Attitudes Toward Women in the Workforce: The Impact of Maternal Employment in Adolescence
Tina Jiwatram, MSW, Shilpi Sharma, MSW, Julia Shu-Hua Wang, MSW & Hans Oh, MSW
Columbia University School of Social Work

BACKGROUND
• More mothers are entering the workforce than in previous eras
• The mother is a critical agent in the formation of her child’s views on gender
• Gender role attitudes form during the early stages of human development, particularly in adolescence
• Child attitude formation about women depends on several variables including:
  • parental views about women
  • parental educational level
  • child-rearing style
• maternal employment
• For males: maternal employment is generally positively associated with liberal attitudes towards women in the workforce and own lifestyle choices
• For males: maternal employment is not associated or only slightly positively associated with liberal attitudes towards women in the workforce

LIMITATIONS OF PAST RESEARCH EXAMINING MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT EFFECTS ON ATTITUDE FORMATION
• Retrospective designs
• Most studies were cross-sectional
• Many studies used small sample sizes
• Few studies included male attitudes
• Many only recruited college students as sample group

STUDY AIM
To examine the relationship between a person’s attitude towards women in the workforce and maternal employment status during his or her childhood.

METHODS
ATTITUDE TOWARD WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE: THE IMPACT OF MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT IN ADOLESCENCE

We address past limitations by:
• Using a large national sample
• Using multiple time-points from a longitudinal dataset
• Controlling for a various confounders

RESULTS
MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT STATUS
• Across life stages and between genders, maternal employment is associated with more liberal attitudes, holding other variables constant.
• Respondents whose mothers worked the full-year expressed more liberal attitudes than those whose mothers worked only part of the year or not at all.

LIFE CYCLE TRENDS - CHANGES BETWEEN 1979, 1987 AND 2004
• Respondents expressed their most liberal attitude when in their twenties (i.e. in 1987).
• Respondents expressed their most conservative attitudes during adolescence (in 1984)

DISCUSSION
SUMMARY
• Maternal employment exhibits long-term associations with more liberal gender attitudes
• Women expressed more liberal attitudes than men
• Men whose mothers worked expressed more liberal attitudes than those whose mothers did not work

LIMITATIONS
• Limited measurement of independent variable - maternal employment was limited to all, part, or none during the year
• Additionally, maternal employment was only captured in 1979
• Important mediators were not measured including child-rearing style and gender attitudes of the mother

IMPLICATIONS
• Identifying maternal employment as a mechanism for more liberal gender attitude formation can inform
  (1) the ongoing discussion around employment incentives for mothers
  (2) the creation of child-friendly and female-friendly work environments
  (3) the development of family leave policies

Correspondence can be directed to: jw2674@columbia.edu