

Work-family stress ongoing for mothers

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It would not surprise many people to learn that being a new mum coupled with working is quite stressful but WA researchers have determined that this high stress level remains constant throughout the first eight years of their children's lives.

The research, involving Telethon Kids Institute, measured [mothers'](#) work-family conflict and [psychological distress](#) in two-year intervals from the time their children were 0-1 up to 8-9 years of age.

Contrary to expectations, the researchers found these stressors didn't diminish as children got older, but remained relatively consistent.

"It may have been expected that as mothers gain more experience in being both a parent and an employee they would cope better with work-family conflict over time," Telethon Professor Stephen Zubrick says.

"Or that the negative interplay between work-family conflict and psychological distress would be either heightened by or confined to a specific life course stage.

"In contrast, we found that conflicting work and family roles showed a similarly adverse impact on mothers' well-being when their children were toddlers, preschoolers and school age."

A mother's age, job satisfaction, the size of the family and how rich or poor the family was did little to change this situation.

Instead, researchers concluded that parents are always facing new and different challenges.

For example, mums replace the need to spend long hours taking care of babies in the early days with part-time work when their kids get a bit older.

Once they reach [school age](#), women not only tend to increase their part-time hours, but have to deal with strict school hours and getting kids to activities and sports—creating new sources of stress.

But everyone's situation is different.

Researchers found older mothers and those with more money had lower psychological distress but greater work-family conflict.

"This may be due to [older mothers](#) being more advanced in their career who thus have associated increased responsibilities and work hours," Prof Zubrick says.

"As mothers progress at work, they may face ongoing complexity in managing work-family demands, which may not be fully supported by the resources available to them from within and outside the workplace."

If unaddressed, this could hurt their mental health—and that of their children.

Prof Zubrick says the study highlights the need for companies to have supportive policies for all mothers, not just those with newborns, including better family leave and flexible hours.

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.

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