

Parents under Pressure? Involvement in Childcare and the Perception of Time Pressure among Czech Mothers and Fathers

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Abstract: This study examines the link between involvement in childcare and perceived time pressures among parents with at least one child up to 12 years of age in the Czech Republic. Using data from the Czech Household Panel Survey (2015), this study combines multiple indicators of subjective time pressure with time-use diary data on time spent on different types of childcare activities. Multilevel mixed-effect logistic regression models reveal the gendered link between childcare participation and the perception of time stress and time deficits in terms of family time, personal time and sleep. Long working hours contribute to time stress and a lack of personal time for both parents, although the effect is stronger for mothers. While greater total time spent caring for children increases time stress for mothers, it has no such effect on fathers. For mothers, focused care time decreased perceived time deficits with family rather than the total time spent on childcare. Additionally, mothers are more likely to report a lack of personal time, and parents of small children report a higher lack of sleep, even when controlling for the time spent in paid work and childcare. This study contributes to the research on gender disparities in unpaid family work and the outcomes of intensive parenting in the context of the Czech Republic.

Keywords: childcare time, time use, time pressure, time stress, time deficits, intensive parenting, gender

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Introduction

Parental well-being, that is, subjective life satisfaction and emotional, mental and physical health, has attracted significant scholarly attention in recent decades (for review, see Nelson et al., 2014; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Previous research indicates that parents experience greater meaning in life, satisfaction, positive emotions and enhanced social roles compared to individuals without children (Nelson et al., 2014). Research that employs assessments of momentary well-being reveals that parents report greater happiness and meaning during time spent with their children than without them. However, parents, particularly mothers, report more fatigue and stress in the time spent with their children (Musick et al., 2016).

Furthermore, parents experience greater negative emotions, more sleep disturbances, financial problems and more strained partner relationships compared to nonparents (Nelson et al., 2014). A particularly pervasive stressor for contemporary parents is perceived time pressure, reflecting the felt difficulties with the demands and conflicts within the parenting role (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Subjective time pressure refers to the perceived difficulty of meeting competing time demands and social expectations within the constraints of finite time resources (Craig et al., 2020; Craig & Brown, 2017; Kleiner, 2014). Prior research indicates that subjective time pressure negatively affects parental well-being and mental and physical health, contributing to increased distress, anger and sleep problems (Kleiner, 2014; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2023; Roxburgh, 2006).

Time pressure has been conceptualised in two main ways: objective time pressure, which refers to actual workload, and subjective time pressure, which reflects the perceived experience of being rushed, stressed or pressed for time due to the inability to complete one's duties and responsibilities in the time available (Craig et al., 2020; Craig & Brown, 2017; Kleiner, 2014). Notably, the terms subjective time pressure and time stress are often used interchangeably in the literature (Craig et al., 2020; Kleiner, 2014).

In addition to the overall perception of subjective time pressure, previous studies have also focused on the perception of time adequacy or deficits in specific domains, for example, in time with children (Kleiner, 2014; Milkie et al., 2021; Roxburgh, 2006). Perceived time deficits reflect the gap between what individuals are doing and what they think they 'should' be doing, regardless of the objective level of time spent (Milkie et al., 2019). Distinguishing different dimensions is important because predictors of subjective time pressure can differ between domains (Kleiner, 2014; Milkie et al., 2021).

The bulk of the research indicates that the perception of time pressure varies by employment, socioeconomic status and family structure as well as between mothers and fathers (Berghammer & Milkie, 2021; Milkie et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2014). However, fewer studies have examined the relationship between the extent of participation in parenting activities and perceived time pressures. This is surprising because, in recent decades, the amount of time invested by parents in their children has increased considerably (Dotti et al., 2016; Kornrich & Fursten-

berg, 2013), and intensive parenting has become a dominant normative model of contemporary parenting (Ennis, 2014; Hays, 1996). Intensive parenting norms place significant pressure on parents, particularly mothers, requiring them to spend a great deal of time, energy and money on their children to promote their children's optimal development (Gauthier et al., 2021; Hays, 1996). These norms can often place unrealistic demands on parents and their endorsement can have negative impacts on parental psychological well-being (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017; Hays, 1996; Rizzo et al., 2013; Schiffrin et al., 2015). However, other studies suggest that child-centred parenting—with a high investment in children and prioritising the needs and well-being of children—is linked with deriving more meaning and happiness from parenthood (Ashton-James et al., 2013).

Previous research that focused on the links between intensive parenting and parental well-being predominantly originates from the North American context (Hays, 1996; Liss et al., 2013; Rizzo et al., 2013; Weinschenker & Kim, 2022); studies in other contexts are rare. However, some evidence suggests that norms of intensive parenting have also become prevalent in the European context (Gauthier et al., 2021). For example, findings from Germany reveal that parents perceive increased pressures related to time, finances and investments in children's education (Walper & Kreyenfeld, 2022). In the Czech Republic, evidence from prior, mostly qualitative studies suggests that intensive parenting norms have also become dominant, likely facilitated by strong norms of full-time maternal care for children up to 3 years of age (Marková Volejníčková, 2018). Furthermore, a qualitative study of new parents from Czechia indicates that mothers are more likely than fathers to adhere to intensive parenting norms and consequently feel more stressed and time-squeezed (Nešporová, 2019b).

A recent study based on time-use data from the Czech Household Panel Study (CHPS, 2015) confirms that mothers consistently spend more time caring for their children than fathers. Although the gender gap for children over 3 years of age decreases, particularly in time spent playing and talking with children, overall, mothers still invest more time in childcare overall (Klímová Chaloupková & Pospíšilová, 2024). However, less attention has been paid to the impact of time spent in childcare on parents' perceived time stress and feelings of time deficits.

This study aims to fill the knowledge gap regarding the impact of time spent childcare on parental well-being by studying perceived time pressures among parents in the Czech Republic. This study addresses three questions: (1) To what extent do Czech mothers and fathers experience subjective time pressures? (2) How do these perceived time pressures relate to participation in childcare? (3) Do the associations between time participation in childcare and subjective time pressure differ by gender? This study focuses on parents with at least one child up to the age of 12 years, as childcare time requirements are higher for parents of younger children (Berghammer & Milkie, 2021; Kalil et al., 2012). To answer these questions, this study uses data from the Czech Household Panel Survey (CHPS), which includes information on both perceptions of time pressure and time spent on childcare activities recorded in time-use diaries.

This study employed several indicators of subjective time pressure. Beyond general questions on feelings of time stress and lack of family time, this study focuses on feelings of lack of personal time and sleep. Adequate personal time allows individuals to engage in activities of their choice, free from work or family responsibilities, thus contributing to their relaxation and mental and physical health. The duration of sleep and other characteristics of sleep patterns are closely linked to individual well-being and quality of life (Kudrnáčová & Hamplová, 2022; Kudrnáčová & Kudrnáč, 2023).

