JYU DISSERTATIONS 112

Sanna Moilanen

Managing the "Triple Demand"

Lone Mothers' Non-Standard Work Hours and Work–Family Reconciliation

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

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Finnish Summary

This doctoral study examined how lone mothers in Finland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom experience the reconciliation of work and family life when the mothers are faced with the "triple demand" which links their status as sole breadwinners and caregivers with work during non-standard hours (e.g., evenings, nights, and weekends). The specific focus was on three areas of work–family reconciliation, each of which were examined in three interrelated sub-studies: (1) childcare arrangements, (2) negative and positive work-to-family interface, and (3) cultural notions of "good" mothering. The sub-studies used two types of data collected as part of the Families 24/7 research project in the three countries: comparative cross-national survey data collected from working lone and coupled mothers (N = 1,106) and qualitative interview data collected from 16 Finnish lone mothers.

The results, first, showed that in all three countries, lone mothers and coupled mothers were equally likely to experience challenges with childcare arrangements when working non-standard hours. Second, across the countries, the positive relationship between non-standard work hours and the perceived conflict between time for work and time for family responsibilities was stronger for lone mothers than coupled mothers. Third, Finnish lone mothers perceived their non-standard work hours to pose a potential risk to the wellbeing of their children, which indicated that their work during these hours fits poorly into cultural notions of "good" mothering. To mend this discrepancy and display themselves as responsible mothers, the mothers provided accounts by which they both conformed to and challenged strong cultural mothering expectations.

Overall, the findings indicate that lone mothers experience non-standard work hours primarily as a challenge in terms of work–family reconciliation. Findings further suggest that mothers' experiences are shaped by both the policy environment and the cultural assumptions attached to "good" motherhood and the wellbeing of children.

Keywords: lone mothers; employed mothers; non-standard work hours; work–family reconciliation; cross-national comparative study; accounts

TIIVISTELMÄ

Moilanen, Sanna
Monitahoisten vaatimusten keskellä: Yksinhuoltajaäitien epätyypilliset työajat ja työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittaminen
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Finnish Summary

Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus tarkasteli, kuinka yksinhuoltajaäidit Suomessa, Alankomaissa ja Isossa-Britanniassa kokevat työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamisen silloin, kun äidit työskentelevät epätyypillisinä aikoina, eli esimerkiksi iltaisin, öisin ja viikonloppuisin. Tutkimus koostui kolmesta empiirisestä osatutkimuksesta, jotka tarkastelivat työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamista kolmesta eri näkökulmasta: (1) lastenhoidon järjestäminen, (2) työ- ja perheroolien yhdistäminen sekä (3) kulttuuriset äitiysodotukset ja ymmärrys ”hyvästä” äitiydestä. Osatutkimuksissa hyödynnettiin Perheet 24/7 -tutkimusprojektissa kolmesta maasta kerättyä verkkokyselyaineistoa, josta valittiin työssäkäyvien yksinhuoltajaäitien ja kahden vanhemman perheissä elävien puolisoäitien vastaukset (*N* = 1,106), sekä 16 suomalaiselta yksinhuoltajaäidiltä kerättyä haastatteluaineistoa.

Tulosten mukaan äitien epätyypilliset työajat olivat yhteydessä sekä yksinhuoltajaäitien että puolisoäitien kokemiin lastenhoidon järjestämiseen liittyviin haasteisiin kaikissa tutkimusmaissa. Lisäksi tulokset osoittivat, että kaikissa kolmessa maassa epätyypillisinä aikoina työskentelevät yksinhuoltajaäidit kokivat puolisoäitejä voimakkaammin aikaperustaista työstä perheeseen suuntautuvaa rooliristiriitaa. Tulokset paljastivat myös suomalaisten yksinhuoltajaäitien kokevan epätyypilliset työaikansa riskinä lastensa hyvinvoinnille, jolloin työaikojen koettiin olevan ristiriidassa myös kulttuuristen äitiysodotusten kanssa. Yksinhuoltajaäidit perustelivat työntekoaan epätyypillisinä aikoina yhtäältä mukautuen kulttuurisiin äitiysodotuksiin ja toisaalta haastaen niitä ja puolustivat näin olevansa moraalisesti vastuuntuntoisia äitejä.

Tutkimustulosten perusteella yksinhuoltajaäidit kokevat epätyypilliset työaikansa ensisijaisesti haasteena työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamiselle. Tutkimuksen valossa näyttäisi siltä, että yksinhuoltajaäitien työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittaminen kytkeytyy niin hyvinvointiyhteiskuntien rakenteisiin, kuten työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamista edistäviin poliittisiin linjauksiin kuin myös eri maiden kulttuuriseen ymmärrykseen hyvästä äitiydestä ja lapsen parhaasta.

Asiasanat: yksinhuoltajaäidit, työssäkäyvät äidit, epätyypillinen työaika, työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittaminen, vertaileva tutkimus, selonteot

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Jyväskylä, August 2019
Sanna Moilanen

ORIGINAL PAPERS

The present doctoral study is based on three empirical sub-studies, listed below, that have been published or accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals. In this summary report of the doctoral study, the publications are referred to as sub-studies followed by the Roman numerals I-III. Copies of the published articles (sub-studies) can be found as appendices to this report, and they have been reprinted with the permission of the publishers.

Article I Moilanen, S., May, V., Räikkönen, E., Sevón, E., & Laakso, M.-L. (2016). Mothers' non-standard working and childcare-related challenges: A comparison between lone and coupled mothers. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 36*(1/2), 36–52.

Article II Moilanen, S., Aunola, K., May, V., Sevón, E., & Laakso, M.-L. (2019). Nonstandard work hours and single versus coupled mothers' work-to-family conflict. *Family Relations, 68*(2), 213–231.

Article III Moilanen, S., May, V., Sevón, E., Murtorinne-Lahtinen, M., & Laakso, M.-L. (in press). Displaying morally responsible motherhood: Lone mothers accounting for work during non-standard hours. *Families, Relationships and Societies*.

The first author has taken an active role in the implementation of all the three sub-studies. In sub-studies I and II, the statistical analyses were performed, and findings reported, in co-operation with Adjunct Professor Eija Räikkönen (sub-study I) and Professor Kaisa Aunola (sub-study II). The first author conducted the analysis and reporting of the sub-study III independently. Other co-authors have had an advisory role in all three sub-studies by commenting on the three manuscripts.

FIGURE

TABLE

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between mothers' work hours and family life has become a central topic in the field of work–family research (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Maternal work hours characteristic of the 24/7 economy, especially non-standard work hours that take place during early mornings, evenings, nights, and weekends (Presser, 2003) have aroused particular interest among scholars. This is because non-standard work hours pose demands on everyday family life that have the potential to intensify the challenges families encounter. These challenges relate to, for example, difficulties with childcare arrangements (e.g., Craig & Powell, 2011; Hepburn, 2018; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004; Verhoef, Tammelin, May, Rönkä & Roeters, 2016b), conflict between work and family roles (e.g., Baxter & Alexander, 2008; Ciabattari, 2007; Tammelin, Malinen, Rönkä & Verhoef, 2017), and deteriorated child behavior and wellbeing (e.g., Gassman-Pines, 2011; Han, 2008; Kaiser, Li & Pollmann-Schult, 2019; Rönkä, Malinen, Metsäpelto, Laakso, Sevón & Verhoef-van Dorp, 2017a; Strazdins, Clements, Korda, Broom & D'Souza, 2006). Lone mothers who carry the main responsibility for their children without a residential partner are particularly vulnerable to the effects of non-standard work hours because they are solely responsible for reconciling work and family (e.g., Alsarve, 2017; Han & Waldfogel, 2007; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004), and they often have limited resources at their disposal compared to two-parent families. However, the majority of studies that have examined the relationship between maternal non-standard work hours and family life have been conducted outside Europe or with a focus on European two-parent families. Therefore, much uncertainty still exists about the relationship between maternal non-standard work hours and their impact on the experience of work–family reconciliation among European lone mothers.

This doctoral study aimed to provide new insights into and understanding of how ongoing developments in working times characteristic of 24/7 economies affect lone mothers' abilities to reconcile paid work and family life in three European countries—Finland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. In this study, work–family reconciliation refers to the manageability of the reconciliation and combination of the demands and responsibilities attached to the

spheres of work and family, and the roles inherent in these spheres. Role theory developed by Katz and Kahn (1978) offers a framework for understanding the reconciliation of the roles inherent in work and family spheres. As applied to the present study, role theory holds that mothers are expected to adjust their behavior according to the task requirements, which are considered here as *demands*, associated with their work and family roles. As a result, the central premise of the present study is that lone mothers who work during non-standard hours face a "triple demand" associated with these two everyday roles when striving to reconcile work with family.

The first demand has to do with *lone motherhood* itself, which can be perceived to violate the core cultural understanding of what is considered "proper" motherhood across Western countries. Given that motherhood is a social construction shaped by ideologies concerning socially appropriate child-rearing and mothering characteristic to each society (Hays, 1996), lone mothers can be seen to deviate from the prevailing cultural understanding that considers the two-parent family as the ideal environment for children to grow and develop within (e.g., Golombok, 2015; May, 2008, 2011; Thane, 2011). Due to this norm violation, lone motherhood is still, to some extent, characterized as problematic and is even stigmatized (Gornick, 2018; May, 2011) and therefore lone mothers' ability to ensure the best child development and wellbeing remains questioned (Forssén, Haataja & Hakovirta, 2009; May, 2003, 2008). Indeed, when the role of the mother is conceived in terms of the ideal of a married mother, lone motherhood may easily become characterized with words such as "ineffective" or "deficient" (Dermott & Pomati, 2016; McIntosh, 1996).

The second demand relates to *maternal paid work*, and more specifically to its social acceptance and to lone mothers' abilities to combine the two roles of mother and worker, often with limited resources compared to coupled mothers living with a partner. There exists country-specific variation with regard to whether a mother's primary role is considered that of a mother or a worker. Gornick (2018) talks about an ongoing gender revolution, due to which lone mothers, as women in general, are expected to engage in paid work across Western countries. Yet, at the same time, there tends to exist a resilient cultural emphasis on maternal care as the best form of care for young children (see e.g., Hietamäki, Repo & Lammi-Taskula, 2018; Salin, Hakovirta & Ylikännö, 2016; Van Wel & Knijn, 2006), which has a strong influence on whether, and to what extent, paid work of mothers with young children is considered socially acceptable. Such ambivalence creates tensions particularly for lone mothers, because they, as the sole breadwinners and caregivers of their children, have to weigh the options of whether they engage in employment or care for their children at home. In this way, the demand associated with lone mothers' paid work also reflects the gendered nature of work and family roles (Edgell, Ammons & Dahlin, 2012), which echoes the historical desirability of the "male-breadwinner model family," in which men assumed the role of breadwinner while women were seen as responsible for providing care for the children and managing housework (Lewis & Hobson, 1997). Given this gendered nature of work and

family roles, working lone mothers can be considered particularly likely to face pressures with work–family reconciliation because they often have no one to share childcare with at home (Calder, 2018; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018) and they are solely responsible for the family breadwinner role. In the absence of a residing partner, many lone mothers are managing the requirements attached to their work and family roles, namely earning wages, caring for their children, and carrying out housework with more limited resources in terms of, for example, time, energy, education, and finances (Calder, 2018; Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Gornick, 2018), compared to two-parent families. This is likely to expose lone mothers' resources to conflicting demands between the two roles (e.g., Baxter & Alexander, 2008; Son & Bauer, 2010). Furthermore, when reconciling work and family in their everyday life, lone mothers face constraints that relate to normative ideas of motherhood (Bakker & Karsten, 2013). Given the prevailing cultural understanding concerning "good" motherhood, according to which mothers are expected to invest a considerable amount of time, money, and energy in maintaining the proper development and wellbeing of children (Hays, 1996), the task of reconciling work and family life is arguably tougher for many lone mothers compared to coupled mothers.

The third demand faced by working lone mothers concerns mothers' *non-standard work hours*, which, in the present study, are seen to form an additional challenge in the puzzle of reconciling work and family life. In Europe, the amount of work being performed during non-standard hours is substantial (Presser, Gornick & Parashar, 2008). Although, in the United States, lone parents are found particularly likely to work during non-standard hours (Presser, 2003), it appears that in the three countries under study, lone mothers are as likely as coupled mothers to work during these hours (see Barnes, Bryson & Smith, 2006; La Valle, Arthur, Millward, Scott & Clayden, 2002; National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2015). However, previous qualitative research conducted in Europe suggests that, in general, reconciling non-standard work hours with different aspects of family life poses challenges and difficulties particularly to lone mothers (e.g., Alsarve, 2017; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004; Roman, 2017, 2019). In addition to limited access to or gaps in the provision of childcare services during non-standard hours (e.g., Plantenga & Remery, 2009, 2013) and the difficulty in establishing stable everyday family routines for children (Moss, 2009; Rönkä, Malinen, Sevón, Metsäpelto & May, 2017b), for instance, an additional disadvantage associated with work during non-standard hours is that these are the times traditionally considered "family time" (Daly, 2001), namely, times when family members are expected to engage in shared family activities in home surroundings.

Despite the increasing scholarly interest in mothers' non-standard work hours and the impact that these work hours have on family life, there exist important shortcomings in relation to this issue within two distinct research fields. First, in the field of work–family research, existing quantitative studies that have systematically and with large samples analyzed the associations between lone mothers' non-standard work hours and family life have generally been

conducted with samples from North America (e.g., Ciabattari, 2007; Han & Waldfogel, 2007; Hepburn, 2018) or Australia (e.g., Baxter & Alexander, 2008). In European studies, the focus has typically been on two-parent families (e.g., Tammelin et al., 2017; Verhoef, Roeters & Van der Lippe, 2016a). Therefore, there is a need for a quantitative analysis of the relationship between maternal non-standard work hours and family life with a focus on European lone-mother families. Furthermore, it has been established that different welfare regimes affect mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation (see Casper & Swanberg, 2011; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; Van der Lippe, Jager & Kops, 2006). The comparative studies that have been carried out with a focus on European lone mothers have generally employed qualitative methodologies in comparing the experiences of lone mothers across different countries (e.g., Kröger, 2010; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004). Therefore, there remains a need for comparative studies with larger samples on European lone mothers working non-standard hours. Second, there is a research gap in the literature concerning definitions of "good" mothering in the context of maternal non-standard work hours. To be precise, although some existing studies have explored how working mothers navigate between the demands and expectations associated with mothering and paid work (e.g., Damaske, 2011; Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Roman, 2019), we know little about how lone mothers deal with the paradox created by cultural expectations attached to "good" mothering and current working time demands, namely, non-standard work hours.

This doctoral study was designed to address the two gaps in the work–family and mothering literatures, described above, by examining how work during non-standard hours, within the frame of the 24/7 economy, impacts lone mothers' experience of work–family reconciliation (see Figure 1). This general objective was approached with three main aims. The first aim was to examine how different welfare states characterized by divergent policy contexts through childcare service provision and maternal work hour cultures (i.e., part- or full-time cultures) shape lone mothers' abilities to reconcile work and family life in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK. These countries were chosen for this study because they represent diverse welfare and care regimes and therefore provide different contexts for lone mothers' work–family reconciliation. Secondly, the study aimed to investigate whether the experience of work–family reconciliation is different for lone mothers than for coupled mothers. Evaluating the differences was considered important in illustrating what was possibly unique to the situation of lone mothers in the context of maternal non-standard work hours. The third aim of the present study related to Christine Roman's (2017) observation that work–family reconciliation is not "solely about juggling time and coping" but that "the possibilities to act in accordance with notions of 'good' parenting are also part of the picture" (p. 25). Consequently, the present study aimed to examine how lone mothers in Finland navigate within the demands set by non-standard work hours and the culturally shared understanding and expectations attached to "good" mothering, which are closely tied with what is considered best for child wellbeing.

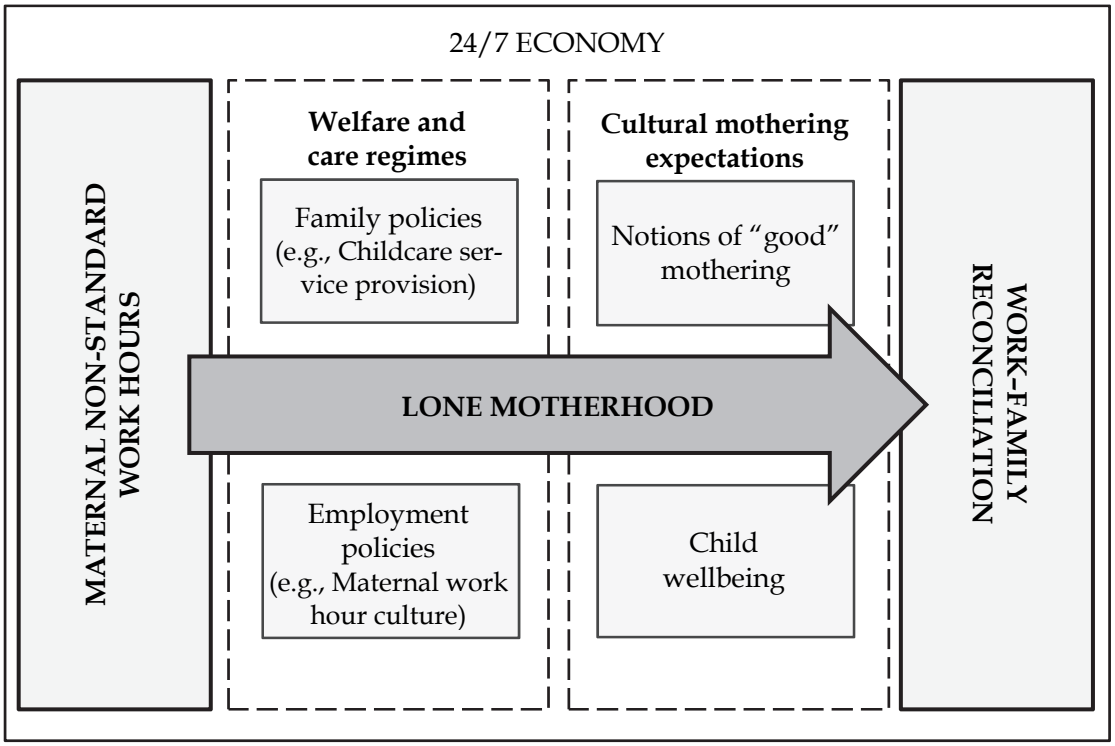

FIGURE 1 Conceptual framework of the present study

The three main aims, described above, were realized through three empirical sub-studies. Accordingly, the first two sub-studies, investigating lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation from a cross-national comparative aspect with quantitative methods, enabled the comparison of the experiences of lone mothers and coupled mothers living across different welfare states. The third sub-study approached the phenomenon with qualitative methods, which gave the voice to lone mothers themselves by exploring how lone mothers in Finland perceive the relationship between cultural mothering expectations and their non-standard work hours. From the outset of the study, lone mothers in Finland provided an interesting group to focus on due to the structural features of the Finnish welfare state and the dominant working time culture (i.e., full-time work) and high prevalence of shift work among female employees.

The research problem of the present study, namely, how lone mothers experience work–family reconciliation when they work during non-standard hours, can be characterized as multi-dimensional and complex. Not only are the mothers' experiences influenced by the country-specific cultural contexts but also by the diverse welfare and care regimes representative of these countries. Furthermore, comparing the experiences of mothers living in two different family forms creates another dimension or layer to the research problem. The multidimensionality of the research problem situates the present study in the crossroads of multiple disciplines; in addition to work–family research and research on mothering, the study is situated in the field of research on lone parenthood

whereas the focus on childcare service provision across the three countries connects it closely to the discipline of early childhood education.

As an approach to researching such multi-dimensionality of lived experience, this study draws from *facet methodology*. Jennifer Mason (2011) explains the idea of facet methodology through a visual metaphor of a gemstone and facets: When a ray of light is cast on the gemstone, the facets (i.e., sides) in a cut gemstone have the capability to reflect and intensify light differently depending on the strength and direction of the illumination. The central idea, then, is that these different ways that the light is cast in the facets enables us to perceive and appreciate the unique characteristic of the gemstone. In research, the gemstone represents the central research problem, and facets denote carefully designed investigations, which by refracting light differently and providing different ways of seeing, assist in defining the overall object of interest. (Mason, 2011.)

In this study, the three empirical sub-studies comprising the overall study represent different facets that were designed to assist in defining and casting flashes of insight into the reconciliation of work and family life in lone-mother families. For me, facet methodology, through its gemstone metaphor, worked as a heuristic tool and a thinking device that helped me to understand and make sense of the complexity of lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation and to clarify the focus of the study. Using a facet methodological approach further helped with the realization that across the three countries, the challenges lone mothers experienced *vis-à-vis* work–family reconciliation in the context of non-standard work hours relate in different ways to the structural features of the welfare states and the cultural norms attached to motherhood and the care of children. The following two chapters situate the study within its theoretical and conceptual contexts and discuss more thoroughly the main concepts presented in Figure 1, before moving on to the specific aims and results of the present study.

2 WORKING LONE MOTHERS ACROSS THREE WELFARE STATES

2.1 Defining a lone mother

One of the central concepts of this study is that of *lone motherhood*. The definition of the concept is not a simple one, as lone mothers are a heterogeneous group (May, 2010; McIntosh, 1996), each having individual routes to lone motherhood and having different cohabiting and marital status (see Bernardi, Mortelmans & Larenza, 2018), according to which the term lone mother is also defined here. In this study, lone mother refers to a mother who has at least one child aged less than 13 years of age residing all or almost all the time with the mother and who bears the main responsibility, that is, without a residential partner, for the upbringing and care for her child or children. The focus was set on lone mothers who do not cohabit with a partner, because these mothers tend to bear the sole or primary responsibility for the wellbeing of children even if they receive financial or emotional support from their non-resident partners (see Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012). In terms of marital status, then, lone mothers in the present study are either widowed, divorced, separated, or are single mothers. Whereas, historically speaking, bereavement was for a long time the most common route to lone motherhood, today marital dissolution and the breakdown of a cohabiting relationship have surpassed widowhood in terms of prevalence across Western countries (Bernardi et al., 2018; Haataja, 2009; Knijn & Van Wel, 2001). The term single mother, again, refers to a never-married lone mother who may have separated from the father before the birth of the child or is a single mother by choice, that is, choosing to have children without a partner, for instance, through donor insemination or adoption.

Burghes (1996) emphasizes that the definition of lone-parent families becomes even more complex when re-partnering enters the picture. Indeed, lone motherhood, for some women, is a transitionary phase as the mothers establish new partnerships (Letablier & Wall, 2018). In these instances, cohabitation status becomes relevant in distinguishing a lone mother from a coupled mother. In

the present study, women who are in a relationship with a partner who is not the biological father of the child are considered to be practically lone mothers if the new partner does not share the residence with the mother and the child(ren). A coupled mother, then, is defined in the present study as a mother who shares residence with the other parent of the child or a new partner, whether they are married, in a Civil Partnership, or living in a common-law union.

The various living situations of lone mothers and their children further complicates the definition of lone motherhood. Children of separated or divorced parents, for example, may spend most of their time with the mother but they may also alternate between two homes (Letablier & Wall, 2018). When defining a lone mother, however, the present study does not pay particular attention to custody arrangements or to the visitation agreements between separated parents or the maintenance allowances paid by the fathers (or the state, in case of bereavement). This is because, even in cases where separated parents would end up with joint custody arrangements, it tends to be the parent with whom the child resides who has the main responsibility for the reconciliation of work and everyday family life (Forssén et al., 2009; also, Kröger, 2010; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004).

In defining lone motherhood, this study also did not take into consideration any other relatives living with the mother and the child. In some cultures, for example for African American lone mothers living in the United States (George & Dickerson, 1995), it is customary for lone mothers and their children to share their residence with a member or members of the extended family, usually the maternal grandmother (Pilkauskas, Garfinkel & McLanahan, 2014). However, this is not a common household composition in the studied countries (see Chambaz, 2001; Smallwood & Wilson, 2007; Statistics Netherlands, 2015), so this aspect of cohabitation status was not considered relevant in determining lone motherhood in the present study. According to statistical information, the most common living arrangement for lone-parent families in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK, is one comprising a mother and her child or children, as a significant majority of lone-parent families in all three countries are headed by a mother (Statistics Netherlands, 2008; Office for National Statistics, 2017; Official Statistics of Finland, 2018). Furthermore, the proportion of lone-mother families has steadily grown during the past decades across Europe (Bernardi et al., 2018). With regard to the prevalence of children living in lone-mother families, in the year 2016, the proportion of Finnish and Dutch children aged 17 years and under living with a lone parent were nearly equal, 13.2% and 13.1% respectively, whereas in the UK, nearly a quarter of children (23.2%) lived with a lone parent (OECD, 2016a). Indeed, Harkness & Fernández Salgado (2018) note that in the UK, lone motherhood has become more common, as "single motherhood has moved from being a relatively rare experience among children that grew up in the 1960s and 1970s to a social norm among those born in 2000" (p. 101).

Whereas this study has adopted the term "lone" mother or "lone-mother" family, there are several corresponding concepts denoting lone motherhood that are used differently according to certain geographical contexts or theoretical traditions. To name a few, in the United States, studies commonly use the

terms "single" mother or "single-mother" family (e.g., Ciabattari, 2007; Son & Bauer, 2010), whereas studies conducted in Australia sometimes prefer the term "sole" mother or "sole-mother" family (e.g., Dockery, Li & Kendall, 2016; Webber & Boromeo, 2005). Furthermore, "solo" mother or "solo-mother" family are often used in studies that focus on mothers having children on their own, often via donor insemination (e.g., Golombok, 2015; Golombok & Badger, 2010) and in studies that employ a feministic approach on exploring lone motherhood (e.g., Holmes, 2018).

The concept of lone mother was chosen for the present study because it is generally the dominant one used in studies on lone mothers conducted in Europe (e.g., Alsarve, 2017; Millar & Ridge, n.d.; Roman, 2019), the context of the present study. Furthermore, the term nicely captures the definition of a lone mother in this study in that even if these mothers need not be literally "alone" responsible for the upbringing and care of their children, these mothers are seen to have the *primary* responsibility for their children as well as for the everyday reconciliation of work and family life. This, however, does not exclude family situations in which the mother shares some of the childcare responsibilities with the other parent, or in some cases with the grandparents. Furthermore, the term single mother is less appropriate because "single" is considered here a marital status, whereas the definition of lone mother encompasses also divorced, separated, and widowed women.

2.2 Persistent perception of lone motherhood as "problematic" when contrasted with the ideal of a coupled mother

There exists variation between the three studied countries in terms of how lone mothers have been, and are today, portrayed within policy settings and public discourses. Despite the variation, the dominant discourses tend to share the portrayal of lone mothers as somehow "deficient" when compared to their coupled counterparts. The deficiency becomes particularly apparent when lone mothers' abilities to secure the proper development and wellbeing of their children are contrasted to those of two-parent families (see e.g., Dermott & Pomati, 2016; Forssén et al., 2009). Calder (2018) notes that the dominant discourses around "appropriate" parenting influence how parents see themselves and how parents in different family forms are perceived in contemporary societies. Thereby, the ways lone mothers are talked and written about may influence how they see and situate themselves; therefore, the discourses on lone motherhood provide an important context for the present study in that they help in understanding the political and cultural surroundings in which lone mothers are living their lives and that might also shape their experiences of reconciling work and family. Furthermore, Duncan and Edwards (1999) note that

> "the dominance of certain discourses about lone motherhood not only affects how it is understood, but also helps to set parameters on how individual lone mothers should

> act, and on how the state should intervene. In turn, state policies towards lone motherhood – and families in general – interact with popular and political perceptions to provide another reference point for the formation of discourses about lone motherhood." (p. 24)

Indeed, the public and policy discussions closely interact with the political decisions concerning lone-mother families. What is more, the discourses on lone motherhood are, of course, contingent on time and place. The mid-twentieth century, for instance, characterizes a time when women's marital status and notions of sexual "decency" were influential in determining their moral worth (May, 2011). Thereby, particularly unmarried and divorced mothers in Finland and the UK, for example, faced disapproval and moral stigma from families and community members (May, 2011; Thane, 2011). Even if such stigmatization took place over a half a century ago, after which lone-mother families can be considered to have become a social norm (see Harkness & Fernández Salgado, 2018), the dominant terminology that has been used to describe lone mothers in the past tends to reflect on how they are perceived today. That is to say, contrasting lone mothers to their coupled counterparts may involve the danger of labelling lone motherhood as "problematic" – even today. Such terminology can influence the ways they are viewed and portrayed by the public, policymakers, and scientists, which can in turn impact the policy decisions concerning them.

Policy and public discourses, together with scientific literature, have over time helped form the popular image of lone motherhood as problematic in terms of child wellbeing and development. Within the policy context, the idea of lone motherhood as problematic peaked in the 1990s, particularly in the UK, where lone mothers became considered a "social problem" because of their deviation from the "male-breadwinner family model" (Lewis & Hobson, 1997). The difficulties lone mothers, as sole providers and caregivers, faced in combining paid work and family, resulted in their failure to engage in the labor market and further in their high reliance on state benefits (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; Van Drenth, Knijn & Lewis, 1999). Due to this, lone mothers became central policy targets, as a result of which lone mothers in the UK have become an active part of the labor force (e.g., Millar & Ridge, n.d.). Despite their elevated employment rates, Salter (2018) argues that politicians together with the media in the UK continue to identify lone parents, that is, lone mothers, as a group with a multiply disadvantaged social position. The findings by Hinton-Smith (2015) agree with this argument as she states that

> "the most economically vulnerable lone parents are also the most socially stigmatised in a neoliberal climate in which it is to be poor rather than to be unmarried that is deemed the main social crime of lone parenthood" (p. 219).

Indeed, it appears that lone mothers in the UK still face a certain degree of stigma in the policy context because of their shared status as lone mothers.

In the Netherlands and Finland, the problematizing nature of lone motherhood, with regard to policy discourses, has not been as severe as in the UK. During the 1990s, lone motherhood in the Netherlands was associated with is-

sues related to lone mothers' poverty and dependency on welfare benefits, but without the strong moralistic dimension characteristic to British public and policy discussions around lone mothers and their employment (Knijn & Van Wel, 2001; Van Drenth et al., 1999). In Finland, again, lone mothers were in a very different position in the labor market compared to their Dutch and British counterparts as their employment rates were exceptionally high until the early 1990s recession, after which lone mothers' position in the labor market eroded substantially (Hiilamo, 2009). Although, after the recession, important changes were made to the Finnish family policy, the political discussion was not targeted to lone mothers to the same extent as in the Netherlands and the UK. This was possibly due to Finnish lone mothers' comparatively high activity in the labor market and low reliance on the state benefits before the recession (Hakovirta, 2006). Hiilamo (2009) further considers it possible that the needs of lone-mother families were perhaps not highlighted in the discussion of the Finnish family policy because of the desire to refrain from labelling or stigmatizing lone mothers in this regard.

In addition to policy discourses, the idea of lone motherhood as problematic has been accompanied by claims of lone mothers' inability to provide high-quality parenting to their children in the same way that two parents can (Dermott & Pomati, 2016). This view stems from the comparison of lone-mother families with the dominant cultural idealization of heterosexual two-parent families (Golombok, 2015; Thane, 2011; Vuori, 2003; Webber & Boromeo, 2005), which is based on the idea that families with two parents are considered to provide the best environment for a child's growth and development. This narrow view rather easily leads to a blunt understanding that other family forms, lone-mother families included, are insufficient in ensuring the proper development and wellbeing of children, thus positioning lone mothers as "deficient parents" (Dermott & Pomati, 2016). It also easily leads to a juxtaposition of lone mothers and coupled mothers:

> "Many of the discussions of lone motherhood are concerned with a comparison between lone mothers and an imaginary ideal of the married mother or with the ineffectiveness of lone parenting compared with a supposed model of dual parenting" (McIntosh, 1996, p. 154).

The consequences of such juxtapositions between lone mothers and coupled mothers are disconcerting in that they can lead to or reassert the traditional perception of lone motherhood as problematic, especially when approached from the perspective of child wellbeing and upbringing (Dermott & Pomati, 2016; Forssén et al., 2009; May, 2008, 2011). Indeed, although lone mothers in Finland, for example, have not faced moral stigmatization associated with their labor market behavior, as suggested above, May (2011) notes that Finnish lone mothers are facing a novel kind of stigma associated with the lack of a father in their children's lives. Due to the increasing importance that is placed on fathers' participation in the lives of their children to assure child wellbeing (Vuori, 2003), the absence of another residential parent may result in the questioning of lone mothers' abilities to provide the proper environment for the child's upbringing.

Because of this, there is a tendency also in Finland to view lone motherhood as problematic with regards to child wellbeing (Forssén et al., 2009).

Accordingly, one of the most serious and intertwined concerns that is currently attached to lone motherhood relates to the assumption that lone mothers are less able than coupled mothers to bring up children and assure their wellbeing. But some recent studies have been both challenging the problematic nature attached to lone motherhood (e.g., Golombok & Badger, 2010; Golombok, Zadeh, Imrie, Smith & Freeman, 2016) and highlighting that even though lone-parent families, and children in these families, are more likely than two-parent families to experience reduced wellbeing, this is not necessarily related to lone parenthood *per se*. The present study adopts this stance in studying lone mothers and emphasizes that lone mothers may be faring worse because they face more challenges in their attempts to secure the wellbeing for themselves and their children, which they often try to accomplish with scarcer socio-economic resources than two-parent families (Dermott & Pomati, 2016; Zagel, Kadar-Satat, Jacobs & Glendinning, 2013). Undeniably, compared to two-parent families, lone mothers are more often solely responsible for the maintenance of the needs and wellbeing of the family members, due to which they might have limited resources in terms of education, finance, and time to take care of these needs (Gornick, 2018). Furthermore, Calder (2018) argues that the disadvantage attached to lone parents "depends on decisions about the distribution of resources in society, alongside dominant assumptions about appropriate family forms, both which are contingent and up for revision" (p. 427). This recognition should shift the focus from lone motherhood *alone* to the broader structural settings that lone-mother families live in. These settings comprise the policies and resources that shape lone mothers' employment opportunities which are likely to impact the wellbeing of the members in lone-mother families (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018).

2.3 Welfare and care regimes – varying degrees and forms of support for lone mothers' work–family reconciliation

The three countries under study represent three welfare states characterized by different welfare and care regimes in which the states, along with the market and individual households (Esping-Andersen, 1999), take differing roles in promoting or preventing lone mothers' opportunities to engage in paid employment. With its focus on working lone mothers, this study is particularly interested in the ways that lone mothers living in different welfare and care regimes are able to manage the combination of the responsibilities attached to paid work and childcare. There is a continuing need to study how well lone mothers fare in different welfare regimes, as this continues to illuminate the issue of gendered social rights, that is, the right to form an independent household without the risk of poverty and marginalization (Kilkey, 2000; Lewis &

Hobson, 1997). Lone mothers are often economically marginal in that they have lower incomes and are more likely to be dependent on welfare benefits compared to coupled mothers, and therefore children living in lone-mother families are at increased risk of poverty (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Hübgen, 2018; Nieuwenhuis, Munzi, Neugschwender, Omar & Palmisano, 2018). Thereby, the labor market and welfare state represent the two key institutions regarding lone mothers' poverty risk (Hübgen, 2018) and thus the wellbeing of these mothers and their children.

In the 1990s, lone mothers' "welfare dependency" became an important political issue across Europe (Lewis & Hobson, 1997), which invoked the need for welfare states to develop support measures such as childcare service provision and benefits that enabled lone mothers to engage in paid employment. Such support measures for lone mothers were, and still are, important in that they can promote the autonomy and the wellbeing of lone-mother families as well as reduce the inequalities between children that come from different socioeconomic backgrounds by preventing lone mothers' dependency on state benefits and the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Mayes & Thomson, 2012; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2018; Plantenga & Remery, 2009). In discussing the diverse ways that different welfare states and their policy environments enable lone mothers to reconcile paid work with family responsibilities, I apply the following theoretical frameworks.[1] First, I refer to the three ideal-typical configurations of care systems, which Van Hooren and Becker (2012) have identified by following Esping-Andersen's (1999) typology of welfare regimes developed through the analytical lens of the family. Central to the typology of Esping-Andersen (1999) has been the concept of "de-familialization," originally introduced by Lister (2003), with which she refers to

> "the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independently of family relationships, either through paid work or through social security provisions and either inside or outside of a couple relationship" (p. 172).

In addition, I use the typology developed by Pfau-Effinger (2005), which provides a characterization of the diverse care arrangements influenced by the political and cultural atmospheres across the three countries. Policy-wise, I focus on two structural features of the welfare states that are central in terms of lone mothers' labor market participation: the provision of formal childcare services and benefits as well as country-specific maternal work hour cultures (i.e., part-time and full-time cultures). Here, formal childcare is defined as comprising

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[1] Due to the policy interest on lone mothers, the latter part of the 1990s and the early millennium marked an era when academics developed care regime categorizations with a particular focus on lone mothers. Lewis and Hobson (1997) developed a framework focusing on two ideal types of care regimes differentiated by the resources available for lone mothers to organize paid work and caregiving. This was subsequently supplemented by Kilkey (2000). Despite the important focus of these frameworks on lone mothers, the typologies characterize a different time period compared to the present, which is why I chose to discuss these regimes by referring to the typologies of Van Hooren and Becker (2012) and Pfau-Effinger (2005), which provide a more up-to-date characterization of the welfare and care regimes.

care provided by professional caregivers in public or private institutions or in family day care.

In Table 1, the variation regarding the diverse political contexts across the three countries is illustrated by the employment rates of lone and coupled mothers, as well as the take-up of mothers' part-time work. Out of the three studied countries, Finnish lone mothers have the highest employment rates and highest level of full-time work. This reflects that Finland belongs to the social democratic type of welfare and care regime, which is characterized by publicly provided formal childcare services and the children's subjective right to receive such care (Van Hooren & Becker, 2012). Through its family policy, the Finnish government strongly supports mothers' labor market participation by tax-based childcare services and benefits, enacted and administrated by individual municipalities (Anttonen, 2001). Indeed, Pfau-Effinger (2005) classifies Finland as the "dual breadwinner/external childcare model," according to which both parents in two-parent families work full time and a fair amount of childcare responsibilities are shared with institutions outside of the family. Public childcare services are in principal universal in that all children, irrespective of the financial situation of their families, have a subjective right to early childhood education and care (ECEC; henceforth referred to as formal childcare) (Rönkä, Turja, Malinen, Tammelin & Kekkonen, 2017c). The subjective right and tax-based provision of formal childcare ensures that Finland is among the countries providing the most comprehensive and affordable full-time and part-time formal childcare services for under school-aged children, which enables mothers across different family forms to engage in full-time employment. Pfau-Effinger (2012) notes that such family policies can be classified as "de-familizing" policies, in that the comprehensive formal childcare enables women to divest themselves of family responsibilities and dependency. Indeed, Finnish women are found more likely than women in the other two countries to earn their own income, and thereby Finland has comparatively low poverty rates among all families (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2018), although it should be noticed that lone-mother families are more likely to fall below the margins of poverty compared to two-parent families (Mukkila, Ilmakangas, Moisio & Saikkonen, 2017).

TABLE 1 Employment rates of lone and coupled mothers in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK, and the proportion of mothers working part-time in 2017 (%)

	Lone mothers		Coupled mothers	
	Employed	Part-time	Employed	Part-time
Finland	71.9	16.9	76.4	15.3
The Netherlands	62.7	79.6	80.6	82.5
The UK	66.0	58.5	75.7	52.4

Note. From 15 to 64 years
Source: Eurostat (2018)

In addition to formal childcare, the Finnish government also financially supports home-based care for under three-year-olds by the partly income-tested

child home care allowance (Kilkey, 2000; Repo, 2010). Thereby, lone mothers of young children are supported by the government irrespective of whether they *choose* to engage in full-time paid employment *or* in full-time caregiving at home (Kilkey, 2000). Home-based care, usually provided by the mother, is a common arrangement in Finnish families with children under the age of three (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2013), which is reflected on the relatively low participation rates of children aged 0–2 years in formal childcare, shown in Table 2. In Finland, childcare has also been subject to a degree of liberalization, by allowing for greater reliance on markets (i.e., by the use of private care allowance) and on families, especially mothers, to care for the young children (Mahon, Anttonen, Bergqvist, Brennan & Hobson, 2012). However, the child home care allowance is not substantial (Pfau-Effinger, 2012), and as a result, providing full-time care for children may not be a viable option, especially for lone mothers (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Mäntylä, 2016) who may have to return to the labor market soon after their maternal and parental leave, when the child is about nine months old. As can be seen from Table 2, the use of informal childcare among Finnish families seems exceptionally rare, which can be due to the comprehensive formal childcare services provided on full-time basis, together with the child home care allowance enabling home-based care for young children.

