FIREFIGHTING AND FATHERING:
WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT, PARENTING STRESS,
AND SATISFACTION WITH PARENTING AND CHILD BEHAVIOR

Using a sample of fathers who are firefighters (N = 473), we first examined the link between work role stressors and fatherhood role salience in predicting work-to-family conflict. Second, we examined how each of those was associated with parenting stress and satisfaction with parenting and children’s behavior. Occupational stress, working over 60 hours per week, and lack of sleep were associated with greater work-to-family conflict, as was perceived childcare load. Work-to-family conflict was associated with higher parenting stress and lower parenting satisfaction. Working more than 60 hours per week significantly predicted lower satisfaction with children’s behavior. Fatherhood role salience factors were also associated with parenting stress and parenting satisfaction. These results highlight the importance of work-to-family conflict in fathering research and suggest that the salience of the fatherhood role provides a contextual understanding for the relationship between work and parenting in fathers’ lives.

Keywords: work-family conflict, work stress, parenting stress, parenting satisfaction, child behavior, importance of fatherhood

As the U.S. has transitioned into a society where the majority of parents are dual-earner or single (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002), today’s employed fathers tend to have substantial household responsibilities in addition to work obligations (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). Fathers spend more time caring for their children than they did a few decades ago (Bianchi, 2000), despite continuing to feel that breadwinning is central to being a “good father” (Winslow, 2005). Striving to meet both involved fathering and breadwinning ideals, men report increasing conflicts between their work and family demands (Nomaguchi, 2009; Townsend, 2002). Work-family conflict refers...
to an inter-role conflict in which work and family role demands are mutually incompatible; each role places unique demands on a person’s time and energy (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Conflicts can be bi-directional (Frone et al., 1997), but work-to-family conflict is of particular interest for parenting outcomes. Work-to-family conflict has also been associated with numerous negative outcomes for individuals and families, including poor health and well-being (see Allen et al., 2000 for a review), low marital quality (Matthews, Conger, & Wickrama, 1996), and negative behavioral and emotional outcomes (see Frone, 2003 for a review). Prior research on work-family conflict has largely considered conflicts felt by working mothers. Indeed, researchers have been slow to acknowledge that working fathers might experience similar conflicts (Cohen, 1993), though more recent research documents that fathers experience levels of work-family conflict that are similar to those felt by working mothers (Frone, 2003; Hill, Hawkins, Martinson, & Ferris, 2003; Namaguchi, 2009; Winslow, 2005).

Parenting stress, or the fatigue and time strain due to parenting, has been linked to children’s negative developmental functioning (Creasey & Jarvis, 1994), adolescents’ self-concept (Putnick et al., 2008), the quality of parent-child interactions (Noppe et al., 1990) and the marital relationship (Lavee, Sharlin, & Katz, 1996). Alternatively, parents who are more satisfied or happier with their parenting tend to report better physical and mental health (Umberson & Williams, 1993; Wickrama et al., 2001), less harshness of discipline (Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993) and positive family outcomes (e.g., Downing-Matibag, 2009). Over the past forty years, men have begun to share the parenting role more with mothers and have increased their time with children (Bianchi, 2000). Given the shift from the traditional division of labor to a more egalitarian one, understanding how fathers’ work role is linked to the family role is of growing interest to family researchers. Fathers’ parenting attitudes and behaviors in the context of work-family conflict, however, have received limited attention (Cinamon, Weisel, & Tzuk, 2007). One of the few exceptions was a study by Williams and Alliger (1994) who studied both mothers’ and fathers’ ability to deal with daily work and family role responsibilities. Juggling work and family was associated with higher overall distress in all parents, though specific parenting outcomes were not examined.

