CAN WOMEN IN LAW HAVE IT ALL? A STUDY OF MOTHERHOOD, CAREER SATISFACTION AND LIFE BALANCE

Jean E. Wallace

ABSTRACT

Studies suggest that women in law appear dissatisfied with the practice of law due to the difficulties of balancing work and family. Little research has examined how the contextual characteristics of law firms affect women lawyers' sense of life balance and career satisfaction, which is the focus of this study. I propose that if women in law firms can have children and be just as satisfied with their careers and have the same degree of life balance as women without children, then women practicing law can "have it all". I show how contextual characteristics of law firms are important in understanding mothers' and non-mothers' work experiences.

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There may be no setting more significant than the legal profession for observing the advances and setbacks that women today are experiencing in a changing world that structures work and family roles. Lawyers are often powerful players in the organization of social, economic, and political life, and women, often acting as lawyers, are now participants in these arenas of public and private influence. Yet there is serious doubt whether this participation is translating into opportunities for women to contribute all then can in and through the legal profession. (Hagan & Kay, 1995, p. 3)

As indicated by Hagan and Kay (1995), women's success in law firms has important societal implications. Women's access and opportunities for achieving highly ranked positions in law firms is sometimes used as a barometer of generalized gender equality (Beckman & Phillips, 2005). The most powerful positions in the profession are held by partners of the largest firms who are also often members of the elite class in society (Beckman & Phillips, 2005; Hagan, Huxter, & Parker, 1988). Large firms are influential in directing the ruling bodies of the legal profession itself as well as through their interconnections to the boards of directors of dominant corporations (Adam & Baer, 1984). While women have been entering law firm practice in larger numbers than in the past, many bump into the glass ceiling prevalent in firms or they exit through the revolving door such that significantly fewer women are promoted to partnership than men (Hull & Nelson, 2000; Kay & Hagan, 1995). Both pregnancy and parenting often result in women's delayed partnership or departure from private practice, such that women are not in as powerful positions as men to influence structural change at higher levels of the profession (Kay & Hagan, 1995).

Becoming a mother can make combining a balanced life with a satisfying career very difficult for professional women (Hill, Märtinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004). Some mothers strive to "have it all" by simultaneously having a demanding career and a family. This often results in feelings of role overload, conflict and a general sense of imbalance as mothers attempt to satisfy two competing sets of demands and responsibilities. Other mothers "scale back" (Becker & Moen, 1999) their careers by significantly reducing their work hours and responsibilities. As Budig and England (2001) suggest, following the theory of compensating differentials, mothers may trade off certain job rewards, such as higher wages or career advancements, for jobs that make it easier to combine work and family. Thus, work–life balance for women often has economic and career costs that may take the form of forgone wages and career advancement (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). This pattern is referred to as the "mommy track" experience (Schwartz, 1989), which can result in women feeling less successful and less satisfied with their career.
Research shows that the time demands associated with practising law and the difficulties encountered in attempting to balance work and family are major sources of stress and dissatisfaction, especially for women who are mothers (Brockman, 1994; Hagan & Kay, 1995; Wallace, 2001). The same studies also report that these stresses are often responsible for women leaving the practice of law at higher rates than men. Although it has been documented that significant numbers of lawyers are dissatisfied with the practice of law and are leaving the profession (Kay, 1997), little research has examined whether working conditions associated with law firms affect women’s ability to have a balanced life and a satisfying career. This study addresses this neglected question.

In this paper, I examine the following questions: (1) Do mothers in law firms report the same degree of life balance and career satisfaction as non-mothers? (2) How do certain law firm characteristics affect women lawyers’ sense of life balance and career satisfaction? and (3) Do these factors differ for mothers and non-mothers? I use survey data collected from mothers and non-mothers working in law firm settings. I propose that if women lawyers can have children and be as satisfied with their careers and have the same degree of life balance as women without children, then women practising law can, indeed, “have it all”. I hypothesize that a number of contextual characteristics of law firms affect this possibility.