TABLE 2 Enrolment rates in formal childcare services and primary education and proportion of children using informal childcare arrangements by age group in 2016 (%)

	Enrolment rates in formal childcare and primary education			Children using informal childcare arrangements		
	0–2 y	3–5 y	6 y	0–2 y	3–5 y	6–12 y
Finland	30.5	79.0	72.9[a]	1.5	1.9	0.1
The Netherlands	55.9	94.6	–	57.3	54.9	34.9
The UK	31.5	100.0	–	37.4	37.1	34.6

Source: OECD (2016b, 2016c). [a]Säkkinen & Kuoppala (2018)

Whereas Finnish lone mothers tend to be actively involved in full-time employment, their Dutch counterparts represent much lower participation rates in total and especially in full-time employment (see Table 1). The Netherlands has traditionally been classified as the conservative type of welfare and care regime characterized by the traditional breadwinner-housewife family model in which mothers, including lone mothers, were until the 1990s recognized primarily as caregivers entitled to welfare benefits (Lewis & Hobson, 1997; Van Hooren & Becker, 2012). Indeed, the comparatively low employment rates and high prevalence of part-time work among Dutch mothers, overall, may reflect this highly valued maternal care culture (Knijn & Van Wel, 2001; Van Wel & Knijn, 2006). In the 1990s, however, lone mothers' dependency on welfare benefits became a political issue (Van Drenth et al., 1999), and thereafter Dutch lone mothers have increasingly been encouraged to become active in the labor market instead of being caregivers living on state subsidies, and their duty of care-

giver has been combined with that of a breadwinner (Bussemaker, Van Drenth, Knijn & Plantenga, 1997; Knijn & Van Wel, 2001). It is important to note, however, that employed lone mothers tend to have a higher educational background than those who are not employed, which may indicate that less educated lone mothers on welfare have particularly strong care ethos (Knijn & Van Wel, 2001). As can be seen from Table 1, employed lone mothers in the Netherlands are more likely to work full time compared to coupled mothers. This may be because in order to make work pay, lone mothers, as sole providers, cannot settle for anything other than a well-paid job, which may require them to work full time (Knijn & Van Wel, 2001; Van Drenth et al., 1999).

The increase in the employment rates of lone mothers in the Netherlands has been enabled by the investments of the Dutch government in state supported childcare services for young children (Knijn & Van Wel, 2001). As a result, formal childcare has become somewhat more socially accepted (De Ruijter, 2004), as reflected in the growth in the number of children attending formal childcare (Vermeer et al., 2008) as well as the findings indicating that the childcare provision in the Netherlands is becoming increasingly universal and inclusive (Kröger, 2011; Rauch, 2007; see Table 2). As a result of the developments in childcare, Van Hooren and Becker (2012) emphasize that today, the Netherlands can be characterized as a "hybrid" of different care regimes; social-democratic features are present in the public subsidies for social services, whereas liberal features are reflected in the market logic underlying care provision, and conservatism has remained present as childcare is not a universal service for all children, but is dependent on the parents' employment status. According to Pfau-Effinger (2005), an egalitarian "dual breadwinner/dual carer model" has become established in the country, which emphasizes that both parents in two-parent families engage in part-time work and share childcare responsibilities both with each other and with an institution outside the family. For lone mothers this probably means that they need to replace the care provided by the other parent in two-parent families by either making more use of formal childcare services compared to two-parent families (see De Ruijter, 2004) or by relying on the more flexible and cheaper option of informal care, provided primarily by grandmothers (Bakker & Karsten, 2013). It may be that even though the government as well as employers help pay part of the fees of formal childcare through income-dependent imbursements (Plantenga and Remery, 2009; Van Klaveren, Maassen van den Brink & Van Praag, 2013), the fees remain too high for lone mothers. Furthermore, because formal services are offered only on a part-time basis (Plantenga & Remery, 2009), Dutch lone mothers working full time may choose to rely solely on their informal care networks to reduce the number of caregivers. Out of the three countries, the proportion of children using informal childcare arrangements is highest in the Netherlands (see Table 2).

The employment statistics of lone mothers in the UK resemble those of their Dutch counterparts in terms of the lower employment rates and higher levels of part-time work compared to Finnish lone mothers (see Table 1). The UK has regularly been classified as the liberal type of welfare and regime,

which emphasizes the individual responsibility for arranging childcare, which is provided primarily by the market (Van Hooren & Becker, 2012). Like their Dutch counterparts, British lone mothers were, up until the 1990s, paid welfare benefits to support their caregiving roles; yet in the course of the decade, their dependency on state benefits became a pressing political issue (Lewis & Hobson, 1997; Van Drenth et al., 1999). In order to prevent lone mothers' welfare dependency, policies aiming to encourage lone mothers' participation in the labor market were developed (Kilkey, 2000; Lewis & Hobson, 1997; Van Drenth et al., 1999). With the introduction of affordable childcare and early years services, successive governments have aimed to increase the employment rates of disadvantaged groups including lone parents (Rutter & Evans, 2012; Statham & Mooney, 2003). According to Rutter and Evans (2012), since the late 1990s, prior to which childcare was considered to be a private matter for families, formal childcare provision has expanded and the government has introduced initiatives such as free entitlement to part-time early childhood education for children aged 3 and 4 years,[2] and subsidies for childcare costs through the tax credit system, to make childcare more affordable especially for low income families. These developments in the childcare service system are visible in Table 2, which shows full enrolment rates in ECEC among British children aged 3 to 5 years. Lone parents have also been a substantial group among the recipients of in-work tax credits, which have offered significant financial support for these families (Kazimirski, Smith, Butt, Ireland & Lloyd, 2008; Millar & Ridge, n.d.). Given that today nearly seven in ten lone mothers are in employment (see Table 1), these initiatives seem to have been rather successful. Indeed, Millar and Ridge (n.d.) state that "the default position is now that lone parents should be working or seeking work" (p. 3). However, due to the weak institutional support for part-time wages, lone mothers working part-time may face substantial wage penalties (McGinnity & McManus, 2007).

Formal childcare available on a part-time basis supports the "male breadwinner/female part-time carer model" characteristic of the British care regime, which expects that fathers are full-time workers and mothers manage the responsibilities attached to work and childcare through part-time work (Pfau-Effinger, 2005). This asks the important question of whether the childcare system is able to meet the needs of working lone mothers. It seems that in spite of the introduction of tax free childcare in 2017 (see Harding & Cottell, 2018) along with other additional benefits or reimbursements, British lone mothers may find it challenging to successfully reconcile work and childcare due to the contradiction of comparatively high childcare costs and low income levels (Fagan & Norman, 2012; Kröger, 2011; Ridge & Millar, 2011). Harding and Cottell (2018) note that it is especially challenging to find affordable childcare for young children, before they are old enough to attend the free early childhood education.

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[2] Universal free early education for all children covers 15 hours a week. Since 2017, children aged three and four of *working parents* in England have been able to get 30 hours of free childcare per week for 38 weeks per year. Providers, however, are not obliged to offer such care, and there are also some gaps in the availability of such provision. (Harding & Cottell, 2018.)

This, together with the gaps in the availability of the universal free entitlement, creates challenges for finding suitable formal childcare providers (Harding & Cottell, 2018). Therefore, working lone mothers of young children need to rely heavily on informal childcare offered by grandparents, other relatives, ex-partners and friends (Kazimirski et al., 2008; Rutter & Evans, 2012). Indeed, Van Hooren and Becker (2012) remark that in the UK, childcare is still partly seen as an individual responsibility that is primarily provided by the market, which is typical for liberal welfare and care regimes. This, for one, explains the complexity of the British childcare system. Similarly, Fagan and Norman (2012) state that although several publicly subsidized or funded childcare services have been generated, the demand, however, still exceeds the supply of these services. The higher rate of part-time work among British lone mothers compared to coupled mothers (see Table 1) may therefore reflect the shortage of full-time formal childcare services together with the high cost of market-based services (Kazimirski et al., 2008; see Kröger, 2010).

In conclusion, there exists variation across the three countries in relation to the diverse opportunities and restrictions that the welfare state policies offer for lone mothers to take up paid work that enables them to provide financially for themselves and their children. The present study has taken place at an interesting time, considering the changes that policy approaches to lone motherhood have seen, especially in the Netherlands and the UK during the past three decades. Today, lone mothers across the three countries live in contexts where their labor market participation is assumed and encouraged (e.g., Bussemaker et al., 1997; Millar & Ridge, n.d.; Van Drenth et al., 1999), but this encouragement has been conducted in different ways and with different outcomes to the employment rates of lone mothers and particularly to the take-up of mothers' part-time and full-time work. Indeed, although lone mothers in the Netherlands and the UK, for example, are expected to be an active part of the labor force supported by formal childcare services, tax reductions, and financial incentives (e.g., Knijn & Van Wel, 2001; Millar & Ridge, n.d.), the care regimes characterizing these two countries still emphasize the part-time work of mothers (Pfau-Effinger, 2005) and thereby only subsidize formal childcare on a part-time basis (Kröger, 2010; Plantenga & Remery, 2009). The strong maternal care culture (e.g., Kazimirski et al., 2008; Van Wel & Knijn, 2006), together with the failure of the childcare service systems to meet the needs of working lone mothers, places these mothers in a difficult position in trying to manage financially without a residential partner. Therefore, lone mothers in the Netherlands and the UK are more likely than Finnish lone mothers to work part time and possibly to earn a low income (Cousins & Tang, 2004; McGinnity & McManus, 2007), which means that they are facing a comparatively greater risk of in-work poverty compared to lone mothers in Finland (Hübgen, 2018). Indeed, the different changes in policy approaches towards lone mothers witnessed by the three countries means that the lives of the studied lone mothers, especially in the Netherlands and the UK, have been characterized by changing policy landscapes.

3 MATERNAL NON-STANDARD WORK HOURS AND LONE MOTHERS' WORK–FAMILY RECONCILIATON

3.1 Non-standard work hours characteristic of a 24/7 economy

A significant number of women, and mothers among them, engaged in the present-day labor market are working *outside* the standard working day that takes place during 9-to-5 office hours, Monday through Friday. Working times outside this standard working day are representative of a "24/7" economy characterized by technological development, a competitive global market, and round-the-clock demand for services and products as well as a flexible work force (e.g., Alves, Bouquin, & Poças, 2007; Glorieux, Mestdag & Minnen, 2008; Plantenga, 2004; Presser, 2003; Richbell, Brookes, Brewster & Wood, 2011). In the present study, working times outside the standard working day are referred to as *non-standard work hours*,[3] which comprise work hours that cover evenings (6pm–10pm), nights (10pm–5am), early mornings (5am–7am), and weekends. Although the emergence of the 24/7 economy is evident in the United States (see Presser, 2003), there is lack of consensus as to the extent to which European economies have shifted towards this type of economy. Whereas Rubery, Ward, Grimshaw and Beynon (2005), for instance, argue that "more and more of economic activity takes place outside the 'standard' working day" (p. 105) (see also

[3] In the literature, some interchangeable concepts for non-standard work hours cover "atypical work hours" (e.g., Kröger, 2010; La Valle et al., 2002; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004; Statham & Mooney, 2003), "nonstandard shifts" and "nontraditional shifts" (Hepburn, 2018). These concepts highlight the separation of these work times from the "traditional," "standard," or "typical" ones that stand for the industrial working time, which was characterized by the standardization of work and leisure time (Anttila, 2005; Richbell et al., 2011). Relatedly, another concept used for non-standard work hours is "unsociable hours" (e.g., Dixey, 1999), which refers to the antisocial nature of these work hours. Explicitly, those working *unsocial* hours are either working or sleeping when other members of the family or friends tend to socialize (Moss, 2009).

Plantenga, 2004), others have not found an increasing trend attached to such working times (e.g., Glorieux et al., 2008; Parent-Thirion, Fernández, Hurley & Vermeylen, 2007). Statham and Mooney (2003) take the middle way by noting that although some professions, such as those in some manufacturing industries, have for long required work outside standard working day, thus indicating that work during evenings and night-time is not a novel phenomenon, work outside standard daytime hours has nevertheless become more widespread.

Given the ongoing developments in relation to working times as well as the welfare state investments that aim to increase the labor market participation of women, it is important to understand how these developments influence mothers' abilities to reconcile work and family life, and ultimately, what kind of impact they have on motherhood as mothers across various occupations are required to work during non-standard hours. Indeed, high rates of non-standard work hours are characteristic of two female-dominated work sectors, namely, the expanding service sector and the health sector (Parent-Thirion et al., 2007; Presser, 2003), making work during early mornings, evenings, nights, and weekends prevalent for many working women, mothers among them. As stated above, nowadays, these hours have become part of various professions, and therefore can be found in both low- and high-level occupations characterized by diverse working time patterns. In nursing and service professions, for instance, non-standard work hours often take the form of rotating two- or three shift work or regular evening or night work. In some higher level occupations intensification, extensification, and boundarylessness in the form of overtime hours and work-related travelling may cause the working day to be stretched beyond standard daytime hours (Green & McIntosh, 2001; La Valle et al., 2002; Moen, Lam, Ammons & Kelly, 2013; Richbell et al., 2011). Indeed, it is important to note that for some, non-standard work hours may represent a requirement originating from the employer or the nature of work, but others may choose to work these hours because of individual ambition (usually among professionals and managers) or in order to, for example, accommodate work and family responsibilities or have higher earnings because of a shift premium (see McMenamin, 2007; Richbell et al., 2011).

Statistical information collected by the European Union on the patterns of non-standard work hours among employed women in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK are presented in Table 3. As seen from the table, Finland stands out with an exceptionally high rate of shift work among women whereas work during evenings and weekends is comparatively common among Dutch women. Night-time work is the least common, whereas a relatively large proportion of women in all three countries work on Saturdays. Apart from shift work and evening work, great differences are not visible in the figures for non-standard work hours employed by women across the three countries. However, the Netherlands stands out from the other two countries due to its strict opening hours, high levels of part-time work, and limited offering of round-the-clock services (Mills & Täht, 2010), which is why women possibly work during these times on a part-time basis. Furthermore, even if in the UK, an increasing num-

ber of services are available to consumers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, non-standard work hours, overall, seem not to be as typical for British women compared to their Finnish and Dutch counterparts. In Finland, again, the regulation of the opening hours of shops was annulled in 2016 in order to, for instance, improve the employment situation. Although Finland is notably separated from the two countries only by the high prevalence of shift work, Finnish women often work non-standard hours on a full-time basis.

TABLE 3 Patterns of non-standard work hours among employed women in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK in 2017 (%)

	Finland	The Netherlands	The UK
Shift work	26.9	13.9	18.0
Evenings[a]	22.9	31.4	10.2
Nights[a]	6.3	6.4	4.7
Saturdays[a]	24.4	31.2	25.0
Sundays[a]	18.1	22.9	16.9

Note. [a]Usually works during these times
Source: Eurostat (2018); ages: 15–64 years

In terms of the relationship between non-standard work hours and family form, there is a lack of comparable European statistics available to indicate the number of lone mothers who work during non-standard hours in the three countries. In the United States, the topic has been surveyed more comprehensively, and according to the Current Population Survey, non-married American women do more shift work and work fewer regular daytime schedules compared to their married counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Also, Presser (2003) suggested that lone parents in the United States are particularly likely to work during non-standard hours. With a focus on the studied countries, no such findings have emerged as lone mothers have been found to be as likely as coupled mothers to frequently work during non-standard hours in the UK (Barnes et al., 2006; La Valle et al., 2002) and to do shift work in Finland (National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2015). Barnes et al. (2006) did find that, in the UK, lone mothers were somewhat more likely than coupled mothers to work during the night-time and Saturdays, which may indicate that lone mothers are more likely to work contracted non-standard hours (e.g., shift work, weekend work) whereas overtime work is more typical for coupled mothers.

3.2 Work–family reconciliation and the idea of a "triple demand"

The work–family literature has established that work and family life are not to be understood as segregated or separate but very much intertwined spheres of

everyday life (Lambert, 1990).[4] Several concepts have been identified that signify this interrelated nature of the work and family life and which are often used interchangeably. *Work–family reconciliation* is often used when discussing the relationship of work and family in the wider policy context and as a neutral description of the relationship between these two spheres (Fagan, Lyonette, Smith & Saldaña-Tejeda, 2012), whereas *work–family integration, combination,* and *interface*, for example, are regularly used to refer to the link between work and family roles (e.g., Ilies, Wilson & Wagner, 2009; Zimmerman & Hammer, 2010). In this study, the term work–family reconciliation is used in a broad sense to refer to lone mothers' abilities to manage the reconciliation, combination, and integration of the demands and responsibilities attached to the spheres of work and family, and the roles inherent in these spheres. Work–family reconciliation stands here for an upper-level concept that encompasses three areas: (1) childcare arrangements, (2) negative and positive work-to-family interface, and (3) cultural notions of "good" mothering, each of which are discussed separately with a focus on lone mothers' non-standard work hours in the following three sections.

Role theory by Katz and Kahn (1978) offers a framework for understanding the reconciliation of the roles inherent in the two everyday life spheres of work and family. The theory indicates that a person can engage in multiple roles, for example, in a role of a mother and that of a worker. Each of these two roles is associated with specific forms of behavior that develop from task requirements characteristic to the given roles. The task requirements can be seen as *demands* because they follow general role expectations according to which a person is expected to adjust her behavior. (Katz & Kahn, 1978.) As applied to the present study, role theory holds that mothers are expected to adhere to the demands associated with their work roles as well as family roles. As a result, the central argument of the present study is that lone mothers who reconcile work during non-standard hours with family responsibilities face a "triple demand" associated with their work and family roles. Together their status as a lone mother, their engagement in paid employment, and work during non-standard hours can be seen to violate the cultural understanding held within contemporary societies about what is considered to ensure optimum child development and wellbeing (e.g., Forssén et al., 2009; Hays, 1996; May, 2008, 2011). Furthermore, reconciling the demands and responsibilities attached to work and family with the resources of one parent (e.g., Gornick, 2018) is likely to expose lone mothers to heavier demands compared to coupled mothers.

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[4] According to Lambert (1990), segmentation, compensation, and spillover comprise three main theoretical frameworks that scholars have often used to explain the process through which work and family are linked. When work and family spheres are *segmented*, they do not impact each other, whereas *compensation* occurs when workers try to compensate for the lack of satisfaction in one of the spheres to find more satisfaction in the other. Spillover theory is the most popular view to work and family relationship by indicating that the effects (e.g., emotions, attitudes, or behaviors) of either one of the spheres spills (either negatively or positively) over to the other sphere, and thus affect not only the worker but also other family members.

3.2.1 Childcare arrangements during non-standard hours

One of the central elements of work–family reconciliation is that of childcare arrangements. In families where one or both parents work during non-standard hours, the need for childcare is different compared to families with parents working during daytime alone (Lammi-Taskula & Siippainen, 2018), as childcare is also needed during early mornings, evenings, nights, and weekends. The present study is interested in how mothers' non-standard work hours associate with lone mothers' and coupled mothers' experiences of challenges related to childcare arrangements, and whether lone mothers' experiences differ from those of their coupled counterparts. In terms of lone-mother families, it goes without saying that, in the absence of a residential partner, the availability of non-parental childcare during non-standard hours represents an important means of successful reconciliation of work and family life for these mothers.

When mothers make decisions concerning childcare, there are certain criteria that need to be met. These criteria can vary according to differences, for example, in work hours, family finances, and cultural values and expectations (Ceglowski & Baciagalupa, 2002). First, three structural criteria regarding the provision of childcare during non-standard hours are important if mothers are intending to work during these hours: *availability* (i.e., the supply of childcare services), *affordability* (i.e., the cost of childcare), and *accessibility* (i.e., whether childcare services are located in the close vicinity of the families) of childcare (see Plantenga & Remery, 2009). Second, the *quality* – or perceived quality – of childcare matters to mothers when they make decisions about childcare as they are unlikely to place their children in childcare if they cannot trust the quality of care (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). Below, I review the role that both the formal childcare service provision and informal care resources provided by the social network (e.g., grandparents, friends, and neighbors) have on the opportunities for lone-mother families and two-parent families to arrange childcare during non-standard hours in the three countries. I also address the issue of quality of childcare, which is important not only to mothers making the decisions concerning childcare but also when discussing the types of childcare services that governments should provide or endorse.

3.2.1.1 Formal childcare service provision

In Finland, under-school-aged children have a legal right to receive government-subsidized care during the times their parents are working or studying. Thereby, a major and progressive aspect of the Finnish childcare system is the government-subsidized formal childcare that is available during evenings, nights, weekends, and during holidays, usually in a municipal childcare center (Rönkä et al., 2017c) and that is as affordable for families as formal childcare during standard hours (Peltoperä, Turja, Vehkakoski, Poikonen & Laakso, 2018). This care is here referred to as *day-and-night care*[5] to separate it from day care

[5] Finnish day-and-night care has also been referred to as "flexibly scheduled ECEC," "around-the-clock childcare" or "shift care" (see Rönkä et al., 2017c).

provided generally between 6am and 6pm. Some day-and-night care centers offer their services for up to 24 hours a day, seven days a week while others have extended operating hours, for example, in the form of evening care that takes place between 6pm and 10pm (Säkkinen, 2014). Families are entitled to the day-and-night care services if both parents in a two-parent family or the residential parent in a lone-parent family work(s) during non-standard hours. Because of the regulations that determine who is eligible to utilize day-and-night care, lone-mother families form a major clientele of these services (Rönkä et al., 2017c). Municipal day-and-night care is the most typical form of childcare in Finnish families with parent(s) working non-standard hours (Lammi-Taskula & Siippainen, 2018),[6] and Finnish parents use this type of care more frequently compared to Dutch and British parents (Verhoef, Plagnol & May, 2018). However, according to Plantenga and Remery (2009), only 62 per cent of the Finnish municipalities meet the need for day-and-night care services, which puts into question the universal availability of these services. Indeed, all families do not necessarily have access to day-and-night care if they, for example, live in rural areas (Rönkä et al., 2017c). Therefore, families with parental non-standard work hours may have to rely more heavily on informal care compared to families with parents working standard daytime hours (Lammi-Taskula & Siippainen, 2018).

Compared to Finland, in the Netherlands, there are gaps in the availability, affordability, and accessibility of formal childcare during non-standard hours. Highly flexible childcare, for example, overnight care, is not commonly used among Dutch families (De Schipper, Tavecchio, Van IJzendoorn & Linting, 2003). Even if the Dutch government has invested in government-supported childcare services, and care centers have been urged to make childcare facilities more "flexible" (De Schipper et al., 2003), a shortage of formal childcare offered during non-standard hours still exists (Plantenga and Remery, 2009). Childminders are able to offer slightly more extensive caring possibilities when parents are working during non-standard hours (Verhoef et al., 2016a). In a recent study by Verhoef et al. (2016a), coupled parents in the Netherlands who worked these hours were found likely to use parental care as childcare arrangement. The probability of using parental care possibly reflects the limited availability of childcare services during non-standard hours as well as the cultural norms that emphasize the preference for parental care for children (Bünning & Pollman-Schultz, 2016; Knijn & Van Wel, 2001; Van Wel & Knijn, 2006). Indeed, Dutch culture and individual parents in two-parent families may prefer parental care over formal or informal childcare, and work during non-standard hours can provide parents the opportunity to provide such care for their children. Verhoef et al. (2016a) refer to these couples as "split shift" couples, which denotes the parents working in opposite shifts to facilitate everyday work–family reconciliation and to ensure that their children receive parental care. For

6 In 2013, about 7 per cent of all Finnish children attending municipal childcare were cared for in day-and-night care centers, and about half of these children received care over-nights or weekends (Säkkinen, 2014).

some couples, working non-standard hours may even facilitate the successful reconciliation of work and family, when work schedules can be adjusted to the schedules of other family members and thereby have more time to devote to family (Haddock, Schindler Zimmerman, Ziemba, & Lyness, 2006). In the absence of a residential partner, lone mothers may prefer using informal care, which according to Bakker and Karsten (2013) does not necessarily stem from the Dutch culture of care as much as from the flexibility and affordability of this option.

Similar findings with regard to the availability, accessibility, and affordability of formal childcare in the Netherlands have been reported in the UK, as one of the largest gaps in childcare provision across the country is the inability of childcare services to meet the needs of parents working outside standard office hours and during school-holidays (Harding & Cottell, 2018; Kazimirski et al., 2008; Rutter & Evans, 2012). The study by Statham and Mooney (2003) indicated that although nurseries, for example, offer their services before 8am and after 6pm, they fail to provide care during weekends or nights, for example. In the same study, childminders were found the most likely to offer care during non-standard hours, but only a small proportion of them offer childcare during nights or weekends, and when they do, these times are usually accompanied with heightened fees. This corresponds to the findings made by Verhoef et al. (2018), according to which parents in the UK mainly used formal childcare during early mornings and evenings but less so during the night-time. Indeed, the British parents in both coupled and lone-parent families have been found likely to rely on informal childcare when working such hours (Kazimirski et al., 2008; Verhoef et al., 2016b). Another reason for the high usage of informal care may relate to parents' reluctance to use a non-relative caregiver during night-time, for example, because of the cultural belief that parental care, or at least relative care, at the home setting is considered the best for the children (Statham & Mooney, 2003). A compromise might be using a childminder or hiring a nanny to care for the child at home during non-standard hours (Singler, 2011), which however may be too costly an option for lone mothers. Overall, due to the high price of and the gaps in the provision of formal childcare as well as mothers' concerns over the safety of their children when in the care of a childminder, lone mothers who work during non-standard hours are particularly likely to face difficulties with childcare arrangements (Bell, Finch, La Valle, Sainsbury & Skinner, 2005; Kazimirski et al., 2008).

A notable childcare-related shortage that is present in all three countries relates to formal care provision during non-standard hours for school-aged children (Plantenga & Remery, 2013). In Finland, the Netherlands and the UK, the children go to school when they are 7, 4/5, and 5 years old, respectively. The shortage in the provision of formal care may lead to young school-aged children being in self-care at home without adult supervision (Casper & Smith, 2004), which can expose them to various accidents and risks (Heymann, 2006). However, work during non-standard hours may be preferable to some, especially when it allows mothers to keep their young school-aged children safe by

walking them to and from school or see them off to school and welcoming them home in the afternoons (Presser, 2004; also, Roeters, Van Der Lippe, Kluwer & Raub, 2012). In cultures and individual families where there is a strong preference for parental care, work during evenings and nights can mean that the family's care preferences match the form of childcare used, especially when care is provided by parents or relatives in home surroundings (Riley & Glass, 2002).

3.2.1.2 Informal childcare

As discussed above, across the three countries, support offered by an informal care network becomes important in families where the mother works during non-standard hours. Informal care can be considered a particularly important resource for lone mothers, because they may not be able to rely on the other parent to share childcare responsibilities (Hakovirta, 2006; Kröger, 2010; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004). Indeed, in studying the care patterns of lone mothers in five European countries including Finland and the UK, Kröger (2010) found that it was common for lone mothers across the sample to supplement formal childcare hours or school hours with informal care usually provided by grandparents when the mothers worked during non-standard hours. Grandparents were found to provide wraparound care (i.e., help with collecting children from school or day care) and care during afternoons, evenings, nights, weekends, and school holidays (Kröger, 2010). Therefore, having relatives and friends who are ready to provide care assistance can facilitate the reconciliation of work during non-standard hours and childcare in lone-mother families.

Despite its importance, informal childcare is not available to all families and is by no means free from disruptions. In terms of availability and accessibility, grandparents or other members of the social network of families may be unable or unwilling to provide help with childcare because of their own paid work or illness (Singler, 2011), geographical distances or because of interpersonal conflicts (Hakovirta, 2006; Kröger, 2010; also, Dixey, 1999). Sometimes lone mothers themselves may feel that it is not right to presume taken-for-granted assistance solely from grandparents (Bell et al., 2005). Thereby, when lone mothers work during non-standard hours, they may have to rely on a number of people in their social networks, including grandparents, siblings, friends, and neighbors (Kröger, 2010). Relying on multiple care providers, however, has the potential of making childcare arrangements complex and less continuous (Hepburn, 2018), which can increase the likelihood for disruptions in care (Usdansky & Wolf, 2008) and negative consequences for the wellbeing of children (De Schipper et al., 2003).

3.2.1.3 Quality in childcare

The issue of quality in childcare and its effects on child outcomes and wellbeing has attracted the attention of researchers. Several studies (e.g., for a review, see Burger, 2010; Felfe & Lalive, 2018; Geoffroy et al., 2010; Zagel et al., 2013) have supported the idea that high-quality childcare is important in leveling out the disadvantages and in reinforcing children's socio-emotional and cognitive development. However, there is no single definition of quality in formal childcare

because it is defined differently from the viewpoints of, for example, the parents, the researchers, as well as the policymakers (e.g., Farquhar, 1990). Research on quality has distinguished between the structural and process elements contributing to the functioning of the childcare system. Structural elements are often regulated and include the 'iron triangle,' namely: staff training, staff to child ratios, and group sizes, which in interaction with other factors, such as participation rates inform about the quality of the childcare services, whereas process elements refer to what is done in the childcare settings, staff-child interaction, staff-family interaction, and teaching and pedagogical quality (Bonnetti & Brown, 2018; Ishimine, Tayler & Thorpe, 2009). These aspects comprising the structural and process quality in childcare may also be important to parents from the perspective of child development (e.g., Statham & Mooney, 2003), but the definition of quality also includes the parents' values of childcare, evaluation of the child's experience and overall satisfaction of childcare (Scopelliti & Musatti, 2013). These values and evaluations are also influenced by cultural ideas about what is good for the child (Ellingsæter & Gulbransen, 2007). In discussing the quality in childcare, I focus primarily on parents' perspectives on the quality of childcare in the context of non-standard hours because I consider this to have the strongest influence on mothers' experiences of childcare arrangements during non-standard hours.

The provision of the Finnish day-and-night care is nationally organized and controlled (Peltoperä et al., 2018; Rönkä et al., 2017c). The legislation, thereby, determines the level of staff training, staff to child ratios, and group sizes in day-and-night care centers. The provision of formal center-based childcare during non-standard hours in stable settings with educated personnel can, indeed, be considered safe and supportive of children (Peltoperä et al., 2018). However, according to the law, the duration of a child's day in daycare can be maximum of ten consecutive hours, but in day-and-night care, the daily duration is set in accordance with the needs of the child – or the parent's work hours. Long periods that children spend in day-and-night care are, indeed, more typical for children attending day-and-night care compared to daycare (Rönkä et al., 2017c), and are found to denote one reason for concern for parents (Murtorinne-Lahtinen, Moilanen, Tammelin, Rönkä & Laakso, 2016). Peltoperä et al. (2018) further note that even if the day-and-night care has the institutional status, public attitudes, including those of parents, on formal care during non-standard hours are conflicting. In addition to long days, parents may have concerns about the unpredictability of children's everyday rhythms and routines (Rönkä et al., 2017c), which can hamper the child's sense of continuity, predictability, and belonging to a peer group (Peltoperä et al., 2018).

With regard to the Netherlands, as stated above, using highly flexible formal childcare is not common among Dutch families (De Schipper et al., 2003). This is probably due to the limited availability of childcare services during non-standard hours and the preference for home-based care during these hours (e.g., Bünning & Pollman-Schultz, 2016; Van Wel & Knijn, 2006). Another reason may relate to the parents' perceptions of the quality in center-based care during non-

standard hours. De Schipper et al. (2003), for example, found several features of flexible childcare that have the possibility to negatively affect the wellbeing of the child: the use of flexible childcare facilities associated with less stability of caregivers and in peer contacts, as well as less structure in the child's daily program. They further discovered that when the staff turnover rate in the childcare center was higher, the quality of caregiving behavior was lower. Furthermore, caregivers were more involved in children's activities and stimulated their development more in daycare centers with more long-term continuity in teaching staff. (De Schipper et al., 2003.) These aspects may be particularly worrisome from the perspective of parents who may, in striving to protect their children, favor home-based childcare over center-based care. However, the findings by De Schipper et al. (2003) also suggested that when there was less stability in childcare, the caregivers were more involved with the children. Authors propose it is possible that caregivers' awareness of the instability associated with care during non-standard hours leads to the caregivers pursuing being positively oriented towards the children.

With regard to the quality in childcare during non-standard hours in the UK, Bell et al. (2005) found that with regard to formal provision, parents valued the quality in nurseries and out-of-school clubs due to the opportunities these facilities offered for children's socialization and stimulation, whereas the strongest concerns in terms of trust and safety were placed on childminders, who usually accommodate childcare during non-standard hours (Statham & Mooney, 2003). It appears thus that in the UK, parents value the benefits of children's learning and socialization in *daycare*, but institutional care during non-standard hours is considered problematic from the perspective of the child's best interest (Statham & Mooney, 2003). Bell et al. (2005) pointed out that British parents tended to favor informal childcare over formal provision during non-standard hours because they perceived informal carers as trustworthy and committed, and the child as happier and more comfortable in more familiar surroundings. Although informal childcare is an important childcare resource especially for lone mothers, when the quality of childcare is evaluated from the perspective that emphasizes child outcomes, informal childcare can be considered to associate with low quality (e.g., Geoffroy et al., 2010). One reason for this is that the informal caregiver has lower educational background compared to professionals working in institutional settings.

3.2.1.4 Concluding remarks on the availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality in childcare during non-standard hours

The above review of the availability, affordability, and accessibility as well as quality of childcare during non-standard hours suggests that in all three countries, lone mothers who work during these hours are exposed to an increased likelihood of experiencing challenges with childcare arrangements. Although two-parent families are faced with the same above described issues and challenges attached to formal and informal childcare, the advantages in two-parent families have to do with their ability to share childcare-related responsibilities and with the greater financial resources they often have at their disposal com-

pared to lone-mother families (Gill & Davidson, 2001; Kröger, 2010). In general, research conducted across the three countries shows that in two-parent families where the mother works non-standard hours, the fathers are particularly likely to be involved in childcare-related tasks (La Valle et al., 2002; Mills & Täht, 2010; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016), which may reduce the need for outsourcing childcare (Lammi-Taskula & Siippainen, 2018). Therefore, the possibility for coupled parents to share at least some of the childcare-related tasks firstly, ensures that the child receives as much parental home-based care as possible, which parents often consider the best form of care, especially for young children (e.g., Bünning & Pollmann-Schult, 2016; Staham & Mooney, 2003; Hietamäki et al., 2018). Also, the study conducted by Boyd-Swan (2019) in the United States suggested that non-parental childcare (i.e., center-based care, relative, or nonrelative caregiver), compared to care provided by the parents, during non-standard hours associated with multiple care arrangements, long hours, and declines in children's cognitive, behavioral, and physical wellbeing. Secondly, parental care can make care arrangements more flexible when possible disruptions or unexpected situations (e.g., illness) occur.

Given the absence of a residential partner and scarcer financial means, working lone mothers rely on formal provision or their informal care network when arranging childcare during non-standard hours. In Finland, the childcare service provision acknowledges the needs for childcare in families with diverse backgrounds and with parents working various hours, as day-and-night care is nationally organized and controlled and thus available and affordable to all families (Peltoperä et al., 2018; Rönkä et al., 2017c). However, as discussed above, the gaps associated with the availability, affordability, and/or accessibility of formal childcare during non-standard hours, especially in the Netherlands and the UK, together with the concerns that the societies' and mothers' share about the wellbeing and development of children cared for in institutional settings during these hours, may create doubts about placing their children in such childcare. Informal care arrangements are another option for lone mothers working non-standard hours, but this type of care is associated with lower quality compared with formal childcare when evaluated from the 'child outcome' perspective (e.g., Geoffroy et al., 2010) and with heightened complexity and precariousness, which can make lone mothers particularly likely to experience challenges with childcare arrangements.

3.2.2 Negative and positive work-to-family interface

Probably one of the most frequently studied topics in the work–family literature is the interaction of work and family roles, often referred to as the *work–family interface*. In the present study, work–family interface refers to lone and coupled mothers' experience of the combination of work and family roles, which is considered to have a significant impact on how mothers experience their overall work–family reconciliation. Studies have established that the work–family interface is bidirectional, meaning that the work role can affect the family role and vice versa (Frone, 2003). This study concentrates on the *work-to-family* interface,

which denotes how lone mothers, compared to coupled mothers, perceive their involvement in the work role to affect their participation in the family role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). What is more, by now, several studies have recognized that simultaneous engagement in multiple roles can result in *conflict* between the two roles (for a review, see Byron, 2005) and also in *gratification* (for a review, see McNall, Nicklin & Masuda, 2010). The present study thus takes into consideration both of these aspects and explores the negative and positive dimensions of work-to-family interface, experienced by lone and coupled mothers, in the context of maternal non-standard work hours.

As a negative dimension to the work-to-family interface, this study sets its attention on *time-based work-to-family conflict*, which denotes one form of inter-role conflict between work and family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Katz & Kahn, 1978). In the context of the present study, time-based work-to-family conflict occurs when mothers perceive that the time they devote to their work role requirements interferes with their abilities to fulfill the requirements attached to their family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Such an interpretation stems from the scarcity approach to multiple roles, according to which individuals attempt to fulfill their role requirements with fixed role resources (Goode, 1960). Time can definitely be considered as such a fixed resource, and in view of the scarcity approach, this study proposes that mothers' work during non-standard hours is associated with heightened levels of time-based work-to-family conflict for both lone and coupled mothers because non-standard work hours add time demands to the mothers' work role. Findings from previous studies provide support for this proposition, as maternal non-standard work hours have been found to associate with the experience of time-based work-to-family conflict among coupled mothers in the three study countries (Tammelin et al., 2017), as well as among lone mothers in Australia (Baxter & Alexander, 2008) and the United States (Ciabattari, 2007). The sense of added time demand does not stem from working *more* hours but is seen here to result from the perception that work during non-standard hours potentially clashes with the normative assumptions concerning family time. Accordingly, mothers' non-standard working hours can be seen to contravene general norms in industrialized societies regarding "family time," which dictate that weekdays are for working, while evenings and weekends are seen predominantly as family time and night-time as time for sleep (Daly, 2001). As a result, work during evenings, nights, and weekends is argued to associate with the experience of time-based work-to-family conflict among both lone and coupled mothers, which can result in role strain and worry over not having enough time for children, family activities, and joint family meals (Goode, 1960) as well as in other negative outcomes in terms of health, employment, and interaction for mothers and children (e.g., Barnes, Wagner & Ghumman, 2012; Bull & Mittelmark, 2009; Ciabattari, 2007; Gassman-Pines, 2011; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004; Mauno, Kinnunen & Rantanen, 2011; Pocock & Clarke, 2005; Son & Bauer, 2010).

Although previous studies have indicated a relationship between maternal non-standard work hours and time-based work-to-family conflict for both

coupled mothers and lone mothers, what is less understood is whether lone and coupled mothers differ with regard to the strength of this relationship. This study suggests that because lone mothers are solely responsible for coordinating work and childcare (Bell et al., 2005; Gill & Davidson, 2001) and because engagement and arrangement of family activities and time spent together along with household responsibilities take up a lot of lone mothers' time and effort, lone mothers, compared to coupled mothers, perceive more strongly that their work during non-standard hours leads to the experience of time-based work-to-family conflict. Due to their greater workload, lone mothers may feel that they do not have enough time for their children or energy to engage in activities with them when at home. In the case of coupled mothers, the other parent or residential partner may facilitate their management of multiple role demands. Explicitly, as the other parent in two-parent families is particularly likely to be involved in childcare and housework when the mother works during non-standard hours (La Valle et al., 2002; Mills & Täht, 2010; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016), many coupled mothers can rest assured that the other parent is engaging in activities with the children at home while the mother is at work (see La Valle et al., 2002). Furthermore, some coupled mothers may choose to work during non-standard hours so as to accommodate family responsibilities (Craig & Powell, 2011; Roeters et al., 2012) by working in opposite shifts with the other parent (e.g., Verhoef et al., 2016a). The suggestion presented above further coheres with findings of qualitative studies conducted in Europe, according to which non-standard work hours create particular difficulties and challenges for lone mothers in combining the requirements associated with work and family roles (e.g., Alsarve, 2017; Bakker & Karsten, 2013; Millar, 2008; Roman, 2017, 2019).

Due to the vast scholarly interest in the negative aspect of the work–family interface, a need for research on the experience of positive work-to-family interface has been established, particularly in the context of maternal non-standard work hours (see Mauno, Kinnunen, Rantanen & Mäkikangas, 2015). This study attempted to respond to this need by exploring whether there is a relationship between maternal non-standard work hours and *work-to-family positive affective spillover*,[7] and whether mothers living in different family forms and countries differ in their experience of this relationship. Work-to-family positive affective spillover appears when a mother perceives that the positive affect and mood that she experiences in her work role transfers to her family role and possibly leads to better performance along with positive affect and mood (e.g., satisfaction) in her family role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Unlike work-to-family

[7] Positive spillover is one aspect on positive work–family interface, which refers to the idea of either one of the two roles possibly enhancing the other (Zimmerman & Hammer, 2010). Additional concepts for positive spillover encompass "work–family balance," which is sometimes used to denote the absence of conflict (Frone, 2003), whereas terms such as work–family "enrichment" (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), "enhancement" (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer & King, 2002), or "facilitation" (e.g., Wayne et al., 2007) are measures of the process of work–family positive spillover (Zimmerman & Hammer, 2010). Despite the differing terminology, these concepts denote similar phenomena (Greenhaus & Foley, 2007).

conflict, positive interaction between work and family roles can have encouraging outcomes for family members as it has been found to increase mothers' life satisfaction and reduce stress (Mauno et al., 2011) as well as enhance mother–child interaction and family wellbeing in general (Wayne, Grzywacs, Carlson & Kacmar, 2007).