Understanding how fathers’ work and family role experiences are connected can inform employers about how to better accommodate all their employees, not just mothers. Integrating work and family roles is an issue relevant to all employees; it is not solely a women’s issue. We extend previous research by documenting how work role stressors and fatherhood role salience are related to fathers’ levels of work-to-family conflict, and we examine the importance of work-to-family conflict on parenting stress and satisfaction of parenting and children’s behavior. Further, we conduct this research among fathers in an occupation with multiple work stressors: firefighting. Restricting analyses to focus on an occupation with multiple stressors experienced by all employees allows us to better understand contextual role and identity influences on parenting stress and satisfaction with parenting and child behavior.
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The present study is situated within role stress and identity theory frameworks. Role stress is the result of work or family conditions that put strain on an individual; work-family conflict is a type of role strain (Kahn & Quinn, 1970). The boundary between the contexts of work and family is permeable, such that what happens at work can influence what happens at home or how one feels at home (Eckenrode & Gore, 1990; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Stressful experiences at the fire station and during rescues, for example, can therefore “spill over” and influence behavior in the family role (Staines, 1980). Despite similar work stressors, however, not all employees with certain work demands report high conflict.

Role identity theory (Stryker, 1968) can explain individuals’ attitudes and behaviors in different roles. The self is comprised of multiple role identities (e.g., father, firefighter), each with expectations, meanings, values, and scripts attached to them. Rane and McBride (2000) found that fathers who placed a higher value on the fathering role were more engaged and involved with their children. We posit that fatherhood role salience has important implications for understanding the link between work and parenting outcomes, such that if fatherhood is of low value or if fathers perceive themselves to be doing more than their fair share of childcare, they may experience greater work-to-family conflict as well as more negative parenting behaviors or experiences. Therefore, the degree to which fathers feel more work-to-family conflict or are stressed or satisfied with their parenting and children’s behavior is assumed to be shaped by both structural circumstances (i.e., work stressors) as well as by attitudes and stressors regarding fatherhood (i.e., fatherhood role identity).

Working Fathers

Once thought to be separate spheres, work and family are viewed as interconnected—now, for women and men (Coltrane, 1996; Kanter, 1977). Work and family literature has predominantly focused on the associations between maternal employment, well-being, and child outcomes given traditional gender role ideologies. Yet even though men still lag behind women in terms of their parental involvement (Coltrane, 1996; Parke, 1996), men have increased their time in the parenting role. Fathers can have a unique and influential role in children’s development. Thus attention is needed to what specific factors at work can increase experiences of conflict between the two spheres and what factors can influence their satisfaction with fathering. By understanding those associations, researchers can develop strategies for fostering that association ultimately for the benefit of fathers, mothers, and children. Although as a whole fathers seem to be more involved, there is still variability in how much they are involved, from little to active (Coltrane, 1996). Thus, the link between work-family conflict and parenting role stress and satisfaction could be explained by the amount of time spent in that role and how salient the fathering role is to men.
Work Role Stressors and Work-to-Family Conflict: The Firefighting Case

Firefighters face a number of stressors on the job, including long work hours, rotating shifts, and experiences that can be traumatic or even life threatening, all of which place firefighters at a high risk for negative parenting outcomes. The occupational conditions inherent in the firefighting profession have been shown to be particularly problematic for workers and their families in other contexts, including long work hours (Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001), nonstandard shifts (Presser, 2003), and stressful work conditions (Bianchi, Casper, & King, 2005). In the present study we examined the following work conditions: occupational stress, working over 60 hours per week, experiencing lack of sleep (i.e., because shifts are typically 24-hours long, firefighters may miss regular sleep periods), feeling that one’s life is in danger due to work, and experiencing a co-worker’s death on the job.

Occupational stress. The nature of the job can be stressful and traumatic for firefighters. Chronic job stress is associated with numerous negative consequences for the family. Job stress has been linked to negative individual mental and physical health outcomes (Bianchi et al., 2005) and work-to-family conflict (Wierda-Boer, Gerris, & Vermulst, 2009).

Long work shifts. According to Totterdell (2005), “The mental and physical health of workers depends not only on what they do at work but also on when they work and for how long they work” (p. 35). Long, rotating, non-standard shifts have been a regular part of the fire service since its inception in the U.S. in the late 1700s (IAFF, 2007). Firefighters originally worked 24-hour shifts and only left the fire stations during slow periods (Cooper, 1995). In the 1930s and 1940s, the local unions were instrumental in changing the working hours of firefighters from continuous shifts to rotating shifts, which still exist today (IAFF, 2007; Rule, 1999). Most fire departments in the United States utilize rotating shifts of 24 hours on-duty and 48 hours off, for an average work week of 56 hours (Rule, 1999). As work hours increase, particularly for men, mental and physical health suffers (Artazcoz et al., 2009). Rotating shifts have been found to be the most detrimental type of nonstandard shift for family functioning (Grosswald, 2003); however, the more that spouses’ shifts do not overlap, the greater involvement fathers have in child care (Brayfield, 1995) and the more fathers report feeling attached to their children (Deutsch, 1999).

