

# Parenthood and Commitment to the Legal Profession: Are Mothers Less Committed than Fathers?

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Published online: 23 May 2008  
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**Abstract** This research examined the relationship between parenthood and career commitment. Karasek's (*Administrative Science Quarterly* 24:285–308, 1979) Job Demand-Job Control Model was used as a theoretic framework for hypothesizing the relationships between work and family demands, job control and social support and parents' career commitment. Questionnaire data from a sample of practicing lawyers with children were used to test this model. The results show fathers generally reported more work demands than mothers; whereas, mothers reported more family demands than fathers. Job control and social support did not moderate relationships between work and family demands and parents' career commitment. Perhaps the most surprising finding of this study, contrary to assumptions in the literature and the workplace, was that mothers practicing law are significantly *more* committed to their careers than fathers. This paper closes by discussing possible explanations for these findings.

**Keywords** Career commitment · Parenthood · Professionals · Work–family balance · Support

## Introduction

Research on the legal profession suggests that excessive work demands and long hours are stressful work conditions that contribute to lawyers feeling dissatisfied with their jobs and leaving the profession (Brockman 1992; Hagan and Kay 1995). The profession demands total commitment and expects lawyers to be endlessly available to work long hours around the clock (Epstein et al. 1999; Hagan and Kay 1995; Wallace 1997, 1999). The literature

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suggests that the legal profession and the family, particularly in regards to women's roles, are both *greedy institutions*.<sup>1</sup>

This study examined work and family demands and support among practicing lawyers who are parents and how these are related to their career commitment. Career commitment is defined as the degree to which lawyers intend to continue practicing law. Three key questions are addressed in this paper: (1) Do mothers and fathers differ significantly in their work and family demands and supports? (2) How do work and family demands and supports affect parents' career commitment? and (3) Are mothers practicing law less committed to their legal careers than fathers? Two data sets were used to answer these questions. First, questionnaires were sent to a large sample of lawyers. These data were used to compare mothers' and fathers' work and family demands and supports (Question 1) by conducting mean differences tests. They were also used to conduct multiple regression analyses to answer Questions 2 and 3 regarding the factors related to parents' career commitment. Second, exploratory, in-depth interviews were conducted with a smaller sample of lawyers. Excerpts from the interview data are presented to provide a richer interpretation of the quantitative findings of this study.

This paper is organized as follows. First, Karasek's Job Demand-Control (JDC) model (1979) of job stress is introduced as a theoretic framework for examining parents' commitment to their legal career. Specific variables used to test the hypotheses represented in this model are also identified. Second, the methods used in this study are presented. Next, using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression, the hypotheses were tested with the questionnaire data and significant results are highlighted with interview excerpts. Lastly, this paper closes with a discussion of the findings and the conclusions drawn from this study.

## Review of the Literature

The general perception held in the legal profession, and the workforce in general, is that women, particularly mothers, are less committed to their careers than men (Epstein et al. 1999; Wallace 2004). In explaining gender differences in career commitment, emphasis is usually placed on the choices or constraints that working women face (Reskin 1993). That is, women tend to choose different occupations, specialties and work settings than men because women hold different work and family values that lead them to select jobs that best facilitate work–family balance (Reskin 1993). Alternatively, constraints, such as institutional barriers or discrimination, make it difficult for workers, particularly women, to balance work and family responsibilities that may then lead to gender inequalities at work. Regardless of which approach is taken, the primary reason women appear less committed to and/or less successful in their careers than men is because of family responsibilities. Either women make career decisions and sacrifices in attempting 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 their work (Bielby and Bielby 1988). Fathers are not viewed in the same way in terms of sacrificing their careers or career commitment as a result of becoming a parent.

**Hypothesis 1:** Mothers will be less committed to their careers than fathers.

<sup>1</sup> Coser (1974) introduced the term *greedy institutions* to refer to the total or near total commitment demanded by organizations such as the military and monastic orders.

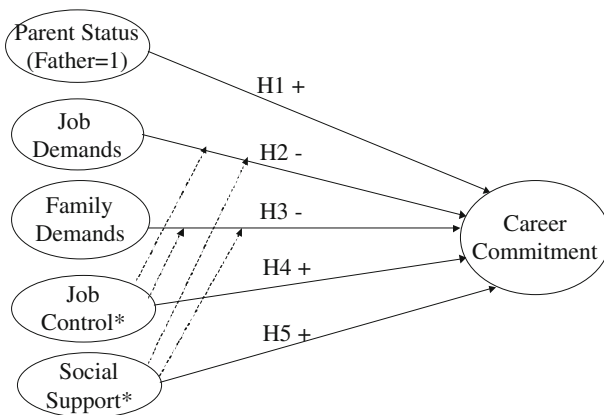
A Proposed Model of Parents' Career Commitment

Karasek's (1979) classic JDC model of work stress has been applied to many work-related outcome variables, including job stress, burnout, job satisfaction, and psychologic distress/well being [see Van der Doef and Maes (1999) for a review]. This framework includes three key concepts that are hypothesized important in understanding parents' career commitment: (a) job and family demands; (b) control and flexibility over work hours; and (c) workplace and family support. Figure 1 presents the conceptual JDC model of career commitment proposed in this study.