In terms of the relationship between maternal non-standard work hours, family form, and work-to-family positive affective spillover, there is a lack of previous research. It is possible, however, that because non-standard work hours have been associated with negative health outcomes for employees (e.g., Jamal, 2004), work during these hours can impede mothers' perception of positive affective spillover. That is to say, the strain related to the mother's work role can be seen to hinder the emergence of positive mood and affect in the first place, which means there is little chance of perceiving any positive affect to spill over to the family role. Because of the lack of prior research to inform firm expectations, this study focuses on exploring, firstly, whether non-standard work hours among lone and coupled mothers are associated with their experiences of positive affective spillover, and secondly, whether this association is different among lone mothers and coupled mothers across three countries.

As we saw earlier, the three countries under study represent different welfare states that differ according to their family and employment policies, which together with workplace policies can be seen to affect mothers' abilities to allocate, for example, time between work and family roles. Indeed, on one hand, mothers' work-to-family interface can be facilitated with adequate support from the government, the workplace, and the family (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011), but the availability of these support measures and their impact in terms of facilitating mothers' combination of work and family roles varies across the three countries. With regard to family policy and governmental support, it is only logical to assume that the near-universal and affordable provision of childcare services in Finland (Rönkä et al., 2017c) would protect mothers from high time-based work-to-family conflict. Whereas Stier, Lewin-Epstein and Braun (2012) found support for this assumption, other studies (Cousins & Tang, 2004; Steiber, 2009) have discovered that women in countries with a comprehensive childcare infrastructure are as likely to experience conflict as women in countries that lack comprehensive childcare service provision. A possible explanation for this is that mothers in the Netherlands and the UK, for example, where the usage of informal care is more common (see Table 2), are more likely than Finnish mothers to receive family support, which has been found to help reduce conflict between work and family roles (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011). Workplace support can also have impact on mothers' work-to-family interface, but Abendroth and Den Dulk (2011) discovered that in the service sector, support received from the workplace (e.g., job control, emotional support received from supervisors) was low in Finland and the UK but high in the Netherlands.

Some comparative studies (Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; Van der Lippe et al., 2006) suggest that employment policies and maternal work hour culture may be more influential than family policy for mothers' experience of work-to-

family interface. For example, frequent part-time work among Dutch and British mothers may be a conscious strategy that help mothers adapt their labor market participation around family responsibilities (Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; Roeters & Craig, 2014) thus reducing the likelihood of conflict between work and family roles (Cousins & Tang, 2004). In comparison, due to the nature of Finnish family policy, discussed earlier, it may be less common for Finnish mothers, compared to their Dutch and British counterparts, to use part-time work as a facilitative strategy with work–family reconciliation. However, resolving the incompatibility of work and family roles with part-time work may penalize mothers in the Netherlands and the UK with low wages and financial dependence on others (Cousins & Tang, 2004; McGinnity & McManus, 2007) which, again, has been found to predict work-to-family conflict for women (Edgell et al., 2012). In conclusion, there is great variation in the support measures offered and used by families to reconcile work and family roles, and the complexity of the issues involved means that it is difficult to predict mothers' experiences of time-based work-to-family conflict and positive affective spillover across the three countries.

3.2.3 Work–family reconciliation in light of "good" mothering expectations

Cultural notions of "good" mothering, in addition to the political contexts in diverse welfare states, are potentially central in shaping lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation (Roman, 2017). The present study argues that lone mothers who work during non-standard hours are faced with a *paradox* between current working time demands and the cultural expectations attached to "good" mothering. This paradox results from the fact that according to the prevailing cultural understanding in many Western societies concerning "good" motherhood (Hays, 1996), lone motherhood combined with paid work taking place during non-standard hours can be seen to risk the wellbeing of the child (e.g., May, 2008, 2011; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016). Damaske (2013) stresses that it is important for women to learn to negotiate and navigate within the paradox and moral dilemmas surrounding contemporary motherhood and paid work. For working lone mothers, moral dilemmas are particularly likely because of their sole responsibility for the financial provision and care of the children. What is more, studies that have explored the ways mothers navigate between the demands attached to mothering and paid work have shown a diversity of ways in which mothers with different work practices respond to and potentially transform the cultural expectations attached to mothering (e.g., Christopher, 2012; Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Given the ongoing developments in the working times related to 24/7 economies, a topical question is how lone mothers deal with the paradox created by the cultural expectations concerning "good" mothering along with the demands to work during non-standard hours.

Cultural ideologies attached to motherhood come to shape what is seen as socially "acceptable," "proper," or "good" motherhood. Hays (1996) explains that the "ideology and practices of appropriate child rearing are socially constructed" (p. 12), and because of this, motherhood is perceived and evaluated according to

certain normative rules characteristic for each society. Currently, the dominant ideology of motherhood across Western countries, to which Hays (1996) refers as "intensive mothering," involves the child-centered nature of socially appropriate child rearing, according to which a "good" mother, in possessing the primary responsibility for the child, is expected to prioritize, listen to, and respond to the needs of the child, thus dedicating her time and energy to preserving the child's wellbeing. Such child-centeredness is characterized by an overall "moral imperative" which denotes the total prioritization of the child's needs before those of the mother (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies, 2000, p. 789).

When a "good" mother is expected by the moral imperative to prioritize the needs and wellbeing of the child (Hays, 1996; Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2000), lone mothers can be perceived as violating this moral imperative, due to their deviation from the nuclear family (Golombok, 2015), which is considered to offer the ideal environment for child development and wellbeing (May 2008, 2011). Indeed, psy-discourses, which have a powerful impact on parenting in the present-day, emphasize the importance of the role that not only mothers but also fathers have in responding to both the material as well as psychological needs of the child in order to maintain their "proper" development and wellbeing (May, 2003; Vuori, 2003). Thereby, because the children of lone mothers grow up in a family with only one resident parent, lone mothers' ability to ensure optimum child development without the immediate presence of the father in the child's life becomes questioned (May, 2003, 2008).

Engagement in paid work is another way by which lone mothers of young children can be seen to violate expectations concerning "good" mothering. While many lone mothers have to work due to financial reasons, cultural expectations attached to "good" mothering as well as general attitudes, and those of individual mothers, towards women's paid work will influence how this work is viewed (Hakovirta, 2006). Although, maternal full-time work is a norm in Finland and therefore socially accepted, in the case of young children, the most favorably viewed care arrangement is that of a male breadwinner and female part-time carer (Salin et al., 2016), reflecting the normative assumption of mothers as the primary caregivers of young children (Hietamäki et al., 2018). Repo (2010) adds that family-centered thinking has gained popularity in Finland, which is visible in the public worry about the lack of family time and thereby the wellbeing of the children. The public debate around families is shaped by modern familism, which emphasizes the importance of mothers' responsibility for caring for their young children at home (Jallinoja, 2006; Repo, 2010). This cultural emphasis on the importance of maternal care echoes the concerns about the wellbeing of children who are cared for in center-based out-of-home care (Peltoperä et al., 2018). It is also reflected in the low proportion of young children being cared for in formal childcare, despite the comprehensiveness of the Finnish childcare system (see Pfau-Effinger, 2012; also Table 2), which thus means that a number of young children are being cared for at home, usually by the mother (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2013). Despite the general endorsement of maternal part-time work, work on a part-time basis is

rarely available and is poorly encouraged by the Finnish state and therefore not financially profitable (Salmi et al., 2016). Thereby, lone mothers of young children, as sole providers, are possibly left with no other choice but to engage in full-time employment, especially if they have a low-income job (Salmi et al., 2016), which reflects a potential conflict between lone mothers' preferences and the opportunities available to them (Hakovirta, 2006). Such conflict then may leave these mothers with a moral dilemma of whether they are leaving their child in the full-time care of other people "too early."

The moral dilemmas experienced by working lone mothers have arguably been intensified by the demand to work during non-standard hours. Hietamäki et al. (2018), for example, discovered that mothers who had jobs with non-standard work hours appealed to the difficulties to reconcile these work hours with the care responsibilities of their young children as a reason for engaging in full-time caregiving at home. However, as we saw above, full-time caregiving may not be a financially viable option for lone mothers, and the only possibility may be to take a job that involves work during non-standard hours. The issue of maternal non-standard work hours as a potential risk to child wellbeing has received considerable attention in academic literature, also reflected in public debates in Finland (see Jallinoja, 2006). Thereby, the moral dilemmas experienced by lone mothers may be intensified if the mothers perceive work during non-standard hours as a potential risk to child wellbeing.

Studies that have examined the link between maternal non-standard work hours and child wellbeing have tended to emphasize the potential risks that mothers' work during these hours pose to child wellbeing. Such risks include the unpredictability of everyday routines (Rönkä et al., 2017c; Sevón, Rönkä, Räikkönen & Laitinen, 2017) in relation to, for example, mealtimes as well as irregular sleeping rhythms that can result in insufficient amounts of sleep (Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016; see also Gassman-Pines, 2011). Moreover, as the children of lone mothers with non-standard work hours are likely to be cared for in day-and-night care centers (Rönkä et al., 2017c), these children are more likely than their counterparts living in two-parent families to spend some of their "family time" (see Daly, 2001) away from home and apart from their mothers. Indeed, lone mothers' work particularly in rotating shifts has the possibility to increase the likelihood of a reduced mother-child closeness and interaction as well as lack of family time (Han & Waldfogel, 2007; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016), which can be seen as harmful for child wellbeing (see Leibbrand, 2018). As we saw above, mothers working non-standard hours may also worry about the irregularity in childcare (Sevón et al., 2017), long time periods that children spend in day-and-night care (Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016; Rönkä et al., 2017c), and about overnight care in center-based care which can negatively affect children's socio-emotional wellbeing (see Verhoef et al., 2018).

Although prior studies have tended to highlight the negative relationship between parents' non-standard work hours and child wellbeing, it is important to note that not all findings are negative but that some patterns of non-standard work hours can be considered to benefit children's wellbeing (see e.g., Han &

Waldfogel, 2007; Hsueh & Yoshikawa, 2007; Leibbrand, 2018; Lleras, 2008; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016; Sevón et al., 2017). What these studies seem to indicate, however, is the particularly negative impact that mothers' work during non-standard hours and in rotating shifts, which is common among employed women in Finland (see Table 3), has for child wellbeing (e.g., Han & Waldfogel, 2007; Leibbrand, 2018).

Lone mothers' deviation from the cultural expectations attached to "good" motherhood, as explained above, creates the practical requirement for them to reflect on and offer an *account* for their actions to mend the apparent incongruity between their non-standard work hours and the expectations attached to them as mothers (Buttny, 1993; Juhila, 2012; Scott & Lyman, 1968). Accounts can be used to influence the self as well as to modify others' negative evaluations by altering the harmful nature of the action, or one's responsibility for it (Buttny, 1993; Mills, 1940; Scott & Lyman, 1968). The overall function of accounts for lone mothers in this study then had to do with preserving their view of themselves as responsible mothers. Damaske (2013) stresses that by making a difference between the actions that women have taken and how they rationalize their actions enables a better understanding of the moral ideologies attached to work and family practices. In this context, accounts can be understood as the product of the negotiation between paid work and mothering and the cultural meanings attached to these actions (Damaske, 2013).

As stated above, studies have shown a variety of ways in which mothers with different work practices, when negotiating the demands attached to paid work and mothering, respond to these cultural expectations and potentially transform them (e.g., Christopher, 2012; Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Indeed, not only have mothers been found to conform to the expectations pertaining to the intensive mothering ideal but they have also used different ways to challenge the all-encompassing requirement to prioritize the needs of the child. In the study by Christopher (2012), for example, lone mothers developed the notion of "extensive mothering" by reframing how their employment fitted into notions of mothering in their lives. This was done, for example, by emphasizing, not only the benefits their children gained from their work, but also the personal benefits the mothers themselves received from working. In another study, Johnston and Swanson (2006) discovered that mothers modified mothering expectations to support their work decision. For full-time working mothers, who perceived a lack of mother–child time due to their work hours, for example, this meant a focus on empowering their children and building their self-esteem.

As lone mothers bear the sole responsibility for work–family reconciliation within the demands set by the current labor market, lone mothers who work during non-standard hours are particularly likely to experience pressures in their efforts to reconcile work and family life. These demands together with the cultural expectations placed on them as mothers, makes it important to explore the ways that lone mothers navigate within the paradox created by demands and expectations attached to their working times and motherhood.

4 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study was set to fill gaps in the work–family literature as well as the literature concerning definitions of "good" mothering by attempting to provide new insights into how lone mothers living in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK experience the reconciliation of work and family life when they work during non-standard hours. The present study focused on three areas of work–family reconciliation within the context of maternal non-standard work hours, each of which were examined by three interrelated sub-studies: (1) childcare arrangements (*sub-study I*), (2) negative and positive work-to-family interface (*sub-study II*), and (3) cultural notions of "good" mothering (*sub-study III*). The three sub-studies were designed so as to assist in casting flashes of insight into the reconciliation of work and family life in lone-mother families. Thereby, this study involves both quantitative cross-national comparative research (sub-studies I and II) and qualitative single-national research (sub-study III) which address the three main research aims, presented below, that contribute to the overarching research objective. Figure 2 presents the general objective of the present study, its three main aims, and research questions linked to these aims as well as their connections to the three sub-studies and their specific research questions.

The first aim of the present study was to investigate *how lone mothers who live in three welfare states characterized by diverse welfare and care regimes experience childcare arrangements and negative and positive work-to-family interface when they work during non-standard hours*. To highlight the experiences of lone mothers, the second aim of the present study relates to the first one by *comparing lone mothers' experiences relating to childcare arrangements and negative and positive work-to-family interface in the context of maternal non-standard work hours to those of coupled mothers*. By comparison, the study aimed to unravel whether work–family reconciliation, in the context of maternal non-standard work hours, is different for lone mothers than for coupled mothers across the three countries. These two aims were approached by sub-studies I and II, both of which utilized a quantitative research approach that enabled the comparison between the experiences of mothers living in the two family forms and across the three countries. Specifically, sub-study I

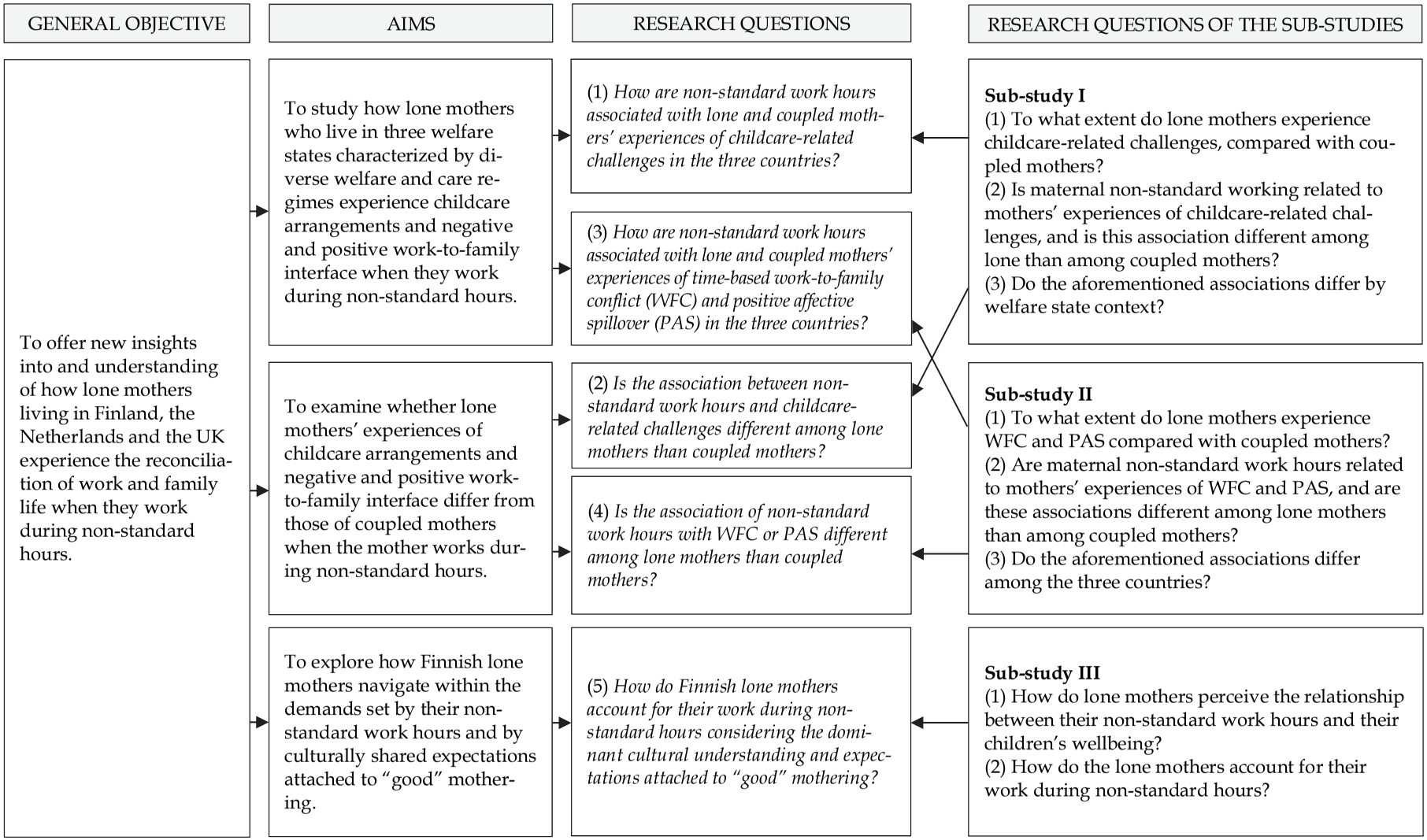

FIGURE 2 The general objective, aims, and research questions of the study and their connections to the sub-studies I–III

explored the associations of maternal non-standard work hours, lone motherhood, and their interaction with perceived challenges with childcare arrangements and compared these associations across the three countries. Sub-study II focused on mothers' perceptions of negative and positive work-to-family interface, namely time-based work-to-family conflict and work-to-family positive affective spillover, respectively, and compared the associations of non-standard work hours and lone motherhood, and their interaction with time-based work-to-family conflict and positive affective spillover between the three countries. With regard to the first two aims, the following four research questions were formulated:

> **Research question 1**: How are maternal non-standard work hours associated with lone and coupled mothers' experiences of childcare-related challenges in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK?
>
> **Research question 2**: Is the association between non-standard work hours and childcare-related challenges different among lone mothers than coupled mothers?

On the basis of previous research, it was expected that both coupled mothers and lone mothers would be likely to face challenges with childcare arrangements when they work during non-standard hours because of the lack of or gaps in the provision of formal childcare during non-standard hours (e.g., Plantenga & Remery, 2009, 2013) and the concerns that parents place on childcare during non-standard hours (e.g., Bell et al., 2005; De Schipper et al., 2003; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016; Statham & Mooney, 2003). Furthermore, it was anticipated that the magnitude of these problems was likely to be greater for lone mothers than for coupled mothers because of lone mothers' sole responsibility for and limited resources in arranging childcare (e.g., Gill & Davidson, 2001; Kröger, 2010; La Valle et al., 2002; Mills & Täht, 2010; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016). In terms of country differences, no expectations were formulated because of the pros and cons attached to different types of care arrangements (i.e., formal and informal care) that relate to the availability, affordability, and accessibility of care resources as well as quality in childcare during non-standard hours. Therefore, it was considered difficult to explicitly foretell in which of the three countries childcare arrangements would be experienced as particularly easy or problematic by mothers who work during non-standard hours.

> **Research question 3**: How are maternal non-standard work hours associated with lone and coupled mothers' experiences of time-based work-to-family conflict and work-to-family positive affective spillover in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK?

> **Research question 4**: Is the association of non-standard work hours with time-based work-to-family conflict or work-to-family positive affective spillover different among lone mothers than coupled mothers?

Based on earlier research, non-standard work hours were assumed to be positively associated with negative work-to-family interface, namely time-based work-to-family conflict, among both lone mothers (see Baxter & Alexander, 2008; Ciabattari, 2007) and coupled mothers (see e.g., Tammelin et al., 2017). Furthermore, because lone mothers are reconciling work and family roles with limited time resources compared to two-parent families (e.g., Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Gornick, 2018), they may be particularly vulnerable to the experience of time-based conflict between the responsibilities attached to work and family roles. Therefore, it was proposed that for lone mothers the positive relationship between non-standard work hours and time-based work-to-family conflict is stronger compared to coupled mothers. Due to the lack of previous research to inform expectations regarding the relationship between non-standard work hours, lone motherhood, and work-to-family positive affective spillover, no hypothesis was formulated. With regard to differences across the three countries, again, no hypotheses were formed because of the complexity related to varying welfare state contexts and workplace policies that are found to impact mothers' experiences of work-to-family interface.

The third aim of the present study was to explore *how Finnish lone mothers navigate within the demands set by their non-standard work hours and by culturally shared expectations attached to "good" mothering*. This aim was realized through sub-study III, which investigated how Finnish lone mothers account for or rationalize their work during non-standard hours and the effect these working times might have on the wellbeing of their children. The sub-study employed a single-national research approach through qualitative interviews conducted with Finnish lone mothers. The interviews assisted in understanding the lives of lone mothers by studying what kinds of challenges lone mothers experience in relation to the reconciliation of their work during non-standard hours and family life, how the mothers deal with such challenges, and what they mean for their ability to gain a sense of themselves as "good" mothers. The specific research question relating to the third aim of the present study is as follows:

> **Research question 5**: How do Finnish lone mothers account for their work during non-standard hours, considering the dominant cultural understanding and expectations attached to "good" mothering?

5 METHODS

5.1 Methodological and philosophical foundations of the study

The present study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods in approaching the central research problem, which aims at providing new insights into and understanding of lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation within the context of maternal non-standard work hours. Rather than defining such an approach according to the conventional way of thinking about "mixed methods" as a form of triangulation and integration of different types of data and their results (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), this study adopts a somewhat different kind of orientation, namely *facet methodology*, which stands for an orientation and an approach to researching the multi-dimensionality of lived experience (Mason, 2011). Indeed, the research problem of the present study can be characterized as multi-dimensional and complex, involving the experiences of mothers living in different family environments as well as diverse socio-cultural and political surroundings. As mentioned in the introduction, the use of facet methodology assisted in understanding the complexity of this multi-dimensionality and in clarifying the focus of this study. The adoption of facet methodology as a broader methodological frame further guided the philosophical assumptions underpinning this study, which comprise the assumptions about the nature of the investigated social reality (ontology) and the ways in which knowledge of this reality can be obtained (epistemology) (Blaikie, 2007). The definition and application of facet methodology in this study as well as its ontological and epistemological assumptions are discussed more closely below.

According to Mason (2011), the aim of the facet methodology approach is to "create a strategically illuminating set of facets in relation to specific research concerns" (p. 77). In illustrating the idea of facet methodology, she uses a visual metaphor of a gemstone, which is considered to represent the central research problem. When a gemstone is illuminated with light from different perspectives, facets (i.e., sides) with different shapes and sizes in a cut gemstone become visible. It is through the facets that we are able to see and appreciate the unique

character of the gemstone. Applied in research, facets can be seen as carefully designed methodological-substantive surfaces, which in refracting light differently help define the overall research problem and its distinctive character. (Mason, 2011.) Given the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation, there are several potential perspectives, approaches, and facets in exploring lone mothers' work–family reconciliation. Thereby, as Mason (2011) emphasizes, it is the researcher who makes the decision in terms of "how to best carve the facets so that they catch the light in best possible way" (p. 77). Furthermore,

> "[e]ach facet represents a way or ways of looking at and investigating *something* that is theoretically interesting or puzzling in relation to the overall enquiry and each seeks out particular instances or versions of the kinds of entwinements and contingencies that are thought to be characteristic of the object of concern in some way." (Mason, 2011, p. 79, emphasis in the original.)

Adhering to this definition, the three sub-studies can be seen to represent different *facets*, which were designed so as to produce insights into the reconciliation of work and family life in lone-mother families by acknowledging that the different dimensions of the mothers' experiences are connected and intertwined. The facets of this study, thus, aimed at generating different kinds of knowledge of the central research problem rather than trying to provide maximum coverage of the research topic (see Mason, 2011). First, a cross-national comparative research design was employed in sub-studies I and II to gain a general overview of how lone mothers living in three different welfare states perceive that their non-standard work hours affect their abilities to reconcile work and family life – a topic on which there is a need for comparative research in Europe. The quantitative design not only enabled the cross-national comparison, which provided valuable insights into the experiences of lone-mother families across different welfare and care regimes, but also enabled the examination of the possible differences between the experiences of mothers living in two family forms, namely lone mothers and coupled mothers.

The findings of the first two sub-studies helped in formulating the research objective for the third sub-study, which, in utilizing a qualitative research approach with a focus on Finnish lone mothers, set the focus on how cultural mothering expectations shape the experiences of the work–family reconciliation of lone mothers working non-standard hours. Initially, the motive for choosing Finland as the country to focus on was based on the structural features of the Finnish welfare state and the dominant working time culture (i.e., full-time work) and high prevalence of shift work among female employees (see Table 3). Furthermore, as the first two sub-studies progressed, it became evident that the Finnish mothers who responded to the survey were unique in that their experiences stood out from the mothers living in the other two countries, often to the opposite direction of what might have been expected, thus making the experiences of Finnish lone mothers even more intriguing. Thereby, the qualitative approach enabled a more nuanced and in-depth exploration of how Finnish lone mothers working non-standard hours reconcile work and family

life and produced new knowledge through much-needed understanding of the lives of these mothers in relation to cultural mothering expectations. It was considered important to highlight the subjective experiences and perspectives of individual lone mothers about the ways the mothers perceived the relationship between their non-standard work hours and motherhood. Furthermore, an important and therefore beneficial aspect related particularly to the qualitative approach and personal interviews of lone mothers was that it enabled "giving voice" to lone mothers themselves, which would not have been possible if only a quantitative approach had been used.

Ontology involves the assumptions about the nature of the investigated social reality (Blaikie, 2007). According to the facet methodology, the world is not only assumed as lived and experienced, but it is also characterized by the idea of contingency as well as its multi-dimensional and entwined nature. For example, the lives and experiences of lone mothers take place in various socio-cultural and socio-economic surroundings and environments. Mason (2011) points out that a primary interest for a researcher implementing facet methodology is in understanding how these different dimensions are connected and to create facets that seek out these entwinements. Adopting the facet methodology approach, therefore, does not involve an adherence to any particular version of ontology but operates with a *connective* and *anti-reductionist* ontology (Mason, 2011). This means that the different entwinements of the dimensions of the social phenomena that we seek out and come to understand through the facets, are to be seen as connected rather than separated and reduced to their constitute dimensions, which is characteristic to reductionist ontology (Sayer, 2000). This connection, in turn, is seen as central to how the world can be understood.

Epistemological choices denote the ways in which knowledge of the investigated reality can be obtained; epistemology also refers to the relationship between researchers and the subjects of research (Blaikie, 2007). Mason (2011) stresses that researchers using facet methodology need to be aware of different epistemologies, willing to use them and to look at the world through different epistemological eyes and accept the certain "limits to what social scientists know and can know" (p. 82). The emphasis is thus on *how we are looking* and *how we use our methods to perceive* what we are looking at. Thereby, this study draws from two epistemological approaches, *empiricism* and *constructionism*. It is important to note that the two epistemological approaches, connected to different types of methods and data, are seen in this study, to complement instead of contrasting with one another.

Empiricism places emphasis on human senses in the production of knowledge as it sees that objectively observing the world around us is the way that knowledge is produced, which allows the researcher to take the role of a neutral observer. Observation is also emphasized in the requirement that knowledge of the world can only be considered to be true if it can be put to the test of experience. (Blaikie, 2007.) In other words, "beliefs about reality must be justified empirically," by experience (Meyers, 2006, p. 3). Explanations are achieved through the generalizations of what scientists have observed. It needs

to be understood, however, that it is often impossible to establish universal generalizations in the social sciences. (Blaikie, 2007.) This epistemological approach is closely connected to quantitative methods, which employ experiments and surveys as strategies of enquiry, and use statistical analysis methods (Creswell, 2003) with an aim to understand the social world through testing hypotheses and theories against empirical observations.

Constructionism, or social constructionism, perceives that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, language and communication rather than simply discovered from external reality. Within this approach, reality is understood as socially constructed by both social actors and scientists through their conceptualizations and interpretations of their own actions and experiences as well as the actions of others and social situations. (Blaikie, 2007.) Thus, I, as a researcher, am actively constructing the knowledge of social actors' realities: "The activities involved in constructing knowledge occur against the background of shared interpretations, practices, and language; they occur within our historical, cultural, and gendered ways of being" (Blaikie, 2007, p. 23). Indeed, the participating mothers of the present study who are living in a particular socio-cultural context are seen to construct their social realities via the conceptualization and interpretation of their own actions and experiences, and those of others, parts of which are then interpreted by me, as a researcher. This interpretation is in turn influenced by the process of mirroring and reflecting my personal history and experiences on the conclusions that I draw from the findings. Thereby, the qualitative study findings cannot be considered as objectively attained knowledge of the external world, but knowledge that has been developed through making sense and interpreting the reflections of the experiences provided by the social actors (Blaikie, 2007). Such knowledge claims are characteristic to qualitative research methods, which do not seek to subject social action to mathematical transformations but to preserve and analyze the situated form, content, and experience of social action (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

5.2 Families 24/7 data sets

This study utilized data collected as a part of the cross-national research consortium "Children's socio-emotional wellbeing and daily family life in a 24/7 economy"[8] (henceforth Families 24/7) funded by the Academy of Finland between 2011 and 2014. The research consortium was designed in response to the need for European comparative data on different areas of everyday family life and children's socio-emotional wellbeing in the context of parental non-

[8] The collaborative institutions involved in the Families 24/7 research project were Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (Project leader: Professor Anna Rönkä), University of Jyväskylä (Professor Marja-Leena Laakso), and National Institute for Health and Welfare (Dr Marjatta Kekkonen) in Finland, Utrecht University in the Netherlands (Professor Tanja van der Lippe), and The University of Manchester in the United Kingdom (Professor Vanessa May).

standard work hours and the 24/7 economy. The topic was approached from the perspectives of children, parents, and the educators in day-and-night care centers. The present study utilized two sets of data gathered in the project. These data was comprised of both cross-national quantitative survey data collected in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK, as well as single-national qualitative interview data collected in Finland. The original publications of the three sub-studies provide detailed descriptions of the collection processes of the survey data (sub-studies I and II) and interview data (sub-study III). Thus, a brief summary of both types of data collection is provided below.

The Families 24/7 survey data directed at Finnish, Dutch, and British working parents with at least one child aged 12 years or less were collected in two stages. First, web-based survey data (N = 1,294; 1,067 women, 227 men) were gathered between November 2012 and January 2013. The voluntary participants were recruited through childcare organizations, labor unions, and workplaces. Explicitly, employers, trade union representatives as well as day care centers and day-and-night care centers (in Finland) were contacted and asked to provide employees and parents a public link to the survey. Second, due to the low turnout of lone parents after the first data collection (n = 113), an additional survey sample (n = 192) was gathered between April and June 2013 by promoting the survey on websites of organizations aimed specifically at lone-parent families in the three countries. After the additional data collection, the total sample included 1,486 working parents across the three countries.

The interview data were collected during spring 2013. The interviews were carried out with 55 Finnish parents who worked during non-standard hours. The majority of the interviewed parents had expressed their willingness to participate in the interviews when filling in the Families 24/7 survey. Some interviewees were also recruited through the social networks of the Finnish research team.

5.2.1 Cross-national survey data and respondents

The sub-studies I and II used the Families 24/7 cross-national survey data. Criteria for selecting lone and coupled mothers from the original sample were as follows: first, with the aim of selecting mothers, women who reported living all or almost all the time with at least one child aged 0 to 12 years were included in the sample. Second, criteria required that the mothers were either self-employed or employed, and therefore unemployed mothers and mothers on study or family leave from their places of employment were excluded from the final sample. After these specifications, 1,106 respondents met these criteria (74.4% of the original sample; 411 Finnish, 338 Dutch, 357 British respondents). Comprehensive information on the sample is provided in the original publications of sub-studies I and II, and thus are only briefly described below.

Table 4 presents some of the background characteristics of the survey participants. As can be seen from the table, there were more coupled mothers (n = 878; 79.4% of the eligible sample) than lone mothers (n = 228; 20.6%) in the dataset. In terms of work-related characteristics, Finnish mothers working during non-standard hours were overrepresented compared to the Dutch and British

sub-samples. This was possibly due to the fact that in Finland, survey participants were recruited via day-and-night care centers whereas in the Netherlands and the UK, such public childcare organizations are rare or non-existent (see Verhoef et al., 2016b). Regarding the weekly working hours, the figures agree with the statistics presented in Table 1. First, in Finland, lone mothers worked somewhat longer weeks than lone mothers in the Netherlands and the UK. Second, there was hardly any difference in the weekly working hours between Finnish lone and coupled mothers, but Dutch lone mothers were working longer weeks than coupled mothers and British lone mothers, again, worked somewhat, but not substantially, shorter weeks compared to coupled mothers. In terms of educational background, there were more lone mothers in the Dutch and British sub-samples with high educational background compared to the Finnish sub-sample. With regard to educational level, in Finland, there were more lone mothers than coupled mothers with high educational background. This may relate to the fact that lone mothers with high educational backgrounds are more likely to be in employment compared to those with low educational backgrounds (Hakovirta, 2006). In the other two sub-samples, lone mothers had, on average, a lower educational background compared to coupled mothers (also Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012). Overall, the Finnish sub-sample represented a more versatile educational spectrum among the survey participants. Despite the country-level differences in the educational backgrounds of the participants, across the three countries, lone mothers perceived their financial situation to be poorer compared to coupled mothers. Finally, the children of lone mothers were somewhat older compared to the children of coupled mothers across the three countries. The number of children in lone-mother families was somewhat smaller compared to two-parent families.

5.2.2 Interview data and participants

The data for sub-study III draws from the Families 24/7 qualitative interview data. The sample of the present study consists of interviews conducted with 16 Finnish lone mothers. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 52 years, the average being 37 years. The mothers had become lone mothers as a result of divorce or separation either before or after the birth of the child, or a death of a partner and thus carried the main responsibility for their children as well as the everyday reconciliation of work and family life. In four families, the mothers had had children with two men. The frequency at which the fathers of the children took part in their children's lives varied from family to family. In three of the families, the father had passed away. In six cases, fathers were not at all involved in their children's lives. These fathers were either geographically distant or had other reasons for not having contact with the child, which were not necessarily clear to the mothers either (i.e., the mothers did not know the motives for the father's departure or not keeping contact with the child). One father saw his children "occasionally." In five cases, the children visited their fathers every other weekend, whereas in three cases, the parents had made weekly rotating living

TABLE 4 Background characteristics of the survey participants

	Finland				The Netherlands				The United Kingdom			
	Lone n = 129		Coupled n = 282		Lone n = 50		Coupled n = 288		Lone n = 49		Coupled n = 308	
	M or %	*SD*	*M* or %	*SD*	*M* or %	*SD*	*M* or %	*SD*	*M* or %	*SD*	*M* or %	*SD*
Work-related characteristics												
Non-standard work hours[a]	0.26	0.79	0.31	0.73	−0.10	0.70	−0.22	0.73	−0.08	0.71	−0.15	0.70
Weekly working hours	36.28	9.30	36.18	9.18	32.93	9.87	29.12	8.15	34.08	9.77	34.70	11.11
Family-related characteristics												
Educational level: tertiary education (%)	48.1		44.3		66.0		73.3		69.4		82.1	
Financial situation[b]	4.19	2.20	5.68	2.11	4.94	2.52	6.50	1.77	4.18	2.38	5.40	2.14
Age of the child	5.56	2.81	4.51	2.48	7.98	3.44	3.35	2.51	6.84	3.72	4.37	2.98
Number of children	1.61	0.78	1.84	0.81	1.58	0.73	1.87	0.89	1.49	0.74	1.77	0.71

Note. N = 1,106.

[a]The empirical range for the variable "non-standard work hours" was −0.98–1.55. [b]Subjective evaluation of the financial situation (0 = the worst, 10 = the best).

arrangements so that the child lived one week with the mother and another week with the father. Two fathers were actively involved in the everyday life of the child, but the child did not necessarily spend the nights in the father's home. It was common for the mothers to receive help with childcare from the children's grandparents; only two mothers did not receive any help with childcare from the grandparents or the father of the child.

All mothers worked during non-standard hours, and four of the mothers were studying alongside working. Eleven of the interviewed lone mothers had attained secondary education through vocational training, and most of these mothers with lower educational backgrounds were working either in health or service sectors, which denote two work sectors characterized by a female-dominated labor force and non-standard work hours (e.g., Parent-Thirion et al., 2007). Their jobs were often characterized by work in rotating shifts or regular night shifts, for example. Among these mothers, there was also an entrepreneur, who worked evenings and weekends in addition to standard daytime hours. Three mothers had completed the first stage of tertiary education. These mothers with higher educational backgrounds had more variability in their work schedules in that there were certain periods during the year when non-standard work hours were more frequent. For example, occasional work-related travelling was part of the job descriptions of two mothers, who also worked evenings and weekends, and even during night-time, due to the nature of their work. The other one of these mothers often worked during night-time, due to the high volume of work commitments, while her child was asleep. The third mother with a higher educational background worked in the health sector in three shifts.

The interviews were semi-structured, and the frame covered themes relating to (1) mothers' work and working times, (2) childcare arrangements, (3) everyday family life and time with children, (4) motherhood and maternal wellbeing, (5) the wellbeing of the child, and (6) cooperation with the day-and-night care center. Prior to the interviews, an informed consent was gained from the participants. The one-on-one interviews were tape recorded and took place either in the homes or workplaces of the interviewees or alternatively in public places, like cafes. I, myself, carried out 6 out of the 16 interviews conducted with lone mothers. Other interviews with lone mothers were conducted either by the members of the Families 24/7 research project or by students, who carried out the interviews as part of a course focusing on qualitative research interviews in the University of Jyväskylä and Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences.

The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours and 5 minutes, but on average they were between one hour and two hours. The transcripts were, on average, 28 A4-sized pages long, ranging from 8 to 53 pages. One interview conducted by the students covered only part of the themes, and in few instances, there were difficulties with the recorders (e.g., batteries ran out in the middle of the interview or the recording device was in other ways dysfunctional). In these instances, transcripts were completed with handwritten notes. The fact that the interviews were conducted by several people can be seen as beneficial, as on one hand, the more experienced interviewers were able

to ask more defined questions, which were not written in the interview frame, based on what the interviewees had said. On the other hand, the more inexperienced interviewers, myself included, might have missed some important opportunities to ask further questions in relation to some important and central topic mentioned by the participants. Overall, however, the interviews offered rich data for me and other researchers in the Families 24/7 project to work on.

5.3 Analytical procedures

5.3.1 Measures

Summary of the variables used in sub-studies I and II are represented in Table 5. Both studies used corresponding independent variables and shared some of the control variables. Even though the independent variables were similarly measured in both sub-studies, the names of these variables varied in the original publications. This is because the journals in which the articles were published represent diverse English-speaking areas (i.e., British and American). For the sake of clarity, however, the variables are given uniform names in Table 5, which are also used throughout the present study. Comprehensive information of the used variables and measures, as well as evaluation of their validity and reliability can be found in the original publications.