Lack of sleep. Work demands have been shown to impact parental sleep and fatigue (Bouvin, Tremblay, & James, 2007). Because of the 24-hour shifts, firefighters experience occasional shifts without sleep (Paley & Tepas, 1994). There is a gap in research on sleep and work-family outcomes (Linton, 2004), though recent research indicates that sleep is significantly associated with work-family conflict (Lallukka, Rahkonen, Lahelma, & Arber, 2009).
Dangerous and traumatic working conditions. Prior research suggests that working in traumatic and disaster contexts can impair mental and physical health and consequences can persist for prolonged periods. Workers in critical occupations such as firefighters, police officers, and emergency personnel are at a much higher risk of experiencing traumatic events than the population at large (Paton & Violanti, 1996). Firefighters are regularly exposed to gruesome injuries and death, and they often face dangerous, unpredictable situations (Beaton et al., 1998; Brown et al., 2002). Approximately 22 percent of U.S. firefighters meet the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Corneil et al., 1999).

Drawing on theory and prior research, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1**. Work stressors, including occupational stress, long work hours, lacking sleep, feeling that one's life is in danger, and experiencing the death of a fellow firefighter will be associated with higher work-to-family conflict.

Work-to-Family Conflict and Parenting Stress and Satisfaction with Parenting and Children’s Behavior

Both the structure of work and the conflicts between work and family contexts have important implications for individual and family well-being (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Although most of the work-family literature has focused on mothers managing the two roles, research over the years examining work and parenting associations among fathers has increased. There is clearly a need for such research; fathers in dual-earner marriages have experienced the largest increase in work-family conflict over the past several decades (Nomaguchi, 2009).

Most research on parenting focuses on negative outcomes rather than positive ones, such as satisfaction with the parental role or children’s behavior. There are no articles known to the authors linking work-family conflict and satisfaction with parenting or children’s behavior. To the extent that work-family conflict is linked to lower quality of family life, it is also likely to be linked to lower parental satisfaction. If strain from the work role takes its toll on the father, he may not be able to enjoy the parenting role as much as he would if he had the energy and time. Related to parenting stress and satisfaction we make the following predictions:

**Hypothesis 2**. Work-to-family conflict will be positively associated with parenting stress.

**Hypothesis 3**. Work-to-family conflict will be negatively associated with parenting satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 4**. Work-to-family conflict will be negatively associated with satisfaction with children’s behavior.

Fatherhood Role Salience

Fatherhood role salience. Work-family research typically examines how work characteristics or stressors are associated with individual and family well-being, but such
research often fails to consider individual characteristics that might influence the relationship. When considering how fathers in a multiple-stressor occupation experience work-to-family conflict, the priority they assign to fatherhood itself, or to fathering activities, may also be important. Much prior research on fathers working long hours has focused on men in professional/managerial occupations. These men often express an ideological commitment to fatherhood and shared parenting, though many fail to achieve fully shared parenting (Cooper, 2002). It is unclear how fathers in long-hour, rotating-shift emergency service occupations, such as firefighting, view fatherhood or participate in shared parenting, but prior research indicates that greater fatherhood salience is linked to greater family involvement (Rane & McBride, 2000), suggesting the potential for greater work-to-family conflict. Guided by an integrated role stress and identity perspective, we make these last hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 5.** Fatherhood role salience, including the importance of fatherhood and participation in shared parenting, will be associated with higher work-to-family conflict.

**Hypothesis 6.** Fatherhood role salience will be associated with lower parenting stress.

**Hypothesis 7.** Fatherhood role salience will be associated with greater parenting satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 8.** Fatherhood role salience will be associated with greater satisfaction of children’s behavior.

