

## Support for Mothers' Employment at Home Compared to External Employment: Australian Attitudes, 2002\*

S.M.C. Kelley<sup>1</sup>, C.G.E. Kelley<sup>1</sup>, M.D.R. Evans<sup>2</sup>, Jonathan Kelley<sup>3</sup>  
International Survey Center<sup>1</sup>  
University of Nevada, Reno<sup>2</sup>  
University of Nevada, Reno and University of Melbourne<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

People have mixed feelings about paid employment for mothers with young children. This might reflect opposition to women's work per se or, instead, fear that children are harmed by mothers' absence from the home. To find out, we developed new questions differentiating employment at home from employment outside the home. Data from a large representative national sample of Australia (n=1324) show that support for employment is about 30 percentage points greater if the mother works at home. This difference is even larger for those who perceive great conflict between work and family but vanishes for those who perceive no conflict. Structural equation analyses show social differences in levels of support, mainly reflecting different perceptions of conflict between work and family. Governments seeking to increase women's labor force participation should consider policies encouraging working from home.

**Keywords:** Labor force participation, Women, Work at home, Australia

### 1. Introduction

Debates over conflict between women's work and family responsibilities have been widespread over the past half-century. We analyze public attitudes towards paid employment by mothers of young children when the work is done at home, contrasting it with the alternative of paid work outside the home. So far as we know, this issue has not previously been addressed in a representative national sample. We examine these issues for Australia, a typical developed country in its attitudes toward maternal employment.

#### 1.1 Characteristics of Home-based Employment

Dramatic falls in the costs of decentralized computing and communications, especially since the rise of the internet, have led to the re-emergence of home-based work. Since about 1980 it has been growing rapidly in many developed nations and now forms an important part of the 21st century workforce. Consider the example of Australia, a typical advanced economy.

Table 1: Employment in the home and outside:  
Description. Australia, 2002 except where noted.<sup>[1]</sup>

	Works mostly at home	Works outside
<b>1. Percent of labor force</b>		
Australia, 2002	8%	92%
Women	9%	91%
Men	7%	93%
Britain, 1998	4%	96%
USA, 1995	5%	95%
<b>2. Percent full-time</b>		
	26%	53%
<b>3. Percent Self-employed</b>		
	42%	13%
<b>4. Percent with university education</b>		
Australia, 2002	25%	25%
Britain, 1998	20%	16%
USA, 1995	38%	24%
<b>5. Percent professional &amp; managerial</b>		
Australia, 2002	52%	25%
Britain, 1998	33%	27%
USA, 1995	40%	27%
<b>6. Job quality (points out of 100), adjusted by regression for other differences<sup>[2]</sup></b>		
Occupational status	54	55 (ns)
Self-rated prestige	55	50 (ns)
Hierarchical position	60	49 (p<.01)
Pay, fringe benefits	52	54 (ns)
Job security	65	63 (ns)
Intrinsic rewards	75	68 (p<.01)

[1] Sources: Australian data in Panels 1, 2, 3 and 5 are estimated from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002), based on large labor force surveys. Other panels are from our survey (N=897 adults, 18 or over, in the labor force). British data are from Felstead et al 2000, based on the large Quarterly Labor Force surveys. US data are from US Census (2001), based on Current Population Surveys. Definitions in these sources vary appreciably, especially for Panel 1, due to different treatment of those who work both at home and outside. The Australian data in Panels 1 and 6 distinguish those working mainly at home from all others; in other panels those working both at home and outside are included in the "at home" category. The US and British data omit from the analysis those working both at home and outside.

[2] Estimated by regression adjusting for differences in age, education, gender, full-time versus part-time work, and farm versus non-farm. Occupational status is a single item coded into Worldwide Status scores, and hierarchical position is a single self-report of position in the firm's authority hierarchy. The other measures are reliable multi-item scales (details available on request).

ns -- predicted value not significantly different from column 1 at p<.05 two-tailed; Panel 6 only.

