (CPS), constitute the main source of information on trends in women's paid work. After briefly describing the data and our measures, we discuss variability in estimates of full-time paid work. Two complexities arise in assessing the extent of women's market work: the CPS data (1) offer multiple reference periods for examining labor force activity and (2) allow trends to be constructed for more than one universe. We describe changes in hours and weeks of paid employment, focusing on trends for all women, for married women, and for married mothers of young children. We show that, depending on the universe and reference period one uses, widely different estimates of married women's "attachment" to the labor force may be calculated. The range of estimates creates ambiguity and complicates assessments of competing claims about women's "commitment" to market work.

Finally, to address the question of whether women's market involvement has responded more to constraints or to opportunities, we model the relationship between the extent of a woman's employment (as measured by annual hours of paid work), on the one hand, and marriage, young children, the woman's level of educational attain-

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ment, and her access to other income (for example, her husband's earnings), on the other. We do not view women's labor supply as unfettered; indeed, we find that women continue to work more when they have *less* access to other sources of income. However, the *trends* in the relationship between labor supply and predictor variables such as education and other income are more consistent with an "opportunities" than with a "constraints" interpretation. We conclude by speculating about the implications of our findings for the combination of paid work and child rearing among poor single mothers.

## Work and welfare

The year 1996 saw landmark legislation that is changing the face of welfare support for poor single mothers in the United States. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act emerged from a long debate about the purpose and potential negative incentives of welfare. With the imposition of time limits on the receipt of welfare and a strong emphasis on moving recipients from welfare to work, the Act implicitly endorses a model of mothering of young children that looks quite different from the one behind the establishment of the 1935 Social Security Act (with its widows' pensions) and the Aid to Dependent Children (later, Aid to Families with Dependent Children) programs that were the centerpiece of the welfare system.

Originally, mothers who had lost the wage support of the father of their young children because of his early death (or who were indigent because the child's father deserted the family or was unwilling or unable to financially support his children) were supported, at least at some minimal level, so that they could remain *out of the labor force* to nurture and raise their children. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act is based on a quite different model of motherhood: a "good mother" locates child care for her young children and finds a job, perhaps after some additional job training, by means of which she can financially support herself and her children. Given the wage rates that many, if not most, single mothers on welfare can expect to command even after job training, the new model requires full-time, year-round market work for former welfare mothers if they are to have a realistic hope of keeping their families above the poverty level (in 1998 dollars, \$13,133 for a mother living with her two children). The new scenario for poor mothers—sufficient paid work, in conjunction with fathers' responsibility to support their children—is in part dictated by the more general changes that have occurred for all mothers.<sup>1</sup>

Labor force rates for married mothers have risen rapidly in recent decades, and many see this increase as connected to what has happened to men's wages. Researchers have noted the dramatic widening of wage inequality among workers<sup>2</sup>

and the stagnation or, in the case of the least skilled, the substantial decline, in the real wages of men.<sup>3</sup> The suggestion is that, increasingly, married women "need" to work to compensate for the labor force difficulties of their husbands, and as the "choice" of married mothers to stay out of the labor market and rear their own children becomes more and more constrained, it appears reasonable that single mothers, too, are subjected to similar constraints.

Although many more married women with young children work for pay nowadays than in the past, married women continue to exercise a variety of options in the way they balance work and family. For example, as we shall show, in any given year, most married women with preschoolers do not negotiate full-time, year-round jobs together with family responsibilities. Thus, the question arises, To the extent that the trends for married women have influenced the welfare debate, is it realistic to expect *single* mothers to combine full-time paid work and child care?

A second concern is that the focus on men's declining wages may have led to a view of changes in married women's market work as *primarily* the result of economic constraints. But have economic forces compelled married women to work more than they really want to? In actuality, the view that married women's economic roles have expanded more from "push" than "pull" factors is not clearly established. For example, although one recent study estimates that at least half of the increase in women's earnings relative to men's results from men's declining wages,<sup>4</sup> others question this interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

Economists who have investigated whether a woman's own wage-earning potential and occupational opportunities or whether her lack of prospects of financial support from another person (for example, her husband) are more likely to encourage her labor force participation tend to find that changes more often reflect expanding opportunities. For example, Claudia Goldin argues that, over time, married women's labor force participation has become less responsive to their husband's earnings.<sup>6</sup> And Chinhui Juhn and Kevin M. Murphy contend that, although in the aggregate the increase in wives' employment would seem to compensate for the decline in their husband's earnings, this needs-based interpretation does not square well with the fact that labor force gains have been largest for wives married to highly educated, high-earning husbands.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, we see the trends in paid work for women—particularly married women—as providing a context in which expectations are developed for single mothers. We raise two questions. First, are we overestimating how dramatic the march toward paid work—especially full-time, year-round paid work—has been for *married* mothers of young children? Second, is an explanation of changes in married women's labor force participation that emphasizes "push" factors, such as the decline in male earnings, a correct or useful way to inter-

pret the trends? There is an interesting irony that attaches to the received view of married women's labor supply: emphasizing need factors rather than opportunity structures for married women strengthens the rationale for why (single) welfare mothers should be propelled into the labor force.