In the JDC model, job demands refer to workload stressors that are usually assessed in terms of time pressures, role conflict, or role overload. Job control, also referred to as decision latitude, denotes a worker's ability to control his or her work activities. Karasek's model is often extended to include social support (Searle et al. 2001), which is an interpersonal coping resource where one person helps another. It often involves having someone to talk to who is supportive and understanding of the individual. In applying Karasek's JDC model, this research also examined the extent to which job control and social support may potentially buffer the negative effects of excessive job demands experienced by practicing lawyers.

Job Demands

Job demands are usually recognized as the key source of work stress (Wallace 2005), and time pressures are most often identified as major sources of stress and dissatisfaction in the legal profession (Brockman 1992). Lawyers are renowned for their long work hours with reports of them working from dawn to midnight, around the clock, for days (Wallace 1997). While most work time is spent at the office, many lawyers also regularly work at home in the evenings and on weekends. The time employees spend at work is often interpreted as evidence of their career dedication (Perlow 1995; Thompson et al. 1999), and it is widely documented that women work fewer hours than men and are generally perceived as less committed to their careers (Damiano-Teixeira 2006; Epstein et al. 1999; Hagan and Kay 1995; Seron 1996).



**Fig. 1** Job Demand–Job Control Model of Career Commitment. \*The buffer hypotheses for job control (H6) and social support (H7) are shown with dashed arrows

Excessive time demands may result in work spilling over into one's life at home and thereby affecting parents' ability to balance work and family (Craig 2007; Hagan and Kay 1995; Wallace 1999, 2001). This reflects work-to-family conflict or the extent to which work demands interfere with home and family life (Wallace 1999). Long hours, working evenings and weekends and inflexible work schedules may exacerbate work–family tensions for working parents.

In law, as in other occupations, different work settings have different work demands associated with them. For lawyers, especially those in private practice, which is notorious for its excessive time demands, work productivity and commitment are often measured directly by the number of hours worked or billed to clients (Epstein et al. 1999; Hagan and Kay 1995; Seron 1996; Wallace 1997). Those who do not work in private practice tend to have more limited and structured hours that are more amenable to balancing family life and accommodating childcare arrangements.

In sum, four aspects of lawyers' job demands were examined in this study: (a) the number of hours worked per week at the office; (b) the number of hours worked per week at home; (c) work-to-family conflict; and (d) whether their work setting is in private practice.

**Hypothesis 2:** Job demands (hours at the office, hours at home, work-to-family conflict, work setting) will be negatively related to career commitment.

### *Family Demands*

Like work demands, family demands may also involve time pressures that place additional stress on working parents and contribute to dissatisfaction with their careers. The amount of responsibility and time associated with raising a family often depends on the age of the children, where preschool-aged children require more time and energy than older children (Craig 2007; Press et al. 2006).

Male professionals often have wives who work part time or not at all; whereas, female professionals tend to be married to men who also have demanding professional careers.<sup>2</sup> Dual-career couples with children tend to experience more stress than those where only one spouse works full time (Hammer et al. 1997). Individuals who simultaneously try to balance the demands of two careers tend to place a premium on time, which is often their most scarce and valued resource (Craig 2007; Parasuraman et al. 1992).

In this study, three family demands were examined: (a) the number of hours per week the respondent's spouse works at the office; (b) the number of hours respondents spend with their children on work days; and (c) whether or not they have preschool-aged children.

**Hypothesis 3:** Family demands (spouse's work hours, hours with children, presence of preschool children) will be negatively related to career commitment.

### *Job Control*

Job control is consistent with the most commonly cited family-friendly policy that reflects flexibility and/or control over one's work hours (Haddock et al. 2006). Two different ways

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in this study, virtually all of the female lawyers' husbands worked full time; whereas, only half of the married male lawyers (52%) were in dual-career situations where both spouses work full time. One quarter (24%) of the male lawyers' wives worked part time, and one quarter (24%) reported that their wife was unemployed.

in which lawyers may exert control over the time demands of their jobs were examined in this study: (a) control over the flexibility in their work hours; and (b) control over when they work. Greater flexibility and discretion in one's work hours may help parents structure their workdays so that they can better cope with competing role demands and reduce or buffer the negative impact of work demands (Haddock et al. 2006; Roehling et al. 2001). It may allow parents to alter their daily starting and ending times at work or simply give them the ability to leave work when unexpected family demands arise (Golden 2001). Some have argued that control over one's work time is often more salient to workers than the sheer number of hours they work (Holtzman and Glass 1999). Moreover the adoption of work-life policies, that include for example flexible work hours, is believed to result in a more committed workforce (Roehling et al. 2001).

**Hypothesis 4:** Job control (over flexibility and work hours) will be positively related to career commitment.

### *Social Support*

Two forms of work-related support were examined in this study: coworker support and organizational support. Support from one's coworkers means they listen to and empathize with the demands of one's job and show concern and offer support and encouragement to the individual (Thomas and Ganster 1995). Organizational support refers to the extent to which the culture of the employing organization supports employees who take advantage of the family benefits it offers. The formal policies of an organization do not necessarily equate with its day-to-day practices and very little research has assessed the role of a supportive or unsupportive work environment (Roehling et al. 2001). A supportive organization values the integration of employees' work and family lives (Thompson et al. 1999) and does not penalize employees who use work-to-family benefits or devote time to family (Comer and Stites-Doe 2006; Clark 2001; Estes et al. 2007; Haddock et al. 2006; Roehling et al. 2001).

