

Mothers At Work : What Happen To Children?

Nasruddin Yunos* and Johari Talib**

Malaysia economy has shifted from lower-income agriculture to upper-middle income and increasingly industrial based. These development have affected families in many ways and the most substantial change is the large extended family has become nuclear family unit. At present there are about 70% of mothers with children below 12 years of age working full-time in Malaysia. As Malay and Chinese are the major ethnics in Malaysia, the present research attempted to investigate the effects of Malay and Chinese mothers' work conditions on parenting styles, children behavior and school achievement. Following survey method, this study deployed 400 mothers (200 = Malay, 200 = Chinese) who work full-time and 400 primary school children as sample of study. Data of this study are analyzed using path model analysis. Results of this study indicate that mothers work conditions has modest effects on parenting styles, children behavior and school achievement. The importance of social support for lower-income families is discussed.

Field of Research: Educational Psychology

1. Introduction

Women participation into workforce in Malaysia is quite high. There are about 70 percent mothers with children below 12 years of age working full-time. The phenomenon originates from economy development in Malaysia since 1990s. Rapid industrial development which is based in urban centers has encouraged massive migration of rural population to the urban industrialized areas. The migration of rural population to urban centers has also affected overall family life. Since the middle of the 1980s the incidence of psychosocial problems such as divorce, child abandonment, incest, teenage pregnancies and missing adolescents increased greatly (Malaysia, 1996 Social Welfare Department, 1996). Stress among parents is high due to urban life style's demands. Stress also could be related to children education because the system is purely examination oriented. Cost of living in the urban centers become very high and at the same time supports from the policy-makers for the disadvantaged group is quite limited. The present study attempts to investigate effects of mothers' work conditions on children' s school achievement.

2. Review Of Literature

The possibility that parental work conditions such as work-time, job demands, job supervision, job satisfaction, and wage level may affect worker's life satisfaction, their family life, and thereby children's school achievement have been suggested by many psychologists (Gottfried. Gottfried and Bathurst, 1995; Bronfenbrenner and

* Nasruddin Yunos, Center for General Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, email: nasrudin@ukm.my

** Johari Talib, Center for General Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, email: johari@ukm.my

Crouter, 1982; Lerner, 1994). Related to this issue, Hughes and Galinsky (1988) in their review pointed out, "the effect of job on individual health and well-being are found to be a potential source for workers and their families. Workers must accommodate their schedules to do their jobs more than their families" (p.234). Work hours affects parents' involvement with their family depend on the size of the family, whether is a single or dual-earner family, the number and ages of children, children's gender, and parental occupational status (Baruch and Barnett, 1987). This statement suggests parental work conditions do affect their involvement in the family affair and involvement in children's school matters.

The Fullerton Longitudinal Study (Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst and Guerin, 1994) examined three factors related to mothers' and fathers' employment (employment hours, occupational status, and work flexibility) with parenting style, home environment, and child's development. Parents' occupational status was significantly related to children's intelligence, school achievement, intrinsic motivation, and social maturity. This study suggests that higher occupational status is associated with higher achievement, aspiration, and motivation in parents and higher motivation is also significantly related to higher involvement in children' school work.

Employed mother' positive attitudes are reflected in positive parent-child interactions and in children's school achievement. Although employed mothers spend less time in housework, studies reveal that they are more likely to share childcare responsibilities with husbands or other adults members in the family (Hoffman, 1989; Pleck, 1985). Moreover, working mothers tend to be better educated and have fewer children. These background lead to positive effects on children's school achievement especially those who come from lower-income family background (Hoffman, 1989; Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, and Ginsburg, 1986).

Milne at al. (1986) point out that mothers' employment may have positive effect on achievement of lower-income. The size of effects varies with the amount of time worked, for instance achievement of a child whose mother worked full-time is lower than achievement of a child whose mother did not work (Heyns and Catsambis, 1986). Bogen and Joshi (2001) and Han (2005) showed that maternal nonstandard working schedules are associated with increase in children's behaviour problems and decrease in test scores, respectively. Vandell and Ramanan (1992) on the other hand indicate although mothers' employment benefit lower-income children, children's school achievement still depends on mothers' education, suggesting that parents' education attainment is related to occupational status and in some respects of work conditions; when attitudes towards work and employment status are congruent, children show better adjustment and are more competent in school than children of mothers with incongruent work attitudes (Farel, 1980; Gove and Zeiss, 1987).

