



# Weathering the Storm Alone: Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on the Psychological and Job-related Well-being of Sole Working Mothers

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## T School's Out. Parental Burnout Isn't Going Away.

'I know you're angry with me right now because you're hungry'

How parents in food-insecure households are stretching meals and struggling to nourish their kids during the pandemic.

### Caregiver programs may become the most in-demand benefits of 2020

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## Sole Working Mothers

- Dependent children
- Not married; no co-habiting romantic partner
- Still working during COVID-19



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A woman and a child are sitting at a table, painting together. The woman is on the left, and the child is on the right. They are both looking at their work. There are various art supplies on the table, including a globe and a container of paint. The background shows a room with a window and some decorations.

Aleksandar Nakic  
bit.ly/CRIWCOVID2

- The proportion of single-parent families in Canada is climbing.
- Women head approximately 80% of single-parent households.

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## COVID-19: The boundary between work and family completely vanishes overnight

- Unique pressures and challenges for sole working mothers brought about by the pandemic (e.g., complete absence of caregiving alternatives).
- Potential implications related to parenting, health, and work.



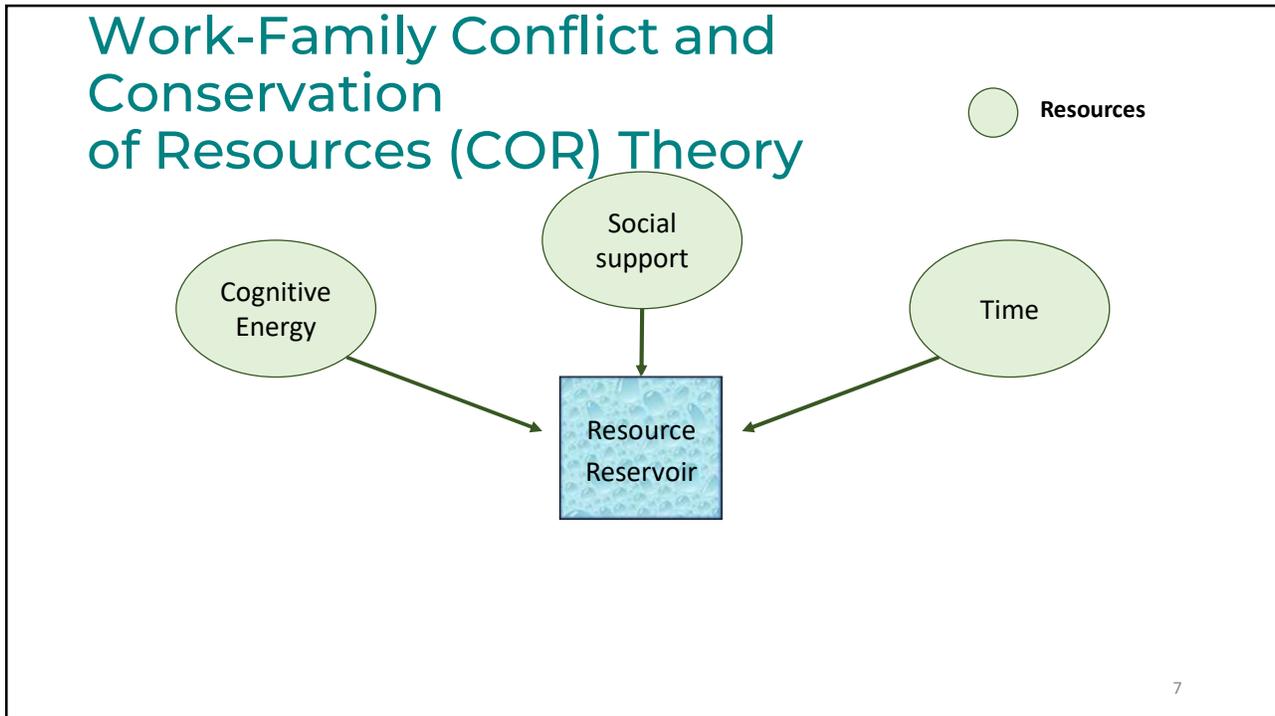
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## Our Research Questions:

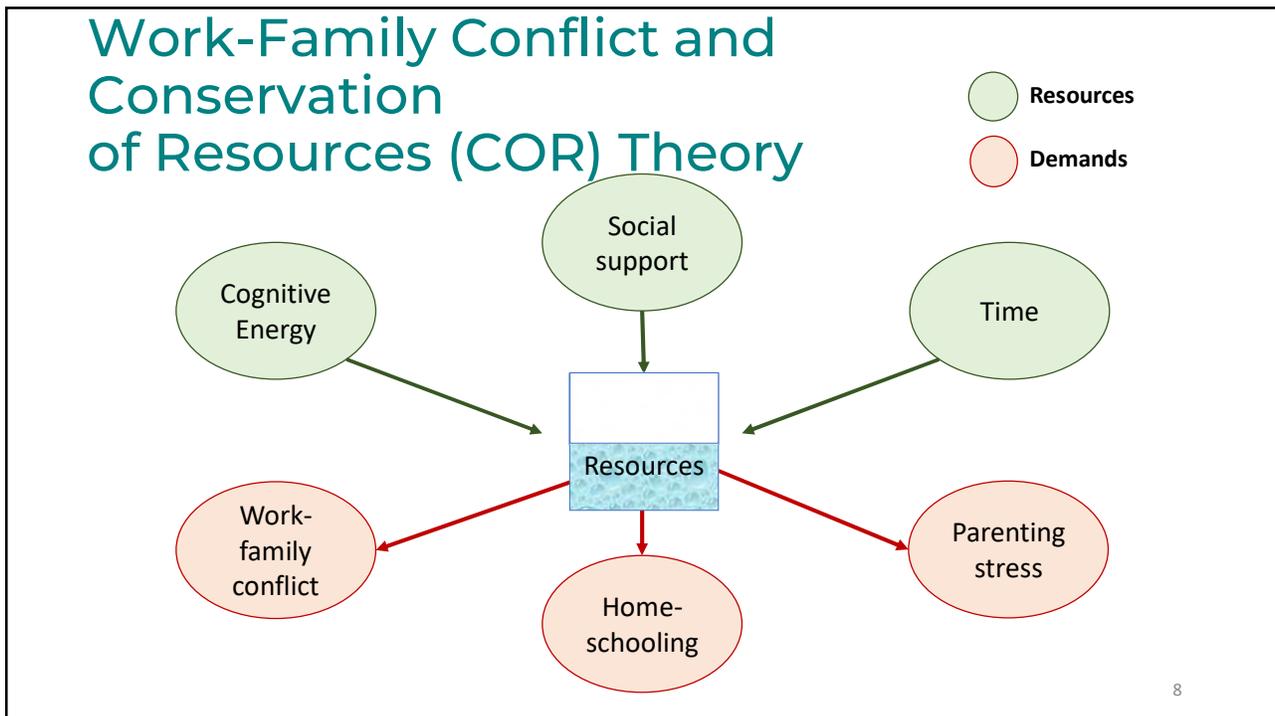
1. Are work-family demands being experienced by working mothers due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to greater levels of psychological distress depending upon whether one is a sole compared to partnered parent ?
2. What impact might these potential differences in psychological well-being, have on the ability of employed mothers to be engaged in their work?

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## Literature Review: Work-Family Conflict

“The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life.”

“My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfill my family duties.”

“Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities.”