### Data and methods

The data we employ in this study are from the March cps microdata for the years 1978 through 1998.<sup>8</sup> Two reference periods are used in the March survey: respondents are asked about their work schedules in the week preceding the survey and about weeks and hours worked in the previous year.<sup>9</sup> In descriptive tables, we distinguish two universes: all women and women workers (women who were employed at least 1 hour in the previous week). We present estimates for women in the prime working ages of 25–54 and for women aged 16–64. We provide estimates for all women in each of these universes, as well as for the subsets of married women and married women with children under 6 years old.

We offer estimates across time for average hours employed per week, average hours employed per year, average weeks employed per year, percent employed at all, percent employed full time, and percent employed full time, year round. The last two measures conform to standard BLS definitions according to which a full-time workweek is 35 hours or more of paid work and a full year is 50 weeks or more.

In addition, we estimate tobit regressions of annual hours of paid work for prime working-age women (25–54), for each year from 1978 to 1998. The regressions help establish the extent to which the changes over time represent compositional shifts or changes in the forces that affect women's labor force participation directly. The regression model includes dummy variables for four categories of family: married women with spouse present and with children under 6, married women with spouse present and without children under 6, women with no spouse present and with children under 6, and women with no spouse present and without children under 6 (the excluded category).

We include dummy variables for women who have a high school degree or some college and for women with at least a 4-year degree or 4 years of college education; women with less than 4 years of high school are the excluded category. These education variables may be considered a proxy for wage elasticity, or the effect of potential wages on women's decisions regarding employment.

To evaluate the effect of other available income on women's decisions regarding employment, we add a variable for other family income, calculated as the natural logarithm of total family income less women's own earned income.<sup>10</sup> We also include dummy variables for non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic other, with non-Hispanic whites as the omitted

category. The sample is restricted to civilians, and all the analyses are weighted with the March cps person-weight.

### Methodological issues

The most commonly used indicator of women's market involvement is the percentage of women who are in the paid labor force in a given week.<sup>11</sup> The *labor force concept* encompasses not only those who actually worked for pay in the reference week, but also those who had a job, but, for various reasons, were not actually working in the week before the survey and those who did not have a job, but were actively looking for work. By the mid-1990s, more than three-quarters of women aged 25 to 54 (women in the "prime working ages," when school attendance is usually complete and retirement has not yet begun) were in the labor force. By contrast, in 1960 the percentage was 43 percent, and in 1970 it was 50 percent.<sup>12</sup>

Although commonly used, the labor force participation rate gives little sense of how much time workers commit to paid work. As noted earlier, March cps data employ two reference periods: how much respondents worked for pay in the week before the March survey (typically, the week in March containing the 12th) and how much the respondent worked in the year preceding the survey. More individuals work some hours for pay over the course of a year than are in the labor force at any one particular time during the year. Hence, the "last year" reference period yields higher employment rates than the "last week" reference period.

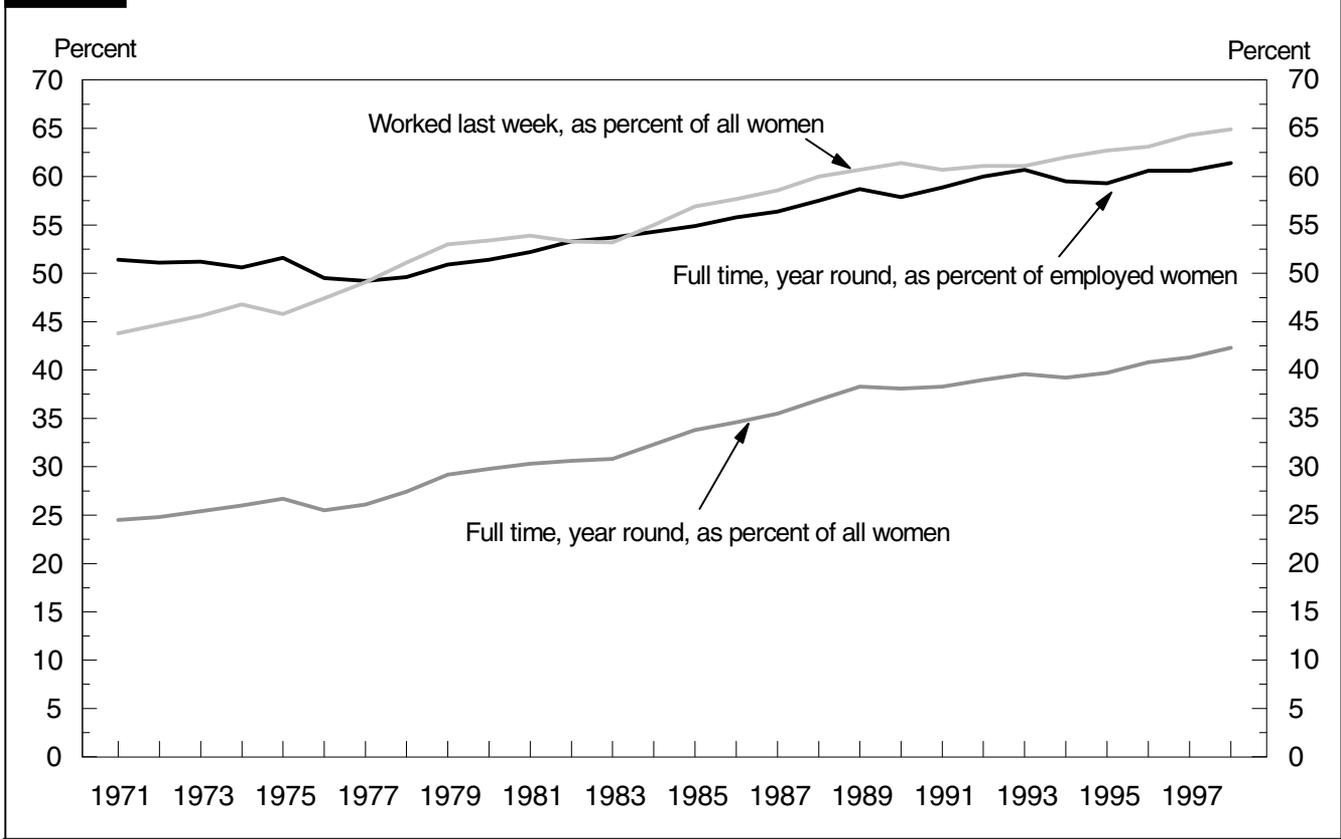
With the cps, it is also possible to calculate employment measures using all women as the base for rates or using only employed women. For illustrative purposes, the following tabulation displays the percentage of women working full time, year round, based on the cross-classification of the two universes (all women and women employed the previous week)<sup>13</sup> by the two reference periods (last week and last year), for two age ranges in March 1998:

