Married mothers' work patterns: the job-family compromise

Today's married mothers are twice as likely to work full time all year than their predecessors of 20 years ago

Howard V. Hayghe
and
Suzanne M. Bianchi

Married mothers form a significant segment of the female work force. Likewise, the families of these working mothers account for a sizable share of all families, and contain almost half of the Nation's children.[1] Consequently, married mothers' market work (or work for pay or profit) plays a role in the lives of sizable numbers of families and children.

Over the past two decades, the proportions of mothers (living with their husbands) who were in the labor force rose dramatically. By 1992, two-thirds of all married mothers were working or looking for work, including more than half of those with children under age 6. These familiar statistics (labor force participation rates) present only a snapshot—taken at a very specific point in time—of married mothers as workers. They do not indicate how much time these mothers spend engaged in market work over any sort of extended period. Using only the participation rate data, therefore, makes it difficult to determine the significance of married mothers' employment with regard, not only to family life, but also to women's labor force trends as a whole.

To understand more clearly how married mothers affect female labor force participation patterns overall, as well as the family/work interface, analysts need to examine measures of the amount of time these mothers spend at work and how that has changed over the years. The amount of time married mothers spend working for pay affects, not only their families and children, but also the mothers' personal economic outcomes.[2] In addition, the labor market experience of today's married mothers may influence the educational and career choices of their daughters, as well as the marriage and family formation patterns of the younger generation.

This article examines the issue of time spent in market work by looking at married mothers' work experience during calendar year 1992. The data are based on information collected yearly in March in the Current Population Survey.[3] The term "work experience" refers to the number of weeks married mothers worked during the period of a calendar year and whether they worked full time or part time. Differences in work experience by a variety of personal and family characteristics—including husbands' annual work experience—are also examined. Additionally, this article traces the broad trends in married mothers' work experience over the past 20 years.[4]

Work experience, 1992

About 18 million married mothers—or nearly three-fourths of the total—worked at some time during the 1992 calendar year. More than 9 million—nearly 4 out of 10—worked year round full time.[5]

The impact of child-care obligations on the amount of time married mothers choose to work during the year can be discerned from table 1 which compares the work experience of married

Howard V. Hayghe is an economist in the Division of Labor Force Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics and Suzanne M. Bianchi is assistant chief for Social and Demographic Statistics, Population Division, Bureau of the Census. Andrea Walter, also of the Census Bureau, provided statistical support.

mothers with that of women without children and with that of men in 1992. (It should be noted that the 20 to 54 year age interval for women and men without children and all men was selected for these comparisons because almost all parents fall into that age category. Younger or older persons—who are unlikely to have children under 18—have considerably different work experience patterns.) As can be seen, 73 percent of the married mothers had work experience during 1992, and only 37 percent worked year round full time. By contrast, 85 percent of the women with no children had work experience and 54 percent were year-round full-time workers. Likewise, 92 percent of the men worked at some time during 1992 and 66 percent worked year round full time.

Among the men, annual work experience also differed by the presence of children, although in this case, the differences ran in the opposite direction. Those who were not fathers were significantly *less* likely to have worked at all during the year, or to have worked year round full time than those who were fathers.

Child-care obligations. Many married mothers' work patterns differ by the needs of their children. Thus, while 78 percent of mothers whose youngest child was school age (6 to 17 years old) worked at some time in 1992, the proportion was lower—67 percent—among those whose youngest child was under 6 (table 2). The older children spend much of the year in school and, when they are not in school, may not require the kind of close parental supervision as do preschool children. Thus, 43 percent of the mothers whose youngest child was of school age worked year round full time, compared with 31 percent of mothers with children under 6. Roughly the same proportions of each group of mothers were part-year and/or part-time workers, but mothers of preschoolers were about half again as likely as the mothers of older children to stay at home all year. Clearly, child-care responsibilities affect the annual work experience of married mothers, an effect that is much greater for mothers of young children.