Research on work–family dynamics has also demonstrated the importance of support from one's spouse in coping with job stress (Parasuraman et al. 1992; Voydanoff 2005). In this study, spousal support was examined in two different ways: whether the respondent's spouse respects and encourages his/her career; and whether the respondent is happy with the amount of time they spend with his/her spouse. It is important for individuals in highly demanding professional jobs to have a supportive spouse, both in sharing the stress their career incurs and the rewards it offers (e.g., Beatty 1996; Comer and Stites-Doe 2006; Press et al. 2006).

**Hypothesis 5:** Social support (work-family culture, coworker support, spouse's support of career and satisfaction with spouse time) will be positively related to career commitment.

### *Buffering Effects*

Hypotheses 2 through 5 reflect the strain (main effect) hypotheses that predict that workers in *high strain* jobs will experience more job stress than those in *low strain* jobs (Karasek 1979). *High strain* jobs are characterized by excessive work demands and little job control. These hypotheses suggest that career commitment will be affected by the additive, independent effects of work and family demands (Hypotheses 2 and 3, respectively) and job

control (Hypothesis 4). In addition, Karasek suggested that there are buffer (interaction) effects such that control moderates the impact of job demands on workers' well being and work attitudes. That is, control over one's work can buffer the potentially negative relationship between job demands and career commitment. The crucial issue for the sixth hypothesis is not whether having high demands and low control are negatively related to worker attitudes, but whether there is an interaction between the two.

**Hypothesis 6:** Job control (over flexibility and work hours) will moderate the relationships of job and family demands with career commitment. More specifically, the negative relationship between job and family demands and career commitment will be stronger for workers with less job control.

Two basic hypotheses are also set out in the literature regarding social support. The strain (main effect) hypothesis suggests that support exerts a direct effect on outcomes regardless of the amount of job demands a person is experiencing (Hypothesis 5). Similar to the arguments posed for job control, the buffer (interaction effect) hypothesis suggests that social support moderates the relationship between job demands and well-being.

**Hypothesis 7:** Social support (work-family culture, coworker support, spouse's support of career and satisfaction with spouse time) will moderate the relationships of job demands with career commitment. More specifically, the negative relationship between job and family demands and career commitment will be stronger for workers with less social support.

## Data and Methods

As indicated above, two data sets were analyzed in this research. The hypotheses posed above were tested using questionnaire data. Qualitative interview data are also presented to highlight the statistically significant findings. First, the questionnaire data and methods are presented, followed by a description of the interview data and methods.

### Questionnaire Sample

Questionnaires were sent to all 5,921 active lawyers in the Province of Alberta in June 2000 and 1,827 were returned, yielding a response rate of 31%. Provincial data provided by the Law Society of Alberta regarding all members' gender and employment situation by city allowed for comparisons between the provincial and sample data (available from the author on request). These comparisons indicated that similar proportions of lawyers participated by gender, practice setting (e.g., law firm, government office, etc.) and city (e.g., Calgary, Edmonton, etc.). Chi-square tests (available from author) showed that the proportions were not significantly different.

The analyses in this study were restricted to married mothers and fathers, which consist of 230 (28%) mothers and 604 (72%) fathers.<sup>3</sup> More than half of the sample (57%) had only one child at the time of the survey and the remaining parents had two or more. Almost half (42%) had at least one preschool-aged child. Respondents were married, on average, 15½ years, and 74% of the respondents' spouses were employed at the time of the study.

<sup>3</sup> Only married parents were included as spousal support and spouse's work hours are not applicable to single parents. Forty single mothers and 21 single fathers were excluded.

Their household income was \$188,752 for 1999 before taxes and other deductions were made. On a weekly basis, they worked, on average, about 46 h at the office and an additional four hours at home. They had practiced law for almost 15 years (mean = 14.91) on average, and most (77%) worked in private practice.

### Questionnaire Measures

Many of the measures included in the questionnaire were multiple-item, Likert scales. The values reported for these variables represent the mean scores calculated by summing the items and dividing by the number of items for the particular scale. Unless otherwise indicated, the response categories ranged from *strongly disagree* (coded 1) to *strongly agree* (coded 5). Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) reliability coefficients are reported for the multiple item measures.

Career Commitment was measured by six Likert items (Wallace 2001) that tap the extent to which respondents would like to continue working in the legal profession or a different occupation, plan to continue practicing law as long as possible, and would like to leave, are thinking of leaving or intend to leave the legal profession in the near future ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Parent Status (Father) was coded 1 for fathers and 0 for mothers.

### Job Demand Variables

Weekly Hours at Office is the average number of hours respondents reported working at the office per week, including evenings and weekends. Weekly Hours at Home is the average number of hours respondents worked per week at home, including evenings and weekends. Work-to-Family Conflict was based the five-item Work–Family Conflict Scale developed by Netemeyer et al. (1996). The scale taps the extent to which work demands interfere with home and family life, that changes are often made in plans for family activities as a result of work, and that work time and demands make it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities and do things at home ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Work Setting was coded 1 for private practice (e.g., solo and law firm practice) and 0 for all other work settings (e.g., government, private corporations).

