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**SOMMAIRE / CONTENTS**

**ARTICLES**

- Puissance et pouvoir en négociation collective** ..... 171  
Pier-Luc Bilodeau  
RÉSUMÉ, SUMMARY, RESUMEN
- Supportive Legislation, Unsupportive Employers and Collective Bargaining in New Zealand** ..... 192  
Barry Foster, Erling Rasmussen, John Murrrie and Ian Laird  
SUMMARY, RÉSUMÉ, RESUMEN
- Employee and Organizational Impacts of Flexitime Work Arrangements**..... 213  
Derek Eldridge and Tahir M. Nisar  
SUMMARY, RÉSUMÉ, RESUMEN
- Occupational Similarity and Spousal Support: A Study of the Importance of Gender and Spouse's Occupation** ..... 235  
Jean E. Wallace and Alyssa Jovanovic  
SUMMARY, RÉSUMÉ, RESUMEN
- Activité professionnelle et responsabilités familiales : les mères sont-elles encore perdantes dans leur qualité d'emploi ?** ..... 256  
Luc Cloutier, Paul Bernard et Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay  
RÉSUMÉ, SUMMARY, RESUMEN
- Commitment or Even Compliance? An Australian University's Approach to Equal Employment Opportunity** ..... 279  
Andrea North-Samardzic and Sarah Gregson  
SUMMARY, RÉSUMÉ, RESUMEN

# Occupational Similarity and Spousal Support: A Study of the Importance of Gender and Spouse's Occupation

Jean E. Wallace and Alyssa Jovanovic

**This paper examines how gender and the occupation of one's spouse may explain differences in the amounts and types of spousal support individuals receive when coping with the stress of their job. We analyze survey data from a sample of married lawyers, some of whom are married to other lawyers and some of whom have spouses who are not lawyers. The results show that men receive more emotional support from their spouse than women, regardless of their spouse's occupation. In contrast, lawyers receive more informational support from their spouse if they are also a lawyer, regardless of their gender. Future research might explore not only the importance of shared statuses, such as occupation, but also the meaning of shared experiences in order to better understand spouses' support of one another.**

**KEYWORDS: work, family, spousal support, occupational similarity**

## Introduction

Recent demographic changes have contributed to the increasing interest in research examining work and family. The number of dual income couples, dual career couples and women entering and remaining in the paid labour force has steadily increased over the years (Bird, 1997; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2006). For instance, the percentage of women who are employed in the Canadian workforce has increased from 45.7% in 1976 to 61.8% in 2005 (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2006). Along with the increasing percentage of women who are working, dual-income and dual-career couples now represent the majority (62%) of Canadian couples (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2006). Another trend includes the growing number of couples who work in the same occupation or the same profession (Janning,

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2006). For example, a recent Canadian study documented that among family physicians, the proportion of male physicians married to another physician increased from 4.5% to 18% over the past 40 years (Woodward, 2005).

These trends may mean that many more individuals face the challenges related to balancing both work and family responsibilities (Bird, 1997; Eagle, Miles and Icenogle, 1997; Robinson, 2003; Monna and Gauthier, 2008). These challenges are even more prevalent for those working in professional occupations, such as law, where considerable time and work commitment are required (Robinson, 2003). Professionals may have a harder time meeting their work and family obligations because both their profession and families are “greedy institutions” (Coser, 1974). Both the family and professional workplace require unlimited time, energy and loyalty, often making it difficult to achieve balance between the two (Blair-Loy, 2003).

The purpose of this paper is to examine how two status characteristics are related to how much social support individuals receive from their spouse in coping with the stresses of their work. Specifically, this paper sets out to examine how gender and the occupational status of one’s spouse may explain differences in social support in terms of the amounts and types of support received from one’s spouse. Coping can be defined as how individuals manage stressful work situations, putting forth effort to solve work-related problems, and seeking to minimize the feelings and sources of stress (Campolietti, Hyatt and Kralj, 2007). Social support is considered a coping resource and usually refers to family members, such as a spouse or partner, or friends and coworkers offering comfort, assistance and/or understanding. Research over the last 20 years has clearly demonstrated the importance of social support in relation to one’s health and wellbeing (House, Umberson and Landis, 1988; Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Brown *et al.*, 2003; Lincoln, Chatters and Taylor, 2003).

Two types of support are generally examined in the literature: informational and emotional (House, Umberson and Landis, 1988). Informational support refers to offering suggestions, useful information, advice and guidance (Wills, 1985). Typically, it is combined with emotional and/or instrumental support (see Ducharme and Martin, 2000; Bellman *et al.*, 2003; Aycan and Eskin, 2005; Schwarzer and Guitierrez-Dona, 2005). Emotional support, on the other hand, refers to less constructive or tangible aid, that may include offering sympathy, understanding, love and caring during stressful times (Thoits, 1995; Xu and Burleson, 2001; Neff and Karney, 2005; Schwarzer and Guitierrez-Dona, 2005). In this respect, this study examines spousal support in both its emotional and informational forms.