In 2000, 8 percent of the labor force worked entirely at home and another 13 percent spent part of their working hours at home (Table 1). Women were only a little more likely to work at home than men (9% vs. 7%). The 8 percent working entirely at home are more

likely than people who work away from home to be part-time workers (53% vs. 26%) and much more likely to be self-employed (42% versus 13%). Much the same holds in Britain and the United States where 4% or 5% work mainly at home and many more spend part of their working hours at home.

Those who work at home are not a marginal group; on the contrary, they are at least as well-off, and often better off, than those who work away from home (Table 1, Panels 4 to 6). In Australia home workers are just as likely as external workers to be college educated (25%) and in Britain and the USA more likely. Many more home workers are in professional and managerial jobs in Australia (52% compared to 25% for external workers), as in Britain and the USA. In Australia our data (Panel 6) suggest that, net of other things, home workers' occupational status is on average just as high as those who work outside home (54 points out of 100), as is their self-rated prestige (50 points), satisfaction with pay and fringe benefits (52 points), and self-rated job security (63 points). Indeed, home-based workers see themselves as occupying a higher hierarchical position in their workplace (60 points to 49) and find their work more intrinsically rewarding than external workers (75 points to 68).

## 2. Theory and prior research

It is unlikely that disapproval about employment for mothers of young children stems from disapproval of women's economic activity itself, which has been normal throughout history. Contemporary public opinion overwhelming supports women working before marriage (e.g. Sorensen 2004), so the main issue cannot be gender per se. Nor is marriage the problem: most people think that married women should work before they have children (e.g. Treas and Widmer 2000).

Instead children are the key issue, with opinion being sharply divided between people who support mothers' employment and those who oppose it. There is more concern about mothers of preschoolers than about mothers of older children, and much more concern about full-time employment rather than part-time employment (Evans and Kelley 2001; Treas and Widmer 2000). Any perception that mother's employment has adverse effects on the family greatly reduces support (Evans and Mason 1996).

These facts suggest that disapproval of maternal employment may in part reflect reservations about the mother being away from home – an important consideration in the early stages of the industrial revolution (Sokoloff and Dollar 1997) – rather than the work itself. To test this general hypothesis, we

developed new questions about approval of full-time and part-time paid work inside the home. If the root of the concern is maternal separation from young children rather than about maternal employment per se, approval of work inside the home should be greater than approval of work away from home.

### 2.1 Social structure

Although no prior research has specifically considered attitudes to home-based employment for mothers of preschoolers, variables previously found to influence views on mothers' employment outside the home are likely to be relevant. They are listed in Table 2.

Insofar as people perceive that maternal accessibility (in terms of both time and energy) is important to good child rearing, they will in general be more favorable towards home-based employment for mothers of young children than towards employment outside the home. The key consideration is that mothers working for pay inside the home will still be with their children and thus able to look after them. On this argument, the public will also feel more favorable towards part-time than full-time employment, because part-time employment leaves more of the mother's time and energy available to her children. Indeed, on average women work somewhat longer hours than they think they ought to (Evans and Kelley 2001).

We expect that most social structural variables that influence attitudes toward external employment will have similar but smaller influences on attitudes to home-based employment. This is because the motives underlying the structural effects are often, we suspect, based on fears about working mothers being unable to take proper care of their children and family, which should be less of a concern for mothers working at home where they can watch over the children. But even a job done at home demands time, energy, and commitment and so competes with the time, energy, and commitment required for successful child raising. So the fears will remain, albeit attenuated.

### 2.2 Subjective influences

In addition to our main model, we introduce a second model with additional subjective variables: measures of perceived conflict between work and family, intrinsic job values, extrinsic job values, and political preferences. We envision these as intervening variables: potentially consequences of the structural variables of the first model and, together with them, jointly determinants of attitudes toward mothers working. This separates the effects of structural

variables into direct effects and indirect effects through the subjective variables.