### Family Demands

Spouse's Weekly Hours at Office is the average number of hours respondents reported their spouse worked at the office per week, including evenings and weekends. Hours with Children on Work Days is the number of hours per day that respondents spent with their children, taking care of them, playing with them, feeding them, etc. on days that they worked. Presence of Preschool Children was coded 1 for those with any children under the age of six living at home and 0 for those who did not have any preschool aged children.

### Job Control Variables

Flexibility in Work Hours was measured by a single Likert item assessing how hard it is to take time off to take care of personal or family matters (Holtzman and Glass 1999). Control over Work Hours was measured by a single Likert item tapping how much control respondents have over when they work.

### *Social Support Variables*

Supportive Work–Family Culture was measured by six Likert items from the Work–Family Culture Supportiveness Scale (Thompson et al. (1999). All items were reverse coded. They reflect whether lawyers in the organization: (a) are expected to work more than 50 h a week, (b) take work home at night and/or on weekends, (c) put their jobs before their families, (d) are resentful when people take extended leaves to care for new or adopted children, (e) view lawyers who participate in available work–family programs (e.g., part-time work) as less serious about their careers and (f) feel if they turn down work for family-related reasons they are seriously hurting their careers ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Coworker Support was measured by four Likert items that Thomas and Ganster (1995) used to assess emotional supervisor support where reference to one’s *supervisor* was changed to refer to one’s *coworkers*. Respondents indicated how often the lawyers they usually talk to: (a) listen to their work-related problems; (b) empathize with their stresses; (c) offer support and encouragement; and (d) show concern. The response categories ranged from *never* (coded 1) to *most of the time* (coded 4) ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Spouse’s Support of Career was measured by five Likert items from Beatty’s (1996) eight-item scale assessing how much the respondent’s spouse considered their career of lower priority than his/hers, is resentful of their career, was uncomfortable that they earn more, complained about the amount of time devoted to their work, and was very supportive of their career ( $\alpha = .75$ ).<sup>4</sup> Satisfaction with Spouse Time was measured by a single item indicating how happy respondents were with the time they spent with their partner. The response categories ranged from *very unhappy* (coded 1) to *very happy* (coded 5).

### *Control Variables*

A number of variables were included as controls in order to demonstrate that the relationships found among work demands, job control and social support and career commitment were not spurious and due to the omission of key variables. Career Plateau refers to the extent to which respondents believed they had a low likelihood of being promoted in their current organization. It was measured by three Likert items from Ettington (1998) that tapped whether respondents expected to advance to a higher level or be promoted above their current level in their current organization ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Job Satisfaction is the extent to which employees liked their job and was measured by three Likert items from Brayfield and Rothe (1951) that reflect the extent to which respondents were enthusiastic about, enjoyed and liked their job ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Law Experience was computed by subtracting the year the respondent started practicing law from the survey date. Household Income was the sum of respondent’s own and spouse’s total annual earnings for the 1999 tax year, before taxes and other deductions were made. Adequate Time for Self was measured by a single Likert item: I have enough time for myself. Workaholic was measured by a single Likert item constructed for this study: It is accurate to say that I am somewhat of a *workaholic*.

### *Analytic Strategy*

First, mean difference tests were used to answer Question 1 by determining whether mothers and fathers differed in their work and family demands, job control and support. T-test statistics (one-tailed tests) were used to establish whether the observed mean

<sup>4</sup> Three items were excluded because of their similarity with other measures included in the survey (e.g., emotional spousal support and family-to-work conflict).



differences were statistically significant. In order to answer the second and third questions, OLS regression was used to estimate the hypothesized relationships between job demands, family demands, job control, social support variables, parental status and career commitment. In doing so, several steps were taken. First, it was determined whether an additive model was appropriate. Gender-interaction tests were conducted with all variables in the model to ascertain whether the variables had similar or different effects for the two groups of parents. To do this, gender cross-product interaction terms were computed for each independent variable (e.g., gender\*weekly hours at office; gender\*weekly hours at home). The results indicated that none of the gender interaction terms were statistically significant at the .05 level. That is, none of the variables included in the model differed significantly in their relationship with career commitment for mothers compared to fathers.

Following this, the two buffer (interaction) hypotheses were tested by determining whether the cross-product interaction terms between work and family demands and job control (Hypothesis 6) and the cross-product interaction terms between work and family demands and social support (Hypothesis 7) had statistically significant effects on career commitment. To test for the buffer interactions, a series of intermediate models were estimated where the cross-product interaction terms were added to the model in blocks for each set of moderators (e.g., the four cross-product interactions between work demands and flexibility; then the four interactions between work demands and control over work hours). Of the 42 interactions estimated to test whether job control and social support moderate the effects of work and family demands, only five were statistically significant at the .05 level. Of these, only two of the five acted as buffers;<sup>5</sup> whereas, the other three attenuated the negative effects on career commitment.<sup>6</sup> Given these results, the model was treated as additive because virtually all of the work and family demand variables negatively impacted on career commitment, regardless of the amount of job control or social support parents received. These results also suggest that there is no empirical support for either buffer hypothesis (Hypotheses 6 and 7).