Dependent variables

Childcare-related challenges

In sub-study I, childcare-related challenges were measured with two variables: first, problematic or unsatisfactory childcare arrangements were measured by asking the respondents to assess on a scale from 1 (*I am satisfied, this is going well*) to 5 (*I am dissatisfied, this is a problem*) whether they find their childcare arrangements problematic or unsatisfactory. Thereby, higher scores on the scale represented experiencing childcare arrangements as more problematic or unsatisfactory. Second, to measure the perceived *difficulty in arranging childcare at short notice*, the respondents were asked "How easy is it for you to make unanticipated childcare arrangements (i.e., in case you are unexpectedly delayed at work or if your child falls ill)?" The response options ranged from 1 (*very easy*) to 5 (*very difficult*), and thus higher scores of the scale indicated more difficulties with arranging childcare at short notice. When answering the childcare-related questions, the respondents were asked to think about the child in the family closest to the age of four or younger (in case they had more than one child). The age four was chosen because of country-specific reasons: in Finland, children are often cared for at home until their third birthday, after which the majority of children are cared for in formal childcare. In the Netherlands, again, children start elementary school on a part-time basis at the age of four. By setting the age of the

TABLE 5 Research questions and variables used in sub-studies I and II

	Sub-study I	Sub-study II
Research questions	RQ1: *How are maternal non-standard work hours associated with lone and coupled mothers' experiences of childcare-related challenges in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK?* RQ2: *Is the association between non-standard work hours and childcare-related challenges different among lone mothers than coupled mothers?*	RQ3: *How are maternal non-standard work hours associated with lone and coupled mothers' experiences of time-based work-to-family conflict and work-to-family positive affective spillover in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK?* RQ4: *Is the association of non-standard work hours with time-based work-to-family conflict or work-to-family positive affective spillover different among lone mothers than coupled mothers?*
Dependent variables	Childcare-related challenges *Problematic or unsatisfactory childcare arrangements* *Difficulty in arranging childcare at short notice*	Time-based work-to-family conflict Work-to-family positive affective spillover
Independent variables	Lone motherhood Non-standard work hours[b]	Lone motherhood[a] Non-standard work hours
Control variables	**Work-related factors** Weekly work hours Irregular work times Workplace flexibility **Family-related factors** Age of the child[c] Educational level Financial situation	**Work-related factors** Weekly work hours Irregular work times Fixed starting and finishing times Job satisfaction Job pressure **Family-related factors** Number of children Age of the child[c] Education(al) level Financial situation Challenges with childcare

Note. [a]"Single motherhood" in the original article (sub-study II). [b]"Nonstandard working" in the original article (sub-study I). [c]When answering some of the childcare-related questions, the respondents were asked to think about the child in the family closest to the age of four.

target child to four, therefore, we were trying to capture the experiences of parents whose children were most likely to be in the public childcare system and not yet at school so as to ensure that the responses would be as comparable as possible, and that the other measures used in the survey were applicable.

Time-based work-to-family conflict

In sub-study II, *time-based work-to-family conflict* was based on a subscale developed by Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000), which involved three following items. "My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like," "The time I must devote to my job keeps me from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities," and "I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities." For each item, the response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A mean score was calculated for the three items, and thus higher scores indicated a higher level of time-based work-to-family conflict.

Work-to-family positive affective spillover

Work-to-family positive affective spillover measured mothers' perceptions of the transfer of positive mood from work role to family role with four following items developed by Hanson, Hammer, and Colton (2006). "When things are going well at work, my outlook regarding my family life is improved," "Being in a positive mood at work helps me to be in a positive mood at home," "Being happy at work improves my spirits at home," and "Having a good day at work allows me to be optimistic with my family." Response options for each of the four items ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), and a mean score was calculated for the items. Higher scores represented a higher level of positive affective spillover.

Independent variables

Non-standard work hours

To measure the amount of non-standard work hours, two sets of questions were used (adapted from European Working Conditions Survey, 2010). First, respondents were asked to respond on a scale ranging from 1 (*none*) to 4 (*more than twice*) to the following questions: "How many times a month do you work in the evening, for at least two hours?"; "How many times a month do you work at night, for at least two hours?"; and "How many times a month do you work early in the morning, for at least two hours?" Second, to measure work done during weekends, separate questions asking "How many times a month do you work on Saturdays / Sundays?" with dichotomous 1 (*no*) and 2 (*yes*) response options were used. A mean score for non-standard working was calculated by standardizing the five items with a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1 and calculating the mean of the standardized values. The higher the score, the more the mothers worked during non-standard hours.

Lone motherhood

Lone motherhood (0 = coupled mother; 1 = lone mother) was based on participants' answers to questions about their marital and cohabitation status. Whereas coupled mothers reported living in the same household with the other biological or adoptive parent of the child, lone mothers reported being either separated, divorced, widowed, or single. According to the definition of a lone moth-

er in the present study, six mothers who were in a relationship with a partner who was not the biological father of the child, were considered to be practically lone mothers if the new partner did not share the residence with the mother and the child(ren) and if the mother "never" or "rarely" received support with the upbringing of the children from the new partner.

Control variables

The following work- and family-related control variables (or covariates in regression analysis) were included in the analyses of sub-studies I and II (see Table 5). The inclusion of these variables was based on the findings of prior research that suggests that these aspects affect mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation and the studied dependent variables. Justifications for the selection of these variables for the research questions have been provided in the original sub-studies and thus only listed briefly, below.

Work-related controls comprised *weekly work hours* in the main job, *irregular working times* (i.e., regular changes to work schedules; 0 = "no," 1 = "yes"), *workplace flexibility* (1 = working time arrangement is set by the employer, 2 = I can choose between several fixed working schedules determined by the company/organization, 3 = I can adapt my working hours with certain limits, 4= my working hours are entirely determined by myself) (European Working Conditions Survey, 2010), *fixed starting and finishing times* (0 = "no," 1 = "yes"), *job satisfaction* (1 = "very dissatisfied" – 4 = "very satisfied"), and *job pressure* (i.e., working at high speed and to tight deadlines; 1 = "never" – 7 = "all of the time").

Family-related controls included *number of children* under 18 years of age living at home, *age of the child* in years, the respondent's evaluation of the *family's financial situation* (0 = "the worst" – 10 = "the best"), and mothers' *education level* (0 = "non-tertiary", 1 = "tertiary"). For the purpose of analysis, the variable measuring education level was collapsed into a dummy variable due to the different educational systems and levels of education in the three study countries. Three items were used to measure *challenges with childcare* in sub-study II: the respondents were first asked whether they experienced problems with childcare arrangements (1 = "no," 2 = "yes"). Second, the respondents were asked to estimate the ease with which they could make unanticipated childcare arrangements (1 = "very easy"– 5 = "very difficult"). Finally, they were asked to assess their overall satisfaction with childcare arrangements (i.e., "What do you think about the case arrangements of your child when you are working?") with response options ranging from 1 = "I am satisfied, this is going well" to 5 = "I am dissatisfied, this in not going well." A mean score for childcare-related challenges was calculated by standardizing the three variables (mean 0, standard deviation 1) and calculating the mean of these standardized variables.

5.3.2 Statistical analyses

Sub-study I aimed to investigate whether maternal non-standard work hours were associated with perceived problems with childcare arrangements and difficulties with arranging childcare at short notice, and whether these associations were different among lone mothers and coupled mothers, as well as across the three countries. Associations were examined using multivariate regression analysis. Work- and family-related controls were adjusted for the analysis, which focused on the main effects of nonstandard work hours and lone motherhood on the two dependent variables as well as the effect of the interaction term (nonstandard work hours × lone motherhood) on the dependent variables. To examine whether the studied associations were identical in each of the three countries, a multigroup option was used in model testing. The analysis was performed using the MPlus statistical package (version 7.3; Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012), and the method of estimation was full information maximum likelihood (FIML) with standard error corrected to be robust in the case of non-normality (MLR estimator). FIML uses all observations in the data set when estimating the parameters in the model, without imputing the missing values.

The goal of sub-study II was to examine the associations of maternal non-standard work hours with time-based work-to-family conflict and work-to-family positive affective spillover, and to investigate whether these associations differed between lone mothers and coupled mothers, and whether they differed across the three countries. The study applied path analysis to estimate the paths from nonstandard work hours, lone motherhood, and the interaction term (nonstandard work hours × lone motherhood) to time-based work-to-family conflict and work-to-family positive affective spillover after controlling for the effects of work-related and family-related control variables on the dependent variables. Again, the multigroup option, which in the original publication was referred to as a multi-sample procedure, was used in model testing. MPlus statistical software (version 7; Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2010) was used in model estimation. The method of estimation was that of FIML, and because some of the variables were initially skewed, the parameters were estimated using the MLR estimator. In investigating the association between the interaction term and time-based work-to-family conflict, that is, whether the association between non-standard work hours and time-based work-to-family conflict was different among lone mothers and coupled mothers, the path model provided support for significant interaction effect after accounting for the main effects of the covariates in all three countries. Consequently, regions of significance analyses (RoS) were performed in order to interpret these interaction effects and to better understand the structure of the relations (Aiken & West, 1991; Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). As the significant interaction effects only indicated a significant difference in the regression slopes for the two groups of mothers in each country, the RoS analyses were performed to identify the region(s) of the variable non-standard work hours where the regression slopes for lone mothers and coupled mothers would be significantly different (Aiken & West, 1991).

5.3.3 Accounts and category analysis

The analysis in sub-study III exploited accounts analysis with an ethnomethodological category analytical approach. According to this approach, moral order and everyday routines are constituted by the rights and responsibilities attached to the descriptions of different categories (Juhila, Jokinen & Suoninen, 2012), which themselves are often moral in their nature (Jayyusi, 1991). In this study, the focus is on the category of "mother," and *the moral order of "good" motherhood* is understood to denote the cultural knowledge and the social practices of appropriate child-rearing and mothering, which in turn contribute to the moral expectations that are seen to determine on one hand who is acting "appropriately" in a society, and on the other hand, who is defined as deviating from the norm (Jayyusi, 1991; Juhila, 2012; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). A deviation from the moral order can be seen as the social actor neglecting one's category-bounded responsibilities, which creates a gap between the expectation and actions taken by the actor (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Juhila (2012) refers to this gap as a *problem*, which is constructed by the actors themselves and those around them. Committing a problematic act creates the need for the social actor, in this case, the mother, to offer an account to mend the deviation from the moral order of "good" motherhood (see Juhila, 2012; Scott & Lyman, 1968).

Prior to analyzing the interview data, the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed word by word, and the transcripts were read several times to attain a general impression of the data. As a first step of the analysis, excerpts in which the lone mothers discussed their perceptions of the relationship between their work during non-standard hours and child wellbeing were identified. This talk, henceforth referred to as "worry talk," was often tinged with concern or worry over the wellbeing of the children. Therefore, the mothers were interpreted as constructing their working during non-standard hours predominantly as *problematic* in terms of child wellbeing (Juhila, 2012). This analysis also revealed that the mothers offered explanations for their work hours. After this discovery, the focus of the analysis was set on *accounts*, which denote statements with which the mothers explain their work during non-standard hours in order to rationalize their problematic behavior (Scott & Lyman, 1968).

The majority of the accounts were spontaneously produced by the interviewees. In other words, the accounts were not responses to direct questions that would have mandated the mothers to explain themselves and their actions. Nor were the accounts responses to accusations or blame occurring in real-life settings which would have required the mothers to defend themselves verbally. On the contrary, the interview situation and the semi-structured interview frame allowed the mothers to actively construct the problematic themselves, which they then rationalized through the provision of accounts. Indeed, the ethnomethodological approach to category analysis pays interest in the ways that those who are involved in the "problematic actions" define what is problematic themselves and then account for these actions (Buttny, 1993; Juhila, 2012).

The initial accounts identified from the data were categorized with the help of Scott and Lyman's (1968) typology of "excusing" and "justifying" accounts. *Who* or *what* the mothers saw as responsible for their non-standard work hours distinguished these two categories. Accordingly, in excusing accounts the mothers admitted that their working times were harmful in terms of child wellbeing but placed the ultimate responsibility for the work hours to some external actor (e.g., employer) or matter (e.g., family's financial situation). Justifying accounts were ones in which the mother accepted her responsibility for work but denied its harmful nature. Due to encountering several accounts during the analysis that did not fit in either category of excusing or justifying accounts, the analytical frame of Scott and Lyman (1968) was extended with a third account, which was named "defending" accounts (see Buttny, 1993). In defending accounts, the mothers acknowledged the possibility of harm to the wellbeing of the child and took responsibility for it but made every effort to defend themselves as mothers by establishing that they strived to prioritize child's needs and wellbeing.

After having categorized the accounts into excusing, justifying, and defending accounts, the analysis was nuanced by concentrating on the linguistic features of the talk. Specifically, modality, which refers to expressions reflecting the perceived obligation and necessity (e.g., should / need to / have to), possibility and ability (e.g., can / could), or volition (e.g., will / would) (Biber & Quirk, 1999) with regard to work and mothering. After analyzing the accounts through linguistic lenses, the "excusing," "justifying," and "defending" accounts were categorized into four final types of account.

5.4 Ethical considerations – the importance of being sensitive to lone mothers' experiences

Ensuring good-quality research relates to conducting it in an ethically responsible manner. This refers to the idea that research is carried out so that the interests and concerns of those taking part in the study, and who are potentially affected by it, are safeguarded (Robson, 2002). In this study, ethical issues and responsible conduct of research were ensured by following the guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK) (2013).

First, when collecting the data via web-based questionnaires and interviews, the purpose of the study and its cross-national nature in the case of the questionnaire, were explained to the participants before they were asked for their written consent to participate. It was also assured that participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were given the opportunity to drop out at any point, should they choose to do so. In terms of the questionnaire, not only was withdrawal from the questionnaire made possible at any stage, which erased the incomplete questionnaire responses, but the respondents were neither compelled to answer every single question of the questionnaire. Regarding

the interviews conducted with Finnish lone mothers, prior to the interviews, participants were asked for their written consent to participate and an oral consent for using a tape recorder to record the interview.

Second, the confidentiality of received information and anonymity of participants have been ensured throughout the research process. For example, the respondents did not have to provide their names or addresses when responding to the questionnaire. During the collection of the interview data, the written consents to participate were secured by the participants' signatures, but these forms of consent were securely archived separately from the rest of the data. Furthermore, in writing up the results, participants in the qualitative interviews were given pseudonyms, preventing the recognition of individual participants. Careful attention has also been paid to treating the personal experiences that the study participants have shared with us with respect and responsibility.

Third, the information provided by participants has been stored and treated with ethical consideration (Walliman, 2006). Explicitly, information gathered during the study is considered confidential, and the data have been handled, stored, and passed to the researchers involved in the broader project in a way that no third party can gain access to the data. The participants were also informed about the storage of the data and of those who will have access to the data upon application.

The final, but not the least important, ethical consideration relates to understanding the possible vulnerability of the studied mothers and the call for sensitivity on my part, as a researcher. Lone mothers can be considered vulnerable because they may be viewed as a part of a traditionally marginalized or stigmatized group, but which, for me personally, does not indicate that these mothers would be in any way problematic or disempowered. Because of their potential vulnerability, there is the issue of a differential power relation between me as a researcher and the mothers as research participants (Farrimond, 2013). As I conducted some of the interviews, it was necessary for me to consider this difference when encountering the mothers but also to not automatically assume its existence. Through empathy, understanding, and respect for the feelings and experiences of the mothers and their situations, I strived to create a safe and confidential atmosphere, and thereby breach the power gap that the mother potentially perceived between us. Moreover, in the interviews, the mothers were talking about personal matters when they shared their everyday family life and the feelings and experiences embedded in it.

During the interviews, there were topics that brought tears to the eyes of some of the mothers, which was a clear indication of the topic being a sensitive one to them. Hypothetically, such issues might have been the death of a partner or a divorce, in which case the mother clearly wanted to talk about it with me. Although such topics did not fall under the pre-determined themes of the interview frame, I considered it important to let the mother talk about the topic and then gently move on with the interview. Some mothers became emotional also when talking about their children, in a positive sense. Before the field work, we received training to carry out the research interviews, during which we re-

ceived instructions about how to deal with situations such as the ones described above, when interviewees might become emotional. These instructions were in line with the guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK) (2013). Following the instructions, after the interviews, in which the interviewees had become emotional, I took the time to ensure after turning off the tape recorder that everything was alright. Had I suspected that some harm had been caused by the interview, I would have offered to seek help for the mother. However, such suspicions did not arise, and the mothers were more likely to emphasize that it was valuable to talk to somebody about their family life and experiences. This positive response further ensured that no harm was caused and that potentially some gain was produced by listening to what the mother wanted to say (see Walliman, 2006). This also showed the mothers' willingness and dedication to contribute to the research.

6 MAIN RESULTS OF THE ORIGINAL STUDIES

6.1 Sub-study I – Childcare arrangements

The first two research questions of the present study focused on the associations of maternal non-standard work hours on lone and coupled mothers' experiences of childcare-related challenges across the three countries. Sub-study I provided answers to these questions. The study examined whether maternal non-standard work hours are related to mothers' experiences of childcare-related challenges in terms of problematic or unsatisfactory childcare arrangements and difficulty in arranging childcare at short notice, and whether this relationship is different among lone mothers than among coupled mothers. Moreover, the study sought to examine whether these associations differed between the three countries. The corresponding tables in relation to the results have been provided in the original article and thus are only verbally described below.

The results of multivariate regression analysis showed that there was a positive association between maternal non-standard work hours and experiencing childcare arrangements as problematic or unsatisfactory in all three countries. This means that the more the mothers worked during non-standard hours, the more they perceived problems and dissatisfaction with childcare arrangements. However, non-standard work hours were not significantly associated with the perceived difficulty in arranging childcare at short notice. With regard to differences between lone mothers and coupled mothers, the results showed that lone motherhood did not significantly moderate the association between non-standard work hours and problematic or unsatisfactory childcare arrangements. This result illustrates that there were no significant differences between lone and coupled mothers with regard to experiencing childcare-related challenges, as for mothers in both family forms non-standard work hours had a parallel, positive association with perceiving childcare arrangements as problematic or unsatisfactory. This was found to be the case for lone and coupled mothers across three countries.

6.2 Sub-study II – Negative and positive work-to-family interface

The research questions 3 and 4 of this study inquired about the associations of non-standard work hours with lone and coupled mothers' experiences of negative and positive work-to-family interface across the three countries. These questions were answered by the findings of sub-study II, which investigated whether maternal non-standard work hours are related to mothers' experiences of time-based work-to-family conflict and positive affective spillover, and whether this relationship is different among lone mothers than among coupled mothers. The differences of these associations between the three countries were also explored. The corresponding tables with regard to the results have been provided in the original article and therefore are only verbally described below.

The results of path analysis showed that non-standard work hours were positively associated with time-based work-to-family conflict among lone mothers in the Netherlands and the UK, and both coupled mothers and lone mothers in Finland. Positive association indicates that the more the mother works during non-standard hours, the more she experiences time-based work-to-family conflict. The results further revealed that the positive relationship between the amount of non-standard work hours and time-based work-to-family conflict was stronger among lone mothers than among coupled mothers in all three countries. This suggests that lone mothers perceived more strongly than coupled mothers that their work during non-standard hours interferes with time for family responsibilities.

In interpreting the significant interaction effects, the regions of significance analyses demonstrated that in Finland, the positive association of non-standard work hours with time-based work-to-family conflict was statistically stronger among lone mothers than among coupled mothers only for relatively low observed values of non-standard work hours. In other words, when the amount of non-standard work hours was below the mean, non-standard work hours were more strongly associated with time-based work-to-family conflict among lone mothers than coupled mothers, whereas when the amount of non-standard work hours was above the mean, the positive association of non-standard work hours with time-based work-to-family conflict was statistically indistinguishable between lone and coupled mothers. On the contrary, in the Netherlands and the UK, the positive association between non-standard work hours and time-based work-to-family conflict was statistically stronger among lone than among coupled mothers only for relatively high observed values of non-standard work hours, which illustrates that when the amount of non-standard work hours was near the mean or higher, the positive relationship between non-standard work hours and time-based work-to-family conflict was stronger among lone than among coupled mothers.

With regard to work-to-family positive affective spillover, the results showed that in all three countries, non-standard work hours were not signifi-

cantly associated with positive affective spillover among lone mothers or coupled mothers.

6.3 Sub-study III – Cultural notions of "good" mothering

The fifth and final research question of the present study enquired how Finnish lone mothers account for their work during non-standard hours, considering the dominant cultural understanding and expectations attached to "good" mothering. This question was addressed by sub-study III, which examined how lone mothers perceive the relationship between their non-standard work hours and the wellbeing of their children, and how these mothers account for their work hours.

The experienced paradox between the conflicting demands of their non-standard work hours and cultural expectations attached to mothering was echoed in the worry talk in relation to child wellbeing that all but two of the lone mothers produced. This worry mainly pertained to irregularity in the everyday rhythm of children, long childcare hours, and the perceived lack of family time due to mothers' inaccessibility during evenings, nights and weekends, that is, at times when family members typically engage in shared activities (see Daly, 2001). The intensity of the worry talk was interpreted as an indication that the mothers regarded the relationship between their non-standard work hours and child wellbeing as problematic (Juhila, 2012). Negotiating such conflict led many of the mothers to express feelings of guilt and insufficiency and created the need to provide an account for their work during non-standard hours. The mothers produced four types of account by excusing and justifying their work hours and defending themselves as responsible mothers, which reflected that the mothers both conformed with and challenged the dominant cultural understanding of a "good" mother.

When accounting for their work during non-standard hours, the mothers largely conformed to the idea of "good" mothering with the help of two types of defending account, namely "*Appealing to the inability to act according to 'good' mothering ideals*" and "*Using adaptive strategies to protect child wellbeing*." These accounts offered them the means to highlight their intentions and efforts to safeguard their children's wellbeing. This, in turn, allowed them to defend themselves as morally responsible mothers (see Buttny, 1993) in a situation where their inability to fulfil these intentions was beyond their control. The inability was revealed through the mothers' preferences to care for their young children at home, work regularly in the daytime or work reduced hours, which however were not viable options because of the financial pressure they were under as sole providers combined with the lack of jobs with standard hours. So, by drawing on their ideological preferences and value orientations and by conforming to the expectations of "good" mothering, the mothers were striving to alter others' and possibly their own, evaluations of their seemingly problematic actions. Furthermore, not only were mothers talking about their intentions and

inabilities to protect their children from the risks associated with their work hours, they also demonstrated activity and adaptability by talking about having done their best in counteracting any risk to their children's wellbeing. Adaptive strategies were enabled by flexible employers, social support networks, and the application of creative means to ensure the child's wellbeing, which often required the mothers to put their own needs aside in their efforts to carry out the "ideal" kind of motherhood that focuses, first and foremost, on ensuring the child's needs.

The mothers also challenged the dominant cultural expectations attached to "good" mothering and the view of their work hours as a risk to their children's wellbeing by excusing and justifying their work during non-standard hours. With excusing accounts, "*Excusing work during non-standard hours as an external demand*," the mothers emphasized the fact that they did not have control over their work hours due to the lack of job opportunities with standard hours. Together with this restriction, mothers with low income referred to the economic necessity to support their families as sole earners, which did not leave room for choosing the most preferable working time. Lone mothers with higher educational backgrounds, again, invoked the nature of their job, which required the commitment to do extra hours during evenings and nights, if needed. Furthermore, by providing justifying accounts, namely "*Challenging the idea of risk*," the mothers were able to challenge the normative perception that their non-standard work hours are inevitably detrimental to child wellbeing and to lessen the perceived discrepancy between these hours and mothering expectations. This was done by denying or diminishing the risk to child wellbeing associated with the mothers' working times by highlighting, for example, that the mother–child relationship is not developed during the night-time or that their children receive good and skillful care in a day-and-night care center. Moreover, the mothers asserted the positive value and possible benefits of their working times to their children. For example, because of their days off following shift work, the mothers were able to spend more time with their children compared to mothers working daytime hours. The mothers also justified their work hours by comparing their family's situation to those lone mother-families who have it worse, for example, where the mothers' work schedules were seen as more harmful for the child compared to their own.

7 DISCUSSION

This doctoral study has contributed to the work–family literature and literature concerning definitions of "good" mothering by providing new knowledge of how ongoing developments in working times characteristic of 24/7 economies affect lone mothers' abilities to reconcile paid work and family life in an area of research that has previously focused largely on lone mothers living outside Europe or on qualitative methodology. Specifically, this study examined how lone mothers experience the reconciliation of work and family life when they work during non-standard hours across three European countries—Finland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Of particular interest was the influence that maternal non-standard work hours have on lone mothers' experiences in three areas of work–family reconciliation: (1) childcare arrangements, (2) negative and positive work-to-family interface, and (3) cultural notions of "good" mothering. Lone mothers' experiences were first investigated from a cross-national comparative aspect, which enabled the comparison of the experiences of lone mothers living across different welfare and care regimes. After that, the focus was shifted to Finnish lone mothers and their experiences and perceptions of navigating within demands attached to work during non-standard hours and cultural expectations of motherhood. By applying a facet methodological approach, the study aimed to provide new insights into and understanding of the reconciliation of work and family life in lone-mother families in Europe.

7.1 New insights into lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation in Europe

7.1.1 Childcare arrangements: Challenges during non-standard hours

The first aim of this study was to explore how lone mothers who live in three welfare states characterized by different welfare and care regimes experience childcare arrangements and the negative and positive work-to-family interface

when they work during non-standard hours. In terms of childcare arrangements, the results were consistent with the original expectation as they showed that non-standard work hours appeared challenging for lone mothers across the three countries. To be precise, although non-standard work hours were not associated with the perception of difficulties in arranging childcare at short notice, the results showed that the more non-standard hours the mothers worked, the more they perceived that childcare arrangements were either problematic or unsatisfactory. It was rather unexpected that no differences were found in the experiences of lone mothers living in the three countries, because the diverse policy contexts in different welfare and care regimes are found to matter for the opportunities and restrictions that mothers encounter in combining paid work and family life (e.g., Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; Van der Lippe et al., 2006). Although the finding of heightened challenges was an expected outcome for the Dutch and British lone mothers owing to the lack of and gaps in the availability, affordability, and accessibility of childcare services during non-standard hours (e.g., Kazimirski et al., 2008; Plantenga & Remery, 2009; Rutter & Evans, 2012), it was perhaps less so for their Finnish counterparts. Put differently, because subsidized formal childcare in the Netherlands and the UK is offered only on part-time basis and mainly during the daytime hours (e.g., Harding & Cottell, 2018; Kröger, 2010; Plantenga & Remery, 2009), lone-mother families may find it challenging when required to patch up these gaps by supplementing their childcare resources possibly with multiple care providers that together are able to cover the childcare needs of these families. The options for additional childcare comprise purchasing help, which may not be a readily available option for low-income lone mothers or relying on social support networks (Bakker & Karsten, 2003; Kazimirski et al., 2008; Rutter & Evans, 2012). Relying on multiple care providers, however, can make arranging childcare complex and less continuous (Hepburn, 2018) which can, in turn, increase the likelihood of disruptions in care (Usdansky & Wolf, 2008) and thereby lead to the mothers experiencing heightened challenges.

The finding that Finnish lone mothers perceived arranging childcare during non-standard hours as equally problematic or unsatisfactory as their Dutch and British counterparts seemed particularly surprising because of the relatively comprehensible and affordable childcare service provision available in Finland. Specifically, the law ensures under school-aged children the subjective right to early childhood education and care, which is also available during non-standard hours in specific municipal day-and-night care centers (Peltoperä et al., 2018; Rönkä et al., 2017c). Furthermore, the government-subsidized formal childcare, the price of which is set according to a family's financial situation, ensures that childcare services during non-standard hours are affordable (Peltoperä et al., 2018). Despite the relative extensiveness of the Finnish childcare services, the system, however, is not entirely without gaps, which may explain some of the challenges encountered by the Finnish lone mothers in the present study. For example, because only 62 per cent of municipalities in Finland meet the need for day-and-night care services (Plantenga & Remery, 2009), all fami-

lies who have need for it, for example those living in rural areas, may not have access to such care (see Rönkä et al., 2017c). About one in every five Finnish mothers who participated in the survey lived outside towns and cities, and therefore, inaccessibility of formal childcare services can explain part of the challenges experienced by the mothers. Although inaccessibility is, indeed, a challenge for those families who do not live in the close vicinity of a day-and-night care center, it seems an insufficient explanation for the absence of a difference between the experiences of lone mothers living in Finland and their counterparts living in the other two countries characterized with more widespread gaps in the provision of formal childcare during non-standard hours. The gaps that the three countries share, however, is formal childcare provision for school-aged children (Plantenga & Remery, 2013), which may have reflected the problems experienced by the mothers. Another possible explanation is that because Finnish mothers in the present study typically worked in shifts (results not shown), which is common for employed Finnish women (see Table 3), they may find arranging childcare challenging due to the rotating nature of their work shifts. Furthermore, shift workers are less autonomous compared to other workers (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011; Parent-Thirion et al., 2007), so the lack of control over their (non-standard) work hours, supported also by the findings of sub-study III, might have contributed in Finnish lone mothers experiencing challenges with childcare arrangements.

The experience of childcare-related challenges may also be tied to the mothers' perceptions of the quality in childcare, which affects mothers' decisions about childcare (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). Studies conducted in the three countries (e.g., Bell et al., 2005; De Schipper et al. 2003; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016; Rönkä et al., 2017c; Statham & Mooney, 2003) suggest that parents who work during non-standard hours consider the quality in childcare to include trust, safety, stability, and predictability in caregiving patterns and structure in children's days as well as educated professionals in ensuring the wellbeing and development of children. Furthermore, cultural norms attached to motherhood and the wellbeing of children are likely to have impact on mothers' individual preferences and desires for the type of childcare, that in turn are closely tied to cultural understandings about what is best for the child (see Dixey, 1999; Ellingsæter & Gulbransen, 2007; Pfau-Effinger, 2012; Terävä, Kuukka & Alasuutari, 2018). In addition to the gaps in provision of childcare during non-standard hours, the issues related to the mothers' perceptions of the quality in childcare and cultural understandings about the child's best interest possibly help to explain the similar findings between the three countries; these issues are discussed in more detail below.

Echoing the historical emphasis on lone mothers' caregiving role (see Lewis & Hobson, 1997; Van Drenth et al., 1999), the Netherlands is characterized by a particularly strong maternal care culture according to which maternal care for children is a highly valued and preferred option in many families (Van Drenth et al., 1999; Van Wel & Knijn, 2006) and formal childcare during daytime, for example, is accepted only on a part-time basis (Plantenga & Remery, 2009).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Dutch parents are found to prefer informal or parental care over formal childcare during non-standard hours (De Schipper et al., 2003). Another reason is the concerns that Dutch parents possibly place on child wellbeing in the context of formal childcare during non-standard hours, including instability of caregivers and peers, high staff turnover rates, and low level of stimulation (De Schipper et al., 2003). In the UK, parents may also be hesitant about using center-based care or childminders during night-time, for example, due to trust and safety concerns related to childminders and the cultural belief that parental care, or relative care at the minimum, at home is considered to serve the child's best interest by making the child feel happy and comfortable (Statham & Mooney, 2003). Such preferences towards home-based care provided by informal caregivers, which mothers see as supporting child wellbeing, are possibly in line with the actual care arrangements of children living in the Dutch and British lone-mother families, which may level out the experience of challenges with childcare arrangements.

In contrast, Finnish children of lone mothers working non-standard hours are more likely to be cared for in an institutional setting (Lammi-Taskula & Siippainen, 2018; Rönkä et al., 2017c; Verhoef et al., 2018). Although institutional-based care is an accepted form of childcare in Finland (Vuori, 2003), Peltoperä et al. (2018) point out that public attitudes, including those of parents, about formal childcare during non-standard hours are conflicting. Despite the benefits of using day-and-night care services, that is, not necessarily having to rely on multiple caregivers and being assured that children are safe and cared for by educated personnel (Peltoperä et al., 2018), lone mothers, who comprise a major clientele of day-and-night care services (Rönkä et al., 2017c), may still worry about the wellbeing of their children in these care centers. These worries may result from children spending long periods of time in day-and-night care (Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016; Rönkä et al., 2017c) and the unpredictability of children's everyday rhythms and routines (Rönkä et al., 2017c), which possibly hamper the child's sense of continuity, predictability, and belonging to a peer group (Peltoperä et al., 2018). The findings of sub-study III indicated that Finnish lone mothers do acknowledge these potential risks that their non-standard work hours pose to the wellbeing of their children who are being cared for in day-and-night care centers, which may also bear an impact on the mothers' experiences of childcare-related challenges. Some of the lone mothers working in rotating shifts, for example, would have preferred to work only daytime hours or reduced hours so as not to have to take their young children to day-and-night care overnight. Consequently, if help from informal childcare resources is not available (see Table 2), lone mothers may worry for their children who frequently spend their nights outside home and away from their mothers. Thereby, conflicts between individual preferences and reality may indeed for some survey respondents have resulted in the perception that their childcare arrangements were problematic or unsatisfactory.

7.1.2 Non-standard work hours add time demands

With reference to negative and positive work-to-family interface, the findings indicated that maternal non-standard work hours were significantly associated only with the negative dimension of the interface. Specifically, lone mothers across the three countries perceived that the more they worked during non-standard hours, the more they experienced time-based work-to-family conflict, which confirms the original expectation. This result in providing support to the scarcity approach to multiple roles (Goode, 1960) and previous findings concerning lone mothers residing in the United States (Ciabattari, 2007) and Australia (Baxter & Alexander, 2008), indicates that the mothers with non-standard work hours perceived that the time devoted to their work roles makes it difficult to fulfill the requirements attached to their family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The sense of added time demands probably resulted from a clash between their non-standard work hours and the normative assumption concerning "family time," according to which weekdays are for working, while evenings and weekends are seen primarily as family time, and nights as time for sleep (Daly, 2001). As a result, work during early mornings, evenings, nights, and/or weekends led these mothers to experience time-based work-to-family conflict and possibly also role strain, which relates to feelings of not having enough time for children, family activities, joint family meals, and housework because of work demands (see Goode, 1960).

The findings showed that Finnish lone mothers were equally likely to experience time-based work-to-family conflict as Dutch and British lone mothers when working non-standard hours. This was an indication that a comprehensive childcare infrastructure *alone* does not seem to protect mothers from experiencing such conflict between work and family responsibilities (also Cousins & Tang, 2004; Steiber, 2009). Possible explanations for this finding may relate to diverse workplace policies and family policies across the three countries. In Finland, the lack of workplace support (e.g., job control, emotional support received from supervisors) has been found to be low in the service sector (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011), which may explain the high levels of time-based conflict among Finnish mothers. Furthermore, Finnish policies largely support *either* maternal full-time employment *or* full-time caregiving for young children (Repo, 2010; Salmi et al., 2016), which is why Finnish mothers are less likely to use part-time work as a facilitative strategy compared to Dutch and British mothers when combining work and family responsibilities (Roeters & Craig, 2014; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006). Relatedly, the higher usage of informal childcare in the Netherlands and the UK (see Table 2) may mean that Dutch and British mothers are more likely to receive support from their social support networks than their Finnish counterparts. Given that part-time work and family support can help in reducing the experienced conflict between work and family roles (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011), it is possible that the unlikelihood of Finnish mothers utilizing these two as a facilitative strategy to reconcile work and family life together with the lack of working time autonomy associat-

ed with shift work (Parent-Thirion et al., 2007) led to the high levels of time-based conflict experienced by the survey respondents.

Regarding the positive dimension of work-to-family interface, the results showed that non-standard work hours were not associated with lone mothers' perceptions of work-to-family positive affective spillover. This indicates that the mothers did not perceive that their non-standard work hours would influence the perceived transfer of positive affect from their work role to their family role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). However, the absence of a negative association between maternal non-standard work hours and positive affective spillover can be perceived as a positive outcome, as this suggests that these working non-standard hours do not hamper mothers' perception of positive affect spilling over from their work role to family role. It may be that mothers' perceptions of the relationship between non-standard work hours and positive affective spillover relates more to other factors that the work hours *per se*. Such factors could comprise, for instance, experiencing one's work as meaningful, which could be the case in health occupations characterized by non-standard work hours. Having a job that evokes the feeling of contributing to something meaningful might mean that this positive affect can be perceived to transfer from work to family life. In addition, other work-related factors, such as workplace support (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011), could potentially be associated with work-to-family positive affective spillover. It can also be that work-to-family positive *affective* spillover was not the most relevant measure in examining the positive work-to-family interface within the context of maternal non-standard work hours. Other measures for positive spillover between work and family roles could also be probed, such as work–family balance (Frone, 2003), enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), enhancement (Ruderman et al., 2002), or facilitation (Wayne et al., 2007) that denote similar phenomena with slightly different terminology (Greenhaus & Foley, 2007). Instead of the affective aspect, positive work-to-family spillover, with respect to values, skills, or behavior (see Edwards & Rothbard), could also be investigated in the context of maternal non-standard work hours.

The findings discussed above suggested that in addition to the possibilities and constraints that the political contexts offer for lone mothers to combine their work and family responsibilities in different welfare and care regimes, their experiences are likely to be influenced by the degree to which their working times meet their preferences and perceptions of what serves the best interest of their children. As with childcare arrangements, the experience of time-based work-to-family conflict may be reduced when the mother finds working times that, in addition to being easy to coordinate with family life, are also desirable and suitable to their personal values. Lone mothers in the Netherlands, for example, have been found to identify themselves primarily as caregivers (Bakker & Karsten, 2013), and because they are more typically employed full time than their coupled counterparts (see Table 1), the conflict between their preferred roles as caregivers and their responsibilities as breadwinners may be the cause of high time-based conflict between work and family roles. British lone mothers,

again, may struggle to make ends meet with part-time work, which is likely to lead to tensions between time for work and time for family (Millar, 2008; Millar & Ridge, n.d.). In Finland, the cultural assumptions around maternal work and the child's best possibly influence lone mothers' experiences on time-based work-to-family conflict.

7.1.3 Comparing the experiences of lone and coupled mothers

The second aim of this study was to examine whether lone mothers' experiences of childcare arrangements and negative and positive work-to-family interface differ from those of coupled mothers when the mother works during non-standard hours. It was originally expected that lone mothers with non-standard work hours would be exposed to a heightened likelihood of experiencing childcare-related challenges and time-based work-to-family conflict, because of their more limited financial and time resources compared to coupled mothers (e.g., Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Gornick, 2018; Son & Bauer, 2010). The results did not provide support for this expectation in terms of childcare-related challenges, but lone mothers across the three countries were found to experience more strongly than coupled mothers that their work during non-standard hours associates with the experience of heightened level of time-based work-to-family conflict.

With regard to childcare-related challenges, there are several possible explanations for not finding differences between the experiences of lone mothers and coupled mothers. First, it may be that lone mothers, who are able to maintain employment during non-standard hours, need to have a strong social support network in place which can be thought to replace the childcare provided by the residential partner in two-parent families. Indeed, lone mothers across the three countries, when working during non-standard hours, are found likely to count on their informal care networks with childcare (e.g., Bakker & Karsten, 2013; Kazimirski et al., 2008; Kröger, 2010). Second, coupled mothers are faced with similar structural and quality issues attached to formal childcare, although two-parent families may be in a financially more advantageous position than lone mother-families (Gill & Davidson, 2001; Kröger, 2010). However, even if paid childcare would be more readily available to coupled parents, it requires a different kind of or even a more complex organization compared to, for example, care provided by relatives. What is more, the majority of Dutch and British lone mothers in this study had a high educational background, so they possibly represent middle-class lone mothers who may have more financial means and possibilities to purchase additional childcare that facilitates their childcare arrangements. Finally, although coupled parents are likely to share childcare-related tasks when the mother works during non-standard hours (La Valle et al., 2002; Mills & Täht, 2010; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016), this may not always work smoothly, but may in turn lead to disputes between the parents and cause coupled mothers to perceive the situation as problematic or unsatisfactory. All the possible explanations raised here present fruitful avenues for future studies.

Even though childcare arrangements were perceived to be equally challenging among lone and coupled mothers, when the focus was on the negative work-to-family interface in the context of maternal non-standard work hours, some important differences were found between mothers living in the two family forms. In the first place, the results indicated that, across the three countries, lone mothers perceived more strongly than coupled mothers that their work during non-standard hours interferes with the time for family responsibilities. In addition, important differences were found between the three countries in terms of this result. Starting with the Netherlands and the UK, lone mothers perceived their non-standard work hours to associate with heightened levels of time-based conflict when the amount of non-standard work hours was high, whereas for coupled mothers, there was no meaningful relationship between non-standard work hours and time-based conflict. This finding corresponds with prior research, according to which combining the requirements inherent in work and family roles is particularly problematic for lone mothers in these two countries (see Bakker & Karsten, 2013; Millar, 2008). This is probably because lone mothers are navigating two everyday life spheres as main breadwinners and caregivers, with the time resources of only one parent (e.g., Bell et al., 2005; Gill & Davidson, 2001; Gornick, 2018). Due to the greater workload and work during "family time" (Daly, 2001), lone mothers may easily feel that they are missing out on spending time with their children when they are at work and that even when they are at home, they do not have enough time for their children or the energy to engage in activities with them.

Maternal work hour culture may also be particularly influential in shaping mothers' experiences of combining work and family roles, as suggested by previous studies (Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; Van der Lippe et al., 2006). That is to say, as Dutch and British mothers have been found to use part-time work as a strategy to help them adapt their working times around family responsibilities (Roeters & Craig, 2014; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006), this strategy possibly reduces the perceived conflict between work and family responsibilities for coupled mothers. However, low wages and financial dependency on others associated with part-time work may particularly penalize lone mothers (Cousins & Tang, 2004; McGinnity & McManus, 2007; Millar & Ridge, n.d.), which again is associated with high levels of conflict between work and family (Edgell et al., 2012). Furthermore, because the residential partner in two-parent families is likely to be involved in childcare and housework when the mother works during non-standard hours (e.g., La Valle et al., 2002; Mills & Täht, 2010), coupled mothers may possibly rest assured that at least the other parent is engaged in activities with the children at home while the mother is at work (see La Valle et al., 2002), while the children of lone mothers are more likely to be cared for outside the home, likely by someone else than the other parent.