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## Literature Review: Work-Family Conflict

- Sole working mothers have lower baseline levels of resources
- Sole working mothers have less at their disposal to cope with increasing demands of the COVID-19 pandemic



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## Literature Review: Parenting Stress

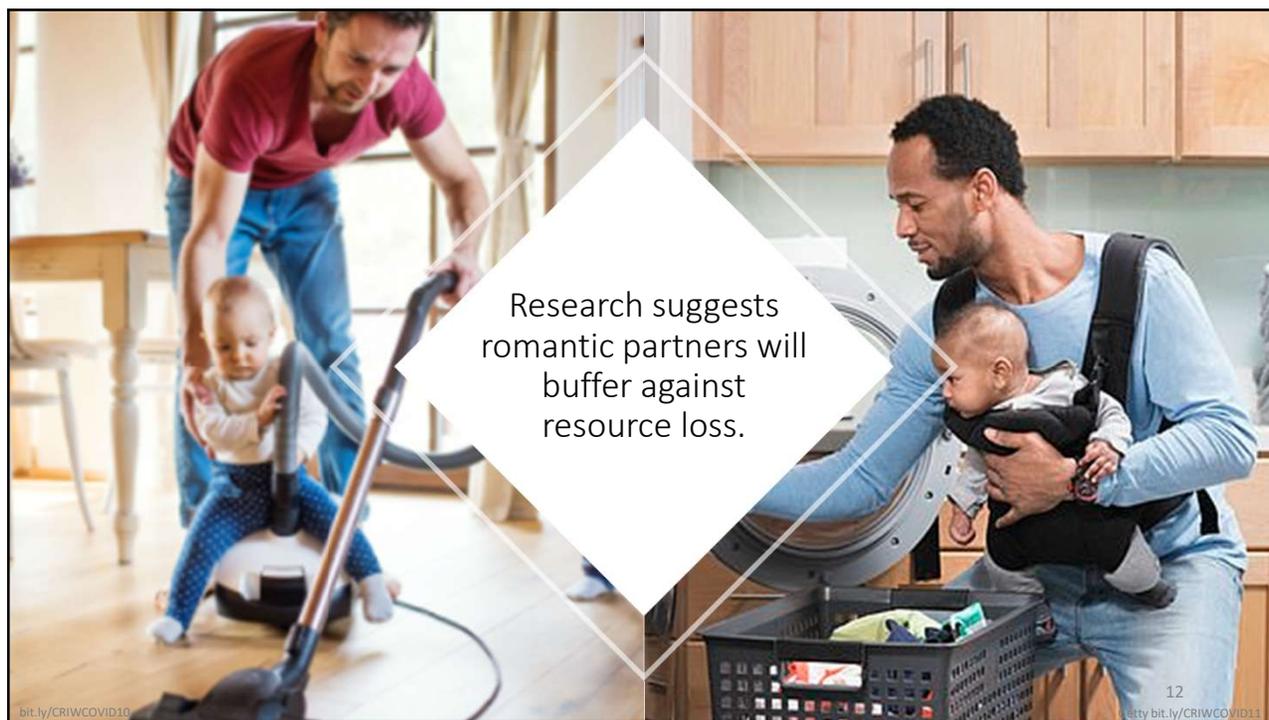
“Having children leaves little time and flexibility in my life.”

“I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent.”

“Caring for my children sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give.”

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# Literature Review: Work Engagement

“While working, I feel bursting with energy.”

“I am enthusiastic about my job.”

“I get carried away when I am working.”

Research suggests resource depleted mothers will lower their resource output in defense.

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# Hypotheses

- H1: Work-family conflict will be positively associated with parenting stress.
- H2: Mothers’ partnership status will moderate the association between work-family conflict and parenting stress (stronger for sole mothers).
- H3: Parenting stress will be negatively associated with work engagement.
- H4: Parenting stress will mediate the association between work-family conflict and work engagement.
- H5: Mothers’ partnership status will moderate the mediation model.

```

    graph LR
      WLC[Work Life Conflict] --> PS[Parenting Stress]
      WLC --> WE[Work Engagement]
      PS --> WE
      MPS[Mothers' Partner Status] --> PS
      MPS --> WLC_PS_Path
      style WLC_PS_Path stroke-width:0px
  