Having established that the model is additive, the main effect hypotheses (1–5) were tested by examining the independent effects of parent status, job demands, family demands, job control and social support on lawyers' career commitment. All variables were entered simultaneously as there was no *a priori* reason to expect a particular hierarchical ordering among the seven sets of variables. These results are presented in Table 1.

Lastly, examination of the zero-order correlations (available from the author upon request) demonstrated that none of the correlations were greater than .60, which suggests that there were no multicollinearity problems among the independent variables (Fox 1991). Variance-inflation factors (VIF) were also estimated for all variables included in the regression analysis (Fox 1991). These results (available from author) also suggest that multicollinearity among the predictors is not evident for any of the variables.

## Interview Data and Methods

The parents' interview data represent a subset of interviews from a sample of 121 lawyers. Initially, 129 lawyers were contacted and 121 agreed to participate, yielding a 94%

<sup>5</sup> Having flexible hours buffered the negative effects of hours worked at the office and control over hours buffered the negative effects of work-to-family conflict.

<sup>6</sup> More flexible hours and a more supportive work-family culture increased the negative effect of work-to-family conflict on commitment and greater coworker support increased the negative effect of hours worked at home on career commitment.

**Table 1** Mean differences between mothers ( $N = 230$ ) and fathers ( $N = 604$ ) and regression results for career commitment

	Mothers Mean (SD)	Fathers Mean (SD) <sup>a</sup>	Regression b (Beta) <sup>b</sup>
Parent status (1 = Father)			-.13 (-.07)*
Job demands			
Weekly hours at office	41.38 (11.90)	48.09 (10.30)***	-.00 (-.03)
Weekly hours at home	4.19 (5.39)	4.06 (5.82)	-.00 (-.02)
Work-to-family conflict	3.20 (.88)	3.11 (.88)	-.21 (-.21)***
Work setting (1 = Private practice)	.67 (.47)	.81 (.39)***	.00 (.00)
Family demands			
Spouse's weekly hours at office	40.78 (16.66)	18.67 (19.11)***	-.00 (-.06)*
Hours with children on work days	3.27 (1.68)	1.82 (1.29)***	.01 (.02)
Presence of pre-school children	.50 (.50)	.39 (.49)**	-.02 (-.01)
Job control			
Flexibility in work hours	3.43 (1.03)	3.39 (1.07)	.07 (.09)**
Control over work hours	3.40 (1.18)	3.67 (1.07)***	.09 (.11)***
Work-related support			
Supportive work-family culture	2.99 (.97)	3.13 (.80)*	.01 (.01)
Coworker support	3.09 (.65)	2.89 (.68)***	.09 (.07)*
Family-related support			
Spouse's support of career	3.51 (.47)	3.53 (.47)	.11 (.06)*
Satisfied with spouse time	2.69 (1.15)	2.57 (1.13)	.02 (.03)
Controls			
Career plateau	3.18 (.92)	3.16 (.91)	-.22 (-.24)***
Job satisfaction	3.06 (.40)	3.09 (.37)	.59 (.27)***
Law experience	11.92 (6.29)	16.03 (7.46)***	.01 (.07)
Law experience squared	181.47 (173.20)	312.68 (254.93)***	.00 (.03)
Household income (logged)	11.98 (.53)	11.99 (.58)	.09 (.06)*
Adequate time for self	1.91 (.99)	2.50 (1.14)***	-.01 (-.01)
Workaholic	2.89 (1.05)	2.91 (1.07)	.16 (.21)***
$R^2$			.34***

Note: <sup>a</sup> The asterisks in this column indicates a statistically significant difference between mothers and fathers

<sup>b</sup> The asterisks in this column indicates a statistically significant regression coefficient

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

response rate. The interview data for this paper were limited to parents' responses representing 29 mothers and 33 fathers. A snowball strategy was used to construct a sampling frame and potential respondents were contacted at their workplace. Telephone interviews were scheduled at a time most convenient for them that averaged about 35 min in duration (range = 20–75 min). Parents were asked a series of open-ended questions and the ones relevant to this paper relate to their intentions to continue practicing law or changing jobs, their experiences having children, their work history, and their current work arrangements and family situation. Quotes are introduced below to establish a point of view or experience that is not idiosyncratic but rather reflects a more prevalent theme found in the

interviews. These responses provide a rich source of insights into the careers of mothers and fathers practicing law.

One-fifth (21%) of the parents interviewed had only one child living at home, and the remaining parents had two or more. More than half (69%) had at least one preschool-aged child. The parents who were interviewed were married, on average, 12 years and 81% of the participants' spouses were employed at the time of the survey. Their household income averaged approximately \$200,000 for 1999 before taxes and other deductions were made. On a weekly basis, they worked about 45 h at the office and an additional 5½ hours at home. They practiced law for almost 12 years (mean = 11.93), and most (73%) worked in private practice.

## Results

### Do Married Mothers and Fathers Differ Significantly in their Work and Family Demands and Supports?

Table 1 shows that mothers (mean = 41.38) reported significantly shorter office hours than fathers (mean = 48.09), and both groups worked about four hours a week at home. Mothers and fathers reported similar degrees of work-to-family conflict. Significantly more fathers (81%) worked in the more demanding private practice settings than mothers (67%). All three family demands differed significantly. Mothers' husbands (mean = 40.78) worked significantly longer hours than fathers' wives (mean = 18.67). Mothers spent more than three hours a day with their children on the days that they work, whereas fathers spent less than two hours. Mothers (50%) were more likely to have preschool-aged children at home than fathers (39%), and this is likely because the men practicing law were older and farther along their family life course than the women.