Universe	Reference period	
	Last week	Last year
Aged 16–64:		
All women .....	43.9	42.3
Employed women .....	67.6	61.4
Aged 25–54:		
All women .....	51.2	50.2
Employed women .....	72.2	67.1

Shown in the tabulation are the percentages that would be classified as having a full-time commitment to market work. Not surprisingly, fewer women meet the criterion of working full time when the reference period is an entire year than when it is just 1 week.

It is common to assess full-time work status not for all

**Chart 1. Paid-work rates, women aged 16 to 64, 1971–98**



women, but as a percentage of *working* women. The second row of figures for each age group provides these estimates: when we restrict the universe to women who were employed at the time of the survey, 68 percent of them were full-time workers the previous week, and 61 percent were estimated to have worked full time, year round the previous year. The important point is the large gap separating the four estimates, any of which could be taken to indicate women's attachment to full-time work. In 1998, 42 percent of all women had worked full-time during the preceding year, whereas 68 percent of women who were employed the week before the survey put in a full-time workweek—a difference of more than 25 percentage points. (Estimates are higher if the age range is restricted to 25–54, but the range between these estimates is still 22 percentage points among “prime” working-age women.)

Competing claims about whether women are committed to market work or just responding to economic need can be substantiated or refuted by opportunistically choosing a particular reference period and subgroup. The foregoing tabulation reminds us that, given the range of estimates of full-time attachment to market work (from 42 percent to 68 percent in 1998), it is probably not surprising that the views on women's motivations about market work (as well as the evidence cited

in support of each view) continue to be discussed, debated, and disputed. On the one hand, those who want to suggest that women would really rather be in the home have only to point out that just 42 percent of women worked full time, year round, according to the March 1998 CPS. On the other hand, those who wish to emphasize women's commitment to market work can refer to the 72 percent of working women aged 25 to 54 who were employed full time in March 1998. Our goal here is primarily to emphasize how important it is to understand the array of reference periods, universes, and age groups—as well as the trends in each—that are used in assessing women's participation in market work.

### Trends in women's employment

Perhaps the most striking aspect of women's labor force participation over the 20-year period examined in this article is how steadily and linearly upward are the trends, no matter what the universe or measure. Chart 1 shows the trend lines in the proportion of women who worked at all in the previous week, the proportion of women who worked full time, year round, and the proportion of working women who worked full time, year round. Table 1 shows the full array of measures for

all women and employed women, in two age ranges, for the beginning and ending of the 1978–98 period.

In 1978, 33 percent of women aged 16 to 64 worked full time the week before the survey, and the percentage rose to 44 percent in 1998—an increase of more than 10 percentage points. The increase in full-time, year-round work was almost 15 percentage points when the previous year was taken to be the reference period: in 1978, 27 percent of women worked full time, year round, a figure that rose to 42 percent by 1997.

Between 1978 and 1998, average annual hours of paid employment for all women increased from 900 to 1,239, or 38 percent. Table 1 shows that most of the increase in average annual hours for women who were employed at least 1 hour during the previous week was the result of an increase in the proportion of all women who worked for pay—not an increase in how many hours working women were spending on their jobs each week. Women in the paid labor force in March of 1998 worked less than 2 hours more per week than their counterparts in the paid labor force in 1978.<sup>14</sup> Working women of 1998 did average almost 4 more weeks of paid work over the course of a year than did working women of 1978, a 14-percent increase. The table shows that the trends are similar when we restrict our examination to women aged 25 to 54, although the increases over time are somewhat steeper.