As noted above, we explore the extent to which there are gender differences in the amount and types of support received from one’s spouse. In addition, we

also explore the extent to which having a spouse in the same occupation is related to how supportive they are. Both emotional and informational support from a spouse have been found to help restore morale and improve one's health and wellbeing (Adams, King and King, 1996; Aycan and Eskin, 2005). However, examining social support from a spouse in the same occupational field has been rarely studied (see Janning (2006) and De Grood and Wallace (in press) for examples). In this paper, we analyze data from a sample of married lawyers, some of whom are married to other lawyers and some who have spouses who are not lawyers. It is expected that dual lawyer couples and their different family circumstances can ultimately reflect differences in the amount and types of support received.

## Review of the Literature

The literature clearly shows that many lawyers are experiencing high levels of work-related stress (Hagan and Kay, 2007; Kessler, 1997). In examining work stress and its impact on individuals, one relevant area of research focuses on the spillover effects of stressors into different domains. Specifically, research suggests that stressors can spillover across persons, role domains, and stages of life (Thoits, 1995). Most of the spillover research focuses on psychological outcomes of stress, such as depression, burnout and work/family conflict (Westman, 2001). Contemporary models of the work/family interface emphasize both the spillover of family into work (family-to-work conflict) and the spillover of work into family (work-to-family conflict), where most researchers focus on the latter. In particular, in examining potentially stressful work conditions, it has been suggested that stress may not only have implications for individual workers in the work domain, but it can also spillover into one's life at home by contributing to work-to-family conflict (Thoits, 1995; Ross and Mirowsky, 1989; Westman, 2001). In other words, work-to-family conflict may arise when responsibilities and expectations of the work role interferes with the responsibilities associated with familial roles. For example, deadlines associated with work may preoccupy an individual's thoughts when spending time with his/her family (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992b).

With regards to the profession of law, researchers are now recognizing that as a result of the stressful nature of their work, many lawyers are dissatisfied with their jobs and report major health concerns. For example, numerous studies have documented that as a result of excessive work stress, burnout, or conflict between their work and home life, many lawyers are leaving the profession (Brockman, 1994; Hagan and Kay, 2007; Rhode, 2002; Keeva, 2006). Further, there is ample evidence that stress in one's job has an impact on a wide range of individual outcomes, including one's mental health (Cohen and Patten, 2005), physical well-being (Linzer *et al.*, 2002), job satisfaction (Sargent and Terry, 2000) and burnout (LeBlanc *et al.*, 2001), to name a few.

When dealing with work related stress, lawyers may rely on a variety of different coping resources. Coping can be defined as actions people take on their own behalf as they attempt to avoid or lessen the impact of life problems (Pearlin, 1989). Coping resources include any cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual or physical remedies that may be used to aid in dealing with stressful situations (Durm and Glaze, 2002).

Originally, research on coping resources and social support were conceptually and empirically separate, even though both involved explaining similar responses to stressful events. More recently, growing attention is being directed towards linking coping and social support in order to further develop an interpersonal theory of coping, again often in response to stressful life experiences. For example, DeLongis and O'Brien (1990) discuss the importance of interpersonal factors and their role in predicting an individual's ability to cope with a stressful situation, as in the case of Alzheimer's disease. They discuss the importance of drawing on the support of others in coping with stressful events.

There is considerable evidence that social support, as a coping resource, can help lessen the impact of stress on a variety of outcomes, including those mentioned above (House, Umberson and Landis, 1988; Ross and Mirowsky, 1989; Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Haines and Hurlbert, 1992; Thoits, 1995; Van der Doef and Maes, 1999; Lincoln, Chatters and Taylor, 2003). Social support is considered a coping resource that may include receiving love, esteem, advice, assistance and/or understanding from others (Thoits, 1995; Lincoln, Chatters and Taylor, 2003). As indicated above, research has clearly demonstrated the beneficial effects of social support for wellbeing in general. Studies show how those with social support adjust better psychologically to stressful events, recover more quickly from already diagnosed illness and reduce their risk of mortality from specific diseases (Coyne and Downey, 1991; House, Umberson and Landis, 1988; Sarason, Pierce and Sarason, 1990). Generally, it is widely considered that social support serves a protective function by providing people with a sense of being loved and valued (House, Umberson and Landis, 1988; Ducharme and Martin, 2000; Ross and Mirowsky, 2003).

### **Types and Sources of Social Support**

The literature suggests there are two distinct types of social support provided by interpersonal relationships. First, interpersonal relationships may contribute to wellbeing because they are a source of sympathy, understanding, love and caring, i.e., emotional support (Thoits, 1995). Second, those offering social support may provide useful information, advice and guidance, i.e., informational support (Thoits, 1995).