Turning next to the job control variables, both groups of parents reported similar amounts of flexibility in their work hours, but fathers (mean = 3.67) reported significantly more control over when they work than mothers (mean = 3.40). In regards to social support, fathers (mean = 3.13) reported significantly more supportive work environments in terms of work–family culture than mothers (mean = 2.99); whereas, mothers (mean = 3.09) reported significantly more support from colleagues than fathers (mean = 2.89). Both groups reported similar spousal support and satisfaction with the time they spend with their spouse.

Both sets of parents were similar in whether they felt their careers had plateaued, they were satisfied with their jobs and they felt they were *workaholics*. They also reported similar household incomes. Fathers (mean = 16.03) reported significantly more years practicing law than mothers (mean = 11.92). Fathers (mean = 2.50) also felt they had somewhat more time for themselves than mothers (mean = 1.91).

In summary, fathers generally reported more work demands than mothers; whereas, mothers reported more family demands than fathers. Fathers indicated that they have more control over their work hours. Mothers and fathers received work-related support from different sources and both groups indicated similar degrees of support from their spouses.

### How do the Work and Family Demands and Supports Affect Career Commitment for Fathers and Mothers?

As indicated above, the career commitment model is an additive one as the relationships did not vary for mothers versus fathers, and none of the control or support variables acted as buffers. Thus, only additive results are presented in Table 1 and Fig. 2.

Work-to-family conflict was the only work demand variable significantly related to parents' career commitment ( $\beta = -.21$ ). The more work interferes with family time, activities and responsibilities, the less committed parents are to practicing law. This variable has one of the strongest relationships with career commitment as well. Recall, that mothers and fathers reported similar amounts of work-to-family conflict. The following two parents explained how practicing law has a potentially negative impact on their ability to be good parents because it interferes with family time. The first quote is from a mother of three children and the second quote from a father of three.

*It is very difficult to be a good lawyer, a good wife, a **good** mother, and an all-round happy person. This profession is very bad at accommodating alternate styles of practice. I want to work less and spend more time with my family.*

*In hindsight, however, the biggest sacrifice has been time spent with my children as a parent. They have essentially raised themselves. I am lucky to spend half an hour a day talking to my kids. That is a sad commentary on our society as a whole if people put their job responsibilities above their parenting responsibilities. Regrettably I have. It has manifested itself in lack of discipline, direction and drive in my children, probably a reaction to not be like their father.*

The other three work demand variables were unrelated to parents' career commitment. Even though fathers worked longer hours at the office and they were more likely to work in private practice, these factors were unrelated to career commitment.

In regard to the family demand variables, the amount of time one's spouse spent at the office was negatively related to lawyers' career commitment ( $\beta = -.06$ ). In addition, recall that the husbands of the mothers worked significantly longer hours than the wives of the fathers. When asked about commitment to practicing law, the following mother explained how the amount of time her husband used to spend at work affected their overall quality of life:

*My husband used to have a job where he worked long hours, weekends, holidays and evenings. He quit, returned to school and became a teacher so he would have better hours, weekends off and the same holidays as our kids when they're in school. This has improved our quality of life.*

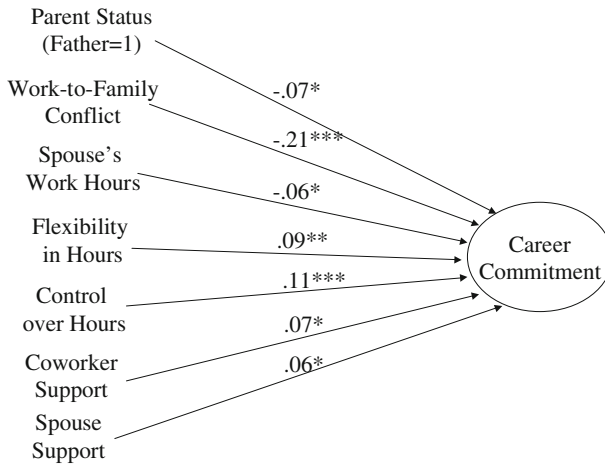
The amount of time spent with one's children and the presence of preschool aged children in the home are unrelated to parents' career commitment. Mothers reported significantly more of both these family demands.

