

Flexible schedule is key to keeping working moms on the job

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Women who return to work after giving birth are more likely to stay on the job if they have greater control over their work schedules, according to a Baylor University study. Researchers also found that job security and the ability to make use of a variety of their job skills leads to greater retention of working moms, while the impact of work-related stress on their physical and mental health causes greater turnover.

The study is published online in the [Journal of Applied Psychology](#).

"Having a flexible schedule is an important element necessary to decrease working mom turnover because it can be used when work demands arise," said Dawn S. Carlson, Ph.D., study author, professor of management and H. R. Gibson Chair of Organizational Development at the Hankamer School of Business at Baylor University, Waco.

"When confronted by one or more job demands, a flexible schedule provides working moms with alternatives for meeting those demands while caring for their newborns. When working moms are better able to control their work environment and adapt, work-related stress is less likely to become a family issue," she said.

According to 2008 data from the U.S. [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), 71 percent of women with children under the age of 18 were working or looking for work, and nearly 60 percent of women with young children were employed. Yet, a large number of mothers who return to work after childbirth subsequently leave the labor force. Very little is known about

the factors that play a role in women's work decisions after childbirth.

The transition back to work is pivotal for a new mother, and this study offers important insight into the understanding of how a job can either contribute to or detract from the mother's decision to stay with her employer after she returns to work, said Carlson.

The researchers surveyed 179 full-time [working mothers](#) in North Carolina with an average age of 31 years. Of the group, 72 percent was white, 27 percent was black and one percent was Asian. The majority, 79 percent, was married. They worked an average of 39.7 hours per week and planned on returning to work 30 or more hours by four months postpartum. The duration of [maternity leave](#) was six weeks, but only 48.1 percent reported having paid maternity leave. Among the new mothers, 40 percent reported that the recent birth was their first child. For the study, they completed an interview survey at four months postpartum, eight months postpartum and 12 months postpartum.

Job security also plays an important role in decision-making. When job security is high, workers are not distracted by worry or exhausted by strain. Instead, they are able to engage more fully in responsibilities inside and outside the workplace.

"[Job security](#) heightens motivation and energy, particularly for mothers who are sensitive to the security of their jobs after returning from maternity leave. When working mothers believe that their tenure with an organization is not at risk, they will have more energy and other resources with which to fully engage and perform both at work and at home," added Merideth J. Ferguson, Ph.D., assistant professor of management and entrepreneurship at Baylor and a co-author of the study.

Results suggest that employers may be able to promote beneficial

outcomes through systematic attempts to increase the use of a working mom's skills by cross-training her for multiple functions. Mental and physical health play an important role in retaining working mothers and deserve attention, such as through employee assistance programs, support systems, or more integrative work-life initiatives, Carlson concluded.

"Although further research is needed, the results of this study indicate the impact of job characteristics on work-family relations that play a role in the mental and physical health and retention of working mothers as they make the pivotal transition back to work after childbirth," she said.

Provided by Baylor University

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