Aotearoa's Working Parents: Exploring the Association Between Employment and Parents' Highlights and Challenges with their Child

Susannah Jaques

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ABSTRACT

There is a large body of Western literature exploring many aspects of parental employment and the effects these may have on both the rewarding and challenging moments parents experience with their young children. However, there remains a lack of research relevant to the Aotearoa New Zealand context, with implications specific to working parents within current New Zealand society. This thesis aims to fill this gap by exploring how the different employment situations of New Zealand parents affect their self-reported highlights and challenges with their child. Data from mothers (N = 6822) and their partners (N = 4404) within a current New Zealand longitudinal study found similarities in the highlights reported by working and non-working parents but variation in the reported challenges with respect to different aspects of employment (such as working hours and work schedule). Subsequent logistic regression analysis revealed that the most frequently reported challenges for both working and non-working parents (relating to work-life balance, parent-child bonding, sleep challenges, managing behaviour, child attributes, and parenthood in its entirety) were related to aspects of parental employment for both mothers and partners. These factors included work hours and schedules, childcare, child parity, parental age, socioeconomic deprivation, household income, and solo parenting. Of note, work-life balance challenges were found to have a large number of predictors, especially for mothers, reiterating the importance of supportive strategies for working mothers. The range of other predictive relationships presents implications for workplaces to provide flexibility and support for employees. These results align in general with existing literature and contribute to the small body of parental employment research specific to Aotearoa NZ, with findings that may inform Aotearoa's working parents.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As returning to work has become a social norm for mothers of young children in recent decades, maternal employment has become a topic of debate with an often pervasive view that negative outcomes are likely associated with both parents' involvement in paid employment (Wills & Brauer, 2012). A US review of work and family literature from 2000-2010 examined the changes in employment within Western society, identifying a rise in mothers returning to work that peaked at the turn of the millennium (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). As mothers' employment rates rose, so too did expectations: both within the workplace, regarding commitment to the role of an employee, and at home, regarding parents' involvement with their young children (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010).

As times and expectations changed, a number of researchers and members of society became concerned with parents' ability to juggle employment and parenting and maintain a healthy level of parental functioning themselves (Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003; Jacobs & Gerson, 2016). To this day, society remains a major influencing factor for many parents as they form a decision surrounding a mother's return to work; qualitative research highlights the voices of parents as they navigate societal expectations, notions of good parenting, and the ways in which their return to work may impact their child (Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Lupton & Schmied, 2002). The concern held by some researchers began to influence much of the literature through an assumption that working mothers and their young families would experience negative outcomes, adding to the pressure already experienced by working mothers (Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003). However, there is also a growing body of research that explores the potential positives associated with maternal employment, for both mother and child (Bianchi, 2000; Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003; Işik & Güven, 2007; Wills & Brauer, 2012).

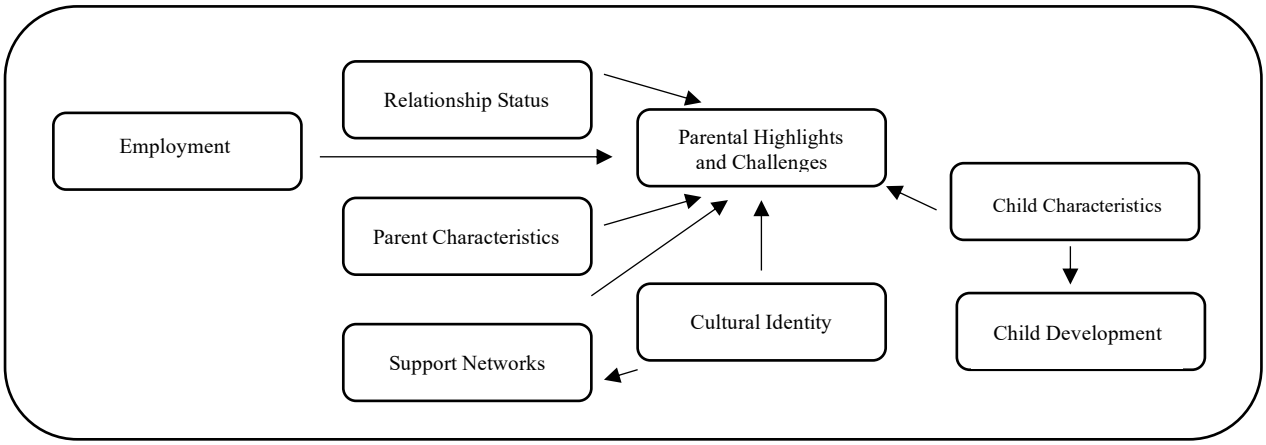
Nevertheless, there has been a clear lack of research that focuses on the highlights and joys parents experience, especially in comparison to the high volume of literature exploring the challenges that may arise. In particular, there is a current lack of quantitative data regarding these highlights. Qualitative research offers parents the opportunity to speak honestly of the ups and downs of their own parenting experiences, and this opportunity often gives voice to the rewarding nature of the positive moments and the way in which this reward serves to minimise the more difficult moments (Lupton & Schmied, 2002). As observed by Peterson et al. (2017), perhaps it is the rich quality of these highlights that mitigates the challenges, and the satisfaction and delight parents gain from the time they spend with their child, that truly impact the overall parenting journey.

Current research explores a number of factors that are hypothesised to have an effect on parenting. Belsky's process model of the determinants of parenting (1984) is a popular model that considers a range of contextual factors that influence parenting, including the effect of employment and support networks as well as child and parental characteristics. A modified version of Belsky's model is shown in Figure 1, with small adaptations made to include the original factors that are pertinent to the current study and additional factors included to reflect the changes in society and literature since the development of Belsky's 1984 model. For example, employment is identified as a major impacting factor, along with social networks such as employment support and external support networks, and cultural identity has been added as it plays an important role in the parenting experience (Jenkins et al., 2011; Podsiadlowski & Fox, 2011). The model also recognises a link between parenting and the child themselves, with child characteristics likely to affect parenting, and child development impacted by both parenting and child characteristics. Overall, this model posits the idea that parenting is affected by multiple factors, relevant to a range of families. This

study will also focus specifically on the parent-reported highlights and challenges with the child and thus the model has been amended accordingly to reflect this as the outcome.

Figure 1

Theoretical Model: Factors Impacting the Parent-Reported Highlights and Challenges with their Child, Adapted from Belsky's Determinants of Parenting Model (1984)



This literature review that follows will draw on the adapted model, exploring the emerging themes within existing work and family research, such as some of the most commonly reported aspects of parenting and employment that may have an effect on parents' highlights and challenges throughout their early parenting experience. The review will also summarise existing findings regarding the highlights and challenges reported by parents of nine-month-old children from the Growing Up in New Zealand (GUiNZ) longitudinal study examining the lives of more than 6,000 children and their families in Aotearoa New Zealand. The current study builds on this early work by exploring, in the same cohort, the parent-reported highlights and challenges when the cohort children were two years of age. Importantly, it also focuses more specifically on the child by asking the parents about the highlights and challenges *with* their child rather than the earlier, more generic question of parental highlights and challenges in general since the birth of their child. The adapted theoretical model of the factors impacting parent-reported highlights and challenges will be

utilised to guide this review of the range of possible influences on parents' perceptions of their highlights and challenges with their child in Aotearoa NZ.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Employment

There is extensive research regarding parents in employment and the effects paid work may have on the family. Bianchi and Milkie's review (2010) highlights the change throughout Western society in recent decades as more and more families became dual-earner households: home lives, childcare, workplaces, and even gender norms and equality began to shift. It should be acknowledged that there is a lack of research that explores the experiences of same-sex couples and their families, as traditional expectations of a family with a father, mother, and children are significantly more prominent throughout the literature. Bianchi and Milkie's review (2010) notes that men began to spend more time with their children and in household chores while women decreased their time in these areas to accommodate their own employment, often becoming the main breadwinners themselves. The nuclear family became less predominant as families with unmarried parents or single parents became more commonplace. An earlier study conducted by Milkie et al. (2004), using data from two large-scale US surveys, examined the relationship between parents' work hours and time strain, and found that longer work hours were associated with an increase in time strain, linked with parents feeling a lack of time and energy for their family with the more hours they spent at work.

With the rise in maternal employment, the intensive mothering discourse (Hays, 1996) gained greater traction when applied specifically to working mothers. This discourse argues that mothers of young children should dedicate the majority of their time and energy to their children and their household, despite their commitments to work (Jacobs & Gerson, 2016). This expectation then contributed to tension between the contrasting expectations of being a good mother and a good employee, and work-family balance was highlighted as even more imperative to uphold to maintain a healthy family life (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). The

pressure on working parents to ensure positive family functioning has been echoed by several researchers (e.g., Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003; Jacobs & Gerson, 2016). Jacobs and Gerson's research (2016) explored the views of Americans regarding mothers' employment, with findings that uncover a persistent traditional belief that mothers should carry the majority of household and childcare responsibilities as fathers remain the breadwinner for the family; this attitude was found to remain prevalent despite the study's findings that Americans' attitudes may become less gendered when specific family or employment situations are taken into account.

Much of the debate surrounding outcomes for dual-earner families applied specifically to parents' role demands (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010) and the effect that a decrease in availability may have on child outcomes (Wills & Brauer, 2012). Role overload is described as the negative effect associated with a high number of role demands, resulting in a person failing to meet every responsibility due to time constraints (Sieber, 1974). While parents in dual-earner families may experience some degree of role overload, Wills and Brauer (2012) suggest that this may be evenly spread between both parents due to role sharing and can be combatted with adequate time management skills and support networks, allowing parents to maintain availability and time to spend with their children and mitigating any negative effects of role overload. Indeed, Wills and Brauer's study (2012), utilising data from the US National Longitudinal Study of Youth, found that maternal employment had no consequential effect on a range of child outcomes, including child behaviour and cognitive development, even in the child's early stages of development. Overall, numerous researchers have now found that the societal shift toward dual-earner families becoming the new norm has been accomplished without a substantive negative effect on children (Bianchi, 2000).

There is, in fact, a wide range of literature that posits maternal employment in a more positive light. Haddock and Rattenborg's study (2003), consisting of interview data from 47

couples in the US with a range of incomes and careers, found that mothers in paid employment with children at home reported a decrease in stress levels and experienced greater levels of physical and emotional health. As mothers return to work, the father's role may buffer any additional stress the mother might experience when household and childcare responsibilities are shared between both parents; in addition, positive work experiences can also have a buffering effect on maternal stress (Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003). The financial gain from dual incomes also contributes to a greater level of healthy family functioning, and as household income increases, family and marital harmony tend to rise in turn (Işik & Güven, 2007).

In Aotearoa NZ, as in many other Western countries, mothers' return to work is encouraged, with a political focus on advancement of the labour force (Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Noy & Sin, 2021). This presents New Zealand mothers with a critical decision to make surrounding the context in which they choose to focus their personal resources of time and energy. While society presents the expectation that mothers maintain a consistently high level of energy committed to their parenting role (Lupton & Schmied, 2002), the pressure and desire to return to work may provide a conflicting expectation, creating inconsistencies within each mother's construct of self. Contextual factors may influence each woman's individual decision, including flexibility around working hours, the availability of paid parental leave, and the cost and quality of childcare options (Kahu & Morgan, 2007), as well as each individual household's time management abilities.

2.1.1 Workplace Flexibility

Non-standard working hours may allow parents to spend more time with their children. Parents who work part-time often choose working hours that align with those their children would spend at school, leaving after-school hours available for family time (Craig & Powell, 2011). However, the regularity of part-time work plays an important part in its

effectiveness: families where one or more parents are employed in irregular shift work (e.g., night shifts or rotating shifts) are likely to find greater levels of disruption within the family than those who are employed in regular shifts (Repetti & Wang, 2014). In addition, when one parent works evening shifts, daytime shifts may allow the other parent to spend more time with their children and have the opportunity to be more actively involved in their children's lives (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010), indicating the potential benefit of flexible employment options for dual-earner households.

The ability to maintain this flexibility in work hours typically depends on the employer. Bianchi and Milkie's review (2010) observed that supportive employers and co-workers lowered levels of work-family conflict, and flexibility within employment was shown to allow parents to separate work from family life and spend more quality time with their children. In fact, informal support, such as workplace flexibility and the option to work from home, was shown to have an even greater effect on lowering work-family conflict than more formal support options such as parental leave policies.

2.1.2 Parental Leave

Parental leave does, however, help working mothers to maintain a strong connection between their employment and their home lives, as well as maintaining employment rates among women and decreasing the loss of women from the labour market (Ray et al., 2010). Parental leave, and a delayed return to work, have been found to improve health outcomes for both mother and child (Growing Up in New Zealand, 2014). Within countries in the OECD, the current average length of paid maternity leave is 18 weeks (OECD, 2019). Aotearoa NZ currently offers a maximum of 52 weeks of parental leave for the child's primary caregiver, comprised of 26 weeks of paid primary carer leave (capped at $661.12 per week before tax) and 26 weeks of extended, unpaid parental leave. Partners are entitled to a maximum of two

weeks' unpaid leave but can share the 52 weeks' parental leave with the primary caregiver (Employment New Zealand, 2022).

Despite the provision of paid parental leave for New Zealand families, both the financial allowances and the length of time available may not always be adequate for individual families. A majority of mothers within the GUiNZ study referenced financial pressure as the main reason for their return to work within the first nine months since their child's birth (Growing Up in New Zealand, 2014; Meissel et al., 2018; Peterson et al., 2017). It is important to note, however, that at the time the study data were collected, the paid parental leave allowance was 14 weeks. Data from GUiNZ shows that most mothers would prefer to take more unpaid leave after utilising the full available length of paid parental leave (Meissel et al., 2018; Noy & Sin, 2021); this creates a greater challenge for families with lower incomes. Other studies found that women with longer paid parental leave options were less eager to seek employment shortly after the birth of their child (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Brough et al., 2009), creating a rift between a gain for the labour force and personal gain for new mothers and the wellbeing of their families.

2.1.3 Childcare

Childcare costs can also play a decisive role in the feasibility of both parents working outside the home (OECD, 2008). Bianchi and Milkie (2010) found that the costs associated with finding day-to-day care for children often present difficulties, especially when considering higher-quality childcare options and particularly for low-income families. These costs may reduce the hours that a parent is able to work outside the home and can even serve as a barrier preventing parents from returning to work at all. In low-income communities, high-quality formal childcare was less accessible than in higher-income areas, and mothers with lower incomes were more likely to require multiple childcare options, often both formal and within the extended family.

Government subsidies may help to make childcare more affordable for lower-income families. For example, in Aotearoa NZ, families receiving low to middle incomes may receive a Childcare Subsidy if their child is attending a preschool childcare service (New Zealand Government, n.d.). All families with preschool children over three years old may also receive up to 20 hours of free childcare per week. However, many providers apply additional conditions that can ultimately result in further costs (e.g., a maximum number of "free" hours per day), which can present additional barriers to working-class families. Furthermore, while government childcare subsidies offer a helping hand to low-income families, many working-class families may have household incomes too high to qualify for these subsidies, yet still struggle to afford quality childcare options. Individuals with strong social support networks, such as extended family members or close friends, can help to solve the problem of finding childcare that is financially feasible by offering informal childcare help themselves, providing multiple childcare options and financial help to families (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010), but this presents challenges for those with no family support nearby and those in other difficult situations, such as single parent families.