Turning next to job control, both had the hypothesized relationships with career commitment. More flexible work hours ( $\beta = .09$ ) and more control over work hours ( $\beta = .11$ ) were associated with parents being more committed to their legal careers. Quotes from two parents emphasized how important control over their work time is to them:

*The advantage of law is that you can control your own time—most fail to realize this. As the billboard says—“simply say no”.*

*Law is very stressful and having a large degree of control over your practice and hours is essential to balance and health. Without it I would see myself looking for another career to avoid the constant stress, responsibility and conflict inherent to the career.*

Further, this father explained the benefits and costs of flexibility associated with practicing law:



**Fig. 2** Standardized regression results for the Job Demand-Job Control Model of Career Commitment. *Note:* Only statistically significant coefficients for the variables represented by the Job Demand-Control Model are presented in this figure. The statistically significant results for the control variables are presented in Table 1

*I have enjoyed practice for almost 20 years now in a variety of settings, trying to balance professional, family and personal life. If anything the legal profession has given me flexibility to change the level of commitment as circumstances changed. I work more now than when we had young children. This profession has remarkable flexibility as long as you understand income is directly commensurate with time and effort (and skill).*

Turning next to the support variables, parents with more supportive coworkers ( $\beta = .07$ ) were more committed to their careers, as well as those who received more career support from their spouse ( $\beta = .06$ ). Recall mothers reported more supportive coworkers than fathers. The extent to which the employing organization had a supportive work-to-family culture and the respondent was satisfied with the amount of time they spent alone with his/her spouse appear unrelated to parents' commitment to practicing law.

Many parents emphasized how important a supportive work environment and family was in successfully juggling work and family. For example, the following quotes from a mother and father respectively, briefly describe their support systems as follows:

*My experiences are very unusual. I have a **very** supportive husband and a **very** family-oriented law firm that puts family and personal time before money.*

*The key to juggling it all is to have an understanding, supportive spouse and to work somewhere that offers you some freedom and flexibility.*

The next parent explained the importance of having support from his family and spouse in dealing with the stresses of his job.

*My practice is very rewarding and fulfilling in part because it allows me the freedom I need to commit to my family. My family is very committed to me and my practice, which provides me with the support I need when things do get hectic.*

Turning next to the control variables, job satisfaction ( $\beta = .27$ ) had the strongest relationship with parents' career commitment—the more satisfied they were in their jobs, the more committed they were to their careers. Career plateau was also important ( $\beta = -.24$ ) in that parents who felt their career had plateaued were less committed to practicing law. Parents with more workaholic personalities reported greater career commitment ( $\beta = .21$ ). Lastly, parents with higher household incomes were more committed to continuing their legal careers ( $\beta = .06$ ). Years of experience and having adequate time for one's self were not important in explaining parents' career commitment.

In summary, the results for the JDC model show that the work demand variable, work-to-family conflict, is the most important factor related to parents' career commitment. The only relevant family demand is whether lawyers are in a dual-career relationship, where the more hours their spouse works, the less committed they are to their legal career. Both flexibility and control over work hours were positively related to lawyers' career commitment. Two forms of support are important to parents' career commitment—support from coworkers and their spouse. None of the variables differed in their relationships to career commitment for mothers and fathers, and the work and family demands variables are not buffered by job control nor work or family support.

#### Are Mothers Practicing Law Less Committed to their Legal Careers than Fathers?

According to Table 1, after taking into account work and family demands and supports and the control variables, mothers were significantly *more* committed to their careers than fathers ( $\beta = -.07$ ), contrary to Hypothesis 1. This is an unexpected finding that challenges many assumptions held in the literature and the workplace. The following mothers explained how choices they made in managing their careers upon the arrival of their children were perceived by others as indicative of lowered career commitment even though the mothers felt highly committed to their careers.

*I'm incredibly committed to this place. I work only four days, so they assume you're less committed. My commitment is very high. I called from the labor room three times the last time I was there to make sure they could contact my clients and reschedule my appointments.*

*It's in this particular environment where the people who succeed and who are rewarded are those who give up everything in their lives for their work. If you're not willing to do that, you don't get very much positive feedback or rewards. You're still working all night and on the weekend to get the job done, but you're still doing the minimum in their eyes and that's not very satisfying.*

*When I went on maternity leave recently, the "usual response" also surfaced: "she must be less committed to the company than we thought"... guess I'm now on the "Mommy Track", irrespective of how much I continue to contribute on my return.*

These quotes support the finding that women who become mothers are not necessarily less committed to their careers than their male counterparts.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This research set out to answer three questions about the relationship between parenthood and lawyers' career commitment. In doing so, concepts from Karasek's (1979) Job

Demand-Job Control model were used to explain parents' commitment to the practice of law. They include: (a) work and family demands; (b) control and flexibility over the job; and (c) support from workplace and family. The model proposed that demands of the job and family can be overwhelming at times and reduce career commitment; whereas, control and flexibility over work hours and support from work and family may enhance professionals' commitment to their careers.

First, the results show that fathers reported more work-related demands than mothers and mothers reported more family-related demands than fathers. This pattern of findings is consistent with the well-established literature on the gendered nature of work and family roles. Mothers and fathers reported different sources of work-related support however. Mothers have more supportive colleagues; whereas, fathers reported more supportive organizations. Both groups of parents indicated receiving the same degree of support from their spouse.

Secondly, the relationships between parents' work and family demands and supports and career commitment were examined. One of the major tenets of Karasek's theory is that job control and social support may buffer the negative effects of demands on workers' well being. An important finding is that the model was found to be additive where job control and social support do not act as moderators. The buffer hypotheses have received mixed support in the literature where some studies report evidence of the buffer effect and others do not (Van der Doef and Maes 1999). The results presented here suggest that job control simply enhances commitment, as do coworker and spouse support.