**CONTEXTUAL AND JOB CHARACTERISTICS OF LAW FIRMS**

Professional work involves long hours that spill over into personal time, private life or “after hours”. Practising law is no exception. Lawyers are renowned for the long hours they work. Surveys show that they typically work for more than 50 h a week and that this is on the rise (Wallace, 1997). Law firm lawyers work relatively long hours not only in comparison to other professionals, but also compared to lawyers in other legal settings. Additional data from this study (available from author) show that law firm lawyers work on average for about 50 h a week at the office, with most working between 40 and 60 h in total. These lawyers also work two to three evenings a week, an additional half-day on the weekends and another 6 h at home per week. In contrast, on average, government lawyers work 44 h a week at the office, with most working between 35 and 53 h a week. Only about half of them work on weekends and they are less likely to work on evenings than law firm lawyers.
As a “greedy institution” (Coser, 1974), law firms demand total commitment and frequently expect lawyers to put work first and to be endlessly available to perform professional tasks (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Sauté, 1999; Seron & Ferris, 1995). Many lawyers feel that they are always on call for their firms and are expected to drop everything to come into the office at any time or day. The pace of work in law firms is often characterized as in “crisis mode” (Epstein et al., 1999), involving long bursts of activity that may necessitate working through the night and over weekends in order to meet deadlines and client demands. In addition, law firm lawyers are expected to attend social functions with colleagues and/or clients, typically on evenings and weekends. Kanter (1977) refers to these as “diplomatic tasks”. They involve after-hours dinners and weekend golf games with business partners and potential clients. The work context of law firms, then, is not only demanding because of the sheer amount of time that lawyers are expected to commit to their work, it is also unpredictable and often beyond the control of the lawyers involved. These time and work demands are not only stressful, but can also be sources of career dissatisfaction and can affect the ability to balance work and family (Brockman, 1992; Hagan & Kay, 1995; Wallace, 1999, 2001).

Increasingly, research on work–family issues is devoting greater attention both to the characteristics of the job and to contextual factors (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). Much of this literature investigates how social relations and work context facilitate or impede employees’ abilities to balance work and family. In this study, three contextual characteristics of law firms are examined: (1) the extent of female concentration within the firm at both partner and non-partner levels; (2) family-responsive working conditions; and (3) whether there is a supportive work–family culture. These three sets of factors reflect the social, structural and cultural conditions of the workplace, respectively, and each is elaborated below. Subsequently, we examine two characteristics of the job itself: work demands and rewards.

*Female Concentration*

The literature on sex segregation suggests that women tend to be highly concentrated in jobs believed to be compatible with family responsibilities (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). Because women are responsible for the majority of family tasks and most likely to take advantage of work–family benefits, they are expected to receive greater social support in balancing family and career demands when more co-workers are women facing similar challenges. That is, the greater the number of women employed in an
organization and in senior positions, the more family friendly should be the work setting. Consistent with this argument, research shows that women rate highly various work–family benefits (Frone & Yardley, 1996).

The support of supervisors affects whether employees actually use work–family benefits (Clark, 2001; Glass & Estes, 1997). If supervisors are themselves juggling work and family responsibilities, they are more likely to encourage and facilitate subordinates to take advantage of such benefits. The evidence, however, is mixed and several studies have challenged the proposition that female-dominated work settings are more compatible with parenting (e.g., Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Glass, 1990; Glass & Fujimoto, 1995). Nevertheless, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1a.** A greater percentage of female lawyers in a law firm will result in greater life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

**Hypothesis 1b.** The presence of female partners will result in greater life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

In this study, female concentration is examined by the percentage of female lawyers and the presence of female partners. Despite the recent influx of women into the legal profession, law remains a male-dominated profession. Women are under-represented in law firm practice and are more likely to be working outside private practice such as in corporations or government offices (Epstein et al., 1999; Hull & Nelson, 2000; Kay & Hagan, 1995; Robson & Wallace, 2001). In the jurisdiction examined here (Alberta, Canada), more than half of all lawyers work in law firms (64%) and 76% of those lawyers are men. In contrast, only 17% of male lawyers work in corporations or government offices compared to 30% of female lawyers (Law Society Annual Report, 2000). The same survey indicates that women represent 44% of associates in law firms but only 18% of partners. These proportions are comparable to those reported in other studies (e.g., Hull & Nelson, 2000; Kay & Hagan, 1995; Spurr & Sueyoshi, 1994). It is expected that most women will report being the minority in their male-dominated firms where they often hold a token status (Kanter, 1977). Most of their colleagues are likely men and many will report that there are no female partners in their firm.

*Family-Responsive Working Conditions*

Family-responsive working conditions are typically defined as those that require less energy, more flexible hours, fewer demands for travel and less
weekend or evening work. Further, there will be on-site day care, opportunities to take time out for childcare needs, and, most obviously, the ability to work reduced hours or part-time (Becker, 1991; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Clark, 2001). Firms that are more family-responsive should help mothers balance their work and family lives and feel more satisfied with their careers. In the literature, the key indicators of family-friendly firms centre on reduced work hours, flexible hours and a supportive work environment (Glass & Estes, 1997). In this study, the family responsiveness of law firms is assessed by the extent to which they allow lawyers flexibility in their work hours and give them control over the hours they work, and by whether the firm offers alternate work arrangements. A supportive work–family culture is examined separately in this study.