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, this study empirically expands the assessment of parents' perceptions of time pressure in the Czech Republic. Second, by examining various aspects of subjective time pressure and parental involvement in childcare, this study sheds light on gendered disparities in the load associated with unpaid work in families. In addition, this study contributes to the research on the outcomes of intensive parenting in the context of the Czech Republic.

Theoretical background

Links among intensive parenting norms, parenting practices and mental health

The notion that parenting is fulfilling, but also emotionally and physically tiring, is closely associated with the concept of intensive parenting (Hays, 1996; Liss et al., 2013). Following Hays's concept of intensive motherhood (1996), intensive parenting norms have been conceptualised by several interrelated dimensions. However, in addition to child-centredness and focus on the stimulation of a child's development, the previous conceptualisations also distinguished other dimensions. In particular, they differ in that they consider the primary responsibility of mothers for childcare to be the key dimension of intensive parenting norms (Gauthier et al., 2021; Liss et al., 2013). Gauthier et al. (2021) distinguished four dimensions of intensive parenting norms: child-centredness, focus on stimulating a child's development, parental responsibility to do what is best for their children and pressure to follow expert advice (Gauthier et al., 2021). According to the Intensive Parenting Attitudes Questionnaire (IPAQ) proposed by Liss et al. (2013), intensive parenting norms are characterised by child-centredness, efforts to stimulate a child's development, an emphasis that childcare is mothers' primary responsibility and that parenting is fulfilling and challenging.

Prior research from the American context suggests that mothers with preschool children who endorse more intensive parenting norms experience higher levels of stress, exhaustion, frustration and anxiety, along with lower life satisfaction (Liss et al., 2013; Rizzo et al., 2013). Studies also indicate that increased parental investment could have negative outcomes on parental well-being (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017; Weinshenker & Kim, 2022). Rather than the total time parents spend on childcare, studies have increasingly concentrated on the specific quality of time spent with children (such as 'quality time' or exclusive time with

children) or on engagement in specific activities with children that have been associated with an enhancement of child development and engendering close parent-child relations, such as reading, conversing with children, helping with homework, play and leisure activities, shared mealtimes or involving the child in extracurricular activities (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017; Klímová Chaloupková & Pospíšilová, 2024; Kutrovátz & Nikolett, 2022; Lankes, 2022; Wray et al., 2021; Yerkes et al., 2019).

For instance, Gunderson and Barrett (2017) found that American mothers who provided more intensive emotional support to their children reported increased depressive symptoms, poorer self-rated mental health and increased negative affect. However, another intensive mothering indicator, putting more thought and effort into the relationship with children, was found to align with better mental health (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017). In contrast, Lankes (2022) revealed that American mothers who spent more engaged time playing and reading with their children were less likely to view parenting as tiring than those with less time involvement. This finding supports the notion that a perceived investment deficit might cause mothers to feel time-stressed rather than higher time involvement (Milkie et al., 2019). Notably, prior findings indicate that more time devoted to children might not be sufficient to alleviate the feeling of time strain, but the quality of time spent with children is important. In particular, prior research suggests that focused time with children strongly reduces feelings of spending too little time with children (Milkie et al., 2004).

Therefore, this study assessed three different measures of participation in childcare to examine whether these measures have a different effect on the parents' perception of time pressure: total time spent in childcare, time spent in interactive care (play, talking with children, etc.) and time spent in focused care when parents are involved in childcare without any ongoing parallel activities.

In summary, we formulated the following two contrasting hypotheses:

- H1: According to the hypothesis of perceived time deficits, less time spent on childcare activities is associated with feelings of stress and time deficits in the family. No clear association is expected between time spent on childcare activities and feelings of a lack of personal time and sleep.

- H2: According to the detrimental hypothesis of intensive parenting, high involvement in childcare is expected to increase feelings of stress and lack of personal time and sleep. No clear association is expected between the time spent on childcare activities and the feeling of a lack of time for the family. Despite their greater involvement, parents who strongly endorse intensive parenting norms may still perceive a gap between their ideal and actual participation and may feel a lack of family time.

Gender differences in the perception of time deficits

The divergent impact of parental involvement with children on perceived time pressure might be explained by gendered expectations and gendered patterns of participation in childcare activities. However, previous research has provided unclear evidence on the extent to which intensive parenting norms relate to both parents, or predominantly to mothers. Based on data from the USA, Ishizuka (2019) found that social norms related to child-centred, time-intensive parenting apply to both parents (Ishizuka, 2019). On the contrary, other studies have suggested that these expectations are experienced less intensively by fathers than by mothers, who see themselves as more responsible for their children's development (Hays, 1996; Shirani et al., 2012). Regarding gender, Gauthier et al. (2021) found a difference only in the subscale related to parental responsibility, on which women scored higher (Gauthier et al., 2021); however, men and women do not vary in their support of child-centredness, their focus on child's development and expert guidance.

If mothers feel that they are more responsible for childcare, they may perceive more time deficits related to childcare participation compared to fathers, controlling for other factors, such as working hours. Therefore, mothers' time involvement in childcare may be related to different perceived time pressures compared to those of fathers. On the contrary, fathers may feel more responsible for providing for their families economically and may face higher expectations of working long hours from their employers compared to mothers, which might lead to additional time pressures.

In the Czech context, regardless of gradual changes, rather conservative social norms regarding the division of childcare and patterns of involvement in childcare and housework prevail. During the initial years after childbirth, the norm of full-time motherhood and breadwinner fatherhood is predominant; mothers are primarily responsible for childcare and housework (Hašková et al., 2022; Nešporová, 2019a; Šťastná, 2023). Comparative research on gender beliefs reveals that, in the Czech Republic as well as in other Central and Eastern European countries, multidimensional gender beliefs prevail regarding egalitarian essentialism (familialism). These beliefs combine support for joint participation in paid work with a belief in gendered traits when it comes to caring for children and housework (Begall et al., 2023; Grunow et al., 2018).

The gendered childcare model is supported by the Czech family policy, which offers extended periods of childcare leave, typically until the child is 3 years old. However, it provides limited support for shared childcare responsibilities between parents and lacks childcare services for children up to 3 years (Hašková & Dudová, 2017). This results in a high divergence in women's employment rates based on the age of their child in the Czech Republic: it is very low among mothers with children under 3 years of age (20%), about average among mothers with children aged 3–5 years (75%), and higher than the European average for mothers with school-aged children (82%). If employed, most mothers

work full-time, while the proportion of part-time employment among mothers is low in the Czech Republic (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2024).