Nevertheless, these findings should not be generalized too broadly. Moorehouse (1991) found that there were do differences in the children of employed versus non-employed mothers in terms of their school competence. It seems that many other factors can be operating that could mediate or cancel out the risks to better performance. For instance, middle-class and lower-class employed mother who have high levels of education compensate for the time spent away for the child (Vandell and Ramanan, 1992). Children's school achievement therefore depends on the socioeconomic status of the family, parental attitudes about employment, some

aspects of work conditions, parental involvement in children's education and parenting styles.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted following a survey method which involved parents' responses to questionnaires. The approach of this study is based on cultural-ecology model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). On the basis of an ecological approach this study postulated a hierarchical model specifying three level of factors: family background (microsystem), parental involvement (macrosystem) and parental work conditions (exosystem). Research study was conducted in twelve months between August 2005 to August 2006. Researcher was helped by school teachers in choosing sample, conducting test and gathering other information needed for this study. Research for this study was carried out in the state of Negeri Sembilan (NS) in the Malay Peninsula. NS was chosen because its demographic, social and economic backgrounds were consistent with the study's model background: urbanized and industrialized, and has multicultural communities which reflects Malaysia's community as a whole. In 2004, NS has about 900,000 people (52.6% Malay, 29.7% Chinese and 17% Indian and Others. NS has 160 primary schools with about 54,000 children in Year 1 thorough Year 3 (Primary 1, 2, 3).

3.1 Sample of the Study

This study involved 200 intact Malay families which comprised 200 full-time working mothers, 200 school children and 45 teachers. The study only focused on Malay dual earners families because majority of them are new in the urban environment as compared to another major ethnic in urban Malaysia, the Chinese group. Most families were nuclear based, had children between 2-7, had of monthly income between RM1500 - RM6000 and about 47% had full-time maid. Mean of mother's age in the study were between 39-40 years and had various educational and occupational background and most of them worked 44 hours a week and many of them had day time working hours. There were altogether 200 children in the study selected from 15 school in urban areas, 50% (100) males and 50% were females and had age ranges between 7-9 years. Children's background was provided with their school achievement based on there major subjects: Reading (Mean = 80.4%, SD = 15.37), Malay Language (Mean 80.70%, SD = 16.30) and Mathematics (Mean 77.20%, SD = 19.56). There were 45 teachers involved in the study.

3.2 Research Instruments

Research design of the present study comprises of four panels of variables as in indicated in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Panel 1: child sex, socio-economic status, parents' work conditions, work tempo and help hours family received from maid or family helper. Panel 2: parenting styles: parenting styles (authoritarian, permissive, authoritative); parental self efficacy, parental monitoring of children's school activities, and parental beliefs on children's self management and social skills. Panel 3: children's task engagement behaviour. The last Panel 4 is children's school achievement. Relationships between variables from Panel 1, Panel 2 and Panel 3 were tested direct and indirectly using path analysis approach. There were eleven types of measures in the study and were tested in the pilot study using 80 families.

Measures were taken or adapted from previous researchers' instruments. Overall the cronbach alpha coefficients of all measures were between 0.65 to 0.85: Work Conditions adapted from Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969) and Job Descriptive Index, Roznowski, (1989) (Job Demand 0.85; Job Supervision 0.81, Job Promotion 0.85); Parenting Styles adapted from Lamborn et al. (1991) and Dornbusch et al. (1987) (Authoritarian 0.65, Permissive 0.62, Authoritative 0.68); Parental Monitoring 0.84 taken from Milne et al. (1986) ; Parents' Self-Efficacy 0.81 adapted from Gibson and Denbom (1984); and Parents' Beliefs in Children's Social Skills 0.83; Parents' Beliefs in Child's Self-Management Skills 0.83, all taken from Okagaki and Sternberg (1993). The last measure in Panel 4 is Children's Task-Engagement Behaviour 0.86, taken from Fincham, Hakoda and Sanders (1989).

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Data for the present study were analyzed using path model approach and correlation. The correlation matrices appear in Table 1 and path diagram which shows standardized coefficients for the model parameters are shown in Figure 1.