2.2 Relationship Status

Parents' relationship status may also affect their highlights and challenges with their child, with single parent families often more likely to experience challenging circumstances than dual-earner families. Government support may help to lower financial stress: Aotearoa NZ offers Sole Parent Support as financial support and assistance for single parents to find paid work once their youngest child turns three (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.). Bianchi and Milkie's review (2010) discusses the rise in Western single mothers joining the workforce in the 1990s and the related decrease in these mothers' ability to consistently meet all needs within the household by themselves. However, employment has also been linked to

higher levels of self-efficacy in single mothers, with a subsequent effect on lower levels of depressive symptoms (Jackson & Scheines, 2005).

While the ability to provide for the family financially may often be a challenge for single parent families, the challenges may also extend to other areas of life. Without a partner's help, a single parent may find time management a greater challenge (Milkie et al., 2004) and may struggle due to reduced emotional support (Soriano et al., 2001). Conversely, single parents may however avoid the inter-parental conflict that can arise in dual-parent households and the stress associated with this conflict (McQuillan & Bates, 2017). In regards to childcare availability, single mothers were found to be more likely to rely on multiple childcare arrangements rather than just one, for example, utilising both formal childcare services and informal care from family members or friends (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). When formal childcare services are a feasible option, single mothers may be financially limited to those of a lower quality (Jacobs & Gerson, 2016). Assistance from social networks can provide support that extends even further than childcare, resulting in lower stress levels and consequently a more positive parenting experience for single parents and a stronger bond with their children (McQuillan & Bates, 2017).

2.3 Parent-Child Relationship

The theoretical model suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between a positive parent-child bond and several of the factors that contribute to the highlights and challenges of the parenting experience. Belsky posited that parents who are warm and attentive towards their infant create an environment that is conducive to positive developmental outcomes for the child and reciprocal effects for the parent (Belsky, 1984). The more time a mother can spend in sharing positive emotion with her child, the more she promotes emotional development and qualities such as resilience and positive emotionality for the child throughout the early years (Mäntymaa et al., 2015). Mothers have also been

found to gain positivity themselves in response to their child's happiness (Bridgett et al., 2013). Research shows that positive mother-infant interaction is a main contributor to overall pleasure in parenting; the joy within this interaction has been shown to positively affect maternal self-regulation, mental clarity, and dopamine levels (Mäntymaa et al., 2015), as well as parental self-efficacy (Kochanska et al., 2004). These factors may contribute to lower stress levels for mothers (Bridgett et al., 2013) and promote a more enjoyable parenting experience overall (Mäntymaa et al., 2015).

Responsiveness and empathy in parenting go hand-in-hand and are key qualities that help to promote a strong relationship between parent and infant, as the child's needs are recognised and met (Kochanska et al., 2004). Attachment theory postulates that when caregivers enjoy a close relationship with their infants and are attentive to their needs, this bond helps to construct a secure attachment within which the child feels safe to explore their environment, knowing and trusting that their caregiver will be there to take care of them if required (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). This secure attachment relationship, often but not exclusively between mother and child, then paves the way for a range of benefits for the child's overall development. A low level of empathy may result in difficulty reading a child's signals, thus negatively impacting the parent's ability to meet their child's needs and reassure the child that they are there when needed (Clark et al., 2000).

Research also underscores the importance of a father's attitude towards the parenting role. A recent study explores fathers' enjoyment in spending time with their child, and its effect on the relationship (Brown & Cox, 2020). This research described fathers' enjoyment of parenting as a factor of a healthy father-child relationship, and showed that commitment to and enjoyment of a father's parental responsibilities can help to promote his overall happiness. Fathers who derive pleasure from their parenting role are more likely to prioritise meeting the needs of their children and to commit more physical and emotional energy to the

parenting experience over a longer period of time, creating a more secure attachment relationship with the child. Kochanska et al.'s study (2004) shows that fathers were able to create more positive interactions with their child, and a more positive relationship in turn, when they were more responsive and open to their child. While child temperament plays a prominent role in determining the ease of positivity and enjoyment in parenting (McQuillan & Bates, 2017), these studies provide evidence for the importance of positivity and responsiveness in a father's parenting role.

2.4 Child Characteristics and Development

Belsky hypothesizes that positive parenting and healthy parental functioning is a reciprocal relationship between parent and child (Belsky, 1984), and the child's characteristics can present a range of challenges while also contributing to highlights throughout the journey of parenting. Children in the first few years of life are characteristically demanding with regards to behaviour as attitudinal qualities such as autonomy and wilfulness arise (McQuillan & Bates, 2017). Some children may indeed display much higher levels of externalising behaviour than others (Brown et al., 2011). Children's behaviour problems present a challenge that can have a range of negative effects on parents, such as rising stress levels and lower levels of well-being (Kwon et al., 2013), in turn affecting parenting strategies. Mothers in particular may experience an increase in feelings of anxiety and irritability, reflecting negatively on their interactions with their child as they experience lower levels of affection and desire to spend time with their child (Seymour et al., 2015).

While the notion of a "difficult" child may hold various distinct meanings to parents in different cultures, parents who feel that they are unable to overcome their child's behavioural challenges are likely to feel lower levels of self-efficacy and confidence in their parenting skills (McQuillan & Bates, 2017). Emotions such as frustration and embarrassment

may result in the parent feeling a lack of control over the situation, heightening stress levels. In return, parental stress can negatively impact children's behaviour, continuing the cycle of challenging behaviours (Mulsow et al., 2002), and affect other areas of the parent's own life, such as a decrease in time and motivation for self-care. Parental stress may even affect employment through an increase in family-work conflict and can require additional flexibility in work hours or present challenges surrounding childcare (Breevaart & Bakker, 2011).

Children's behaviour challenges can be exacerbated by developmental problems or delays. Parents caring for children with disabilities or developmental delays are more likely to experience lower levels of mental and physical health, and even depression (Oelofsen & Richardson, 2006). This challenge may extend beyond childcare responsibilities and can affect how the parent perceives the manageability of all areas of their life, lowering self-confidence and sense of meaning. Their feelings of self-efficacy in the parenting role may be negatively impacted and stress levels are likely to rise with increasing levels of behavioural problems (Hassall et al., 2005).

Children with physical health needs present additional challenges as parents are required to play a greater part in caregiving, specifically in the areas of nursing the child through sickness and organising professional medical assistance (Cunningham-Burley et al., 2006). Despite the recent increase in women's labour force participation, mothers often play this hands-on role in a greater capacity than fathers, due to the breadwinning role fathers have traditionally occupied and are still expected by much of society to occupy (Jacobs & Gerson, 2016). Through interviews with 30 working mothers in Edinburgh, Scotland, Cunningham-Burley et al. found that mothers of children with additional physical health demands reported higher levels of stress, lasting several years and negatively affecting their own physical and emotional health (2006). These mothers voiced their feelings about taking days off work to look after their children: they would save their own sick days to use when their children

needed them, and they spoke of the pressure and responsibility they felt to consistently be the one caring for their children. Fathers reported their own challenges surrounding caregiving of children with additional health needs, expressing the heartbreak they felt at diagnosis and the distress they experienced seeing their children so unwell, yet recognising the importance of controlling their emotions and being supportive to their family, both emotionally and financially (Sriram, 2019). Collectively, the literature regarding children with additional health needs highlights the importance of collaboration between fathers and mothers, due to the complementary nature of the traditional roles.

However, just as mothers in Lupton & Schmied's study (2002) reported work as an escape from household responsibilities, work can provide respite from the caregiving role for mothers of children with additional health or developmental needs (Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003; Peterson et al., 2017). This illustrates the buffering effect that employment may have on parenting, as described by the enhancement hypothesis, highlighting the resources made available to parents through employment (Haar & Bardoel, 2008; Sieber, 1974). Belsky also emphasises support networks as a resource that can provide respite from these challenges (1984).

2.5 Support Networks

A common theme that threads throughout a majority of existing work and family literature is that of the positive effects of support networks in reducing the stress that parents' challenges may generate. While parents may experience elements of stress in a number of areas, Repetti and Wang (2014) suggest that it is less important to focus on the reduction of stressors themselves than on maintaining a positive response to these stressors, and on the resources that parents can utilise to ensure a healthy response. As previously discussed, Belsky's process model of the determinants of parenting (1984) and the revised theoretical model shown in Figure 1 both highlight support networks as a vital component of healthy

parental functioning, which in turn allows for optimal socioemotional development in the child's early years.

Existing literature outlines how social support structures can be an effective resource to assist parents' stress reduction and increase parenting efficacy. Contact with support networks can assist parents of children with behavioural problems (Breevaart & Bakker, 2011; Kwon et al., 2013; Mulsow et al., 2002; Östberg & Hagekull, 2000) and those who are experiencing fatigue and a lack of self-confidence (McQuillan & Bates, 2017). Parents of children with disabilities or health problems can benefit from contact with social networks and those with this support have been shown to report lower stress levels than those without (Hassall et al., 2005). Not only does social support offer parents an opportunity to interact with a number of different networks (Gallagher & Gerstel, 2001), it can also alleviate stress in parenting challenges through childcare help or advice (Mustillo et al., 2020; Östberg & Hagekull, 2000). As Belsky theorises, we are social beings born into a pre-existing social context; therefore, support from those around us should unquestionably be part of a positive parenting experience (Belsky, 1984).

2.6 Cultural Identity

The multiplicity of cultural backgrounds and identities within Aotearoa NZ provides a range of parenting experiences that may differ between families of different cultures. Within cultures such as Māori, Pacific, and Asian, a collectivist approach is predominant, in which the individual is considered an integral part of the extended family group (Jenkins et al., 2011). Child-rearing is a wider family affair and the extended family is deeply involved in bringing up the child. In Māori culture, and similarly in other Pacific cultures, connectedness to the whānau and iwi provides a system wherein support is consistently close at hand, and the young child may benefit from the additional attachment figures in their lives and the reduction of parental stress (Poland et al., 2007). In Asian cultures, this support may be an

expected part of wider family life with three-generation households a commonality (Conn et al., 2013; Mustillo et al., 2020). Conversely, within individualist cultures, such as NZ European, the immediate family unit is generally more independent in bringing up their child (Podsiadlowski & Fox, 2011); the extended family is more likely to remain a separate entity, while still often providing childcare on an informal basis.

Grandparent care is the most common type of informal childcare for preschool children in Aotearoa NZ (Statistics New Zealand, 2017). This implies that, regardless of culture, grandparents provide indispensable support to New Zealand families with young children. In Asian and Pacific cultures particularly, grandparents often co-reside with the young family; a study based in China compared 133 two-generation households with 129 three-generation households, where grandparents were living with the family, to observe the effect of grandparent co-residence on work-family conflict (Mustillo et al., 2020). The study found that having grandparents at home with the family offered immediate support to working parents, limiting the negative effect of parents' work-family conflict on the children themselves in three-generation households. Another study based in Aotearoa NZ found that young mothers of Pacific descent were more likely to live with grandparents than older, non-Pacific mothers, highlighting the cultural significance of family support and suggesting that it is particularly beneficial for younger families (Poland et al., 2007).

Grandparent support may take the form of assistance with household responsibilities and childcare, or emotional support and advice, or it may serve as a protective factor against inter-family conflict. Even when grandparents are not co-residing with the family, they are indispensable to families with working parents and may themselves appreciate the opportunity to offer childcare support to their family's younger generations (Airey et al., 2021).

2.7 Parental Highlights with the Child

Qualitative research is an effective tool to give voice to the authentic experiences and opinions of parents, often while these experiences are still occurring. Soriano et al.'s study (2001) comprises a diverse sample of Australian parents, who described a number of the more challenging and rewarding moments of parenting through focus group discussions. These parents described the child themselves, and their relationship with their child, as a source of satisfaction and a reward for the hard work. Parents in this study expressed that while the addition of a child to the family is accompanied by much change and adjustment, the satisfaction they gain from their child can make the harder moments easier to bear.

Employment can also have a positive impact on parents' time management abilities by lessening the pressure of household responsibilities and increasing happiness in the parenting role. Mothers in particular may feel the benefits of time spent at work as an escape from childcare responsibilities, albeit with some recognised level of guilt, related for example to missing developmental milestones or spending less time with their child (Lupton & Schmied, 2002; Peterson et al., 2017). Mothers in Lupton and Schmied's study (2002) also described the benefits they experienced from being back at work through their own feelings of greater independence and self-development, and reinforced the understanding that stay-at-home mothers who are unhappy are less beneficial to their children than a working mother who is happier. This argument aligns with the enhancement hypothesis, as defined by Sieber (1974) (Haar & Bardoel, 2008). Factors such as workplace flexibility, paid parental leave, and childcare options may help to further promote employment as a positive factor within the parenting experience.

The overall experience of parenting may also bring an increase in self-efficacy and confidence in parents' identity and role, and as society carries an expectation around adults occupying a parenting role, fulfilment of this role may provide a sense of validity and value

(Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2004). The increase in self-efficacy can support a positive response to challenges and help to maintain an enjoyable parenting experience for both parents and children, an experience that carries a significant amount of weight in regards to readying the next generation to be valued and effective members of society (Rasmussen, 2014). Many parents describe parenting itself as filling them with a sense of purpose and identity, as the same responsibilities that can challenge parents also offer meaning and enjoyment; those who experience parenting more positively are able to commit greater amounts of time and energy to their children (Brown & Cox, 2020), enabling them to celebrate their child reaching developmental milestones and build a strong parent-child bond (Kochanska et al., 2004).

2.7.1 Parental Highlights – GUiNZ Findings

The Growing Up in New Zealand study adds much to existing literature with an extensive and diverse sample, contributing data on parents' highlights with their child to a body of research that often lacks a focus on the more positive moments of family life. GUiNZ participants were selected from different district health boards in Aotearoa NZ, covering a wide range of socioeconomic statuses and cultural backgrounds, and the study's findings contribute to existing literature with contemporary research that is diverse and relevant not only to the New Zealand context but to the global research context (Morton et al., 2014). When children were nine months old, mothers were asked about their biggest highlight since the birth of their child (Corkin et al., 2021; Peterson et al., 2017). Results uncovered a number of areas through which mothers gained joy and satisfaction; "enjoyment of the child" emerged as the most commonly reported theme, particularly among first-time mothers and mothers of Māori ethnicity (Corkin et al., 2021, p. 928). This theme encompasses a variety of ways in which mothers expressed the joy they gained from their infant, aligning with the separate highlight of "characteristics of the child", describing the positive personality traits and qualities their child displayed (Corkin et al., 2021, p. 929).

Mother-child bonding is another prominent highlight described by mothers within the GUiNZ study. This has been linked with physical contact as breastfeeding mothers in particular experienced a sense of oneness and harmony with their children through this unique bonding time (Corkin et al., 2021). These mothers also reported gaining joy from other physical connections with their children, such as a kiss or a cuddle.

As GUiNZ mothers experienced success in their parenting role and attained new skills, they reported a sense of personal growth (Corkin et al., 2021). The transition to parenthood was also described as an experience in personal growth for these new mothers, as they restructured their roles and responsibilities with the addition to their family. The return to paid employment was suggested to offer relief from home and childcare responsibilities for some (Peterson et al., 2017), in alignment with the enhancement hypothesis (Haar & Bardoel, 2008; Sieber, 1974).