**Psychosocial Well-being and Demographic Characteristics**

We expect that all relationships will remain significant even after controlling for psychosocial well-being and demographic characteristics. Common occupational conditions do not equate to equal outcomes; all firefighters who are fathers facing these conditions will not experience work-family conflict and/or negative parenting outcomes. For that reason, the present study accounted for individual differences in demographic and psychosocial aspects of well-being important in the work-family literature (i.e., depressive symptoms, social support, sleep, and health). Specifically, we controlled for age, family income, number of children, partner status, and race, which have been linked to significant work-family and/or parenting findings (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Prior research on firefighters suggests that (a) firefighters report higher rates of depression than the average working population (Regehr et al., 2000); (b) social support mediates the negative effects of trauma on consequences (Solomon, 1986); and (c) health risks are common for firefighters, including high rates of heart disease (Kales et al., 2007). It is expected that the associations between work stressors, work-to-family conflict, and parental stress and satisfaction may be associated with individual differences in psychosocial wellbeing; therefore, we controlled for indices found to be important in the work-family literature, including depressive symptoms, social support, sleep, and health in addition to demographic characteristics.
The Present Study

In sum, utilizing data from a statewide sample of firefighters, this paper addresses three research questions:

1. In an occupation with multiple risks, which negative work stressors are most salient for fathers’ work-to-family conflict?
2. How is fatherhood role salience associated with father’s level of work-to-family conflict?
3. How are fathers’ work stressors, fatherhood role salience, and work-to-family conflict related to their parenting stress and satisfaction with parenting and children’s behavior?

Method

Participants

The current paper utilizes the 2010 Survey of Firefighters’ Work and Family Lives, an in-person survey of 698 firefighters throughout a state in the south-central region of the U.S. Efforts were made to survey large and small fire departments in geographic locations throughout the state. Surveys were conducted at twelve fire departments, with a total of 689 male and 9 female participants. All fire departments surveyed utilized a 24-hour rotating schedule, and the research team conducted surveys three days in a row at each department to offer all firefighters the opportunity to participate. In the largest department surveyed, fire district chiefs were trained and assisted with data collection efforts. Approximately 64 percent of the firefighters who were asked to participate in the study chose to do so, and the majority of questions had less than 5 percent missing (family income had the most missing data, with approximately 8 percent of respondents leaving the question blank). The survey took 35-45 minutes for the firefighters to fill out, and the men were on duty during their survey participation. Often, firefighters were called out in the middle of filling out their surveys. In nearly every case, research team members were able to wait due to the short length of most calls (e.g., less than one hour). In one case involving a large fire, the research team was able to leave surveys and sealable envelopes for the firefighters to fill out that evening, which were retrieved the next day.

The surveys were anonymous; no identifying information other than department and station were collected. The purpose of the survey was to increase understanding of firefighters’ work and family conflicts, stressors, and supports in an effort to promote resilience among firefighters and their families. We restrict the sample for this paper to the 473 male firefighters who reported they had at least one child younger than 19 in their care (though not necessarily in their residence).
MEASURES

Work Role Stressors

Occupational stress was assessed by level of agreement to the statement, “My job is more stressful than I have ever imagined” and ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Working more than 60 hours per week was assessed by a question asking, “How many hours a week do you work, in an average week, at all of your jobs?” Answers of “More than 60 hours/week” were coded as a 1; all other answers were coded as a 0. Lack of sleep was assessed by a question that asked, “During the past month, how often did you have a period of 24 hours or more without any sleep?” Respondents reporting “not during the past month” were coded as a 0, whereas respondents reporting a 24-hour period occurring “less than once a week,” “once or twice a week,” or “three or more times a week” were coded as a 1. Life in danger was derived from two questions: “Have you ever felt like your life was endangered while on the job” and “How often do you feel this way?” Respondents were asked the second question if they responded positively to the first question. Responses of “sometimes” or “all the time” to the second question were coded as a 1, and all other responses (including “no” to the first question) were coded as a 0. Traumatic experience is an indicator variable, with 1 indicating that the respondent had seen a fellow firefighter killed in the line of duty.

Fatherhood Role Salience

The importance of fatherhood scale was assessed by level of agreement to four questions developed by Johnson and White (2009), including: “Having children is important because it will make me feel complete as a man;” and “with children, my life will be more fulfilling.” The scale (alpha reliability of .80) utilized the mean of available items and ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Perceived caregiving load was measured by responses to the question, “Do you do your fair share of caring for the children?” Responses range from 1 = (I do much less than my fair share) to 5 = (I do much more than my fair share).