4.1 Effects on Parenting Styles and Parental Beliefs for Malay Mothers

As indicated in Table 1 and Figure I, social-economic-status (SES) was negatively related to authoritarianism ($p = -0.39$, $t = -5.98$) but positively related to authoritativeness ($p = 0.31$, $t = 4.5$). There were also significant positive relationships between child sex and authoritarianism ($p = -0.19$, $t = -2.99$), and between SES and self-efficacy ($p = 0.18$, $t = 2.40$) along with a relationship with a negative relationship between help hours and beliefs in social skills ($p = -0.15$, $t = -2.11$).

4.2 Effects on Task Engagement for Malay Mothers

Task Engagement behaviour was negatively related to authoritarianism ($p = -0.16$, $t = -2.29$), but positively related to child sex ($p = 0.17$, $t = 2.54$). This variable was also positively related to work conditions ($p = 0.25$, $t = 3.70$).

4.3 Effects on School Achievement for Malay Mothers

For Malay mothers, school achievement was related positively to task engagement ($p = 0.41$, $t = 7.61$), child sex ($p = 0.11$, $t = 2.12$) and SES ($p = 0.16$, $t = 2.69$), the latter effect also reflected in indirect effects through the parenting styles and task engagement variables ($p = 0.19$, $t = 4.39$). On the other hand, achievement was negatively related to authoritarianism ($p = -0.18$, $t = -3.46$) and help hours received ($p = 0.14$, $t = -2.89$). School achievement was also positively related to authoritativeness ($p = 0.15$, $t = 3.09$) and work conditions ($p = 0.13$, $t = 2.53$). The latter effect was also reflected in a significant indirect effects on achievement through the parenting style and task engagement variables ($p = 0.10$, $t = 3.18$).

4.4 Effects on Parenting Styles and Parental Belief for Chinese Mothers

As indicated in Table 2 and Figure 2, for Chinese mothers, SES had a negative direct effect on authoritarianism ($p=-0.19$, $t = -2.26$), but positive effects on authoritativeness ($p=0.41$, $t = 6.39$) and beliefs in social skill ($p= 0.20$, $t = 2.70$). Work conditions had a positive effect on belief in social skills ($p = 0.27$, $t = 3.86$). SES was also positively related to beliefs in self-management ($p=0.20$, $t =2.71$) and self-efficacy ($p= 0.30$, $t = 4.04$) while child sex had a significant negative effect on authoritativeness ($p=-0.14$, $t =2.16$). For mothers, help hours were positively related to monitoring ($p= 0.26$, $t=3.68$), but negatively to beliefs in the importance of self-management ($p=-0.14$, $t=-2.00$), while work conditions had positive effects on beliefs in self-management ($p=0.30$, $t = 4.31$).

4.5 Effects on Task Engagement for Chinese Mothers

For Chinese mothers, task engagement was negatively related to authoritarianism (Direct effects: $p = -0.24$, $t = -4.76$; Indirect Effects: $p = -.0.13$, $t= -4.37$) and child sex (Direct effects : $p = -0.14$, $t = -2.81$; Indirect Effects $p = -0.17$, $t = -3.54$). Task Engagement was, however, positively related to authoritativeness (Direct effects : $p = 0.34$, $t = 6.12$; Indirect effects : $p = 0.18$, $t = 5.35$) and SES ($p= 0.19$, $t = 2.97$). For Chinese mothers, Task Engagement was also negatively related to permissiveness ($p =-.16$, $t= -3.16$) and beliefs in social skills ($p=-0.13$, $t = -2.45$). Mothers' monitoring level also was related positively on achievement ($p= 0.18$, $t =5.41$).

4.6 Effects on School Achievement for Chinese Mothers

In the Chinese sample, task engagement had a strong positive relationship with school achievement ($p = 0.54$, $t = 10.99$), as did authoritativeness ($p = 0.30$, $t = 7.28$) and help hours the family received ($p = 0.17$, $t = 4.34$). Achievement was also negatively related to authoritarianism for Chinese mothers. SES however, on the other hand, had a significant indirect effect on school achievement ($p = 0.39$, $t = 7.00$). Chinese mothers' self-efficacy also had significant positive direct effects on school achievement ($p = 0.12$, $t = 3.35$).

