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**SPOUSAL PROBLEMS AND FAMILY-TO-WORK CONFLICT:
THE NEGLECTED FAMILY DEMANDS FOR EMPLOYED ADULTS**

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Spousal Problems and Family-to-Work Conflict:
The Neglected Family Demands for Employed Adults

ABSTRACT

Research has shown that children's health and behavioral problems are major family demands that influence parents' family-to-work conflict, while ignoring the potential importance of spouses' health problems or emotional and behavioral difficulties as primary sources of family-to-work conflict for employed adults. Analyses using data from the 1995-1996 National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (N = 1,499) show that more than one-fourth of employed adults report their spouse having a health problem, and close to half report their spouse having other types of problems such as anxiety, substance abuse, and interpersonal issues. Spouses' health or other problems are positively related to respondents' family-to-work conflict in part through increased time strain, relationship strain, and financial strain. We find no variation in the associations by gender or parental status. These findings suggest that spouses' health and other problems have notable implications for employed adults' ability to balance work and family.

Thirty years ago, Crouter (1984: 425) called family-to-work conflict “the neglected side of work-family interface.” Since then, researchers have investigated factors that might affect individuals’ family-to-work conflict, or the extent to which individuals feel that family demands interfere their ability to fulfill work duties (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Mennino, Rubin, & Brayfield, 2005). Still, more research is needed to better understand various sources of family-to-work conflict, as a majority of employed adults have some kind of family responsibility (Williams, 2010). In particular, prior studies have largely focused on caregiving responsibilities for children, especially children with health problems or difficult disposition, as family demands that would influence family-to-work conflict (Fitzpatrick, Janzen, Abonyi, & Kelly, 2012; Stevens, Minnotte, Mannon, & Kiger, 2007), ignoring another key family demand—spouses’ health problems and emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Qualitative research has suggested that a sizable number of employed adults may have spouses—in this paper, we use the term “spouse” in a broader sense which includes cohabiting partners—who have health problems (Williams, 2010) or emotional and behavioral difficulties, which include various interconnected issues such as depression, alcohol abuse, interpersonal conflict, and trouble keeping a job (Amato & Previti, 2003; Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Having a spouse with health problems or other issues can be stressful (Schulz & Beach, 1999), in part because it hinders the spouse’s ability to share paid work and household responsibilities (Sarwari, Fredman, Langenbeg, & Magaziner, 1998), increases relationship conflict (Booth & Johnson, 1994), and leads to financial strains (Shaw, Agahi, & Krause, 2011). Such strains may, in turn, relate to the other spouse’s family-to-work conflict.

This paper examines the association between spousal problems and respondents’ family-to-work conflict, using data from the 1995-1996 National Survey of Midlife Development in the

United States (MIDUS)—the only available data set with a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults that includes information about spouses' problems and family-to-work conflict. We focus on two aspects of spousal problems, including (a) health problems and (b) emotional and behavioral difficulties, because these areas have been a significant concern to prior literature on challenges in marriage and partnership in contemporary American society (Amato & Previti, 2003; Edin & Kefalas, 2005). We examine health problems separately from other problems because, as we will discuss later, policy implications differ for care for health versus these other types of problems. We address the following three questions: (a) Is the presence of spousal problems associated with greater family-to-work conflict? (b) Is the relationship between spousal problems and respondents' family-to-work conflict attenuated by three types of strain—time strain, relationship strain, or financial strain? (c) And lastly, are there variations in these relationships by gender or whether an individual is a parent to minor children?

Prior research has shown that family-to-work conflict has significant implications for the workplace—missing work, lower levels of job satisfaction, and dropping out of the labor market (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002). As a result, it is important to examine sources of family-to-work conflict. This study extends prior research by investigating the association between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict with a specific focus on the role of time, relationship, and financial strain in mediating the association as well as variation in the association by gender and the presence of minor children.

BACKGROUND

Spousal Problems and Family-To-Work Conflict

Work-family conflict refers to the extent to which individuals perceive that their work and family obligations are incompatible with one another. Conflict arises when these demands

compete for an individual's energy and attention, making participation in either domain difficult by the engagement in the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict is bidirectional, where work can interfere with family (i.e., work-to-family conflict) and family can interfere with work (i.e., family-to-work conflict). Prior research has largely focused on work-to-family conflict rather than family-to-work conflict (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Considering that family-to-work conflict has been shown to influence the ability of workers to fully participate in the workforce, including absenteeism, lower job satisfaction, and labor market exits (Anderson et al., 2002), it is critical to understand sources of family-to-work conflict.

According to Voydanoff's (2005) demands-resources model, family demands (e.g., overload of child care and household chores, interpersonal conflict) foster greater family-to-work conflict, whereas family resources (e.g., spousal emotional support) act as buffers to this conflict. Much of prior research has examined demographic characteristics, such as the number of children, children's ages, presence of a spouse or partner, as indicators of such demands or resources that affect family-to-work conflict (Mennino et al., 2005). Although some studies have examined how child's problems (e.g., health, behavioral, or emotional) can be a source of parents' greater family-to-work conflict (Michel et al., 2011; Stevens et al., 2007), little research has examined spousal problems as possible sources of this conflict. This is a serious gap in the literature because, as family systems theory suggests (Day, 1995), what one spouse does (or does not do) influences the other spouse greatly. Prior research has shown that poor emotional support from one's spouse (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), as well as spouses' unequal share or participation in household chores (Nomaguchi, 2012), is related to greater perceptions of family-to-work conflict. However, less is known regarding possible sources of lower participation in housework

or poor relationship quality—including spouses' health problems or emotional and behavioral difficulties.

The present study explores the associations between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict. We focus on health problems as well as emotional or behavioral difficulties, two spheres of spousal problems that prior research has commonly shown as major burdens for marriage and partnership (e.g., Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Sarwari et al., 1998). Below, we discuss specifically how each of the two aspects of spousal problems may be related to respondents' family-to-work conflict.