```

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## Methods

- Quantitative survey via Qualtrics
- June-July 2020
- 206 Canadian mothers with at least one co-habiting child (age <12)
- Employed during the pandemic
- Quota sampling: 104 sole and 102 partnered mothers



[bit.ly/CRIWCOVID14](https://bit.ly/CRIWCOVID14)

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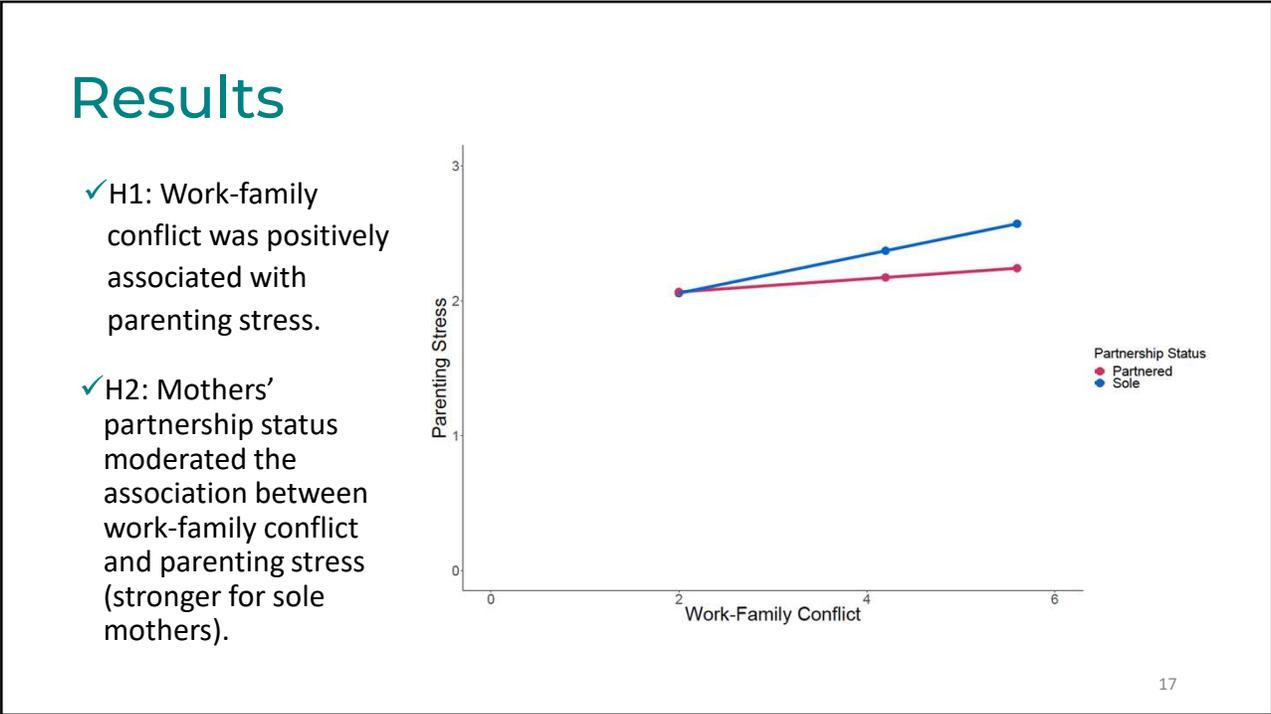
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## Sample

Sole Mothers	Partnered Mothers
Average age: 34.5 years	Average age: 38.3 years
35.6% achieved at least a Bachelor's Degree	62.8% achieved at least a Bachelor's Degree
73.1% with household income <i>less</i> than \$75k	78.4% with household income <i>greater</i> than \$75k
64.4% have only one child	69.4% have more than one child
73.1% self-identified as essential workers	47.1% self-identified as essential workers
72% White, 8.7% Black, 6.7% East, South, or South-East Asian	62.7% White, 4.9% Black 21.6% East, South, or South-East Asian