Is juggling work and family more pressing for women today than 35 years ago? The answer is “yes and no”: yes, in that proportionately more adult women are engaged in the juggle; no, in that the number of weekly hours of paid work that an employed woman must balance with other commitments has not increased dramatically—it is a little, not a lot,

higher than 20 years ago.

Table 2 offers the same measures as table 1, but for women aged 25 to 54; in addition, the table describes married women and married women with children under age 6. Again, there is no question that married mothers’ attachment to market work has increased greatly since 1978. Trends are similar for married women, married mothers of young children, and all women, with one important exception: working married women with children under age 6 have increased the number of weeks they work per year—and consequently their annual hours—more substantially than have all women (or all married women).

By 1998, half of all women in the prime working ages were employed full time, year round; in comparison, 46 percent of married women and 35 percent of married mothers of young children did so. We estimate that in 1998, around 65 percent of married mothers of preschoolers were not full-time, year-round workers. This is by no means a picture of married mothers abandoning the rearing of their own children so that they can commit themselves to market work. Rather, there has been a ratcheting up of attachment to market work, but with the norm—at least in terms of modality—continuing to be something other than full-time, year-round work for married mothers during their children’s preschool years.

Apparently, then, most married mothers have not stopped taking care of their own children to engage in full-time market work. So why do we often hear that they have? Perhaps the answer lies partially in the fact that statistics on the extent of full-time employment tend to be calculated using only the employed as the base. Among women employed in any given week, 72 percent worked full-time schedules in 1998. But it is

**Table 1. Changes in women's hours and weeks of paid work, 1976–98**

Category	Age 16–64			Age 25–54		
	1978	1998	Change	1978	1998	Change
<b>All women</b>						
Previous week:						
Average hours .....	17.5	23.4	5.9	19.6	26.6	7.0
Percent employed 1 or more hours .....	51.1	64.9	13.8	55.5	71.0	15.5
Percent employed full time .....	33.4	43.9	10.5	38.1	51.2	13.1
Previous year: .....						
Average weeks .....	25.3	33.3	8.0	27.5	36.8	9.3
Percent employed 1 or more weeks .....	63.9	74.5	10.6	65.7	79.4	13.7
Percent employed full time, year round .....	27.4	42.3	14.9	32.4	50.2	17.8
Annual hours .....	900	1,239	339	1,002	1,415	413
<b>Employed women<sup>1</sup></b>						
Previous week:						
Average hours .....	34.2	36.1	1.9	35.3	37.5	2.2
Percent employed full time .....	65.3	67.6	2.3	68.6	72.2	3.6
Previous year: .....						
Average weeks .....	42.2	46.0	3.8	43.5	47.3	3.8
Percent employed full time, year round .....	49.6	61.4	11.8	54.4	67.1	12.7
Annual hours .....	1,515	1,731	216	1,596	1,830	234

<sup>1</sup> Women employed (1 or more hours) the previous week.

SOURCE: March Current Population Surveys.

**Table 2.** Hours and weeks of paid work for all women aged 25–54, married women aged 25–54, and married women aged 25–54 with young children, 1976–98

Category	All women			Married women			Married women with children less than 6 years of age		
	1978	1998	Change	1978	1998	Change	1978	1998	Change
<b>All women</b>									
Previous week:									
Average hours .....	19.6	26.6	7.0	17.4	25.1	7.7	11.8	19.6	7.8
Percent employed 1 or more hours .....	55.5	71.0	15.5	51.4	68.8	17.4	38.1	58.2	20.1
Percent employed full time ..	38.1	51.2	13.1	32.5	47.2	14.7	21.1	34.5	13.4
Previous year:									
Average weeks .....	27.5	36.8	9.3	25.2	35.8	10.6	17.5	30.9	13.4
Percent employed 1 or more weeks .....	65.7	79.4	13.7	62.0	77.7	15.7	50.5	70.5	20.0
Percent employed full time, year round .....	32.4	50.2	17.8	26.9	46.1	19.2	14.3	34.7	20.4
Annual hours .....	1,002	1,415	413	884	1,339	455	583	1,094	511
<b>Employed women<sup>1</sup></b>									
Previous week:									
Average hours .....	35.3	37.5	2.2	33.8	36.4	2.6	31.0	33.7	2.7
Percent employed full time ...	68.6	72.2	3.6	63.2	68.6	5.4	55.4	59.3	3.9
Previous year:									
Average weeks .....	43.5	47.3	3.8	42.4	47.2	4.8	36.0	45.4	9.4
Percent employed full time, year round .....	54.4	67.1	12.7	48.5	63.3	14.8	33.2	54.0	20.8
Annual hours .....	1,596	1,830	234	1,501	1,779	278	1,215	1,625	410

<sup>1</sup> Women employed (1 or more hours) the previous week.

SOURCE: March Current Population Surveys.

worth noting that this phenomenon is not so new: the comparable number was 69 percent 20 years earlier.

## Explaining the trends

Although half of women are still not full-time, year-round workers, their involvement in market work has moved steadily upward. There are two competing explanations for this trend: compared with past experience, women have increased opportunities for earnings and occupational attainment that they seek to realize, or, alternatively, women have increased needs because male wages stagnated and desired standards of living rose.

