

Moms more likely than other employees to leave male-dominated jobs with long hours

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This is Youngjoo Cha. Credit: Indiana University

As demands for long work hours continue to increase, an Indiana University study found that mothers are more likely than other employees to leave jobs in male-dominated fields. This trend was not seen in balanced or female-dominated occupations.

"Mothers were 52 percent more likely than other [women](#) to leave their

[jobs](#) if they were working a 50-hour week or more, but only in [occupations](#) dominated by men," said Youngjoo Cha, assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at IU Bloomington. "Many of these are lucrative fields, such as law, medicine, finance and engineering."

Her findings, published in the journal *Gender & Society*, reveal how overwork contributes to occupational segregation and stalled efforts to narrow the gender gap in white-collar workplaces. Many of the mothers who leave these jobs exit the job market entirely because of the lack of suitable part-time positions in these fields.

The study analyzed data collected from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, a national longitudinal household survey, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. It included 382 occupations, 173 of which were considered male-dominated, where men made up 70 percent or more of the workforce.

Cha said workplaces dominated by men tend to operate on outdated assumptions about "separate spheres" marriage—families with a homemaking woman and a breadwinning man. Yet today, both partners are employed in nearly 80 percent of American couples.

Here are more findings from "Overwork and the Persistence of Gender Segregation in Occupations," which is available [online](#).

- In male-dominated occupations, overwork was more likely than in balanced fields or female-dominated fields.
- Mothers in male-dominated occupations were more discouraged despite the fact that the women who survived in those more masculine fields may on average be more committed to [work](#) than overworking women in other jobs.
- Higher education levels make it more likely that women stay in

their jobs, but not enough to overcome the discouraging effect of being an overworking mother.

- Meanwhile, men (whether fathers or not) and women without children were not more likely to leave their jobs in overworking fields.
- When mothers left their jobs, some moved to less male-dominated professions; others entirely left the labor force.

Cha advocates labor policies that can reduce work-family conflicts and benefit women, men, families and firms. In her article, she recommends promoting workplace policies that minimize the expectation for overwork, such as setting the maximum allowable work hours, prohibiting compulsory overtime, expanding the coverage of the Fair Labor Standards Act's overtime provisions, and granting employees the right to work part-time hours without losing benefits.

More than one-third of men and nearly one-fifth of women in professions work more than 50 hours a week. While men and women have adjusted their ability to share domestic caregiving in recent years, these more extreme situations of overwork demonstrate the limits of the flexibility that men and women often aim for but can't always achieve.

Cha has found in her earlier research that when husbands overwork, it limits their contributions to home responsibilities and restricts the wife's time for work outside the home. When the wife overworks, according to her research, it rarely affects the husband's work.

Provided by Indiana University

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