While society's expectations of what it means to be a good mother can add pressure for a mother to afford vast amounts of energy to parenting her children, and employment can further heighten this strain, enjoyment of the child presents motivation and reason for parents to prioritise time with their children. As a majority of GUiNZ parents expressed the joy they experienced from simply being with their infant, when the child was nine months old, they underscored the strength of this joy as motivation to dedicate time and energy to their children (Corkin et al., 2021; Peterson et al., 2017). Responses from these mothers indicated how powerful an impact a child can have on their mother, and Peterson et al. suggest that this impact may be rewarding enough to outweigh the more challenging moments of parenting (2017).

2.8 Parental Challenges with the Child

2.8.1 Time Management

Within the existing literature, there is an abundance of data surrounding the more challenging aspects of parenting. Much research has uncovered time management as a dominant challenge for Western working parents (Brough et al., 2009; Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003; Kwon et al., 2013; Peterson et al., 2017; Soriano et al., 2001), often linked with an increase in work-family conflict, which can result in a more negative parenting experience and a decrease in the quality of parent-child interactions (Vieira et al., 2016). When parents experience work stress to the extent that it begins to affect home life, children can recognise and absorb elements of this stress and may notice a decrease in parents' availability (Milkie et al., 2004). In contrast, parents' modelling of time management strategies may promote development of the same in their children; effective time management may include constructing and maintaining regular family routines. Research emphasises time management as an essential mechanism to maintain a healthy home environment, with minimised strain and work-family conflict as a result (Malatras et al., 2016).

The "good parent" expectation is highlighted throughout parents' voices within qualitative research. Five dyads of parents of young children in an Australian longitudinal study discussed feelings of societal pressure surrounding a mother's choice to leave her role as stay-at-home mother to re-join the workforce, with some in favour of and some against this transition (Lupton & Schmied, 2002). In alignment with the intensive mothering discourse as discussed in Section 2.1 (Hays, 1996; Kahu & Morgan, 2007), the "good mother" expectation can place high levels of strain on mothers who are already feeling the strain of time management as they balance paid employment and household chores with parenting. This

expectation compels mothers to prioritise their children above themselves and commit vast amounts of energy and time towards caring for their children (Lupton & Schmied, 2002).

Fathers traditionally spend a greater percentage of their time in paid employment than mothers (Milkie et al., 2004), leaving less available time to contribute to their children; therefore, they may be even more likely to experience time management as a challenge. This may be offset somewhat by the traditional "good father" view of fathers as providers, as they recognise the responsibility of this role and consider participation in paid employment as vital to their contribution to the family (Lupton & Schmied, 2002). However, cultural norms are shifting toward more balanced gender roles, with an expectation for greater father involvement (Ishizuka, 2019; Shirani et al., 2012) and mothers beginning to occupy a greater proportion of the family's breadwinning role (Milkie et al., 2004). If family circumstances are such that the socially expected balance between time spent with children and time spent in paid employment cannot be met, both mothers and fathers may experience feelings of inadequacy (Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Soriano et al., 2001).

The recent increase of parents in paid employment is suggested to contribute to the challenge of time management through a growing number of obligations for parents (Milkie et al., 2004). Juggling the multiple responsibilities found within parenting and employment can result in role overload as parents' personal resources are stretched thin, decreasing their ability to provide quality time and interactions with their children (Mustillo et al., 2020). This adverse experience aligns with the scarcity hypothesis within literature, with the expectation that the combination of paid employment and parenting will drain a mother of her personal resources of time and energy (Goode, 1960; Haar & Bardoel, 2008; Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003).

2.8.2 Sleep Disruption and Fatigue

Another prominent challenge reported by parents of young families within the literature relates to sleep. Sleep disruption is a widely accepted element of parenting young children; in addition to increased levels of home responsibilities and stress around the adjustment to a family's first child, this can contribute to sleep deprivation and corresponding fatigue (Cooklin et al., 2011). Fatigue can then increase parents' stress levels once more, creating a continuous bi-directional effect (McQuillan & Bates, 2017).

Fatigue is described as a longer-lasting degree of tiredness: it is not easily relieved and affects a wide spectrum of functioning (Cooklin et al., 2011; Giallo et al., 2012). It has been found to negatively impact parenting in a number of ways: it may reduce parents' ability to positively engage with and show affection to their child, negatively affect parents' executive functioning, and reduce parents' ability to regulate stress (Dunning & Giallo, 2012). On a daily basis, fatigue can also have a detrimental effect on parents' wellbeing and can impair workplace functioning, often described as a consistent feeling of haziness (Giallo et al., 2012). With the increase in stress that fatigue can bring about, parents may experience a reduction of enjoyment and confidence within the parenting role, and an overall lack of positivity surrounding parenting (Cooklin et al., 2011). Strategies to combat fatigue include a consistent bedtime routine for children and social support systems that reduce stress in parenting (McQuillan & Bates, 2017).

Giallo et al. (2012) found that while stay-at-home mothers in their study expressed feeling the effects of fatigue on their responsibilities around the home and with their children, working fathers described the impact their own fatigue has on their employment, their ability to be present with their children once they return home, and their emotion regulation. Both mothers and fathers may experience difficulty regulating emotions such as frustration and anger, especially when triggered by their children's own emotions; fathers in particular

describe lower levels of patience and self-control when fatigued, and often experience feeling regretful after emotional interactions with their children (Giallo et al., 2012). Overall, the parenting experience may appear to be more taxing to exhausted parents, adding once again to their fatigue (Dunning & Giallo, 2012).

2.8.3 Parental Challenges – GUiNZ Findings

Mothers within the GUiNZ study were also asked about their biggest challenge when their child was nine months old. Although characteristics of the child were often described as a highlight, child attributes emerged also as a challenge, described by 12% of mothers surveyed. This was linked specifically with children's developmental or health needs, as mothers were more likely to report challenges surrounding child attributes when their child experienced additional developmental or health-related problems (Corkin et al., 2018).

While the highlights of working and non-working mothers of children aged nine months old were in alignment with each other, the challenges of each group differed with respect to the ranking of the top challenges (Corkin et al., 2018; Peterson et al., 2017). For working mothers, the top reported challenge was time management, yet this was only the second-most reported challenge among the non-working cohort, suggesting that the balance of time between employment and home life becomes more prominent once mothers return to work.

Working GUiNZ mothers also reported a challenge surrounding fulfilment of their maternal roles and responsibilities (Peterson et al., 2017). This echoes the voices of 11 New Zealand mothers of infants within Kahu and Morgan's qualitative study (2007), as they discussed the tension and guilt around societal expectations regarding the return to work. These women, who were previously full-time employees, talked about their desire to prioritise their children, in line with Hays' intensive mothering discourse (1996), and their contrasting desires for independence, the ability to earn money for the family, and the

opportunity to occupy a role that was more than just mothering. This research discusses the current societal view that mothers should be able to participate in paid work as well as being a mother, and the pressure that this affords women. The GUiNZ mothers shared similar challenges as they described feeling the pressure to be a good mother, often accompanied by feelings of guilt when returning to paid employment (Peterson et al., 2017).

2.9 The Current Study

While existing literature offers insights concerning employment and a range of parenting challenges, the dearth of literature regarding parents' highlights indicates that this is an important topic to further explore. In addition, there is a lack of literature examining parents' employment and their highlights and challenges with their child that is specific to the New Zealand context. While research throughout the OECD paints a broad picture of Western work and family outcomes, there are facets of life in Aotearoa NZ that are specific to this local context, such as government policy and the day-to-day experience of Kiwi families. The Growing Up in New Zealand study offers data that inform an understanding of what parenting is like for New Zealanders. When GUiNZ children were nine months old, their mothers described their highlights and challenges since their baby arrived (Peterson et al., 2017). When the children reached the age of two years, their mothers were again asked about their highlights and challenges, with a slight shift to focus on highlights and challenges with their child specifically. The two-year data also includes responses from the mothers' partners, contributing an important aspect of the parenting experience. Employment data from both parents also allows a glimpse into the potential effects work may have on the highlights and challenges of family life in Aotearoa NZ.

As the current study aims to inform policy and practice relevant to the Aotearoa NZ context, GUiNZ provides a unique insight into employment and parenting experiences for both parents within this context with a large, diverse sample and a wealth of information

regarding family life in New Zealand (Morton et al., 2014). This study aims to investigate the experiences of GUiNZ parents at the child's age of two years, exploring their highlights and challenges with their child, and the emerging themes throughout. This study will also examine the employment status of these parents and look for a relationship between parents' employment and their parenting experiences, in order to answer the research question: *What is the relationship between parental employment, and parents' biggest reported highlights and challenges with their child?*

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This section outlines the data source and the methods of analysis utilised to explore the data.

3.1 Data Source: Growing Up in New Zealand (GUiNZ)

The GUiNZ longitudinal study is unique in its strong focus on the positive factors that benefit children and their families, rather than the factors that are less beneficial (Morton et al., 2010). The study was designed to create a broad picture of the growing New Zealand child, highlighting the factors from a range of developmental domains that contribute to shaping tomorrow's citizens of Aotearoa NZ. The study's large sample size and the diversity of participants accurately represents the New Zealand population, and its broad range of areas of research presents an opportunity for analysis in a variety of different domains (Morton et al., 2010).

The current study utilises data from the antenatal, nine-month, and two-year data collection waves, all gathered through face-to-face interviews. The data are comprised of responses from New Zealand mothers and their partners. Within this sample there is a range of various employment circumstances and different highlights and challenges, and thus the data are likely to include a range of varied family experiences.

3.2 Procedures

3.2.1 Sampling

GUiNZ's diverse sample is comprised of over 6,000 children, their mothers, and their partners, who were living in the Auckland, Counties Manukau, and Waikato District Health Board regions at the time the mothers were pregnant (Morton et al., 2010). These regions were selected by GUiNZ as they encapsulate around a third of the New Zealand population and represent a generalisable range of ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. The large sample size was also intended to provide the best possible results and outcomes for

Māori children and their families and sufficient explanatory power for all major ethnic groups.

Pregnant mothers who were registered with the relevant district health boards and who had a due date between 25 April 2009 and 25 March 2010 were invited to participate (Morton et al., 2010). At the time of recruitment, the mothers were asked to give consent for their child to participate in the longitudinal study, and to give contact details for their current partners. Face-to-face interviews were conducted from before birth and then at regular intervals, collecting data directly from the children's mothers, their partners, and, from the age of eight, the children themselves. Information was also collected regularly in between data collection waves, through telephone interviews and from other external sources. The children are expected to be followed until they are at least 21.

3.2.2 Participants

A total of 6,822 mothers took part in the antenatal interviews and gave consent for their children to take part in the study (Morton et al., 2010). Mothers were between the ages of 15 and 47 when giving birth, with an average age of 30 years. At the antenatal interview, mothers were asked about the ethnic group with which they identified most strongly, as well as all other ethnic groups they identified with. Most mothers identified primarily as New Zealand European (62.2%), followed by Māori (18.3%), Pacific (16.9%), and Asian (15.8%). Note that the percentages in this section add to more than 100% as many participants identified with more than one ethnic group.

It should also be noted that as mothers were nominated as the main parent, 66 mothers have since been replaced by another prominent figure in the child's life. For the purposes of clarity, the main parent will be referred to as the mother throughout the current study, although it should be noted that this cohort includes a small number of adoptive and foster mothers, biological fathers, and other family members.

A total of 4,404 partners also agreed to take part in the study and completed the antenatal interviews (Morton et al., 2010). Almost all partners identified themselves as the biological fathers of the child, although at the nine-month data collection wave 16 partners identified as either adoptive fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, or biological or adoptive mothers, and 14 partners did not specify their relationship to the child. At the time of the child's birth, partners' ages ranged from 16 to 64 years, with an average age of 33 years. As with mothers, partners were asked to state the ethnic group with which they identified most strongly, as well as all other ethnic groups with which they identified also. Most partners identified primarily as New Zealand European (69.2%), followed by Māori (14.7%), Asian (14.4%), and Pacific (13.2%) (Morton et al., 2010).

The GUiNZ cohort was comprised of 6,853 children at birth, with 6,327 children remaining in the study at the two-year data collection wave (Morton et al., 2014). Mothers were asked to state the ethnicities with which they expected their child to identify, with most expecting their child to identify as New Zealand European (71%), followed by 24% as Māori, 20% as Pacific, and 16% as Asian. At two years old, 56% of children had regular childcare, whether that was a formal early childhood education service or an informal arrangement, such as care from a family member. Regarding birth order, 42% of children in the study are first-born, and 58% of children subsequent births; 161 children (3%) are twins or triplets (Morton et al., 2014).

The socioeconomic status of households was determined using the NZ Deprivation Index 2006 (Morton et al., 2014; Salmond et al., 2007). This measure utilises nine variables from the 2006 NZ census to establish the deprivation levels of mesh-block areas around New Zealand, ranging from decile 1 (least deprived) to decile 10 (most deprived). Socioeconomic status may then be indicated by ascertaining the deprivation levels of the area in which each family resides.

3.2.3 GUiNZ Parents' Employment

At the antenatal data collection wave, 55% of mothers and 80.7% of partners were in paid employment (Morton et al., 2010). After the babies were born, 84% of mothers took maternal leave from their employment, with 30% of these mothers remaining on leave when the children were nine months old (Morton et al., 2012). A total of 83% of partners who were in paid employment prior to the child's birth took parental leave, with only 0.6% remaining on leave at the nine-month data collection wave. When the children were two years of age, 53% of mothers and 94% of partners were in paid employment, with 5% of these mothers still on parental leave (Morton et al., 2014).

At the two-year data collection wave, on average, mothers were working close to 29 hours per week while partners worked just over 46 hours per week. Most mothers (72.3%) and partners (81.6%) worked a regular standard shift, with the most common schedule being a regular daytime shift. The second most common work schedule was an irregular schedule, comprised of either on-call or irregular shift work, with 17.1% of mothers and 11% of partners indicating this response.

3.2.4 Ethical Procedures

The GUiNZ study adheres to protocol set out at conception of the study to ensure ethical and responsible data use and storage (Growing Up in New Zealand, 2020). The principles of this protocol emphasise the importance of protection of participants' information and the data they provide, ensuring that all information collected is beneficial to the future of the study and is utilised only for the purposes of research. The protocol protects any information provided by Māori participants as *taonga* (treasure) and require that this information be used in a way that benefits Māori.

At each data collection wave, GUiNZ acquires full ethical approval from the Health and Disability Ethics Committee (HDEC), and every participant gives informed consent (or

assent, if applicable) before participation in data collection (Growing Up in New Zealand, 2020). Data are fully anonymised, with participants' responses fully de-identified and coded with ID numbers. All datasets are then securely stored on the database.

Data access for this study was acquired through a comprehensive application process that ensured ethical use of the data and adherence to GUiNZ protocols. A data access request was submitted to the Data Access Committee, providing information by which the researcher was vetted to ensure authenticity, both of the individual and of the intended study. No additional ethical approval was required. Once the request was confirmed by the Data Access Committee, the researcher was granted access to the Research Datasets server for analysis purposes. All analysis undertaken was stored securely on this server and, where appropriate, on a password-protected drive accessed only by the researcher. Throughout this study, every step has been taken to ensure that the research remains in line with the University of Auckland's Guiding Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants (2022), as well as the GUiNZ protocols approved by HDEC.