Flexible work hours enable the balancing of work and family responsibilities by allowing employees to alter their daily starting and ending times at work or simply permit them to leave work when unexpected non-work demands arise (Glass & Camarigg, 1992; Glass & Riley, 1998; Golden, 2001). Flexibility in hours may be a formal work arrangement offered to part-time or full-time lawyers. Or, it may be offered informally by granting considerable discretion over the exact times that lawyers start and finish work, and the opportunities they may be given to leave work to attend to family obligations. Some have argued that the degree of control and flexibility over one’s work time is often more salient to workers than the sheer number of hours they work (Holtzman & Glass, 1999; Kalleberg & Epstein, 2001). Therefore,

**Hypothesis 2a.** Provision of greater flexibility in work hours will result in greater life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

Lawyers indicate that law firms may demand longer hours compared to other types of employment situations, but they also tend to offer more flexibility and control over one’s work hours (Wallace, 2004). Having personal control over their work hours helps professionals structure their work time so that they can accommodate family responsibilities and minimize or reduce work–family conflict (Clark, 2001; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, & Beutell, 1989; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). However, while law firm lawyers are usually able to exercise considerable discretion over when they work and to a greater extent than in other work settings, clients’ demands or deadlines may exacerbate work-related pressures and reduce the flexibility often needed to fulfil family responsibilities. The number of hours worked, when they are worked and the degree of open-ended flexibility
associated with them, thus often “depends on the day” (Seron & Ferris, 1995) or the client involved (Epstein, Sauté, Oglensky, & Gever, 1995). Further, the autonomy of junior professionals may be unexpectedly and suddenly eliminated when certain clients, files or senior partners demand their immediate and undivided attention. As well, emphasis on the documentation of billable hours has intensified with computerized accounting systems (Epstein et al., 1999) with the result that not only is the number of hours worked closely and relatively easily monitored, but when and where lawyers work are also carefully observed. Control over their work schedule, therefore, has a positive effect on family life and sense of life balance (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Thus,

**Hypothesis 2b.** Greater personal control over the number of hours worked will result in greater life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

**Hypothesis 2c.** Greater personal control over when hours are worked will result in greater life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

The availability of alternate work schedules refers to whether the firm offers part-time, reduced hours or other variations on the standard work arrangement of full-time hours. An alternate work schedule is “any alternative to the full-time norm of fifty hours or more per week and/or open ended schedules” (Epstein et al., 1995, p. 392). Such arrangements are an increasingly popular option enabling parents to balance work and family, especially for mothers (Becker & Moen, 1999; Epstein et al., 1999; Hagan & Kay, 1995; Hill et al., 2004; Moen & Dempster-McClain, 1987; Schwartz, 1989). Thus,

**Hypothesis 2d.** The availability of alternate work arrangements will result in greater life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

*Supportive Work–Family Culture*

Recently, organization culture has been recognized as important in affecting employees’ satisfaction with their jobs and work–life balance (Clark, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Even though employers may offer family-responsive benefits, if these policies are not embedded within the organization’s culture, it is unlikely that good employees will actually use them (Kelly, 1999). For example, in organizations with a prevalent “overtime
culture" (Fried, 1998) that pressures employees to work long hours and put their work first, employees may believe that using work–family benefits will result in negative consequences for their careers (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). Women who use parental leaves, part-time work or other alternate work arrangements, often feel viewed as less committed and that they receive less interesting and challenging assignments. Consequently, their opportunities for promotion disappear (Hagan & Kay, 1995; Wallace, 2004).

Work–family culture refers to the “shared assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees’ work and family lives” (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 394). The work–family culture may reflect the time demands or expectations that employees will prioritize work over family as well as the perceived negative consequences if employees use work–family benefits or devote time to family (Bailyn, 1997; Clark, 2001). A supportive organizational culture means that lawyers are not expected to prioritize work over family, there are no negative career consequences for using work–family benefits or devoting time to one’s family, and it should be easier for lawyers to balance work and family (Thompson et al., 1999). Thus,

**Hypothesis 3.** A more supportive work–family culture in a law firm will result in greater life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

**Job Characteristics**

In addition to contextual characteristics, two types of job characteristics are frequently cited as likely to affect a woman’s sense of life balance and career satisfaction: work demands and rewards. These are examined in greater detail below.

The work demands variables tap the extent to which work may be excessive and potentially interfere with lawyers’ non-work responsibilities. Multiple roles may compete for a person’s time, which is referred to as role conflict, or more specifically, work–family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). It is important to take into account the extent to which work poses excessive pressures that may negatively affect a sense of balance between different life domains and satisfaction with one’s career. In this study, work demands are examined in two ways: work overload and work hours. Work overload reflects the subjective, role-based component of work demands; and work hours reflect the quantitative, time-based component (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Wallace, 1997). Work overload refers to whether the demands
of the job are felt to be excessive (Wallace, 1999). Feeling overwhelmed by the demands and pressures of one’s job and working long hours are often cited as illustrative of the all-encompassing nature of practising law (Kessler, 1997; Wallace, 1997). The amount of time that lawyers spend at work directly reduces the time they have available for non-work activities, such that they are likely to feel greater role strain and less satisfaction. Thus,

**Hypothesis 4a.** Greater work overload will result in less life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

**Hypothesis 4b.** Longer work hours will result in less life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

Extrinsic and intrinsic job rewards will have a positive impact on worker experiences and attitudes. Professional work can be very rewarding by providing both intrinsically challenging work in combination with the extrinsic reward of high compensation. Lawyers are renowned for the high salaries they earn and it is reasonable to suppose that women enter law in anticipation of securing good compensation. A second attraction of professional work is that it is challenging, interesting and stimulating, and lawyers report these as important characteristics of their work (Dart, 1988). Mothers, however, often report that their careers are derailed onto the “mommy track” (Schwartz, 1989), where they receive lower compensation and less important and less challenging work. Thus,

**Hypothesis 4c.** More challenging work will result in greater life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

**Hypothesis 4d.** Adequate income will result in greater life balance and career satisfaction for women lawyers with children.

