



The mental health implications of maternal employment: Working versus at-home mothering identities

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Abstract

Past research exploring the effect of employment on mothers' mental health has largely constructed maternal employment as a problem of identity and energy supply within the theory of multiple roles. Specifically, maternal employment has been investigated as either beneficial (role enhancement hypothesis) or detrimental (role strain hypothesis) to women's psychological wellbeing, with little consideration given towards a more complex relationship. As such, despite three decades of research, there is inconsistent support for both the role strain and role enhancement hypotheses. The few trends to emerge from this research suggest that while maternal employment may be associated with better psychological functioning, this effect may be mediated by the over-absorption of one's time and resources within a particular identity role. Future research would benefit from revising the manner in which maternal employment is constructed as a variable in order to yield more consistent and usable findings.

Keywords

employment, maternal employment, mother, mothering identities, multiple role theory, role strain, role enhancement

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