Covariates

Psychosocial covariates. Psychosocial and physical symptoms were used as indicators of general well-being. Psychological distress was assessed by a modified (10-item) version of the CES-D scale (see Radloff, 1977). Items were coded or reverse-coded so that high scores indicate high levels of depressive symptoms. Individual items as well as the constructed scale are used for the current study. Respondents were asked how often they felt or behaved in certain ways during the past two weeks (e.g., “I was bothered by things that don’t usually bother me.”), Responses were rated on a 4-point scale (for example, 1 = rarely, 4 = all of the time), and the composite scale was the mean re-
response to the items. The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ coefficient for the CES-D scale with this sample is .80. Perceived social support was assessed by the 12-item Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). Questions such as, “My friends really try to help me,” were assessed on a 7-point scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The scale in the current paper (alpha reliability of .94) used the mean of available items. Physical symptoms were assessed with nine items from a scale developed by Spector and Jex (1998). These symptoms (e.g., headache, backache, stomach-ache, palpitations or irregular heartbeat) were rated with five response options (0 = never, 4 = all the time). The Cronbach’s alpha for physical symptoms is .75.

Background characteristics. Covariates include demographic characteristics of age (in years), family income [categorical, ranging from 1 (less than $10,000 per year) to 11 (over $100,000 per year)], number of children under 19 in the respondent’s care, living with a partner in a union (no/yes), and white (1 = white; 0 = nonwhite).

Dependent Variables

Work-to-family conflict was based on a scale using five items adapted from Marshall and Barnett (1991, 1993). The items have also been utilized in the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey (Wooden, Simon, & Watson, 2002). The variables used a 5-point Likert scale to measure how strongly respondents agreed with the following questions: (a) “Because of the requirements of my job, my family time is less enjoyable and more pressurized;” (b) “Because of the requirements of my job, I miss out on home or family activities that I would prefer to participate in;” (c) “My job leaves me with too little time or energy to be the kind of parent I want to be;” and (d) “My job leaves me with too little time or energy to be the kind of spouse or partner I want to be.” Because not all firefighters in this sample answered all questions (e.g., single firefighters who did not answer the final question in the scale regarding time or energy within a relationship), the scale is comprised of the mean of available items and ranges from 1 to 5, with high values indicating higher work-to-family conflict. The Cronbach’s alpha for the scale in the current sample is .82.

The Parenting Stress Index (PSI) is an instrument designed to identify the relative magnitude and sources of stress the parent feels in the parent-child system (Abidin, 1990). This study utilized three items from the larger 102-item index. Questions probed respondents how strongly they agreed or disagreed to feeling (a) “tired, worn out, or exhausted from meeting the needs of my children;” (b) “trapped by my responsibilities as a parent;” and (c) “that taking care of my child/children is much more work than pleasure.” The Cronbach’s alpha for the parenting stress scale in this sample is .71, and the mean of available items was used for analyses, with the responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Parenting satisfaction was assessed by a question asking, “On the whole, how satisfied are you with your parenting? Responses are coded from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).
Satisfaction with child/ren’s behavior was derived from a question that asked, “On the whole, how satisfied are you with your children’s behavior?” and is a continuous variable ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

Analytic Strategy

We first evaluated the relative importance of occupational stress, working long hours (over 60/week), lack of sleep, how often the respondent feels his life is in danger, and having a traumatic experience for explaining differences in work-to-family conflict among firefighters using OLS regression. Controls for background variables of age, family income, number of children, living with a spouse/partner, and race, as well as psychosocial well-being variables of depression, social support, and physical health were also included in Model 1. In Model 2, we added variables representing fatherhood role salience: importance of fatherhood and perceived unfairness of care responsibilities.