It is well established that social support may come from a variety of sources. In coping with work-related stress, coworker support and spousal support are two common sources examined in the literature<sup>1</sup> (Thoits, 1982, 1986). The beneficial effects of coworker support have received a fair amount of attention from both sociologists and psychologists (LaRocco, House and French, 1980; Thoits, 1995; Daalen Van, Sanders and Willemssen, 2005). Spousal support has also been found to be an important coping resource, which is the focus of this paper.

Support from one's spouse when dealing with work-related stress can be defined as the help, advice and understanding that spouses provide one another (Aycan and Eskin, 2005; Verhofstadt, Buysse and Ickes, 2007). Spouses may offer emotional support that can be expressed by listening to and empathizing with each other when they talk about the stresses of their jobs (Wallace, 2005). Informational support from a spouse may include offering advice or information in coping with work-related stressors. Both emotional and informational support from a spouse may help restore morale and improve one's health and wellbeing (Adams, King and King, 1996; Aycan and Eskin, 2005; Verhofstadt, Buysse and Ickes, 2007). In addition, greater spousal support has been found to be associated with less work-family conflict (Rosenbaum and Cohen, 1999), greater psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction (LaRocco, House and French, 1980), and better marital adjustment (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992a).

### **Social Support and Gender**

Research consistently reports gender differences in social support in terms of giving, receiving and its effects. It has been argued that childhood socialization produces gender differences in dispositions, personality characteristics and ways of communicating (Kessler and McLeod, 1984). As children, young girls are socialized to be more emotional and interpersonal than young boys (Turner and Turner, 1999). In turn, this results in gender differences in their social support experiences and in the effects of social support on their health and wellbeing (Kessler and McLeod, 1984). Studies suggest that men have a more inexpressive style of responding to stressors and women have a more emotional, expressive style (Kessler and McLeod, 1984). Men more often report controlling their emotions, accepting the problem, not thinking about the situation, and engaging in problem solving efforts, whereas women more often report seeking social support, distracting themselves and letting out their feelings (Thoits, 1995). Women's greater tendency to seek social support is fairly consistent across studies (Turner and Turner, 1999; Thoits, 1995; Verhofstadt, Buysse and Ickes, 2007).

With respect to receiving social support, studies generally show that women either receive or make use of more emotional social supports than men (Fuhrer and Stansfeld, 2002; Schwarzer and Guitierrez-Dona, 2005). Women are also known

to have more extensive and better social relations than men and, as a result, report that they receive more social support from a greater number of different sources such as coworkers, relatives and friends (Schwarzer and Guitierrez-Dona, 2005; Proulx *et al.*, 2009; Geok, 2010). Since men tend to have a more limited social network, with fewer social contacts to rely on, they often identify their wives as their primary and sometimes only source of support (Umberson *et al.*, 1996; Okun and Keith, 1998).

Although both husbands and wives turn to other people for various types of support, spouses remain one of the most vital sources of support (Walen and Lachman, 2000). However, marital relationships do not provide the same amounts of social support for husbands and wives. In 1982, Belle coined the term the “support gap hypothesis”, which suggests that women receive less support from their spouses than men receive from their spouses. Most researchers believe this occurs as a result of gender role expectations, where women are expected to be providers of support and nurturance (Xu and Burleson, 2001; Neff and Karney, 2005). Regardless of why the difference occurs, the support gap hypothesis maintains that men receive more social support from their spouse, and ultimately benefit more from marital relationships than women (Neff and Karney, 2005). For example, Schwarzer and Guitierrez-Dona (2005) found that when dealing with work stress, women received less support than their husbands, and the support they did receive was often not helpful. That is, the support women received from their husbands did not significantly reduce their work stress. As a result, women tend to look outside the marital relationship to friends for social support in dealing with work stress. Therefore, men receive more support from their wives compared to the social support women receive from their husbands (Neff and Karney, 2005). The following hypothesis will be tested:

**HYPOTHESIS 1:** Men will report receiving more support (emotional and informational) from their spouse than women.

### **Social Support and Occupational Similarity**

It has been well established that men and women lawyers, like men and women professionals in general, tend to have fundamentally different marital situations (Wallace and Young, 2008). Married female lawyers are typically part of a dual-career relationship where their husbands have educational and occupational statuses at least comparable to their own. Although the number of “traditional” families (with a breadwinning husband and a stay-at-home wife) is decreasing, the single-career household is still more prominent for male professionals than female professionals (Schneer and Reitman, 1993). Men are more likely to be married to women who are not professionals, or perhaps were professionals but curtailed or left their careers to care for their children (Milkie

and Peltola, 1999; Hinze, 2000; Hill, 2005). For example, US census data from 2000 show that 93% of the husbands of female physicians are employed compared to 59% of the wives of male physicians, and 81% of the husbands of the female physicians who are employed are in a professional or managerial occupation compared to 56% of the employed physicians' wives (Boulis and Jacobs, 2010).