Spouses' health problems. Spouses' health problems may have implications for respondents' time commitments, relationship quality, and financial wellbeing, which may be related to greater perceptions of family-to-work conflict. First, a spouse's illness may increase the other spouse's unpaid work responsibilities which may foster greater time strain. Those experiencing a health condition face greater time deficits and a decreased capacity to engage in household responsibilities. Several studies have found that declining physical health (Sarwari et al., 1998) and chronic illnesses (e.g., Bair et al., 2008; Rothrock et al., 2010) are related to reduced ability to complete household responsibilities and chores. Consequently, those experiencing health conditions may pass household chores and family responsibilities to their spouse, who may subsequently face greater family-to-work conflict (Dugan, Matthews, & Barnes-Farrell, 2012; Nomaguchi, 2012).

Second, spouses' illnesses may deteriorate the couple's relationship quality. Faced with poorer communication and weaker relationship cohesion (Booth & Johnson, 1994; Garand et al., 2007), those with poor health and chronic illnesses may suffer from poorer relationship quality. Worry and stress accompanied by poor relationship quality may, subsequently, spillover from

home to work, resulting in greater family-to-work conflict (Gareis, Barnett, Ertel, & Berkman, 2009).

Finally, spousal illnesses may increase financial burdens. As out-of-pocket spending (e.g., premiums, deductibles and coinsurance) has increased at rates that exceed family income (Banthin, Cunningham, & Bernard, 2008), financial burdens placed upon families have become a major concern—considering that those with poor health or chronic conditions have a lower financial tolerance (Cunningham, Miller, & Cassil 2008). Ill spouses may have to reduce work hours, which may lead to greater financial strain. Greater perceptions of financial strain may result in greater family-to-work conflict (Young & Schieman, 2012).

Spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Qualitative research has suggested that a substantial proportion of U.S. adults have spouses or partners who experience emotional and behavioral difficulties, including anxiety, alcohol or substance abuse, irresponsible spending habits, problems at school or work, difficulty keeping a job, facing legal problems, and difficulty getting along with others (Amato & Previti, 2003; Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Yet, surprisingly little research has explicitly examined the issue of spousal emotional or behavioral difficulties as a source of family-to-work conflict. Alcohol or substance abuse problems have been linked with financial, emotional, and inter-personal problems (Kushner, Sher, & Beitman, 1990; Sullivan, Fiellin, & O'Connor, 2005) as well as with difficulty at work and difficulty finding or keeping a job (Williams, 2010). Considering the interconnectedness of these various types of problems, the present analyses groups these together and labels them as emotional and behavioral difficulties.

As with health problems, emotional and behavioral difficulties may be related to greater family-to-work conflict through greater time strain, relationship strain, and financial strain. First, emotional and behavioral difficulties, such as substance abuse, anxiety, and trouble keeping and

finding jobs, may interfere with an individual's capacity to complete or perform household chores or responsibilities and may foster greater time strains. Individuals with alcohol-related problems often neglect completing household responsibilities (Finney, Moos, & Brennan, 1991; Sinclair & Sillanaukee, 1993). Additionally, Edin and Kefalas's (2005) qualitative study found that fathers with problems, such as alcohol or substance abuse, trouble finding or keeping a job, often spent time away from the household at bars or a friend's house. Faced with additional responsibilities, the other spouse may perceive greater time strain and, subsequently, family-to-work conflict.

Second, spouses with emotional and behavioral difficulties may negatively affect relationship quality. Edin and Kefalas (2005) illustrated that alcohol and substance abuse or financial problems were related to less spousal support and poorer relationship quality. Those with anxiety disorders, alcohol and substance abuse, and a difficulty maintaining a job are often emotionally unavailable, have weakened relationships and lower relationship quality (Conger & Conger, 2004; McLeod, 1994; Rook, Dooley, & Catalano, 1991). This, in turn may be related to greater family-to-work conflict (Gareis et al., 2009; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

Finally, having a spouse experiencing emotional and behavioral difficulties may foster greater financial strain. Past research has found that anxiety, alcohol problems and legal problems, and difficulty looking for and keeping a job to be related to financial strain (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Peirce et al., 1994; Shaw et al., 2011). Because of this, respondents may take on a breadwinning role and shoulder greater responsibilities, and, subsequently, experience greater family-to-work conflict.

Variations by Gender and Parenthood

The relationship between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict may vary by the respondent's gender. Prior research suggests two conflicting predictions on how the association may differ for men and women. Some have found that men have difficulties assuming household and caregiving responsibilities (Zarit, Todd, & Zarit, 1986) and may experience greater family-to-work conflict than women. Others have suggested that men are more open to shouldering greater household responsibilities (Hilton, Crawford, & Tarko, 2000; McFarland & Sanders, 1999) and may not experience greater family-to-work conflict than women with the same burden of spousal problems. Considering that women shoulder greater caregiving roles already (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2007), the additional burden of spousal problems may lead to greater family-to-work conflict for women than men (Mennino et al., 2005). The association between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict may differ by the presence of minor children. Considering that parents experience higher levels of family-to-work conflict (Minnotte, Minnotte, & Pedersen, 2013), additional strain from spousal problems might place parents at a greater risk for family-to-work conflict. Lastly, the relationship between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict may be stronger for mothers with minor children than their male counterparts or adults without minor children. Due to gendered norms of childcare, women are more likely to feel responsible and gain a sense of identity from parenthood compared to men (Erickson, 2005). Thus, mothers to minor children may be prone to experiencing greater levels of family-to-work conflict when their spouse has a problem.