We suggest that most people attach a very high value to the welfare of their children and family (Evans and Mason 1996), with the rewards from paid work also valued, but much less highly. Thus perceptions of the extent to which work and family actually do conflict will be a dominant influence on attitudes toward mothers working, especially for working outside the home where the conflict is sharpest. These conflicts are difficult to weigh up, as the costs and benefits to balance are many and not always clear. There do seem to be clear costs to women's careers in taking time out for childrearing. For example, women who take time off working to have a child earn less when they return to work, due to less work experience and a higher likelihood of having a part-time job. By contrast, effects on the children are controversial with well designed studies reporting a variety of results, in part because the possibilities of selection effects are many, varied, and difficult to control. With scholars struggling to establish the magnitude and sometimes even the direction of these effects, it is no wonder that the general population holds a variety of views. Thus we hypothesize:

*H1: Public attitudes will be more favorable towards employment for mothers of young children when the mothers work from home rather than working outside the home.*

*H2: Public attitudes will be more favorable towards part-time employment rather than full-time employment for mothers of young children.*

*H3: People who perceive more conflict between work and family will be much less supportive of maternal employment, especially outside the home.*

*H4: Structural differences shape attitudes toward maternal employment in large part because they shape perceptions of conflict between work and family.*

*H5: Structural differences and perceptions conflict between work and family will have less effect (and job values more effect) on attitudes toward mothers working at home rather than away from home.*

### 3. Data, Measurement and Methods

#### 3.1 Data

IsssA (International Social Science Surveys Australia) surveys, conducted annually except for a few years, are from simple random samples of Australian citizens

drawn by the Electoral Commission from the compulsory electoral roll, a public document. The population covered is defined as English-speaking citizens over age 18 who are resident at the address they provided to the Electoral Office and who are capable of answering a self-completion questionnaire.

The surveys are conducted by mail using a modification of Dillman's Total Response Method. First, a personally addressed preliminary letter announces the survey, then the survey itself arrives in the post some weeks later. For non-respondents, this is typically followed by four follow-up mailings, two with fresh copies of the questionnaire, over a six to 12 month period. Completion rates (RR3) for ISSSA surveys run around 60 to 65 per cent, which compares favorably with recent experience in Australia, the USA, and many other industrial nations. The data used are from the 2002 survey with an RR3 response rate of 61%. There are 1324 cases.

Benchmarking information comparing the IsssA surveys to the Census (on the limited range of variables available in the Census) shows that the survey closely resembles the population as a whole (Sikora 1997).

#### 3.2 Measurement: Dependent variables

The questions measure two concepts. (1) Attitudes to mothers working at home is measured by two items, one about full-time inside the home and the other about part-time inside the home. Alpha reliability =.84. (2) Attitudes to mothers working outside the home is measured by one question on full-time outside the home and another on part-timework outside the home. Alpha reliability =.82.

These answer categories are ordinal. The conventional procedure would be to score them in equal intervals. However, this assumption is problematic, at least potentially. We therefore assign the intervals empirically on the basis of ordinal probit analyses (one for each dependent variable) which make no assumption about intervals. The cutting points imply a suitable scoring for the categories of the dependent variable, essentially an effect-proportional score using probit's hypothesized underlying continuous variable as the criterion. The gap between categories is allowed to vary freely. For clarity, they are converted to range from 0 to 100.

These results suggest that the gaps between "definitely yes" and "yes" are somewhat larger than implied by the equal interval model (by about 30%) while the gaps between "yes" and "undecided" and between "no" and

"undecided" are somewhat smaller (by about 10% to 20%). The exact figures vary from item to item.

Making these adjustments makes little difference in practice. Predicted values from them are correlated around  $r=.99$  with predicted values from equal-interval scoring.

**3.3 Measurement: Demographic variables**

Demographic variables are measured conventionally (Evans and Kelley 2004, Appendix). Test-retest reliabilities for single items (from an earlier panel survey) and confirmatory factor loadings for multiple item measures are available on request.

**3.4 Measurement: Attitudinal variables**

We conceive of the attitudinal variables of interest as involving six distinct concepts, each measured by multiple items. However, there are several alternatives to be considered (and rejected) first (Table 2). Our preferred model has a satisfactory fit (RMSEA = .066). Chi-square still shows a statistically significant lack of fit, but that is to be expected with a sample as large as ours.

Our attitudinal measures are all multiple item measures. Item wording and factor loadings are available on request.