If women increasingly work because opportunities have expanded, we might expect to see a decline in the effect of other income—particularly their husbands' earnings—on women's labor force participation. We might also view an increasing correlation between educational attainment and labor force participation as suggestive of increased opportunities for women, for it is likely that the most highly educated have gained the most in terms of opportunity structures in the labor market over the previous two decades.

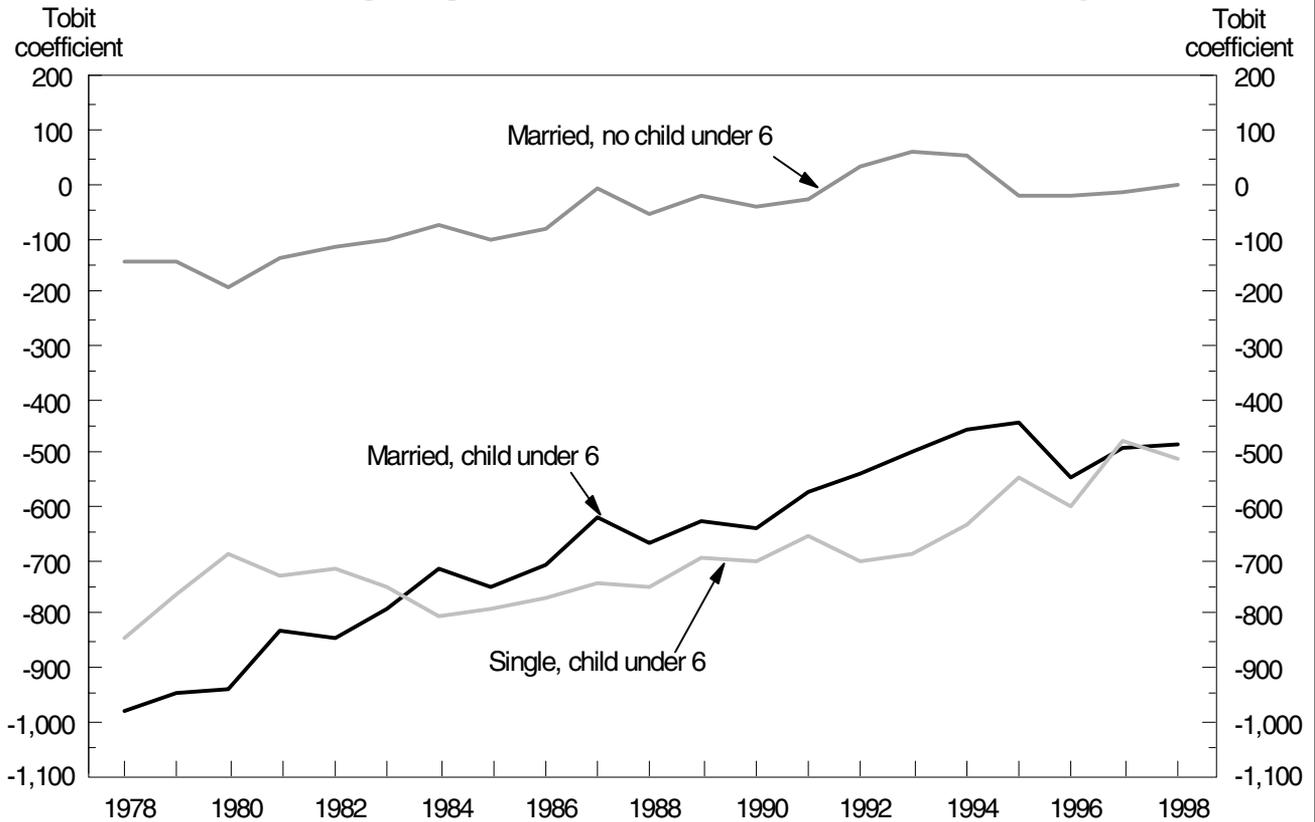
On the other hand, if women's increased commitment to paid work is in response to men's labor force difficulties, we

might expect access to other income to remain a strong predictor of the extent of women's employment. If, instead, it is primarily need that drives women's labor force participation, we should see a stable or increasing effect of other income, and we should see labor force rates remain high among those with less education, who presumably have more need for income.

Table 3 shows the results of tobit regressions for annual hours of employment on women's marital and motherhood status, educational attainment, and the presence of other family income. Age and race or ethnicity are also included in the models as controls. We use a tobit estimator because of censoring:<sup>15</sup> many women in the sample worked no hours in the previous year and are therefore assigned a code of zero on the continuous dependent variable.<sup>16</sup>

Relative to unmarried women without children (the omitted category in the regression models), both married mothers and single mothers commit far fewer hours to market work, but the differential has declined significantly over the past two decades. In the late 1970s, married women without young children worked for pay significantly fewer hours than their single counterparts, the models show, but by the late 1990s, there was no longer a significant difference in hours of labor force participation attributable to marriage among these women.