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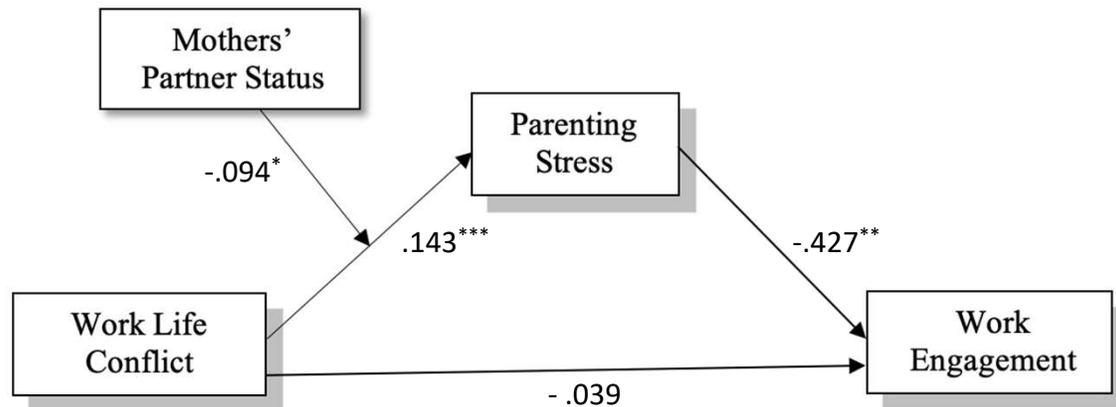
## Results

- ✓ H3: Parenting stress was negatively associated with work engagement.
- ✓ H4: Parenting stress mediated the association between work-family conflict and work engagement.
- ✓ H5: Mothers' partnership status moderated the mediation model.

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## Results



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## Implications

- Sole working mothers are disproportionately feeling the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, in ways that increase their vulnerability and the precariousness of their day-to-day life.
- Work-family conflict should be a serious concern for all organizations.
  - Flexible work arrangements and paid leave provisions
  - Additional consideration for the needs of sole working mothers



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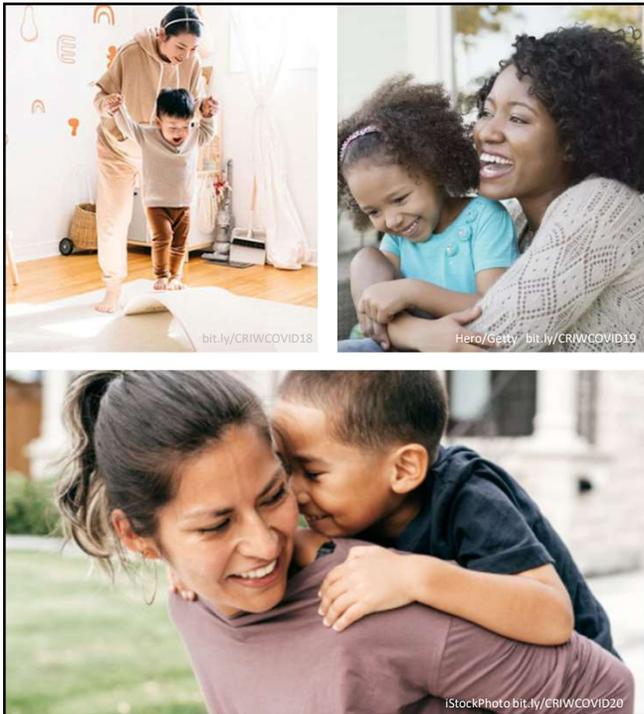
# Implications

- Prioritize the building or replenishing of drained employees' resources.
  - Organizational (EAP for work-life balance, health, well-being)
  - Leaders, coworkers (social support)
  - Parents (mindfulness, expressive writing, nature exposure)



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# Future Directions

- Future quantitative research (longitudinal, dyadic)
- Other outcomes (child, parent, work); life after COVID-19
- Qualitative investigation
  - Unique work- and family-based challenges; perceived factors to alleviate stressors

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## Thank you for attending

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