3.3 Context

It is important to acknowledge the cultural context by which this research is surrounded. This study is specific to the Aotearoa NZ context, and the researcher is bound by the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) as a University of Auckland student and a New Zealand citizen. Te Tiriti o Waitangi recognises Māori as *tangata whenua* (people of the land) and affords Māori rights to ensure fair treatment and promote wellbeing on an ongoing basis (Hudson & Russell, 2009). The current research is underpinned by the three overarching Tiriti principles of partnership, participation and protection. Partnership refers to working together with Māori communities in order to protect Māori rights; participation requires that Māori are involved in decision-making of New Zealand research,

particularly that which involves Māori; and protection refers to making efforts to protect Māori rights, culture, values, and language throughout research (Hudson & Russell, 2009).

In following with the afore-mentioned GUiNZ protocol for data use (Growing Up in New Zealand, 2020) and the University of Auckland's Guiding Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants (2022) this research aims to consistently provide outcomes that are beneficial for Māori. While ethnicity is not utilised as an explanatory variable within the current study, this research seeks to provide findings that are generalisable and beneficial to the current Aotearoa NZ context, inclusive of Māori.

Māori voices have frequently not been heard and Māori knowledge has often not been valued or legitimised (Smith et al., 2016), highlighting the importance of research that is culturally appropriate and ethical in design and interpretation. In order to provide research outcomes that are generalisable to all New Zealanders, including Māori, it is important that Māori cultural values and traditions are upheld and taken into account. It has previously been highlighted that Māori whānau may have very contrasting experiences to Pākehā families (Jenkins et al., 2011). As Māori culture is a collectivist culture, Māori parents may have greater access to social support than families within more individualist cultures, such as Pākehā families (Podsiadlowski & Fox, 2011; Poland et al., 2007). Through inclusion and legitimisation of Māori voices, this research may provide insight to both Māori and Pākehā parents, as well as other New Zealanders with a variety of cultural backgrounds.

3.4 Measures

Data from the antenatal, nine-month, and two-year data collection waves of GUiNZ were utilised to explore the relationship between parental employment and parent-reported highlights and challenges with their child. Antenatal data provides contextual information regarding the participants; nine-month data contributes employment information surrounding parental leave and the return to work; and data from the two-year data collection wave

provides the highlights and challenges of both parents, current employment information, and contextual household information.

3.4.1 Dependent Variables

As this research aims to explore contributing factors to the parenting experience, the dependent variables are the highlights and challenges of GUiNZ parents. Within the face-to-face interview format, each parent was asked, "Can you tell me what has been your biggest highlight/challenge with your child in the past year?" Responses were recorded and were later thematically analysed using small q quantitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020), a positivistic approach where codes were identified and grouped into a series of themes.

The coding scheme for the challenges was developed in part to help identify any early challenges associated with the possible early detection of ASD (e.g., behaviour, sleep, and food issues) (Yanga et al., 2022). In this study, three of the categories were combined for analysis as this fine-grained approach was less relevant to our research question. Specifically, the themes related to development were combined to create the Child's Development category; these were the Psychosocial Cognitive Development, Physical Development, and Developmental Disability themes. A full description of the approach to coding and interrater reliability can be found in Yanga et al. (2022) and the coding schemes can be found in Appendices A and B.

3.4.2. Predictor Variables

The predictor variables within this study have been chosen in order to paint a detailed picture of the employment situation of each of the GUiNZ parents, and thus the different employment situations of a range of New Zealanders. Each of these variables is described below and summarised in Table 3.1.

Work Hours. Parents were asked to specify how many hours per week they spent in paid employment. In preparation for analysis, parents' working hours were grouped as

follows: 1-29 hours (part-time), 30-40 hours (full-time), 41-55 hours (high full-time), and 56-90 hours (over-time) of work per week. This grouping was structured in accordance with Statistics New Zealand's definition of full-time work as 30 hours or more per week (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.) as well as patterns evident in the responses, such as a clear delineation at 40 hours.

Work Schedule. Parents were asked to select the option that best fit their current work schedule. Original responses fell into seven categories and for the purposes of this analysis were then aggregated into three groups. The Regular Standard group includes regular daytime, evening, or night shifts; Regular Non-Standard is comprised of rotating or split shifts; and Irregular includes on-call or irregular shifts.

Weekend Work. Parents were also asked to indicate whether they would work in the weekends on a regular basis.

Childcare. This variable is specific to the mothers' data as it was an item included only in the mothers' interviews. Mothers were asked if their child had received regular care from someone outside the household in the last month. Childcare is here defined as both formal and informal care, spanning a range of options from daycare centres to care from a family member or neighbour. However, the current study does not differentiate between the types of care children received, as the effect on highlights or challenges was considered more likely to relate to the extent and balance of care rather than the type.

Solo Parenting. Due to the sampling method utilised by GUiNZ, mothers' data are again prioritised for this variable. At the two-year data collection wave, one partner indicated that they were a solo parent; however, this is an insufficient sample size for further analysis. In contrast, 615 mothers identified as solo parents at the two-year interviews: therefore, mothers exclusively comprise the solo parenting cohort within the current study.

Child Parity. At the antenatal interviews, mothers were asked whether this was their first child or a subsequent birth. Note that responses indicating that this child is first-born do not imply that there is only one child within the family at the two-year data collection wave, as additional children may have been born following the cohort child's birth.

Parent's Age. This variable indicates the ages of the mothers and partners on the day of the two-year interview. Age was calculated using the interview date and the parent's birth date; parents' ages were then divided into groups broadly based on current definitions of maternal fertility age (Ministry of Health, 2022; Statistics New Zealand, 2019) and the distribution of the data. Groups included those aged younger than 20 years, 20-27, 28-35, and 36 years and over.

Total Leave Taken. This variable describes the total time parents spent on leave after the birth of their child. Total leave includes both paid and unpaid leave and is reported as specific to the individual, rather than the total leave taken by the couple as a combined entity.

NZ Deprivation Index 2006. The NZ Deprivation Index 2006 is a 10-point decile scale of socioeconomic deprivation, derived from nine variables within the 2006 NZ census (Salmond et al., 2007). Areas in decile 1 are defined as least deprived and those in decile 10 as most deprived. It should be noted, however, that this scale measures the deprivation of individual mesh-blocks (small geographic areas covering the entirety of Aotearoa NZ), rather than of individuals or households. For this reason, results may not accurately reflect individual households but rather the area in which they live.

Household Income. Parents were asked to indicate their total yearly household income. Responses were then grouped into categories as follows: Loss; Zero Income; $1-$30,000; $30,001-$50,000; $50,001-$70,000; $70,001-$100,000; $100,001-$150,000; and $150,001 and upwards.

Table 3.1

Summary of Predictor Variables

Predictor Variable	Brief description	Source and scale
Work Hours	Number of hours per week parents spent in paid employment.	Derived variable divided into four categories: part-time (1–29 hours), full-time (30-40 hours), high full-time (41-55 hours), and over-time (56-90). Data from 2-year DCW.
Work Schedule	Parents' current work schedule.	Derived variable divided into three categories: regular standard* (regular daytime/evening/night shift), regular non-standard (rotating or split shift), and irregular (on-call or irregular shift). Data from 2-year DCW.
Weekend Work	Indication of whether parents usually work on weekends or not*.	Item administered in 2-year DCW. Removed from mothers' logistic regression models due to statistically insignificant results.
Childcare	Whether the child received regular care over the last month or not*.	Item administered in 2-year DCW to mothers only. Care includes formal care (daycare or home-based care) and informal care (family member or friend).
Solo Parenting	Whether mothers had a current partner* or not.	Item administered in 2-year DCW to mothers only.
Child Parity	Whether the child is first-born* or a subsequent birth.	Item administered in Antenatal DCW to mothers only.
Parent's Age at Interview	Age of each parent at 2-year DCW.	Age grouped into <20, 20-27, 28-35, 36+. Derived from Parents' Birth Date (Antenatal DCW) and Date of Interview variables (2-year DCW).
NZ Deprivation Index 2006	Scale based on nine census variables, indicating deprivation level of mesh-block areas. Scale ranges from Decile 1 (least deprived) to Decile 10 (most deprived).	NZDep2006 Index of Deprivation (Salmond et al., 2007). Administered in Antenatal DCW.
Household Income	Total yearly household income.	Administered at 2-year DCW. Grouped into eight categories: Loss, Zero Income, $1-$30,000, $30,001-$50,000, $50,001-$70,000, $70,001-$100,000, $100,001-$150,000, and $150,001+.

Note: * indicates reference category for categorical variables.

3.5 Data Analysis Plan

This section introduces and outlines the plan for analysis of the data to better understand the relationship between parents' employment and their highlights and challenges with the child. Initial exploratory analysis will guide further logistic regression analysis to investigate potential predictors of parent-reported challenges.

3.5.1 Comparison of the Highlights and Challenges for Working and Non-Working Parents

Inductive thematic analysis will explore the parent-reported highlights and challenges with the child, how they are ranked, and how they differ between working and non-working cohorts. Frequencies of the responses within each theme will be calculated to provide details of the percentages of parents indicating each highlight or challenge within the working and non-working cohorts, and comparison of the two cohorts will provide some understanding of how paid employment may affect the highlights and challenges parents experience with their child.

3.5.2 Chi-Square Analysis

Chi-square analysis will be carried out to assess any relationship between parents' employment and their highlights and challenges, and to indicate potentially important predictor variables for further logistic regression analysis. Chi-square analysis compares observed frequencies occurring within categorical data to the expected frequencies, in order to explore the relationship between two variables (Field et al., 2012). SPSS Statistics will be utilised to carry out this analysis (IBM Corp, 2021).

For this step of the analysis, all highlights and challenges will be analysed along with details of parents' employment. The initial chi-square analysis will explore the association between highlights and challenges and parents' employment status, being whether or not a parent is employed at the two-year data collection wave. Further analysis will explore the association between highlights and challenges and different aspects of employment for the

working cohort, such as working hours, work schedule, and weekend work. Social support factors of employment such as childcare will also be analysed.

3.5.3 Logistic Regression Analysis

Finally, logistic regression models will be created to explore potential predictors of specific parent-reported highlights and challenges, using R software (R Core Team, 2020). Chi-square analysis will inform selection of specific highlights and challenges and employment characteristics. Logistic regression is appropriate for analysis of these data as the outcome variables are categorical (Field et al., 2012). Binary logistic regression will be utilised as the outcome variables are the highlight and challenge variables; these variables have only two possible outcomes, being the presence or absence of each highlight or challenge.

Logistic regression models will be created separately for each highlight or challenge. Each model will be comprised of one highlight or challenge as the outcome variable, with a number of employment variables as predictors. Predictor variables may differ between mothers' and partners' models due to availability of data. The forced entry method will be utilised to introduce all predictor variables in one step; this is the default method and is the most appropriate method for theory testing within multiple regression analysis (Field et al., 2012). Each logistic regression model will be assessed using R^2 coefficients, to assess how well the model fits the data and provide an indication of its statistical significance.

3.6 Data Preparation

Testing for multicollinearity, utilising VIF statistics, showed that data did not violate collinearity assumptions, and no outliers were detected. All observations are independent and testing for linearity showed that the assumption of linearity of the logit has been met for the continuous predictors (Field et al., 2012).

3.6.1 Missing Data

Missing value analysis was conducted, to determine whether cases with missing data were likely to influence the results. Little's MCAR test was initially used to ascertain whether there was evidence of any pattern within the missing data. Results of Little's MCAR test were significant ($p < .01$), indicating that the missing data were not missing completely at random (MCAR) and thus were non-ignorable. Given the large sample size it is plausible that the significant result is a function of statistical power rather than a strong indication of bias. Therefore, data were examined further to explore patterns of missingness.

Following missing value analysis, almost all of the data were found to be independent of the outcome variables, and complete case analysis was therefore deemed unbiased by missing data for these logistic regression models (Hughes et al., 2019). The exceptions were for the mother-reported Child's Health challenge model and the partner-reported Sleep Challenges with the Child model. In both cases, patterns of missingness indicated that the parents who reported the challenges were more likely to have complete data and thus the missing data were unlikely to affect the findings.

In addition, as the levels of missing data for each logistic regression model were found to be below 10%, analysis was deemed unbiased and therefore imputation was not required (Bennett, 2001). As a result of listwise deletion for complete case analysis, the sample size for mothers was reduced from 3,268 to 2,972, representing a reduction of just over 9%. For partners the sample size was reduced from 3,564 to 3,418, a reduction of just over 4%.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.1 shows the employment and childcare information of the mothers and partners participating in the study. It should be noted that these data were collected when the child was nine months old, while later analysis utilises data from the two-year collection wave.

Descriptive statistics show that partners in general spent less time at home after the child was born than mothers did. This is in line with the literature and may be informed by national parental leave policies. On average, partners also spent less time on leave than mothers, both on paid leave only and total leave (paid and unpaid). It should be noted that as data were collected in 2011 and 2012, parental leave findings reflect policies that were current at the time, but which have since been extended. Table 4.1 also provides information regarding use of childcare, with a mean of 24 hours per week.

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics of Employment and Childcare Information

Variable	Mothers		
	M	SD	Range
Child's age at return to work (months)	5.02	2.32	0.07 - 14
Paid parental leave (weeks)	13.93	4.08	1 - 60.83
Total leave (months)	5.46	2.93	0.07 - 18
Hours of childcare per week	23.96	14.10	0 - 90
Variable	Partners		
	M	SD	Range
Child's age at return to work (months)	0.69	1.13	0.03 - 13
Paid parental leave (weeks)	1.76	1.94	0.14 – 17.38
Total leave (months)	0.58	0.81	0.03 - 18

Note: *N* (mothers) = 6198; *N* (partners) = 3804. Parental leave results specific to policies current in 2011-2012.

A smaller proportion of parents within this study identified as solo parents. Due to the sampling method identifying mothers as the main parent, the cohort of solo parents does not include partners. At the two-year data collection wave, 615 mothers indicated that they were solo parents; of these, 208 were in paid employment.

4.2 Comparison of the Highlights and Challenges for Working and Non-Working Parents

Table 4.2 provides the frequencies of highlights reported by each parent. Based on these frequencies, the six most commonly reported highlights were selected for further analysis as they capture 10% or more of the responses in at least one cohort.

The top six reported highlight categories for working mothers were as follows: Social Development, Love for Child, Child's Personality, Reaching Milestones, Cognitive

Development, and Physical Development. For mothers who were not in paid employment, the top six highlights were Love for Child, Social Development, Child's Personality, Reaching Milestones, Cognitive Development, and Physical Development. The top six highlights for each cohort indicate that working and non-working mothers experienced very similar highlights, with only minimal differences observed in ranking.

Working partners reported the same top six highlights as those of working mothers: Social Development, Love for Child, Child's Personality, Reaching Milestones, Cognitive Development, and Physical Development. The top six highlight categories for non-working partners were Social Development, Love for Child, Reaching Milestones, Cognitive Development, Child's Personality, and Physical Development. In a similar way to the ranking of mothers' highlights, working and non-working partners reported the same top six highlights, with a small difference in ranking but consistency within the highlights themselves.