**3.5 Measurement: Perceptions of conflict between work and family**

An important element in understanding people's attitudes toward women working is their perception of whether there is actually a conflict between women

working for pay and successful child rearing. Some people think that a career takes away time, energy and attention that are necessary to raise children successfully. Others think that women have plenty of time, energy and attention simultaneously to manage the house and children and have a career. To measure these perceptions, we used a scale due to Evans and Mason (1966) with several extensions. The questions:

1. *A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work (reversed scoring).*
2. *All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.*
3. *It is more difficult to raise children successfully when both parents work full-time.*
4. *To learn well, a toddler really needs the attention of a full-time mother.*
5. *It is harder for working mothers to find enough time to teach their children new things.*
6. *Working mothers are too tired to be as strict as they should be with their children.*
7. *A job takes so much energy that it is hard for working mothers to discipline their children firmly and consistently.*
8. *It is best for young children if their mother stays home to take care of them.*

These questions measure perceptions of a factual issue (indeed one on which expert opinion is divided).

Table 2. Alternative measurement models for attitude and value questions: Confirmatory factor analyses. N=1,351; Australia, 2002.

Measurement model	Number of concepts	Chi-sq	d.f.	Change in Chi-sq	Change in d.f.	Change: significance	Fit: RMSEA
1. One general factor including all attitude and value questions	1	10,000.7	536	--	--	--	.148
2. One general factor combining views on women working outside the home, views on women working at home, and perceptions of conflict between work and family. Three separate factors for intrinsic job values, extrinsic job values, and politics	4	6,413.9	488	3,586.8	48	p<.001	.123
3. One factor combining views on women working outside the home and perceptions of conflict between work and family. Separate factors for views on women working at home, intrinsic job values, extrinsic job values, and politics	5	4,517.9	470	1,896.0	18	p<.001	.104
4. Preferred model: Six separate factors for views on women working outside the home, views on women working at home, perceptions of conflict between work and family, intrinsic job values, extrinsic job values, and politics	6	2,036.3	451	2,481.6	19	p<.001	.066

Views on these matters are very diverse.

All these items measure a single concept and do so reliably (Table 3). The correlations between them are high; correlations with criterion variables are similar; and factor loadings are consistently high, well above the conventional cut off of .50. Alpha reliability is .92.

These perceptual items do not measure the same thing as the attitudinal measures of approval or disapproval of mothers working (compare models 3 and 4 in Table 2: change in chi-square = 2,481.6, 19 d.f.,  $p < .001$ ).

### 3.6 Methods and models

Missing data are imputed by maximum likelihood using the routines in Amos 4 (Arbuckle and Wothke 1999). We estimate full-information structural equation models by maximum likelihood methods using Amos 4 software. These models correct for attenuation due to random measurement error

## 4. Description

### 4.1 Full-time work

People's attitudes toward mothers of young children having full-time jobs away from home are generally negative:

*When there is a baby or toddler under age 3, do you approve of the mother having ...*

**a. A full-time paid job outside the home**

<i>Definitely yes</i>	7%
<i>Yes</i>	18%
<i>Mixed feelings, undecided</i>	18%
<i>No</i>	39%
<i>Definitely no</i>	19%
	100%

(N = 1324)  
Mean = 43

This is consistent with prior research where location was not specified but was implicitly assumed to be away from home.

By contrast, there is majority support for full-time employment at home for mothers of young children, with fully 56% approving, either definitely or mildly. A quarter of the population has neutral or mixed feelings. Less than a quarter disapprove.

**b. A full-time paid job that she can do from home?**

<i>Definitely yes</i>	14%
<i>Yes</i>	42%
<i>Mixed feelings, undecided</i>	25%
<i>No</i>	15%
<i>Definitely no</i>	4%
	100%

(N = 1321)  
Mean = 59

### 4.2 Part-time employment

There is majority support for mothers of young children having a part-time job outside the home, consistent with previous research:

*When there is a baby or toddler under age 3, do you approve of the mother having ...*

**a. A part-time paid job outside the home**

<i>Definitely yes</i>	11%
<i>Yes</i>	42%
<i>Mixed feelings, undecided</i>	15%
<i>No</i>	24%
<i>Definitely no</i>	8%
	100%

(N = 1315)  
Mean = 51

In contrast, attitudes towards home-based part-time employment are overwhelmingly positive:

**b. A part-time paid job that she can do from home?**

<i>Definitely yes</i>	19%
<i>Yes</i>	62%
<i>Mixed feelings, undecided</i>	13%
<i>No</i>	5%
<i>Definitely no</i>	1%
	100%

(N = 1314)  
Mean = 64

### 4.3 Differences between employment at home and outside the home

Our most striking finding is that public support for home-based employment for mothers of young children is substantially greater than support for work done outside the home. Public support for a mother with young children working for pay is about 30 percentage points greater when the mother works at home than when she works outside the home (Table 3).