**DATA AND METHODS**

All lawyers practising in the Province of Alberta, Canada, were mailed a survey to their place of work in June 2000. The mailing list was obtained from the Law Society of Alberta and contained the names of all active members. A comparison of the sample data with the provincial statistics indicates that similar proportions of lawyers participated when compared by gender, practice setting (e.g., law firm, government office, etc.) and city (e.g., Calgary, Edmonton, etc.).
The analyses in this paper are restricted to the women working in law firms who completed the survey. These respondents consist of 135 (43%) mothers and 180 (57%) non-mothers. Most of the women were married (76%) and about 38 years of age at the time of the study (range = 26–62 years). About half of the mothers (49%) had at least one preschool aged child and 64% had only one child living at home. On average, respondents had practiced law for approximately nine years (range = 1–32 years) and their average annual earnings was $94,377 (range = $8,400–$400,000). Most had traditional, full-time work arrangements (87%). On average, the women in this study worked about 51 h a week, including weekends and evenings at the office and at home (range = 10–94 h). Although the average size of law firm is about 100 lawyers, half of the respondents worked in firms with 27 lawyers or lesser.

**Measures**

As indicated below, a number of the measures included in this analysis are Likert measures. The response categories for these items are: strongly disagree (coded 1), disagree (coded 2), neither agree nor disagree (coded 3), agree (coded 4) and strongly agree (coded 5). An "(R)" indicates that the item is reverse coded.

*Life balance* is measured by a single Likert item adapted from Marks and MacDermid (1996): ‘In general, I feel I have a pretty balanced life’. *Career satisfaction* is measured by three Likert items adapted from Greenhaus and Beutell (1985): ‘I am satisfied with the success I have achieved so far in my legal career’; ‘I am not satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals in law’ (R); and ‘I am happy with the way things are going in my legal career’ (α = 0.80). *Motherhood status* is measured by whether (coded 1) or not (coded 0) the respondent has any children living with her.

**Female Concentration**

The *percentage of female lawyers* was computed by dividing the total number of female lawyers in the firm into the total number of its lawyers multiplied by 100. *Presence of female partners* is coded 1 for the presence of any female partners in the firm and 0 if there are no female partners in the firm.
Family-Responsive Work Conditions

*Flexibility in work hours* is measured by a single Likert item: ‘It’s very hard for me to take time off to take care of personal or family matters’ (R). *Control over work hours (number)* is measured by a single Likert item: ‘I have considerable control over the *number* of hours that I work’. *Control over work hours (when)* is measured by a single Likert item: ‘I have considerable control over *when* I work the hours I work’. *Alternate arrangements available* is coded 1 if their firm allows part time, reduced hours or other alternate arrangements for lawyers and 0 if they do not.

*Supportive work–family culture* is measured by the mean score of three Likert items adapted from Thompson et al. (1999): ‘Turning down work for family related reasons will seriously hurt one’s career in this organization’ (R); ‘Many lawyers are resentful when people in this organization take extended leaves to care for new or adopted children’ (R); and ‘In this organization, lawyers who participate in work–family programmes are viewed as less serious about their careers’ (R) ($\alpha = 0.79$).

Job Characteristics

*Work overload* is measured by the mean score of four Likert items adapted from Caplan, Cobb, and French (1975): ‘I do not have enough time to get everything done in my job’; ‘My workload is too heavy in my job’; ‘I have to work very quickly to get everything done in my job’; and ‘I often feel rushed in my job’ ($\alpha = 0.80$). *Work hours* is the average number of hours per week that respondents report working at the office and at home, including evenings and weekends. *Challenging work* is measured by the mean score of five Likert items that Ettington (1998) adapted from Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969): ‘The work I do in my job is challenging’; ‘Generally, I find my work is boring’ (R); ‘I find my work allows me to be creative’; ‘The work I do is routine’ (R); ‘The work I do is important’ ($\alpha = 0.81$). *Adequate income* is measured by a single item adapted from Kelly and Voyandoff (1985): ‘I feel I have enough money for all of my needs’.

Control Variables

Three control variables are included in the analyses: firm size, partnership status and marital status. *Firm size* is coded 1 if the firm has 100 or more
lawyers and 0 if it has 99 or less. A continuous measure of firm size was not used because it was highly correlated with the female concentration variables. Partnership status is coded 1 for partner and 0 for associate. Marital status is coded 1 for married or common law and 0 for single (never married), separated, divorced and widowed.