Table 4.2

Frequency of each Highlight Reported by Parents

Highlight Category	Working mothers' frequency (%) (N = 3268)	Non-working mothers' frequency (%) (N = 2915)	Working partners' frequency (%) (N = 3564)	Non-working partners' frequency (%) (N = 239)
Social development	34.7	30.8	37.0	40.2
Love for child (parent-child bond)	31.4	31.1	29.1	28.9
Child's personality	30.9	27.7	27.4	16.7
Reaching milestones	16.4	11.5	25.4	19.2
Cognitive development	10.5	10.8	12.3	17.2
Physical development	7.6	7.4	10.8	14.2
Sibling interaction	7.3	6.6	4.7	3.8
Child's expression of love (child-parent bond)	5.8	5.7	7.2	5.4
New environments and/or experiences that have a positive effect on the child	5.0	4.4	4.5	4.2
Positive effects of child on family	5.0	4.9	3.3	2.5
Independence/mastered skills and tasks	4.8	5.4	4.1	3.8
Parent's personal growth	3.6	3.5	3.8	2.5
Child's health	2.8	3.9	2.4	4.6
Parenting	0.9	1.2	1.4	0.8
Culture/religion connectedness	0.9	1.3	1.2	3.3
Positive impact of child on the environment	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.4
Sleep	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.8

Table 4.3 provides the frequencies of challenges reported by each parent. In accordance with the highlights, the six most frequently reported challenges were selected as they were indicated by 10% of parents in at least one cohort.

The top six challenges reported by the working mothers' cohort were as follows: Parenthood, Child's Health, Work-Life Balance, Child Attributes, Managing Behaviour, and Sleep Challenges with the Child. Mothers who were not in paid employment reported the top six challenges as being Parenthood, Managing Behaviour, Child Attributes, Child's Health, Sleep Challenges with the Child, and Family Cohesiveness. While the top six highlights for working and non-working mothers showed a high degree of similarity, the top six challenges show more variability.

The working partners' top six challenges were Parenthood, Sleep Challenges with the Child, Child Attributes, Parent-Child Bonding, Work-Life Balance, and Child's Health. Partners who were not in paid employment reported their top six challenges as follows: Parenthood, Managing Behaviour, Child's Health, Child's Development, Child Attributes, and Family Adversity. As above, the working and non-working partners' most-reported challenges show a higher degree of variability than their top six highlights.

Table 4.3

Frequency of each Challenge Reported by Parents

Challenge category	Working mothers' frequency (%) (N = 3268)	Non-working mothers' frequency (%) (N = 2915)	Working partners' frequency (%) (N = 3564)	Non-working partners' frequency (%) (N = 239)
Parenthood	15.8	17.8	17.7	17.2
Child's health	14.1	12.3	9.6	11.3
Work-life balance	13.6	1.7	9.8	2.5
Child attributes	12.1	12.7	11.4	9.2
Managing behaviour	10.2	12.8	6.2	11.3
Sleep challenges (with the child)	9.7	8.0	11.7	5.0
Time management	7.3	6.8	6.8	2.9
Parent-child bonding	5.8	2.3	10.2	4.6
Family cohesiveness	5.4	7.3	3.6	2.1
Child's development	5.3	6.9	5.8	10.9
Food issues	5.2	5.7	3.1	3.3
Parent's health	4.6	4.7	2.7	2.1
Skill training	3.8	6.1	2.3	5.0
Family adversity	3.2	3.0	3.3	6.7
Parent's personal identity	2.6	2.3	1.8	0.8
Environmental adjustment for parent and child	2.3	1.6	2.4	2.9
Solo parenting	1.7	1.7	0.0	0.4

4.3 Chi-Square Analysis

Preliminary chi-square analysis was carried out, using SPSS version 28.0.1.0 (IBM Corp, 2021), to assess any existing relationship between paid employment and parent-reported highlights and challenges, and to ascertain potentially important predictor variables for further analysis. Any samples with an expected count of less than five were excluded from analysis.

Chi-square analysis found a significant association between employment and the highlight of Reaching Milestones for mothers ($x^2[2] = 31.05$, $p = <0.001$), with 16.4% of mothers who were in paid employment reporting this as a highlight while 11.5% of non-working mothers indicated the same. Analysis also indicated a significant association between employment and the highlight of Child's Personality for partners ($x^2[2] = 13.34$, $p = 0.001$), with a higher percentage of working partners (27.4%) reporting this highlight than those who were not in paid employment (16.7%).

Analysis indicated a significant association between parents' employment status and the challenge of Work-Life Balance for both mothers ($x^2[2] = 295.01$, $p = <0.001$) and partners ($x^2[2] = 14.14$, $p = <0.001$), with 13.6% of working mothers and 9.8% of working partners reporting this as a challenge; only 1.7% of non-working mothers and 2.5% of non-working partners responded in this way.

Analysis also revealed a significant association between employment status and the challenge of Parent-Child Bonding, for both mothers ($x^2[2] = 45.99$, $p = <0.001$) and partners ($x^2[2] = 16.91$, $p = <0.001$). Once again, mothers (5.8%) and partners (10.2%) in the working cohort reported this as a challenge more than the non-working cohort (mothers: 2.3%; partners: 4.6%).

The challenge of Skill Training was found to be significantly associated with employment for both parents (mothers: $x^2[2] = 18.10$, $p = <0.001$; partners: $x^2[2] = 6.98$, $p =$

0.031). This was reported as a challenge more often by mothers (6.1%) and partners (5.0%) in the non-working cohort, compared with 3.8% of working mothers and 2.3% of working partners indicating skill training as a challenge.

It is also interesting to note that 7.0% of mothers who were not in paid employment responded with No Challenge while 5.0% of the working mothers' cohort indicated No Challenge ($x^2[2] = 11.78$, $p = 0.003$).

4.4 Work Characteristics

4.4.1 Work Hours

Table 4.4 shows the descriptive statistics of working parents' total weekly working hours. On average, working mothers were in paid employment for close to 29 hours per week while working partners worked just over 46 hours per week.

Table 4.4

Descriptive Statistics of Working Parents' Weekly Work Hours

Variable	Mothers' frequency (%)	Partners' frequency (%)
Part-time	42.8	3.9
Full-time	38.7	33.0
High full-time	11.1	48.5
Over-time	1.6	14.4

Note: *N* (mothers) = 3268; *N* (partners) = 3564.

Chi-square analysis showed that mothers working part-time were more likely to report the highlight of Sibling Interaction ($x^2[3] = 19.850$, $p = <0.001$), while those who worked over-time (over 55 hours a week) were more likely to report Positive Effects of Child on the Family ($x^2[3] = 12.845$, $p = 0.005$) and on the Environment ($x^2[3] = 9.267$, $p = 0.026$) as highlights, as well as Independence/Mastered Skills ($x^2[3] = 8.375$, $p = 0.039$). Partners

working full-time were more likely to report the highlight of Positive Effect of the Child on the Environment ($x^2[3] = 9.097$, $p = 0.028$), a highlight that reflects pride in the child in relation to their interaction with others within their environment. Partners who worked high full-time hours (between 41 and 55 hours a week) were likely to report highlights that pertained to the child themselves and their development, with Reaching Milestones ($x^2[3] = 12.477$, $p = 0.006$) and Child's Personality ($x^2[3] = 9.100$, $p = 0.028$) more likely to be reported by this group.

Regarding challenges, mothers who worked part-time were more likely to report Time Management challenges ($x^2[3] = 22.580$, $p = <0.001$); this challenge category encapsulates the strain of managing time in areas not related to employment. In specific relation to employment, challenges with Work-Life Balance ($x^2[3] = 54.719$, $p = <0.001$) were more likely to be reported by mothers with high full-time working hours. Parent-Child Bonding was also likely to be reported by this group ($x^2[3] = 26.571$, $p = <0.001$). Mothers who worked over-time were more likely to report Parenthood as a challenge ($x^2[3] = 11.149$, $p = 0.025$); these are challenges pertaining to the general roles and responsibilities of parenthood. Partners who worked high full-time hours were more likely to report Sleep Challenges with the Child ($x^2[3] = 10.905$, $p = 0.012$), and partners working over-time were the group more likely to experience challenges with Work-Life Balance ($x^2[3] = 20.052$, $p = <0.001$) and Parent-Child Bonding ($x^2[3] = 23.203$, $p = <0.001$).

4.4.2 Work Schedule

Work schedule variables were grouped into three categories for analysis: regular standard schedule (regular daytime, regular evening, and regular night shifts), regular non-standard schedule (rotating shift and split shifts), and irregular schedule (on-call and irregular schedules). Table 4.5 presents the frequencies of working parents whose shifts fit within each group of work schedules.

Table 4.5

Types of Work Schedule and Frequencies

Work Schedule	Mothers' frequency (%)	Partners' frequency (%)
Regular standard	72.3	81.6
Regular non-standard	5.5	7.3
Irregular	17.1	11.0

Note: *N* (mothers) = 3268; *N* (partners) = 3564.

Chi-square analysis indicated a significant association between the type of work schedule and parents' highlights with their child. For mothers, the highlight of Culture and Religion Connectedness was significantly associated with regular standard shifts ($x^2[1] = 8.892$, $p = 0.003$) and irregular shifts ($x^2[1] = 5.986$, $p = 0.014$). For partners, the highlight of Love for Child was significantly associated with working irregular shifts ($x^2[1] = 4.252$, $p = 0.039$), and Reaching Milestones with both regular standard ($x^2[1] = 6.538$, $p = 0.011$) and irregular shifts ($x^2[1] = 4.050$, $p = 0.044$). The highlight of Parenting was found to be significantly associated with regular non-standard shifts ($x^2[1] = 5.855$, $p = 0.016$).

Further chi-square analysis indicated several significant associations regarding mothers' challenges: those working regular standard shifts were most likely to report their biggest challenges as Work-Life Balance ($x^2[1] = 3.953$, $p = 0.047$), Time Management ($x^2[1] = 4.632$, $p = 0.031$), Family Cohesiveness ($x^2[1] = 5.472$, $p = 0.019$), Solo Parenting ($x^2[1] = 11.789$, $p = <0.001$), and Child's Health ($x^2[1] = 6.939$, $p = 0.008$). There were no significant associations between regular non-standard shifts and any mother-reported challenges, but those working irregular shifts were found to be most likely to report their biggest challenges as Work-Life Balance ($x^2[1] = 10.126$, $p = 0.001$), Time Management ($x^2[1] = 8.623$, $p = 0.003$), Solo Parenting ($x^2[1] = 8.916$, $p = 0.003$), and Child's Health ($x^2[1] = 4.845$, $p = 0.028$). For partners, there were two challenges significantly associated with work schedules: Sleep Challenges with the Child were most commonly reported by partners working regular

non-standard shifts (x^2[1] = 6.934, p = 0.008) and Family Adversity most commonly reported as a challenge by those working irregular shifts (x^2[1] = 4.005, p = 0.045).

4.4.3 Weekend Work

Chi-square analysis was also used to explore the relationship between parent-reported highlights and challenges and whether parents regularly worked in the weekends. Table 4.6 presents descriptive statistics of mothers' and partners' weekend work schedules.

Table 4.6

Frequencies of Weekend Work

Variable group	Mothers' frequency (%)	Partners' frequency (%)
Weekend work	31.0	41.0
No weekend work	68.8	58.9

Note: N (mothers) = 3268; N (partners) = 3564.

All significant associations with highlights were for parents who did not usually work in the weekends, indicating that parents whose work schedules were regularly Monday to Friday were the ones more likely to report highlights. For mothers, these associations were with the highlights of Reaching Milestones (x^2[3] = 10.522, p = 0.015), Child's Personality (x^2[3] = 11.272, p = 0.01), Sibling Interaction (x^2[3] = 13.905, p = 0.003) and Personal Growth (x^2[3] = 25.922, p = <0.001). For partners, these associations were with the highlight themes of Reaching Milestones (x^2[3] = 17.459, p = <0.001), Child's Personality (x^2[3] = 13.662, p = 0.003), New Environments/Experiences with Positive Impact on Child (x^2[3] = 28.516, p = <0.001), Culture/Religion Connectedness (x^2[3] = 25.633, p = <0.001), and Cognitive Development (x^2[3] = 8.506, p = 0.037).

Chi-square analysis uncovered more significant associations between mothers' challenges and their weekend work schedules than for partners. Mothers who worked in the weekends were likely to report challenges with Family Cohesiveness (x^2[3] = 18.611, p =

<0.001), and partners who worked in the weekends were more likely to report Food Issues as a challenge (x^2[3] =15.226, p = 0.002). Parents who did not work in the weekends were likely to report Sleep Challenges with the Child (mothers: x^2[3] = 17.538, p = <0.001; partners: x^2[3] = 9.608, p = 0.022). Mothers who did not work in the weekends were also more likely to report Managing Behaviour (x^2[3] = 11.57, p = 0.009) and Food Issues (x^2[3] = 23.96, p = <0.001) as challenges.

4.4.4 Childcare

Table 4.7 shows the descriptive statistics of parents using childcare. As these data are derived solely from the mothers' interviews, the following section will refer primarily to mothers. Other descriptive statistics regarding hours of childcare per week are available in Table 4.1.

Table 4.7

Percentages of Working Mothers' Use of Childcare

Variable	Use of childcare (%)	No use of childcare (%)
Working mothers	73.7	26.4
Non-working mothers	26.3	73.5

Note: N (working mothers) = 3268; N (non-working mothers) = 6198.

Chi-square analyses were also carried out to find any association between mothers' use of childcare and their highlights and challenges. Working mothers with their child in childcare were more likely to report the highlight of Social Development (x^2[3] = 9.619, p = 0.022), relating perhaps to the benefits of social interaction in childcare settings. For mothers who were not working but had their child in childcare, a significant relationship was indicated between childcare and the highlights of Reaching Milestones (x^2[3] = 17.286, p = <0.001) and New Environments/Experiences with a Positive Impact on the Child (x^2[3] =

31.14, p = <0.001), suggesting mothers were perceiving these childcare arrangements as having a positive effect on these outcomes.

Working mothers utilising childcare options were more likely to report challenges with Work-Life Balance (x^2[3] = 13.135, p = 0.004) and Food Issues (x^2[3] = 8.262, p = 0.041). Non-working mothers with their child in childcare were more likely to report the challenges of Environmental Adjustment (x^2[3] = 62.083, p = <0.001) and Family Adversity (x^2[3] = 46.945, p = <0.001). Solo Parenting was also more likely to be reported as a challenge by the non-working mothers who were utilising childcare (x^2[3] = 14.903, p = 0.002); it is possible that childcare drop-off and pick-up times may become an opportunity for solo mothers to observe other parents in relationships, thus emphasising their own solo parenting as more of a challenge.

There were no significant associations found between any highlights or challenges and mothers not using childcare, however it is interesting to note that analysis did indicate a significant association between working mothers with their child not in childcare and the response of No Challenge (x^2[3] = 16.073, p = 0.001).

4.5 Logistic Regression Analysis

Further binary logistic regression analysis was carried out in R version 4.0.3 (R Core Team, 2020) to explore possible predictors of the top challenges for working parents. As the most frequently reported highlights did not differ greatly between the working and non-working cohorts, further analysis of highlights was deemed unnecessary. The top six challenges were selected for analysis: for working mothers, these were Parenthood (15.8%), Child's Health (14.1%), Work-Life Balance (13.6%), Child Attributes (12.1%), Managing Behaviour (10.2%), and Sleep Challenges with the Child (9.7%). For working partners, the top six challenges were Parenthood (17.7%), Sleep Challenges with the Child (11.7%), Child Attributes (11.4%), Parent-Child Bonding (10.2%), Work-Life Balance (9.8%), and Child's

Health (9.6%). Dummy coding was used in analysis for the work schedule variable with regular standard schedule as the reference category, as this schedule was most commonly reported by working parents.