Table 4. Percent approving of paid employment for a mother with children under age three. Australia, 2002. N = 1,335

Hours worked:	Work outside the home			Significance
	(1)	(2)	(2 - 1)	
Full-time	25	56	31	t= 23.78, p<.001
Part-time	53	81	28	t= 21.68, p<.001

Source: International Social Science Survey/ Australia

### 5. Analysis: Social structure

We turn next to the question of who approves and who disapproves of various employment options for mothers with young children.

#### 5.1 Employment outside the home

To provide a context, we first consider the traditional question of employment outside the home for mothers with young children. For simplicity, we focus on the standardized effects (Table 5, column 1), although the metric effects are also given (column 3). Our results are very similar to those found in previous research on Australia and other developed nations

Table 5. Influences on attitudes to women with young children working inside and outside the home: Structural equation models correcting for random measurement error with maximum likelihood imputation of missing data and ordinal probit based scoring of the dependent variables. Total effects. N=1351; Australia, 2002.

	Standardized coefficients		Metric coefficients	
	(1) Outside home	(2) At home	(3) Outside home	(4) At home
Age	-.17	-.18	-0.2	-0.2
Male	-.17	-.10	-7	-4
Mother's education	ns	ns	ns	ns
Mother worked	.13	.09	11	7
Catholic	.07	ns	4	ns
Education	.23	.14	1.8	0.9
Married	ns	ns	ns	ns
Divorced	ns	ns	ns	ns
Mother, children at home	ns	ns	ns	ns
Father, children at home	ns	ns	ns	ns
Church going	-.12	ns	-7.1	ns
Potential family income	ns	ns	ns	ns
Subjective Class	ns	ns	ns	ns
R-square (%) or constant	18%	12%	34.7	61.4
Fit, RMSEA <sup>[1]</sup>	.052	.052	--	--

ns -- not statistically significant at p<.05, two-tailed.

[1] The fit measure, RMSEA, is Browne and Cudeck's root mean square error of approximation: values less than .10 usually indicate an acceptable fit. It is for the corresponding model with no missing data, as our software does not provide fit measures for models with missing data.

#### 5.2 Employment at home

Attitudes toward mothers with young children working for pay at home are shaped by many of the same factors, although the differences are mostly smaller and religious effects fade away altogether (Figure 1B and Table 5, columns 2 and 4). Older people are much less supportive, by fully -.18. Men are a little less supportive, but only by -.10. Having a well-educated mother has no effect but having a working mother engenders a bit more support, .09. Catholics are no more supportive than members of other denominations or the unchurched. The well-educated are somewhat more supportive, .14. Concretely, a university graduate is 6 points out of 100 more supportive than an otherwise comparable person with the legal minimum of schooling. Marriage and divorce are irrelevant. Mothers and fathers of young children are no different than anyone else. Nor do regular church-goers have attitudes any different from those who do not attend church. Income and class are, as usual, irrelevant.

Table 6. Direct and indirect effects on attitudes to women with young children working inside and outside the home: Standardized structural equation estimates correcting for random measurement error with maximum likelihood imputation of missing data and ordinal probit scoring of the dependent variables. N=1351; Australia, 2002.