Similar to the spillover effects of stress discussed above, research also suggests that social support from one domain may help in, or carryover to, another. That is, receiving social support from a spouse in the family domain may help workers deal with the stress they are experiencing from the work domain (Ray and Miller, 1994). It seems even more plausible that couples who work in the same occupation or who share similar work experiences will be better able to provide the necessary support to help one another in coping with work-related stress. Suitor and Pillemer (2000) call this "experiential similarity" and suggest that this enhances one's empathetic understanding and, as a result, others who have been through the same experience are better able to help reduce feelings of stress. Therefore, being married to someone in the same occupation (occupational similarity) may help individuals cope with the stresses of their work lives.

Although lawyers married to other lawyers share a general understanding of what it means to be a lawyer on a day-to-day basis, it is unrealistic to assume that dual lawyer couples actually share the same specific work experiences, given the highly complex and varying nature of lawyers' specialties and work settings. For example, lawyer spouses may understand and empathize with one another in discussing pressures to produce profit, dealing with their clients or other lawyers, or working long hours more so than non-lawyer spouses. However, a tax lawyer working in a large international law firm married to a criminal lawyer working in solo practice may have somewhat different experiences in terms of the specific nature of their work experiences. We contend, however, that dual lawyer couples will share a much greater understanding of the general experiences associated with practicing law because of their occupational similarity than lawyers who are not married to lawyers. Lawyers who are part of a dual lawyer marriage will likely receive more emotional understanding and practical advice based on similar understandings and shared experiences of stressful work situations. We hypothesize:

**HYPOTHESIS 2:** Individuals married to someone in the same occupation will report more support (emotional and informational) from their spouse than individuals married to someone in a different occupation.

The research that has examined gender differences in received spousal support has not taken into account whether the spouse is also in the same occupation

or not, nor has it considered emotional support separately from informational support (see Janning, 2006). We will empirically explore whether male and female lawyers differ in terms of the extent to which they receive these two different types of support from their spouse and whether or not it varies depending on their spouse's occupation.

## Data and Methods

The data are from a survey that collected information on practicing lawyers' work and family experiences and attitudes. The survey was distributed to all practicing lawyers in the Province of Alberta in 2000. Of the 5,921 lawyers contacted, 1,829 completed the survey yielding a 31% response rate. A comparison of the sample data to the provincial figures from the Law Society of Alberta using chi-square tests (available from authors) indicates that similar proportions of lawyers are represented in the survey data by gender, work setting, and city.

For the purposes of this paper, the sample is restricted to 1,445 lawyers who were working full time and who were married or living common law<sup>2</sup> at the time of the study. On average, they have been married approximately 14½ years, although this varies significantly from newlyweds to those married for 54 years. Of the 953 men in the sample, 107 (11%) reported that their wife is also a lawyer. Of the 492 women, 128 (26%) report that they are married to a lawyer. The lawyers in this sample work approximately 51 hours a week at the office and at home, including evenings and weekends. Approximately half (54%), work in a law firm with the remainder of the sample working in solo practice, government offices or private corporations.

## Measures

Social support was measured by items used in House's (1981) social support scales that is one of the most commonly used measures in the literature (Halbesleben, 2006). First, spousal emotional support was measured by four items where respondents were asked to indicate how often their spouse does the following things when they have a stressful day at work: (1) listen to their work-related problems; (2) empathize with their stresses; (3) offer support and encouragement; and (4) show concern ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Spousal informational support was similarly measured by four items reflecting how often their spouse does the following things when they have a stressful day at work: (1) offer suggestions or solutions; (2) share advice or ideas; (3) share relevant difficulties they experienced in their job; and (4) help them figure out how to solve a work-related problem ( $\alpha = .89$ ). The response categories include never (coded 1), not very often (coded 2), often (coded 3) and most of the time (coded 4). Responses were summed and divided by the number of items to compute a mean score.

If the respondent's spouse/partner was employed, they were then asked to indicate their Spouse's occupation. In this analysis, spouses who are lawyers are coded 1 and all others coded 0. Gender is dummy coded with men coded 1 and women coded 0.

A number of control variables were included to control for the respondents' work experiences and their family situation. In terms of the respondents' work experiences, we controlled for their work hours, workload, and work setting. With regards to their family situation, we controlled for their spouse's work hours, the number of years they have been married, the presence of preschool-aged children, housework strain and financial strain. The control variables and their measures are described below.

To tap the degree of stressfulness of the respondent's job, we controlled for their work hours, work overload and whether they work in a law firm setting. Lawyers working long hours, reporting a greater workload and who work in a law firm setting are expected to be experiencing more stressful jobs that may initiate seeking support from their spouse (Wallace, 2005). Work hours was measured by the sum of two items tapping how many hours in an average week respondents work at the office and at home (including evenings and weekends). Work overload was measured by four Likert items from Caplan, Cobb and French (1975) that tapped the extent to which respondents felt they did not have enough time to get everything done at work, their workload was too heavy, they had to work very quickly and they often feel rushed at work ( $\alpha = .79$ ). Work setting is coded 1 for law firm settings and 0 for all others (e.g., corporations, government or solo practice).