Race and Hispanic origin. Hispanic mothers are less likely to work during a year than their white or black counterparts. About 6 out of 10 Hispanic mothers worked at some time during 1992, compared with a little more than 7 out of 10 white mothers and 8 of 10 black married mothers (table 3). Likewise, Hispanic married mothers were also less likely to work year round full time. While these differences may reflect different notions of family life and child rearing, they may also reflect the fact that Hispanic mothers have a more difficult time finding jobs, as indicated by their higher unemployment rate.[6]

Table 1. **Work experience of persons in 1992 by selected characteristics, March 1993**

[Numbers in thousands]

Work experience	Parents		Persons 20 to 54 years old		
	Married mothers	All fathers	Women with no children under 18	Men: Total	Men: With no children under 18
Total	24,706	26,182	30,616	62,625	36,443
Worked in 1992	18,018	24,784	26,007	57,282	32,498
As percent of total	72.9	94.7	84.9	91.5	89.2
Percent of total who:					
Worked full year in 1992[1]	47.9	77.9	63.5	69.2	62.9
Full time[2]	36.8	76.1	54.1	65.6	58.0
Part time[2]	11.1	1.8	9.4	3.6	4.9
Worked part year in 1992[3]	25.1	16.8	21.5	22.2	26.2
Full time[2]	12.0	14.5	12.8	17.4	19.4
40 to 49 weeks	4.4	6.6	4.9	6.9	7.0
27 to 39 weeks	2.8	3.6	2.9	4.1	4.5
1 to 26 weeks	4.8	4.3	5.0	6.4	7.9
Part time[2]	13.1	2.3	8.7	4.8	6.8
40 to 49 weeks	3.4	0.6	2.7	1.2	1.6
27 to 39 weeks	2.7	0.5	1.8	0.9	1.4
1 to 26 weeks	7.0	1.2	4.2	2.7	3.8
Did not work in 1992	27.1	5.3	15.1	8.6	10.8

[1] Fifty to 52 weeks.

[2] Full time is defined as 35 hours a week or more. Part time is less than 35 hours.

[3] One to 49 weeks.

NOTE: Based on the fact that nearly all parents are 20 to 54 years old, data for men and women 20 to 54 years old with no children under 18 were constructed by subtracting parents from estimates for all 20- to 54-year olds.

Table 2. **Work experience of married mothers in 1992 by age of youngest child, March 1993**

[Numbers in thousands]

Work experience	With children 6 to 17, none younger	With children under 6: Total	With children under 6: Under 3
Marries mothers, total	12,764	11,942	7,168
Worked in 1992	10,004	8,013	4,776
As percent of total	78.4	67.2	66.6
Percent of married mothers who:			
Worked full year in 1992[1]	55.2	40.0	36.3
Full time[2]	42.6	30.6	27.7
Part time[2]	12.6	9.4	8.6
Worked part year in 1992[3]	23.1	27.1	30.4
Full time[2]	11.2	12.7	15.2
40 to 49 weeks	4.2	4.6	5.6
27 to 39 weeks	2.7	2.8	3.4
1 to 26 weeks	4.3	5.3	6.2
Part time[2]	11.9	14.4	15.2
40 to 49 weeks	3.6	3.1	3.1
27 to 39 weeks	2.8	2.7	2.8
1 to 26 weeks	5.5	8.6	9.4
Did not work in 1992	21.6	32.9	33.4

[1] Fifty to 52 weeks.

[2] Full time is defined as 35 hours a week or more. Part time is less than 35 hours.

[3] One to 49 weeks.

For all three groups, the younger the children, the less likely the mothers were to have worked during the year. However, black mothers whose youngest child was under age 6 were more likely

to have worked during the year than their white or Hispanic counterparts. This was true as well among black mothers whose youngest child was 6 to 17. Moreover, the difference in the proportions with work experience between those with school-age children and those with preschoolers was somewhat less among blacks (7 percentage points) than among whites or Hispanics (approximately 12 percentage points).

All three groups of mothers followed the same pattern with regard to year-round full-time work; namely, the younger the children, the less likely the mother was to work all year full time. And, whatever the age of the youngest child, black mothers were much more likely than the others to be year-round, full-time workers.

Working parents. In 7 out of 10 of the 24.7 million two-parent families, both the mother and father worked at some time during 1992. The proportion was higher among families in which the youngest child was 6 to 17 years old than among those with younger children. In a similar fashion, the percentage of families in which both parents were year-round full-time workers (almost 30 percent overall) differed markedly by the ages of the youngest child (table 4).