We then examined how work role stressors, fatherhood role salience, and work-to-family conflict were related to parenting stress, satisfaction with parenting, and satisfaction with children’s behavior. In Model 1 for each dependent variable, we included work role stressors, fatherhood role salience, background characteristics, and psychosocial well-being factors. In Model 2, we added work-to-family conflict. Because of the skew of the dependent variables in the parenting outcome analyses (parenting stress, satisfaction with parenting, and satisfaction with children’s behavior), the variables utilized in the models presented were first log transformed to make the distribution of the outcome variables more normally distributed.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

The means, standard deviations, and range among the study variables are presented in Table 1. They offer interesting insights about the work and family lives of fathers who are firefighters. The mean work-to-family conflict score was approximately a 3—representing “neutral” on the Likert-style scale. Closer examination of the range of work-to-family conflict scores using a histogram (not shown) indicated a roughly normal distribution of responses. Parenting stress, parenting satisfaction, and satisfaction with children’s behavior, on the other hand, were highly skewed, with a low average parenting stress score and high parenting and children’s behavior satisfaction scores. This distribution is not surprising, given the social desirability of reporting positive parenting behaviors (Morsbach & Prinz, 2006). Also notable in the descriptive statistics is the high proportion of firefighters (57%) working over 60 hours per week. Over 40 percent reported missing sleep within the past month, nearly half reported feeling that their lives were often in danger, and on average, the firefighters had witnessed a fellow firefighter killed in the line of duty.
Substantive Analyses

Work role stressors and work-to-family conflict. The first aim of this paper was to examine how multiple work stressors are linked to work-to-family conflict for fathers in a high-stress occupation. Additionally, we were interested in the relationship between fatherhood role salience and work-to-family conflict. The OLS regression analysis of work stressors and fatherhood role salience predicting work-to-family conflict is presented in Table 2. Background and psychosocial well-being variables were included in all models (not shown in the tables). The results of Model 1 indicated that greater occupational stress, working more than 60 hours per week, and lacking sleep were significantly associated with greater work-to-family conflict. The R² was .31 for the first
Model. Hypothesis 1 was partially supported; feeling that one’s life is often in danger and experiencing the death of a fellow firefighter in the line of duty were not significantly related to greater work-to-family conflict.

We also explored how fatherhood role salience is related to work-to-family conflict. Thus, Model 2 included the importance of fatherhood and perceived caregiving load. Their inclusion in Model 2 did not reduce the effects of the significant work role stressors, and the analyses indicate that respondents who reported doing a lot of the caregiving had lower levels of work-to-family conflict. Thus Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

**Work-to-family conflict and parenting stress, satisfaction with parenting, and satisfaction with children’s behavior.** Multivariate analyses were conducted predicting parenting stress, parenting satisfaction, and satisfaction with children’s behavior from work-to-family conflict, controlling for psychosocial well-being and background variables (Table 3). Results from the parenting stress analysis reveal a significant, negative association between the importance of fatherhood and parenting stress. The full model (Model 2) indicates a significant association between greater work-to-family conflict and parenting stress, satisfaction with parenting, and satisfaction with children’s behavior.

### Table 2
*Results of OLS Models Predicting Work-to-Family Conflict by Work Role Stressors, Fatherhood Role Salience, and Covariates (N = 473)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Work role stressors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupational stress</td>
<td>.302***</td>
<td>.040</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work over 60 hrs/wk</td>
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<td>Lack of sleep</td>
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<td>.074</td>
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<td>Life in danger</td>
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<td>.073</td>
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<td>Traumatic experience</td>
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<td><strong>Fatherhood role salience</strong></td>
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<td>Importance of fatherhood</td>
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<td>Perceived childcare load</td>
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<td>.037</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>.415</td>
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<tr>
<td>R square change</td>
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*Note.* All models control for background characteristics (age, family income, number of children under 19, partner status, race) and psychosocial well-being (depression, social support, and health problems).

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*
and parenting stress. No work stressors were significantly associated with parenting stress. Hypotheses 2 and 6 were supported.

Analyses of parenting satisfaction indicate significant associations between fatherhood role salience and parenting satisfaction; valuing fatherhood as more important and perceptions of higher caregiving load were significantly associated with parenting satisfaction. In Model 2, occupational stress is associated with more parenting satisfaction, whereas more work-to-family conflict is related to lower parenting satisfaction. Hypotheses 3 and 7 were therefore supported.

