

# Employment transitions, child care conflict, and the mental health of low-income urban women with children <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Full article PDF <sup>[2]</sup>

## Abstract

### Objective

Although studies suggest that employment promotes mental health, it is unclear whether this pattern extends to low-income urban women with children who are disproportionately employed in unstable jobs and often unable to obtain child care. In this paper, we consider whether becoming employed reduces symptoms of psychological distress among low-income women with children. We also assess whether having trouble securing adequate child care offsets these benefits.

### Study Design

We use longitudinal data from the Welfare, Children, and Families project, a probability sample of low-income women with children living in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio, to test whether becoming employed reduces symptoms of psychological distress over time and whether having trouble securing child care moderates this association.

### Results

We find that employment is associated with lower levels of distress among women who have no trouble with child care and higher levels of distress among women who struggle with child care.

### Conclusion

Taken together, our results suggest that valuing the benefits of paid work over unpaid work is an oversimplification and that the emphasis on placing poor women with children into paid work could be misguided. Policies that focus on moving low-income women off of government assistance and into paid work could be more effective if greater resources were devoted to increasing access to quality child care.

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** equity <sup>[4]</sup>

low-income <sup>[5]</sup>

employment <sup>[6]</sup>

**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/16/06/employment-transitions-child-care-conflict-and-mental>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/16/06/employment-transitions-child-care-conflict-and-mental> <sup>[2]</sup>

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