Several models were found to be statistically nonsignificant, providing insufficient evidence to conclude that the independent variables were predictors of these employment challenges, and therefore indicating that the prevalence of these specific challenges was similar regardless of work status. These models were as follows: mother-reported Child's Health challenges, and partner-reported Parenthood, Child Attributes, and Child's Health challenges. The models where significant predictors were identified are described below. In addition, it should be noted that the R^2 coefficient of each model indicates that the ability to predict the outcome is weak; this is likely partly due to the binary outcome but is also an indication that other factors are likely contributing to variations in reported challenges.

4.5.1 Mothers' Parenthood Challenges

The overall challenge of Parenthood was the most commonly reported challenge by mothers in the study, with 15.8% of mothers indicating associated challenges. As outlined previously, this challenge encompassed many of the more general difficulties mothers discussed, surrounding the roles and responsibilities of parenting. Examples of this challenge include "trying to bring him up right" and "making sure he has everything he needs". A binomial logistic regression was carried out to explore predictors of this challenge, with the model found to be statistically significant (X^2 (df = 9, N = 3268) = 31.35, p = <.001).

Work hours were a significant predictor of Parenthood challenges (OR = 0.83), indicating that mothers who spend fewer hours per week in paid employment are more likely to experience these challenges than those who spend more time at work. Results found that child parity was another predictor, with mothers of first-born children more likely to report

these challenges than those with more than one child (OR = 0.62); this may relate to the shift to the new role of parenthood with the birth of a mother's first child.

Table 4.8

Predictors of Mothers' Parenthood Challenges

Predictor	*β*	SE	OR *[95% CI]*	*p*
Work hours	**-.14**	**.05**	**0.83 *[0.72, 0.96]***	**.013**
Regular non-standard work schedule	.01	.05	1.07 *[0.68, 1.60]*	.770
Irregular work schedule	.00	.05	1.00 *[0.75, 1.30]*	.980
Childcare	-.01	.05	0.98 *[0.76, 1.25]*	.847
Solo parenting	-.07	.05	0.76 *[0.48, 1.15]*	.212
Child parity	**-.24**	**.05**	**0.62 *[0.50, 0.76]***	**<.001**
Mother's age	.05	.05	1.08 *[0.92, 1.26]*	.344
NZ Deprivation Index	.10	.05	1.04 *[1.00, 1.08]*	.050
Household income	.00	.05	1.00 *[0.99, 1.00]*	.955

Note: Total $N = 3268$. CI = Confidence Interval; OR = Odds Ratio. $R^2 = .01$ (Cox & Snell), .02 (Nagelkerke). The statistically significant predictor(s) are in bold.

4.5.2 Mothers' Work-Life Balance Challenges

Work-life Balance was the third most commonly reported challenge category among working mothers in this study, with 13.6% reporting this as a challenge. Binomial logistic regression found several statistically significant predictors, and the model itself was also found to be significant: X^2 (df = 9, N = 3268) = 85.65, p = <.001.

Work hours were found to be a significant predictor of this challenge. Results indicate that mothers who were working more hours per week were more likely to find associated challenges with balancing work and home life than those who did not work as many hours (OR = 1.47). Analysis also found that mothers whose children spent time in some form of childcare (both formal and informal) were more likely to report this challenge than those who had no childcare arrangements (OR = 1.47).

Child parity was also found to be a predictor, suggesting that mothers of first-born children may be more likely to experience challenges with work-life balance than those who had more than one child (OR = 0.66). The mother's age also had a significant effect, with older mothers more likely to report this challenge than younger mothers (OR = 1.25).

While NZ Deprivation Index and household income were both found to be predictors in this model, it should be noted that these variables were measured separately. As outlined above, NZ Deprivation Index is a ten-point scale that refers to the deprivation level of the area in which families live and is not directly related to the household's income. For this reason, both variables were included in the model, with VIF statistics indicating the absence of multicollinearity. The effects within this model were small but statistically significant: mothers in areas with less deprivation were more likely to report this challenge (OR = 0.95), as were those with lower household incomes (OR = 0.99).

Table 4.9

Predictors of Mothers' Work-Life Balance Challenges

Predictor	*β*	SE	OR *[95% CI]*	*p*
Work hours	**.29**	**.05**	**1.47** ***[1.28, 1.69]***	**<.001**
Regular non-standard work schedule	.05	.05	1.23 *[0.78, 1.86]*	.349
Irregular work schedule	-.08	.06	0.81 *[0.58, 1.12]*	.214
Childcare	**.16**	**.06**	**1.47** ***[1.10, 2.02]***	**.013**
Solo parenting	.00	.06	1.00 *[0.62, 1.54]*	.996
Child parity	**-.20**	**.06**	**0.66** ***[0.53, 0.83]***	**<.001**
Mother's age	**.15**	**.06**	**1.25** ***[1.06, 1.49]***	**.010**
NZ Deprivation Index	**-.15**	**.06**	**0.95** ***[0.91, 0.99]***	**.010**
Household income	**-.16**	**.08**	**0.99** ***[0.98, 1.00]***	**.041**

Note: Total $N = 3268$. CI = Confidence Interval; OR = Odds Ratio. $R^2 = .03$ (Cox & Snell), .05 (Nagelkerke). The statistically significant predictor(s) are in bold.

4.5.3 Mothers' Child Attributes Challenges

Challenges related to attributes of the child were reported by 12.1% of the working mothers in this study; binomial logistic regression was carried out to explore possible predictors. This regression model was found to be statistically significant (X^2 (df = 9, N = 3268) = 30.82, p = <.001. Child parity was the only significant predictor of this challenge, with mothers of subsequent children more likely to experience difficulties related to child attributes than primiparous mothers (OR = 1.84).

Table 4.10

Predictors of Mothers' Child Attributes Challenges

Predictor	*β*	SE	OR *[95% CI]*	*p*
Work hours	-.01	.06	0.98 *[0.84, 1.14]*	.822
Regular non-standard work schedule	.09	.05	1.45 *[0.92, 2.19]*	.089
Irregular work schedule	.04	.06	1.12 *[0.83, 1.50]*	.445
Childcare	.05	.06	1.12 *[0.85, 1.48]*	.437
Solo parenting	-.06	.06	0.78 *[0.46, 1.25]*	.326
Child parity	**.30**	**.06**	**1.84** ***[1.44, 2.35]***	**<.001**
Mother's age	-.05	.06	0.93 *[0.78, 1.10]*	.379
NZ Deprivation Index	-.02	.06	0.99 *[0.95, 1.03]*	.714
Household income	.02	.05	1.00 *[1.00, 1.01]*	.657

Note: Total N = 3268. CI = Confidence Interval; OR = Odds Ratio. R^2 = .01 (Cox & Snell), .02 (Nagelkerke). The statistically significant predictor(s) are in bold.

4.5.4 Mothers' Managing Behaviour Challenges

Managing behaviour was a challenge that was reported by 10.2% of working mothers in the study. Binomial logistic regression analysis found that the mothers' age was a predictor of this challenge, suggesting that younger mothers may be likely to find managing their child's behaviour more challenging than older mothers (OR = 0.77). The model itself was also found to be statistically significant: X^2 (df = 9, N = 3268) = 19.76, p = .019.

Table 4.11

Predictors of Mothers' Managing Behaviour Challenges

Predictor	*β*	SE	OR *[95% CI]*	*p*
Work hours	-.11	.07	0.87 *[0.72, 1.03]*	.104
Regular non-standard work schedule	.05	.06	1.22 *[0.72, 1.96]*	.444
Irregular work schedule	.10	.06	1.30 *[0.95, 1.77]*	.098
Childcare	.12	.07	1.32 *[0.97, 1.83]*	.080
Solo parenting	-.06	.07	0.79 *[0.45, 1.29]*	.371
Child parity	.04	.06	1.10 *[0.85, 1.40]*	.498
Mother's age	**-.18**	**.06**	**0.77** ***[0.64, 0.92]***	**.004**
NZ Deprivation Index	-.08	.06	0.97 *[0.93, 1.02]*	.232
Household income	.07	.05	1.00 *[1.00, 1.01]*	.227

Note: Total N = 3268. CI = Confidence Interval; OR = Odds Ratio. R^2 = .01 (Cox & Snell), .01 (Nagelkerke). The statistically significant predictor(s) are in bold.

4.5.5 Mothers' Sleep Challenges with the Child

The sixth most commonly reported challenge among working mothers was related to their child's sleep, with 9.7% of working mothers in the study reporting this challenge. Binomial logistic regression analysis was carried out, and the model was found to be statistically significant: X^2 (df = 9, N = 3268) = 30.37, p = <.001.

Solo parenting was found to be a predictor of this challenge, with results indicating that solo mothers are less likely to report this challenge than those with a partner (OR = 0.49). NZ Deprivation Index was also found to be a predictor, with a small but significant effect once again, as mothers in less deprived areas were more likely to experience sleep challenges with their child than those in more deprived areas (OR = 0.93).

Table 4.12

Predictors of Mothers' Sleep Challenges with the Child

Predictor	*β*	SE	OR *[95% CI]*	*p*
Work hours	-.01	.06	0.98 *[0.83, 1.16]*	.842
Regular non-standard work schedule	.02	.06	1.08 *[0.62, 1.78]*	.774
Irregular work schedule	.00	.07	0.99 *[0.70, 1.38]*	.963
Childcare	.13	.07	1.36 *[0.99, 1.91]*	.068
Solo parenting	**-.18**	**.09**	**0.49 *[0.23, 0.92]***	**.041**
Child parity	.04	.06	1.09 *[0.85, 1.41]*	.494
Mother's age	.08	.07	1.13 *[0.93, 1.37]*	.237
NZ Deprivation Index	**-.22**	**.07**	**0.93 *[0.88, 0.97]***	**.001**
Household income	.04	.06	1.00 *[1.00, 1.01]*	.505

Note: Total $N = 3268$. CI = Confidence Interval; OR = Odds Ratio. $R^2 = .01$ (Cox & Snell), .02 (Nagelkerke). The statistically significant predictor(s) are in bold.

4.5.6 Partners' Sleep Challenges with the Child

Sleep challenges were found to be one of the six greatest challenges reported by partners in the study, identified by 11.7% of working partners. A binomial logistic regression was performed to explore the effects of several employment variables on partners' sleep challenges with their child. The logistic regression model was found to be statistically significant: X^2 (df = 8, N = 3564) = 31.99, p = <.001. The following predictors: weekend work, partner's age at interview, and NZ Deprivation Index were all found to be significantly associated with the likelihood of partners reporting sleep challenges with their child.

Analysis found that older partners were more likely to report this challenge than younger partners (OR = 1.22). NZ Deprivation Index was also found to predict sleep challenges: those living in areas with lower deprivation had higher odds of reporting this challenge than those in more deprived deciles (OR = 0.96). This analysis also found that partners who did not work on the weekends were more likely to report sleep challenges with their child (OR = 0.75).

Table 4.13

Predictors of Partners' Sleep Challenges with the Child

Predictor	*β*	SE	OR *[95% CI]*	*p*
Work hours	.01	.05	1.01 *[0.87, 1.17]*	.913
Regular non-standard work schedule	-.13	.07	0.61 *[0.34, 1.01]*	.069
Irregular work schedule	.06	.05	1.21 *[0.86, 1.68]*	.253
Weekend work	**-.14**	**.06**	**0.75** ***[0.59, 0.96]***	**.022**
Partner's age	**.12**	**.06**	**1.21** ***[1.01, 1.46]***	**.039**
NZ Deprivation Index	**-.12**	**.06**	**0.96** ***[0.92, 0.99]***	**.026**
Household income	-.11	.07	0.99 *[0.98, 1.00]*	.114

Note: Total $N = 3564$. CI = Confidence Interval; OR = Odds Ratio. $R^2 = .01$ (Cox & Snell), .02 (Nagelkerke). The statistically significant predictor(s) are in bold.

4.5.7 Partners' Parent-Child Bonding Challenges

Parent-Child Bonding was reported as a challenge by 10.2% of working partners. A binomial logistic regression found that the work hours variable was a predictor of this challenge. Analysis indicated that partners working longer hours per week had higher odds of reporting challenges associated with parent-child bonding than those working less hours (OR = 1.41). This model was found to be statistically significant: X^2 (df = 8, N = 3564) = 24.85, p = .002.

Table 4.14

Predictors of Partners' Parent-Child Bonding Challenges

Predictor	*β*	SE	OR *[95% CI]*	*p*
Work hours	**.26**	**.06**	**1.41** ***[1.20, 1.66]***	**<.001**
Regular non-standard work schedule	-.07	.07	0.75 *[0.44, 1.21]*	.262
Irregular work schedule	.03	.06	1.11 *[0.77, 1.58]*	.551
Weekend work	-.06	.06	0.88 *[0.68, 1.14]*	.344
Partner's age	.03	.06	1.05 *[0.87, 1.27]*	.626
NZ Deprivation Index	-.08	.06	0.97 *[0.93, 1.01]*	.174
Household income	-.02	.06	1.00 *[0.99, 1.01]*	.729

Note: Total N = 3564. CI = Confidence Interval; OR = Odds Ratio. R^2 = .01 (Cox & Snell), .02 (Nagelkerke). The statistically significant predictor(s) are in bold.

4.5.8 Partners' Work-Life Balance Challenges

Work-Life Balance was reported as a challenge by 9.8% of working partners. Through binomial logistic regression, this challenge was found to be significantly associated with work hours and total parental leave taken. The regression model was statistically significant: X^2 (df = 8, N = 3564) = 29.93, p = <.001.

Work hours were found to be the only significant predictor (OR = 1.40), with partners who worked more hours per week more likely to report this challenge than those who did not work as many hours. This aligns with findings for working mothers, indicating that the more time parents spend in employment, the more they may struggle with balancing work and family commitments.

Table 4.15

Predictors of Partners' Work-Life Balance Challenges

Predictor	*β*	SE	OR *[95% CI]*	*p*
Work hours	**.24**	**.06**	**1.40** ***[1.19, 1.67]***	**<.001**
Regular non-standard work schedule	.10	.06	1.44 *[0.93, 2.16]*	.067
Irregular work schedule	.00	.06	1.02 *[0.68, 1.48]*	.953
Weekend work	-.11	.07	0.80 *[0.61, 1.03]*	.087
Partner's age	.01	.06	1.01 *[0.83, 1.22]*	.826
NZ Deprivation Index	-.10	.06	0.96 *[0.92, 1.00]*	.082
Household income	.00	.06	1.00 *[0.99, 1.01]*	.984

Note: Total N = 3564. CI = Confidence Interval; OR = Odds Ratio. R^2 = .01 (Cox & Snell), .02 (Nagelkerke). The statistically significant predictor(s) are in bold.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter will explore the findings of this study and the contribution it makes to existing knowledge of the association between employment and parent-reported highlights and challenges with the child. Results will be explored with reference to the literature, beginning with the highlights, and continuing to explore the challenges and their predictors. Implications and areas for further research will then be outlined, and study limitations will be detailed.