In terms of their family situation, we controlled for the spouse's work hours, which may limit their availability for offering support. Spouse's work hours is measured by the total number of hours they work per week (including evenings, weekends, at home and at the office). We controlled for how long they have been married and the amount of time they spend together as indirect measures of marital stability and closeness that may be positively related to support. Years married is measured by the number of years the respondent has been married to their current spouse. The presence of preschool children, distribution of housework and financial strain are included to control for demands of the household. The presence of preschool aged children is coded 1 for those with children under the age of 6 living at home and 0 for those who do not have preschool aged children. Housework strain is measured by a single Likert item from Twiggs, McQuillan and Ferree (1999) that reflects whether the respondent feels they never do as much housework as their spouse would like. Many female professionals feel strain and guilt between their professional and personal roles. For those who work fulltime, many of the daily activities of housework and

childcare are still their responsibility (Izraeli, 1994; Sobecks *et al.*, 1999; Katz *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, not only do women provide more support to their spouses as indicated in the support gap hypothesis, but they are also expected to take care of their household and children. As a result, and primarily due to a lack of time and energy, many wives find it difficult to combine work and family and take care of the needs and wants of different family members (Simon, 1995). Therefore, when couples have children, even when the wife is a professional, she typically takes on more of the childcare responsibility than the husband, which then leaves her with less time for her husband and ultimately less time to devote to providing any type of support. Financial strain is measured by a single Likert item tapping whether respondents feel they have enough money for all their needs where a higher score indicates greater financial strain (refer to Table 1 for the correlation matrix of these variables).

**TABLE 1**  
**Zero-Order Correlations of Variables (N = 1426)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Emotional Support	1.00											
2 Informational Support	0.70*	1.00										
3 Gender (Male = 1)	-0.01	-0.07*	1.00									
4 Spouse's Occupation (Lawyer = 1)	0.08*	0.20*	-0.15*	1.00								
5 Work Hours	-0.01	-0.60*	0.12*	-0.03	1.00							
6 Work Overload	0.04	0.05*	0.05*	0.02	-0.34*	1.00						
7 Work Setting (Law Firm = 1)	0.08*	0.04	0.09*	0.04*	0.19*	-0.01	1.00					
8 Spouse's Work Hours	0.03	0.09*	-0.29*	0.22*	0.03	-0.04	-0.04	1.00				
9 Years Married	-0.18*	-0.15*	0.24*	-0.16*	-0.07*	0.05*	-0.03	-0.15*	1.00			
10 Preschool Children (Yes = 1)	0.01*	-0.00	0.04	0.08*	-0.06*	-0.07*	0.03	-0.08*	-0.27*	1.00		
11 Housework Strain	-0.13*	-0.12*	0.26*	-0.09*	0.16*	-0.17*	-0.01	-0.06*	0.03	0.06*	1.00	
12 Financial Strain	-0.08*	-0.06*	0.06*	-0.07*	-0.02	-0.10*	-0.12*	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	0.14*	1.00
Mean	3.18	2.90	0.63	0.13	50.59	2.51	0.54	40.16	14.43	0.22	2.83	2.77
Standard Deviation	0.69	0.72	0.48	0.33	12.45	0.79	0.50	18.36	9.47	0.41	1.11	1.12

\*p < .05, two-tailed test

## Data Analysis

To test Hypothesis 1, first, we conducted mean difference tests for the different types of support and these results are presented in Table 2. In addition, the regression results in Table 3 allow us to determine whether women and men differ in the amounts of support they receive after taking into account the control vari-

ables. To test Hypothesis 2, we can examine both the mean difference tests and the regression results in Table 3. Next, we conducted a series of interaction tests to determine whether gender and the spouse's occupation are conditional in their relationships with emotional and informational support. To do this, we computed a multiplicative term (gender-by-spouse's occupation) and added it to Equation 2 in Table 3 for each type of support. The results (not shown) indicate that none of these terms were statistically significant at the .05 level. Consequently, only the main effect models are presented in Table 3 and discussed below.

## Results

Table 2 presents the mean difference tests for emotional and informational support. Because these results are consistent with the regression results in Table 3, we turn to those. Table 3 contains the regression results for both emotional and informational support. Hypothesis 1 predicted that men would receive more support from their spouse than women. The results presented in Equation 2 for emotional support are consistent with Hypothesis 1. However men and women do not differ significantly in the amount of informational support they receive from their spouse as shown in Equation 2 for informational support.