Other Factors

All analyses are controlled for several factors that are related to both the prevalence of spousal problems and family-to-work conflict. First, several respondents' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics are included. Older age is related to lower levels of family-to-

work conflict (Voydanoff, 2005) and greater health problems (Conn, 2011; Nelson & Nierman, 2000). Non-Whites are less likely to report family-to-work conflict (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), whereas they may be more likely to report health issues (Weinick, Zuvekas, & Cohen, 2000) and less likely to report emotional or behavioral difficulties (Woodward et al., 2010). Cohabiting couples may be more likely than married couples to report greater spousal problems (Edin & Keflas, 2005) whereas they report that they experience lower levels of family-to-work conflict (McGinnity & Whelan, 2009). Higher levels of education and household income may enable greater resources and ability to combat work and family imbalance (Williams, 2010) and spousal health or other types of problems (Brown, Hummer, & Hayward, 2014; Caetano, Vaeth, & Rodriguez, 2012). Second, respondents whose spouse has health or other problems could have physical or emotional concerns of their own (Evangelista et al, 2002; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1991; Marks 1998). Considering this, poorer physical and emotional health are related to greater family-to-work conflict (Frone et al., 1992). Third, spouses' hours spent on housework and paid work are included because these factors depend on problems (Sarwari et al., 1998) and are related to the other spouses' family-to-work conflict (Nomaguchi, 2012).

THE CURRENT STUDY

Despite the important role that spouses play in individuals' balancing of work and family responsibilities, little research has examined whether spousal problems are related to family-to-work conflict. We predict that spousal problems—health or emotional and behavioral difficulties—are related to higher levels of family-to-work conflict (H1). We also examine three mediating factors. First, we predict that spousal problems increase time strain and therefore increase family-to-work conflict (H2a). Second, spousal problems are expected to foster greater relationship strain, which is related to higher levels of family-to-work conflict (H2b). Third,

spousal problems will be related to greater financial strain and therefore higher levels of family-to-work conflict (H2c).

Further, we examine whether the relationship between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict varies by gender and the presence of minor children. For gender differences, we state two countervailing hypotheses. First, the association between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict is greater for men than women (H3a) because men may have greater difficulty assuming family responsibilities. Second, the relationship between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict is greater for women than men (H3b) because women are already more likely to assume household responsibilities and additional strain may foster greater family-to-work conflict. For the presence of children, because parents face greater strains compared to their counterparts, we expect that the relationship between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict is greater for parents with minor children compared to those without minor children (H4). Lastly, because of the norms that obligate mothers to contribute more to family responsibilities, the relationship between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict will be greater for mothers of minor children compared to fathers of minor children as well as men and women who do not have minor children (H5).

METHOD

Data

The data for this study are obtained from the 1995-1996 National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) conducted by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Successful Midlife Development (Brim et al., 2010). MIDUS is a nationally representative random-digit-dial sample of English-speaking adults aged 25 to 74 residing in a non-institutionalized setting within the contiguous United States. Of those within the sampling

frame, the response rate was 70% for the telephone interview and 87% for the mail questionnaire. The total response rate for both parts of the survey was 61%. Although it might appear to be dated, the MIDUS is the best data set for the current analysis with a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults that provides a wide range of spousal problems and indicators of family-to-work conflict.

For this paper, we first selected 3,487 respondents who are included in the main sample of the MIDUS. We then selected 2,350 respondents who are either married or cohabiting with a partner. We further reduced the sample to 1,986 respondents, including only those under the age of 62, considering that this age is associated with retirement in the MIDUS data. Prior research has used similar age-limiting strategies (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Voydanoff, 2005). We excluded those outside of the workforce, which reduced the sample to $N = 1,499$.

Measures

Dependent variable. Respondents' family-to-work conflict was measured as a four-item mean scale ($\alpha = .78$). Used with other studies (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000), Respondents were asked how often they experienced the following in the past year: (a) "responsibilities at home reduce the effort you can devote to your job, (b) personal or family worries and problems distract you when you are at work, (c) activities and chores at home prevent you from getting the amount of sleep you need to do your job well, and (d) stress at home makes you irritable at work (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = most of the time, and 5 = all of the time)."

Independent variables. Two types of spousal problems were examined: health problems and emotional or behavioral difficulties. Respondents were asked whether nine types of problems have happened to their spouse or partner in the previous twelve months (0 = no, and 1 = yes). *Health problems* were measured as a sum of two types of problems, (a) chronic disease or

disability and (b) frequent minor illnesses. *Emotional and behavioral difficulties* were measured as a sum of seven dichotomous types of problems including (a) emotional problems (e.g., sadness, anxiety), (b) alcohol or substance problems, (c) financial problems (e.g., heavy debts), (d) problems at school or at work (e.g., failing grades, poor job performance), (e) difficulty finding or keeping a job, (f) legal problems (e.g., involved in law suits, police charges, traffic violations), and (g) difficulty getting along with others ($\alpha = .64$). Following Greenfield and Marks (2006), spouses not working or not in school were coded as not experiencing problems at school or at work.

Mediating variables. Three aspects of mediating variables were assessed. *Time strain* included two objective indicators and one subjective indicator. The first objective indicator of time strain, *respondents' weekly work hours*, was measured from the sum of the following questions: "About how many hours do you work for pay in an average week on your main job? In an average week, how many hours do you work for pay at any other jobs?" The second objective indicator of time strain, *respondent's weekly housework hours*, was measured from the following question: "In a typical week, about how many hours do you generally spend doing household chores?" For both respondents' work hours and time performing housework, individuals who had values larger than the 95th percentile were recoded into the 95th percentile by gender (Marini & Shelton, 1993). The subjective indicator for time strain, *perceived time strain*, was measured as a four-item mean scale ($\alpha = .69$), asking respondents, "How often has each of the following occurred at home in the past year? (a) you have too many demands made on you, (b) you control the amount of time you spend on tasks, (c) you have enough time to get everything done, or (d) you have a lot of interruptions (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *most of the time*, and 5 = *all of the time*)." *Relationship strain* was measured by two subjective