Overall, while the results of this study show that parents' highlights with the child appear to remain generally consistent regardless of their employment status, results also show that a number of the various contextual factors of employment may have an effect on the parent-reported challenges. Thus, the initial research question: *What is the relationship between parental employment and parents' biggest reported highlights and challenges with their child?* may be answered by exploring the consistency of parent-reported highlights and the variation within the effects of different employment factors on parents' challenges with the child.

5.1 Parental Highlights with the Child

The parent-reported highlights were found to have a high level of consistency, with minimal discrepancy between the highlights of working and non-working parents. This consistency is similar to that expressed by parents in the literature, as they spoke of the satisfying and rewarding moments of parenting as serving to minimise the challenges (Peterson et al., 2017; Soriano et al., 2001). The range of highlights within the current study captures the over-arching sense of positivity of moments within the parenting journey, and suggests that the full experience of parenting may often be the biggest highlight in itself.

In particular, many parents within this study described the child themselves as the source of their biggest highlight, bringing joy to the parenting role. The most frequently

reported highlights encompass the love parents expressed for their child, and the delight of seeing the parent-child relationship grow. These highlights also captured the way in which the child brought joy to the parents' lives and brightened up their days. As children's personalities began to develop, parents discussed their enjoyment of the child's personality traits and how this enjoyment strengthened the relationship further.

Another prominent theme was the joy of watching the child develop and grow, both in general and with more specific developmental themes. Social development was a predominant highlight for both parents, whether they were working or not. As the children were two years old at data collection, an age where much language and social development generally occurs (Kwon et al., 2013), the child's newly acquired social and communication skills are a prevalent highlight in the parenting experience at this stage. Many parents' responses conveyed excitement at this new stage and enjoyment of the child's growing ability to communicate with their parents.

The consistency and general nature of the highlights within the current study indicate a positive experience of the overall parenting role, and as the most frequently reported highlights were shown to remain consistent for both working and non-working parents, employment status does not appear to greatly influence any variation in the positive moments that stand out to parents. While much of the literature focuses on the effects of employment on parents' challenges, these findings indicate that the highlights are just as salient for parents in Aotearoa NZ. Whether they are in paid employment or not, parents are likely to find joy in simply watching their child grow and building a relationship with them.

There are a limited number of existing studies that explore parents' highlights with their child, focusing on specific aspects of the parenting role; while this specificity may contrast with the more general findings of the current study, combined they help to inform the positive effects of these highlights on the entirety of the parenting experience. Enjoyment of

the parenting role is described as providing an increase in self-efficacy (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2004) and a sense of purpose and identity (Brown & Cox, 2020). A positive response to the challenges experienced, brought on by self-efficacy and purpose, may then serve to increase the value and enjoyment of the parenting experience, both for parents and for children, and in turn decrease the negative effects of the challenges encountered (Rasmussen, 2014; Soriano et al., 2001). As Peterson et al. also note, perhaps it is these highlights that make the challenges seem more bearable (Peterson et al., 2017).

5.2 Parental Challenges with the Child

The challenges of GUiNZ parents, as explored by the current study, are comprised of a number of areas in which parents expressed difficulty. These areas relate to a variety of themes, both surrounding the child themselves and pertaining to contextual factors such as work-life balance or family dynamics. Both working and non-working parents expressed difficulties with their child's health, sleep, behaviour, and attributes within the top six most-reported challenges; however, variation in the ranking of these indicate a difference in the prominence of each challenge for each group of parents. For example, a higher percentage of parents who were not in paid employment indicated experiencing Managing Behaviour challenges, perhaps related to the increase of time spent with the child for parents who did not work. This result suggests that work may be viewed as an escape for parents, in accordance with the enhancement hypothesis (Haar & Bardoel, 2008; Sieber, 1974) and echoing the experiences of participants in Lupton & Schmied's study (2002). While Child Attributes remained consistently ranked and Child's Health fluctuated in ranked position between working and non-working parents, Sleep Challenges with the Child became more prominent for working mothers and significantly more so for working partners. Non-working partners did not rank this challenge in their top six at all, suggesting that the effects of sleep challenges for partners may be more impactful when concurrent with employment. In

contrast, both working and non-working mothers reported this challenge within their top six. Overall, this variation within relevant challenges suggests that there are a number of factors that may pertain to the more challenging aspects of parenting, and these may vary between individual situations.

Work-life balance is a prominent challenge for working parents within this study and results show that it is particularly predominant for mothers. Analysis indicated a pronounced difference in the number of predictors of work-life balance challenges for mothers and for partners, as several predictors were found to have significant effects for mothers while work hours remained the only significant predictor for partners. In addition, a greater percentage of working mothers (13.6%) reported this challenge than did working partners (9.8%). This reflects findings within the literature that mothers are more likely to be dissatisfied with the balance of work and home responsibilities than fathers may be (Craig & Powell, 2011). The theory of role overload is also related, described as strain that occurs when parents are faced with a large number of responsibilities and a lack of time in which to complete them (Mustillo et al., 2020; Sieber, 1974). While this study does not specifically take into account the sharing of household or childcare responsibilities between parents, mothers within the study were found to work less hours on average than partners as they remained the primary caregivers for their children, indicating that GUiNZ mothers may indeed have a greater number of roles to juggle than partners. This role-juggling can result in role overload and may explain the greater pressure of work-life balance challenges experienced by mothers in this study.

While the over-arching role of parenthood was found to be a highlight in itself, it was also the most frequently reported challenge for both working and non-working parents. This challenge encompasses issues surrounding the roles and responsibilities of parenting, such as providing for the child, ensuring their wellbeing, and providing discipline: for example,

responses included “meeting his needs” and “showing him his boundaries”. Findings indicate that this challenge remains pervasive regardless of employment status. Although parenthood was the most frequently reported challenge, the logistic regression model for partners was found to be statistically nonsignificant; however, this does not suggest that partners do not find difficulty within the parenting role. Rather, it suggests that this was a consistent challenge for many partners regardless of the contextual factors included as predictors.

A small number of challenges were reported only within the top six group for non-working parents, with mothers reporting Family Cohesiveness challenges and partners reporting Family Adversity issues. Family Cohesiveness includes difficulties surrounding relationships within the family, while Family Adversity relates to more external challenges such as financial problems and lack of family support. This may indicate that relational issues are more pervasive for mothers while partners are more concerned with contextual family challenges. Non-working partners were also the only cohort to report Child’s Development within their top six challenges, suggesting that developmental issues may be more impactful for partners who spend more time with their children.

5.2.1 Work-Related Predictors

In order to explore the effect of employment factors on parent-reported challenges, further analysis took into account the experiences of working parents exclusively. Work hours were found to predict the highest number of challenges, with significant effects on mother-reported parenthood challenges, parent-child bonding challenges for partners, and work-life balance challenges for both parents. For almost all of these challenges, working longer hours predicted a higher likelihood of reporting the challenge; this is in line with existing literature as parents who spent more time in paid employment were shown to be more likely to find difficulty within different aspects of the parenting role (Milkie et al., 2004; Wills & Brauer, 2012; Vieira et al., 2016).

The strongest effect of longer work hours was on work-life balance challenges, with parents who worked a higher number of hours per week more likely to find difficulty in this area. This challenge relates to the task of allocating an adequate proportion of one's time to household and parenting responsibilities alongside work commitments in order to achieve a healthy balance and is widely felt among working parents in this study. These results echo findings throughout parenting literature (Brough et al., 2009; Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003; Kwon et al., 2013; Peterson et al., 2017; Soriano et al., 2001), and support results from Milkie et al.'s study (2004) as they found that greater levels of time strain were associated with longer work hours. This effect was found to be particularly prevalent for mothers, as they were even more likely than partners to report challenges with work-life balance when working longer hours. As discussed above, one explanation may be the possibility of role overload, with the pursuit of work-life balance compounded by more time spent at work and additional household responsibilities for mothers.

The effect of work hours on work-life balance may also be related to societal expectations. Throughout parenting literature, the "good parent" expectation is highlighted as the notion that mothers should prioritise their children while also remaining committed to employment responsibilities, and that fathers should provide for their families through a high level of commitment to their work (Lupton & Schmied, 2002). This expectation causes parents to feel pressure to meet this ideal and often results in tension between being a good parent and a good employee (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). The intensive mothering discourse implies that mothers may feel the strain more acutely as a result of additional household responsibilities (Hays, 1996; Jacobs & Gerson, 2016), which provides support for this study's findings that longer work hours may have a greater effect on mothers' work-life balance challenges.

While societal expectations rely on mothers to be present for their children regardless of work status, partners were found to report challenges with finding adequate time to spend with their child. Analysis found that work hours were a predictor of parent-child bonding challenges for partners, with those who worked longer hours more likely to find difficulty in bonding with their child. This may be explained by the effects of work hours on availability and quality time spent with the child. When fathers are able to be more physically and emotionally available for their children, the positivity of interaction between father and child is increased and the relationship is strengthened (Kochanska et al., 2004). When time availability is decreased and stress levels are heightened due to longer work hours, the opportunity for positive interaction and relationship-building may also decrease as a result. Parents who spend more time at work may feel a sense of guilt in the knowledge that their availability for their children is low (Milkie et al., 2004), and thus partners who work longer hours may indeed feel the strain of increasing their physical and emotional availability to facilitate a positive bonding experience with their child.

One result contrasts with previous findings regarding work hours, with results of analysis showing that mothers who worked less hours per week were more likely to experience challenges related to the roles and responsibilities of parenthood. Examples of these challenges include discipline and keeping the child safe and occupied. An explanation may be that these mothers were spending more time in the parenting role and thus encountering related challenges more frequently than mothers who spent a greater proportion of their time at work. It is also possible that these results are related to the finding that first-time mothers are more likely to report parenthood challenges, as first-time mothers may slow their return to work by working less hours initially. This would indicate that the effect of work hours has less of an impact on parent-reported challenges than child parity, but also that

the two factors may go hand-in-hand. The effects of child parity on parents' challenges with their child will be discussed in the following section.

While work hours predicted a number of challenges, other work-related factors presented limited effects. Weekend work was found to exclusively predict partners' Sleep Challenges with the Child, with results indicating that partners who did not work in the weekends were more likely to report these challenges than those who did. One possible explanation for this effect is that the absence of weekend work may signal a more regular, standard weekly shift. When partners are working regular shifts throughout the week, more emphasis may be put on a regular sleep schedule, and partners may feel the effects of disruption to this schedule more strongly than if their work shifts were more flexible. However, as work schedule was not found to be a significant predictor of this challenge, this may signal the effect of other external factors and may require further investigation.

The relationship between different work schedules and parent-reported challenges was also explored, with no significant effects: this suggests that the schedule of work shifts, whether regular or irregular, does not play a significant role in predicting parents' challenges with the child. Taken together with the predictive effects of work hours, these results indicate that a parent's work schedule is less important when it comes to predicting their challenges with the child than the number of hours they work each week.

5.2.2 Contextual Predictors

Child parity was explored with relation to mother-reported challenges, with findings that indicate that both mothers of first-born children and mothers of subsequent children are each likely to experience different challenges. Mothers of first-born children were found to be more likely to report challenges surrounding the roles and responsibilities of parenthood than mothers of subsequent children. As first-time mothers are occupying the parenting role for the first time, with no previous experience for comparison or skill-building, they may find

more difficulty in the shift from having no children to having one child, as compared to the addition of a child to a family with existing children. As becoming a mother for the first time entails much adjustment and societal pressure (Lupton & Schmied, 2002; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2004), this may cause the general experience of parenthood to feel more challenging for first-time mothers.

However, mothers of more than one child were found to be more likely to report challenges surrounding the attributes of their child than mothers of first-born children; these challenges include behavioural difficulties such as the child's independence or stubbornness. This result is in contrast with the expectation that the initial transition to parenting is a greater shift than the addition of subsequent children (Lupton & Schmied, 2002; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2004). In fact, a study exploring the predictors of GUiNZ mothers' highlights when the children were nine months old found that mothers of more than one child were more likely to report characteristics of the child as a highlight (Corkin et al., 2021), rather than as a challenge. It may be that multiparous mothers in this study reported behavioural or temperamental challenges more often because they typically have older children to supervise and spend time with, causing the challenging attributes of the younger child to be more difficult to manage with a decrease in availability. The prior experience of parenting an older child may also offer opportunities for comparison of the behavioural attributes of a younger child, resulting in the younger child's behaviour feeling more challenging in comparison.

Another explanation may be related to the link between behavioural issues and maternal stress. A child's difficult behaviour elevates a mother's stress levels (Mulsow et al., 2002) and higher maternal stress in turn exacerbates the difficult behaviour (Stavrinides & Nikiforou, 2013). Corkin et al. (2018) explain that mothers of more than one child may also experience stress in dividing time between each of their children and their other responsibilities; children who exhibit challenging behaviours often require even more time

and involvement, adding increased pressure to this task (Brown et al., 2011). It may be that the stress brought on by these time management difficulties, felt markedly by multiparous mothers, may exacerbate the child's challenging behaviour, especially at this difficult developmental stage.

Another unanticipated finding relates to childcare as a predictor of work-life balance challenges. Throughout the literature, childcare has been highlighted as a supportive factor that assists healthy family functioning, particularly for working parents (Işik & Güven, 2007; Kwon et al., 2013). However, results of this study show that mothers who utilised childcare, whether formal or informal, were more likely to report challenges of work-life balance than those who had no childcare arrangements. One explanation may be that dropping off and picking up children from a formal childcare service or a grandparent's house may add another daily responsibility to a mother who already has multiple responsibilities to juggle. It may also be that the cost of childcare may require parents to work longer hours or over-time in order to more comfortably afford a formal childcare option, causing work-life balance to be a greater challenge. However, these results should not immediately exclude childcare as a supportive factor for working parents as it is widely described as such throughout existing literature. Further research may be needed to more closely identify the cause of the increase in work-life balance challenges for parents utilising childcare, and determine whether there could be possible adjustments made to childcare options that may be more supportive. In addition, further research is needed to explore the challenges for partners utilising childcare options as this study is limited to those for mothers only.

The experiences of older parents are likely to vary with those of younger parents, with different challenges involved (Shelton & Johnson, 2006). Analysis explored the age of parents as a predictor, finding that increased parental age predicted three challenges: Work-Life Balance and Managing Behaviour for mothers, and partner-reported Sleep Challenges

with the Child. The effects of work-life balance challenges for mothers may be due to work-related pressure: as older women may have higher qualifications and greater career advancement than younger women (Corkin et al., 2018), they may experience greater pressure at work as a result. Higher work stress may then result in more difficulty balancing work and parenting responsibilities, increasing the likelihood of work-life balance becoming a challenge for older mothers.

Older mothers were also found to be more likely to report behaviour management challenges than younger women. Shelton and Johnson's study (2006) recounts the experiences of older mothers, with one participant in particular discussing her negative emotional response to her child's difficult behaviour. Her response contrasts with her initial expectation that her advanced age and maturity would equip her with the patience and experience to deal with parenting challenges such as these. If older women enter motherhood with expectations of their maturity serving to ease challenges such as children's behavioural issues, and are met with more difficulty than anticipated, it follows that they may be more likely to report managing behaviour as their greatest challenge.