TABLE 2

### Mean Differences Tests Results for Emotional and Informational Support

Type of Support	Female Lawyers (N = 492) Mean (SD)	Male Lawyers (N = 953) Mean (SD)	Spouse is a Lawyer (N = 1216) Mean (SD)	Spouse not a Lawyer (N = 230) Mean (SD)	Husband is a Lawyer (N = 128) Mean (SD)	Wife is a Lawyer (N = 102) Mean (SD)
Emotional	3.19 (.71)	3.18 (.67)	3.31 (.68)	3.16 (.68)**	3.26 (.73)	3.36 (.61)†
Informational	2.97 (.74)	2.86 (.71)*	3.22 (.69)	2.83 (.71)***	3.19 (.70)	3.25 (.69)

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The results for the relationship between spouse's occupation and support initially appear to corroborate Hypothesis 2, where we see significant positive coefficients in Equation 1 for both emotional and informational support. That is, lawyers married to other lawyers report more emotional and informational support than lawyers married to others who are not members of the legal profession. After taking into account the work and family control variables (Equation 2), we see that lawyers benefit from having a spouse who is also a lawyer in terms of their provision of informational support, but spouse's occupational status is not relevant in receiving emotional support.

The results for the control variables may help to explain why having a spouse in the same occupation is not necessarily important in understanding the extent to

**TABLE 3**  
**Regression Results for Emotional and Informational Support (N = 1446)**

	Emotional Support Equation 1 b(β)	Emotional Support Equation 2 b(β)	Informational Support Equation 1 b(β)	Informational Support Equation 2 b(β)
Gender (male = 1)	.006 (.004)	.113 (.079)**	-.069 (-.046)*	.033 (.022)
Spouse's occupation (lawyer = 1)	.165 (.080)**	.086 (.042)	.411 (.189)***	.344 (.158)***
<b>Controls</b>				
Work hours		-.001 (-.027)		-.003 (-.058)*
Workload		.003 (.004)		.014 (.015)
Work setting (firm = 1)		.086 (.062)*		.050 (.035)
Spouse's work hours		.000 (.004)		.001 (.034)
Years married		-.014 (-.199)***		-.011 (-.141)***
Preschool children		-.066 (-.040)		-.085 (-.049)
Housework strain		-.073 (-.119)***		-.058 (-.089)**
Financial strain		-.038 (-.062)*		-.019 (-.089)
Constant	3.158***	3.649***	2.887***	3.278***
R <sup>2</sup>	.006	.063	.040	.072

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001

which they provide emotional support. It appears that the gender of the respondent is more relevant than the occupation of the spouse in explaining emotional support. Basically, men receive more support from their wives. We conducted interaction tests to see if the support depends on the conditional effects of gender and spouse's occupation and the coefficient was not statistically significant. This suggests that men receive more emotional support from their wives, regardless of their wives' occupation (i.e., whether they are a lawyer or not).

The results in Equation 2 for emotional support also show that lawyers working in law firms receive more emotional support from their spouses. The literature on the legal profession suggests that working in law firms can be considerably more stressful than working in other settings given the pressure to generate and maintain clients and profits and the high degree of competitiveness involved (Joudrey and Wallace, 2009).

Several of the family related controls may be relevant in explaining why the relationship between spouse's occupation and emotional support is reduced to non-significance in Equation 2. The longer couples are married appears to significantly reduce the amount of emotional support they receive from their spouse. As well, the more strain associated with doing housework or finances is

negatively related to spouses' supportiveness. That is, the more strain or conflict experienced in the household that is related to housework or financial issues, the less support lawyers receive from their spouse.

Turning next to the results for informational support, it should be noted that the interaction term for gender by spouse's occupation was also included in these equations and the coefficient was not statistically significant. This indicates that lawyers receive more support from their spouse if s/he is also a lawyer, regardless of their gender. In Equation 2, which includes the control variables, we see that longer work hours reduce the amount of informational support offered by spouses. Similar to the results for emotional support, the longer lawyers are married and the more marital strain associated with housework, the less informational support they receive from their spouse.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This paper set out to examine how gender and the occupation of one's spouse may explain differences in social support in terms of the amounts and types of support received from one's spouse. As expected, the results of our study show that men receive more emotional support from their spouse, regardless of their spouse's occupation. This pattern of findings suggests that wives provide more understanding and empathy to their spouses than husbands, which is consistent with the literature on gender differences in social support. This is also consistent with the social support gap hypothesis, which suggests that men receive more support from their wives compared to the amount women receive from their husbands (Neff and Karney, 2005). This is an important finding as many female lawyers may feel strain and guilt between their professional and personal roles. For many women in professional and managerial careers, the daily activities of housework and childcare are still primarily their responsibility, as well as ensuring they provide caring and understanding for their husbands (Duxbury and Higgins, 2001).

In addition, we found that lawyers receive more informational support from their spouse if s/he is also a lawyer, regardless of the spouse's gender. This finding suggests that when it comes to providing informational support in terms of sharing advice, suggestions, solutions or relevant experiences in solving a work-related problem, a spouse who is in the same occupation may be better able to provide such support. The results of our paper adds to our understanding of Suitor and Pillemer's (2000) concept of "experiential similarity" by expanding their notion of shared experiences to shared occupational status or "occupational similarity". Future research might explore whether the more shared experiences results in more supportive relationships. Due to the limitations of the data, we could only capture whether or not the spouse was in the same occupation based on their occupational title. Suitor and Pillemer suggest that it is the shared

experiences that are key to understanding the degree of supportiveness. This might be explored in more detail in terms of whether the spouses work in the same occupational specialties and/or same employment settings, which would likely offer more opportunities for them to share experiences and understand one another's work stresses than simply sharing the same occupational title.