	Working outside home		Working at home	
	(1) Direct	(2) Indirect	(3) Direct	(4) Indirect
Perceived cost to family	-.73	--	-.43	--
Jobs have intrinsic value	.06	--	.12	--
Jobs have extrinsic value	ns	--	.14	--
Politically conservative	ns	--	ns	--
Age	-.10	-.08	-.14	-.04
Male	ns	-.13	ns	-.06
Mother's education	ns	ns	ns	ns
Mother worked	ns	.09	ns	.06
Catholic	.06	.00	ns	ns
Education	ns	.17	ns	.12
Married	ns	ns	ns	ns
Divorced	ns	ns	ns	ns
Mother, children at home	ns	ns	ns	ns
Father, children at home	ns	ns	ns	ns
Church going	ns	-.09	ns	ns
Potential family income	ns	ns	ns	ns
Subjective Class	ns	ns	ns	ns
R-square (%)	71%	--	31%	--
Fit, RMSEA <sup>[1]</sup>	.065	--	.062	--

ns -- not statistically significant at p<.05, two-tailed.

[1] The fit measure, RMSEA, is Browne and Cudeck's root mean square error of approximation: values less than .10 usually indicate an acceptable fit. It is for the corresponding model with no missing data, as our software does not provide fit measures for models with missing data.

## 6. Analysis: Subjective influences

We next extend our model with additional subjective variables. They are interesting in their own right and also because of the light they shed on why the structural variables in the first model have the effects that they do. Our results are in Table 6.

### 6.1 Employment outside the home

Perceptions of conflict between work and family are by far the most important influence on attitudes toward mothers with young children working outside the home, with a huge standardized effect of  $-.73$  net of everything else. When work and family are thought to be in conflict, most people believe that work must give way (Hypothesis 3).

Those who value the intrinsic rewards of work – interest, using one's skills and abilities, giving a sense of accomplishment – are understandably more supportive of mothers being able to enjoy those rewards by working outside the home. But the effect is tiny, just  $.06$ . Moreover those who value the extrinsic rewards of work – pay, fringe benefits, security – are no more likely than anyone else to think mothers should be able to enjoy those rewards by working outside the home

Despite some differences between party elites, among the general public there is no difference between supporters of the (conservative) Liberal-National coalition and supporters of the (left-leaning) Labor Party.

*Direct and indirect effects.* Most of the structural variables that influence attitudes toward mothers' working outside the home operate indirectly by shaping people's perceptions of how much conflict there is between work and family (Hypothesis 4). In particular, the reason men are less likely than women to approve of mothers working comes is almost entirely that men see more conflict between work and family. It is not because men reject feminism, or because keeping women at home enhances men's power position in the family, or because men attach no importance to a mother's self-interest, or because men were socialized into traditional sex roles. Instead, it is because men perceive the facts differently.

### 6.2 Employment at home

Perceptions of conflict between work and family are by far the largest influence on attitudes toward mothers with young children working for pay at home, with a standardized effect in the structural equation model of

$-.43$ . But this is not the dominating influence they were about work outside the home (Hypothesis 3). That is presumably because a woman working at home can also care for her children, so that the worst outcomes for the family are already ruled out and only more manageable conflicts over time, energy, and commitment remain to be dealt with.

Those who value the intrinsic rewards of work – interest, using skills, a sense of accomplishment – are noticeably more supportive of mothers enjoying those rewards through paid employment at home. Similarly, those who value pay, fringe benefits, security – the extrinsic rewards of work – are also more supportive. Thus in the public's mind view, a mothers' interests are important for employment at home (where the children's interests are not much at risk) but not as relevant for employment outside the home (where the children are more at risk; see Hypothesis 5).

These issues are not politicized. Labor Party supporters have views no different from supporters of the (politically conservative) Liberal-National coalition.

Social differences in attitudes towards women working for pay in the home are broadly similar to those for work outside the home, but mostly rather smaller (Hypothesis 5).