It should be noted that due to collinearity problems, several variables were excluded from the analyses or alternate measures were used. Specifically, partnership status, law experience and earnings were highly correlated, yielding unacceptable tolerance inflation factors greater than 2.0 (Fox, 1991). Consequently, partnership status was retained, law experience was excluded from the analysis, and, rather than actual earnings, the measure of perceptions of “adequate income” was substituted. In addition, some women worked reduced hours in an alternate work arrangement, which was highly correlated with work hours. Work hours was retained because it is a more accurate measure of lawyers’ work involvement. For example, some of the women working in “reduced hours” or “part-time” arrangements worked longer hours than women in full-time jobs.

**Analyses**

Table 1 provides descriptive information about the mothers and non-mothers included in the analyses. Tables 2 and 3 contain the results from the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis used to answer the research questions presented above. The pooled results in Tables 2 and 3 address Question 1, that is, whether mothers report the same degree of life balance and career satisfaction as non-mothers. These results also show which variables have a significant effect on life balance and career satisfaction for both mothers and non-mothers (Question 2). To answer Question 3, OLS regression analysis, in conjunction with interaction tests, was used to determine whether the contextual characteristics of law firms similarly affect sense of life balance and career satisfaction for both mothers and non-mothers. OLS regression was used to estimate an equation for each dependent variable that included both mothers and non-mothers. These results are located in the Pooled models in Tables 2 and 3. Then, this equation was re-estimated by including all of the determinants, a dummy variable for motherhood status and cross-product motherhood-interaction terms for each determinant (not shown). The statistically significant interaction terms identify which regression coefficients differ significantly for mothers and non-mothers. These are also indicated in Tables 2 and 3. Owing to the large number of significant interactions, OLS regression was then used to estimate the main effects...
Table 1. Descriptive Information for Mothers (N = 135)
and Non-Mothers (N = 180).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Non-Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female concentration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of female lawyers</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of female partners</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.70***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family responsiveness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in work hours</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control work hours (number)</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control work hours (when)</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>3.57*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate arrangements available</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.57***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive work–family culture</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work overload</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.48**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work hours</td>
<td>47.79</td>
<td>34.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging work</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate income</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large firm</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership status</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.63***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life balance</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career satisfaction</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.10.

**p < 0.05.

***p < 0.01.

of the determinants on women’s life balance and career satisfaction for mothers and non-mothers treated separately (also presented in Tables 2 and 3). This analysis facilitates interpreting the similarities and differences in the effects of the specific variables on life balance and career satisfaction for mothers and non-mothers.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 provides descriptive information regarding mothers’ and non-mothers’ work experiences in law firms. The results show how the contextual characteristics of their firms differ for these two groups of professionals. Mothers report of having more control over the number of hours that they work and when they work them. Compared to non-mothers, they work about 6 h less a week and are more likely to work in firms that offer alternate
Table 2. Life Balance Regression Results for the Pooled Sample, Mothers (N = 135) and Non-Mothers (N = 180).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Pooled b (B)</th>
<th>Mothers b (B)</th>
<th>Non-Mothers b (B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motherhood status</td>
<td>0.137 (0.067)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female concentration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of female lawyers</td>
<td>0.001 (0.003)</td>
<td>-0.008(-0.207)***</td>
<td>0.010 (0.192)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of female partners</td>
<td>0.107 (0.046)</td>
<td>0.036 (0.015)</td>
<td>0.030 (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family responsiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in work hours</td>
<td>0.162 (0.170)***</td>
<td>0.077 (0.088)</td>
<td>0.233 (0.233)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control work hours (number)</td>
<td>0.094 (0.107)**</td>
<td>-0.003 (-0.004)</td>
<td>0.117 (0.127)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control work hours (when)</td>
<td>0.039 (0.041)</td>
<td>0.092 (0.105)</td>
<td>0.005 (0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate arrangements available</td>
<td>0.071 (0.033)</td>
<td>0.240 (0.110)*</td>
<td>0.024 (0.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive work-family culture</td>
<td>0.117 (0.110)**</td>
<td>0.158 (0.177)*</td>
<td>0.088 (0.073)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work overload</td>
<td>-0.297 (-0.217)***</td>
<td>-0.303(-0.228)***</td>
<td>-0.293(-0.211)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work hours</td>
<td>0.001 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.005 (0.080)</td>
<td>-0.010 (-0.085)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging work</td>
<td>0.136 (0.089)**</td>
<td>0.038 (0.028)</td>
<td>0.253 (0.154)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate income</td>
<td>0.116 (0.126)***</td>
<td>0.199 (0.231)***</td>
<td>0.067 (0.071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large firm</td>
<td>-0.191 (-0.085)*</td>
<td>-0.402 (-0.182)***</td>
<td>0.181 (0.079)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership status</td>
<td>-0.122 (-0.056)</td>
<td>-0.091 (-0.049)</td>
<td>-0.102 (-0.040)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>0.106 (0.045)</td>
<td>0.032 (0.009)</td>
<td>0.119 (0.054)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.307</td>
<td>0.365</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.10.