indicators. The first indicator, *perceived relationship strain*, was measured as a four-item mean scale ($\alpha = .81$). Respondents were asked how often their spouses (a) make too many demands on them, (b) criticize them, (c) let them down when they were counting on him/her, and (d) get on their nerves in the past year (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *some*, and 4 = *and a lot*). The second indicator, *perceived housework unfairness*, was measured from the following question: “How fair do you think your arrangement of household chores is to you (1 = *very fair*, 2 = *somewhat fair*, 3 = *somewhat unfair*, and 4 = *very unfair*)?” Prior research has found that perceptions of housework unfairness to be related to relationship quality and, therefore, may illuminate additional dimensions that perceptions of relationship strain alone does not (Grote & Clark 2001a, 2001b). *Financial strain* was measured using the following question: “How difficult is it for you (and your family) to pay your monthly bills (1 = *not at all difficult*, 2 = *not very difficult*, 3 = *somewhat difficult*, and 4 = *very difficult*)?”

Moderating variables. This study examined variation by gender and the presence of minor children. *Gender* was measured as a dichotomous variable (men = 0, women = 1) and is referenced as *female* in analyses. *Parents with minor children* was measured as a dichotomous variable indicating the presence of any children under the age of 18. The MIDUS data did not provide information about residency of children, whether biological or non-biological. Children residing outside of the respondent’s home were included in this measure. Regardless of residency, respondents who (a) had at least one biological child under the age of 18 or (b) who had been, or currently were, involved in raising at least one child under the age of 18 for five years were assigned 1s. Respondents who did not meet either of these two requirements are assigned 0s. Parents with minor children were referred to as *parenthood*, for brevity.

Control variables. Respondents' characteristics were described below. *Age* was measured from the respondents' self-reported age. *Race and ethnicity* was measured as a series of dichotomous variables including White (reference), Black, Hispanic, and other race. *Union status* was measured as a dichotomous variable (1 = *cohabiting*, and 0 = *married*) and is referenced as *cohabitation* in analyses. *Education* was measured as an ordered continuous variable ranging from 1 = *no school or some grade school* to 12 = *PhD, ED.D, MD, DDS, LLB, LLD, JD, or other professional degree*. Respondent's *poor health* was measured as a Likert-like scale where respondents were asked "in general, would you say your physical health is excellent (1), very good (2), good (3), fair (4), or poor (5)?" Similarly, respondent's *poor emotional health* was measured as a Likert-like scale where respondents were asked "would you say your mental or emotional health is excellent (1), very good (2), good (3), fair (4), or poor (5)?" Two spouses' characteristics were included. Spouses' *weekly work hours* was measured from the sum of the following questions: "About how many hours does your spouse or partner work for pay in an average week on his or her main job? In an average week, about how many hours does your spouse or partner work for pay at any other jobs?" Spouses' *weekly housework hours* was a continuous variable measured as the number of hours a spouse contributes to household chores in a typical week. As with respondents' weekly work hours and housework hours, spouses' values greater than the 95th percentile were recoded into the 95th percentile by gender. We used one indicator of household characteristics, *household income* was measured using the total yearly income of all those residing within the household. In effort to reduce the bias by outliers, those with household incomes greater than the 95th percentile were recoded the 95th percentile.

Analytic Strategy

Multivariate ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were used to examine whether spouses' problems are related to respondents' family-to-work conflict. Eight models were examined. Model 1 examined the association between the spousal problem and respondents' family-to-work conflict with controls. Models 2, 3, 4 added time strain, relationship strain, and financial strain to Model 1, respectively, in order to examine whether these factors mediate the association between spouses' problems and respondents' family-to-work conflict. Model 5 included all three types of strain to Model 1. To examine variation by gender, Model 6 included interactions between the spousal problem and gender. Model 7 included interaction terms between spousal problems and the presence of minor children to examine variation by parenthood. Model 8 added three-way interaction terms between spousal problems, gender, and parental status to examine whether the relationship between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict differed for mothers of minor children, fathers to minor children, as well as those men and women who are not parents to minor children. Model fitness was evaluated by Nested F-tests (Demaris, 2004). Mediation was tested using Sobel tests (Mackinnon et al., 2002). Missing data were handled with multiple imputation methods outlined by Allison (2002) and were conducted using the *Stata* command *ice* for chained equations imputation (Royston, 2014) with analyses using the *mi estimate* command. Imputed variables were constrained within original values. Considering that the command *mi estimate* does not produce estimates for R^2 , the present analyses utilized the installable *Stata* command *mibeta* option *fisherz*, which was available for download (Marchenko, 2011), to produce these estimates. Analyses were adjusted using corrected weights.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table 1. The majority of respondents have minor children (62.2%). About 10 percent are cohabiting. The majority of respondents are non-Hispanic White (84.6%) and have, on average, some college (6.85). The mean age of respondents is 40.3 years old and the mean household income is \$87,650. The mean score for family-to-work is 1.16 (ranging 1 to 4). The mean spousal health problem score is .308 (ranging 0 to 2), whereas the mean spousal emotional and behavioral difficulties score is .843 (ranging 0 to 7). About a quarter of respondents have a spouse with health problem (26%) and just under half (44%) have a spouse with at least one type of emotional and behavioral difficulty.

[Table 1 around here]

Spouses' Health Problems and Respondents' Family-To-Work Conflict

First, the relationship between spouses' health problems and respondents' family-to-work conflict is assessed using ordinary least squares regressions (Model 1 of Table 2). Supportive of the first hypothesis (H1), spouses' health problems are significant and positively associated with respondents' family-to-work conflict, after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Considering the way in which the indicator for health problems is coded, the effect is stronger ($b \cdot x$ or $.164 \cdot 2$) for respondents with spouses that have both chronic and frequent types of illnesses than those with only chronic or frequent types of illnesses.