Given the high proportion of black married mothers who were year-round full-time workers, it is not surprising that the proportion in which both of the parents worked year round full time was larger than that among white two-parent families. By contrast, not only were Hispanic mothers less likely to work year round full time than their white or black counterparts, but so were Hispanic fathers. As a result, both parents were year-round full-time workers in just 2 out of 10 Hispanic families, compared with about 3 out of 10 white families and nearly 4 out of 10 black families.

Trends, 1970–92

A dramatic gain in the proportion of married mothers with work experience was concentrated among those who were year-round full-time workers, resulting in some significant changes in family work patterns.

In 1970, a little more than half of all married mothers worked at all during the year. By 1992, nearly 3 out of 4 did so. The proportion of married mothers who worked year round full time grew from 16 percent in 1970 to 37 percent in 1992. This percentage-point rise was about equal to the decline in the proportion who stayed at home and did not engage in any market work during the year (table 5).

These trends reflect many broad-based changes in American society. Culturally, it has become increasingly acceptable, perhaps even

Table 3. **Work experience of married mothers in 1992 by race and Hispanic origin: age of youngest child, March 1993**

[Numbers in thousands]

Work experience	White				Black				Hispanic origin			
	Total	With children 6 to 17 only	With children under 6		Total	With children 6 to 17 only	With children under 6		Total	With children 6 to 17 only	With children under 6	
			Total	Under 3			Total	Under 3			Total	Under 3
Married mothers, total	21,702	11,207	10,495	6,341	1,863	992	871	495	2,441	1,082	1,359	837
Worked in 1992	15,758	8,786	6,972	4,205	1,481	819	663	357	1,407	704	704	404
As percent of total	72.6	78.4	66.4	66.3	79.5	82.6	76.1	72.1	57.6	65.1	51.8	48.3
Percent of married mothers who:												
Worked full year in 1992[1]	47.3	55.0	39.1	36.0	55.4	59.8	50.2	41.9	36.2	45.7	28.6	25.2
Full time[2]	35.6	41.7	29.1	26.9	49.1	52.6	44.9	36.0	29.5	37.6	23.2	20.4
Part time[2]	11.7	13.3	10.0	9.1	6.3	7.2	5.3	5.9	6.7	8.0	5.5	4.8
Worked part year in 1992[3]	25.2	23.4	27.4	30.4	24.2	22.5	25.9	30.2	21.4	19.3	23.2	23.2
Full time[2]	11.5	10.9	12.3	14.7	15.3	15.1	15.6	19.6	13.6	12.0	14.8	15.6
40 to 49 weeks	4.2	4.0	4.4	5.5	5.6	6.0	5.2	5.9	4.2	4.6	3.9	3.7
27 to 39 weeks	2.6	2.6	2.7	3.2	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.8	3.3	3.0	3.5	4.9
1 to 26 weeks	4.7	4.3	5.2	6.0	5.4	4.9	6.1	8.9	6.1	4.4	7.4	7.0
Part time[2]	13.7	12.5	15.1	15.7	8.9	7.4	10.3	10.6	7.8	7.3	8.4	7.6
40 to 49 weeks	3.5	3.7	3.3	3.1	2.1	1.7	2.5	2.8	1.3	1.5	1.2	1.1
27 to 39 weeks	2.9	3.0	2.9	2.9	1.6	1.4	1.7	3.0	1.8	1.5	2.1	1.8
1 to 26 weeks	7.3	5.8	8.9	9.7	5.2	4.3	6.1	4.8	4.7	4.3	5.1	4.7
Did not work in 1992	27.4	21.6	33.6	33.7	20.5	17.4	23.9	27.9	42.4	35.0	48.2	51.6

[1] Fifty to 52 weeks.

[2] Full time is defined as 35 hours a week or more. Part time is less than 35 hours.

[3] One to 49 weeks.

NOTE: Detail for race and Hispanic-origin groups do not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics are included in both the white and black population groups.