Results from the analyses predicting satisfaction with children’s behavior reveal a significant association between work stressors and less satisfaction; firefighters with more occupational stress and those working more than 60 hours per week reported less satisfaction with children’s behavior. The addition to work-to-family conflict in Model 2 did not change the association between high work hours and lower satisfaction with children’s behavior. Because there were no significant relationships between work-to-family conflict or fatherhood role salience, Hypotheses 4 and 8 were not supported.

DISCUSSION

The current study examined work and role salience predictors of work-to-family conflict for fathers in an occupation with multiple work stressors—firefighting—and it determined to what extent work-to-family conflict predicted parenting stress, satisfaction with parenting, and satisfaction with children’s behavior. Descriptive findings reveal that firefighting is, indeed, an occupation with many potential stressors for fathers. The majority work over 60 hours per week, and nearly half of our sample reported going without sleep in the past month and feeling that their lives are in danger at times. On average, the firefighters had seen a fellow firefighter killed in the line of duty. We were somewhat surprised, therefore, to find that the firefighters, on average, reported feeling lower stress than the neutral response. Similarly, we were surprised to note that the average work-to-family conflict rating was about neutral. It is unclear if these responses are based on normative expectations of a heavily male-dominated career or if other factors are protective for firefighters, such as high social support.

The hypothesis regarding work role stressors and work-to-family conflict was partially supported, as expected based on prior research. Higher occupational stress, working more than 60 hours per week, and lacking sleep were linked to work-to-family conflict in the expected directions. We did not find that feeling that one’s life is often in danger or that seeing a fellow firefighter killed are related to higher work-to-family conflict, but we suspect that, as work stressors, they may be associated with negative individual consequences, such as distress or anxiety.

Our second hypothesis—that work-to-family conflict would be related to greater parenting stress—was also supported. We found that even after controlling for work conditions, fathering attitudes and experiences, psychosocial well-being, and background characteristics, work-to-family conflict continued to show a significant, positive association with parenting stress even though work stressors did not have a significant re-
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Satisfaction with Parenting</th>
<th>Satisfaction with Children’s Behavior</th>
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<td>.034</td>
<td>-.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life in danger</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>-.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic experience</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatherhood role salience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of fatherhood</td>
<td>-.064*</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.038*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived childcare load</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-to-family conflict</td>
<td>.232</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td>1.323***.147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R square</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R square change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All models control for background characteristics (age, family income, number of children under 19, partner status, race) and psychosocial well-being (depression, social support, and health problems). The dependent variables are logged due to skew.  
*p < .05. **p < .01. *** p < .001.
relationship. Our third hypothesis, that work-to-family conflict would be significantly associated lower parenting satisfaction, was also supported.

Our fourth hypothesis was that work-to-family conflict would be negatively associated with satisfaction with children’s behavior, but we did not find support for this relationship. Analyses revealed that working more than 60 hours per week is associated with less satisfaction with children’s behavior, but no other work role stressors were significantly linked with satisfaction with children’s behavior.

Hypotheses 5 through 8 predicted that fatherhood role salience—the importance of fatherhood and perceptions of caregiving load—would be related with work-to-family conflict, parenting stress and satisfaction with parenting, and children’s behavior. We found support for our expectation that lower importance of fatherhood would be associated with greater parenting stress. We also found that greater importance of fatherhood and perceiving a higher load of caregiving responsibilities were related to higher parenting satisfaction. We did not find support that higher fatherhood role salience would be associated with greater satisfaction with children’s behavior.

Strengths and Implications

There are several main contributions of this study. First, our data included a wealth of variables on work stressors, fatherhood role salience, work-family conflict, psychosocial well-being, and a variety of individual and family outcomes. The breadth and depth of the variables enabled us to test the effects of multiple work stressors and fatherhood role salience on work-to-family conflict, and to examine influences of work-to-family conflict, work stressors, fatherhood role salience, psychosocial well-being, and background characteristics on parenting stress and satisfaction with parenting and children’s behavior—variables linked to parenting styles and behaviors, and in turn, child adjustment and development. In addition, our models are theoretically informed by an integration of conceptual perspectives from the work-family and fatherhood fields, and results indicate that both work role stressors and fatherhood role salience are related to work-to-family conflict and parenting outcomes. Thus, our study produced new knowledge about the importance of work stressors and fatherhood role salience for work-to-family conflict, as well as work and fatherhood factors and parenting stress and satisfaction with parenting and children’s behavior.