The experiences of lone mothers in Finland differed from those of their Dutch and British counterparts in that Finnish lone mothers experienced more strongly than coupled mothers that their work during non-standard hours would lead to the experience of time-based work-to-family conflict only when

the amount of non-standard work hours was low. Such a result seems to indicate that in Finland, lone mothers' occasional non-standard work hours, possibly when they are required to work unpredictable overtime hours, for example, have a particularly severe impact on lone mothers' perception about their work hours making it difficult to find time to take care of and engage in family responsibilities. In cases where these overtime hours are non-contracted, lone mothers may not be eligible for a place in a day-and-night care center, which can create conflicts for these mothers in terms of combining the responsibilities attached to their work and family roles. Mothers of young school-aged children, again, may worry for their children being alone at home, without adult supervision. In such instances, the help from a residential partner may buffer the effect of non-standard work hours on time-based conflict for coupled mothers. However, when the amount of non-standard work hours was high, lone mothers' experiences were equal to those of coupled mothers. This was certainly an unexpected outcome, but one possible explanation is that coupled mothers who are working during evenings or weekends while the rest of the family are at home are particularly aware of the family time they are missing out on because of work (see Baxter & Alexander, 2008), which can lead to a high level of time-based work-to-family conflict. It can also be that the mothers considered that their spouses were disproportionately responsible for housework and childcare, which lead to the experience of conflict.

7.1.4 Prevailing cultural mothering expectations: Finnish lone mothers' experiences

The findings pertaining to the first two aims of the present study provided support for the view that lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation are not solely conditional on the policy contexts within different welfare states but that they could also be tied to cultural norms towards motherhood and child wellbeing. Duncan and Edwards (1999) introduced the concept of "gendered moral rationalities," which highlights that the understandings about motherhood and paid work, which are individually held but negotiated within social contexts, help in explaining lone mothers' orientations towards the uptake of paid work (also Duncan & Edwards, 1997; Lewis & Hobson, 1997). For example, family values and the cultural importance attached to caring for children at home can have an impact on lone mothers' caring preferences and thereby also on their engagement in paid work and the pattern of their work hours (see Pfau-Effinger, 2012). La Valle et al. (2002) also note that in light of dominant mothering expectations, the perceptions of missing out in relation to children, that is, experiencing time-based work-to-family conflict, can arouse feelings of guilt in mothers and perceptions of improper mothering. These contemplations closely relate to Roman's (2017) argument that the notions of "good" mothering denote an important part of work–family reconciliation and how this reconciliation is perceived by mothers. Consequently, the third aim of the present study was to better understand how Finnish lone mothers navigate within the demands set by their non-standard work hours and culturally shared expec-

tations attached to "good" mothering. It was important to approach this issue by emphasizing lone mothers' own understandings in accounting for why they work during non-standard hours and how these understandings map on to dominant expectations of "good" mothering.

The literature concerning definitions of "good" mothering accounts for a diversity of ways in which mothers with various work practices respond to and transform the cultural expectations attached to mothering (e.g., Christopher, 2012; Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Overall, the findings of this study showed that Finnish lone mothers perceived that their work during non-standard hours, when considered from the perspective of child wellbeing, fit poorly into notions of "good" mothering. Such incongruity resulted from the fact that the mothers perceived their non-standard hours as posing a potential risk to their children's wellbeing, in addition to which they were aware of the cultural ideas about how mothers are expected to prioritize the needs of their children in ensuring their wellbeing (Hays, 1996; Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2000). In navigating the challenges and complexities resulting from the perceived mismatch between their work hours and child wellbeing and the necessity in their case of working during non-standard hours, the mothers largely conformed to the intensive mothering ideals in striving to display themselves as morally responsible mothers. It may be that lone mothers' opportunities to opt out of an intensive parenting ideology are constrained by context (Smyth & Craig, 2017). That is to say, lone mothers may feel that there is a need to determinedly work to present themselves as "good" enough mothers, and to ensure that their children are faring well. This is not just because they are seen to violate the cultural understanding of the nuclear family as the best environment for the child's growth and development (May, 2008, 2011) and that of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), but also because their work during non-standard hours may be perceived to harm the wellbeing of their children.

Despite conforming to the dominant and intensive mothering ideals, another important finding was that Finnish lone mothers also challenged these ideals by excusing and justifying their non-standard work hours. When the mothers excused their non-standard work hours as an external demand, they emphasized that due to the necessity and obligations (also Roman, 2019) to work as well as the commitments to carry out their work duties, combined with the lack of jobs with standard hours, they did not have a choice concerning their working hours. Such excuses can be considered to make these mothers less accountable to the expectations of intensive mothering (see Christopher, 2012). Here, it is important to note that although, in general, the mothers talked about the personal benefits gained from work, which can be seen as an indication of a challenge to the intensive mothering ideal (also Christopher, 2012), when the mothers talked about their non-standard work hours in light of child wellbeing and family life, through excusing accounts, work was primarily referred to as *a must rather than a choice*. This became particularly evident when the mothers of young children talked about their preferences towards full-time caregiving (see

Hietamäki et al., 2018) or working "family-friendly" hours instead of working non-standard work hours, due to their worries over child wellbeing.

The perceivable conflict between the responsibilities relating to breadwinning, work duties, and mothering reflects the ambivalent nature of the family policy context in Finland, which seems to have left the lone mothers with two options: staying at home full time on the child home care allowance (Repo, 2010) or working full time. However, due to the relatively low level of financial support offered to full-time caregivers (see Pfau-Effinger, 2012), many lone mothers may have little choice but to work. Part-time work, alike, may not appear as a viable option particularly for sole earners, as this might mean failing to provide the family with a sufficient income (see Salmi et al., 2016). Because lone-mother families are more likely to fall below the margins of poverty compared to two-parent families (Mukkila et al., 2017), lone mothers may in reality have no other choice but to take up paid work with "family-unfriendly" hours in order to financially support their families. The findings suggested that, in these cases, it is ultimately left to the responsibility of the individual mothers to do a major part of the balancing act between the demands of the labor market and their responsibility to ensure that the needs of their children are met and thus maintain their wellbeing. Just like the lone mothers in Utrata's (2017) study, the mothers in the present study indicated that a "socially necessary" self is one who assumed individual responsibility for issues that have, at least partly, a structural cause.

Justifying their non-standard work hours by challenging the perception that their work hours pose an inevitable risk to the wellbeing of their children denoted the strongest way with which the lone mothers challenged the cultural notions of "good" mothering when negotiating the complexities and challenges between the demands set by their working times and mothering expectations. Such negotiations encompass transformative potential as some of the mothers highlighted the positive and beneficial aspects of their work hours on their children (also Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016) and assured that their work hours were not harming their children. One way to challenge the intensive mothering ideal, which sees childcare provided by the mothers as the best and even only way to ensure good-quality care (Hays, 1996; Hietamäki et al., 2018), was by emphasizing that the mothers considered themselves fortunate because they had the opportunity to take their children to a day-and-night care center, and rest assured that their children were safe there and received professional care (see Peltoperä et al., 2018). Another way to justify maternal non-standard work hours and thereby challenge the intensive mothering ideal as well as the normative view of "family time" (see Daly, 2001) was by emphasizing that the relationship between mother and child is not developed during night-time. Instead, working in night shifts has the potential to benefit the mother–child relationship as it results in additional days off when the mother and child have more time together (also Lleras, 2008). By challenging the strong cultural ideal attached to motherhood and ensuring their children were faring well, these mothers enacted their agency and contributed to new cultural accounts of what

constitutes "good" motherhood in the context of maternal non-standard work hours and 24/7 economies.

7.2 Managing the "triple demand" in different policy and cultural contexts

The findings of this study showed that lone mothers' non-standard work hours appear primarily as a demand and challenge for their work–family reconciliation across the three countries. Adopting a facet methodological approach (Mason, 2011) helped in understanding the different dimensions of the mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation and how these dimensions are possibly connected and intertwined. Taken together, the findings suggest that the mothers' experiences of the reconciliation of non-standard work hours and everyday family life are founded, not only on the opportunities and restrictions offered by the larger structures of societies, that is, policy environments, but that the mothers' experiences are also closely attached to the mothering expectations embedded in cultural and public discussions attached to "good" motherhood.

The Netherlands and the UK represent countries with a strong tradition of the "male breadwinner-model" (see Hübgen, 2018; Lewis & Hobson, 1997) and strong maternal care cultures (e.g., Kazimirski et al., 2008; Van Wel & Knijn, 2006), echoes of which are still visible today, as the welfare and care regimes characterizing these two countries emphasize mothers' part-time work (Pfau-Effinger, 2005). Despite the recent developments in formal childcare provision that enable lone mothers to engage in paid employment (Knijn & Van Wel, 2001; Rutter & Evans, 2012; Statham & Mooney, 2003), the part-time nature of such provision, mainly during standard hours, seems to primarily serve the needs of two-parent families who can rely on their partners regarding childcare. In the Netherlands, lone mothers, compared to coupled mothers, are more likely to work full-time (see Table 1), possibly in order to earn a family wage, and therefore are also likely to utilize formal childcare services (De Ruijter, 2004). In a culture where maternal care is viewed as ideal, the increasing expectation that lone mothers need to work, and possibly during non-standard hours, in order to provide for their children financially (Knijn & Van Wel, 2001; Van Drenth et al., 1999) may result in the experience of conflict between what the mothers consider ideal and what is expected of them on the part of society (see Bakker & Karsten, 2013). In the UK, again, lone mothers are more likely to work part-time hours compared to coupled mothers (see Table 1), which may cohere with their idea of the importance of maternal care, but it can also reflect the shortage of full-time formal childcare services during standard and especially during non-standard hours (e.g., Harding & Cottell, 2018; Plantenga & Remery, 2009) together with the high cost of these market-based services (Kazimirski et al., 2008; Kröger, 2010). This is likely to leave lone mothers facing challenges with work–

family reconciliation and, at worst, to increase their risk of poverty. Thereby, together the cultural emphasis on maternal care and the failure of the childcare service systems to meet the needs of lone mothers working non-standard hours place British and Dutch lone mothers in a demanding situation in trying to manage with the resources of one parent.

Because of the shortages in the childcare service systems as well as the mothers' perceptions of the quality in childcare during non-standard hours and the maternal care cultures, lone mothers in the Netherlands and the UK who work during non-standard hours may have to rely substantially on their informal care networks. Having access to such support networks can help in reliving the experienced conflict between work and family roles (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011) and this type of care may be more in accordance with mothers' own notions of "good" mothering compared to institutional care arrangements. Contrastingly, the support of informal care networks may not be as readily available to Finnish lone mothers (see Table 2), who are (in principle) able to rely on the provision of formal childcare during non-standard hours (e.g., Rönkä et al., 2017c). Furthermore, although comprehensive family policies and the provision of day-and-night care in Finland *enable* lone mothers to work during non-standard hours and to earn a sufficient income through full-time work, at the same time these policies seem to *constrain* their abilities to act in accordance with the preferences they themselves and the population more widely hold (Salin et al., 2016). In the face of ongoing developments in the labor markets that relate to the unavailability of job opportunities with standard work hours, such policies have an important role in facilitating the work–family reconciliation of lone mothers who, as sole providers and caregivers, are striving to earn a sufficient income. One such facilitative strategy could be to offer to those mothers of young children who wish to work reduced hours, wage replacements to enable them to work part-time hours *and* earning a wage on which it is possible to support a family. At the moment, however, policies fail to do this (Salmi et al., 2016), which leaves many lone mothers with two possibilities: either full-time caregiving or full-time employment during non-standard hours. In a way, this raises a question of whether the Finnish welfare state, in the context of maternal non-standard work hours, offers lone mothers an actual opportunity to choose between paid work and full-time caregiving (see Kilkey, 2000). Rather, in light of the findings of the present study, these structural gaps seem to lead to the idea that lone mothers use a good share of their personal resources when managing the challenges that they face with work–family reconciliation, that is, earning the family a sufficient income while striving to ensure the wellbeing of their children.

In comparing the experiences of lone mothers and coupled mothers, this study has importantly showed that the reconciliation of work and family life seems not to be automatically more challenging for lone mothers compared to coupled mothers. This is an essential finding because of the apparent tendency to equate the disadvantaged circumstances of lone-mother families with the family type itself which can result in a discourse that casts blame on lone moth-

ers and that questions their abilities to provide their children a proper environment for growth and development and to ensure their wellbeing (e.g., Dermott & Pomati, 2016; Forssén et al., 2009; May, 2008, 2011). However, even if lone and coupled mothers shared similar experiences of work–family reconciliation in the context of non-standard work hours, it is equally important to pay attention to the differences between them. It is vital to acknowledge the challenges that lone mothers experience and try to understand these issues in their "broader context." In other words, lone mothers tend to have more limited resources with which they can reconcile work and family responsibilities and ensure the wellbeing of their children (Dermott & Pomati, 2016; Zagel et al., 2013). Due to this, facing challenges with work–family reconciliation may have particularly severe consequences for lone-mother families. As research has indicated, having insufficient means to successfully reconcile work with family life can result in negative health outcomes among mothers (Barnes et al., 2012; Bull & Mittelmark, 2009; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004; Mauno et al., 2011), all of which can further associate with negative outcomes for children (e.g., Pocock & Clarke, 2005; Son & Bauer, 2010). Experiencing challenges with work–family reconciliation can also mean that lone mothers become vulnerable to several social risks that relate to absenteeism from work (Usdansky & Wolf, 2008) and even exclusion from the labor market (Ciabattari, 2007), followed by social exclusion and the risk of poverty (Gill & Davidson, 2001; Heymann, 2006; Ridge & Millar, 2011). It is, therefore, immensely important to acknowledge the disadvantaged position lone-mother families can be in compared to two-parent families, while at the same time recognizing that their situation is not related to lone motherhood *per se*, but to the scarcer resources with which these mothers are striving to secure their own and their children's wellbeing compared to two-parent families (Dermott & Pomati, 2016; Zagel et al., 2013). As it has been acknowledged, employment opportunities and welfare state policies create the key institutions with regard to influencing the employment opportunities and thereby the wellbeing of lone-mother families (see Hübgen, 2018; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018). Therefore, in ensuring the wellbeing of lone mothers and their children, the broader structural settings should ensure that these mothers' employment continues to be enabled by paying attention to factors that help in facilitating the successful reconciliation of work and family life within maternal non-standard work hours.

7.3 Policy implications

The findings of this study imply that non-standard work hours, in associating with heightened demands for work–family reconciliation, create the possibility of making lone mothers and their children vulnerable to several social risks associated with negative health outcomes and unemployment. The overall implication is that the challenges that lone mothers face in relation to work–family reconciliation can be mitigated by paying attention in developing diverse fami-

ly and employment policy strategies suitable for the context of maternal non-standard work hours so that mothers' employment and the wellbeing of all family members can be ensured.

This study has shown that mothers' non-standard work hours pose a challenge to the arrangement of childcare among both lone mothers and coupled mothers across the three countries. This finding signifies how important it would be to develop family policies in such a way as to make it easier for all mothers who work non-standard hours to reconcile work and family life. On one hand, the challenges that these families face may result from the gaps in formal or informal childcare provision in terms of availability, affordability, and accessibility. On the other hand, the challenges may also be connected to the parents' perceptions of quality in childcare that are linked to the ideas that individual mothers (and fathers) hold about what is best for the child and that influence the parents' preferences about the type of care. Therefore, from a policy perspective, there is a definite need for developing the provision of both formal and informal childcare to meet the different needs of individual families. Overall, governments should *ensure the availability, affordability, and accessibility of high-quality childcare during non-standard hours that ensures child wellbeing and development while matching the cultural assumptions concerning the child's best as well as parents' preferences concerning the type of care*. In practice, this requires support from governments for more resources to enhance structural quality (e.g., physical environments, staff-child ratios) and also to develop process quality (e.g., training and skills of staff members) in center-based formal childcare (see Bonnetti & Brown, 2018; Ishimine et al., 2009). This is not a simple task, though, considering the benefits and risks associated with formal and informal childcare to the wellbeing and development of the child as well as the country-specific cultural assumptions, and those of the parents, about the child's best interest. Notwithstanding this challenge, the present study suggests some ways by which governments could develop the provision of childcare during non-standard hours to ensure the sustainability of maternal employment and child wellbeing during non-standard hours.

Across the three countries, continued efforts are needed to *make high-quality formal childcare during non-standard hours more available, affordable, and accessible*. Not only does the access to formal childcare enable mothers to work and earn a family wage, but high-quality childcare offered by trained educators and caregivers further has the potential to benefit child development and to level out the disadvantages between children from various backgrounds (e.g., Burger, 2010; Felfe & Lalive, 2018; Geoffroy et al., 2010; Zagel et al., 2013). The provision of formal center-based childcare during non-standard hours in stable settings with educated personnel can also be considered as safe and supportive of children (Peltoperä et al., 2018). In Finland, the provision of day-and-night care is ensured by the law and is thus available and affordable to all families (Peltoperä et al., 2018; Rönkä et al., 2017c); but the access to day-and-night care services should also be ensured. If the childcare center is a one-hour drive away from the place of family residence, this can become a barrier for lone mothers in

maintaining a job that involves work during non-standard hours. Regarding the Netherlands and the UK, failure to meet the childcare needs of families with maternal non-standard work hours points to the deficiencies in these countries' policies to recognize these needs. Therefore, there is a need to make center-based childcare more available, affordable, and accessible in order to assure that lone mothers are able to attain and sustain work and that child wellbeing is ensured.

Across the three countries, *access to formal childcare should be ensured also for small, school-aged children*. In two-parent families, parents may be able to work "split-shifts" and ensure that either one of the parents is at home during the night while the other one works, but for a lone mother, having to leave a seven-year-old alone at home during the night may result in no other choice but giving in her notice.

In light of the findings of the present study, policy attention should also be paid to *developing childcare services so that they cohere more smoothly with the mothers' perceptions of quality in childcare as well as cultural and individual family value orientations*. The Finnish lone mothers in this study placed concerns over the long periods of time their children spend in day-and-night care as well as about the unpredictability of children's everyday rhythms and routines. Furthermore, the mothers did not feel comfortable in leaving their children at a day-and-night care center over-night. Similar findings were made by De Schipper et al. (2003) among Dutch parents, as concerns were placed upon the instability of caregivers and peers and on the unpredictability associated with formal childcare during non-standard hours, whereas Bell et al. (2005) discovered that British parents, overall, trusted more in informal caregivers compared to formal childcare during non-standard hours. Therefore, attention should be paid to *keeping the staff turnover rate in center-based care as minimal as possible* and *ensuring knowledgeable and qualified staff in day-and-night care* in order to protect the well-being and development of the children. It is possible, for example, that when caregivers are aware of the instability associated with care during non-standard hours, they would strive to be positively oriented towards the children (see De Schipper et al., 2003). Moreover, an open and functioning partnership between trained personnel and mothers might help in supporting the mothers with work–family reconciliation and benefit child wellbeing.

Due to the strong preference for home-based care during non-standard hours especially in the Netherlands and the UK, center-based childcare during non-standard hours is not a generally accepted form of childcare in these countries (Plantenga & Remery, 2009). This means that families may not readily adopt an idea of children spending their evenings, nights, and weekends, for example, in center-based care, which may create a barrier for developing similar services to the day-and-night care in Finland (see Statham & Mooney, 2003). Another obstacle for formal childcare is the high price, which possibly creates a barrier for the demand for such services (e.g., Statham & Mooney, 2003; Van Klaveren et al., 2013). This in turn results in parents using informal childcare or providing care by themselves (see Van Klaveren et al., 2013). One key policy

priority could therefore be to *develop formal childcare services so that care in home-like surroundings could be offered to children in institutional settings* and ensure *financial support from the governments for these services*. If parents perceive formal childcare as trustworthy and safe as well as beneficial for the child, they might start to consider center-based childcare during non-standard hours as a viable option for childcare.

Informal childcare (e.g., grandparental care) appears an important childcare resource, especially for lone mothers in the Netherlands and the UK (see Table 2), because of the affordability (e.g., Bakker & Karsten, 2013) and acceptability (e.g., Bell et al., 2005; Statham & Mooney, 2003) of this type of care during non-standard hours. However, informal childcare is not always available or accessible to families. Perhaps *better financial assistance could be provided in terms of informal caregivers* (see Bell et al., 2005). Moreover, unavailability of informal childcare may imply a need for state subsidized help, especially for those lone-mother families who have no access to social support networks and no financial means to purchase childcare, so that these mothers' work–family reconciliation could be facilitated. One approach to tackling this issue could be *to provide financial assistance to these mothers in purchasing household services*. In Finland, this could mean hiring a nanny who could fetch the child from the day-and-night care center and bring the child home, so that she or he could sleep at home. This would be particularly helpful in situations where the mother's evening shift does not end before the day-and-night care center closes its doors; in which case the child has to remain in the childcare center overnight although the mother sleeps at home. However, it is important to note that although informal care can be an important resource and a preferred option among parents working non-standard hours, using informal childcare alone can be considered to associate with low quality from the perspective of child development (e.g., Geoffroy et al., 2010). In addition, lone mothers may have to rely on multiple care providers, which can potentially make childcare arrangements complex and less continuous (Hepburn, 2018) and thus have negative consequences for the wellbeing of children (De Schipper et al., 2003).

The findings of the present study further showed that lone mothers across the three countries perceived their work during non-standard hours to interfere with the time for family responsibilities. This finding indicates at least two important policy implications: the first one relates to the role that the government has in sensitizing employers to support their employees through providing opportunities for job control as well as emotional support to facilitate mothers' work–family reconciliation (see Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011). Indeed, the *state should support employers to promote family-friendly working time options*, especially for mothers (and fathers) with young children. In Finland and the UK, where support received from the workplace is found to be low (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011), the government needs to take an active role in encouraging and supporting employers especially in the service sector, where mothers commonly work in rotating shifts (see Table 3), to provide working time arrangements that facilitate mothers' work–family reconciliation and secure their attachment

in the labor market. Such arrangements could include, for example, *well compensated part-time work* and *flexible hours*. Legislation could also possibly secure *the right for parents of under three-year-olds to work solely standard, daytime hours*. Having an opportunity to work flexible hours, part-time hours, or merely daytime hours with sufficient income could enable mothers of young children to facilitate the experience of time-based work-to-family conflict (Edgell et al., 2012). However, studies (see e.g., Haddock et al., 2006; Lleras, 2008) have also shown that some lone and coupled mothers may choose to work non-standard hours to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life and to have more time with children during daytime; so when making policy suggestions, it is important to acknowledge the needs and preferences of individual mothers and families. All in all, having an opportunity to work hours suitable to individual family situation with sufficient income would enable lone mothers of young children to maintain their paid employment, to provide for their children, to secure themselves sufficient pension contributions, and to have time to care for and spend with their children.

7.4 Validity and trustworthiness: Assessment of the strengths and limitations

As any study, this one is characterized by particular strengths as well as limitations that contribute to the overall quality of the research. One strength of the present study was the utilization of facet methodology (Mason, 2011) as an approach to the central research problem characterized by its multi-dimensionality. Facet methodology assisted in creating new insights into and knowledge of the ways that lone mothers in diverse socio-cultural and political surroundings experience the reconciliation of work and family life in the context of maternal non-standard work hours, by viewing it from different perspectives involving different methodologies, methods, and data. Working with two different types of data also definitely advanced my scientific skills as a researcher.

Another strength of this study was the cross-national comparison, which provided an opportunity to assess how broader cultural, political, and institutional contexts possibly shape lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation (see Yu, 2015). A related methodological strength was the utilization of both cross-national survey data and single-national interview data gathered within the Families 24/7 research project. Data was gathered in each of the three countries by local researchers, which enabled the respondents to reply on the survey with their mother tongue.

According to Mason (2011), facet methodology does not contain specific directions for ensuring the overall quality of research, but it does require the production of insights and knowledge that are genuine, meaningful, and incisive. Furthermore, ensuring the quality of research when utilizing facet methodology requires honesty as well as responsible thinking and practice in work-

ing with and showing why and how the generated insights are convincing and why there is a reason to believe so (Mason, 2011). To my understanding, in order to produce such genuine and meaningful insights that have been attained through responsible thinking and practice, certain quality criteria that have traditionally been attached to quantitative and qualitative research need to be evaluated. Below, I first discuss the challenges that relate to cross-national research and then move on to consider the quality criteria associated with quantitative and qualitative research.

7.4.1 Challenges associated with cross-national research

Although employing cross-national research design is a definite strength of the present study, there are also certain challenges associated with cross-national family research that need to be acknowledged when making country comparisons and interpreting the results (Yu, 2015). One challenge involves the translation of the survey questions into three languages, which may have involved slight differences in how the respondents understood the questions and statements. However, the local researchers ensured, for example, that the childcare institutions across the three countries were referred to with proper names in the survey. Moreover, after the data collection, the survey responses of the Dutch and Finnish respondents were back-translated into English. Although, the translations were carefully done, it is possible that some nuances of the original languages were lost within the translations. Furthermore, although the sample was collected by utilizing comparable recruitment strategies across the three countries, the sub-samples varied in some characteristics. For instance, Dutch and British mothers with high educational backgrounds were overrepresented in the sample, which can probably be expected because women with high education are found likely to participate in studies (see Rönkä, Sevón, Malinen & Salonen, 2014). The differences in the participants' educational backgrounds among Dutch and British sub-samples and the Finnish sub-sample might question the comparability of the findings across the three countries. However, the differences in the educational level of the participants were accounted for in the analyses.

Yu (2015) further points out that although international comparisons are suitable in investigating the effects that macro-level forces (e.g., policies, cultural norms) have on family-related outcomes, challenges may arise from the difficulty in considering all other macro-level factors that are potentially relevant in relation to the outcome. In this study, like in many other cross-national studies, conclusions were drawn from comparison of micro-level results between country-specific models rather than directly measuring the effects of policies. Thereby, the explanations that are provided can be seen as post hoc and thus challenged by alternative explanations (Yu, 2015). An attempt to overcome this challenge was made by providing comprehensive discussion about the welfare policies, the national cultural norms and the cultural discourses around lone motherhood as well as the common household structures of lone-mother families across the three countries, all of which can be considered to account for the discovered differences between the experiences of lone and coupled mothers. Moreover, with a

larger sample, it could have been possible to rule out the selection process to lone motherhood as a possible explanation for cross-national differences because widowed mothers, for example, may receive different amount of social and financial support compared to divorced mothers (see Yu, 2015).

7.4.2 Issues relating to generalizability, validity and statistical power in quantitative research

One key quality criterion for quantitative research is *generalizability*, which has to do with the extent to which the findings of the study are applicable to the study population in general (Robson, 2002). Generalizability is also given importance in assessing the quality of research approached through facet methodology, as it is important to discuss the extent to which the insights are evocative and resonant (Mason, 2011). Indeed, the generalizability of the findings of this study is subject to certain limitations. The findings of the sub-studies I and II are based on a convenience sample collected using a web-based questionnaire which was directed at parents who work during non-standard hours. Explicitly, employers, trade union representatives and day care centers as well as day-and-night care centers (in Finland) were contacted and asked to provide a public link to the survey to employees and parents. Only in the Netherlands, the childcare organizations that promoted the study to potential participants were randomly selected. Hence, the survey did not yield a random sample, which sets a threat to the representativeness of the sample. The absence of a sampling frame of named individuals, for example, makes it difficult to define the frame population (Couper, 2000) and thus leads to the possibility of selection bias (i.e., the participants are not representative of the target population). Because a public survey link was used instead of a private link, there was no prior knowledge about who opened the link and answered the questionnaire. Another common challenge relating to web-based survey is the nonresponse error (Couper, 2000), which weakens the generalizability of the results. Due to convenience sampling, it was not possible to evaluate the nonresponse rates, which makes it difficult to define the problem associated with potential participants not responding. Despite these challenges, the use of convenience sampling can be justified by the geographical distribution of the population. In addition, convenience sampling was appropriate method for the present study, because the aim was to gain new insights into the research problem. However, the issues listed above need to be considered when drawing conclusions from the findings.

The findings of the first two sub-studies were also limited by the use of cross-sectional data, which fails to provide insights concerning causality of the associations between studied variables. In other words, neither one of the first two sub-studies investigated the causal effects between maternal non-standard work hours and the outcome variables, so there remains a possibility of reversed causality between non-standard work hours and the outcomes that need to be acknowledged. For example, non-standard work hours was used as an independent variable (i.e., "cause") and childcare-related challenges and time-based work-to-family conflict as dependent variables (i.e., "effect") in sub-

studies I and II, respectively. However, there is a possibility that a coupled mother experiencing childcare-related challenges, for example, have chosen to work non-standard hours because of a wish to facilitate childcare arrangements (see e.g., Haddock et al., 2006), in which case the childcare-related challenges could also be seen as a "cause" and non-standard work hours as an "effect."

Validity is another central quality criterion attached to quantitative research and denotes the accuracy of the results (Robson, 2002), especially in terms of the used measures. With regard to sub-study II, *reliability*, which stands for the stability, consistency of observation (i.e., whether a research instrument yields similar results every time it is applied), and thereby, the validity of the used measures (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Robson, 2002), has been discussed in the original publication. In sub-study I, childcare-related challenges were measured by using two separate single-item measures, which may have compromised the validity of these measures. Furthermore, the measure for childcare-related challenges comprised two dependent variables in sub-study I that were different from the (standardized continuous) independent variable used in sub-study II. The justification for using different measures for childcare-related challenges in different roles in the two individual sub-studies can be justified by the different objectives of the sub-studies.

There were further limitations with regard to the used measures. For instance, the response scale for the variables measuring non-standard work hours was limited and may have therefore underestimated the impact of non-standard work hours on the outcome variables. However, the use of a continuous variable that focuses on the amount of non-standard work hours, including multiple types of non-standard work schedules, can be justified by its ability to capture the experiences of mothers working standard hours with additional (non-contracted) non-standard hours. Another justification for the measure used for non-standard work hours relates to that the use of dichotomous variable that differentiates between those working either standard or non-standard hours, which would have been another possible option, has been criticized for not being relevant to the actual lives of many working mothers (see Dunifon, Kalil, Crosby, Su & DeLeire, 2013). Although, several studies (e.g., Han & Fox, 2011; Gassman-Pines, 2011) have established the importance of distinguishing between the multiple types of non-standard work schedules (e.g., shift work, evening work, weekend work), this was not possible in the present study due to the small cell sizes in some of the categories representing different types of schedules. However, in future research it would be important to use a measure that would capture the diverse non-standard work schedules.

Furthermore, in the literature, irregular working times has been conceptualized as part of non-standard work hours but in the present study, irregular working times were treated as a control variable. These hours are, indeed, connected to the 24/7 economy (see Costa et al., 2004) in telling us about how work hours have become more variable. A reason for not conceptualizing irregular working times as part of non-standard work hours is that non-standard work hours were, in this study, defined so that they refer to work hours that take

place outside standard office hours (i.e., early mornings, evenings, nights, and weekends). Because the variable for non-standard work hours was a standardized continuous variable, including irregular work hours in the measure would have made interpreting the findings more complicated. Therefore, irregular work hours was included in the analyses as a control variable. In my view, irregular work hours could also moderate the relationship between non-standard work hours and work–family reconciliation. In other words, working non-standard hours on regular and irregular basis may have different outcomes for employees' experiences on work–family reconciliation, and could be thus used also as a moderating variable in the analyses of future studies.

Another limitation relates to the measure of positive affective spillover. Specifically, no meaningful associations were found between non-standard work hours and work-to-family positive affective spillover, which calls for future research to employ more sensible variables in their designs to find these associations. The measure itself may not have been the best choice for measuring positive work-to-family interface within the context of non-standard work hours, as discussed above. Finally, the fact that the questionnaire was translated into three languages and that in the case of the Dutch and Finnish surveys, participant responses were back-translated to English, may have impaired the validity of the used measures.

Statistical power is the final quality criterion discussed here in terms of the quantitative research. It is possible that particularly the small proportion of lone mothers in the first two sub-studies may have resulted in the inability to discover differences between the experiences of lone mothers and coupled mothers and between the three countries. Furthermore, the effect sizes were between 0.06 and 0.32 which correspond to small to medium effect sizes (see Cohen, 1988, pp. 79–80), but the fact that significant associations were found is important in terms of future research.

7.4.3 Reliability, validity and credibility in qualitative research

The trustworthiness of the qualitative research is evaluated here through the concepts of reliability, validity and credibility. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) note that some aspects of reliability (i.e., consistency of observations) and validity (i.e., truth value of observations) can be also applied to qualitative research. According to them, *reliability*, for example, becomes important in data analysis and specifically in relation to checking the stability of category definitions. In sub-study III, the accounts identified from the interview data were categorized according to the Scott and Lyman's (1968) typology into different types of account which was later on extended with a third accounting type. Although, the identification and categorization processes might have been influenced by my personal experiences and values, the categorizations of the accounts as well as the credibility of the findings were discussed, evaluated and refined in cooperation with my supervisors during our meetings. Furthermore, I have employed transparency in and been explicit about how the inductively located accounts were categorized and how the final types of accounts were formulated and de-

fined. This has relevance to *validity*, as well. In addition to data analysis and the formation of the categories, I have made every effort to be explicit about the interpretations that I have drawn from the findings. By doing this, my intention has been to arrive at *a* right interpretation, which, as Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stress, is different from arriving at *the* right interpretation. For example, the interviewed Finnish lone mothers in sub-study III were not explicitly asked to define "good" mothering but the issue was interpreted by me as a researcher from the interview data through the reflection on what is known about "good" mothering from the literature. There are two reasons for why the mothers were not directly asked what they understood with "good" mothering: first, it was because this was not among the original research questions. Rather, the issue of "good" mothering was something that was revealed through a careful examination of the interview data to be an important theme discussed by the mothers themselves when talking about child wellbeing. The second reason relates to this in that if the mothers were asked directly about the definition of "good" mothering, it is possible that the answers could have reflected more about the mothers' idea of the norms around "good" mothering than their own experiences. Overall, the understandings and explanations I have developed are those that I have found most plausible and insightful.

The concept of *credibility* defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is closely related to the concepts of reliability and validity, discussed above. According to them, credibility in qualitative research refers to the activities that are taken by the researcher that can increase the likelihood of producing credible findings and interpretations. They continue by specifying that one way by which a researcher can assure the credibility of the findings is if she is able to demonstrate a prolonged period of engagement in, for example, learning the "culture, and testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the researcher or of the participants" (p. 307). I have been working on this doctoral study for six years, during which time I have become a mother myself, which in my view has deepened my ability to understand the experiences of the mothers in my research. The topic of the study has, from very early on, been personal in that I am, myself, a daughter of a lone mother who, from time to time, worked two jobs to earn a living for our family including three dependent children at the time. Therefore, my way of approaching and viewing the lived experiences and the situations of my study participants has been characterized by a high respect for them and consideration for their situations. My personal experiences have, on one hand, deepened my devotion to understanding the experiences of the mothers. I have also been conscious of using words that are sensitive and that do not mark lone mothers as somehow "deficient" or "insufficient." On the other hand, I have had to constantly acknowledge that my personal experiences and attitudes might have posed a potential bias on the interpretations and conclusions that I have drawn from the findings. A likelihood for strong bias, however, has been reduced by having three supervisors who have evaluated the trustworthiness of my research with me in different phases of the study.

7.5 Conclusions and future directions

This study has produced new knowledge and enhanced our understanding of the impact that maternal non-standard work hours have on Finnish, Dutch, and British lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation, as well as the factors that shape these experiences. The principal theoretical implication of the present study is that in order to reach a broad understanding of the ways in which lone mothers experience the work–family reconciliation, there is a need for a multifaceted framework that considers the role of different welfare state policies as well as that of cultural understandings and values in relation to motherhood, family and children. In light of the findings of the present study, it appears that in managing the triple demand with the time, energy, and financial resources of only one parent, the availability of affordable and accessible childcare services is essential in enabling lone mothers' work during non-standard hours but may not *alone* be sufficient in resolving the pressures that lone mothers face when reconciling work and family responsibilities. These services should also be designed so that they cohere with the mothers' perceptions of quality in childcare along with cultural norms attached to mothering and what is perceived as best for children, which may have strong influence on the individual mothers' views on the ideal ways to reconcile work and family life. In the meantime, lone mothers are required to use personal means and resources in order to juggle between the demands attached to working times and mothering. Policy focus in the three welfare states should be directed at *how* lone mothers' employment is enabled instead of pondering *whether* lone mothers can engage in paid work.

By bringing into association the insights that the present study have produced about how lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation are perceived in different socio-cultural and policy contexts can also tell us something about how lone mothers' non-standard work hours reflect on child wellbeing. Work during non-standard hours certainly highlights the ambivalence that characterizes the impact of lone mothers' work on the wellbeing of children. On one hand, maternal work through increased wages contributes to positive outcomes for children. On the other hand, the childcare-related challenges that lone mothers experience with during non-standard hours can result in negative outcomes for the wellbeing of the mothers and children, as we saw above. Work during non-standard hours may also limit the availability of mothers during times they consider that they should be with their children (see Neblett, 2007). Many lone mothers are work-oriented and value paid work (e.g., Hakovirta, 2006; Millar & Ridge, n.d.). As sole providers, these mothers' engagement in paid employment is particularly important denominator of the economic and social wellbeing of both themselves and their children (e.g., Christopher, 2012; Frech & Damaske, 2012; Mayes & Thomson, 2012) while it also has an important macro-level contribution to the economic output. Therefore, successful work–family reconciliation, in terms of earning a family wage in a way that

supports maternal wellbeing and does not involve having to worry about the safety and wellbeing of one's children while at work or the lack of family time, is fundamental for lone mothers.

While making important contributions in the fields of work–family research and research on definitions of "good" mothering this study has helped in identifying areas in the work–family realm that would be useful avenues for future research: First of all, future studies are needed to provide further insights into lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation. An essential next step would be that studies consider the influence of both family value orientations and cultural understandings attached to motherhood on lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation, along with that of welfare state contexts. Employing such frameworks would further help in understanding the multifaceted nature of the relationship between paid work, work hours, and family life. Second, this study has focused on three specific areas of work–family reconciliation, so more work is needed to illustrate other areas of reconciliation in the context of lone mothers' non-standard work hours in a European context, such as the wellbeing of the child and the mother. Third, by distinguishing the specific patterns of non-standard work hours (e.g., evenings, weekends, rotating shifts) would possibly provide more complete understanding of lone mothers' experiences of work–family reconciliation within these work patterns across welfare states, which was not possible for this study due to data limitations. Fourth, this study did not pay attention to the reasons that lone mothers give for working during non-standard hours, apart from the Finnish mothers, which might contribute to finding differences between the three countries. Indeed, conducting similar qualitative interviews in the other two countries would deepen our understanding of the lives of Dutch and British lone mothers working non-standard hours and the reasons that mothers give for working these hours. Finally, due to data limitations, this study focused on lone mothers as one group and thus failed to take into consideration the diversity of the situations that lone mothers and their children are in. As the adequacy of the support that welfare states offer for lone mothers vary according to *which* lone mothers are considered (Zagel & Hübgen, 2018), future studies could benefit from distinguishing the lone mothers according to their marital status, living situations, income level, or ethnicity, for example, in order to gain a more nuanced look at the versatility of the experiences of lone mothers. Particularly important would be to focus on the positive aspect and discover facilitative strategies that would support work–family reconciliation in lone-mother families.

Finally, this study, as several cross-national comparative studies on lone motherhood before, have examined lone mothers at one single time point. However, life course analyses have emphasized the transitionary nature of lone motherhood, which highlights the importance of paying attention to dynamic nature of lone motherhood across countries (see Bernardi et al., 2018; Letablier & Wall, 2018). Therefore, a longitudinal perspective of the lives and experiences of lone mothers would reveal their employment trajectories and whether the strategies lone mothers are using in a specific time point affect their work–

family reconciliation, wellbeing, and employment sustainability across time. Many of the Finnish lone mothers, for example, were studying alongside work so as to be able to find a job with work hours more suitable for their family needs. A longitudinal design would enable the investigation of whether mothers are able to successfully conclude their studies in the face of demanding working times and if yes, whether there are jobs available with standard hours. Furthermore, lone mothers, as their coupled counterparts, face different challenges with work–family reconciliation when the children are young compared to having older children. Therefore, future studies could find differences in the experiences of mothers having children of different age groups. Re-partnering can also have an influence on mothers' abilities to successfully reconcile work and family life, which also highlights the need for longitudinal design in examining the lives of lone mothers and their children. Such longitudinal designs would be helpful in unravelling strategies that lone mothers in diverse life and employment situations and stages could apply in reaching a balance with the reconciliation of work and family life.