In addition to differences in the time spent caring for the children, mothers and fathers also differed in their relative task allocation. Despite increasing father participation in childcare, mothers still spend more overall time in childcare and are more likely to perform multitasking alongside childcare. They also take on a greater share of physical childcare tasks (such as feeding and bathing). In contrast, fathers spend a higher proportion of their childcare time on interactive activities (playing, reading, talking with children etc.) and engaging in leisure and social activities than in physical care (Craig et al., 2014; Monna & Gauthier, 2008; Negraia et al., 2018). Interactive childcare activities may have a more optional character and be less likely to be associated with rigid timetables compared to physical care activities (Craig et al., 2014; Monna & Gauthier, 2008; Negraia et al., 2018).

Therefore, participation in childcare might be associated with different pressures for men and women. For example, prior research shows that for women, increased time spent on housework is associated with greater stress compared to men (Milkie et al., 2021). Previous findings also indicate that high involvement in their children's extracurricular activities (such as being a coach and helping organise activities) was more stressful for mothers than for fathers (Weinshenker & Kim, 2022). The authors explicate these differences by stating that fathers may tend to participate in the enjoyable aspects (e.g. coaching) rather than in the tedious elements (e.g. managing the logistics of the child's participation). On the contrary, mothers, particularly those who adhere to intensive parenting norms, may feel more pressured to participate in these activities compared to fathers (Weinshenker & Kim, 2022). Additionally, women are also more involved in mental labour related to the coordination of childcare and housework, such as anticipating needs, planning and monitoring, which could further contribute to feelings of stress (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023).

Previous research has revealed that gender differences in the perception of time deficits with children are related to work hours. Although men are more likely to report that they feel that they do not devote sufficient time to their children compared to women, after controlling for working status, the difference disappeared or reversed (Milkie et al., 2004; Walper & Kreyenfeld, 2022). Therefore, despite the longer time spent with children, mothers may feel more time deficits related to the quality time spent with children compared to fathers.

To sum up, the *gendered pressure hypothesis* (H3) expects that mothers and fathers experience time pressures related to involvement in childcare in different ways. Furthermore, we expect that long working hours are more strongly associated with time stress for mothers, even if their time spent with their children is controlled.

Additional predictors of subjective pressure among parents

Previous studies have shown that work and family characteristics shape parents' perceptions of time deficits (Berghammer & Milkie, 2021; Milkie et al., 2004; Walper & Kreyenfeld, 2022). Apart from working hours, inflexible working schedules and a low sense of control at work contribute to feeling time strain (Berghammer & Milkie, 2021). Although the findings from Germany show no differences in time pressures between parents of different socioeconomic backgrounds, the time pressures reported by parents varied substantially by family form. Single mothers and nonresident fathers expressed higher concerns that they are unable to spend sufficient time with their children compared to coupled parents (Walper & Kreyenfeld, 2022).

Data

This study draws on data from time-use diaries from the CHPS (Lyons et al., 2015a, 2015b), a nationally representative longitudinal survey that began in 2015, using a two-stage stratified probability sampling method (Kudrnáčová, 2020a). Since this study does not focus on longitudinal trends within individuals in childcare involvement but on cross-sectional associations between childcare time and time pressure, it uses time-use diary data from Wave 1 collected in 2015, which provides the largest sample size. Although merging multiple waves can provide a larger dataset and enhance statistical power, it introduces methodological complexities and potential biases that may not align with the research question. For our analyses, we used data from 5,989 adults who completed both the time-use diary and an individual self-completion questionnaire (*indi_papi*), which includes questions on the perception of time pressure (Kudrnáčová, 2020a, p. 77). Our analytical sample was confined to parents living with at least one child under the age of 12, yielding 1,784 individuals from 1,121 households. If a respondent lived with a partner, we included only those with partners of different sexes. The age limit of 12 years for children was chosen to focus on parents of children who require considerable routine parental involvement. For descriptive statistics, see Table 3. The final models were estimated for 1,478 respondents due to missing data variables for key independent variables (mostly working hours). Descriptive analyses used weights (*Wd_indi_papi_diary*), correcting for basic sociodemographic characteristics (sex, age, education and region of residence) and the uniform distribution of the day of the week (Kudrnáčová, 2020b).

Indicators of perceived time pressure

I used four binary measures of subjective time pressure: (1) feeling stressed for time, (2) feeling a lack of sleep, (3) feeling a lack of personal time, and (4) feeling a lack of family time. These measures are derived from responses to the following

questions: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1) I often feel stressed and under time pressure, (2) I regularly get enough sleep, (3) I would like to have more time for myself, and (4) I would like to have more time for my family. The original response scales ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). For further analysis, responses were recoded into binary variables: responses *strongly agree* and *agree* were coded as 1 and other responses were coded as 0. For the feeling of lack of sleep, the scale was reversed. Responses of *strongly disagree* or *disagree* to 'regularly getting enough sleep' were coded as 1, and all other responses as 0.

Time spent on childcare

Information on time spent on childcare was derived from time-use diaries that documented activities on the previous day in 30-minute slots and did not distinguish between main and other activities (for details, see Kudrnáčová, 2020b). This study considered three indicators of involvement in childcare activities: (1) total time spent with childcare, (2) time spent with interactive childcare and (3) focused childcare time. Total childcare time captures the total number of minutes parents spent on basic childcare (including physical care, monitoring the child etc.) and interactive care (e.g. playing and talking with children, reading with them, helping them with homework and taking them for extracurricular activities) during a diary day. Similar to the previous study using CHPS data (Klímová Chaloupková & Pospíšilová, 2024), focused care is defined as the time when parents pay undivided attention to childcare (i.e. there is no report of any parallel activities to basic or interactive childcare). Interactive and focused childcare are considered to reflect engagement in child-centred parenting and parental focus on child development. Note that total childcare time is strongly correlated with interactive childcare time ($r = 0.68$), while its correlation with focused childcare time ($r = 0.47$) is moderate. The correlation between interactive and focused care was lower ($r = 0.28$). To address these associations, separate models were estimated: One set included total time spent on childcare and another set focused on interactive and focused childcare.