These findings have important implications. This study highlights the importance of both work role stressors and fatherhood role salience in work-family research. Typically, work stressors alone are used to predict work-to-family conflict, but our results indicate that the meaning that men place on fatherhood also explain some of the conflict that they experience between their work and family roles. This study suggests the importance of work-to-family conflict for fathering research; an analysis of work role stressors on parenting stress without the inclusion of work-to-family conflict may suggest that fathers’ work demands are not linked to their parenting stress, whereas this study indicates that perceptions of the conflict between work and family demands is significantly linked to greater parenting stress. Therefore, our findings reveal insights into
factors that could improve the well-being of both working fathers and their child/ren. For example, workplace policies and programs that reduce work-to-family conflict have the potential to decrease parenting stress and increase parenting satisfaction.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

There are several limitations that should be considered in evaluating the results of our study. First, the sample is restricted to fathers in a single occupation, which limits the representativeness of the findings to fathers in other occupations. There are benefits to an in-depth study of workers in one occupation (see Lewis et al., 2006), and firefighters are rather unique in the multiple stressors that their jobs place on them and their families. We cannot say, however, if work-to-family conflict predicts parenting outcomes as strongly for fathers who work in an occupation with fewer stressors. A second limitation is possible common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), given that there is one reporter (the father) and no objective indicators of work conditions. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the data. Prior research has indicated the bidirectionality of work and family antecedents and consequences (Frone et al., 1997), which we attempted to reduce by examining work-to-family conflict in isolation from family-to-work conflict. Still, the results presented here can only speak to correlation rather than causality. Longitudinal studies would permit researchers to investigate the duration of the link between work stressors, fatherhood role salience, and parenting and how these factors and relationships change over the life course and as children get older. Relatedly, the present study includes a sample of fathers with children up to the age of 19; parenting brings different challenges at different developmental stages and ages of the child. This too should be considered in future research endeavors.

Despite these limitations, however, the current study highlights the importance of including integrating work role stressors and fatherhood role salience in work-family research, as well as the importance of work-to-family conflict in fathering research. Our study examined only three parenting outcomes—parenting stress, satisfaction with parenting, and satisfaction with children’s behavior—but further research is needed on the role of work-to-family conflict on actual parenting behaviors and subsequent children’s adjustment. A large, longitudinal study exploring work stressors, fatherhood role salience, work-family conflict, parenting behaviors, and individual, child, and couple outcomes would be ideal to fully explore these complex relationships.

**REFERENCES**


Family conflict styles are learned in childhood. Years of exposure to the same patterns indoctrinate the child with the family’s conflict style (e.g., Patterson, Reid, and Dishion 1992). The parents or primary caregivers usually establish the style for the children. Importantly, both parents’ and children’s conflict behaviors evolve over time. For example, before children reach the age of sixteen months, mothers are more likely to use distraction or simple labels such as “naughty” or “nice” during conflict episodes. Mothers and fathers take on different roles during conflict than they had with their younger children. In particular, adolescent boys begin to act more assertive and forceful with their mothers but not their fathers. Parenting behaviors: Associated characteristics and child outcomes (Order No. AAM9809732). Available from PsycINFO. Triple P-positive parenting program: Towards an empirically validated multilevel parenting and family support strategy for the prevention of behavior and emotional problems in children. Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 2(2), 71–90. Sears, R. R., Maccoby, E., and Levin, H. (1957). Parents’ work stress linked to worse parent-child relationships and worse child behaviour. By Child & Family Blog Editor May 2016 No Comments. Child Development Research, Insights and Science Briefs to Your Inbox. For fathers it’s different: if he is suffering work-family conflict, the child’s behaviour is more likely to be bad. The authors suggest that mothers may be better at managing their parenting role, possibly because theirs is a much more established role than the parenting role of fathers. Also, mothers may be able to get better support from others, and overall they spend more time with their children, which might mitigate the impact of work-family conflict. So work family conflict may be upsetting fathers’ parenting practice more directly. References.