Most of the work demands were not related to parents' commitment. As professionals, lawyers are not deterred by working long hours at the office or at home, unless they feel their work is interfering with their family life. One important topic for further study is to examine how work actually interferes with family life. It may be in terms of being unable to attend everyday or special family activities, being unable to be home for dinner with one's family, or being preoccupied with work when spending time with one's family. Further qualitative research may be helpful in this regard.

Similarly, family demands associated with childcare were not very important in explaining career commitment. The more time one's spouse spends at work, however, is negatively associated with respondents' career commitment. Perhaps when spouses work longer hours it results in more household responsibilities for the other person. The zero-order correlations showed that the more time one's spouse spends at work, the more time the respondent spends with their children on work days ( $r = .27$ ), which offers some support for this interpretation.

Turning next to the job control findings, the results showed that flexible hours are important in understanding lawyers' career commitment. Roehling et al. (2001) reported similar findings in regards to organizational commitment. They concluded that: "where feasible, employers should consider adopting flexible-time policies. Such policies appear to have an almost universal employee loyalty pay-off" (Roehling et al. 2001, p. 167). While the focus of the current research is career rather than organizational commitment, the implications are the same. In order to retain professionals in the labor market and their chosen vocation, employers should offer flexible-time opportunities, which is one of the least costly responses that workplaces can offer in supporting work-family balance (Haddock et al. 2006).

Support from colleagues and one's spouse were also related to parents' career commitment. This study examined the extent to which they provide emotional support, but other forms of support may be relevant as well. For example, colleagues may provide instrumental support by taking on additional work responsibilities or tasks when coworkers



have family responsibilities. Haddock et al. (2006) reported that while coworkers helped by covering time away from work, their support transcended work and professional boundaries in that respondents felt a genuine connection with their professional colleagues. In addition, we might ask whether spouses working in the same occupation are more or less supportive or provide different types of support than spouses working in different occupations who work fewer hours or are unemployed? There may be different implications for mothers' and fathers' career commitment.

The third question examined in this study is whether mothers practicing law are less committed to their careers than fathers. Perhaps the most surprising finding is that mothers are significantly *more* committed to their careers in law than fathers. It is not clear why mothers, whose spouses work longer hours, who have less control over when they work, and who report less supportive organizations than fathers, are more committed to their careers, when fathers report more desirable experiences on all three counts.

One reason mothers may report greater career commitment than fathers is that perhaps only the most highly committed mothers return to their careers upon having children; whereas, men's careers are less affected by changes in their parental status. Women who are less committed to their careers may quit their jobs when they enter the child-bearing, child-rearing stages of their life (Wallace 2001). Thus, there may be a *selecting out* process where only women who are mostly highly dedicated to their careers return to work. Longitudinal analyses comparing women's and men's career commitment before and after having children are needed to empirically assess this possibility. As well, it is important to study women who leave the profession upon the arrival of children. While some may leave because they are less committed, others may leave because they do not feel they have family-friendly employers who are willing to offer sufficient flexibility or alternative work schedules to enable work life balance.

A second reason mothers may report higher commitment is that they may have overcome greater obstacles than their male colleagues. Since male lawyers do not typically have to prove themselves to receive the same recognition as others, fathers may have only moderate commitment, compared to that exhibited by mothers who continue practicing law. Mothers, as token women in high-status jobs, may view themselves as overcoming discrimination and stereotypes by choosing to work hard, thereby demonstrating their dedication and capabilities in order to receive the same or even fewer rewards (Kay and Hagan 1998; Maume and Houston 2001). More in-depth analysis of the challenges women face in combining motherhood and a successful career and how this relates to their career commitment is needed (Damiano-Teixeira 2006).

A second unexpected finding is that many of the factors along which mothers and fathers differ are not important to their career commitment. For example, whereas fathers experience more work demands and mothers more family demands, few of these variables were related to career commitment. Perhaps better measures are needed to tap these demands. For example, time spent with children may be demanding for some parents or sources of support for others. Rather than measuring the *quantity* of time spent with children, perhaps the *quality* of time is more relevant. For example, do some parents find that spending time with their children is enjoyable, fulfilling, relaxing or re-energizing, while others find it taxing, difficult, stressful or draining? By examining parents' attitudes toward the time spent with their children, it might better capture the role that this time plays in understanding parents' commitment to their careers.

In closing, it is important to consider whether the factors examined in this study are important in understanding gendered work experiences and outcomes in a broader sense. This paper proposed that regardless of whether the choice or constraint arguments are used



to explain gendered career outcomes, it is assumed that women are less committed to their careers than men because of family responsibilities. It seems that a critical question for future research must ask how, if mothers are more committed to their careers than fathers, can we account for the gendered differences observed in men and women's career outcomes? That is, if mothers are truly more committed, how do we justify their lower earnings, fewer promotions and fewer other occupational rewards? This may entail examining more closely how commitment is tied to parents' productivity, as well as to the work-related rewards they receive. It is important to note, however, that even though mothers may believe or actually be more committed than other workers, it does not mean that their colleagues or employers view them in this way. If employers continue to believe that mothers are less committed, then they will likely continue to treat them accordingly with fewer promotions and lower earnings. Multiple perceptual measures of commitment involving not only the respondent's perceptions, but also those of their colleagues, in combination with measures of effort and productivity would be helpful in beginning to address these issues.

**Acknowledgements** This study was funded by a research grant from the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC). The opinions contained in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of LSAC.

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