[Table 2 around here]

We then assessed whether three types of strain (time, relationship, and financial) account for the relationship between spouses' health problems and family-to-work conflict. As shown in Model 2 (Table 2), time strain is positively related to family-to-work conflict. In contrast, there is no significant association between the objective measures of time strain (i.e., respondents' work

hours or housework) and respondents' family-to-work conflict. Similarly, the results from Model 3 show that perceived relationship strain is positively related to family-to-work conflict with no statistical significance associated with perceptions of housework unfairness. Lastly, as shown in Model 4, perceived financial strain is positively related to family-to-work conflict.

Although the coefficient for spouses' health problems remains statistically significant after inclusion of time strain in Model 2 ($b = .109, p < .01$), relationship strain in Model 3 ($b = .123, p < .001$), and financial strain in Model 4 ($b = .151, p < .001$), the strength of the coefficient diminishes. With the inclusion of all indicators of strain in Model 5, the size of the coefficient for spouses' health problems is almost halved from the first model ($b = .164$) and reduces in significance ($b = .094, p < .01$). These results support H2a, H2b, and H2c, and suggest that time strain, relationship strain, and financial strain mediates the relationship between spouses' health problems and respondent's family-to-work conflict. As noted above, perceptions of time, relationship or financial strain remain statistically significant across all models and in Model 5. Sobel tests show that health problems are largely mediated by perceived time strain (39%; $z = 10.56, p < .001$), and less so for perceived relationship strain (32%; $z = 10.59, p < .001$) and financial strain (9%; $z = 4.906, p < .001$). Nested-F tests suggest that Model 5 helps explain additional variance that the previous four models do not ($p < .001$). The variables in Model 5 explain 32.1 percent of the total variance in family-to-work conflict.

As shown in Model 6, the interaction between gender and spouses' health problems is not significant, neither is the coefficient for gender. Model 7 shows that the interaction between parenthood and spouses' health problems is not significant. These results suggest that there is no variation in the relationship between spousal health problems and family-to-work conflict by gender or parenthood, failing to provide support for either H3a, H3b, or H4. Lastly, Model 8

includes interaction terms between spouses' health problems and gender, spouses' health problems and parenthood, and spouses' health problems, gender and parenthood. All three interactions are not significant and do not provide support for hypothesis H5.

Spouses' Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties, and Respondents' Family-To-Work Conflict

Next, the relationship between spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and respondents' family-to-work conflict is assessed using OLS regressions (Table 3). After controlling for a net of covariates, spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties are significantly associated with respondents' family-to-work conflict. These results are supportive of the first hypothesis (H1).

[Table 3 around here]

We then examine whether time strain, relationship strain, or financial strain will explain the relationship between spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and family-to-work conflict. As shown in Table 3, perceptions of time strain are positively related to family-to-work conflict, in contrast, no significant associations exist for objective indicators of time strain—respondents' work hours or housework. Model 3 shows that respondents' perceptions of relationship strain are positively associated with family-to-work conflict where respondents' contribution to household income is not significantly related. As shown in Model 4, respondents' perceptions of financial strain are positively related to family-to-work conflict. After all indicators of strain are included (Model 5), the strength of the relationships diminishes but remain significant. Respondents' perceptions of time strain, perceptions of relationship strain, and perceptions of financial strain are positively related to family-to-work conflict. In contrast, respondents' work hours, housework, and perceptions of housework unfairness are not statistically related to respondents' family-to-work conflict.

Although the coefficient for spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties remains significant after inclusion of time strain in Model 2 ($b = .048, p < .001$) and financial strain in Model 4 ($b = .052, p < .001$), the strength of the coefficient diminishes. The coefficient loses significance with the inclusion of relationship strain in Model 3 ($b = .031$). After all indicators of strain are included in Model 5, the size of the coefficient for the spousal problem is 82% lower from the first model and is no longer significant. These results are supportive of H2a, H2b, and H2c and suggest that these indicators of strain mediate the relationship between spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and respondent's family-to-work conflict. Only perceptions of time, relationship, or financial strain remained significant across all models and in Model 5. Sobel tests suggest that emotional and behavioral difficulties are mediated most by perceived relationship strain (54%; $z = 22.86, p < .001$) and less so by perceived time strain (46%; $z = 18.57, p < .001$) or financial strain (30%; $z = 15.64, p < .001$). Nested F-tests of the nested models suggest that Model 5 helps explain additional variance that the previous four models do not. The variables in Model 5 explain 32 percent of the total variance in family-to-work conflict.

As shown in Model 6, the interaction term between gender and spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties is not significant, neither is the coefficient for gender. Model 7 includes an interaction term between spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and parenthood as well as an indicator for parenthood, of which, neither are significant. As with spouses' health problems, there appears to be no variation in the relationship between spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and respondents' family-to-work conflict by gender or parenthood, failing to provide support for either hypotheses H3a, H3b, or H4. Lastly, Model 8 includes interaction terms between spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and gender, spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and parenthood, and spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties,

gender and parenthood. All three interactions, as well as the indicators for gender and parenthood, are not significant and do not provide support for hypothesis H5.

Post Hoc Analyses

We conducted several post-hoc analyses to examine robustness of the present findings (data not shown). First, we included the two aspects of spousal problems—health problems as well as emotional and behavioral difficulties—in the same models to examine whether one aspect of spousal problems would diminish the other aspect of spousal problems. The results suggest that when both indicators of spousal problems were included in the same models, the relationships and patterns between spousal problems and respondents' family-to-work conflict were consistent with the findings discussed above. Congruent with models discussed in the tables, spouses' medical problems appear to be mediated most by respondents' time strain, whereas spouses' emotional or behavioral difficulties appeared to be mediated most by respondents' relationship strain.