Other covariates

Work hours were derived from responses to a question about weekly working hours. Those who were not employed were coded as having zero working hours. Work hours were moderately correlated with total childcare time ($r = -0.48$) and interactive care time ($r = -0.41$), and weakly correlated with focused care time ($r = -0.28$). Furthermore, the models included individual and family characteristics that were previously identified as being associated with childcare involvement and the perception of time pressure. These include parental gender, educational attainment (low, secondary school with a high school diploma and high)

and age. The study focuses on parents with at least one child under 12, but they may also have other older children. To account for family size, the total number of children up to 18 years of age living in the household was classified as reference categories 1, 2, and 3+. I also controlled for partnership status (single parent or partnered). In addition, three age groups were distinguished by the age of the youngest child: ages 0–3, 4–6, and 7–12. To control for the family's economic situation, I included information on the receipt of childcare child allowances for which low-income families are eligible. Specifically, in 2015, families eligible for these allowances had an average monthly net income that did not exceed 2.4 times the family's minimum subsistence level (Turková, 2019). Additionally, I also controlled for diary day (weekday vs. weekend or holiday).¹ All analyses were estimated using STATA.

Analytical strategy

As the time pressure variables were dichotomous, I employed binary logistic regression. To account for the interdependence between observations from the same household, a multilevel mixed-effects approach was adopted, treating the respondents as nested within the household (melogit in STATA). A total of four models were estimated for each of the four dependent variables. In the first step (a), two separate models were estimated for each dependent variable. One model used the total time spent caring for the children, while the other focused on the time spent in interactive and focused care. Both included work hours and all other covariates. In the second step (b), these models were extended by including interactions between gender, participation in childcare and work hours to assess whether gender moderates the relationship between time participation and perceived time pressure.

Results

Descriptive results

The descriptive results reported in Table 1 indicate that men are more likely to perceive time stress and a lack of family time compared to women. In general, almost 50% of fathers and 44% of mothers with at least one child up to 12 years of age feel time stress. An even higher proportion of parents, 79% of fathers and 59% of mothers, expressed that they lack time for their family. On the contrary, a higher proportion of mothers reported a lack of personal time (70%) compared

¹ To assess the robustness of the findings, I reran the models only for individuals responding on weekdays. These additional analyses confirmed that the results remained consistent with those from the full dataset.

Table 1. Perception of time pressure among mothers and fathers and according to the age of the youngest child (%)

	Time stress	Lack of family time	Lack of personal time	Lack of sleep
Fathers				
Total	49.9	78.8	53.7	33.6
Age of the youngest child (years)				
0–3	51.5	80.5	50.1	36.5
4–7	49.7	80.9	61.2	35.9
7–12	47.7	74.9	53.4	27.7
Mothers				
Total	44.0	58.9	70.4	34.5
Age of the youngest child (years)				
0–3	36.9	42.9	69.0	40.6
4–7	50.7	69.0	74.4	28.9
7–12	48.6	72.8	69.6	30.4

Source: CHPS (2015). Data are weighted. $N = 1,784$.

to fathers (54%). Both genders reported similar perceptions about lack of sleep (approximately 34%).

Furthermore, the perception of stress over time varies according to the age of the children. Mothers experience the lowest levels of time stress for family time when their children are aged 0–3 years, while mothers with preschool- and school-aged children experience increased stress, presumably due to the combined demands of work and childcare. On the contrary, among fathers, the perception of stress over time, lack of personal time and lack of sleep remains more consistent, regardless of the child's age.

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics for the main explanatory variables indicating time spent in engaged caregiving in minutes per day. The findings show that, on average, mothers spend approximately 7 hours a day with their children, while men spend less than 3 hours (170 minutes). The gender gap in interactive care and focused care time is lower compared to total childcare time. While providing childcare, fathers are more likely to engage in interactive care than mothers. However, the proportion of focused time relative to total time is approximately the same for both mothers and fathers. Although the gender gap decreases with the age of the child, it remains substantial among the parents of school-aged children. On average, mothers with school-aged children devote 4 hours to childcare, while fathers devote approximately 1.5 hours.

Table 2. The amount of time devoted to childcare activities by gender and age of child (in minutes per day)

	Fathers		Mothers	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Total childcare time	170.2	220.4	442.4	391.7
Interactive care time	98.7	163.2	199.5	237.9
Focused care time	52.9	85.7	117.3	136.0
Child aged 0–3				
Total childcare time	224.9	259.3	634.9	398.0
Interactive care time	128.0	198.3	277.3	278.4
Focused care time	70.2	102.1	174.8	153.1
Child aged 4–6				
Total childcare time	165.5	210.5	360.5	338.0
Interactive care time	97.2	149.3	169.4	195.6
Focused care time	49.0	73.0	95.2	118.1
Child aged 7–12				
Total childcare time	93.9	120.7	248.6	290.0
Interactive care time	56.8	91.9	119.3	165.3
Focused care time	30.3	58.4	57.7	84.4

Source: CHPS (2015). Data are weighted. *N* (not weighted) = 1,784.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for all the explanatory variables used in the analyses. The proportion of mothers in the sample is slightly higher (54.4%) than that of fathers. The average age of the parents is 37 years. Compared to men, women are more likely to be single parents and to not be working because they stay on parental leave. In addition, fathers spend more time in paid work compared to mothers (note that those not employed were coded as 0 hours). If we consider only those who are employed, fathers work 44 hours per week on average, while mothers work 38 hours per week on average. There is a higher proportion of individuals with low education among fathers compared to mothers.

Multivariate results

The multilevel logistic regression models examined whether the feeling of time pressure was associated with time spent in childcare and paid work and whether these associations differed by gender. Full estimates from the models and the

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the analytical sample (N = 1,784)

	Fathers		Mothers		Total	N (not weighted)
	M/%	SD	M/%	SD	M/%	
Gender	45.6		54.4		100.0	1,784
Age of the youngest child (years)						1,784
0–3	46.1		43.6		44.7	
4–7	22.4		22.6		22.5	
7–12	31.6		33.8		32.8	
Number of children						1,784
1	38.0		39.3		38.7	
2	50.2		51.6		50.4	
3+	11.8		10.1		10.9	
With partner	94.0		86.0		91.5	1,784
Education						1,784
Low	38.2		32.4		35.0	
Secondary	40.0		40.3		40.2	
High	21.8		27.3		24.8	
Employed	94.0		53.7		72.1	1,784
Work hours (weekly)	42.6	13.9	21.7	20.3	31.2	1,541
Age	38.8	7.1	36.0	6.5	37.3	1,784
Weekend diary	32.7		35.0		34.0	1,713
Child allowance	16.4		21.7		19.3	1,784

Source: CHPS (2015). Data are weighted. The table presents proportions in percentages or means and standard deviations.

statistics of model fit are provided in Tables A1–A4 in the Appendix. To ease the interpretation of the findings, Table 4 presents the results as average marginal effects (AMEs) for the main predictors, indicating a change in the probability of feeling time pressure with a one-unit change in the explanatory variable.