5. Conclusion

In summary, for both ethnics there were significant positive relationships between SES and authoritativeness, but significant negative relationship between SES and authoritarianism. Authoritarianism also related negatively both to task engagement and to achievement, while authoritativeness was positively related to this variable. Directly children's school achievement was influenced by children's task engagement behaviour, families' socio-economic status background, parental authoritativeness, parental authoritarianism (negative), and help hours the family received (negative).

Several variables were thus influential for children school achievement and socio-economic status played an important role in determining parenting styles, children behaviour in classroom and school achievement. Indirect effects of variables from panel one of the study (work conditions, work tempo, socio-economic status, help hours family received and child sex) on children's school achievement were largely mediated through two variables in the second panel : parenting styles (authoritarian, permissive, authoritative) and parental involvement (monitoring, parents' belief in

the importance of social skills, belief in the importance of self-management skills, and parental self-efficacy) and one variable in the third panel of the study (children's task-engagement behaviour).

Results of children's school achievement in relation to SES for the present study were very much similar to the American samples as reviewed by McLoyd (1988) who summarized that children from poor and low-socio-economic home background, on average performed significantly less well than middle-class children. Among the three traditional indicators of socio-economic status, family income had highest correlation with children academic achievement, followed by parental occupational status and educational achievement. Poor children' school achievement could be traced as early as preschool years. Children who were less learning readiness, deficits in verbal, mathematical, and reading skills. There are still many rooms to improve this conditions such as better support system both at school and overall family system for lower-income children, better attention for low achievement children in the classroom, the need to fully utilize the public school facilities and dissemination of parenting or child rearing practices' knowledge and information for parents and teacher.

6. References

- Baruch, G.K and Barnett, R.C. 1987, Roles quality and psychological well-being. In F Crosby (Eds.), *Spouse, Parent, Worker*, New Haven, CT : Yale University Press.
- Baumrind, D. 1966, Effects of authoritative on child behavior. *Child Development*, 37, 887-907.
- Baumrind, D. 1971, Current pattern of parental authority. *Developmental Psychology*, 24, 225-239.
- Baumrind, D. 1973, A development of instrumental competence through socialization. In A.D. Pick (Ed.) *Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology*, 7, Minneapolis : Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- Baumrind, D. and Black, A. E. 1967, Socialization practices associated with dimensions of competence in preschool boys and girls. *Child Development*, 38, 291-327.
- Block, J. H. 1965, *The Childrearing Practices Report (CRPR). A set of Q items for the description of parental socialization attitudes and values.* (mimeograph). Berkeley : University of California, Institute of Human Development.
- Bogen, K. and Joshi, P. 2001, *Bad work or good move: The relationship of part-time and nonstandard work schedules to parenting and child behaviour in working poor families.* Paper presented at Low Income Families: Coping as Parents and Workers Conference, Washington, DC.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. 1979, *The ecology of human development. Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., and Crouter, A. 1982, The evolution of environmental models in development research. In P.H. Mussen and W.Kessen, *Handbook of Child Development, Vol. 1 History, Theories and Method.* NY : Wiley.