Overall, this doctoral study has provided new insights into the multidimensional nature of the experiences of work–family reconciliation among lone mothers working non-standard hours. Many lone mothers are work-oriented, and their employment can benefit the wellbeing of both themselves and their children in several ways. However, when the mothers face challenges and problems with the reconciliation of the everyday life spheres of work and family, these challenges have the potential to hinder the benefits of lone mothers' employment on their families. An important question that has risen as a result of this study is, to what extent these mothers are required to rely on their personal resources to patch up the mismatch between the demands attached to working times and cultural understandings attached to motherhood and child wellbeing caused partly by the broader structures. In order to relieve the burden of these mothers, welfare state institutions should adjust properly to the ongoing developments in the labor market by considering that, today, the rhythm and demands of the 24/7 economies very much affect the lives of many mothers and children, and not necessarily in a positive way. In the face of these developments, policy makers need to acknowledge that *non-standard* might have actually become *the standard* and thus direct their attention to such facilitation strategies that would help in relieving the tensions that mothers across family forms perceive in relation to work–family reconciliation. Moreover, given the steady growth in the proportion of lone-mother families that has been witnessed across Europe during the past decades (see Bernardi et al., 2018) and the ongoing incentives for lone mothers' labor market participation (e.g., Knijn & Van Wel, 2001; Millar & Ridge, n.d.), lone mothers form a significant part of the labor force. Therefore, attention should be paid to the role that the welfare states through their policies could play in helping lone-mother families to successfully combine work during non-standard hours and family responsibilities that would also benefit the wellbeing of these families.

YHTEENVETO

Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus tarkasteli, kuinka yksinhuoltajaäidit Suomessa, Alankomaissa ja Isossa-Britanniassa kokevat työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamisen silloin, kun äidit työskentelevät epätyypillisinä aikoina, eli esimerkiksi iltaisin, öisin ja viikonloppuisin (Presser, 2003). Epätyypilliset työajat ovat tunnusomaisia 24/7-taloudelle vastaten esimerkiksi ympärivuorokautisten palvelujen ja tuotteiden saatavuuden synnyttämiin tarpeisiin (esim. Alves ym., 2007; Glorieux ym., 2008; Plantenga, 2004; Richbell ym., 2011). Vaikka epätyypilliset työajat eivät ole uusi ilmiö, koska esimerkiksi teollisuus- ja hoitoaloilla on jo kauan työskennelty kaikkina vuorokauden aikoina, nämä työajat ovat kuitenkin tulleet aiempaa laajemmin osaksi muitakin ammattialoja, kuten eri palvelualoja (Statham & Mooney, 2003). Viimeaikaiset ja kansainväliset työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamista tarkastelleet tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet erityistä mielenkiintoa epätyypillisiä työaikoja kohtaan ja paljastaneet, että vanhempien työ epätyypillisinä aikoina vahvistaa perheiden arjessaan kokemia haasteita. Tutkimustulosten valossa haasteet liittyvät esimerkiksi lastenhoidon järjestämiseen (esim. Craig & Powell, 2011; Hepburn, 2018; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004; Verhoef ym., 2016b), työ- ja perheroolien yhdistämiseen (esim. Baxter & Alexander, 2008; Ciabattari, 2007; Tammelin ym., 2017) sekä lasten käyttäytymisen ongelmiin ja pahoinvointiin (esim. Gassman-Pines, 2011; Han, 2008; Kaiser ym., 2019).

Erityisen haavoittuvia epätyypillisten työaikojen vaikutuksille ovat yksinhuoltajaäidit, koska he ovat usein pääosin yksin vastuussa työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamisesta (esim. Alsarve, 2017; Han & Waldfogel, 2007; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004). Näin ollen yksinhuoltajaäideillä on usein myös rajallisemmat resurssit käytettävänään verrattuna kahden vanhemman perheisiin (esim. Gornick, 2018). Tästä huolimatta aiempi tutkimus äidin epätyypillisten työaikojen vaikutuksista perhe-elämään on keskittynyt tarkastelemaan lähes yksiomaan eurooppalaisia kahden vanhemman perheitä (esim. Tammelin et al., 2017) tai yksinhuoltajaperheitä Euroopan ulkopuolella, esimerkiksi Yhdysvalloissa (esim. Ciabattari, 2007) ja Australiassa (esim. Baxter & Alexander, 2008). Tämän vuoksi tutkimustietoa kaivataan erityisesti siitä, kuinka yksinhuoltajaäidit Euroopassa kokevat epätyypillisten työaikojen heijastuvan heidän mahdollisuuksiinsa yhteensovittaa työ ja perhe-elämä toisiinsa.

Työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamisella viitataan tässä väitöskirjatutkimuksessa siihen, kuinka äidit onnistuvat sovittamaan yhteen samanaikaiset työhön ja perhe-elämään liittyvät vaatimukset ja vastuut sekä näihin elämänalueisiin kytkeytyvät rooliodotukset. Tutkimus koostuu kolmesta empiirisestä osatutkimuksesta, joista kukin tarkasteli yksinhuoltajaäitien epätyypillisten työaikojen yhteyksiä työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamiseen eri näkökulmasta: (1) lastenhoidon järjestäminen, (2) työ- ja perheroolien yhdistäminen sekä (3) kulttuuriset äitiysodotukset ja ymmärrys ”hyvästä” äitiydestä. Osatutkimuksissa on hyödynnetty Suomen Akatemian rahoittamassa Perheet 24/7 -tutkimusprojektissa (engl. Children’s socio-emotional wellbeing and daily family life in a 24-h economy) vuosina 2012–2013 kerättyä kysely- ja haastatteluai-

neistoa. Kahden ensimmäisen osatutkimuksen aineistona käytettiin kolmesta maasta kerättyä verkkokyselyaineistoa, josta valittiin työssäkäyvien yksinhuoltajaäitien ja kahden vanhemman perheissä elävien puolisoäitien vastaukset (N = 1,106). Kolmannessa osatutkimuksessa aineistona hyödynnettiin 16 suomalaisen yksinhuoltajaäidin kanssa tehtyä yksilöhaastattelua, joissa äidit kertoivat muun muassa työstään ja työajoistaan, perheensä arjesta, äitiydestään sekä perheenjäsentensä hyvinvoinnista. Tilastollisina analyysimenetelminä kahdessa ensimmäisessä osatutkimuksessa käytettiin monimuuttujaista regressioanalyysiä ja polkumallinnusta. Kolmannessa osatutkimuksessa analyysimenetelmänä käytettiin selontekoanalyysia (Scott & Lyman, 1968), jota lähestyttiin etnometodologisella kategoria-analyysilla (esim. Buttny, 1993; Juhila, 2012).

Väitöskirjan ensimmäisenä tavoitteena oli tarkastella, kuinka epätyypillisinä aikoina työskentelevät yksinhuoltajaäidit kokevat lastenhoidon järjestämisen sekä työ- ja perheroolien yhdistämisen kolmessa tutkimusmaassa, jotka edustavat erilaisia hyvinvointi- ja hoivaregiimejä. Toinen tavoite oli selvittää, miten yksinhuoltajaäitien edellä mainitut, työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamiseen liittyvät kokemukset eroavat puolisoäitien kokemuksista kolmessa tutkimusmaassa. Ensimmäiseen ja toiseen tavoitteeseen liittyvät tutkimuskysymykset olivat:

1. Miten äitien epätyypilliset työajat ovat yhteydessä yksinhuoltajaäitien ja puolisoäitien kokemiin lastenhoidon järjestämiseen liittyviin haasteisiin Suomessa, Alankomaissa ja Isossa-Britanniassa?
2. Onko epätyypillisten työaikojen yhteys lastenhoidon järjestämiseen liittyviin haasteisiin erilainen yksinhuoltajaäideillä ja puolisoäideillä?
3. Miten äitien epätyypilliset työajat ovat yhteydessä yksinhuoltajaäitien ja puolisoäitien kokemuksiin aikaperustaisesta työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamisesta aiheutuvasta rooliristiriidasta sekä näkemyksiin työstä perheeseen suuntautuvasta tunteisiin liittyvästä myönteisestä siirrännästä Suomessa, Alankomaissa ja Isossa-Britanniassa?
4. Onko epätyypillisten työaikojen yhteys aikaperustaiseen työ-perherooliristiriitaan tai tunteisiin liittyvään myönteiseen siirräntään erilainen yksinhuoltajaäideillä ja puolisoäideillä?

Ensimmäisen osatutkimuksen tulokset vastasivat edellä esitettyihin tutkimuskysymyksiin 1 ja 2. Tulosten mukaan äitien epätyypilliset työajat olivat yhteydessä sekä yksinhuoltajaäitien että puolisoäitien kokemiin lastenhoidon järjestämiseen liittyviin haasteisiin kaikissa tutkimusmaissa. Tulokset osoittivat, että mitä enemmän epätyypillistä työaikaa äidit tekivät, sitä ongelmallisemmaksi he kokivat lastenhoidon järjestämisen tai sitä tyytymättömämpiä he olivat hoitojärjestelyihin. Yhteyden voimakkuus ei eronnut tilastollisesti merkitsevästi yksinhuoltajaäitien ja puolisoäitien välillä. Voi olla, että Alankomaissa ja Isossa-Britanniassa äitien kokemat haasteet liittyvät muun muassa julkisesti tuetun ja järjestetyn lastenhoidon rajoitettuun saatavuuteen tai saavutettavuuteen epätyypillisinä aikoina tai vastaavasti lastenhoidon kalliiseen hintaan

(Plantenga & Remery, 2009). Suomessa sen sijaan kattava varhaiskasvatuspalvelujärjestelmä ja erityisesti vuorohoidon saatavuus takaavat lapsille verrattain edullisen lastenhoidon silloin, kun molemmat kaksivanhempaisen perheen vanhemmat työskentelevät tai yksinhuoltajavanhempi työskentelee epätyypillisinä aikoina (Lammi-Taskula & Siippainen, 2018; Rönkä ym., 2017c). Vuorohoito ei kuitenkaan välttämättä ole kaikkien, esimerkiksi maaseudulla asuvien saavutettavissa (Plantenga & Remery, 2009; Rönkä ym., 2017c), jolloin pitkä matka lähimpään vuorohoitoa tarjoavaan päiväkotiin voidaan kokea ongelmalliseksi. Kaikissa tutkimusmaissa ongelmia tai tyytymättömyyttä hoitojärjestelyihin voi lisäksi aiheuttaa pienille kouluikäisille lapsille suunnattujen lastenhoitopalveluiden puute (ks. Plantenga & Remery, 2013)

Vanhempien käsitykset lastenhoidon laadusta voivat myös osaltaan selittää äitien kokemia lastenhoidon järjestämiseen kytkeytyviä haasteita. Tutkimusten (esim. Bell ym., 2005; De Schipper ym. 2003; Murtorinne-Lahtinen ym., 2016; Rönkä ym., 2017c; Statham & Mooney, 2003) mukaan epätyypillisinä aikoina työskentelevät vanhemmat pitävät luotettavuutta, turvallisuutta, henkilökunnan ja hoitolasten pysyvyyttä sekä hoitoaikojen ennakoitavuutta ja koulutettua hoitohenkilökuntaa tärkeinä lastenhoidon laadun kriteereinä. Nämä samaiset tekijät voivatkin aiheuttaa vanhemmissa huolta lapsen hyvinvoinnin suhteen, jolloin etenkin hollantilaiset ja brittivanhemmat suosivat joko vanhempien tai isovanhempien tarjoamaa lastenhoitoapua. Tällaiset järjestelyt tukevat molemmissa maissa vallitsevaa kulttuurista käsitystä siitä, että lapsen paikka öisin on kotona joko vanhemman tai vähintäänkin tutun sukulaisen hoivassa (ks. esim. De Schipper ym. 2003; Statham & Mooney, 2003). Myös suomalaisten äitien kokemat lastenhoidon järjestämiseen liittyvät ongelmat tai tyytymättömyys järjestelyihin voivat kytkeytyä kulttuuriseen ymmärrykseen ja äitien omiin käsityksiin hyvästä äitiydestä ja lapsen parhaasta (ks. esim. Terävä ym., 2018), joissa esimerkiksi korostuu äidin hoivan tärkeys lapsen ensimmäisinä elinvuosina (Hietamäki ym., 2018; Salin ym., 2016). Väitöskirjan kolmas osatutkimus tarjosi tukea tälle olettamukselle, kun se osoitti suomalaisten, erityisesti vuorotyötä tekevien yksinhuoltajaäitien kokevan ongelmalliseksi muun muassa lasten vuoropäiväkodissa viettämät pitkät hoitoajat tai sen, että lapset viettävät yöt vuoropäiväkodissa, poissa kotoa ja erossa äidistä.

Toisen osatutkimuksen tulokset vastasivat tutkimuskysymyksiin 3 ja 4, ja ne paljastivat, että Alankomaissa ja Isossa-Britanniassa vain yksinhuoltajaäidit ja Suomessa sekä yksinhuoltajaäidit että puolisoäidit kokivat epätyypillisten työaikojen olevan yhteydessä työstä perheeseen suuntautuvaan aikaperustaiseen työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamisesta aiheutuvaan rooliristiriitaan; mitä enemmän epätyypillistä työaikaa äidit tekivät, sitä enemmän he kokivat aikaperustaista rooliristiriitaa. Tulos osoittaa, että erityisesti epätyypillisiin aikoihin työskentelevät äidit kokivat, että heidän työhön panostamansa aikaresurssit vaikeuttavat perheeseen liittyvien odotusten tai velvollisuuksien täyttämistä (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Näin ollen aikaperustainen rooliristiriita voi johtaa kokemukseen aikapaineesta (Goode, 1960), jolloin äidit kokevat, ettei heillä työn takia ole tarpeeksi aikaa lapsille, perheen yhteisille toiminnoille

(esim. yhteiset ateriat) tai kotitöille. Tämän tutkimuksen kontekstissa aikaperustainen rooliristiriita voi ilmetä erityisesti tilanteissa, joissa äiti ei koe pystyvänsä olemaan fyysisesti tai henkisesti läsnä lapsilleen perinteisenä ”perheaikana”, eli esimerkiksi iltaisin, öisin ja viikonloppuisin, jolloin perheen on perinteisesti ajateltu viettävän aikaa yhdessä tai olevan kotona (ks. Daly, 2001).

Mielenkiintoinen ja tärkeä toisen osatutkimuksen tulos oli, että kaikissa kolmessa maassa yksinhuoltajaäidit kokivat epätyypillisten työaikojen yhteyden aikaperustaiseen rooliristiriitaan puolisoäitejä voimakkaammin. Koska yksinhuoltajaäidin aikaresurssit ainoana vanhempana ovat rajalliset, äidit saattavat kokea, että heidän työhön panostamansa aikaresurssit vievät äidin aikaa ja energiaa pois perheeltä (Goode, 1960; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Alankomaissa ja Isossa-Britanniassa yksinhuoltajaäitien puolisoäitejä voimakkaammin kokema aikaperustainen rooliristiriita ilmeni silloin, kun epätyypillistä työaikaa tehtiin paljon. Tulos voi selittyä sillä, että yksinhuoltajaäidit ovat yksin vastuussa perheen elättämisestä, kotitöistä sekä lastenhoidosta (esim. Bell ym., 2005; Gill & Davidson, 2001; Gornick, 2018), jolloin he voivat yhtäältä kokea, että kun he ovat töissä, he ovat poissa lasten luota aikoina, jolloin perheet perinteisesti viettävät aikaa yhdessä. Toisaalta äidit voivat kokea, että kotona ollessaan heillä ei ole energiaa osallistua perheen yhteisiin toimiin siinä määrin kuin he toivoisivat. Suomessa taas yksinhuoltajaäideillä yhteys epätyypillisten työaikojen ja aikaperustaisen rooliristiriidan välillä oli voimakkaampi kuin puolisoäideillä silloin, kun epätyypillistä työaikaa tehtiin vähän. Tämä tulos voi selittyä esimerkiksi odottamattomilla ylitöillä, jotka voivat vaikeuttaa työn ja perheen yhteensovittamista ja johtaa aikapaineen kokemukseen. Äitien epätyypilliset työajat eivät tulosten mukaan olleet yhteydessä työstä perheeseen suuntautuvaan tunteisiin liittyvään myönteiseen siirräntään.

Kolmas väitöskirjatutkimuksen tavoite liittyi kolmanteen osatutkimukseen, jonka tavoitteena oli ymmärtää, millaisin keinoin suomalaiset yksinhuoltajaäidit suunnistavat epätyypillisten työaikojen ja kulttuuristen äitiysodotusten asettamien ristiriitaisten vaatimusten keskellä. Tähän tavoitteeseen liittyvä tutkimuskysymys oli seuraava:

5. Kuinka suomalaiset yksinhuoltajaäidit selittävät tai perustelevat työtään epätyypillisinä aikoina, kun huomioon otetaan kulttuurinen ymmärrys ”hyvästä” äitiydestä sekä kulttuuriset äitiysodotukset?

Kolmannen osatutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että yksinhuoltajaäidit kokivat epätyypilliset työaikansa ensisijaisesti *ongelmallisiksi* lapsen hyvinvoinnin näkökulmasta. Ongelmallisuus kävi ilmi äitien huolipuheesta, jossa korostui äitien huoli esimerkiksi lasten epäsäännöllisestä päivärytmistä, johon liittyi rutiinien puute ja ennakoimattomuus, pitkistä hoitoajoista vuoropäiväkodissa sekä perheajan vähyydestä ja äidin poissaolosta aikoina, jolloin perheenjäsenet perinteisesti viettävät aikaa yhdessä (ks. Daly, 2001). Koska epätyypilliset työajat koettiin ensisijaisesti ongelmana ja jopa riskinä lapsen hyvinvoinnille, äitien voidaan epätyypillisinä aikoina työskennellessään nähdä irtautuvan hyvän äitiyden moraalisesta järjestyksestä (ks. Juhila, 2012), joka korostaa lapsen tarpeista ja hyvinvoinnista huolehtimisen ensisijaisuutta äidin tärkeimpänä velvollisuu-

tena (esim. Hays, 1996; Ribbens McCarthy ym., 2000). Moraalisen järjestyksen murtumisen synnyttämän selontekotarpeen seurauksena (Juhila, 2012; Scott & Lyman, 1968) äidit perustelivat neljällä tavalla työtekoaan epätyypillisinä aikoina sekä puolustivat olevansa moraalisesti vastuuntuntoisia äitejä. Puolustavin selonteoin (engl. *defending accounts*) yksinhuoltajaäidit mukautuivat vallalla olevaan kulttuuriseen ymmärrykseen hyvästä äitiydestä (esim. Hays, 1996; Ribbens McCarthy ym., 2001); näiden selontekojen avulla äidit osoittivat tiedostavansa, mitä heiltä äiteinä odotetaan ja pyrkivänsä tekemään parhaansa lapsen hyvinvoinnin takaamiseksi epätyypillisistä työajoista riippumatta. Voi olla, että yksinhuoltajaäidit kokivat tärkeäksi osoittaa olevansa ”riittävän” hyviä äitejä, kun huomioon otetaan heihin kohdistuva leimaannuttamis-tendenssi (Forssén ym., 2009) ja poikkeaminen kulttuurisesta kahden vanhemman perheihanteesta (esim. May, 2008, 2011). Selontekojen kautta äidit rakensivat itsestään kuvaa riittävän hyvinä ja vastuuntuntoisina äiteinä, kun he korostivat pyrkivänsä toimimaan kulttuuristen hyvän äidin odotusten mukaisesti, johon kuuluu kiinteästi ajatus lapsen hyvinvoinnin turvaamisesta ja priorisoinnista.

Puolustavien selontekojen lisäksi yksinhuoltajaäidit kuitenkin myös haastoivat kulttuurisia äitiysodotuksia kahdentyyppisin oikeuttavin selonteoin (engl. *excusing accounts*, *justifying accounts*). Kun äidit puhuivat epätyypillisten työaikojensa kytköksistä lapsen hyvinvointiin, työaikoja perusteltiin ennemminkin ulkoisena pakkona kuin tietoisena valintana. Tällöin äidit korostivat, ettei heillä ollut mahdollisuutta vaikuttaa työaikoihinsa ja/tai että työajat olivat ”ulkoapäin”, esimerkiksi työnantajalta tuleva tai työn luonteeseen liittyvä vaatimus. Näissä selonteoissa korostui puhe siitä, että äidit olisivat mieluummin hoitaneet pieniä lapsiaan kotona (ks. Hietamäki ym., 2018) tai työskennelleet joko osa-aikaisesti tai yksinomaan päiväaikaan. Nämä vaihtoehdot eivät kuitenkaan olleet varteenotettavia taloudellisten paineiden ja rajoitettujen työ(aika)mahdollisuuksien vuoksi. Epätyypillisin ajoin työskentelyä oikeutettiin kuitenkin myös muun muassa painottamalla, etteivät työajat vahingoittaneet lasta vaan joissain tapauksissa työaikojen nähtiin jopa tukevan lapsen hyvinvointia ja äiti–lapsiaikaa. Äidit saattoivat esimerkiksi kokea, että vuorotyöhön liittyvien vapaiden ansiosta he pystyivät viettämään enemmän aikaa lasten kanssa verrattuna työskentelyyn tyypillisinä aikoina. Lisäksi pienten lasten äidit korostivat vuorohoidon tärkeyttä; monet kokivat vuorohoidon mahdollistavan heidän työntekonsa ja vuorohoidon olemassaolosta ja henkilökunnan osaamisesta oltiin kiitollisia. Näin äidit osaltaan haastoivat kulttuurista käsitystä siitä, että äidin tulisi olla ensisijainen ja ainoa pienen lapsen hoivaaja. Lisäksi äidit korostivat sitä, että lapset ovat turvassa, vaikka olisivatkin yöaikaan hoidossa kodin ulkopuolella. Täten he eivät vain haastaneet mutta myös avarsivat hyvän äitiyden määritelmää punoessaan työaikansa ja elämäntilanteensa osaksi hyvän äidin käsitystä.

Kolmen osatutkimusten tulokset yhdessä osoittivat, että yksinhuoltajaäidit kokevat epätyypilliset työajat ensisijaisesti haasteena työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamiselle. Epätyypilliset työajat asettavat haasteita niin lastenhoidon järjestämiselle kuin myös äitien aikaresursseille. Lisäksi suomalaiset yksinhuol-

tajaäidit näkivät työaikansa riskinä lapsen hyvinvoinnille, jolloin työaikojen koettiin olevan ristiriidassa kulttuuristen äitiysodotusten kanssa. Tutkimuksen valossa näyttääkin siltä, että yksinhuoltajaäitien työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittaminen liittyy niin hyvinvointiyhteiskuntien rakenteisiin, kuten työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamista edistäviin poliittisiin linjauksiin kuin myös eri maiden kulttuuriseen ymmärrykseen hyvästä äitiydestä ja lapsen parhaasta.

Erityisesti yksinhuoltajaäitien kokemilla työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamiseen liittyvillä haasteilla voi olla vakavia seurauksia äideille ja heidän lapsilleen. Koetut haasteet voivat esimerkiksi johtaa työpoissaoloihin (Usdansky & Wolf, 2008), tai pahimmillaan siihen, että äidit joutuvat jättäytymään pois työelämästä (Ciabattari, 2007), joka voi heijastua kielteisesti niin äitien kuin myös lasten hyvinvointiin (esim. Gill & Davidson, 2001; Ridge & Millar, 2011). Lisäksi koetut vaikeudet sovittaa työtä ja perhe-elämää toisiinsa voivat johtaa äideillä terveydellisiin ongelmiin (Barnes et al., 2012; Bull & Mittelmark, 2009; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004; Mauno et al., 2011) ja edelleen esimerkiksi lasten käyttäytymisen ongelmiin (Pocock & Clarke, 2005; Son & Bauer, 2010). Tämän takia olisi ehdottoman tärkeää tukea yksinhuoltajaäitien mahdollisuuksia sovittaa työhön ja perhe-elämään kytkeytyviä vastuita toisiinsa, jotta äitien osallistuminen työmarkkinoille voidaan taata. On lisäksi tarpeellista ymmärtää, etteivät haasteet johdu yksinomaan *yksinhuoltajuudesta* vaan siitä, että yksinhuoltajaperheillä on usein vähemmän resursseja käytettävänään työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamiseen ja lasten hyvinvoinnin turvaamiseen kuin esimerkiksi kahden vanhemman perheillä (esim. Gornick, 2018).

Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella näyttää siltä, että yksinhuoltajaäidit ovat 24/7-taloudessa puolisoäitejä ristialttiimmassa tilanteessa sovittaessaan yhteen työhön ja perheeseen liittyviä vastuita toisiinsa. Koska monessa ammatissa vaaditaan tänä päivänä työskentelyä epätyypillisinä aikoina, jonka seurauksena huomattava osa eurooppalaisista työssäkäyvistä naisista (ja miehistä) työskentelee epätyypillisinä aikoina (Presser ym., 2008), on sosiaalipoliittisten ratkaisujen ja yhteiskunnallisten palveluiden vastattava myös epätyypillistä työaikaa tekevien vanhempien ja heidän perheidensä tarpeisiin. Jotta yksinhuoltajaäitien työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamista voitaisiin tukea esimerkiksi lastenhoidon palveluita ja tukia kehittämällä, on tärkeää ottaa huomioon erilaisissa kulttuureissa asuvien ja eritaustaisten perheiden tarpeet ja toiveet. Yksi keino tukea työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamista on taata laadukkaan ja edullisen varhaiskasvatuksen saatavuus ja saavutettavuus niin alle kouluikäisille kuin myös pienille kouluikäisille lapsille. Lisäksi huomiota tulisi kiinnittää hoitohenkilökunnan pysyvyyteen ja kouluttamiseen sekä kenties myös vuoropäiväkodin kodinomaisuuteen, jotta vanhemmat etenkin Alankomaissa ja Isossa-Britanniassa kokisivat vuorohoidon, tai muun siihen rinnastettavan institutionaalisen varhaiskasvatuksen varteenotettavaksi vaihtoehdoksi ja lapsen edun mukaiseksi hoitopaikaksi (esim. Bell ym., 2005; De Schipper ym., 2003). Kenties perheissä, joissa sukulaisten tarjoama hoiva koetaan lapsen kannalta parhaaksi vaihtoehdoksi, valtiot voisivat tarjota aiempaa enemmän tukea sukulaisen palkkaamiseksi. Yksinhuoltajaperheissä, joissa tukiverkostoa ei ole tuki voitai-

siin hyödyntää esimerkiksi kotihoidon palveluiden muodossa. Yhteiskunnan olisi myös tärkeää kenties nykyistä voimakkaammin tukea pienten lasten sekä pienten kouluikäisten lasten vanhempien osa-aikatyön mahdollisuutta siten, että työstä saa riittävän toimeentulon ja että työ takaa samalla riittävän eläkkeen. Lisäksi valtion työnantajille tarjoama tuki olisi tärkeää, jotta työnantajat voisivat tukea työntekijöitään esimerkiksi mahdollistamalla vanhemmille joustavat työajat, jotka voivat helpottaa työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamista (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011). Tämän lisäksi lainsäädännön avulla voitaisiin kenties turvata esimerkiksi alle 3-vuotiaiden lasten vanhemmille oikeus työskennellä yksinomaan tai pääasiallisesti tyypillisinä aikoina.

Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus on tuottanut uudenlaista tietoa siitä, kuinka yksinhuoltajaäidit Suomessa, Alankomaissa ja Isossa-Britanniassa kokevat työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamisen silloin, kun he työskentelevät epätyypillisinä aikoina. Jotta yksinhuoltajaäitien epätyypillisten työaikojen ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamisesta saataisiin kokonaisvaltainen kuva, tulevissa tutkimuksissa olisi tärkeää ottaa huomioon sekä maakohtaiset poliittiset tukitoimet työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamiselle että kulttuurinen ymmärrys hyvästä äitiydestä ja lapsuudesta, jotka näyttäisivät tämän tutkimuksen tulosten valossa heijastuvan yksinhuoltajaäitien kokemuksiin ja mahdollisuuksiin yhteensovittaa työtä ja perhe-elämää toisiinsa. Jatkotutkimusten olisi myös tärkeä selvittää, työskentelevätkö äidit eri maissa tai eri perhemuodoissa eri syistä epätyypillisiin aikoihin. Jos työajat ovat ennemminkin työnantajan vaatimus kuin äidin oma valinta, minkä avulla äiti pyrkii helpottamaan työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamista, heijastuvat näiden työaikojen vaikutukset mahdollisesti hyvin eri tavalla äitien kokemuksiin. Lisäksi tulevissa tutkimuksissa olisi hyödyllistä tarkastella eri syistä yksinhuoltajaäideiksi tulleiden äitien kokemuksia sekä lähestyä näitä kokemuksia elämänkulun näkökulmasta (Bernardi ym., 2018; Letablier & Wall, 2018). Monelle äidille yksinhuoltajuus on yksi vaihe elämänkulun kirjossa, jolloin myös pitkittäisasetelmat voisivat tarjota uudenlaisen näkökulman yksinhuoltajaäitien työtilanteisiin ja esimerkiksi siihen, kuinka epätyypilliset työajat heijastuvat perheenjäsenten hyvinvointiin pidemmän ajan kuluessa. Erityisen tärkeää olisi tarkastella epätyypillisiä työaikoja myös myönteisestä näkökulmasta ja etsiä niitä työn ja perhe-elämän yhteensovittamista tukevia tekijöitä ja resursseja, joita yksinhuoltajaperheillä voisi olla tai olisi tärkeää olla käytettävissä arjessaan.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

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MOTHERS' NON-STANDARD WORKING AND CHILDCARE-RELATED CHALLENGES: A COMPARISON BETWEEN LONE AND COUPLED MOTHERS

by

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Non-Standard Working and Childcare-Related Challenges: A Comparison between Lone and Coupled Mothers

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose – This paper, with a particular focus on lone-mother families, compares the childcare-related challenges experienced by working lone mothers and coupled mothers in three European countries in the context of a 24/7 economy and non-standard working hours (e.g., evening, night and weekend work).

Design/methodology – This study utilises survey data from Finnish, Dutch and British working mothers (N = 1,106) collected as part of the 'Families 24/7' research project. Multivariate regression analysis is used to analyse the associations between childcare-related challenges, maternal non-standard working, lone motherhood and country of residence.

Findings – The results indicated similar results across the three countries by showing that working lone mothers experience childcare-related challenges more often compared with coupled mothers. Furthermore, an increase in maternal non-standard working associated positively with increased childcare-related challenges in both lone-mother and coupled families but lone motherhood did not moderate this association. Our findings suggest that, regardless of family form, families in all three countries struggle with childcare arrangements when the mother works during non-standard hours. This possibly relates to the inadequate provision of state-subsidised and flexible formal childcare during non-standard hours and to the country-specific maternal work hours cultures.

Originality/value – This study responds to the need for comparative research on the reconciliation of maternal non-standard working and childcare with self-collected data from three European welfare states. The importance of the study is further highlighted by the risks posed to the maintenance of maternal employment and family wellbeing when reconciliation of work and childcare is unsuccessful, especially in lone-mother families.

Keywords: Lone mothers, Mothers, Employment, Non-standard work hours, Childcare, Finland, Netherlands, United Kingdom

Article Classification: Research paper

Introduction

Working outside of standard '9 to 5' weekly hours which is characteristic to '24-hour' economies (Presser, 2003) has the potential to intensify the pressures working mothers experience in combining work and childcare. Compared to coupled mothers who can often rely on their partners to do at least some of the childcare (La Valle *et al*., 2002) these childcare-related challenges can be particularly worrisome for lone mothers who have to manage both work and care responsibilities on their own. Although previous studies conducted highlight the challenges and complexities lone mothers working non-standard hours face when organizing care for their children (e.g., Gill and Davidson, 2001; Kröger 2010; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004), there has been little quantitative analysis of the topic in the European context.

Not being able to find adequate childcare can have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of lone mothers and their children, for example if this results in children being left home alone without adult supervision (Casper and Smith, 2004; Heymann, 2006; pp. 81-88) or in the mother having to leave paid employment altogether (Gill and Davidson, 2001; Heymann, 2006; p. 104; Ridge and Millar, 2011). Given the severity of these potential risks, investigating the relationship between maternal non-standard working and childcare-related challenges especially in lone-mother families is an important and topical issue.

There is also a need for comparative research about the effects of maternal non-standard working on childcare arrangements because of the important role that welfare state context can play in determining how successfully lone mothers, in particular, are able to combine work with childcare. Welfare states differ in terms of social norms around and patterns of maternal work, the availability and affordability of formal childcare, and the extent to which family policy considers childcare as a societal or familial task (Hennig *et al.*, 2012), thus creating varying opportunities and constraints regarding (lone) mothers' ability to reconcile work with childcare. The present paper investigates and compares the childcare-related challenges experienced by working mothers in three

European countries – Finland, the Netherlands and the UK – which show a relatively high prevalence of non-standard working, yet differ with regard to the three aspects described above. With a particular focus on lone-mother families, this study examines the extent to which lone mothers experience childcare-related challenges compared to coupled mothers and whether maternal non-standard working is associated with these experiences.

Background

Maternal employment and childcare policy contexts in Finland, the Netherlands and the UK

Available and affordable childcare provision is a prerequisite for mothers to attain and maintain paid employment. Out of the three countries under study, Finland has the most comprehensive, near-universal provision of formal childcare provided by professional carers (see Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2013) which enables mothers to engage in full-time work. As Table I shows, the employment rates and rates for part-time work of Finnish lone and coupled mothers are nearly identical. According to Lewis and Hobson (1997), Finland represents the 'Parent/Worker Model', where mothers' full-time work is and has for several decades been supported by welfare services and benefits. Formal childcare for under-school aged children and home-based care for under three-year-olds is guaranteed by law, ensuring extensive childcare services for young children. Furthermore, childcare is heavily subsidised by the state, and the costs that parents pay are calculated according to the size and income level of the family, while children living in low-income families are provided with free childcare (Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

>> Table I about here <<

In comparison, both the Netherlands and the UK have historically been characterised as 'Caregiver Social Wage' regimes (Lewis and Hobson, 1997) where the emphasis was placed on

mothers' caregiving role, echoes of which are still visible today: a significantly greater proportion of Dutch and British mothers work part time compared to Finnish mothers (Table I). Fairly recently, however, the two countries have introduced policy changes aiming to encourage the labour market participation of (lone) mothers (Bussemaker *et al.*, 1997; Van Drenth *et al.*, 1999), shifting the Dutch and British care regimes towards the 'Parent/Worker Model'. For example, the Dutch welfare state has developed features similar to the Nordic welfare states, such as generous public subsidies for social services (Van Hooren and Becker, 2012). In the UK, 3-4-year-olds, and recently also some 2-year-olds living in deprived families, have become entitled to free part-time early childhood education, and there have also been attempts to make childcare more affordable, especially for low-income families through the tax credit system (Rutter, 2015). Consequently, there has been a rapid increase in the number of formal childcare facilities in both countries (Rutter and Evans, 2012; Van Hooren and Becker, 2012), enabling (lone) mothers of young children to engage in paid work.

It is noteworthy, however, that in the Netherlands and the UK, the use of formal childcare is mostly part-time (Plantenga and Remery, 2009) and therefore does not necessarily meet the needs of working lone mothers and may indeed prevent lone mothers from working full time, thus having a direct impact on their wages and increasing the risk of poverty (Rutter, 2015). British lone mothers are particularly likely to have their childcare arrangements constrained as a result of low incomes and high childcare costs as well as insufficient financial subsidies to cover these costs (Gill and Davidson, 2001; Hennig *et al.*, 2012; Ridge and Millar, 2011). Although levels of compensation have improved, these have not kept up with ever-increasing childcare costs, with the result that British childcare remains among the most expensive in Europe (Rutter, 2015). British lone mothers work part time more often than coupled mothers (Table I) perhaps so as to time their work to coincide with school hours and thus reduce their need for childcare (Kröger, 2010).

In the Netherlands, lone mothers are more likely to work full time compared to coupled mothers (Table I). As mothers' role has historically been defined in terms of caregiving, men have been considered the main breadwinners in families (Lewis and Hobson, 1997). This gendered division of labour is still visible in that coupled mothers often work part-time so as to supplement their partner's 'main wage' earned through full-time work. Lone mothers, however, have to survive on only one income, hence their increased inclination to work full time. Furthermore, as lone mothers are more likely to need formal childcare than coupled families (De Ruijter, 2004), the recent reductions to the childcare allowance that have increased families' share of the childcare costs (Statistics Netherlands, 2013) possibly compel lone mothers to work longer hours and to supplement formal childcare with informal care (e.g., grandparents, friends) in order to reconcile work with childcare. Along with the high value Dutch and British parents place on informal childcare (e.g., Bakker and Karsten, 2013; La Valle *et al.*, 2002), they use informal care more often than their Finnish counterparts (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015) as a way of reconciling work with childcare possibly due to the unavailability and unaffordability of formal childcare services.

The 24-hour economy and childcare during non-standard hours

Technological developments along with a globalizing economy and round-the-clock availability of services and products characterise a '24-hour' economy (Presser, 2003), the maintenance of which requires work during non-standard hours, that is, during early mornings, evenings, nights and weekends. While there is some debate about whether European countries can be referred to as 24-hour economies (see e.g., Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007; Rubery *et al.*, 2005), Presser *et al.* (2008) reported that a sizeable minority, about 20-27 per cent, of Finnish, Dutch and British women work outside standard office hours. Some studies also suggest lone mothers are more likely to work non-standard hours compared with coupled mothers (see Presser, 2003). Furthermore, Barnes *et al.* (2006) found some evidence that lone mothers often work contracted non-standard hours (e.g.,

shifts, weekends) while for coupled mothers non-standard hours tend to comprise an extension of the working day (e.g., overtime).

The Finnish childcare system is progressive in that the state-subsidised day-and-night care provision is available in many municipal childcare centres that are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Approximately seven per cent of Finnish children who attend a municipal childcare centre are cared for in day-and-night care (Säkkinen, 2013). Day-and-night care offers a crucial 'family friendly' service to parents who work non-standard hours, something that is of great importance in a country where shift work is common among female workers (Eurostat, 2013). Nevertheless, it has also brought with it its own problems, mainly to do with the length of time that children might potentially spend in childcare due to their parents' shifts. Some parents are faced with the difficult choice of either keeping their child in childcare for long stretches of time, sometimes days in a row, or bringing their child home for short breaks in-between shifts, which might be at the expense of the parents' need for rest (Kröger, 2010; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004). Quite understandably, parents might not feel comfortable leaving their child in a childcare centre for long periods of time. These situations can be made even more challenging when shifts change rapidly, thus reducing any sense of routine in childcare.

It is important to stress that day-and-night care is not available to all parents who work non-standard hours, only to those who live in the vicinity of such a childcare centre and who meet the criteria of the residential parent (in the case of lone parents) or both residential parents (in the case of coupled parents) working contracted non-standard hours. In addition, only 62 per cent of Finnish municipalities meet the need for flexible childcare (Plantenga and Remery, 2009). Compared to Finland, however, Dutch and British parents face wider gaps regarding formal childcare provision during non-standard hours (see Plantenga and Remery, 2009; Rutter and Evans, 2012). Notwithstanding these differences, Verhoef *et al.* (2015) reported that, in all the three countries, parents with non-standard working are more likely to use parental care than formal childcare. The

three countries also share a lack of policy attention to out-of-school care, particularly during non-standard hours (Plantenga and Remery, 2013). As a result, school-aged children in lone-mother families are at particular risk of being left in self-care without adult supervision (Casper and Smith, 2004), an issue that deserves policy attention due to the immediate and long-term risks that such self-care is associated with, such as injuries and behavioural and academic difficulties (Heymann, 2006, p. 50, 81-87).

As stated above, in cases where there is no adequate formal childcare available to meet the needs of mothers working non-standard hours, the support of the informal care network becomes significant (Kröger, 2010; Rutter and Evans, 2012; Usdansky and Wolf, 2008). At its best, informal childcare is affordable and flexible, thus facilitating work-family reconciliation, especially in lone-mother families (Bakker and Karsten, 2013; Kröger, 2010). There are, however, certain risks associated with using informal childcare. One has to do with the unavailability of informal care resulting from interpersonal conflicts, geographical distance or the fact that grandparents themselves are working or too ill to provide childcare (Heymann, 2006, p. 94; Kröger, 2010). Consequently, lone mothers in particular are likely to have complex childcare arrangements involving multiple care providers, which can easily result in variable and precarious care arrangements (Le Bihan and Martin, 2004; Verhoef *et al.*, 2015) that can in turn lead to disruptions in care. These challenges inevitably increase the likelihood of children being in self-care or lone mothers having to give up paid employment, both of which can pose a risk to the health and wellbeing of children and parents alike (Gill and Davidson, 2001; Heymann, 2006; p. 104; Ridge and Millar, 2011).

Study design

Research questions and hypotheses

The present study aims to address three main research questions. The first question asks: to what extent do lone mothers experience childcare-related challenges compared with coupled mothers? We presume working lone-mothers to be more likely to struggle with finding adequate childcare because they have an increased need for non-parental childcare which can be less flexible (Gill and Davidson, 2001) yet more variable and precarious compared to parental care provided in coupled families (Le Bihan and Martin, 2004; Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, children of lone mothers, compared with coupled mothers, are more likely to be left without adult supervision (Casper and Smith, 2004; Heymann, 2006, p. 51), indicating a lack of accessible and affordable childcare.