Time stress

As the comparison of model statistics using the likelihood ratio test indicated that accounting for interactions between gender and total childcare time (M1b)

Table 4. Average marginal effects of key predictors on the perception of time pressure

	Time stress	Lack of family time	Lack of personal time	Lack of sleep
	M1b	M3b	M5a	M7a
Woman	0.016	-0.072**	0.199***	-0.011
Child aged 4–6 years	0.022	0.039	0.020	-0.074**
Child aged 7–12 years	-0.007	0.010	-0.034	-0.087**
2 children	0.082**	-0.002	0.070**	0.043
3+ children	0.040	0.046	0.082**	0.094**
Secondary education	0.057*	-0.054*	0.053	0.039
Higher education	0.032	-0.098**	0.132**	0.027
With partner	-0.083	-0.007	0.043	-0.069
Total childcare time (min)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001**
Work hours per week	0.003***	0.006***	0.002***	<0.000
	M2a	M4b	M6a	M8a
Interactive care time (min)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Focused care time (min)	<0.001	-0.0001	<0.001	<0.001

Note: The full models are in Tables A1–A4 in the Appendix. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Reference categories: men, child aged 0–3 years, one child, low education and single parent.

improved the model fit compared to the baseline model (M1a) (see Table A1 in the Appendix), Table 4 presents the AME estimates of the model with gender interactions (M1b). Additionally, Table 5 presents the average marginal effects of time involved in childcare and paid work separately for mothers and fathers. However, no improvement was observed when considering interactions with gender and participation in focused and interactive care time (M2b).

The results indicate that, when controlling for working hours and total time spent on childcare, there are no differences between genders in the perception of time stress. Regarding sociodemographic characteristics, the findings revealed that parents of two children are 8% more likely to perceive time stress than those with one child. On average, living with a partner decreases the likelihood of perceiving time stress by 8% compared to being a solo parent. Having a medium level of education is associated with higher levels of time stress (AME = 0.06) compared to having a low level of education. The age of the children does not affect the perception of time stress when controlling for time spent on childcare.

The findings confirm that perception of time stress is associated with higher working hours, with an increase of 0.3% for each additional working hour a week, on average. This means that, for instance, parents working 20 hours a week have

Table 5. Average marginal effects of time involvement in childcare and paid work on perception of lack of family time and time stress by gender

		Time stress		Lack of family time	
		dy/dx	p	dy/dx	p
Model		M1b		M3b	
Working hours	Men	0.0040	0.001	0.0029	0.032
	Woman	0.0028	0.005	0.0072	0.000
Total childcare time (min)s	Men	-0.0002	0.031	<0.0001	0.653
	Woman	0.0001	0.057	<0.0001	0.340
Model		M2b		M4b	
Focused care time (min)	Men	<0.0001	0.941	0.0002	0.418
	Woman	-0.0002	0.126	-0.0003	0.004
Interactive care time (min)	Men	-0.0002	0.090	<0.0001	0.802
	Woman	0.0001	0.190	<0.0001	0.554

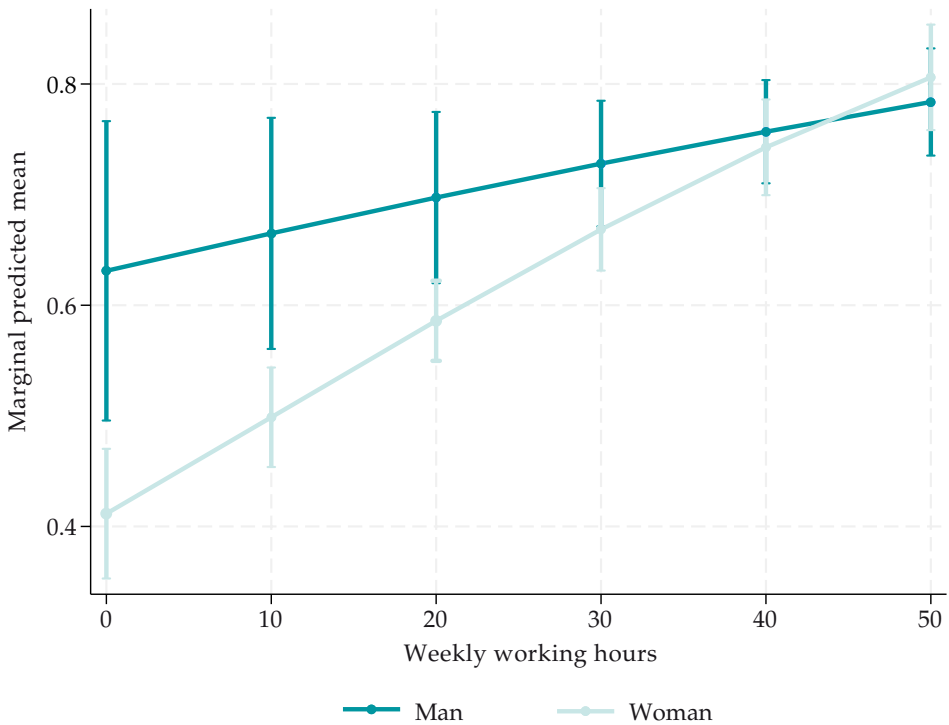
Note: The full models are in Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix.

a 6% higher likelihood of feeling time stress, and those working 40 hours a week have a 12% higher likelihood than those not in paid work.

The findings indicate that the association between total time spent in childcare and time stress differs for mothers and fathers. As the results in Table 5 suggest, for mothers, more time spent with children increases the perception of time stress: each additional hour by approximately 0.6% (0.01×60). On the contrary, fathers who spent more time with children reported less stress, with each additional 60 minutes decreasing it by approximately 1.2% (-0.02×60). Therefore, among women, the results confirm the expectation that increased involvement in childcare is associated with more stress (detrimental intensive parenting hypothesis). In contrast, for fathers, the findings align with the perceived time deficits hypothesis, suggesting that spending more time with children is associated with reduced feelings of stress. The same applies to participation in interactive care. In contrast, involvement in focused care does not affect feelings of stress, presumably because it is less time-consuming.