**Chart 2.** Tobit estimates of annual hours worked, as difference from single women with no children under 6 (controlling for age, education, other income, and race or ethnicity), 1978–98



**Table 3.** Parameter estimates of tobit equations predicting annual hours of paid work for women aged 25–54, 1978–98

Year	Intercept	Married, child under 6	Married, no child under 6	Single, child under 6	Other family income (ln)	High school graduate	College graduate	Age	Black	Hispanic	Other
1978	-2,084.4	-983.6	-140.8	-847.9	-93.6	432.2	746.9	-14.5	60.3	-68.6	106.8
1979	-1,998.5	-950.0	-143.4	-762.4	-87.3	509.7	840.1	-14.1	74.4	(-37.5)	111.3
1980	-2,007.3	-940.1	-192.7	-689.1	-76.0	517.0	791.9	-14.4	20.0	-56.6	3.6
1981	-1,830.2	-834.0	-139.7	-729.6	-80.0	573.2	849.0	-11.3	3.3	-83.7	(46.3)
1982	-1,823.6	-842.1	-119.2	-715.2	-74.6	580.7	878.2	-12.6	(-10.2)	-61.2	100.9
1983	-1,719.0	-791.8	-103.5	-748.0	-72.5	631.4	986.2	-12.7	14.8	-69.8	(-29.5)
1984	-1,665.0	-718.1	-75.0	-804.4	-79.6	653.4	1,036.8	-9.7	(-31.7)	-93.5	(-1.1)
1985	-1,697.5	-746.8	-103.6	-791.1	-72.8	686.1	1,012.6	-10.6	-38.7	-72.5	(-25.3)
1986	-1,693.6	-710.6	-82.7	-772.3	-73.9	653.4	1,021.5	-9.5	(-17.1)	-129.1	(-43.6)
1987	-1,708.2	-619.1	-7.3	-742.6	-76.1	674.5	1,031.1	-10.1	3.8	-115.7	(-30.1)
1988	-1,672.8	-670.6	-57.5	-747.1	-64.4	692.3	1,025.1	-10.1	-60.0	-138.1	-150.6
1989	-1,639.9	-628.3	(-21.2)	-695.4	-70.0	726.8	1,031.2	-8.4	-41.7	-94.1	-86.3
1990	-1,620.1	-643.6	-42.9	-700.2	-61.8	679.7	1,001.5	-8.4	(-20.3)	-106.2	-93.5
1991	-1,589.0	-575.7	-31.0	-651.4	-64.9	697.4	1,006.8	-7.1	-99.3	-156.9	-142.9
1992	-1,522.7	-540.1	36.6	-704.1	-70.4	763.4	1,069.7	-6.6	-64.2	-140.6	-149.8
1993	-1,427.0	-494.8	58.1	-691.5	-69.5	755.2	1,097.0	-5.1	-96.0	-144.3	-125.8
1994	-1,406.5	-457.5	56.3	-633.9	-70.9	790.9	1,145.6	-5.1	-115.9	-193.6	-191.9
1995	-1,396.3	-440.3	-22.0	-545.4	-64.9	713.9	1,045.4	-3.9	-101.4	-173.5	-160.3
1996	-1,432.9	-544.1	(-18.4)	-597.1	-60.2	738.8	1,030.6	-4.7	-85.1	-149.3	-117.0
1997	-1,265.9	-490.9	(16.3)	-475.0	-55.0	765.6	1,068.2	-3.2	-60.3	-131.4	-95.7
1998	-1,354.8	-486.0	(-1.8)	-510.3	-49.8	686.5	1,022.0	-4.7	-28.1	-123.4	-116.7