In addition, the control variables included in the analyses suggest several other factors that appear important in understanding the extent to which spouses provide support to one another. An unexpected finding is the relatively strong *negative* effects of years of marriage on the amount of support received from one's spouse. This variable was included as a control in order to tap the stability of the marriage where it was implicitly assumed that the longer a couple was together, the more understanding and supportive they would be of each other and their careers. Instead, we found that the longer they are married, the less support they receive from their spouse. We also tested to see if perhaps the relationships between years married and support were non-linear by adding a squared coefficient to the equation. For both types of support, this coefficient was non-significant. Future research might explore how and why spousal support declines over time and the factors related to these changes.

The results of this study also show that marital strains associated with housework and finances can damage supportive relationships between spouses. This is not surprising, but illustrates how stresses in the home can be related to the support spouses provide one another in terms of responding to the stresses of each others' work. As noted in the work-family literature, the work and family domains are not separate and independent, but rather more fluid and permeable (Boles, Howard and Donofrio, 2001; Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003; Pleck, 1977; Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992b; Eagle, Miles and Icenogle, 1997; Eby *et al.*, 2005). In understanding how much support one spouse can offer the other, it appears important to take into account the amount of stresses they are experiencing in their home life as well. Excessive stress in one domain may drain the amount of supportiveness available to offer one's spouse in response to stress in another domain. Future research might consider exploring the extent to which supportiveness is a finite resource that may have a maximum threshold point.

Lastly, there are several limitations of this study that must be recognized. First, this study examined a unique, high-status, male-dominated occupation, namely lawyers. Therefore, some of the findings may be limited to this particular occupation or possibly, professionals in general. A second limitation of this study is its cross-sectional design. A cross-sectional design does not allow us to establish causal linkages by demonstrating the time priority among the variables in the model.

In closing, it appears that wives are important in providing emotional support to their husbands, and spouses in the same occupation are important in providing one another with informational support. These findings corroborate

the two different bodies of literature that were bridged by examining the two status characteristics of gender and occupational similarity and their relevance to spousal support. Future research might explore in greater depth not only the importance of shared statuses, such as occupation, but also the meaning of shared experiences, in order to better understand spouses' support of one another during difficult life experiences.

## Notes

- 1 Supervisor support is another commonly studied source (see Griffin, Patterson and West, 2001); although it is not relevant when studying certain types of professionals, such as lawyers, since many do not directly report to one.
- 2 We use the terms "spouse", "wife" and "husband" when discussing our sample since the term "partner" is used to describe the different positions lawyers may hold in law firms (e.g., associates vs. partners).

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## SUMMARY

### Occupational Similarity and Spousal Support: A Study of the Importance of Gender and Spouse's Occupation

This paper examines how gender and the occupation of one's spouse may explain differences in the amounts and types of spousal support individuals receive when coping with the stress of their job. We analyze survey data from a sample of married lawyers, some of whom are married to other lawyers and others who have spouses who are not lawyers. The results show that men receive more emotional support from their spouse than women, regardless of their spouse's occupation. In contrast, lawyers receive more informational support from their spouse if they are also a lawyer, regardless of their gender. These findings suggest that wives provide more understanding and empathy to their spouses than husbands, consistent with the literature on gender differences in social support. Our findings also suggest that when it comes to providing informational support in terms of sharing advice, suggestions, solutions or relevant experiences in solving a work-related problem, a spouse who is in the same occupation may be better able to provide support. This is consistent with the literature demonstrating the importance of shared experiences in understanding the effectiveness of social support. Future research might explore not only the importance of shared statuses, such as occupation, but also the meaning of shared experiences in order to better understand spouses' support of one another.

KEYWORDS: work, family, spousal support, occupational similarity

## RÉSUMÉ

### Similitude professionnelle et soutien conjugal : une étude sur l'importance du sexe et de la profession du conjoint

Cet article cherche à voir si le sexe et la profession du conjoint peuvent expliquer l'ampleur et le type de soutien conjugal quand des personnes sont aux prises avec un stress important par rapport à leur travail. Pour ce faire nous analysons les données tirées d'une enquête auprès d'un échantillon d'avocates et d'avocats qui sont mariés pour certaines et certains à une personne exerçant la même profession et pour d'autres à une personne exerçant une autre profession. Les résultats révèlent que les hommes reçoivent davantage de soutien émotionnel conjugal que les femmes, sans égard à la profession du conjoint ou de la conjointe. Par contre les avocats et avocates reçoivent davantage de soutien informationnel conjugal si le conjoint ou la conjointe exerce aussi la même profession, sans égard au sexe de ce dernier ou de cette dernière. Ces résultats suggèrent que les femmes affichent davantage de compréhension et d'empathie envers leur conjoint que les hommes, ce qui semble conséquent avec la littérature sur l'étude des différences entre les genres en matière de soutien social. Ils suggèrent également que lorsque vient le temps d'offrir du soutien informationnel en termes de partage d'avis, de suggestions, de solutions ou d'expériences pertinentes pour résoudre un problème relié au travail, un conjoint

