

The Real Lives Of Working Mothers

Exploring the lived experiences of professional working mothers in Australia, with children in their early years: A socio-ecological and resource perspective to enable positive workforce participation

Why is this important?

Women's increasing participation in the workforce has been recognised as one of the greatest economic developments of the last century.

It has been estimated that if women's workforce participation was equal to that of men's in 2025, as much as \$28 trillion (26 per cent) would be added to the global annual GDP.

However, according to the Australian 2022 Job and Skills summit, despite Australian women being among the most educated in the world, our economic participation is still not where it should be globally.

Why is this important in Australia?

Australia's overall female workforce participation rate remains below the rates achieved in Europe, Canada, and New Zealand, and is a full 10 percentage points below the rate for Australian males. Australia is now ranked 50th in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Rankings.

Mothers with children under school age (i.e., in their "early years"), still experience the greatest gender disparity in workforce participation in Australia and professional women still experience disparate career opportunities and remain under-represented in leadership positions. In Australia, this "motherhood penalty" is seen to economically impact mothers even a decade into parenthood.



Research aim

This research project aims to understand the lived experiences of professional working mothers with children in their early years, through an ecological and conservation of resources perspective.

This research also aims to identify the positive outcomes of mothers' participation in the workforce, using the work-family enrichment theory, as a means of better incentivising workforce participation.

Research design

This research project will conduct a two-pronged approach to understanding and supporting professional working mothers, with children in their early years, participation in the workforce:

- **Study 1 (Qualitative focus groups):** Explore and understand working mothers' lived experiences participating in the workforce with children in their early years, to identify the work, family and community resources professional.
- **Study 2 (Quantitative testing of identified resources):** Develop and test identified resources, based on findings from Study 1, to conceptualise a theoretical framework and practise principles for enabling working mother's positive workforce participation.

Research impact

This research will provide a deeper understanding of professional working mothers lived experiences participating in the workforce, while caring for children in their early years. Overall, the research will provide theoretical and practical impacts in the following way:

- Will provide an integrated and multi-factored perspective into the broad and complex issue of professional mother's workforce participation.
- Will provide a value-adding depth and breadth of insight into the broader complex issue of mothers' workforce participation, under the parameters of socio-ecological and resource theories.
- Will provide a quantifiable perspective of the resource needs of working mothers to enable greater positive workforce participation.
- Will provide practical theoretical applications for potential strategies and interventions that can support working mother's positive workforce participation, while caring for children in their early years.