- Dornbusch, S.M., Ritter, P.L., Leiderman, P.H., Roberts, D.F and Fraleigh, M.J. 1987, The relation of parenting style to adolescent school performance. *Child Development*, 58, 1244-1257.
- Farel, A.M. 1980, Effects of preferred maternal roles, maternal employment, and sociodemographic status on school adjustment and competence. *Child Development*, 51, 1179-1186.
- Felner, R.D, Prand, S., Du Bois, D.L, Adan, A.M., Mulhall, P.F. and Evans E.G. 1995, Socioeconomic disadvantage, proximal environment experiences, socioemotional and academic adjustment in early adolescence : Investigation of a mediated effects model. *Child Development*, 66, 774-792.
- Fincham, F.D, Hakoda, A. and Sanders, R. Jr. 1989, Learned helplessness. A test anxiety and academic achievement. A longitudinal analysis. *Child Development*, 60, 138-145.
- Gove, W.R. and Zeiss, C.C. 1987, Multiple role and happiness. In F.J. Crosby (Ed.). *Spouse, Parent, Worker. One Gender and Multiple Role*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gottfried, A.W., Gottfried, A.E., Bathurst, K. and Guerin, D.W. 1994, Gifted IQ, early developmental aspects. *The Fullerton Longitudinal Study*, NY : Plenum Press.
- Gottfried, A.W., Gottfried, A.E and Bathurst, K. 1995, Maternal and dual-earner employment, status and parenting. In M.H. Bornstein, *Handbook of Parenting, Vol. 2, Biology and Ecology of Parenting*, NJ :Erlbaum.
- Han, W.J. 2005, Maternal nonstandard work schedules and child outcomes. *Child Development*, 76, 137-156.
- Heyns, B. and Catsambis, S. 1986, Mothers' employment and children's achievement. A critique. *Sociology of Education*, 18, 308-321.
- Hoffman, L.W. 1989, Effects of maternal employment in the two-parent family. *American Psychologist*, 44, 283-292.
- Hughes, D. and Galinsky, E. 1988, Balancing work and family lives. In A.E. Gottfried, A.W Gottfried, *Maternal employment and children's development. Longitudinal research*. NY : Plenum.
- Judge, T.A. and Locke, E.A. 1993, Effect of dysfunctional thought processes on subjective well-being and job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 17, 493-511.
- Judge, T.A. and Watanabe, S. 1993, Another looked at Job satisfaction – Life satisfaction relationship. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78, 939-948.,
- Lamborn, S.D. Mounts, N.S., Steinberg, L. and Dornbusch, S.M. 1991, Pattern of competence and adjustment among adolescents from authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent and respectful families. *Child Development*, 62, 1049-1065.
- Lerner, J.V. 1994, *Working women and their families*. CA, Thousand Oaks : Sage Pub. Series.
- McLoyd, V.C. 1998, Determinants of mental health of black and white children experiencing economic deprivation. *Paper presented at study group meeting on poverty and children*, University of Kansas, Lawrence.
- Milne, A.M., Myers, D.E., Rosenthal, A.S and Ginsburg, A 1986, Single parents, working mothers and educational achievement of school children. *Sociology of Education*, 59, 125-139.
- Moorehouse, M.J. 1991, Linking maternal employment patterns to mother-child activities and children's school competence. *Developmental Psychology*, 27, 295-303.

- Mortimer, J.T. and Borman, K.M. 1988, *Work experience and psychological development throughout the life span*. Boulder, CO :Westview.
- Okagaki,L. and Sternberg, R.J. 1993. Parental beliefs and children school performance. *Child Development*, 64, 36-56.
- Patterson, G. and Stouthamer-Loeber, M. 1984, The correlation of family management practices and delinquency. *Child Development*, 55, 1299-1307.
- Pleck, J.H. 1985, *Working wives/working husbands*. Beverly Hills, CA : Sage.
- Roznowski, M. 1989, Examination of measurement properties of the Job descriptive Index with experimental items. *Journal of Applied Psychology*.
- Smith, P.C., Kendall, L. and Hulin L.L. 1969, *The measurement of satisfaction in work achievement*, Chicago : Rand Mc Nally.
- Vandell, D.C and Ramanan, J. 1992, Effects of early and recent maternal employment on children from low-income families. *Child Development*, 48, 158-166.