Table 4. **Work experience of fathers and mothers in two-parent families in 1992 by age of youngest child, race, and Hispanic origin, March 1993**

[Numbers in thousands]

Parents' work experience	Total	With children 6 to 17, none younger	With children under 6	White	Black	Hispanic origin
Two-parent families, number	24,706	12,764	11,942	21,702	1,863	2,441
Percent in which:						
Both parents worked during year	70.1	74.8	65.0	70.0	74.1	54.1
Father only worked during year	25.1	19.6	31.0	25.8	16.6	38.8
Mother only worked during year	2.2	3.5	2.1	2.6	5.4	3.6
Two-parent families, percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Father worked year round[1] full time[2]	78.1	78.4	77.7	78.8	71.7	67.3
Mother worked year round[1] full time[2]	29.5	34.3	24.3	28.6	38.0	21.3
Mother worked less than year round full time[3]	28.2	27.8	28.6	29.2	21.8	17.9
Mother did not work	20.4	16.2	24.9	21.0	11.9	28.0
Father worked less than year round full time[3]	17.2	16.1	18.3	17.0	19.1	25.6
Mother worked year round[1] full time[2]	5.7	6.3	5.1	5.5	7.8	6.5
Mother worked less than year round full time[3]	6.7	6.4	7.0	6.7	6.6	8.4
Mother did not work	4.7	3.4	6.2	4.8	4.7	10.8
Father did not work	4.8	5.5	4.0	4.2	9.2	7.1
Mother worked year round[1] full time[2]	1.6	2.0	1.2	1.5	3.2	1.8
Mother worked less than year round full time[3]	1.2	1.5	0.9	1.1	2.1	1.8
Mother did not work	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.6	3.8	3.6

[1] Fifty to 52 weeks.

[2] Full time is defined as 35 hours a week or more. Part time is less than 35 hours.

[3] Worked 1 to 49 weeks, either full or part time.

NOTE: Detail for race and Hispanic-origin groups do not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics are included in both the white and black population groups.

expected, for mothers to be breadwinners as well as caregivers. Also, marriage and childbearing patterns are changing. Women are marrying later, and giving birth later (to fewer children).[7] Thus, they have the opportunity to develop strong ties to the labor market that can withstand the pressures of marriage and child rearing. Also important were the economic conditions—including inflation, unemployment, and slow wage growth—that characterized significant periods of the last two decades. Finally, married mothers who work contribute such a significant proportion of family income[8] that many families would be financially hard-pressed without the mothers' earnings.

Age of youngest child. Rapid gains between 1970 and 1992 in the work experience rate of mothers with preschool children were almost equaled by gains among mothers of older children. Thus, the gap between the two groups barely narrowed. In 1970, about 44 percent of the mothers with preschoolers worked at some time during the year; this rose to 67 percent in 1992, a 23-percentage-point gain. Over the same period, mothers of school-age children posted a 20-point increase, as their work experience rate advanced from 58 percent to 78 percent. For both groups of mothers, the source of the rise was the same: increasing proportions who were year-round full-time workers. In 1970, about 23 percent of the mothers with school-age children worked year round full time, as did 10 percent of the mothers of preschoolers. Twenty-two years later, the proportions had reached 43 percent for mothers with school-age children and 31 percent for those with preschoolers.

Race. Work experience rates for both white and black married mothers rose over the period. While the rates for the blacks have been consistently higher, the gap has narrowed. By 1992, there was a 4-percentage-point gap between the work experience rates for the mothers of school age children and a 10-point difference between the rates for mothers with preschool-age children. In 1970, the differences measured 12 percentage points (school-age children) and 18 percentage points (preschool-age).[9]

The proportions of married mothers working year round full time have not displayed the same narrowing tendencies by race as the overall proportions with work experience. Even though white married mothers have gained rapidly in this

particular measure of labor market participation, so have black married mothers. In 1970, about 15 percent of white mothers were year-round full-time workers, compared with 27 percent of the black mothers. By 1992, the proportions were 36 percent (for white mothers) and 49 percent (for black mothers). In both years, the difference was around 12 percentage points.