**p < 0.05.

***p < 0.01.

aSignificant interaction at the 0.10 level.

work arrangements and that have at least one female partner. Despite their more manageable work arrangements, mothers report significantly higher levels of work overload than non-mothers, which may reflect a situation of mothers trying to do more with less. That is, mothers may feel their firm’s work demands cannot be realistically met in the more limited hours that they work. Overall, however, the results suggest that mothers should work
Table 3. Career Satisfaction Regression Results for the Pooled Sample, Mothers ($N = 135$) and Non-Mothers ($N = 180$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pooled b (B)</th>
<th>Mothers b (B)</th>
<th>Non-Mothers b (B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motherhood status</strong></td>
<td>0.013 (0.014)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.116)*</td>
<td>-0.002 (-0.100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female concentration</strong></td>
<td>0.001 (0.005)</td>
<td>-0.180 (-0.146)*</td>
<td>0.205 (0.213)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of female lawyersa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of female partnersa</td>
<td>0.078 (0.074)</td>
<td>-0.180 (-0.146)*</td>
<td>0.205 (0.213)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family responsiveness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in work hours</td>
<td>0.030 (0.070)</td>
<td>0.038 (0.085)</td>
<td>0.011 (0.026)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control work hours (number)b</td>
<td>0.068 (0.173)**</td>
<td>0.021 (0.050)</td>
<td>0.120 (0.313)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control work hours (when)</td>
<td>0.041 (0.095)*</td>
<td>0.062 (0.138)*</td>
<td>0.022 (0.053)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate arrangements available</td>
<td>-0.049 (-0.051)</td>
<td>-0.012 (-0.011)</td>
<td>-0.084 (-0.094)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive work-family culture</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work overload</td>
<td>-0.041 (-0.067)</td>
<td>-0.048 (-0.071)</td>
<td>-0.064 (-0.112)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work hours</td>
<td>-0.001 (-0.002)</td>
<td>-0.003 (-0.008)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.043)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging work</td>
<td>0.120 (0.175)**</td>
<td>0.156 (0.223)**</td>
<td>0.086 (0.127)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate income</td>
<td>0.093 (0.228)**</td>
<td>0.138 (0.315)**</td>
<td>0.063 (0.161)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large firm</td>
<td>-0.053 (-0.053)</td>
<td>-0.111 (-0.099)</td>
<td>-0.045 (-0.048)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership status</td>
<td>-0.098 (-0.101)*</td>
<td>-0.075 (-0.080)</td>
<td>-0.072 (-0.068)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>0.047 (0.044)</td>
<td>0.107 (0.059)</td>
<td>0.010 (0.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>0.277</td>
<td>0.209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < 0.10$.  
** $p < 0.05$.  
*** $p < 0.01$.  
aSignificant interaction at the 0.10 level.

in firms that should be more conducive to achieving a balanced lifestyle. And, the mean difference tests indicate that mothers do, indeed, report significantly more life balance than non-mothers. The two groups of women report similar proportions of female lawyers in their firms and similar degrees of flexibility and challenging work. They are also equally satisfied with their income and careers. The results for the control variables indicate that
mothers tend to work in smaller firms but are more likely to be partners than non-mothers. It is worth noting that mothers have almost twice as much experience practicing law (Mean = 12.07 years) compared to non-mothers (Mean = 6.68 years). Significantly, more of the mothers are married, compared to the non-mothers.

According to the pooled results presented in Tables 2 and 3, mothers report the same degree of life balance and career satisfaction as non-mothers. This suggests that women practicing law in law firms can have a career in law, children, a balanced lifestyle and a satisfying career.

Table 2 gives some indication of how this might be achieved. None of the significant predictors of life balance are the same for mothers and non-mothers, except for work overload. For both groups of women, greater work overload reduces their sense of balance as predicted (H4a) and this variable has one of the strongest effects on their life balance as well. For mothers, three variables that are not significant for non-mothers are important in affecting their sense of life balance. As predicted, a more supportive work-family culture (H3) and an adequate income (H4d) are important in enhancing a mother's sense of life balance. Mothers are less likely to work in large law firms compared to non-mothers (Table 1), but those that do report significantly more life imbalance than those in smaller firms.

In contrast, three variables affect the sense of life balance of non-mothers but are not significant for mothers. The more flexibility they have in their work hours (H2a) and the more control they have over the number of hours they work (H2b) results in a greater life balance. It is somewhat surprising that these family-responsive variables are more important to non-mothers' life balance than mothers'. The third variable important for non-mothers but less so for mothers is more challenging work (H4c).