Lack of family time

In the case of feeling a lack of family time, the model statistics also confirmed that models with gender interactions (M3b and M4b) fit the data better than baseline models (M3a and M4a) (see Table A2 in the Appendix), indicating that the effects of time involvement vary by gender. As shown in Table 4, mothers are 7% less

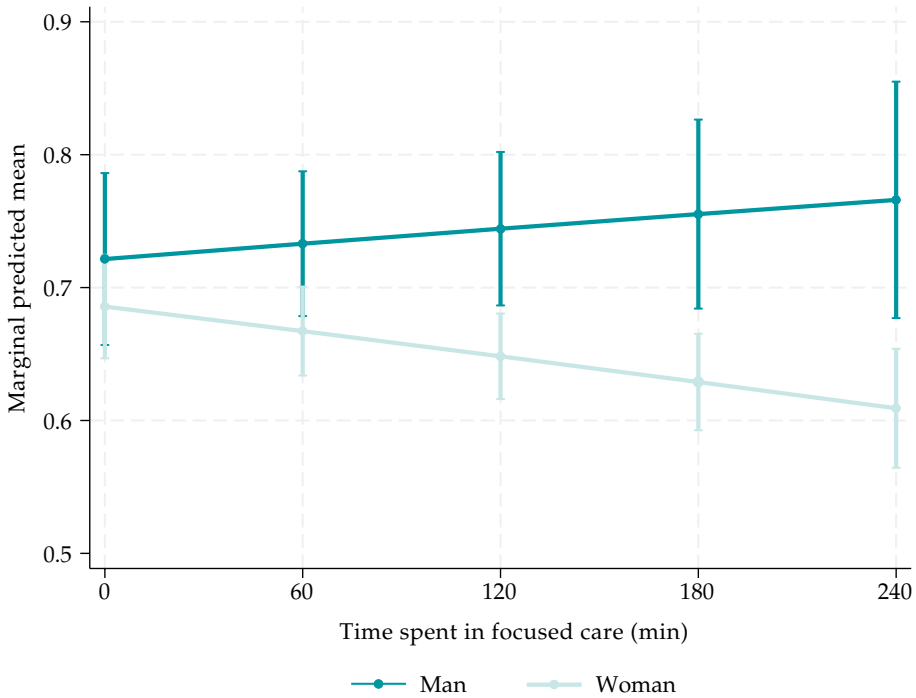
Figure 1. Predicted values of feeling a lack of family time by working hours for mothers and fathers

Notes: Estimated from model M3b.

likely to report a lack of family time compared to fathers. The results in Table 4 confirm that longer working hours are associated with a perception of lack of family time, with each additional working hour increasing this likelihood by 0.6% on average. However, this effect is stronger for mothers: Each additional work hour raises this likelihood by 0.7% for mothers but by 0.3% for fathers (Table 5). For instance, mothers working 20 hours per week are 14% more likely to report a lack of family time, and those working 50 hours a week are 35% more likely to report a lack of family time than those not in paid work. For fathers, these likelihoods are about 6% and 15%, respectively. To visualise these associations, Figure 1 shows the predicted values of perception of lack of family time in the observed range (0–90th percentiles) of working hours for mothers and fathers.

Surprisingly, the perception of lack of family time is not negatively associated with total childcare time or interactive care time but only with focused care, particularly among mothers. The AMEs indicated that, for mothers, 30 min-

Figure 2. Predicted values of feeling a lack of family time for time spent in focused care by gender



Note: Estimated from model M4b (see Table A2 in the Appendix).

utes of focused care reduced their likelihood of perceived lack of family time (-0.03×30) by 0.9%. For fathers, spending more time in focused care did not affect the perception of a lack of family time (Figure 3).

Lack of personal time

For the perception of lack of personal time, models with gender interactions did not provide a better fit, indicating any gender differences in the effects of time participation in childcare and paid work. Therefore, the findings from the baseline models (M5a and M6a) were interpreted (see Table A3 in the Appendix). The findings suggest that women are 20% more likely to perceive a lack of time for themselves compared to men, even when controlling for time spent on paid work and childcare. Highly educated parents are 13% more likely to report a lack of

personal time compared to those with low education. Parents with two children are 7% more likely to perceive a personal time deficit compared to parents with one child, and those with three or more children are 8% more likely to. No differences were observed for partnership status and the age of the youngest child.

Working hours were associated with a greater perception of lack of personal time: Each additional work hour increased this likelihood by 0.2%. For example, individuals working 50 hours a week have a 6% higher probability of perceiving a lack of personal time compared to those working 20 hours a week. However, no association was found between the perception of lack of personal time and total childcare time, nor with interactive or focused care time.

Lack of sleep

For the perception of lack of sleep, the AMEs in Table 4 were estimated from the baseline models (M7a and M8a), as including gender interactions did not improve the model fits (see Table A4 in the Appendix). The findings show that the most important predictors of lack of sleep are age and number of children. Parents of preschool-aged children are 7% less likely, and parents of school-aged children are 9% less likely to report a lack of sleep compared to parents with children under the age of 3, even if time spent on childcare is controlled. Furthermore, parents with multiple children perceived a greater lack of sleep compared to parents with only one child. No differences were observed according to gender, education or partnership status. The findings also suggest that a higher total childcare time is associated with a lack of sleep, but the effect is low (AME less than 0.1%). Additionally, no association was observed between interactive care and focused care time or working hours and perceived sleep deficits. Note that the amount of childcare time during a weekend has a weaker effect on the perception of lacking sleep compared to the time spent on weekdays (see Table A4 in the Appendix).

Discussion and conclusion

This study examined the relationship between involvement in childcare and perceived time pressure among Czech parents with at least one child up to the age of 12. Specifically, it explored how participation in childcare activities was related to feelings of time stress, lack of time for family, personal time and sleep, as well as whether this relationship differed for mothers compared to fathers. Two contrasting hypotheses were formulated. The first hypothesis posited that due to perceived time deficits, spending less time in childcare would be associated with feelings of time stress and time deficits for the family. In contrast, the second hypothesis proposed that intensive involvement in childcare would be associated with increased feelings of stress and a lack of personal time and sleep. Beyond the total time spent on childcare, I examined two indicators of intensive child-centred

parenting: participation in interactive childcare and focused care time, when parents devote full attention to children without engaging in any parallel activities.

The findings show that overall perceptions of feelings of time stress do not differ by gender when considering childcare time and work hours. However, mothers and fathers perceive time deficits differently in different domains. Mothers are more likely than fathers to report a lack of personal time but less likely to report a lack of family time when participation in childcare and paid work is controlled. Additionally, feelings of lack of sleep do not vary by gender but are strongly associated with the child's age.

The findings highlight gendered differences in the link between time participation in childcare, paid work and feelings of time pressure. Both mothers and fathers experience time stress and a lack of time for family and personal time due to long working hours. Nevertheless, the effect of working hours on feelings of a lack of family time is stronger for mothers.

Gender differences also emerge in the relationship between the time spent on childcare and feelings of time stress. For mothers, more time spent with their children increases their perception of time stress, supporting the expectation that more intensive involvement in childcare is associated with more stress (detrimental intensive parenting hypothesis). This finding is consistent with prior studies (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017; Rizzo et al., 2013; Weinshenker & Kim, 2022).