Second, as Greenfield and Marks (2006) did for their study using data from the MIDUS on the association between adult children's problems and parents' well-being, we examined the same models discussed above using a scale of spousal problems created by summing all ten items (two items of health problems as well as eight items of emotional and behavioral difficulties). We found that the patterns of results for the relationship between the spousal problems scale and respondents' family-to-work conflict were similar to the patterns found between spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and respondents' family-to-work conflict. We presented the models that examined spouses' health problems and emotional or behavioral difficulties separately because, as we will discuss in the next section, the findings that the key

mediators for the link between spousal problem and respondents' family-to-work conflict differ for the two aspects of spousal problems have important policy implications.

DISCUSSION

Despite the relevance and focal location spouses have within our lives (e.g., Cherlin, 2010; Huston, 2000), prior research on family-to-work conflict has paid limited attention to their role. In particular, no published study has examined how spousal problems are related to respondent's family-to-work conflict. Utilizing a nationally representative sample of working married and cohabiting individuals, the present analyses sought to fill this gap in the literature by examining the associations between two aspects of spousal problems (i.e., health problems as well as emotional and behavioral difficulties) and respondents' family-to-work conflict, while accounting for mediating factors—time strain, relationship strain, and financial strain—as well as variations by gender and parental status to minor children.

First, the results from the present analyses show that spouse's health problems are positively related to respondents' family-to-work conflict. As hypothesized, this relationship is mediated by time, relationship, and financial strains. The coefficient for spouses' health problems, relating to respondents' family-to-work conflict, is both reduced in magnitude and significance after the inclusion of the strain indicators. In particular, respondents' perceptions of time strain, perceptions of relationship strain, and financial strain are consistently significant, and appear to partially mediate the relationship. Additional analyses finds that perceptions of time strain seem to have the greatest affect mediating the relationship between spouses' health problems and respondents' family-to-work conflict.

Second, the results presented find that spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties are positively related to respondents' family-to-work conflict. Similar to the findings for spousal

health problems, this relationship appears to be mediated by respondents' perceptions of time strain, perceptions of relationship strain, and financial strain are consistently significant, and appear to mediate the relationship between spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and respondents' family-to-work conflict. Supplemental analyses finds that, unlike the case of spousal problems, perceptions of relationship strain seem to have the greatest affect mediating the relationship between spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties and respondents' family-to-work conflict.

Contrary to our predictions, there were no variations in the relationship between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict by gender or the presence of minor children. As to gender differences, we stated two countervailing predictions. On one hand, we suggested that the association between spousal problems and family-to-work conflict would be greater for men than women considering that men may have greater difficulty assuming greater family responsibilities. On the other hand, we suggested that this relationship would be greater for women than men considering that women are already more likely to assume household responsibilities, compared to men, and therefore any additional strain may foster greater family-to-work conflict. It could be that these countervailing effects of gender are both occurring and counteracting one another. As to parenthood differences, having a spouse with a problem appears to be detrimental regardless of the presence of minor children. American society places substantial emphasis on the role of spouse as the primary source of social support (Cherlin 2010; Huston 2000). As a result, if spouses become a source of demands, rather than a source of support, individuals may find this particularly difficult to handle particularly considering already present work and family demands. Additionally, non-findings by parental status could be the result of data limitations. The MIDUS data do not capture residency status of children, whether

biological or non-biological. A child's residency may play an important role in the relationship in which parents perceive family-to-work conflict.

The findings discussed above have important policy implications. Our findings suggest that time deficit is the key issue for employed men or women when their spouse has health problems. Paid leave or flexible work hours may assist employees in balancing time demands associated with taking care of their spouses and households. Without adequate workplace supports to balance increased strain and stress, workers are less productive, have greater absenteeism, and greater job insecurity (Anderson et al., 2002). Policy should be expanded as the existing one, Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), does not require employers to give paid leave nor does it cover all working Americans. Additionally, special consideration should be given to those with spouses who have emotional and behavioral difficulties, including substance abuse, legal trouble, and interpersonal problems, of which are significantly stigmatized (Schomerus et al., 2011), may not be included under FMLA. In particular, the present analyses suggest that relationship strain is the key issue for working men and women when their spouse has emotional and behavioral difficulties. Counseling for individuals and spouses experiencing these types of problems may help elevate relationship discord and strain.

The present analyses have limitations that future research should address. First, the MIDUS data are dated and new data collection that includes information about spousal problems is needed to gain a more contemporary portrait. Additionally, the present study only analyzes data cross-sectionally, thus it limits the ability to interpret causal relationships and time order. Workers experiencing the greatest family-to-work conflict may have dropped out of the labor force prior to the collection of data. Thus, the present analyses may underestimate the link between spousal problems and respondents' family-to-work conflict. Secondly, this study relies

upon the respondents' report of their spousal characteristics, including spousal problems and spousal employment. Future research regarding spousal problems should use couple level data to obtain more accurate results. Lastly, indicators for spouses' problems could be improved. Health problems as well as emotional and behavioral difficulties are created as a count of the *types* of problems spouses' experience, rather than the number of actual problems they experience. Future research should utilize measures that can operationalize magnitude of spouses' problems as well as the types of problems spouses' experience.

Although work-family research has increasingly paid greater attention to family demands that influence individuals' family-to-work conflict, researchers have largely focused on child care and children's special needs as family demands. The present study sheds light on a neglected domain of family demands—spousal problems. The findings suggest that a sizable percentage of employed adults have a spouse who has health problems or other issues. Spousal problems are related to greater family-to-work conflict through increased time strain, relationship strain, and financial strains. Our findings inform policy makers about the urgency in understanding the role in which spousal problems act as a main source of family demands that many employed adults experience and can influence their ability to balance work and family responsibilities.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Of Variables (N = 1,499)