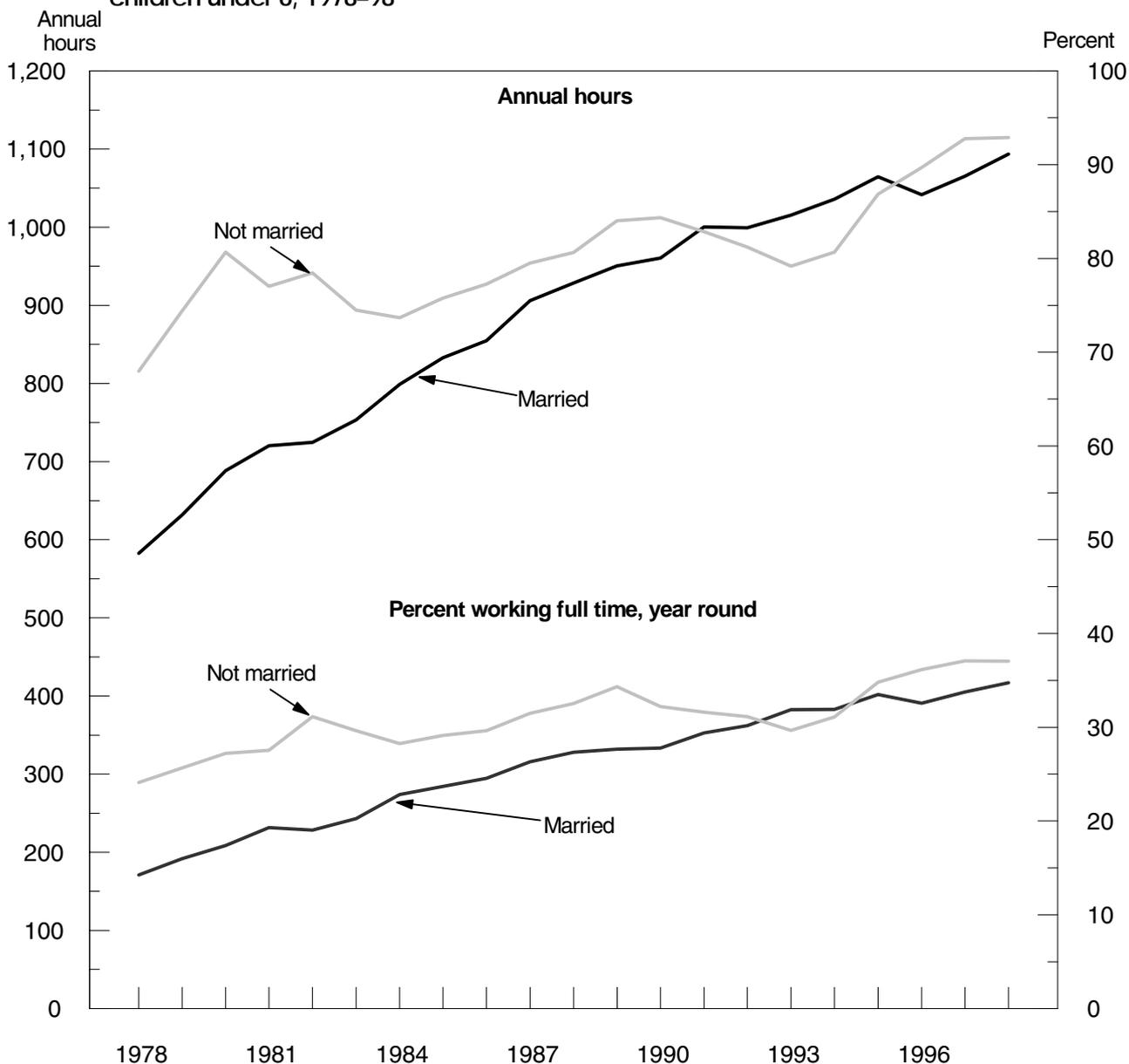
NOTE: Non-Hispanic white is the excluded racial or ethnicity category, single with no children under 6 is the excluded marital-status category, and less than high school is the excluded education-level category. All parameters are significant at  $p < .05$ , except those in parentheses, which are not significant.

Chart 2 illustrates this trend by plotting the difference in predicted annual hours relative to single women without young children over the two decades (the coefficients from table 3). Relative to single women, marriage depressed annual hours by more than 100 hours per year in the late 1970s, and living with a child under 6 depressed a married mother's annual employment by an additional 800 hours. By the 1990s, marriage had no significant effect on those without young children, and from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, married women with young children actually worked more than single

mothers with young children, with other variables held constant. In fact, by the early 1990s, married mothers of young children and single mothers of young children converged in their (unadjusted) annual hours of employment and in the percent of their numbers working full time, year round. (See chart 3.)

With respect to the question of what drives women's increased attachment to paid work, the coefficients on education and on the other income variables are illuminating. Relative to those without a high school education, both high

**Chart 3. Average annual hours in paid work and percent working full time, year round, mothers of children under 6, 1978-98**



school- and college-educated women have become increasingly likely to commit hours to market work over time. Coefficients for high school graduates rose from about 500 in the late 1970s to 700 or more in the late 1990s. College-educated women in the 1970s were predicted by the model to work about 800 hours more than those without high school diplomas, but more than 1,000 hours more by the late 1990s. And although access to other income continues to depress women's labor supply, between the late 1970s and the late 1990s the coefficient for other income declined by almost half. These findings certainly do not constitute conclusive proof that expanding opportunities explain women's increased labor supply, but they are consistent with an increased emphasis on "pull" factors, especially for women with high levels of education.

WOMEN HAVE REACHED THE POINT where marriage in itself has relatively little effect on their labor supply, although access to other income, which, for married women, is primarily earnings from their spouse, continues to exert a downward pressure on women's allocation of time to paid work. This effect of other income is diminishing, however: not unlike what happened earlier for men,<sup>17</sup> educational differentials in the labor supply of women have grown over time, widening the gap between better educated and less educated women, but giving the former more market work opportunities.

Similarly, children exert less of a downward pressure on women's labor supply in the 1990s than they did in the late

1970s, but the effect of having pre-school-aged children on annual hours is substantial. Increasingly, American women seem to exchange some hours of caring for their own children for hours of paid work, but married mothers remain a long way from a situation in which most of them remain committed to full-time, year-round market work.

It is important to emphasize the current level, as well as the trend, of the extent of married mothers' work, especially when one considers current welfare reform. Rather than being in step with levels of employment of married mothers, current reforms require paid-work efforts on the part of single mothers that put them substantially ahead of the curve.