Increased age was also found to be a predictor of partners experiencing sleep challenges with their child. The ongoing physical effects of sleep deprivation and fatigue on energy levels (Dunning & Giallo, 2012) may present added strain for older parents, who may already be experiencing a decrease in energy (Shelton & Johnson, 2006). The adjustment surrounding the transition to parenting may also be felt more strongly by older parents, as they have enjoyed a longer period of autonomy previously; this may result in additional difficulty stemming from the new restrictions of parenthood and exacerbate the challenge of disruption to a once-regular sleep routine (Corkin et al., 2021).

Other contextual factors explored were household income and NZ Deprivation Index. Some of these results may appear conflicting, with lower household income and less

deprivation both predicting work-life balance challenges for mothers. However, it is important to remember that NZ Deprivation Index does not directly reflect the effects of household income, but rather provides a wider picture of the overall deprivation of the geographical area in which families live (Salmond et al., 2007). Note also that the effects of both NZ Deprivation Index and household income as predictors, while significant, were small, indicating that the likelihood of reporting challenges does not change dramatically with shifts in either household income or deprivation level.

Household income was a significant predictor of only one challenge, while NZ Deprivation Index was found to predict two. Mothers who reported lower household income were more likely to experience work-life balance challenges, while less deprivation was more likely to predict mother-reported work-life balance challenges and sleep challenges with the child for both parents. Lower income may be associated with fewer work hours, reducing the likelihood of mothers reporting work-life balance challenges, whereas mothers living in areas of lower deprivation may be more likely to be employed in workplaces that have higher expectations of their employees. The higher pressure of workplaces in less deprived areas may heighten stress surrounding work-life balance, and cause sleep challenges to feel more prevalent for parents when sleep deprivation or fatigue affects their work.

The final contextual factor explored was solo parenting, with results that indicate less of an effect on mother-reported challenges than originally hypothesised. Solo parenting was found only to be a predictor of mothers' sleep challenges with their child, with no significant results for other challenges. Furthermore, the directionality of this relationship suggests that single mothers were less likely to experience sleep challenges with their child than mothers who reported that they had a partner. While it is outside the scope of the current study to further explore potential challenges for solo parents, it is possible that other contextual factors are more challenging for single mothers and serve to diminish the relative significance of

sleep issues being the biggest challenge with their child. This is an area that requires further research in order to explore the factors that are the most challenging for solo mothers, and also to investigate the experiences of solo fathers.

5.3 Implications

Our findings contribute to the current understanding of the way in which several employment factors affect the parenting experience, in both the highlights and challenges. In particular, this study indicated several factors that may predict some of the more challenging moments parents experience with their child. It utilises data from Aotearoa NZ's largest longitudinal study, with a sample size that allows a high level of statistical power and generalisability to the wider population, as well as a cohort that is current and contemporary.

This study not only contributes to existing parenting literature, but also provides information for working parents on which to base decisions around their own employment. By taking into account the predictors that are applicable to individual situations, parents may be able to consider ways in which they can structure their employment in order to minimise the potential challenges. The large sample size of this study reflects the variety of different family and employment situations and cultural backgrounds within Aotearoa NZ, allowing these findings to inform New Zealand parents with varying needs and circumstances. While there is a clear lack of New Zealand research regarding the effects of employment on parents' experiences, this study contributes relevant information for parents within the Aotearoa NZ context.

In particular, this study highlights work-life balance as a prominent challenge that may be affected by a number of different factors and felt widely by working parents. The observed disparity between the number of predictors of this challenge for each parent indicates that this is particularly prevalent for mothers, and thus it is important that supportive strategies are especially directed towards working mothers. Reducing the number of

responsibilities a mother has to juggle may help to minimise work-life balance challenges by limiting role overload and resulting stress; social support and informal childcare options remain effective strategies to do so.

Recommendations for workplaces include flexibility and support of employees' work-life balance, especially for mothers of young children. Workplaces that are flexible and supportive of a healthy work-life balance help to promote a positive, balanced parenting experience and may even have a greater effect on supporting work-life balance than formal strategies such as an increase in parental leave (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Our finding that an increase in work hours predicts an increase in work-life balance challenges emphasises the importance of flexibility surrounding time spent at work, both for workplaces and for parents.

5.4 Limitations

This study does, however, have limitations. While parents were asked to specify their "biggest" highlight or challenge with their child, some parents reported more than one. Parents of multiple children may have given responses inclusive of their other children also, and others referred to external highlights or challenges not specifically related to their child; this limitation was recognised in earlier data collection, and as a result the questionnaire item was reframed for this data collection wave to specify the biggest highlight or challenge *with the child*. However, many parents still responded with more than just their single biggest highlight or challenge. This may be due to the somewhat conversational nature of the interview setting. Each of the themes indicated within these responses was coded, ensuring that no highlight or challenge was excluded regardless of whether or not it was indicated as the biggest.

Another limitation may be related to respondent fatigue, as the questionnaire items regarding highlights and challenges were delivered towards the end of the 90-minute

interview. Regardless, assisted by the large sample size, the data provided paint a broad picture of the different highlights and challenges experienced by parents in Aotearoa NZ.

While this study draws on data from a large, diverse sample and thus is broadly generalisable to the wider population of Aotearoa NZ, there is an argument that Māori data should not be subsumed with that of the general population (Paine et al., 2021). Instead, stratification by ethnicity would allow for greater understanding of the predictors of highlights and challenges for Māori parents, allowing for recommendations that are more relevant to Māori and giving equal explanatory power to Māori voices.

Social desirability bias is another important consideration when analysing qualitative data (Nederhof, 1985). The study itself discusses societal expectations of parenting and the pressure parents may feel to meet these expectations (Lupton & Schmied, 2002), and it is an important consideration that parents within this study may have experienced this pressure and tailored their responses in order to meet perceived expectations. However, due to the commitment participants have made to be involved in the GUiNZ study for 21 years, signalling their recognition of the importance of the study, this bias may be reduced.

5.5 Future Study Recommendations

This study enhances our knowledge of the multiple factors that affect the parenting experience, both positively and negatively. However, there are areas that, while outside the scope of the current study, are important for future research to investigate further.

As this study has focused on the experiences of parents in traditional family roles, namely mothers and fathers, there remains an opportunity for future research to explore the experiences of same-sex couples. Much parenting research exists with the expectation of fathers as providers and mothers as homemakers; while this may still be accurate for many heterosexual nuclear families, the experiences of same-sex couples are likely to offer a

different perspective, valuable and relevant to a growing number of families within the global context.

Another perspective outside the scope of this study belongs to solo parents. While solo parenting is recognised as a challenge within the current study, findings indicate a need for further research for contextualisation. It is apparent that single parents face a number of challenges throughout work and parenting contexts, and while the current study did not identify or analyse these, future study would help to situate these challenges and provide recommendations for minimising these difficulties, relevant to solo parents. In addition, this study explored the experiences of single mothers exclusively; future research is needed to investigate the effects of solo parenting on challenges for fathers.

This study found small but significant predictive effects between deprivation levels and parent-reported challenges. The limited effect size of these results signals a need to further explore the relationship between socioeconomic deprivation and parents' challenges with their child. Stratification by ethnicity as well as by deprivation level is an important consideration for future research as it would allow greater scope for understanding the inequities within parent-reported challenges in the Aotearoa NZ context, and inform action to address these inequities (Paine et al., 2021).

5.6 Summary and Conclusion

This study explored the association between employment and parents' highlights and challenges with their child. It was informed by a modified version of Belsky's process model of the determinants of parenting (1984), identifying the factors related specifically to employment that inform the highlights and challenges parents experience with their child.

Data from 6,822 mothers and 4,404 of their partners were explored in the current study. The most frequently reported highlights and challenges were identified, and those experienced by working parents were compared with those of non-working parents. Chi-

square analysis was carried out to inform further analysis by assessing any existing relationship between parents' employment status and related factors, such as work schedule or child parity. Possible predictors were then identified, leading to logistic regression analysis that explored these predictors and the effect they had on the most frequently reported challenges.

This study followed an adapted version of Belsky's Determinants of Parenting model (Belsky, 1984). The adapted model is shown in Figure 1. This model posited that a number of variables play a part in determining the highlights and challenges parents experience with their child and, along with the literature, informed the direction of the analysis. While the highlights were found to remain generally consistent despite differences in employment, this study has shown that multiple factors related to employment may indeed predict some of the most commonly reported challenges parents experience with their child in the Aotearoa NZ context.

Analysis provided an answer for the research question: *What is the relationship between parental employment and parents' biggest reported highlights and challenges with their child?* The relationship between employment and parent-reported challenges exists within a number of different work factors, indicating that for the majority of cases, this relationship may be individual and dependent on other aspects of the work and family situation. Several employment variables were found to be significant predictors, with total work hours predicting the highest number of challenges ($N = 4$). Work-life balance was the challenge with the most significant predictors, for mothers in particular, suggesting that there are many factors that contribute to the difficulty of achieving a positive balance between the responsibilities of home and work. This highlights the relevance of this challenge for working parents in Aotearoa NZ and indicates areas of focus to ensure a healthy work-life balance. The challenges associated with the overall role of parenthood were also found to remain

consistent despite changes in employment status, signalling a need to support both working and non-working parents throughout their parenting journey.

However, employment status was not found to influence any marked variation in the top-reported highlights, suggesting that parents' highlights with their child remain consistent and are not greatly influenced by employment status. The joy parents gain from the overall experience of parenting, and from the child themselves, is comparatively steady and constant, providing reward and fulfilment even when challenges arise.

APPENDIX A

Coding Scheme Developed for Coding of Parents' Highlights

Highlight category	Category description	Highlight examples
Child's personality	Child's personality coming out, special interests, child becoming their own person	"He likes music and dancing", "his inquisitiveness"
Positive effects of child on family	How child has integrated well within family system, family feeling more connected, child forming good relationships with others in the family/extended family, belongingness	"How much he has enriched the family", "meeting her grandparents in China"
Love for child (parent-child bond)	General statements about parents' love for their child, the bond they share, how they enjoy having a child, spending time with the child, watching them grow	"Every day is a highlight", "playing with him in the park"
Child's expression of love (child-parent bond)	Child's expressions of affection to the parent, cuddles, kisses, saying "I love you"	"Her cuddles when I come home from work", "kisses and cuddles"
Child's health	Broad statements regarding health or eating	"He's a healthy boy", "she eats really well"
Sibling interaction	Positive statements on how the child interacts with their siblings	"She gets on well with her brother", "watching him interact with his siblings"
Positive impact of child on the environment	How the child has improved the environment for parent and family, feeling proud of their child, getting compliments about their child, child making other people laugh	"The joy he brings to everyone who meets him", "I am a proud parent"
Sleep	Broad statements relating to the child's sleep	"His sleeping through the night", "moving from a cot to a bed"

Highlight category	Category description	Highlight examples
Parenting	Positive effects on mother/partner of parenting, being able to teach their child, parenting practices, being a good role model	"Being the one to teach her things", "to be a responsible father"
Parent's personal growth	Positive impacts on being a parent, their personal growth, being more patient or confident	"Given me more than I thought possible", "seeing her happy is a huge reward"
New environments and/or experiences that have a positive effect on the child	Any experiences/environments that parents believe have had a positive impact on child, e.g., daycare, overseas trips, classes, Christmas, birthday parties	"Travelling to new countries", "taking him to Kohanga"
Independence/mastered skills and tasks	Child being able to do things by themselves that had to be taught, e.g., toilet training, sleeping in own bed, riding a bike, eating by themselves	"She can put her shoes on the right feet", "getting the hang of riding his bike"
Culture/religion connectedness	Engaging in culture activities, anything to do with their culture and/or religion, e.g., learning parents' native language, praying	"His christening", "her being able to speak a little bit of Chinese to her grandparents in China"
Social development	Speech and communication development, prosocial behaviours (e.g., helping) and other social aspects (e.g., listening), playing with other children, learning to speak, interacting with others	"Learning to talk", "seeing her interact with people"
Physical development	Specific statements about gross and fine motor skill development	"When she started walking", "him being able to kick a ball"
Cognitive development	Specific statements about the child's learning experiences, e.g., picking things up quickly, exploring their world, being a good learner, smart/clever	"She is so intelligent", "watching him learn"

Highlight category	Category description	Highlight examples
Reaching milestones	Non-specific statements about development, e.g., reaching stages or milestones, normal development, baby to toddler, progress	“Reaching his milestones”, “watching them develop”

APPENDIX B

Coding Scheme Developed for Coding of Parents' Challenges

Challenge category	Category description	Challenge examples
Work-life balance	Adjusting to going back to work	"Trying to balance work and family life", "working full-time and looking after him"
Time management	Separate from work-life balance: balancing other commitments, balancing time between children, routines, maintaining relationships	"Juggling all my children", "being so busy with family life"
Environmental adjustment for parent and child	E.g. moving to a new neighbourhood, city, house, daycare	"Integrating him into daycare", "settling into this house"
Family cohesiveness	E.g. interactions between siblings, parental relationships, having another child, co-parenting consistencies	"Juggling everything with the new baby", "managing the relationships between the kids"
Family adversity	E.g. lack of support, loss of a family member, financial problems, family illness, custody issues	"Losing our support network when we moved", "coping with family ill health"
Child attributes	Independence, personality, strong-willed, stubbornness, clinginess, gender, "terrible two's", dealing with the child getting older	"Her temper and strong will", "he can be quite demanding"
Parenthood	Ensuring enough stimulation, discipline, being a good role model, general sense of safety for their children, general parenting role	"Being a first-time mum", "figuring out how to discipline her"
Solo parenting	Statements related to solo parenthood	"Doing it alone", "being a solo parent has been hard"

Challenge category	Category description	Challenge examples
Parent-child bonding	Feeling guilty about not spending enough time with child, child closer to other parent, missing out on development, attention, missing the child when working away from home	"The guilt of going back to work", "getting used to being apart"
Managing behaviour	Low-risk, e.g. screaming, yelling and tantrums; high-risk, e.g. aggression towards others, hitting themselves, property destruction	"Dealing with meltdowns and tantrums", "fighting with his sister"
Skill training	Skills beyond development that have to be taught/encouraged, e.g. toilet training, brushing teeth, transitioning away from breastfeeding and/or bottle, teaching safety, social skills	"Taking the dummy off her", "trying to toilet train him"
Food issues	E.g. fussy eaters, trying new foods, diet, specific food allergies	"Getting her to eat the right foods", "her milk allergies"
Sleep challenges with the child	Not being able to sleep through the night, general comments related to child's sleep	"Getting him to sleep through the night", "his sleeping patterns"
Child's health	General health, allergies, acute and chronic health problems	"Her tummy issues", "getting chicken pox"
Child's development (social, cognitive, physical, developmental disability)	General development, speech, language and communication development, lack of understanding, motor development, mobility, teething, developmental disability	"Him not being able to express what he wants", "his delayed motor skills", "coming to terms with his disability"
Parent's health	Mental health, physical health, sleep deprivation, stress/general health, postnatal depression, lack of energy	"Not getting enough sleep", "keeping up with him when I was ill"
Parent's personal identity	Being a stay-at-home parent, not being able to pursue goals and interests, not being able to do what they want to do, no personal time	"Not having time to myself", "doubting myself as a first-time mum"

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