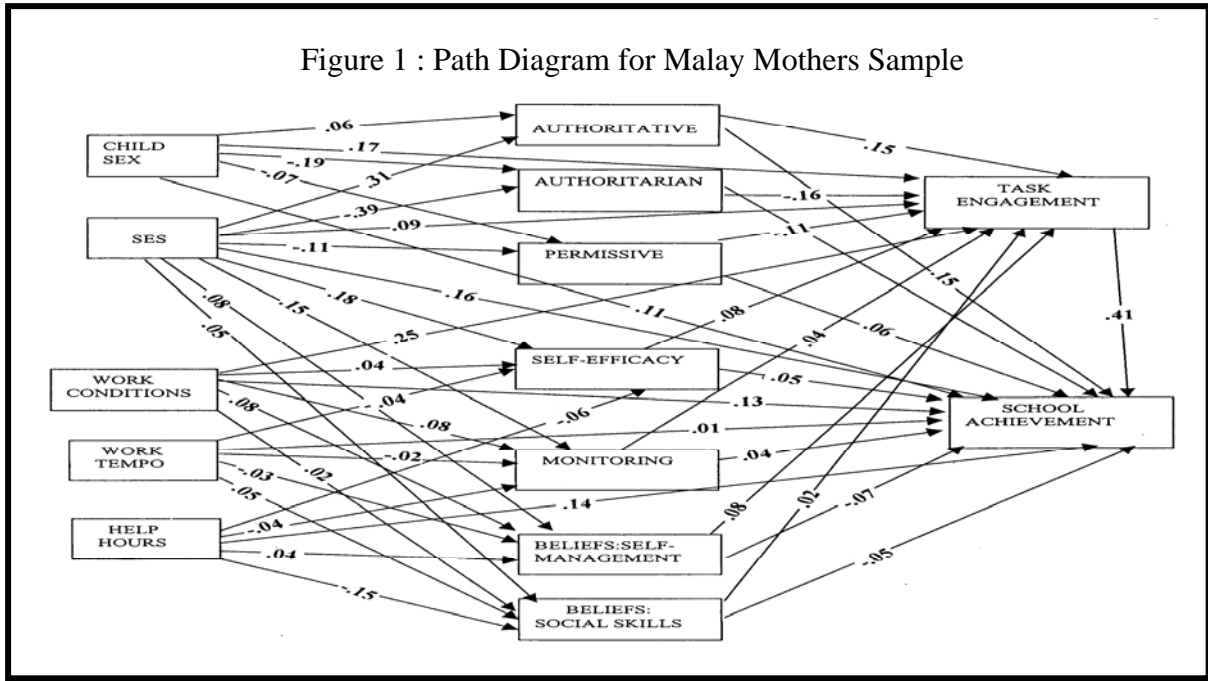


Table 1 : Correlation Matrix for Malay Mothers

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for Malay Mothers

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Child Sex	1.00												
2. Socio-economic status	-0.05	1.00											
3. Help hours received	0.15	0.12	1.00										
4. Work Conditions	0.12	0.35	0.01	1.00									
5. Authoritarian	-0.18	-0.38	-0.09	-0.36	1.00								
6. Permissive	-0.06	-0.11	-0.07	-0.20	0.24	1.00							
7. Authoritative	0.05	0.31	0.01	0.23	-0.42	-0.23	1.00						
8. Monitoring	-0.08	0.17	-0.02	0.14	-0.07	-0.02	0.18	1.00					
9. Beliefs in self-management	-0.04	0.10	-0.03	0.11	0.06	0.00	0.15	0.45	1.00				
10. Beliefs in social skills	-0.10	0.04	-0.14	0.04	0.15	0.05	0.05	0.43	0.50	1.00			
11. Self-efficacy	0.08	0.19	-0.04	0.10	-0.18	0.03	0.20	0.53	0.49	0.40	1.00		
12. School achievement	0.22	0.40	-0.08	0.44	-0.50	-0.07	0.40	0.13	0.01	-0.04	0.17	1.00	
13. Task engagement	0.21	0.24	0.03	0.37	-0.32	-0.03	0.24	0.07	0.04	0.00	0.06	0.61	1.00