In contrast, fathers who spent more time in childcare reported lower stress levels, supporting the perceived time deficits hypothesis. These gender differences reflect societal expectations that assign mothers primary responsibility for childcare and domestic tasks. Fathers may view increased involvement in childcare as a choice, leading to lower stress levels compared to mothers. Additionally, mothers may engage in additional cognitive and emotional labour related to childcare, which might increase their stress levels (Monna et al., 2008; Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023).

Furthermore, our findings concur with findings from the US context (Lankes, 2022; Milkie et al., 2004) that the quality of time spent with children, rather than the total time, alleviates mothers' feelings of lacking family time. Mothers who spend more focused care time are less likely to perceive a lack of family time. Although the time spent caring for children is undoubtedly part of family time, mothers may still feel that they are not spending enough quality time with their families, regardless of the total amount of childcare time. Despite a higher total involvement in childcare, mothers often multitask, particularly with housework, which might contribute to their perception of deficits in the time devoted to children.

In contrast, fathers' perceptions of insufficient family time are driven solely by their working hours rather than by their involvement in focused care or total childcare time. This suggests that fathers may experience less pressure to be constantly engaged in caregiving or may have different expectations of what constitutes sufficient family time. Additionally, unlike mothers, fathers may not multitask housework in the same way that mothers do during childcare; thus,

their perception of time spent with children may differ. Nevertheless, family time may not only involve individual time spent on childcare, but also include overall time spent with children, a partner and other relatives or shared time spent by both parents and children together.

In contrast to our expectations, the perception of lacking personal time was associated only with working hours and not with time spent on childcare. Mothers are more likely to report feelings that they do not have enough time for themselves compared to fathers, even when the time devoted to paid work and childcare is controlled. This disparity can be attributed to the unequal distribution of housework, which is still predominantly done by women (Hamplová et al., 2019; Klímová Chaloupková, 2018). Housework might add to the overall burden and reduce the time available for personal activities, thereby contributing to mothers' perceptions of a lack of personal time. In addition, the extent to which parents share childcare responsibilities might affect the amount of personal time they have.

The findings confirm that family structure and socioeconomic status influence perceived time pressure. Parents with two or more children are more likely to report time stress and lack of personal time and sleep compared to parents with only one child, even when the time devoted to childcare is controlled. Regarding the status of the partnership, differences were observed only in time stress, with coupled parents less likely to feel stressed about time than solo parents. Higher-educated parents reported a greater lack of personal time but were less likely to report feeling a lack of time for family than those with low education. In contrast, parents with a secondary education expressed the highest feeling of time stress. Higher-educated individuals are more likely to work in jobs with flexible work conditions, which might help them balance work and family responsibilities. Furthermore, these disparities may reflect a higher endorsement of intensive parenting norms among parents with higher education, who might prioritise family time over personal time. However, a contrasting explanation is that more educated parents place more emphasis on the need for personal time.

The present findings provide a nuanced understanding of how time involvement in childcare impacts parental perceptions of time pressures and highlight the differing experiences of mothers and fathers. In line with prior literature, our findings confirm that it is important to not only comprehend total childcare time but also to distinguish between the different types of activities with children (Kutrovátz & Nikolett, 2022; Milkie et al., 2015). More research is needed to fully understand the intersection between behaviour and attitudes, which can be linked in a complex manner. Unfortunately, the data used did not include direct questions on attitudes towards intensive parenting norms. Moreover, the data used were single daytime use data and thus did not allow us to examine weekly patterns in childcare participation. Future research could focus not only on childcare activities but also on the cognitive and emotional labour associated with childrearing and how these relate to the parental experience of time pressure. Furthermore, further research should focus on using couple data on the associ-

ation between feelings of time stress and partner participation in paid work and childcare. Despite these limitations, our study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of parental involvement in childcare and its impact on perceived time stress.

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Appendix

Table A1. Estimates from models for feeling time stress

	M1a	M1b	M2a	M2b
Women	-0.142 (0.146)	-0.154 (0.355)	-0.088 (0.144)	0.211 (0.353)
Total time spent on childcare	0.000 (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)		
Working hours	0.013*** (0.004)	0.019*** (0.007)	0.011*** (0.004)	0.020*** (0.007)
Child aged 4–6	0.077 (0.169)	0.098 (0.174)	0.034 (0.170)	0.057 (0.174)
Child aged 7–12	-0.035 (0.175)	-0.033 (0.181)	-0.115 (0.176)	-0.085 (0.181)
Two children	0.356*** (0.130)	0.374*** (0.132)	0.362*** (0.130)	0.377*** (0.133)
Three or more children	0.180 (0.201)	0.181 (0.205)	0.186 (0.202)	0.180 (0.205)
Secondary education	0.273* (0.144)	0.259* (0.146)	0.267* (0.144)	0.249* (0.146)
Higher education	0.153 (0.155)	0.146 (0.158)	0.166 (0.156)	0.156 (0.158)
With partner	-0.346* (0.205)	-0.375* (0.209)	-0.357* (0.207)	-0.371* (0.209)
Age	0.007 (0.011)	0.007 (0.011)	0.007 (0.011)	0.007 (0.011)
Weekends, holiday	-0.158 (0.124)	-0.103 (0.128)	-0.146 (0.125)	-0.105 (0.127)
Child allowance	0.122 (0.161)	0.108 (0.164)	0.115 (0.161)	0.104 (0.164)
Women #total childcare time		0.001*** (0.001)		
Women # work hours		-0.007 (0.008)		-0.011 (0.008)
Interactive care			0.000 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.001)
Focused care			-0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
Women # interactive care				0.002** (0.001)
Woman # focused care				-0.001 (0.001)
Constant	-0.807* (0.468)	-0.874 (0.535)	-0.631 (0.471)	-0.914* (0.538)
AIC	2,028.461	2,023.398	2,029.672	2,028.893
BIC	2,107.937	2,113.471	2,114.447	2,129.563
LR chi ²		9.06		6.78
		p = 0.0108		p = 0.0793

Source: CHPS (2015).

Notes: $N = 1,478$. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are given in parentheses. Reference categories: men, children aged 0–3 years, one child, low education, single parent, weekday time-use diary and not receiving child allowances.