> *Hypothesis 1*: Lone mothers experience childcare-related challenges more often than coupled mothers.

The second research question enquires whether maternal non-standard working is related to mothers' experiences of childcare-related challenges. We expect that non-standard working increases the risk of challenges because of the less adequate supply of formal childcare during non-standard working hours (see Plantenga and Remery, 2009, 2013; Verhoef *et al.*, 2015).

> *Hypothesis 2*: An increase in the mother's non-standard working is associated with an increase in childcare-related challenges.

We further propose that as the amount of non-standard working increases, lone mothers will find it more challenging to arrange childcare compared to coupled mothers (see Gill and Davidson, 2001; Kröger, 2010; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004). This is because coupled parents can more easily utilise so-called 'shift-parenting', that is, synchronizing their work schedules (La Valle *et al.*, 2002) in

order to substitute other forms of childcare with parental care, whereas lone mothers are more likely to have to juggle work and care responsibilities on their own.

Hypothesis 3: Lone mothers experience more childcare-related challenges than coupled mothers when the amount of non-standard working increases.

Third, the present paper asks whether the aforementioned associations differ by welfare state context. As discussed above, childcare provision is less comprehensive in the Netherlands and the UK than in Finland, especially during non-standard hours (Plantenga and Remery, 2009; Rutter and Evans, 2012). Therefore, Dutch and British families make more use of informal childcare which in its flexibility and affordability is a fundamental resource especially for lone mothers in reconciling work and childcare (e.g., Bakker and Karsten, 2013; Kröger, 2010). Although formal childcare provision enables Finnish mothers to work full time, working long days can complicate building up and maintaining a social support network (Gill and Davidson, 2001), a crucial resource especially when childcare is needed at short notice. We have not formed a hypothesis in relation to this last research question because of the complexity involved when we consider three different childcare systems together with varying social norms around and patterns of maternal working. Consequently, the childcare-related challenges faced by working mothers in these three countries will not be straightforward.

Based on previous research, a number of additional work and family characteristics are assumed to affect childcare-related challenges. First, long weekly working hours require accessible and affordable childcare providing long and flexible opening hours – something that is not necessarily available to all families (e.g., Kröger, 2010; Plantenga and Remery, 2009, 2013). Second, irregular working times can make arranging childcare problematic because finding a caregiver to accommodate the need for unexpected childcare can be challenging (Usdansky and

Wolf, 2008). Third, workplace flexibility is considered beneficial for working mothers as it enables mothers to control their working hours in order to attend to family responsibilities (Gill and Davidson, 2001; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004). Regarding family characteristics, the age of the child is expected to affect childcare-related challenges due to the lack of formal childcare provision of out-of-school childcare (Plantenga and Remery, 2013). Moreover, highly educated mothers, compared with their less educated counterparts, may have more demanding jobs and erratic hours that can create problems with childcare arrangements (Gill and Davidson, 2001; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004). A good financial situation, again, enables families to purchase additional childcare (Le Bihan and Martin, 2004; Usdansky and Wolf, 2008).

Sample

This study was based on the 'Families 24/7' cross-national research project, which was designed in response to the lack of European comparative data on everyday family life and family wellbeing in the context of a 24-hour economy and parental non-standard working. The project collected data with a web-based questionnaire directed at Finnish, Dutch and British parents (N = 1,294; 1,067 women, 227 men) with children aged 0–12 years. Data gathering took place between November 2012 and January 2013. Participation to the study was voluntary and the participants were recruited by contacting childcare organisations, labour unions and employers by letter or email and asking them to promote the study to their members or employees. In Finland, day-and-night care centres were also invited to take part in the study which is why our sample contains more Finnish parents working non-standard hours compared with Dutch and British parents. Furthermore, due to low participation rates of lone mothers in the dataset (n = 113), a booster sample of 192 respondents – collected between April and June 2013 by advertising the survey on websites of organisations aimed exclusively at lone-parent families in the three countries – was added to the main sample. Together the main and booster samples comprised 1,486 participants.

For the present paper, eligibility criteria required respondents to be women who reported living all or almost all of the time with at least one child aged 0-12. Students and mothers on parental leave were excluded from the sample, which consequently consisted of self-employed and employed mothers. These criteria were met by 1,106 respondents (74.43% of the original sample; 411 Finnish, 338 Dutch and 357 British respondents). Little's MCAR test for missing data was performed on the eligible sample and proved significant, $\chi^2(63) = 124.26$, $p = .000$, suggesting that the data were not missing completely at random (Little, 1988).

There were more coupled mothers ($n = 878$; 79.39% of the eligible sample) than lone mothers ($n = 228$) in our dataset and the percentage of lone mothers was the highest in the Finnish sub-sample (Table II). The majority of the Dutch and British respondents had attained tertiary education whereas this was the case for only less than half of the Finnish participants. The Dutch also perceived their financial situation significantly better than their Finnish and British counterparts. It is important to note that respondents with a higher socioeconomic status were over-represented in our dataset thus creating sampling bias. According to the findings of Rönkä *et al.* (2014), this bias may have resulted from the fact that women with higher education are more likely to fill in questionnaires than those with lower educational backgrounds. Moreover, it is likely that fewer working lone mothers were able to find the time to take part in the study because of their sole responsibility for both busy work schedules and children (Rönkä *et al*., 2014).

>> Table II about here <<

Measures

Childcare-related challenges. Two variables measured childcare-related challenges. First, the respondents were asked to assess whether they find their childcare arrangements problematic or unsatisfactory (1 = *I am satisfied, this is going well, this is not a problem*; 5 = *I am dissatisfied, this*

is not going well, this is a problem). Second, difficulty with arranging childcare at short notice was measured with the question "How easy is it for you to make unanticipated childcare arrangements (i.e., in case you are unexpectedly delayed at work or if you or your child falls ill)?" (1 = *very easy*; 5 = *very difficult*). In case a respondent had more than one child, they were asked to refer to the care of their child closest to the age of four. This child is henceforth referred to as the "target child".

Independent variables: non-standard working and lone motherhood. The amount of non-standard working was measured with two sets of questions (adapted from EWCS, 2010). Respondents were first asked to answer the following questions: "How many times a month do you work in the evening/at night/early in the morning, for at least two hours?" (1 = *none*, 2 = *once*, 3 = *twice*, 4 = *more than twice*). Second, we asked whether the respondents worked during Saturdays and/or Sundays (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). A mean score for non-standard working was calculated by standardizing these variables and calculating the mean of the standardized values.

The variable lone motherhood (0 = *coupled mother*, 1 = *lone mother*) was based on the respondents' reports of their marital status. Coupled mothers were either married or cohabiting whereas lone mothers were either separated/divorced, widowed or single. Six of the twenty-four mothers, who were living with a partner who was not the biological father of the child, and who "never" or "rarely" received support in raising children from their current partner, were considered as lone mothers.

Covariates. To take into account other maternal work characteristics, we included weekly working hours in the main job, irregular working times (0 = *regular working times* [no changes in working times]; 1 = *irregular working times*) and workplace flexibility (1 = *working time arrangement is set by the employer*, 2 = *I can choose between several fixed working schedules determined by the company/organisation*, 3 = *I can adapt my working hours within certain limits*, 4 = *my working*

hours are entirely determined by myself) (EWCS, 2010) in the analysis. Additionally, we adjusted the age of the target child (i.e., child age), the mother's educational level (0 = *non-tertiary*, 1 = *tertiary*), and the family's financial situation, which in the present paper was based on the subjective evaluation of respondents' financial situation (0 = *the worst*; 10 = *the best*), for the analysis.

Analytic strategy

Multivariate regression analysis was conducted to analyse the associations between childcare-related challenges, maternal non-standard working, lone motherhood and country of residence[1]. Non-standard working and lone motherhood served as independent variables whereas problematic childcare arrangements and difficulty in arranging childcare at short notice were dependent variables in the analysis. Dependent variables were allowed to correlate with each other. Furthermore, other maternal work characteristics (i.e., weekly working hours, irregular working times and workplace flexibility) and family characteristics (i.e., child age, educational level, and financial situation) were adjusted for the analysis which was performed using the MPlus statistical package (version 7.3; Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2012). The method of estimation was full information maximum likelihood estimation (FIML) with standard errors corrected to be robust in the case of non-normality (MLR estimator). FIML uses all observations in the dataset when estimating the parameters in the model without imputing the missing values.

The goodness-of-fit of the estimated model was evaluated using a χ^2-test and a Root Mean Square of Approximation (*RMSEA*; Steiger, 1990). A non-significant *p*-value associated with a χ^2-value indicates a good fit of the estimated model. However, because the χ^2-test is sensitive to a large sample size and easily produces statistically significant results (Bentler and Bonett, 1980), a Comparative Fit Index (*CFI*) and Tucker-Lewis Index (*TLI*; Hu and Bentler, 1999) were

additionally used in order to evaluate the fit of the model. *CFI* and *TLI* values above 0.95 indicate a good fit of the model, while *RMSEA* (Steiger, 1990) values below 0.05 denote a good fit.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The Finnish respondents worked significantly more during non-standard hours compared to Dutch and British respondents (Table II). British mothers reported the most workplace flexibility in their main job. The Dutch respondents worked significantly shorter weeks than the others, whereas Finnish mothers reported the longest working weeks. The Dutch also worked more regular hours with fewer changes to their working times and reported experiencing fewer problems with childcare arrangements than the Finnish and British respondents. Arranging childcare at short notice was reported the most difficult among British mothers.

On a bivariate correlational level, all independent variables and covariates, except for educational level, were significantly correlated with the variable problematic childcare arrangements, whereas four explanatory variables correlated significantly with the variable difficulty in arranging childcare at short notice (Table III). Financial situation and educational level were the strongest and weakest predictors in the case of both dependent variables, respectively. The dependent variables also correlated with each other. Furthermore, there was no correlation exceeding 0.4 between independent variables and covariates, thus reducing the risk of multicollinearity.

>> Table III about here <<

Results of the multivariate regression analysis

Figure 1 displays the saturated regression model (χ^2 (0) = 0, p = 0; *CFI* = 1.00; *TLI* = 1.00; *RMSEA* = .00) including the statistically significant associations between childcare-related challenges, maternal non-standard working, lone motherhood and covariates (i.e., additional work and family characteristics). The results show that working lone mothers experience problems with childcare arrangements and difficulties in arranging childcare at short notice more often compared to their coupled counterparts.

>> Figure 1 about here <<

The results further illustrate that non-standard working has a direct and positive effect on problematic childcare arrangements. This indicates that the more mothers in both family forms work during non-standard hours, the more they experience problems or are unsatisfied with childcare arrangements while they are working.

Our model does not display a significant interaction effect between non-standard working and lone motherhood in relation to childcare-related challenges after taking into account the main effects of the covariates, non-standard working and lone motherhood (Figure 1). For both lone mothers and coupled mothers, non-standard working has a parallel, positive association with childcare-related challenges which indicates that an increase in non-standard working does not differentiate the two groups from each other with respect to experiencing childcare-related challenges.

We also examined whether the three countries differed with respect to the associations between childcare-related challenges, lone motherhood and maternal non-standard working. Our results, however, reveal no significant differences between the three countries.

Regarding the associations between childcare-related challenges and the covariates, having irregular working times, an older child, and a poor financial situation are related to an increased risk

of experiencing more problems with childcare arrangements whereas long weekly working hours, high educational background and poor financial situation are associated with experiencing increased difficulties with arranging childcare at short notice (Figure 1). No significant association is found between workplace flexibility and childcare-related challenges.

Discussion and conclusions

The present paper examined and compared the childcare-related challenges experienced by working lone and coupled mothers in the context of a 24-hour economy in Finland, the Netherlands and the UK. The first research question sought to determine the extent to which lone mothers experience childcare-related challenges compared to coupled mothers. In line with our expectations based on previous research (e.g., Casper and Smith, 2004; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004) we found that lone mothers do indeed experience their childcare arrangements as more problematic or unsatisfactory than their coupled counterparts do. While in coupled families the parents can synchronize their working schedules in order to provide parental care for their children (La Valle *et al.*, 2002), lone mothers, in the absence of a partner, more often have to rely on other forms of childcare that are more variable and precarious (e.g., Le Bihan and Martin, 2004; Verhoef *et al.*, 2015), thus creating complex caring situations that are vulnerable to disruptions. Additionally, we found that arranging childcare at short notice (e.g., in case of sickness) was more difficult for lone than coupled mothers possibly because non-parental childcare is less flexible (see Gill and Davidson, 2001; Usdansky and Wolf, 2008).

As to the second research question, we found that the more both lone and coupled mothers worked during non-standard hours, the more problematic or unsatisfactory they found their childcare arrangements. It has been shown that families with parental non-standard working are less likely to use formal childcare compared to parental care (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). Our findings, therefore, may signal the dissatisfaction of mothers working non-standard hours relating to the lack

of adequate provision of formal childcare across the three countries (Plantenga and Remery, 2009, 2013), though the exact cause of the dissatisfaction may vary: coupled parents may find continuously adjusting parental working schedules around childcare (see La Valle *et al.*, 2002) stressful, while for lone mothers, having to juggle complex non-parental care arrangements (Le Bihan and Martin, 2004) can be a source of worry. Furthermore, the unavailability of formal or informal childcare may mean that especially lone mothers must leave their children in self-care, a further potential source of worry (Casper and Smith, 2004; Heymann, 2006, pp. 81-87).

Contrary to our expectations based on prior findings (Gill and Davidson, 2001; Kröger, 2010; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004), our results did not show that lone mothers experience more childcare-related challenges than coupled mothers when the amount of non-standard working increases. A possible explanation for this might be that lone mothers, who are more reliant on help from their informal care network than coupled mothers (see Kröger 2010; Usdansky and Wolf, 2008), can only regularly work non-standard hours if they have a strong social support network in place. It may be that those lone mothers who do not have an adequate social support network more often work standard hours or are not in employment (Gill and Davidson, 2001). Another explanation may relate to the pattern of non-standard working that we did not distinguish in our analysis. According to Barnes *et al*. (2006), lone mothers possibly work more contracted non-standard hours (e.g., shifts) while for coupled mothers non-standard hours may more often comprise an extension of the working day (e.g., overtime). Compared to unexpected overtime hours, contracted non-standard hours require less organisation of childcare at short notice which is likely to be difficult to organise.

In relation to the third research question, we did not find differences in the aforementioned associations between the three countries. This finding suggests on one hand that mothers' experiences of childcare-related challenges are, to some extent, universal. On the other hand, the nature of these experiences, rather than the extent of the experienced challenges, may relate to the specific welfare regime context. Whereas the childcare-related challenges experienced by the Dutch

and British mothers may relate to the wider lack of available or accessible formal childcare (see Plantenga and Remery, 2009; Rutter and Evans, 2012) or to problems associated with covering childcare fees with the wage received from part-time employment (e.g., Rutter, 2015), Finnish mothers may struggle with different challenges characteristic of the Finnish welfare regime where the state, along with families, has taken a prominent role in childcare provision (Hennig *et al.*, 2012). Full-time work combined with long caring hours, for example, may create challenges that are more emotional than structural, such as worrying that one's child is spending long periods of time in childcare (Kröger, 2010; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004), challenges that are likely to be exacerbated by the fact that many Finnish mothers work shifts (Eurostat, 2013). Working long hours can also make it more difficult to build up and maintain a social support network (Gill and Davidson, 2001) which is a crucial resource for working lone mothers.

Additionally, our results indicated important family and maternal work characteristics that contributed to mothers' experiences of childcare-related challenges. First, finding childcare arrangements particularly problematic or unsatisfactory was related to having an older child and to irregular working times. The former most likely denotes the lack of formal childcare services for school-aged children during non-standard hours (see Plantenga and Remery, 2013). Given the risks associated with leaving children home alone without adult care (see Heymann, 2006, pp. 81-87) this finding emphasises the need for policy attention on childcare services for school-aged children across the three countries. Irregular working times, again, can create pressures with childcare as there are not many caregivers that provide flexible care (see Usdansky and Wolf, 2008). Second, high educational level and long weekly working hours were found to associate with an increase in the difficulties with arranging childcare at short notice. Highly educated mothers may work in jobs with high demands in terms of time and energy that can lead to greater incompatibility of work and childcare (Gill and Davidson, 2001; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004). Long working days, again, require long opening hours from childcare providers or alternatively the acquisition of additional childcare,

and may also increase the risk of mothers worrying for their children who spend long periods of time in childcare or home alone (see Heymann, 2006; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004). Finally, we found good financial situation to associate with less childcare-related challenges. This is particularly worrisome for those lone mothers who as sole earners struggle to earn a living while striving to find adequate care for their children. However, in our study, the number of respondents from a lower socioeconomic status was limited, and therefore our findings need to be interpreted cautiously.

There are some important limitations to this study that require addressing. The data were collected using a web-based questionnaire. Some of the threats to the representativeness of web-based samples relates to the coverage error (i.e., the individuals of the target population who do not have access to the internet) and to the difficulty of describing the frame population (Couper, 2000). Consequently, the data collection method perhaps created some sampling bias. Given that women with high education are more likely to participate in studies (see Rönkä *et al.*, 2014), highly educated Dutch and British lone mothers were over-represented also in our sample. Hence, our findings reflect the experiences of mothers with higher socioeconomic status that are likely to differ from those with a lower status. Our findings are also limited by the use of cross-sectional design, which is why our results are not able to provide information about the causal relationships of the studied phenomena.

To develop a full picture of the antecedents to childcare-related challenges, and possibly find differences between lone and coupled mothers' experiences and welfare regimes, additional studies are needed that distinguish between different patterns of non-standard working (e.g., shift work, evening work) and take into account the impact of the availability of informal childcare. In future studies it might also be important to use a longitudinal study design as well as more specific measures for childcare-related challenges. If working lone mothers in different countries do face challenges that are of a different nature, this could shed new light on the differences between

welfare regimes. Finally, further research that would focus on the specific conditions of non-standard working (i.e., flexibility, irregularity) is also suggested to gain more insight into the impact of maternal non-standard working on childcare-related challenges. Focusing on these elements could provide a more complete picture of the antecedents of childcare-related challenges in the context of a 24-hour economy.

Taken together, our results suggest that working itself, rather than the specific working hours, is the paramount factor in distinguishing lone mothers from their coupled counterparts in terms of childcare-related challenges. The results also indicate that families, regardless of family form, experience challenges with childcare arrangements when the mother works outside standard office hours. Our findings, therefore, have important implications for developing affordable, universal and flexible provision of formal childcare that ensures safe and reliable childcare during parental (non-standard) working hours, supports lone mothers in earning a living for their families, and relieves the pressures resulting from the incompatibility of work and childcare. Lone mothers who have insufficient means to overcome childcare-related challenges become vulnerable not only to role conflict and decreased wellbeing but also several social risks related to exclusion from the labour market, namely social exclusion and poverty (Gill and Davidson, 2001; Heymann, 2006; p. 104, Ridge and Millar, 2011). Therefore, successful childcare arrangements are fundamental if lone mothers are to reconcile work and care in a manner that safeguards the overall wellbeing of their families.

Notes

1. At first, country differences in the associations between childcare-related challenges, non-standard working, lone motherhood and covariates were examined using multigroup option. However, the model turned out to be the same for Finland, the Netherlands and the UK. Therefore, only one model for all participants was estimated.

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Table I.

Proportion of lone-parent families out of all families with children and percentage of lone-mother households, employment rates of lone and coupled mothers, and the proportion of lone and coupled mothers working part time in 2013 (%)

	Lone-parent families[a]	Of which lone-mother households[a]	Lone mothers		Coupled mothers	
			Employed	Part time	Employed	Part time
Finland	23.0	84.9	72.9	13.4[c]	73.9	13.5
The Netherlands	15.9	84.5	64.3	78.8	78.7	86.7
The UK	26.4[b]	86.7	61.1	57.9	70.9	53.0

Notes: [a]2010: Finland; 2011: the Netherlands and the UK. [b]2005. [c]2012.
Sources: Eurostat (2013); OECD (2014)

Table II.

Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) or percentages of the covariates and study variables in Finland (n = 411), The Netherlands (n = 338), and the UK (n = 357)

	Finland	The Netherlands	The UK	F value / χ^2 value	Post Hoc
	M (SD) or %	M (SD) or %	M (SD) or %		
Covariates					
Weekly working hours	36.21 (9.21)	29.65 (8.50)	34.61 (10.92)	44.06***	FIN, UK > NL
Irregular working times	32.8	14.8	37.0	49.65***	
Workplace flexibility	1.88 (0.99)	2.31 (1.00)	2.54 (0.89)	43.28***	UK > FIN, NL
Child age	4.84 (2.63)	4.03 (3.13)	4.71 (3.20)	7.61**	FIN, UK > NL
Educational level	45.5	95.0	80.4	241.88***	
Financial situation	5.21 (2.25)	6.27 (1.98)	5.23 (2.21)	27.39***	NL > FIN, UK
Independent variables					
Non-standard working	0.29 (0.75)	–0.21 (0.72)	–0.14 (0.70)	51.94***	FIN > NL, UK
Lone motherhood: proportion of lone mothers	31.4	14.8	13.7	46.50***	
Dependent variables					
Problematic childcare arrangements	1.90 (0.98)	1.65 (0.83)	1.89 (0.98)	7.75***	FIN, UK > NL
Difficulty in arranging care at short notice	2.99 (1.27)	2.85 (1.11)	3.32 (1.26)	14.01***	UK > FIN, NL

Notes: Level of significance: ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$. Degrees of freedom are 2 for every test. Post hoc analyses were carried out for the statistically significant ANOVA F tests using Bonferroni for groups with equal variances and Dunnett's T3 for groups with unequal variances.
Source: Families 24/7 survey data (2012-2013).

Table III.

Pearson correlations of the covariates and study variables (N = 1,106)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Weekly working hours	–								
2. Irregular working times[a]	.05*	–							
3. Workplace flexibility[b]	.01	–.01	–						
4. Child age	.10**	.05	.08**	–					
5. Educational level[c]	.03	–.02	.03	.05*	–				
6. Financial situation	–.05	.03	.17***	–.10***	–.03	–			
7. Non-standard working	.25***	.10**	–.31***	.02	.02	–.08**	–		
8. Lone motherhood[d]	.07*	.05	–.02	.31***	–.01	–.28***	.07**	–	
9. Problematic childcare arrangements	.07**	.06*	–.09**	.20***	.01	–.25***	.16***	.18***	–
10. Difficulty in arranging childcare at short notice	.07**	.04	–.03	.03	.02	–.16***	.05*	.12***	.34***

Notes: Level of significance: ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05 (one-tailed). [a]0 = no, 1 = yes. [b]1 = working time arrangements set by employer; 4 = working hours determined by the employee. [c]0 = non-tertiary, 1 = tertiary. [d]0 = coupled mothers, 1 = lone mothers.

Source: Families 24/7 survey data (2012-2013).

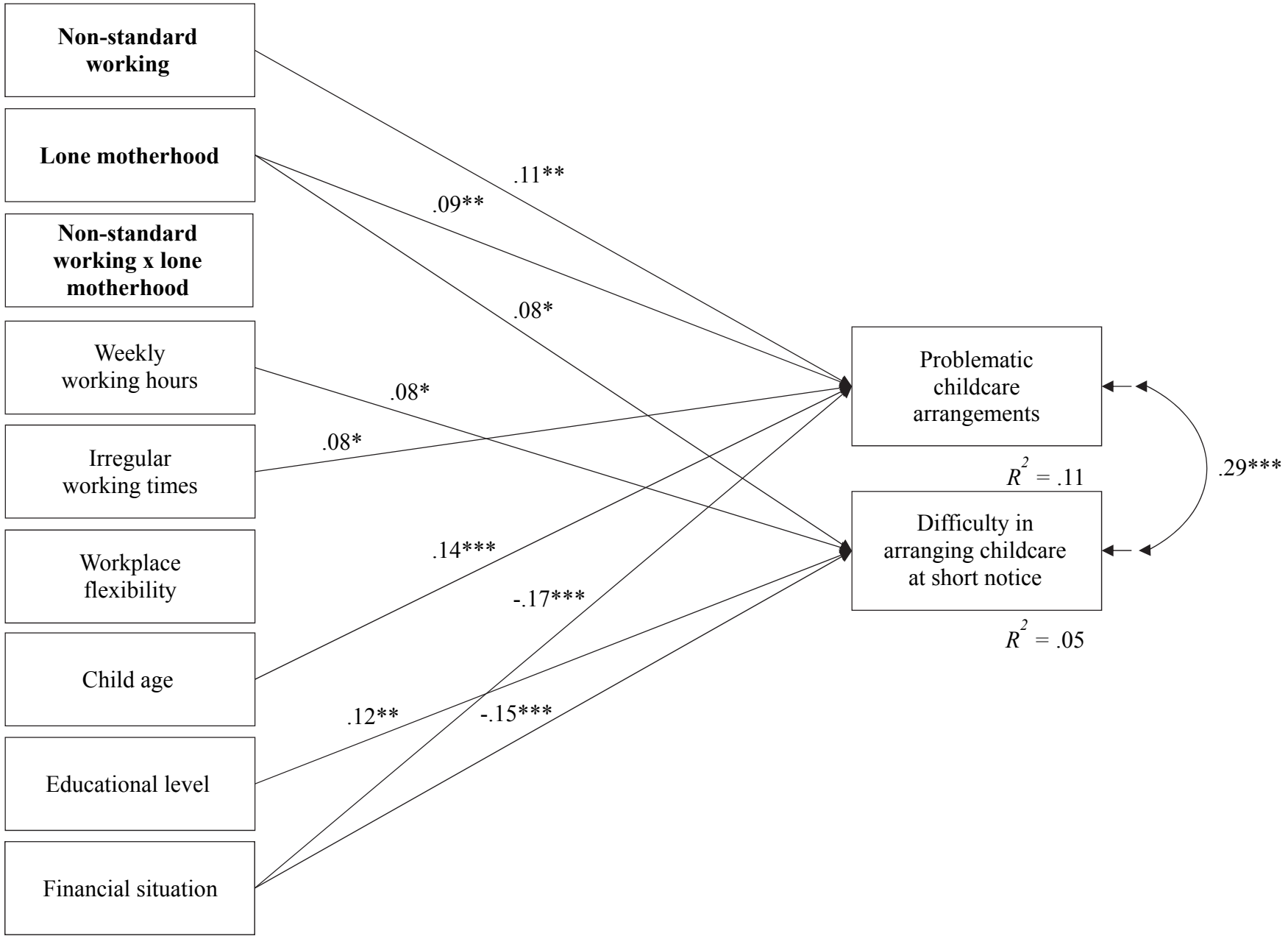

Figure 1.
The final regression model. Regression coefficients (β) are standardized estimates. Only statistically significant associations are presented.
Note: Level of significance: ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$ (one-tailed) **Source**: Families 24/7 survey data (2012-2013)

PII

NONSTANDARD WORK HOURS AND SINGLE VERSUS COUPLED MOTHERS' WORK-TO-FAMILY CONFLICT

by

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Nonstandard Work Hours and Single Versus Coupled Mothers' Work-to-Family Conflict

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Abstract

***Objective*:** To compare single and coupled mothers' experiences of time-based work-to-family conflict (WFC) and work-to-family positive affective spillover (PAS) in the context of maternal nonstandard work hours.

***Background*:** Despite having become one of the central topics of work–family research, studies examining the relationship of maternal work schedules and family roles have mainly focused on North American samples or dual-earner families. Although qualitative studies have highlighted the problems faced by European single mothers in relation to the combination of nonstandard work hours and family life, there are no quantitative or cross-national comparative studies on the association.

***Method*:** Using a convenience sample derived from the Families 24/7 survey of Finnish, Dutch, and British mothers with children 12 years of age or younger (N = 1,106), path analysis was carried out to assess the associations of single motherhood, nonstandard work hours, and their interaction with WFC and PAS, and to compare the associations between three countries.

***Results*:** The positive association between the amount of nonstandard work hours and WFC was found to be stronger among single mothers than coupled mothers in all three countries. However, in Finland, both single and coupled mothers, and in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, only single mothers, experienced higher WFC when the mother worked more during nonstandard hours. In all countries, single mothers experienced less PAS than coupled mothers.

***Conclusion*:** Dutch and British single mothers who work nonstandard hours experience the combination of multiple roles particularly challenging compared with coupled mothers. In Finland, both single and coupled mothers report high levels of WFC when they work more nonstandard hours; hence greater amount of work during nonstandard hours is not an automatic indication of heightened challenges for single mothers alone.

***Implications*:** When aiming to improve mothers' work–family reconciliation via social and workplace policies, it is important to understand the circumstances of single and coupled mothers in different cultural contexts.

Keywords: nonstandard work schedules, single mothers, work–family conflict, work–family spillover, working mothers

The relationship of maternal work schedules and family life has become one of the central topics of work–family research (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Maternal working schedules characteristic of the 24/7 economy, particularly nonstandard work hours (i.e., evenings, nights and weekends; Presser, 2003), have been considered to have both negative (e.g., Tammelin, Malinen, Rönkä, & Verhoef, 2017) and positive (e.g., Murtorinne-Lahtinen, Moilanen, Tammelin, Rönkä, & Laakso, 2016) impacts on the combination of work and family life. Negative aspects include a temporal mismatch these work schedules have with daycare and school hours, as well as the impact nonstandard work schedules have on family routines, such as family meals and time spent together (La Valle, Arthur, Millward, Scott, & Clayden, 2002). However, research has also indicated that nonstandard work hours can be beneficial in terms of facilitating family time and mother–child interaction when, for example, mothers can spend more time with their children during the daytime (e.g., Lleras, 2008; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016; Roeters,Van der Lippe, Kluwer, & Raub, 2012).

Previous studies on the association between maternal working schedules and family life have generally focused either on North American samples (e.g., Ciabattari, 2007; Hepburn, 2018) or dual-earner families (e.g., Steiber, 2009; Tammelin et al., 2017), and the European studies (e.g., Alsarve, 2017; Roman, 2017) that look at this issue in singe-mother families have been largely qualitative. Up to now, there has been no quantitative analysis of European single mothers' experiences of combining work during nonstandard hours and family life. Hence, the present study was designed to compare Finnish, Dutch, and British single and coupled mothers' experiences of time-based work-to-family conflict (WFC; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and work-to-family positive affective spillover (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) in the context of maternal nonstandard work hours. We expect the demands associated with nonstandard work hours to be particularly problematic for single mothers who manage the roles associated with work and family without a resident partner. More

interestingly, given that the work-to-family relationship varies across cultural contexts (e.g., Steiber, 2009; Van der Lippe, Jager, & Kops, 2006), we compare mothers' experiences in three European countries that differ in relation to, for example, maternal work-hour cultures (i.e., part- or full-time cultures) and family policies that influence the extent and type of support available to families to reconcile work and family life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Maternal Nonstandard Work Hours in Europe

Some scholars suggest that economic activity is increasingly taking place outside of traditional work hours (e.g., Rubery, Ward, Grimshaw, & Beynon, 2005); a phenomenon known as the 24/7 economy given around-the-clock availability of services and products (Presser, 2003) and that necessitates nonstandard work hours (i.e., evenings, nights, and weekends). The service and health sectors of the economy have relatively high rates of nonstandard work hours (Parent-Thirion, Fernández, Hurley, & Vermeylen, 2007; Presser, 2003), and both these sectors have female-dominated workforces. Nonstandard work hours have also become commonplace in occupations where overtime hours and work travel cause the working day to extend beyond standard daytime work hours (Moen, Lam, Ammons, & Kelly, 2013).

Specific to the three countries examined in the present study, the Netherlands stands out in terms of nonstandard work hours due to its strict opening hours, high levels of part-time work, and limited availability of around-the-clock services (Mills & Täht, 2010). Conversely, in the United Kingdom, an increasing number of services are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Finland lies somewhere in-between after the deregulation of store opening hours in 2016. According to statistical information collected by the European Union (Eurostat, 2017), among female workers in the three countries, the figures for Saturday work range from 24.9% in Finland to 31.3% in the Netherlands; Sunday work is slightly less

common in all three countries. Finland stands out by having a higher rate of shift work among women (28.9%) compared with the Netherlands (14.1%) and the United Kingdom (17.7%), whereas evening work is highest among Dutch women (31.1%). Night work is the least common, with figures ranging from 4.6% in the United Kingdom to 7.8% in Finland. In sum, a considerable number of women, including mothers, are required to work during nonstandard hours in the three countries. The most notable difference in the nonstandard work patterns concerns women's shift work, which is commonest in Finland.

Research on the relationship between nonstandard work hours and family form, conducted in the United States, has indicated that nonmarried women and single mothers are more likely to work nonstandard schedules compared with their married counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005; Presser, 2003). In the European context, comprehensive comparable data are lacking, but what research does exist indicates variation across European countries regarding the association of family form and working nonstandard hours. For example, nonstandard work hours are somewhat less common for mothers than other women in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Presser, Gornick, & Parashar, 2008), whereas in Finland mothers of young children, compared with other women, more commonly work during weekends (Miettinen & Rotkirch, 2012). To conclude, although the three countries regulate the 24/7 availability of services and products to varying degrees, the literature has identified nonstandard work hours to have become relatively common in a number of occupations, especially those in the service and health sectors employing women and mothers.

Time-Based Work-to-Family Conflict and Positive Affective Spillover

Research on the relationship between work and family roles is extensive. The present work is guided by Katz and Kahn's (1978) role theory, according to which roles are "specific forms of behavior associated with given positions" (p. 43). Furthermore, each role held by the person develops from certain task requirements that follow the general role expectations,

which denote the demands under which the person is required to act. It is now well established from a variety of studies that simultaneous engagement in multiple roles involving competing expectations can lead to role conflict (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 204; for a review, see Byron, 2005), but there is also evidence that the engagement in multiple roles can also result in gratification (for a review, see McNall, Nicklin, & Masuda, 2010).

The scarcity approach to multiple roles emphasizes the fixed nature of role resources (e.g., time), with which individuals attempt to fulfill their role requirements (Goode, 1960). In our study, we focus on one form of inter-role conflict between work and family roles (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 204), namely *time-based WFC* in which time devoted to work role requirements interfere with a mother's ability to fulfill her family role requirements (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). As a result of WFC, role strain is possible, which in this context refers to a mother's feelings of not having enough time for family activities or household responsibilities because of work (Goode, 1960). We specifically focus on time-based WFC because this form of conflict is closely associated with nonstandard work schedules (Steiber, 2009; Tammelin et al., 2017). WFC is associated with lower levels of mother and child well-being by way of lower life satisfaction and elevated stress among mothers (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Rantanen, 2011), which can subsequently lead to negative mother–child interactions and poor behavioral outcomes for children (Pocock & Clarke, 2005).

As a critique to the naturalistic scarcity approach, more positive approaches have been developed to highlight the rewards, instead of mere strain, that result from engaging in multiple roles. For example, the expansionist approach, introduced by Marks (1977), proposed that simultaneous engagement in work and family roles may create role resources, instead of simply consuming them, which then allows resources to transfer between the two roles. Hence, meeting the requirements of a role enhances role performance, which then

results in rewards and gratification (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). As a positive approach to the work-to-family relationship, in the present study we consider *work-to-family positive affective spillover* (PAS), which appears when the mother perceives that the positive mood and affect in her work role transfers to her family role and possibly results in better performance and positive mood and affect (e.g., satisfaction) in the family role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Such a positive interaction between work and family roles has positive outcomes for family members by, for example, increasing mothers' life satisfaction and reducing stress (Mauno et al., 2011), and enhancing mother–child interaction and overall family well-being (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007).

Experiences of WFC. Research comparing single and coupled mothers' experiences of WFC has produced mixed results. Whereas McManus, Korabik, Rosin, and Kelloway (2002) did not find differences between Canadian single and coupled mothers' reports of WFC, a study by Minnotte (2012), conducted in the United States, showed that single mothers experience higher levels of WFC than coupled mothers. Similarly, Baxter and Alexander (2008) found that, in isolation from other factors, Australian single mothers report more WFC than coupled mothers. Single mothers' high levels of WFC may result from having to solely and with limited resources manage responsibilities (Alsarve, 2017; Roman, 2017; Son & Bauer, 2010) that are shared by two individuals in couples. In the absence of a partner, single mothers' total workload—combining work, domestic, and childcare responsibilities—places heavy demands on their family life, particularly compared with two-parent families, as shown by previous studies from the three countries we examine in the present study (Bakker & Karsten, 2013; Kinnunen, Malinen, & Laitinen, 2009; Millar, 2008). Therefore, we hypothesize that single mothers experience higher WFC than coupled mothers (Hypothesis 1).

Nonstandard work hours and WFC. Previous findings suggest that nonstandard work hours are associated with higher WFC for coupled mothers in the European context (e.g.,

Tammelin et al., 2017) and for single mothers residing in Australia (Baxter & Alexander, 2008) and the United States (Ciabattari, 2007). In view of the scarcity approach to multiple roles (Goode, 1960), nonstandard work hours add time demands to the mother's work role. The sense of higher demand is not necessarily due to working more hours but can instead result from nonstandard work hours taking place during family time, which is then perceived to decrease the time available for shared family activities. Hence, we expect a positive relationship between the amount of maternal nonstandard work hours and WFC for both single and coupled mothers (Hypothesis 2a).

Research has established a positive relationship between maternal nonstandard work hours and WFC for both single and coupled mothers, but to the best of our knowledge no detailed attempt has been made to compare variations in the strength of this relationship among mothers living in different family forms. Baxter and Alexander (2008) did investigate the issue and did not find differences between the experiences of single and coupled mothers, but they used rather broad measures for non-standard work hours (i.e., whether work was *sometimes* done on weekends and after 6 p.m. or overnight), which may have not captured the subtler details of the phenomenon. In coupled families, where mothers work during nonstandard hours, fathers are more likely to be involved in childcare compared with other families (La Valle et al., 2002; Mills & Täht, 2010). Whereas "tag-team parenting" as a childcare-related strategy can help in reducing coupled mothers' family workload and ensuring that the child receives parental care (see Mills & Täht, 2010; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016), single mothers navigate work and family responsibilities without a resident partner. Indeed, qualitative studies conducted in Europe (e.g., Alsarve, 2017; Roman, 2017) suggest that nonstandard work hours create major difficulties and pressures particularly for single mothers in combining work and family life. Thus, we expect that the positive association between the amount of nonstandard work hours and WFC is stronger for single

than coupled mothers because nonstandard work hours are unlikely to reduce single mothers' total family-related work load for which the mother is solely and with more limited resources responsible for, compared with families with two parents (Hypothesis 2b).

Experiences of PAS. To date there has been little comparative research on positive work-to-family reconciliation across different family forms (for an exception, see Mauno et al., 2011). In the present study, we focus on positive affect that the mother perceives transferring from her work role to her family role. We argue that because the total workload is heavier for single mothers than for coupled mothers, single mothers are less likely than couples mothers to achieve and maintain a perception of a positive mood derived from work when engaged in family life. Therefore, we propose that single mothers experience less PAS than coupled mothers (Hypothesis 3).

The impact of nonstandard work hours on PAS. Despite the need for research on the experience of a positive work-to-family relationship in the context of maternal nonstandard work hours (Mauno, Kinnunen, Rantanen, & Mäkikangas, 2015), to our knowledge, no such research has been conducted that directly addresses this issue. We presume that because nonstandard work schedules have been associated with negative health outcomes for employees (e.g., Jamal, 2004), they may hinder or negatively influence the experience of PAS. In the present study, we examine (a) whether nonstandard work hours among single and coupled mothers are related to their experiences of PAS and (b) whether this association differs between single and coupled mothers. However, we form no hypothesis on these topics because of the lack of prior research to inform expectations.

Mothers' Experiences in Different Cultural Contexts

Cultural contexts are likely to affect mothers' experiences of the work-to-family relationship. The three countries under study differ, for example, in relation to family and workplace policies as well as work-hour culture. These in turn affect how mothers are able to allocate

time between work and family roles. Simultaneous time demands in the spheres of work and family linked to high WFC can be buffered with adequate support from the government, the workplace, and the family (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011). However, the availability of such support varies across countries: Family policies in Finland promote maternal full-time work by, for example, ensuring comprehensive publicly-provided and -funded childcare services that are also available during nonstandard hours (Rönkä, Turja, Malinen, Tammelin, & Kekkonen, 2017), whereas in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, there are wider gaps in the formal childcare provision, especially during nonstandard hours (Plantenga & Remery, 2009). Hence, Dutch and British families may be more likely to use informal childcare provided by extended family members compared to Finnish families (Verhoef, Tammelin, May, Rönkä, & Roeters, 2015). Although one may assume that comprehensive public provision of childcare and an egalitarian gender culture help to protect mothers from WFC, Steiber (2009) found that women in countries with a good childcare infrastructure are also likely to experience WFC. Perhaps in countries such as Finland, with good public childcare provision, mothers are less likely to receive family support, which buffers against WFC (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011). Furthermore, Abendroth and den Dulk (2011) found that support received in the workplace (e.g., job control, emotional support offered by supervisors) located in the service sector, which can help reduce WFC, was low in Finland and the United Kingdom, but high in the Netherlands.