Given the relatively low rates of full-time, year-round labor force attachment of married mothers, what are the implications of a model of full-time, year-round work for poor single mothers? Certainly, poor women have far less access to any other source of income for their children. Also, placing children in nonparental child care settings is far more common in 1998 than it was when Aid to Families with Dependent Children was introduced. But given the low rates of full-time, year-round labor force participation of married mothers, most of their young children are probably not spending exceedingly long periods in nonparental care settings. Hence, the new model for mothers currently on welfare, who would almost certainly have to work full time, year round to support a family, embodies child care arrangements that have not yet become typical. □

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Sara McLanahan and Lynne Casper, "Growing Diversity and Inequality in the American Family," in Reynolds Farley, ed., *State of the Union: America in the 1990s. Vol. 2, Social Trends* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1995), pp. 1-46; and Daphne Spain and Suzanne M. Bianchi, *Balancing Act: Motherhood, Marriage, and Employment among American Women* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Gottschalk and Timothy M. Smeeding, "Cross-national Comparisons of Earnings and Income Inequality," *Journal of Economic Literature*, June 1997, pp. 633-87; and Lynn A. Karoly and Gary Burtless, "Demographic Changes, Rising Earnings Inequality, and the Distribution of Personal Well-being, 1959-1989," *Demography*, August 1995, pp. 379-406.

<sup>3</sup> See Frank Levy, "Incomes and Income Inequality," in Reynolds Farley, ed., *State of the Union: America in the 1990s. Vol. 1, Economic Trends* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1995), pp. 1-58; and Chinhui Juhn, Kevin M. Murphy, and Brooks Pierce, "Wage Inequality and the Rise in Returns to Skill," *Journal of Political Economy*, June 1993, pp. 410-42.

<sup>4</sup> Annette Bernhardt, Martina Morris, and Mark S. Handcock,

"Women's Gains or Men's Losses? A Closer Look at the Shrinking Gender Gap in Earnings," *American Journal of Sociology*, September 1995, pp. 302-28.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Cotter, J. M. DeFiore, J. M. Hermsen, B. M. Kowalewski, and R. Vanneman, "Same Data, Different Conclusions: Comment on 'Women's Gains or Men's Losses? A Closer Look at the Shrinking Gender Gap in Earnings,'" *American Journal of Sociology*, January 1997, pp. 1143-54.

<sup>6</sup> Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Chinhui Juhn and Kevin M. Murphy, "Wage Inequality and Family Labor Supply," *Journal of Labor Economics*, January 1997, pp. 72-97.

<sup>8</sup> The data are from Unicon Research Corporation (producer and distributor of cps utilities), Santa Monica, CA. cps's from March 1962 to March 1998 are machine-readable data files. The surveys are conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<sup>9</sup> cps data from January 1994 forward are not strictly comparable with data from earlier years because of changes in the design and methodology of the questionnaire. For a discussion of the effect of these changes on measures of hours in the labor force, see Philip L. Rones, Randy E. Ilg, and Jennifer M. Gardner, "Trends in hours of work since the mid-1970s," *Monthly Labor Review*, April 1997, pp. 3-14.

<sup>10</sup> Income is adjusted to 1997 dollars according to the Consumer Price

Index. Women with no other family income are assigned a value of \$1 before the logarithmic transformation. (See Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap*, for a historical review of this effect. For more on modeling women's labor supply, see Mark Killingsworth and James J. Heckman, "Female Labor Supply," in Orley Ashenfelter and Richard Layard, *Handbook of Labor Economics*, vol. 1 (New York, North Holland Press, 1986).)

<sup>11</sup> Actually, it is the *annual average* of the percentage in the labor force in the week before *the monthly cps*, not just the March estimates used in this article. (See Francine D. Blau, "Trends in the Well-Being of American Women, 1970–1995," *Journal of Economic Literature*, March 1998, pp. 112–65.

<sup>12</sup> Spain and Bianchi, *Balancing Act*.

<sup>13</sup> Women are considered employed if they responded with a number greater than zero to the question about how many hours they worked the previous week.

<sup>14</sup> This finding is also documented in other research. (See Rones, Ilg, and Gardner, *Trends in hours of work*, p. 4; and Jerry A. Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson, *The Endless Day or the Flexible Office? Working Hours, Work-Family Conflict, and Gender Equity*, report to the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, June 1997, table 2.

<sup>15</sup> Jan Kamenta, *Elements of Econometrics*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> One portion of the tobit coefficients represents an effect on annual hours employed (for those working), and one portion represents an effect on the odds of being employed (for those who were not, cases were truncated at zero hours). When the primary concern is untruncated cases, however, the decomposition of these components is not necessary. See John F. MacDonald and Robert A. Moffitt, "The Uses of Tobit Analysis," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, May 1980, pp. 318–21.

<sup>17</sup> Juhn, Murphy, and Pierce, "Wage Inequality."

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## Bureau of Labor Statistics Internet

The Bureau of Labor Statistics World Wide Web site on the Internet contains a range of data on consumer and producer prices, employment and unemployment, occupational compensation, employee benefits, workplace injuries and illnesses, and productivity. The homepage can be accessed using any Web browser:

**<http://stats.bls.gov>**.

Also, some data can be accessed through anonymous FTP or Gopher at **[stats.bls.gov](http://stats.bls.gov)**

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