### 6.3 Perceptions of conflict between work and family

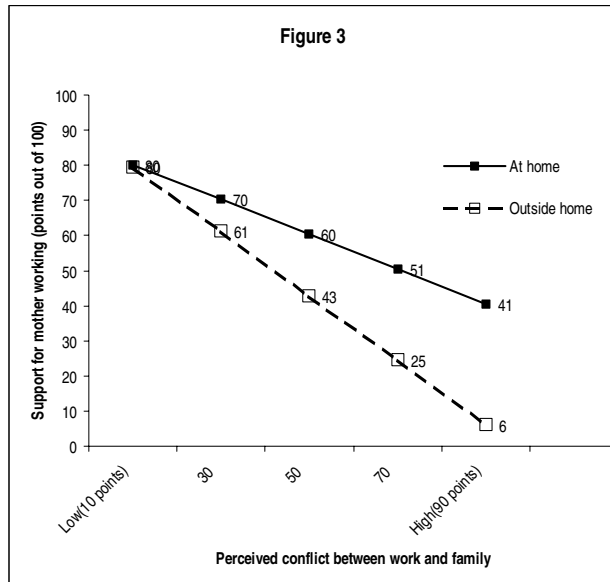
The overwhelming importance of perceived conflict between employment and mothering of young children makes it worth examining more closely. Figure 1 plots its effects, holding other variables fixed at their means.

*If there is no conflict between work and family.* Strikingly, people who perceive little conflict between work and family life are overwhelmingly in favor of women working for pay, both outside the home and at home. Thus most people do not think women's place is in the home (unless their children need them there); they do not accept traditional sex roles (unless that would be good for the children); they do not think women are unsuited to the world of work. Instead they think employment is fine for women, so long as it does not interfere with family responsibilities.

So long as family welfare is not at issue, the public does not seem to care whether paid employment is inside or outside the home. Both are equally acceptable.

*If there is great conflict between work and family.* As perceived conflict between work and family increases, support for mothers of young children working outside

the home drops precipitously, from 80 points among people who see little conflict, to 43 for people who see a moderate amount of conflict, to barely 6 points for people who perceive great conflict (Figure 3, broken line). This suggests that people – men and women alike – value family over work, and that they believe that work outside the home may well conflict with the family.



For work inside the home, support starts at the same level but drops much less (Figure 1, solid line).

This striking difference for people who perceive great conflict between work and family – 41 versus 6, a full 35 point difference in approval – compared to no difference at all for people who perceive little conflict between work and family, is revealing. It strongly suggests that, in the public's view, the key difference between mothers working at home and mothers working outside the home has to do with the consequences for the children (Hypothesis 3).

## 7. Discussion

Despite the flood of mothers into the workforce, research continues to show that the public has mixed feelings about it. Previous research on moral views about maternal employment has differentiated between full-time and part-time work, and between children of different ages. We have built on this by adding a further distinction between employment at home, where the mother can supervise the children, and jobs done away from home where the mother cannot simultaneously care for them. We have found that people's ambivalence to maternal employment is due in good part to the absence of the mother from home,

rather than to any objection to the mother working per se.

Our results do not support the idea that limits on the mother's time and energy are a major constraint on employment. The key to understanding people's attitudes toward mothers working is their perception of whether there is actually a conflict between employment and successful family life (Hypothesis 3) – a factual matter about which even expert opinion differs.

Our findings have important implications for public policy. Rapid population aging makes many governments eager to increase the number of taxpayers by getting more women to work. Other research suggests that young women have a strong desire for both family and career, although many young mothers who would like to work cannot overcome the barriers they face in conventional employment outside the home. Our research suggests that these conflicting goals can be reconciled by policies that facilitate women working from home.

## Acknowledgements

This research was supported in part by a Research Infrastructure and Equipment Facility (RIEF) grant from the Australian Research Council to the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne. This is a revised version of a paper read to the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Montreal, May, 2006.

## References

- Arbuckle, James L. and Werner Wothke. 1999. *Amos 4.0 User's Guide*. Chicago: SmallWaters Corp.
- Evans, M.D.R. and Jonathan Kelley. 2001. "Employment for mothers of pre-school children" *People and Place* 9:28-40.
- . 2004. *Australian Economy and Society 2002: Religion, Morality, and Public Policy in International Perspective, 1984-2002*. Sydney: Federation Press.
- Evans, M.D.R. and Karen Oppenheim Mason. 1996. "Currents and Anchors: Gender Role Attitudes in Australia in the 1980s." Pp. 275-302 in *Social Differentiation and Social Inequality*, edited by D. J. Treiman. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Sikora, Joanna. 1997. "International Survey of Economic Attitudes in Australia, Finland and Poland: Comparison with the Census." *WwA: Worldwide Attitudes* 1997.12.31:1-8.