ou une conjointe exerçant la même profession est peut-être plus apte à offrir un tel soutien. Cela est aussi conséquent avec la littérature démontrant l'importance des expériences partagées dans la compréhension de ce qui rend le soutien social efficace. À l'avenir, la recherche dans ce domaine devrait explorer non seulement l'importance des statuts partagés, comme la profession, mais aussi la signification des expériences partagées, pour mieux comprendre le soutien entre conjoints.

MOTS CLÉS : travail, famille, soutien conjugal, similitude professionnelle.

## RESUMEN

### Similitud profesional y apoyo conyugal: un estudio sobre la importancia del género y de la profesión del cónyuge

Este artículo busca a saber si el género y la profesión del cónyuge pueden explicar la amplitud y el tipo de apoyo conyugal cuando las personas viven un stress importante respecto a su trabajo. Para ello se analizan los datos provenientes de una encuesta efectuada con una muestra de abogados y abogadas algunos de ellos o ellas casados con una persona ejerciendo la misma profesión y otros u otras casados a una persona ejerciendo otra profesión. Los resultados revelan que los hombres reciben mas apoyo emocional conyugal que las mujeres, sea cual fuera la profesión del o de la cónyuge. Al contrario, los abogados y abogadas reciben más apoyo informacional conyugal si el cónyuge o la cónyuge ejerce también la misma profesión, sea cual fuera el género del o de la cónyuge. Estos resultados sugieren que las mujeres muestran mucho más de comprensión y de empatía hacia sus respectivos cónyuges comparativamente a los hombres, lo que parece consecuente con la literatura sobre el estudio de diferencias entre géneros en materia de apoyo social. Se sugiere igualmente que cuando se trata de ofrecer apoyo informacional en términos de compartir una opinión, sugerencias, soluciones o experiencias pertinentes para resolver un problema relativo al trabajo, un o una cónyuge ejerciendo la misma profesión será quizás mas apto o apta a ofrecer dicho apoyo. Esto es también consecuente con la literatura que demuestra la importancia de las experiencias compartida en la comprensión de lo que asegura un apoyo eficaz. En el futuro, la investigación en este campo debería explorar no solo la importancia de los estatutos compartidos, como la profesión, pero también el significado de las experiencias compartidas para comprender mejor el apoyo entre cónyuges.

PALABRAS CLAVES: trabajo, familia, apoyo conyugal, similitud profesional

# Activité professionnelle et responsabilités familiales : les mères sont-elles encore perdantes dans leur qualité d'emploi ?

Luc Cloutier, Paul Bernard<sup>†</sup> et Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay

**À partir d'une nouvelle typologie de la qualité de l'emploi en 12 groupes, nous analysons l'évolution de la situation des femmes du Québec (Canada) avec celle des hommes. L'analyse des résultats, qui portent sur la période 1997-2007, montre qu'il y a eu une amélioration de la qualité de l'emploi des femmes, peu importe leur scolarité et leur situation familiale et que cela s'est traduit par une réduction de l'écart avec les hommes. Toutefois, ces réductions ont été très prononcées dans le cas des personnes n'ayant pas de responsabilités familiales (baisse se situant entre 33 % et 44 %) mais sont demeurées beaucoup plus limitées pour ce qui est des personnes ayant des enfants en bas âge (baisse se situant entre 14 % et 15 %), illustrant ainsi l'effet de la parentalité sur la qualité de l'emploi.**

**MOTS-CLÉS : femmes, emplois, inégalités, conditions de travail, Québec**

## Introduction

La notion de « gagne-pain masculin » (*male breadwinner*) ou du ménage à un seul apporteur (Méda, 2008) est en déclin dans les sociétés développées, à la faveur d'une plus grande participation des femmes au revenu du ménage via l'emploi rémunéré (Warren, 2004; Raley, Martingly et Bianchi, 2006). C'est d'ailleurs le cas au Canada et au Québec, avec l'accroissement significatif ces dernières années de la contribution des femmes au revenu du ménage (voir Marshall, 2006; Sussman et Bonnel, 2006). La réalité du « double revenu » vient donc plus que jamais changer la dynamique familiale traditionnelle puisque les femmes sont maintenant très actives sur le marché du travail, même quand elles ont des enfants (Cloutier, 2007; Gaudreault, 2009; Roy, 2006). Un grand nombre d'écrits

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