The early 1990's

Data for the 1990–92 period suggest that the long-term upward trend in mothers' work experience rates may be slowing, or, perhaps, the rate may have plateaued. (Of course, several more years of data are required before a definitive conclusion can be drawn.) In 1990, about 73 percent of married mothers worked at some time during the year, a figure that rose to 74 percent in the following year. In 1992, the proportion returned to 73 percent. This break in trend, however, did not extend to the proportion who were year-round full-time workers, which continued to grow, rising from 34 percent in 1990 to nearly 37 percent in 1992. It is not clear if these movements might reflect the sluggish and uncertain economic conditions that prevailed during the period or some fundamental change in married mothers' work experience patterns, or both.

Over the 1990–92 period, the work experience rate for mothers with children under 6 changed little, remaining in the 67- to 68-percent range. The work experience rates for both white mothers of children under age 6 and their black counterparts changed little. The work experience rates of mothers whose youngest child was 6 to 17 years old fluctuated over the same period, but the end result was about the same as for the mothers of preschool children—little change. From 1990 to 1991, the work experience rate for these mothers rose from somewhat less than 78 percent to a little more than 79 percent. But, by 1992, it had returned to its 1990 level.

Work and lifestyle patterns

As the proportions of mothers who worked rose—particularly those working year round full time—family work patterns changed. In 1970, as shown on table 6, just 1 two-parent family in 8 included both mother and father who were year-round full-time workers. This proportion has more than doubled since then, with much of the increase taking place among families with chil-

Table 5. **Work experience trends of married mothers by age of youngest child and race, selected years 1970–92**

[Numbers in thousands]

Year and race	With children under 18					With children 6 to 17, none younger					With children under 6				
	Population	Percent who worked during year			Percent who did not work during year	Population	Percent who worked during year			Percent who did not work during year	Population	Percent who worked during year			Percent who did not work during year
		Total	Year round full time[1]	Other[2]			Total	Year round full time[1]	Other[2]			Total	Year round full time[1]	Other[2]	
Total															
1970	24,602	51.3	16.4	34.9	48.7	12,784	57.7	22.8	34.9	42.3	11,919	44.4	9.6	34.8	55.6
1975	25,361	53.7	18.1	35.7	46.3	13,543	59.5	23.4	36.1	40.5	11,819	47.0	11.9	35.2	53.0
1980	25,217	63.4	23.7	39.7	36.6	13,492	68.0	28.9	39.1	32.0	11,725	58.1	17.7	40.4	41.9
1985	25,003	73.9	31.3	42.6	27.1	12,786	72.8	34.6	38.2	27.2	12,217	63.0	22.7	40.3	37.0
1990	24,393	72.8	34.0	38.7	27.2	12,294	77.6	40.0	37.6	22.4	12,099	67.9	28.0	39.9	32.1
1991	24,416	73.5	35.7	37.9	26.5	12,491	79.2	42.2	37.0	20.8	11,925	67.6	28.8	38.7	32.4
1992	24,706	72.9	36.8	36.1	27.1	12,764	78.4	42.6	35.8	21.6	11,942	67.1	30.6	36.5	32.9
White															
1970	22,512	50.2	15.4	34.7	49.8	11,788	56.9	21.8	35.0	43.1	10,723	42.8	8.4	34.4	57.2
1975	22,893	52.8	17.0	35.8	47.2	12,362	58.7	22.3	36.4	41.3	10,531	45.9	10.8	35.1	54.1
1980	22,541	62.8	22.3	40.5	37.2	12,136	67.7	27.7	40.1	32.3	10,405	57.1	16.1	41.0	42.9
1985	22,056	67.3	27.0	40.3	32.7	11,249	72.2	32.7	39.4	27.8	10,808	62.2	20.9	41.3	37.8
1990	21,504	72.7	32.4	40.3	27.3	10,823	77.6	38.3	39.3	22.4	10,686	67.7	26.4	41.3	32.3
1991	21,488	73.4	34.4	39.1	26.6	10,987	79.3	41.0	38.3	20.7	10,501	67.3	27.4	39.9	32.7
1992	21,702	72.6	35.6	37.0	27.4	11,207	78.4	41.7	36.7	21.6	10,495	66.4	29.1	37.3	33.6
Black															
1970	1,910	64.2	27.2	37.0	35.8	861	68.6	34.8	33.8	31.4	1,049	60.6	21.1	39.5	39.4
1975	1,971	64.5	29.8	34.7	35.5	990	69.4	37.0	32.4	30.6	981	59.5	22.5	37.0	40.5
1980	1,924	69.8	36.5	33.3	30.2	1,025	69.8	40.2	29.5	30.2	899	69.7	32.3	37.4	30.3
1985	1,965	76.1	45.0	31.0	23.9	1,038	78.3	50.4	27.9	21.7	926	73.5	39.1	34.4	26.5
1990	1,846	78.9	48.9	30.0	21.1	938	80.5	53.0	27.6	19.5	908	77.3	44.6	32.7	22.7
1991	1,870	78.4	48.7	29.7	21.7	986	79.8	53.3	26.4	20.2	884	76.7	43.3	33.4	23.3
1992	1,863	79.5	49.1	30.4	20.5	992	82.6	52.6	30.0	17.4	871	76.1	44.9	31.2	23.9