Table A2. Estimates from models for feeling a lack of time for family

	M3a	M3b	M4a	M4b
Women	-0.204 (0.169)	-1.039*** (0.397)	-0.200 (0.168)	-0.674* (0.401)
Total time spent on childcare	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.001)		
Working hours	0.034*** (0.005)	0.017** (0.008)	0.033*** (0.005)	0.018** (0.008)
Child aged 4–6 years	0.287 (0.197)	0.220 (0.200)	0.265 (0.200)	0.200 (0.205)
Child aged 7–12 years	0.157 (0.203)	0.057 (0.208)	0.103 (0.206)	0.026 (0.213)
Two children	-0.007 (0.146)	-0.012 (0.147)	0.006 (0.148)	-0.009 (0.151)
Three or more children	0.271 (0.233)	0.267 (0.236)	0.292 (0.236)	0.281 (0.241)
Secondary	-0.330** (0.168)	-0.314* (0.169)	-0.332** (0.169)	-0.313* (0.172)
High education	-0.555*** (0.181)	-0.555*** (0.182)	-0.532*** (0.183)	-0.537*** (0.186)
With partner	-0.045 (0.230)	-0.038 (0.233)	-0.091 (0.234)	-0.080 (0.239)
Age	-0.009 (0.012)	-0.008 (0.012)	-0.008 (0.012)	-0.009 (0.013)
Weekend, holiday	-0.205 (0.140)	-0.238* (0.143)	-0.213 (0.142)	-0.268* (0.146)
Child allowance	0.216 (0.185)	0.217 (0.187)	0.202 (0.188)	0.207 (0.191)
Women # total childcare time		0.000 (0.001)		
Women # work hours		0.024** (0.009)		0.020** (0.009)
Interactive care time			-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Focused care			-0.001** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Women # interactive care				-0.000 (0.001)
Women # focused care				-0.003* (0.002)
Constant	0.597 (0.533)	1.283** (0.610)	0.726 (0.544)	1.218* (0.625)
AIC	1,744.874	1,741.999	1,742.212	1,736.887
BIC	1,824.351	1,832.072	1,826.987	1,837.557
LR chi ²		6.88		11.33
		p = 0.0321		p = 0.0101

Source: CHPS (2015).

Notes: $N = 1,478$. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are given in parentheses. Reference categories: men, children aged 0–3 years, one child, low education, single parent, weekday time-use diary and not receiving child allowances.

Table A3. Estimates from models for feeling a lack of personal time

	M5a	M5b	M6a	M6b
Women	1.017*** (0.174)	1.392*** (0.380)	1.013*** (0.171)	1.381*** (0.377)
Total time spent on childcare	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)		
Working hours	0.008** (0.004)	0.014** (0.007)	0.009** (0.004)	0.014** (0.007)
Child aged 4–6 years	0.109 (0.193)	0.133 (0.195)	0.124 (0.193)	0.150 (0.195)
Child aged 7–12 years	−0.175 (0.196)	−0.133 (0.199)	−0.147 (0.196)	−0.103 (0.200)
Two children	0.365** (0.145)	0.365** (0.146)	0.361** (0.145)	0.360** (0.146)
Three or more children	0.430* (0.231)	0.435* (0.232)	0.421* (0.231)	0.430* (0.232)
Secondary education	0.269* (0.158)	0.269* (0.159)	0.271* (0.158)	0.275* (0.159)
Higher education	0.695*** (0.179)	0.700*** (0.180)	0.683*** (0.179)	0.691*** (0.180)
With partner	0.221 (0.228)	0.220 (0.228)	0.239 (0.228)	0.232 (0.228)
Age	0.019 (0.012)	0.019 (0.012)	0.018 (0.012)	0.018 (0.012)
Weekends, holidays	−0.149 (0.139)	−0.148 (0.141)	−0.143 (0.139)	−0.146 (0.140)
Child allowance	0.069 (0.179)	0.069 (0.179)	0.073 (0.179)	0.072 (0.179)
Women #total childcare time		−0.000 (0.001)		
Women # working hours		−0.009 (0.008)		−0.008 (0.008)
Interactive care			−0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Focused time			0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Women # interactive care				−0.001 (0.001)
Women # focused care				−0.000 (0.001)
Constant	−1.535*** (0.524)	−1.810*** (0.583)	−1.587*** (0.527)	−1.849*** (0.584)
AIC	1,860.055	1,862.766	1,860.395	1,864.898
BIC	1,939.531	1,952.840	1,945.170	1,965.568
LR chi ²		1.29		1.50
		p = 0.5251		p = 0.6829

Source: CHPS (2015).

Notes: $N = 1,478$. Standard errors are given in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Reference categories: men, children aged 0–3 years, one child, low education, single parent, weekday time-use diary and not receiving child allowances.

Table A4. Estimates from models for feeling a lack of sleep

	M7a	M7b	M8a	M8b
Women	-0.064 (0.174)	0.450 (0.415)	-0.005 (0.170)	0.527 (0.413)
Total time spent on childcare	0.001** (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)		
Working hours	-0.002 (0.004)	0.008 (0.008)		
Child aged 4–6 years	-0.414* (0.215)	-0.365* (0.216)	-0.433** (0.214)	-0.380* (0.215)
Child aged 7–12 years	-0.491** (0.222)	-0.428* (0.225)	-0.521** (0.222)	-0.450** (0.225)
Two children	0.250 (0.164)	0.255 (0.164)	0.240 (0.163)	0.250 (0.163)
Three or more children	0.526** (0.254)	0.532** (0.254)	0.504** (0.252)	0.512** (0.252)
Secondary education	0.221 (0.177)	0.212 (0.177)	0.213 (0.176)	0.202 (0.176)
Higher education	0.155 (0.192)	0.156 (0.192)	0.141 (0.191)	0.142 (0.191)
With partner	-0.383 (0.251)	-0.397 (0.251)	-0.349 (0.250)	-0.365 (0.249)
Age	0.016 (0.013)	0.016 (0.013)	0.016 (0.013)	0.015 (0.013)
Weekends, holidays	-0.303* (0.155)	-0.272* (0.156)	-0.276* (0.153)	-0.244 (0.154)
Child allowance	-0.389* (0.206)	-0.398* (0.206)	-0.373* (0.205)	-0.385* (0.205)
Women # total childcare		0.000 (0.001)		
Women # hours2		-0.015* (0.009)		
Interactive care			0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.001)
Focused care time			0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
Work hours			-0.003 (0.004)	0.008 (0.008)
Women #interactive care				0.000 (0.001)
Women # focused care				0.000 (0.001)
Women # work hours				-0.017* (0.009)
Constant	-1.027* (0.578)	-1.437** (0.644)	-0.949* (0.576)	-1.397** (0.643)
AIC	1,892.105	1,892.849	1,897.255	1,899.189
BIC	1,971.582	1,982.922	1,982.030	1,999.859
LR chi ²	3.26			4.07
	p = 0.1963			p = 0.2544

Source: CHPS (2015).

Notes: N = 1,478. Standard errors are given in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Reference categories: men, children aged 0–3 years, one child, low education, single parent, weekday time-use diary and no child allowances.