Figure 2 : Path Diagram for Chinese Mothers Sample

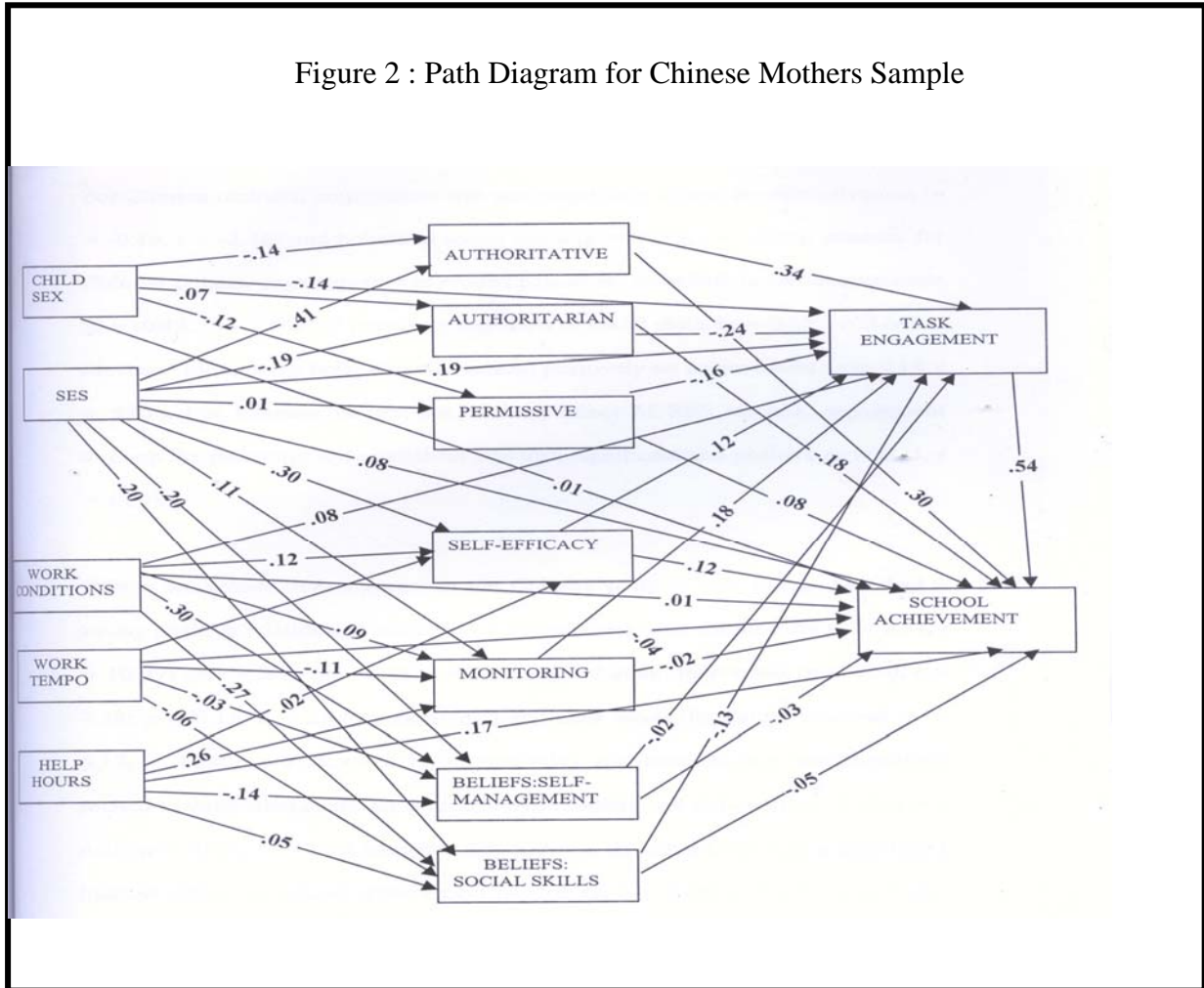


Table 2 : Correlation Matrix for Chinese Mothers

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Child Sex	1.00												
2. Socio-economic status	-0.05	1.00											
3. Help hours received	0.04	0.34	1.00										
4. Work conditions	-0.12	0.30	0.17	1.00									
5. Authoritarian	0.09	-0.19	-0.04	-0.20	1.00								
6. Permissive	-0.12	-0.09	0.09	-0.15	0.11	1.00							
7. Authoritative	-0.16	0.42	0.15	0.24	-0.26	-0.11	1.00						
8. Monitoring	0.03	0.23	0.32	0.17	-0.18	0.18	0.38	1.00					
9. Beliefs in self-management	0.17	0.24	-0.02	0.34	-0.10	-0.46	0.30	0.22	1.00				
10. Beliefs in social skills	0.01	0.29	0.16	0.34	-0.09	-0.16	0.43	0.40	0.60	1.00			
11. Self-efficacy	0.10	0.34	0.15	0.21	0.01	-0.17	0.31	0.26	0.40	0.35	1.00		
12. School achievement	-0.17	0.40	0.35	0.21	-0.46	-0.02	0.67	0.46	0.16	0.31	0.27	1.00	
13. Task engagement	-0.20	0.41	0.24	0.15	-0.43	-0.10	0.55	0.45	0.14	0.19	0.14	0.80	1.00