[1] Worked full time (35 hours or more a week) 50 to 52 weeks.

[2] Worked either full or part time (less than 35 hours a week) for 1 to 49 weeks.

Table 6. **Work experience of mothers and fathers in two-parent families by age of youngest child, selected years, 1970–92**

[Numbers in thousands]

Parents' work experience	With own children under 18			With children 6 to 17, none younger			With children under 6		
	1970	1990	1992	1970	1990	1992	1970	1990	1992
Two-parent families, total	24,703	24,393	24,706	12,784	12,294	12,764	11,919	12,099	11,942
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Both parents had work experience	50.3	70.9	70.1	56.5	75.1	74.8	43.6	66.6	65.0
Both parents worked year round full time[1]	13.2	28.0	29.5	18.7	32.9	34.3	7.3	23.0	24.3
One parent worked year round full time[1]	29.8	36.0	33.9	31.7	36.1	34.1	27.8	36.0	33.7
Father	27.0	31.0	28.2	28.2	30.4	27.8	25.8	31.7	28.6
Mother	2.8	5.0	5.7	3.5	5.7	6.3	2.0	4.2	5.1
Neither parent worked year round full time[1]	7.2	6.8	6.7	6.1	6.1	6.4	8.5	7.6	7.0
One parent only had work experience	48.4	27.5	28.0	41.9	23.2	23.2	55.3	31.8	33.1
Father	47.4	25.6	25.1	40.7	20.7	19.6	54.6	30.5	31.0
Worked year round full time[1]	39.1	21.0	20.4	34.7	17.1	16.2	43.8	24.9	24.9
Mother	1.0	1.9	2.8	1.3	2.5	3.5	.7	1.3	2.1
Worked year round full time[1]	.4	1.0	1.6	.6	1.3	2.0	.2	.8	1.2
Neither parent worked during year	1.3	1.7	1.9	1.6	1.7	2.0	1.1	1.6	1.9

[1] Year round full time is defined as 50 to 52 weeks, 35 hours a week or more.

dren under 6. The proportion of families with preschool children in which both parents worked all year, full time, more than tripled since 1970, from 7 percent to 24 percent. Similarly, the proportion of such families among those with school-age children nearly doubled, reaching 34 percent in 1992.

At the same time, the proportion of families that might be termed "traditional"—those in which the father worked year round full time and the mother stayed home all year—declined. By 1992, only 2 out of 10 two-parent families fit this description, down from 4 out of 10 in 1970. This decline was about the same among families with school-age children as among those with preschoolers. Nonetheless, the families in which the youngest child was under 6 years old remained more likely to fit the so-called traditional model than was the case among families in which the youngest child was 6 to 17 years old.

Among black as well as white families, the proportion in which both parents were year-round full-time workers was about twice as large in 1992 as in 1970. The source of these gains was somewhat different for black families than for white families. Among whites, the growth was almost entirely attributable to increases in the proportion of married mothers working all year full time. Among black families, part of the gain was because black fathers—in addition to the mothers—were more likely to work year round full time in 1992 than in 1970.

Many changes in family life style have accompanied these increases. One such change is the growing importance of the mother as a family breadwinner. Working mothers provide a significant, and slowly growing, portion of family income—as much as 40 percent in situations where they are year-round full-time workers.[10] With regard to the family division of household labor, fathers appear to be participating somewhat more in household tasks[11] and are becoming increasingly involved as caregivers to their children while the mothers work.[12] Nonetheless, the data show that, in general, married mothers remain the primary caregivers and homemakers even though increasing numbers and proportions also work year round full time.