Lastly, the effect of the percentage of female lawyers differs significantly for mothers and non-mothers. For mothers, the higher the proportion of women working in their firm, the less they feel they have a balanced life, contrary to Hypothesis 1a. The effect is the opposite for non-mothers – the higher the proportion of women in their firm, the more balanced their life, consistent with Hypothesis 1a.

Several variables have no significant effect on life balance for either group of women. Table 2 shows that the presence of a female partner (H1b), control over when they work (H2c), the availability of alternate arrangements (H2d) and the number of hours worked per week (H4b) do not affect life balance, contrary to our expectations.

The results for life satisfaction are given in Table 3. There are far fewer significant interactions. Female concentration affects mothers and non-mothers
in significantly different ways. For mothers, the greater the percentage of female lawyers in their firms, the more satisfied they are with their careers, consistent with Hypothesis 1a, whereas this variable has a non-significant effect on non-mothers. Conversely, the presence of female partners has a negative effect on mothers' career satisfaction, contrary to Hypothesis 1b and a positive effect on non-mothers' career satisfaction, consistent with Hypothesis 1b. The only other significant interaction involves control over the number of work hours, which has a significant positive effect on non-mothers' career satisfaction consistent with Hypothesis 2b, but no effect for mothers. Control over when lawyers work has a positive impact on career satisfaction for both groups of women (H2c). The two jobs rewards, challenging work (H4c) and adequate income (H4d), have significant positive effects on career satisfaction for both groups of women, whereas the control variable partnership status has a negative effect.

Several of the variables are unimportant in affecting women's career satisfaction and therefore do not support the hypotheses presented above. Specifically, flexibility in work hours (H2d), the availability of alternate work arrangements (H2a) and a supportive work–family culture (H3) are not important and neither of the work demand variables (H4a and H4b) affects women's career satisfaction.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This paper sets out to investigate whether women lawyers in law firms can "have it all". The results reported above suggest that women in law firms can have children, a satisfying career and a balanced life. This conclusion is based on the findings that mothers are equally satisfied with their careers and report the same degree of life balance as women who are not mothers. Contrary to some suggestions in the literature, it does not appear that to have children women lawyers must sacrifice their careers or suffer from an imbalanced lifestyle.¹

One reason underlying this conclusion may be that mothers tend to work in law firms that are more family friendly. That is, mothers are more likely to report that they work in firms where they have more control over their work hours, greater availability of alternate work arrangements and work lesser hours than non-mothers. By working in more family-friendly law firms, mothers are able to achieve satisfying careers and balanced lives comparable to those of women without children.
The results of this study also illustrate the importance of firm context. An interesting finding is the extent to which factors that affect mother's and non-mother's life balance differ dramatically. Only work overload contributes to a sense of imbalance for both groups of women. For mothers, a supportive work-family culture and adequate income are important in enhancing life balance, whereas working in a more female-dominated workplace or a smaller law firm reduces it. Kay (1997) found that women in small law firms have the highest quit rates compared to lawyers in other legal settings, and perhaps this is due to the difficulties associated with balancing work and family. In contrast, non-mothers reported a more balanced life if they worked in a female-dominated firm, had flexibility and control over their work hours and had interesting and challenging work.

These results suggest what measures law firms can take to enhance women lawyers' sense of life balance. A manageable workload seems important for mothers and non-mothers alike. Further, mothers need to feel they have a supportive organizational culture and an adequate income. If mothers feel they will suffer negative career consequences for their family responsibilities, they are more likely to feel that they cannot balance their work and family needs in a manageable way. There also seems to be certain choices that mothers can make in deciding what type of firm to work in - smaller firms and those (surprisingly) with fewer female lawyers appear to allow a more balanced lifestyle. In contrast, mothers who decide to work in larger firms and those with more female lawyers are more likely to experience a less balanced life.

The findings for career satisfaction are similar for the two groups of women. For both groups, having control over when they work, experiencing challenging work and receiving an adequate income are important for a satisfying career. However, there is an important difference between the two groups: the effect of female partners. For mothers, the presence of female partners reduces their career satisfaction, whereas for non-mothers they are associated with greater career satisfaction.

These results suggest what law firms can do to facilitate a more satisfying career for mothers. If law firms grant women professionals more control over when they work, it enhances their career satisfaction, regardless of parental status. As noted earlier, women who decide to have children often find themselves rerouted onto the "mommy track" and are given less important and less challenging work assignments, such that their opportunities for career advancement decline. The results of this study, not surprisingly, show that doing more intrinsically challenging and financially rewarding work results in a more satisfying career for mothers and non-mothers alike.
More surprising is that mothers appear more satisfied when there are more women lawyers in the firm, but less satisfied when there are female partners in their firm.