	Mean or Proportion	SD	Range	α
Dependent variable				
Respondents' family-to-work conflict	1.155	.641	1 – 4	.779
Explanatory variables				
Spouses' health problems	.308	.547	0 – 2	
No spousal health problems	.735			
One spousal health problem	.222			
Two spousal health problem	.043			
Spouses' emotional and behavioral difficulties	.843	1.244	0 – 7	.631
Proportion with one or more difficulties	.433			
Respondents' time strain				
Weekly paid work hours	45.087	12.965	3 – 75	
Weekly housework hours	11.002	8.113	0 – 35	
Perceived time strain	2.746	.683	1 – 5	.689
Respondents' relationship strain				
Perceived relationship strain	2.205	.643	1 – 4	.811
Perceived housework unfairness	1.801	.869	1 – 4	
Respondents' financial strain	2.252	.841	1 – 4	
Control variables				
Respondent's characteristics				
Female	.465		0 – 1	
Parents with minor children	.622		0 – 1	
Age	40.266	9.177	23 – 61	
Cohabitation	.100		0 – 1	
Race/ethnicity				
Non-Hispanic White	.846		0 – 1	
Non-Hispanic Black	.057		0 – 1	
Hispanic	.062		0 – 1	
Non-Hispanic Other	.035		0 – 1	
Education	6.835	2.394	0 – 12	
Poor physical health	2.398	.901	1 – 5	
Poor emotional health	2.168	.900	1 – 5	
Spouses' characteristics				
Weekly paid work hours	37.295	14.323	0 – 56	
Weekly housework hours	12.602	11.525	0 – 50	
Household characteristics				
Household income (in thousands)	87.650	63.255	0 – 300	

Note: Data are weighted using corrected weights.

Table 2. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models Of Spouses' Health Problems Predicting Family-To-Work Conflict (N = 1,499)

	MODEL 1			MODEL 2			MODEL 3			MODEL 4		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Spouses' health problems	0.164	0.036	***	0.109	0.033	**	0.123	0.034	***	0.151	0.036	***
x female												
x parenthood												
x female x parenthood												
Respondents' time strain												
Weekly paid work hours				0.002	0.001							
Weekly housework hours				-0.001	0.003							
Perceived time strain				0.363	0.028	***						
Respondents' relationship strain												
Perceived relationship strain							0.299	0.031	***			
Housework unfairness							0.017	0.020				
Respondents' financial strain										0.154	0.020	***
Control variables												
Respondent's characteristics												
Female ^a	0.068	0.040		0.005	0.042		0.045	0.038		0.067	0.040	
Parenthood ^a	0.235	0.038	***	0.091	0.037	*	0.178	0.037	***	0.195	0.038	***
Age	-0.008	0.002	***	-0.007	0.002	***	-0.008	0.002	***	-0.007	0.002	***
Cohabitation ^a	-0.080	0.063		-0.022	0.056		-0.087	0.062		-0.098	0.061	
Race/ethnicity ^a												
Non-Hispanic Black	-0.044	0.072		-0.056	0.067		-0.087	0.069		-0.062	0.072	
Hispanic	-0.293	0.082	***	-0.209	0.089	*	-0.271	0.081	**	-0.281	0.078	***
Non-Hispanic Other	0.030	0.097		0.032	0.096		0.018	0.097		0.043	0.092	
Education	0.029	0.008	***	0.019	0.007	*	0.023	0.008	**	0.029	0.008	***
Poor physical health	0.026	0.021		0.018	0.019		0.017	0.020		0.014	0.021	
Poor emotional health	0.142	0.020	***	0.094	0.019	***	0.098	0.020	***	0.129	0.020	***
Spouses' characteristics												
Weekly work hours	0.000	0.002		0.000	0.002		0.001	0.002		0.000	0.002	
Weekly housework hours	0.001	0.002		0.001	0.002		0.003	0.002		0.001	0.002	
Household characteristics												
Household income	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000		0.001	0.000	
Intercept	0.665	0.177	**	-0.114	0.204		0.131	0.168		0.329	0.183	
Pseudo R ²	.134			.260			.216			.169		

Note: Data are weighted using corrected weights.

^aOmitted reference categories include: male, no children < 18, marriage, and Non-Hispanic White.

* < .05. ** < .01. *** < .001.

Table 2. Continued

	MODEL 5		MODEL 6		MODEL 7		MODEL 8	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Spouses' health problems	0.094	0.032 **	0.133	0.046 **	0.128	0.046 **	0.143	0.072
x female			-0.080	0.062			-0.025	0.089
x parenthood					-0.063	0.063	-0.014	0.080
x female x parenthood							-0.132	0.110
Respondents' time strain								
Weekly paid work hours	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001
Weekly housework hours	-0.003	0.003	-0.002	0.003	-0.003	0.003	-0.002	0.003
Perceived time strain	0.277	0.031 ***	0.276	0.031 ***	0.277	0.031 ***	0.276	0.031 ***
Respondents' relationship strain								
Perceived relationship strain	0.168	0.036 ***	0.168	0.036 ***	0.168	0.036 ***	0.166	0.036 ***
Housework unfairness	0.013	0.019	0.014	0.018	0.012	0.018	0.013	0.018
Respondents' financial strain	0.084	0.021 ***	0.084	0.021 ***	0.083	0.021 ***	0.084	0.021 ***
Control variables								
Respondent's characteristics								
Female ^a	0.021	0.041	0.044	0.043	0.018	0.041	0.043	0.043
Parenthood ^a	0.074	0.036 *	0.072	0.036	0.094	0.038 *	0.096	0.038 *
Age	-0.006	0.002 **	-0.006	0.002 **	-0.006	0.002 **	-0.006	0.002 **
Cohabitation ^a	-0.050	0.055	-0.050	0.055	-0.052	0.055	-0.051	0.055
Race/ethnicity ^a								
Non-Hispanic Black	-0.090	0.067	-0.092	0.066	-0.087	0.066	-0.082	0.066
Hispanic	-0.208	0.083 *	-0.209	0.084 *	-0.205	0.084 *	-0.201	0.085 *
Non-Hispanic Other	0.031	0.091	0.029	0.091	0.034	0.091	0.040	0.090
Education	0.018	0.007 *	0.018	0.007 *	0.018	0.007 *	0.018	0.007 *
Poor physical health	0.009	0.019	0.008	0.019	0.008	0.019	0.006	0.019
Poor emotional health	0.073	0.019 ***	0.074	0.019 ***	0.073	0.019 ***	0.075	0.019 ***
Spouses' characteristics								
Weekly work hours	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002
Weekly housework hours	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
Household characteristics								
Household income	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Intercept	-0.427	0.196	-0.438	0.194 *	-0.442	0.199 *	-0.456	0.198 *
Pseudo R ²	.296		.297		.297		.299	

Note: Data are weighted using corrected weights.