Conclusion

In drawing conclusions from work experience data, it must be recognized that the statistics provide information only about work patterns in discrete calendar years. For many married mothers, staying at home may be a relatively temporary expedient intended only to meet a pressing family need.[13] For example, the mother of a newborn infant who worked for only a few months in 1992 may have been a year-round full-time

worker in 1991 and will resume year-round full-time work as soon as her new child is old enough to be placed in some sort of day care arrangement. For others, year-round full-time work may also be a necessary, albeit temporary, expedient to help overcome family financial difficulties.

Despite these limitations, the data clearly show that today's married mothers are not only more likely to work, but they are also far more likely to do so on a year-round full-time basis than their predecessors of 20 years ago. Even so, year-round full-time work remains far from the norm. The majority of married mothers juggle market work and family obligations by working part year and/or part time, or by staying home while their children are young. Thus, married mothers continue to demonstrate that caring for their children personally, especially when the children are very young, remains a high priority in their lives.

Footnotes

[1] As of March 1993, about 30 percent of the approximately 57.6 million women labor force participants are married mothers, and their families make up about one-fourth of the total 68.8 million U.S. families. By contrast, unmarried mothers (widowed, divorced, separated, or never-married) make up only 10 percent of female labor force participants and their families accounted for just 8 percent of all families.

[2] Interruptions, for whatever reason, to market work can have an effect, not only on current earnings, but also future earnings and benefits. For a discussion of this subject, see, Shirley P. Burggraf, "How should the costs of child rearing be distributed?" paper presented at the 1992 annual meeting of the Southern Economics Association in Washington, D.C.

[3] Work experience data are derived from information gathered by supplemental questions to the Current Population Survey (CPS) each March. These questions are designed to elicit information about the number of weeks worked and usual hours worked during the prior calendar year.

The CPS is a monthly survey of a scientifically selected sample of about 60,000 households designed to represent the civilian noninstitutional population. The survey is conducted nationwide for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Bureau of the Census. The main purpose of this survey is to collect information about the current employment status of each household member 16 years old and over. The data are used to assess monthly labor market developments. In addition, supplementary questions on special subjects—such as an individual's work experience over the course of a calendar year—are regularly added.

[4] Howard V. Hayghe and Suzanne M. Bianchi, "Changes in the labor force role of married mothers," 1993 Proceedings of the Social Statistics Section, paper presented at the 1992 Winter Conference of the American Statistical Association, Washington, DC.

[5] Full year (year round) is defined as 50 to 52 weeks. Part year is 1 to 49 weeks. Full time is defined as 35 hours or more a week. Part time is 1 to 34 hours.

[6] In March 1992, for instance, the unemployment rate for Hispanic married mothers was 10.5 percent, compared with 7.6 percent for blacks and 5.5 percent for whites. For an in-depth discussion of Hispanic labor market participation see, Peter Cattan, "The diversity of Hispanics in the U.S. labor force," *Monthly Labor Review*, August 1993, pp. 3–15.

[7] See Howard V. Hayghe, "Contributions of working wives to family income," *Monthly Labor Review*, August 1993, p. 42.

[8] Hayghe, "Contributions of working wives," table 3.

[9] This data series was not tabulated for Hispanics prior to 1988.

[10] Hayghe, "Contributions of working wives," table 3.

[11] See John P. Robinson, "Who's doing the housework?" *American Demographics*, December 1988, pp. 24–28; and John P. Robins and Jonathan Gershuny, "Historic changes in the household division of labor," *Demographics*, November 1988, pp. 537–52. Also, see Cathleen D. Zick and Jane L. McCullough, "Trends in married couples time use: evidence from 1977–78 and 1987–88," *Sex Roles*, vol. 28 no. 1991 pp. 459–88.

[12] See Martin O'Connell, "Where's Papa? Fathers' role in child care," *Population Trends and Public Policy*, Washington, DC, Population Reference Bureau, September 1993.

[13] See Jonathan R. Veum and Philip M. Gleason, "Child care: arrangements and cost," *Monthly Labor Review*, October 1991, p. 15.