The unexpected findings regarding the effects of female concentration in law firms clearly warrants further investigation. It was hypothesized that the presence of female partners and/or a higher concentration of women professionals would enhance the life balance and career satisfaction of women lawyers, especially those with children. Our results, however, are not straightforward. It is not clear exactly how women colleagues and female partners influence whether mothers are satisfied with their careers or with their ability to secure a balanced lifestyle. While female concentration positively affects non-mothers’ life balance and career satisfaction (as predicted), the results are more complex for mothers.

Several studies suggest that female concentration is negatively related to family compatibility, such that the presence of more women in a work setting reduces or has no effect on the availability of family-friendly benefits (Glass & Camarigg, 1992; McNeely & Fogarty, 1988). In subsequent analyses (not shown), comparisons were made between mothers’ firms that have female partners and those that do not. The results suggest that firms without female partners are more family friendly. For example, mothers report a significantly more supportive work–family culture, significantly less work overload and a shorter workweek when their firms do not have female partners. In contrast, mothers in firms with a larger proportion of female lawyers report significantly more control over the number of hours worked and when they work, and a significantly more supportive work–family culture.

Alternatively, Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner, and Ferrigno (2002) suggest that work–family policies and the use of these policies may lead to resentment among workers because some workers receive more benefits than others, and those not using work–family benefits must compensate for their coworkers time off by working harder. These authors found, for example, that although men more so than women resent having to do more work for those who use work–family benefits, both genders share similar degrees of resentment regarding the availability of work–family benefits. That is, women are not necessarily more sympathetic or understanding of others (usually women) who use these benefits.

Women with family responsibilities may request or require certain accommodations with their work hours that may result in additional stress for colleagues who assume the extra workload. Lawyers interviewed by Epstein et al. (1995) reported that colleagues are critical in the type of support
women can expect to receive if they have children. Interestingly, there appears to be a "generational gap" between successful younger and older women's views of motherhood and a legal career. Older generations report that younger women coming out of law schools now feel that they are entitled to child care and part-time work, and expect that their firm will accommodate their complex work-home schedules. Older generations also believe that younger generations are less willing to sacrifice family time and obligations for their careers. Senior female partners, in other words, feel that when they had children, they had to make many more compromises than younger women are prepared to make today. Younger women do not regard older women partners in their firms as positive role models. They view female partners as martyrs — as women who pursued their legal careers at too great a cost to their personal and family life. Clearly, we need to examine further the interactions and attitudes among women working in law firms to obtain a better understanding of these complex findings regarding the impact of female colleagues and partners on mothers' work experiences.

Finally, it is important to note that this study does not include mothers who have left law firm practice or the practice of law altogether and who may have done so to care for their children. These women may have found working in a law firm incompatible with having children, being successful in their career and having a balanced life. As well, this study does not take into account women who are still practising law, but who have decided not to have children because of their legal career. Because women in law tend to report lower incidences of marriage and parenthood compared to men, some researchers conclude that juggling a legal career and a family may not seem desirable or even possible to some women (Liefland, 1986; Pollock & Ramirez, 1995). Women who are not highly satisfied with their careers or do not feel they are able to balance work and family may quit when they enter the child-bearing, child-rearing stages of their life (Wallace, 2001). Future research needs to examine more carefully women who leave their careers to have children and those who choose to continue their career but forgo having children. As long as women continue to sacrifice their careers or family for one another, they will not achieve parity with men in combining the public and private spheres.

As a result of leaving both the legal profession and law firm practice at higher rates than men (Kay, 1997), women are under-represented in the high-status occupation of law as well as the most prestigious positions within law, respectively. This leads to the broader question as to why women are under-represented in certain occupations, specialties and work settings throughout the workforce compared to men. Two competing theoretical
frameworks appear central in answering this question, which basically reflect either gendered choices or gendered constraints. On the one hand, it is suggested that women and men hold different work and family values and interests such that women prefer and choose jobs that facilitate work–family balance, despite being penalized by lower prestige, pay or status (Reskin, 1993). On the other hand, others point to certain constraints or institutional barriers that deter and differentially affect men’s and women’s entry into and success in particular occupations and settings by making it difficult for workers to balance professional and family responsibilities. Such workplaces may not appear to be discriminatory, but their practices do differentially affect men and women through the ways that employers recruit, assign jobs, mentor, promote and retain workers (Roos & Reskin, 1984). Regardless of which explanation is supported, the choices or constraints that women face are explicitly linked to family responsibilities. That is, women make certain career decisions and sacrifices as they attempt to juggle work and family, or women face certain barriers because employers assume they will place priority on their family responsibilities that invariably interfere with work. It follows then that it is important to determine whether individual choice or institutional constraint are key to understanding the broader issues of gendered inequality related to the different career patterns and outcomes observed between men and women.

NOTES

1. Moreover, a subsequent regression analysis of the equations presented in Tables 2 and 3 (available from author) shows that mothers and fathers practicing law are equally satisfied with their careers and report the same degree of life balance. This suggests that mothers are able to obtain the same degree of career satisfaction and life balance as fathers in law firms.

REFERENCES