^aOmitted reference categories include: male, no children < 18, marriage, and Non-Hispanic White.

* < .05. ** < .01. *** < .001.

Table 3. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models Of Spouses' Emotional And Behavioral Difficulties Predicting Family-To-Work Conflict (N = 1,499)

	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3		MODEL 4	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Spouses' emotional and behavioral problems	0.077	0.019 ***	0.048	0.017 *	0.031	0.018	0.052	0.020 *
x female								
x parenthood								
x female x parenthood								
Respondents' time strain								
Weekly paid work hours			0.002	0.001				
Weekly housework hours			-0.001	0.003				
Perceived time strain			0.360	0.028 ***				
Respondents' relationship strain								
Perceived relationship strain					0.295	0.032 ***		
Housework unfairness					0.014	0.020		
Respondents' financial strain							0.139	0.021 ***
Control variables								
Respondent's characteristics								
Female ^a	0.059	0.041	-0.001	0.042	0.043	0.038	0.061	0.040
Parenthood ^a	0.215	0.037 ***	0.079	0.036	0.168	0.036 ***	0.183	0.037 ***
Age	-0.006	0.002 **	-0.006	0.002 **	-0.007	0.002 ***	-0.006	0.002 **
Cohabitation ^a	-0.092	0.063	-0.029	0.057	-0.090	0.062	-0.104	0.062
Race/ethnicity ^a								
Non-Hispanic Black	-0.075	0.073	-0.074	0.068	-0.099	0.070	-0.081	0.073
Hispanic	-0.309	0.082 ***	-0.221	0.088 *	-0.282	0.082 **	-0.296	0.078 ***
Non-Hispanic Other	0.061	0.093	0.053	0.093	0.048	0.095	0.074	0.090
Education	0.024	0.008 **	0.017	0.008 *	0.021	0.008 **	0.026	0.008 **
Poor physical health	0.023	0.021	0.017	0.019	0.017	0.020	0.013	0.021
Poor emotional health	0.132	0.020 ***	0.088	0.019 ***	0.097	0.020 ***	0.125	0.020 ***
Spouses' characteristics								
Weekly work hours	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.000	0.002
Weekly housework hours	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.001	0.002
Household characteristics								
Household income	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000
Intercept	0.684	0.175 ***	-0.107	0.202	0.158	0.165	0.380	0.181
Pseudo R ²	.135		.259		.209		.162	

Note: Data are weighted using corrected weights.

^aOmitted reference categories include: male, no children < 18, marriage, and Non-Hispanic White.

* < .05. ** < .01. *** < .001.

Table 3. Continued

	MODEL 5		MODEL 6		MODEL 7		MODEL 8	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Spouses' emotional and behavioral problems	0.014	0.019	0.028	0.023	0.030	0.024	0.011	0.038
x female			-0.026	0.033			0.027	0.048
x parenthood					-0.023	0.027	0.022	0.038
x female x parenthood							-0.077	0.043
Respondents' time strain								
Weekly paid work hours	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001
Weekly housework hours	-0.002	0.003	-0.002	0.003	-0.002	0.003	-0.002	0.003
Perceived time strain	0.284	0.032 ***	0.282	0.032 ***	0.284	0.031 ***	0.283	0.032 ***
Respondents' relationship strain								
Perceived relationship strain	0.168	0.038 ***	0.169	0.038 ***	0.167	0.038 ***	0.167	0.038 ***
Housework unfairness	0.011	0.018	0.011	0.018	0.010	0.018	0.010	0.018
Respondents' financial strain	0.081	0.022 ***	0.081	0.021 ***	0.081	0.021 ***	0.081	0.021 ***
Control variables								
Respondent's characteristics								
Female ^a	0.017	0.042	0.038	0.052	0.016	0.042	0.035	0.052
Parenthood ^a	0.065	0.036	0.065	0.036	0.083	0.039 *	0.082	0.040 *
Age	-0.006	0.002 **	-0.006	0.002 **	-0.005	0.002 **	-0.006	0.002 **
Cohabitation ^a	-0.050	0.057	-0.048	0.057	-0.054	0.057	-0.054	0.057
Race/ethnicity ^a								
Non-Hispanic Black	-0.096	0.067	-0.094	0.067	-0.094	0.067	-0.082	0.067
Hispanic	-0.215	0.084 *	-0.216	0.083 *	-0.215	0.085 *	-0.211	0.085 *
Non-Hispanic Other	0.054	0.091	0.052	0.090	0.055	0.092	0.054	0.090
Education	0.017	0.008 *	0.017	0.008 *	0.017	0.008 *	0.017	0.008 *
Poor physical health	0.009	0.019	0.008	0.018	0.009	0.019	0.009	0.018
Poor emotional health	0.073	0.019 ***	0.074	0.019 ***	0.073	0.019 ***	0.072	0.019 ***
Spouses' characteristics								
Weekly work hours	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.002
Weekly housework hours	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
Household characteristics								
Household income	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Intercept	-0.425	0.191 *	-0.431	0.189 *	-0.443	0.191 *	-0.447	0.191 *
Pseudo R ²	.291		.292		.291		.294	

Note: Data are weighted using corrected weights.

^aOmitted reference categories include: male, no children < 18, marriage, and Non-Hispanic White.

* < .05. ** < .01. *** < .001.