Other comparative studies (Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; Van der Lippe et al., 2006) have suggested that country-specific work culture or working conditions are perhaps more important than family policy (e.g., provision of child care) in influencing mothers' experiences of WFC across Europe. For example, in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, mothers frequently work part time, which can be used as a coping strategy to adapt mothers' labor market participation around family demands (Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006)

to accommodate their primary roles as caregivers. Indeed, part-time work, compared to full-time work, has been shown to reduce WFC among Dutch and British mothers (Roeters & Craig, 2014). In Finland, the lack of part-time employment options for many women means that mothers of young children often must choose between exiting the paid labor force or working full time (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula, & Mäntylä, 2016). The Finnish family leave system together with the child home care allowance enables mothers to care for their under three-year-old children at home (see Repo, 2010) whereas the comprehensive and subsidized childcare provision encourages mothers to work full time. It is consequently less common for Finnish mothers to use part-time work as a facilitative strategy in work–family reconciliation (and reducing WFC) compared with mothers in the other two countries (see Janus, 2013; Salmi et al., 2016). Overall, the country-specific social policies, work-hour culture, and working conditions in the three countries offer families divergent opportunities to combine work and family roles which can have different impacts on mothers' experiences of WFC and PAS.

The Present Study

In the present study, we explore whether maternal nonstandard work hours are related to Finnish, Dutch, and British mothers' experiences of WFC and PAS, and whether these relationships are different for single mothers and coupled mothers across the three countries. Our research questions and related hypotheses based on the prior findings discussed in the preceding text are as follows:

RQ_1: To what extent do single mothers experience WFC compared with coupled mothers? We hypothesize (H1) that single mothers experience more WFC than coupled mothers.

RQ_2: Are maternal nonstandard work hours related to mothers' experiences of WFC, and is this association different among single mothers than among coupled mothers? We

predict that (H2a) mothers who work more nonstandard hours will experience higher levels of WFC. We further presume that (H2b) the positive association between the amount of nonstandard work hours and WFC is stronger among single mothers than among coupled mothers.

RQ_3: To what extent do single mothers experience PAS compared with coupled mothers? We expect that (H3) single mothers experience lower levels of PAS than coupled mothers.

RQ_4: Are maternal nonstandard work hours related to mothers' experiences of PAS, and is this association different among single mothers than among coupled mothers?

RQ_5: Do the aforementioned associations differ among the three countries? We have not formed hypothesis with regard to country differences due to the complexity of the various country-specific aspects that possibly relate to the combination of mothers' work and family roles.

In the analysis, we controlled for work and family characteristics because prior research suggests that these affect work–family reconciliation. Long weekly work hours, irregular work hours (Tammelin et al., 2017), greater job pressure (Steiber, 2009), and fixed starting and finishing times (Baxter & Alexander, 2008) are associated with higher WFC. Greater PAS is expected to be related to job pressure and greater job satisfaction as studies have reported that mothers with both low and high workload experience negative spillover to maternal mood (Gassman-Pines, 2013) and that job satisfaction is positively associated with positive affect at home (Ilies, Wilson, & Wagner, 2009). In terms of family characteristics, having more than one child (Steiber, 2009), older children (Baxter & Alexander, 2008), lower level of education, and a poorer financial situation (Ciabattari, 2007) are associated with higher WFC. Finally, problems with childcare arrangements are likely to be positively associated with WFC (Baxter & Alexander, 2008; Son & Bauer, 2010).

METHOD

Participants

The data for the present study originate from the Families 24/7 cross-national web-based survey collected between November 2012 and January 2013 from Finnish, Dutch, and British parents (N = 1,294; 1,067 women, 227 men) of children under 13 years of age. The research project was designed in response to the need for European comparative data on everyday family life and family well-being in the context of a 24/7 economy. Voluntary survey participants were recruited first by asking childcare organizations, labor unions, and employers to promote the study to their members or employees. In Finland, study participants were also recruited via day-and-night care centers. Hence, Finnish respondents who work nonstandard hours are overrepresented in the data set. Due to the low number of single parents in the data set (n = 113), another wave of recruitment was conducted between April and June 2013, during which the study was advertised on websites of organizations aimed exclusively at single-parent families in the three countries. This garnered a booster sample of 192 additional survey responses. Together the main and booster samples contained a total of 1,486 participants. For the present study, fathers, unemployed mothers, and mothers on study or parental leave from their places of employment (n = 380) were excluded from the sample, leaving a total sample of 1,106 (n = 411 Finnish, 338 Dutch, and 357 British) (self-)employed mothers.

Table 1 provides descriptive information about the sample and Cronbach alpha internal reliability coefficients of the measures. The statistically significant differences between countries were as follows: Compared with British and Finnish mothers, Dutch mothers worked fewer hours per week, were less likely to have irregular work hours, had lower job pressure and higher job satisfaction, younger children, and a better financial situation. Dutch respondents also reported the least childcare-related challenges, whereas the

British reported the most challenges with childcare arrangements, perhaps because they also were least likely to have fixed starting and finishing times at work (Finnish mothers were the most likely).

In terms of highest educational qualification, the variable was dichotomized (i.e., non-tertiary and tertiary) for our analysis to make it comparable across countries. The percentage of respondents whose highest level of education attained was non-tertiary (high school) was 51.7% in Finland compared with 27.5% in the Netherlands and 19.2% in the United Kingdom; Dutch and British mothers were more likely to have attained a tertiary (college) education (see Table 1).

Table 1 further shows that there were nearly four times more coupled mothers (n = 878; 79.4%) than single mothers (n = 228; 20.6%) in our dataset. The proportion of single mothers was greater in the Finnish subsample compared with the Dutch and British subsamples. Dutch mothers reported lower levels of both WFC and PAS compared with their Finnish and British counterparts. Nonstandard work hours were more common among the Finnish mothers than among Dutch and British mothers.

Measures and Variables

Time-based WFC. WFC was measured using a subscale developed by Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) involving three items (e.g., "I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities"). Response options for each item ranged from *strongly disagree* (scored as 1) to *strongly agree* (5), and a mean score was calculated for the three items (see Table 1 for Cronbach's alphas). The scale has been shown to have good discriminant validity, internal consistency, and factorial invariance across samples (Carlson et al., 2000; see also Tammelin et al., 2017).

Work-to-family positive affective spillover. Mothers' perceptions of the transfer of positive mood from work role to family role (PAS) were measured with four items (e.g.,

"Being in a positive mood at work helps me to be in a positive mood at home") developed by Hanson, Hammer, and Colton (2006). Response options for each item ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5), and a mean score was calculated for the four items (see Table 1 for Cronbach's alphas).

Nonstandard work hours. Two sets of questions were used to measure the amount of nonstandard work hours the respondents had in their main job (adapted from the European Working Conditions Survey, 2010). First, respondents were asked to answer the three questions: "How many times a month do you work (a) in the evening, (b) at night, (c) early in the morning, for at least 2 hours?" Response options ranged from *none* (1) to *more than twice* (4). Second, respondents were asked separately whether they worked Saturdays and Sundays, with dichotomous *no* (1) or *yes* (2) response options for each. A mean score for nonstandard work hours was calculated by standardizing each of these five items and calculating the mean of the standardized values (see Table 1 for Cronbach's alphas).

Single motherhood. Single motherhood (0 = "coupled mother," 1 = "single mother") was based on participants' reports of their marital and cohabitation status. Coupled mothers reported being either married or cohabiting; single mothers were not living with a resident partner; were either separated, divorced, widowed, or single; and reported living all or almost all the time with at least one of their children under 13 years of age. In addition, six mothers who reported being in a relationship with a partner who did not live together with the mother and the child(ren) and was not the biological father of the child, and who "never" or "rarely" received support in raising children from their current partner, were considered to be single mothers in practice.

Control variables. Work-related controls included weekly work hours, irregular work times (i.e., regular work schedule changes; 0 = "no," 1 = "yes"), fixed starting and finishing times (0 = "no," 1 = "yes"), job satisfaction ranging from *very dissatisfied* (1) to *very*

satisfied (4), and job pressure (i.e., working at high speed and to tight deadlines) ranging from *never* (1) to *all of the time* (7). The analysis further included the following family-related controls: number of children under 18 years of age living in the home, age of child in years (i.e., the age of the child closest to 4 years of age), mothers' education level (0 = "non-tertiary," 1 = "tertiary"), and the respondent's evaluation of the family's financial situation ranging from *the worst* (0) to *the best* (10). In addition, childcare-related challenges were measured with three items. First, respondents were asked whether they experienced problems with childcare arrangements (1 = "no," 2 = "yes"). Second, they were asked to estimate the ease with which they could make unanticipated childcare arrangements, with response options ranging from *very easy* (1) to *very difficult* (5). Third, mothers' overall satisfaction with childcare arrangements (i.e., "What do you think of the care arrangements of your child when you are working?") was measured, with response options ranging from *I am satisfied, this is going well* (1) to *I am dissatisfied, this is not going well* (5). A mean score for childcare-related challenges was calculated by standardizing the three variables and calculating the mean of these variables (see Table 1 for Cronbach's alphas).

Analytic Strategy

Missing data for all study variables ranged from 0.1% for the number of children to 6.6% for fixed starting and finishing times at work. When comparing the independent study variables to test for differences between participants with complete data (98.3%) and those with incomplete data (1.7%) in the two dependent variables, the two groups did not statistically differ in relation to family form ($\chi^2(1) = 3.11$, $p = .078$). The participants with missing values on the *nonstandard work hours* variable also had missing values in the two dependent variables (WFC and PAS). Because the results of Little's MCAR test (Little, 1988) for missing data revealed that the data were not completely missing at random ($\chi^2(43) = 74.76$, p

= .002), we assumed the data were missing at random and thus used the standard missing-at-random approach (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2013).

To answer the research questions, we conducted a path analysis. In the tested model, which included both dependent variables, paths from nonstandard work hours, single motherhood, and the interaction term of the two to WFC and PAS were estimated after controlling for the effects of work-related and family-related control variables on these dependent variables. Statistically significant interaction effects were interpreted using regions of significance analyses to better understand the structure of the relation (Aiken & West, 1991; Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). Explicitly, as the significant interaction effect is merely an indication of an overall difference in the slopes of the regression lines, the regions of significance analyses were used to identify the region(s) of the nonstandard work hour variable where the two regression lines would differ significantly (Aiken & West, 1991). To investigate whether the relations of nonstandard work hours, single motherhood, and their interaction on WFC and PAS were identical in each of the three countries, a multi-sample procedure was used in model testing. The model testing was started by fixing the tested paths to be equal across the three countries then evaluating the fit of the model. If the model did not fit with the data, modification indices were used to diagnose the differences in estimated paths across the countries. Paths from control variables to dependent variables were allowed to be freely estimated in each country. Indicators of a good-fitting model included a non-significant test value, a comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) greater than .95, and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) lower than .06 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2010).

The models were estimated using Mplus statistical software (Version 7; Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2013). Using the missing data method with the path models allowed us to include all of the observations in the data set to estimate the parameters in the models.

Because some of the variables were initially skewed, the parameters of the models were estimated using the MLR estimator because it corrects the standard errors to be robust in the case of non-normality (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2010). The correlations of the variables used in the analysis are shown in Table 2.

The fit of the initial model was $\chi^2(20) = 105.77$, $p < .001$; CFI = .76, TLI = .02, RMSEA = .11. Inspection of the modification indices suggested that model fit could be improved by estimating the paths from nonstandard work hours and single motherhood to WFC, as well as correlations between nonstandard work hours, single motherhood, and their interaction term separately for Finnish mothers and others (see Table 3). After these specifications, the model fit the data well, $\chi^2(15) = 8.02$, $p = .923$; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.11; RMSEA = .00.

RESULTS

The results presented in Table 3 show that in the Dutch and British subsamples, single mothers experienced more WFC than coupled mothers. In Finland, however, single mothers experienced less WFC than their coupled counterparts.

In Finland, but not in the other two countries, there was a positive association between the amount of nonstandard work hours and WFC. Namely, mothers who worked more during nonstandard hours experienced more WFC than mothers who worked less during nonstandard hours. Comparing single and coupled mothers, for all three countries there was a statistically significant interaction effect between nonstandard work hours and single motherhood in relation to WFC after accounting for the main effects of the control variables, nonstandard work hours, and single motherhood. To interpret the statistically significant ($p < .05$; one-tailed test) interaction effects, simple slopes of the nonstandard work hours variable in the prediction of WFC were calculated and visualized separately for single mothers and coupled mothers. In these analyses, statistical significance for the simple slopes among single mothers

and coupled mothers, as well as regions of significance (Preacher et al., 2006), were calculated. Figure 1 depicts these interaction effects graphically and separately for each of the three countries. The result indicates that in all three countries, the positive association between the amount of maternal nonstandard work hours and WFC was stronger among single mothers than among coupled mothers.

The regions of significance analyses (see Figure 1) further showed that in Finland, the region of significance (RoS) ranged from 0.28 to 4.90. Thus, the simple slopes among single and coupled mothers were statistically different from each other outside this region: for values of nonstandard work hours less than 0.28 *SD* or greater than 4.90 *SD*, the positive association of nonstandard work hours with WFC was statistically significantly stronger among single mothers than among coupled mothers. For values between 0.28 *SD* and 4.90 *SD*, the association of nonstandard work hours with WFC was equal among single and coupled mothers. This result indicates that when the amount of nonstandard work hours is about on average or low, it is more strongly related with WFC among single than among coupled mothers, whereas when the amount is high (between 0.28 *SD* and 4.90 *SD*), the impacts are equal among single and coupled mothers. Among the Dutch and British subsamples, the RoS ranged from –5.21 to –0.19, which indicates that when the amount of nonstandard work hours was about on average or high (over −0.19 *SD*), the positive association of nonstandard work hours with WFC was statistically significantly stronger among single than among coupled mothers. The analyses further showed that among Finnish respondents, a total of 48% of the single mothers, and 42% of all mothers had scores within the area where the regression lines differed; the same was true for 51% and 41% of Dutch mothers, and 53% and 47% of British mothers, respectively. This indicates that a reasonable percentage of the subsamples (41%–47%) fell into the regions of significance.

Across the three countries, single mothers experienced less PAS than coupled mothers. However, neither nonstandard work hours nor the interaction of nonstandard work hours and single motherhood were statistically associated with PAS in any of the three countries.

Statistical associations between the dependent variables and control variables revealed that in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the amount of weekly work hours was positively associated with WFC. In Finland, again, higher weekly work hours were related to lower PAS. Irregular working hours related to higher WFC in the Finnish and British subsamples. For Dutch and British respondents, greater job pressure was associated with higher WFC. In all three countries, higher perceived job satisfaction was related to lower WFC. Number of children was positively associated with WFC in Finland and PAS in the Netherlands. For British respondents, higher child age was associated with lower WFC. In the Finnish subsample, higher education was related to higher PAS. Better financial situation associated with lower WFC for the Dutch and British respondents. Finally, in all countries, the perception of having more childcare-related challenges related to higher WFC.

Discussion

This study has contributed to the growing area of work–family research (see Bianchi & Milkie, 2010) by examining the impact of nonstandard work hours on time-based WFC and work-to-family PAS experienced by an understudied group, namely European single mothers, and by comparing their experiences to those of coupled mothers. Consistent with the first research question, our results showed that in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, single mothers tended to report higher levels of WFC than did coupled mothers (H1). This indicates that single mothers, more than coupled mothers, perceive that the time they devote to their work role makes it difficult to fulfill the requirements of their family role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Millar (2008) argued that tensions between time for work and care are likely

for single mothers in the United Kingdom, who struggle to make ends meet with anything less than full-time work. In addition, sustaining maternal employment requires great efforts from the whole family, for example, when having to accept reduced family time (Millar, 2008).

In the Netherlands, mothers identify themselves primarily as caregivers (Bakker & Karsten, 2013). Given that Dutch single mothers are more likely than their coupled counterparts to be employed full time (see Moilanen, May, Räikkönen, Sevón, & Laakso, 2016), the conflict between single mothers' preferred roles as caregivers and their duties as breadwinners may be the cause of high WFC. Our finding ran contrary to our expectation that Finnish single mothers would similarly experience higher WFC than coupled mothers (see Kinnunen et al., 2009) as we discovered that single mothers actually reported lower levels of WFC than their coupled counterparts. As mentioned earlier, most Finnish mothers have the option of staying at home or working full time, but part-time work is rarely available (Salmi et al., 2016). Full-time maternal work is supported by the comprehensive childcare provision, which is also available during nonstandard hours (Rönkä et al., 2017). Nevertheless, mothers may still hold traditional views of mothers as caregivers. Indeed, such a view is encouraged by family-centered thinking in Finland that emphasizes the superiority of maternal care in ensuring child well-being in the first years of a child's life (Repo, 2010). In this context, some coupled mothers, especially those who can rely on the father as the main economic provider in the family, might be unsure about their reasons for engaging in paid work, the requirements of which they perceive interfering with their family responsibilities. Single mothers, however, are often the sole providers for their children and therefore do not have the luxury of weighing the pluses and minuses of exiting the paid workforce, and may therefore rationalize working as a financial must with no other options. Furthermore, if the children living in two-parent families are spending time with the father at home, coupled mothers may

be particularly aware of the family time they are missing out on because of work (see Baxter & Alexander, 2008). Further research is needed to more fully understand why Finnish coupled mothers experience higher levels of WFC than single mothers.

The principal and novel finding of our study relates to the second research question, concerning whether mothers' nonstandard work hours are related to their experiences of WFC, and especially whether this association is different for single versus coupled mothers. First, our results showed a positive association between nonstandard work hours and WFC for both single and coupled mothers in Finland, but only for single mothers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (H2a). The Finnish result is consistent with our hypothesis. Mothers who work nonstandard hours may feel that there is not enough time for both family activities and household responsibilities. This sense may be heightened by the fact that they work during evenings and weekends, that is, at times when families typically engage in shared activities (Daly, 2001). We suspect that the absence of a meaningful relationship between nonstandard work hours and WFC among coupled mothers in the Netherlands and United Kingdom might be explained by the type of nonstandard work and the reasons for why coupled mothers in the three countries work these hours. Put simply, service-sector shift work is common among employed women in Finland (Eurostat, 2017). This was visible in our data as well, because, in contrast to Dutch and British coupled mothers, Finnish coupled mothers were more likely to work in two or three shifts than in other working time patterns (results not shown). These positions provide employees relatively low levels of control over when and where to work (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011) and create difficulties for them to balance work and family commitments (Parent-Thirion et al., 2007). In contrast, nonstandard work hours in the Netherlands and United Kingdom might have more commonly been voluntarily in pursuit of one's career ambitions, and as family needs permitted. Indeed, mothers who work nonstandard hours in these two countries often choose

to do so voluntarily as a means to adapt their work hours around family responsibilities (Mills & Täht, 2010; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006). However, we can only speculate that these contextual differences existed across the subsamples; future studies should tease out differences in WFC according to *why* mothers work nonstandard hours.

Second, in line with our original assumption (H2b), the positive association between the amount of nonstandard work hours and WFC was stronger for single mothers than for coupled mothers in all three countries (see Figure 1). This suggests that single mothers who work more nonstandard hours perceive more strongly than their coupled counterparts that work time interferes with their family roles, responsibilities, and desires. Because work during nonstandard hours often takes place during family leisure time (i.e., evenings and weekends), the more a mother works during nonstandard hours, the more difficult it may be for her to arrange family activities such as shared family meals (see also La Valle et al., 2002).

The regions of significance analyses revealed some important differences across countries. In the Netherlands and United Kingdom, single and coupled mothers differed in their experiences of WFC only among those with a relatively high amount of nonstandard work hours, whereas in Finland these differences were observed only among those with a relatively low amount of nonstandard work hours. In the Dutch and British subsamples, nonstandard work hours were linked to high levels of WFC only among single mothers whereas the relationship between nonstandard work hours and WFC was nearly nonexistent for coupled mothers. This finding indicates that single mothers in these two countries are more vulnerable to the negative impact of nonstandard work hours than coupled mothers. This is an expected outcome, because research has indicated that when the coupled mother works during nonstandard hours, the father is likely to engage in childcare (La Valle et al., 2002; Mills & Täht, 2010), which can ease the mother's family workload (see Murtorinne-

Lahtinen et al., 2016). However, nonstandard work hours are unlikely to decrease single mothers' total workload given that they are solely responsible for their households. As a result, single mothers may perceive that they do not have enough time for family activities and household tasks because of work during nonstandard hours.

Interestingly, in Finland, we found that when the amount of nonstandard work hours was low, the positive association between nonstandard work hours and WFC was significantly stronger for single mothers than coupled mothers. This finding suggests that, whereas coupled mothers, overall, experienced higher level of WFC than single mothers, occasionally working during nonstandard hours seemed to have a more severe impact on single mothers' experiences of WFC compared with coupled mothers. It may be that these occasional nonstandard work hours are non-contracted (e.g., unpredictable overtime work) that do not entitle single-mother families a place in a day-and-night care center and may therefore result in difficulties in combining work times with family responsibilities. In these instances, the slightest help from a resident partner may become important in buffering the effect of nonstandard work hours on WFC for coupled mothers. Single mothers, again, are solely responsible for both work and family without a resident partner, which can complicate the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities when the mother works only some nonstandard hours.

Another unanticipated finding was that when the amount of nonstandard work was lower than the mean, coupled mothers in Finland experienced higher levels of WFC than single mothers. It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to cultural expectations toward mothers' caregiving roles, as discussed earlier. It is also possible that coupled mothers with nonstandard work hours have particularly high expectations of their partner's role within the family. Findings from earlier studies show that when a mother works during nonstandard hours, the father is actively engaged in childcare (La Valle et al., 2002; Mills & Täht, 2010;

Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016). Therefore, it may be that mothers who work fewer nonstandard hours have partners who are less helpful in the family, which results in the mother having to take primary responsibility for the family, which in turn leads to high WFC. In contrast, single mothers may be either more accustomed to managing both work and family roles on their own, or simply lack expectations of a partner helping, and might therefore have a different experience than coupled mothers with regard to fulfilling family roles.

The third and fourth research questions focused on single and coupled mothers' experiences of PAS and the association of nonstandard work hours with PAS among them. The results demonstrated that across the three countries single mothers experienced less PAS than their coupled counterparts, as we expected would be the case (H3). This indicates that, compared with coupled mothers, single mothers are less likely to perceive that the positive affect (e.g., moods) they experience in their work roles would transfer to their family roles (see Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). One explanation for the result might be that the positive affect single mothers gain from work is not strong enough to be perceived to transfer to the home sphere given their heavy work load as parents with sole day-to-day responsibility for the family. Further research, however, is needed to investigate the possible antecedents of PAS in coupled- and single-mother families. The results further showed that nonstandard work hours were not associated with PAS. This result suggests that mothers' perceptions of the relationship between nonstandard work hours and PAS may depend more on other factors than the particular work hours. These kinds of factors could include, for example, experiencing one's work as meaningful, as could be the case in health occupations that are characterized by nonstandard work hours.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Considering previous findings on the possible negative consequences of WFC on family well-being (e.g., Mauno et al., 2011; Pocock & Clarke, 2005), the results of the present study

highlight the importance of understanding the circumstances of single and coupled mothers in different cultural contexts when paying attention to social and workplace policies. In the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, policies could be aimed to reduce particularly single mothers' WFC. Part-time work is readily available in these two countries, which assists families in combining work and family responsibilities and encouraging their caregiving roles because parents can adapt their work hours around family duties (Mills & Täht, 2010; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006). However, single-mother families in both countries tend to have fewer financial resources than two-parent families. Family-friendly policies could make part-time work more affordable for sole earners by, for example, offering wage supplements, tax credits, or public subsidies for child care (which is especially needed in the United Kingdom) to ensure the sustainability of part-time paid employment for parents of young children and help single mothers in satisfying the simultaneous demands of work and family.

In Finland, the comprehensive formal childcare provision facilitates the reconciliation of work and family life while supporting maternal full-time work. It may well be that access to day-and-night care particularly helps single mothers, who work during nonstandard hours to reconcile work with family responsibilities, as single-mother families have been shown to form the major of the clientele of day-and-night care (Rönkä et al., 2017). According to our findings, however, Finland differed from the other two countries in that both coupled and single mothers experienced higher WFC when the amount of nonstandard work hours was high. On this basis, we recommend that workplace policies be directed at facilitating the combination of work and family roles in both family forms. In the workplace, job control as well as emotional support received from the supervisor should be promoted as a means to relieve mothers' experiences of WFC (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011). In Finland, where shift work is common (Eurostat, 2017) and the degree of job control is low in the service sector (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011), mothers could benefit from having more control over when

and where they complete their work responsibilities, as well as being able to openly discuss WFC issues with their supervisor. Being able to work reduced hours—if the pay is good enough to support a family—could enable mothers who wish to do so to invest more time in their caregiving roles, especially when the children are young. Although the emphasis here is on workplace policies, the role of the state in implementing workplace support is important because, in addition to supporting parents, doing so "can sensitize employers to the topic of work–life balance and encourage them to offer support" as well (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011, p. 247).

Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to interpret our findings in light of the study's key limitations. First, the results are based on a convenience sample that was collected using a web-based questionnaire directed at parents who worked nonstandard hours. Although the sample was collected using similar recruitment strategies in the three countries in an attempt to elicit comparable samples, the subsamples differed from each other in some characteristics. For example, highly educated Dutch and British mothers were overrepresented in our sample. Therefore, on the one hand, our findings may not be generalizable to less educated Dutch and British mothers, and on the other, the Dutch and British subsamples differ from the Finnish subsample in this regard. Although education level was controlled for in the analysis, this may not have completely accounted for the differences between the subsamples. Furthermore, due to day-and-night care centers being one of the avenues for recruiting our Finnish participants, (a) mothers who work nonstandard hours but whose children are not cared for in day-and-night care centers may be underrepresented, and (b) those coupled mothers in families where both parents work nonstandard hours might be overrepresented (this is because two-parent families where only one parent works nonstandard hours are not entitled to a place in a day-and-night care center). Consequently, it is important to bear in

mind the possible selection bias in the results. In future studies, investigators should identify whether the associations found in the present study hold true with randomized samples and more comparable group compositions.

Second, these cross-sectional data cannot provide insight concerning the direction or causal relationships of the associations between the study variables or the further-reaching influences of nonstandard work hours on WFC. It is possible, for example, that high WFC increases the likelihood of union dissolution, that is, becoming a single mother, and not vice versa. Therefore, future research is needed to examine these associations across time.

Third, there are at least two important limitations posed by the measures used in the analysis. First, the variable measuring nonstandard work hours may have underestimated the impact of nonstandard work hours because the response scale was limited. However, instead of using a dichotomous variable that distinguishes between those working either standard or nonstandard hours, which has been criticized for not being relevant to the actual lives of many working mothers (see Dunifon, Kalil, Crosby, Su, & DeLeire, 2013), the use of a continuous variable measuring the amount of nonstandard work hours enabled us to capture the experiences of those working standard schedules with additional non-contracted nonstandard hours. Furthermore, the variable focuses on the amount of nonstandard work hours, including multiple types of nonstandard schedules that are likely to lead to higher WFC. Hence, we encourage researchers to consider focusing on specific types of nonstandard work schedules and their associations with WFC. The second important limitation of our measures is that more research is needed to identify the antecedents of PAS, because the variables included in the present analysis had no meaningful association with PAS. Perhaps, for example, individual personality or the quality of workplace and family relationships are associated with mothers' experiences of PAS. Finally, for some scales with three or more

items, the Cronbach alphas were low (< .70). Low alphas were found particularly among the Dutch respondents, which somewhat limits our confidence in the validity of the results.

Finally, some effect sizes were small. Hence, future studies are needed to unravel other possible factors that have a larger impact on WFC. Similarly, we encourage future studies that are able to provide a better understanding of how aspects not addressed in our analysis, for example, job control or cultural mothering expectations, affect mothers' WFC.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study enhance understanding of how European single mothers perceive the combination of work and family roles within the context of nonstandard work hours. Our results suggest that in the Netherlands and United Kingdom, single mothers find it harder than coupled mothers to fulfill family requirements because of the time they devote to their work roles when the amount of maternal nonstandard work is high. In Finland, this time-based conflict was not only experienced by single mothers, but also by coupled mothers, which shows that more nonstandard work hours does not always indicate more difficulties for single mothers than for coupled mothers. However, it should also be noted that in Finland, both coupled and single mothers experienced rather high levels of WFC compared with their Dutch and British counterparts, when the amount of nonstandard work hours was high. Moreover, we explored the positive relationship between mothers' work and family roles, and compared single versus coupled mothers' experiences of this. Our findings indicate that single mothers across the three countries perceived less positive affect transferring from work to family than did coupled mothers, suggesting that future studies should focus on the factors enhancing positive work-to-family relationships so that strategies can be developed that would allow single mothers to strengthen the positive relationship between multiple roles.

AUTHOR NOTE

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Tests for Differences Across Countries (N = *1,106*)

			Finland (*n* = 411)			The Netherlands (*n* = 338)			The United Kingdom (*n* = 357)				
Variables	Items	Range	*M* / %	*SD*	α	*M* / %	*SD*	α	*M* / %	*SD*	α	*F* / *H* / χ^2	Post hoc
Control variables													
Weekly working hours		0–74	36.21	9.21		29.65	8.50		34.61	10.92		$F(2, 1069) = 44.06$***	FIN, UK > NL
Irregular working times: yes (%)			36.7			15.5			37.7			$\chi^2(2) = 49.65$***	UK, FIN > NL
Fixed starting and finishing times: yes (%)			67.4			57.7			45.4			$\chi^2(2) = 35.04$***	FIN > NL > UK
Job pressure	2	1–7	4.58	1.43	.74	4.00	1.41	.72	4.63	1.40	.75	$F(2, 1081) = 21.26$***	UK, FIN > NL
Job satisfaction[b]		1–4	2.98	0.70		3.19	0.58		3.05	0.71		$H(2) = 16.34$***	NL > UK, FIN
Number of children in the household[b]		1–6	1.77	0.81		1.83	0.87		1.73	0.72		$H(2) = 0.93$	
Age of the child		0–12	4.84	2.63		4.03	3.13		4.71	3.20		$F(2, 1103) = 7.61$**	FIN, UK > NL
Education level: tertiary education (%)			45.8			72.2			80.8			$\chi^2(2) = 113.04$***	UK, NL > FIN
Financial situation		0–10	5.21	2.25		6.27	1.98		5.23	2.21		$F(2, 1099) = 27.39$***	NL > UK, FIN
Childcare-related challenges	3	–1.16–2.16[a]	0.05	0.81	.67	–0.28	0.59	.55	0.20	0.80	.63	$F(2, 1101) = 37.55$***	UK > FIN > NL
Independent variables													
Single mothers (%)			31.4			14.8			13.7			$\chi^2(2) = 46.50$***	FIN > NL, UK
Nonstandard working	5	–0.98–1.55[a]	0.29	0.75	.79	–0.21	0.72	.83	–0.14	0.70	.80	$F(2, 1084) = 51.94$***	FIN > UK, NL
Dependent variables													
WFC	3	1–5	2.88	0.99	.80	2.53	0.75	.65	2.94	0.95	.79	$F(2, 1084) = 20.58$***	UK, FIN > NL
PAS[b]	4	1–5	4.01	0.70	.87	3.84	0.62	.81	3.97	0.66	.89	$H(2) = 18.74$***	FIN, UK > NL

Note. WFC = time-based work-to-family conflict. PAS = positive affective spillover.
[a]Empirical range. [b]Kruskal–Wallis test was computed for the non-normally distributed continuous variables. Post hoc analyses were carried out for the statistically significant ANOVA F tests using Bonferroni for groups with equal variances and Dunnett's T3 for groups with unequal variances.
**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 2

Intercorrelations for Predictor, Outcome, and Control Variables (*N = 1,106*)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Weekly working hours	–												
2. Irregular working times[a, b]	.23***	–											
3. Fixed starting and finishing times[a, c]	–.08**	–.18***	–										
4. Job pressure	.25***	.18***	–.08**	–									
5. Job satisfaction[a]	–.02	–.09**	–.02	–.22***	–								
6. Number of children in the household[a]	–.04	–.02	–.05	–.04	.06	–							
7. Age of the child	.10**	.08**	–.05	.07*	.03	.22***	–						
8. Educational level[a, d]	.04	–.01	–.22***	–.03	.03	–.00	–.04	–					
9. Financial situation	–.05	–.16***	–.06	–.13***	.17***	–.00	–.10**	.24***	–				
10. Childcare-related challenges	.12***	.14***	–.08**	.20***	–.27***	–.01	.14***	.06*	–.28***	–			
11. Nonstandard working	.25***	.26***	.02	.12***	–.11***	.01	.02	–.16***	–.08**	.13***	–		
12. Single motherhood[a, e]	.09**	.09**	.01	.08**	–.06*	–.14***	.28***	–.09**	–.26***	.18***	.07*	–	
13. Time-based work-to-family conflict	.27***	.22***	–.04	.28***	–.27***	.03	.05	–.04	–.27***	.33***	.27***	.09**	–
14. Positive affective spillover[a]	.04	.11***	–.07*	.04	.05	.05	.05	.01	–.04	.05	.04	.01	.09**

Note. [a]Spearman correlation coefficients are reported for categorical variables and non-normally distributed continuous variables. [b]Irregular working times: 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*. [c]Fixed starting and finishing times at work: 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*. [d]Education level: 0 = *non-tertiary*, 1 = *tertiary*. [e]Single motherhood: 0 = *coupled mother*, 1 = *single mother*.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$ (one-tailed).

Table 3
*Unstandardized estimates (*B*), Standardized estimates (*β*), and* p *Values for the Tested Model (*N = *1,106)*

	Time-based work-to-family conflict (WFC)									Positive affective spillover (PAS)								
	Finland (n = 411, R^2 = .32)			The Netherlands (n = 338, R^2 = .26)			The United Kingdom (n = 357, R^2 = .35)			Finland (n = 411, R^2 = .04)			The Netherlands (n = 338, R^2 = .05)			The United Kingdom (n = 357, R^2 = .03)		
Parameter Estimate	*B*	*β*	*p*	*B*	*β*	*p*	*B*	*β*	*p*	*B*	*β*	*p*	*B*	*β*	*p*	*B*	*β*	*p*
Independent variables																		
Single motherhood	–0.24	–.12	.007	0.24	.11	.011	0.24	.09	.010	–0.11	–.07	.034	–0.11	–.06	.033	–0.11	–.06	.036
Nonstandard work hours	0.32	.24	< .001	0.03	.03	.246	0.03	.02	.247	–0.00	–.00	.468	–0.00	–.00	.468	–0.00	–.00	.468
Nonstandard work hours × single motherhood	0.20	.09	.006	0.20	.07	.006	0.20	.06	.007	0.02	.01	.406	0.02	.01	.406	0.02	.01	.406
Control variables																		
Weekly work hours	0.00	.01	.397	0.02	.22	< .001	0.03	.29	< .001	–0.01	–.11	.015	0.01	.10	.057	0.00	.01	.442
Irregular work hours	0.25	.12	.006	–0.14	–.07	.078	0.24	.12	.006	0.08	.05	.177	0.14	.08	.064	0.11	.08	.089
Fixed start and finish times	–0.13	–.06	.094	0.05	.03	.247	0.08	.04	.166	–0.10	–.07	.116	–0.09	–.07	.102	–0.02	–.01	.403
Job pressure	0.04	.06	.112	0.05	.09	.033	0.10	.15	.001	–0.01	–.01	.469	–0.01	–.03	.309	0.04	.09	.053
Job satisfaction	–0.34	–.24	< .001	–0.16	–.12	.007	–0.19	–.14	.001	0.08	.08	.125	0.07	.06	.152	0.02	.02	.369
Number of children	0.12	.09	.012	0.02	.03	.307	0.02	.02	.361	–0.06	–.07	.121	0.07	.09	.049	0.06	.07	.108
Age of the target child	0.02	.06	.083	0.01	.05	.158	–0.05	–.18	< .001	0.02	.08	.053	–0.00	–.01	.418	0.01	.03	.307
Education level	–0.00	–.00	.480	0.03	.02	.348	0.04	.02	.369	0.16	.11	.011	0.06	.04	.248	–0.05	–.03	.283
Financial situation	–0.03	–.08	.055	–0.05	–.13	.009	–0.09	–.21	< .001	–0.00	–.00	.481	–0.03	–.08	.124	–0.01	–.02	.397
Childcare-related challenges	0.22	.18	< .001	0.29	.22	< .001	0.14	.12	.005	0.04	.04	.232	0.07	.07	.157	0.01	.01	.452

Note. $\chi^2(15) = 8.02$, $p = .923$; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.11; RMSEA = .00.

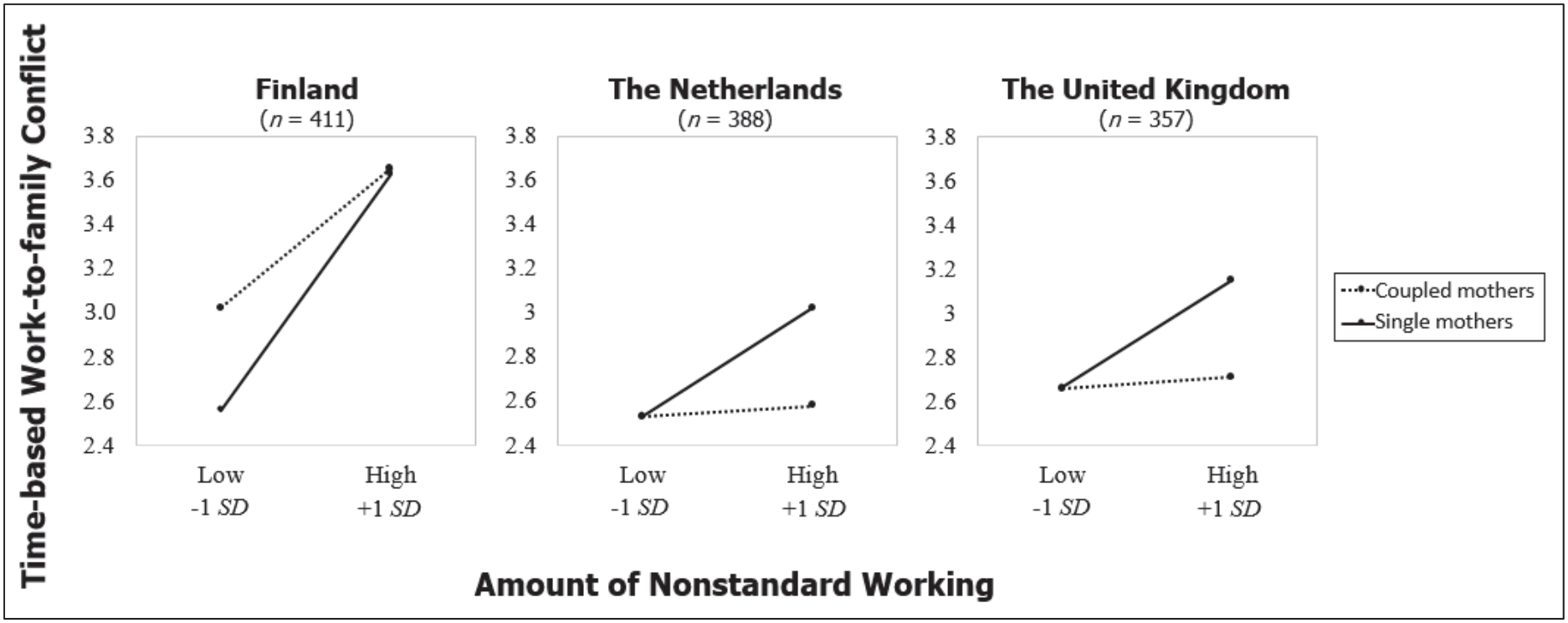

Figure 1. Interaction effect of nonstandard work hours and single motherhood on time-based work-to-family conflict.

PIII

DISPLAYING MORALLY RESPONSIBLE MOTHERHOOD: LONE MOTHERS ACCOUNTING FOR WORK DURING NON-STANDARD HOURS

by

Sanna Moilanen, Vanessa May, Eija Sevón, Minna Murtorinne-Lahtinen, & Marja-Leena Laakso, 2019

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Displaying Morally Responsible Motherhood: Lone Mothers Accounting for Work during Non-Standard Hours

Sanna Moilanen, Vanessa May, Eija Sevón, Minna Murtorinne-Lahtinen and Marja-Leena Laakso

Abstract

This study examined how lone mothers rationalize their work during non-standard hours (e.g., evenings and weekends), which they perceive as problematic in terms of child wellbeing, and thereby as violating the culturally shared moral order of 'good' motherhood. The data comprise interviews with 16 Finnish lone mothers, analysed as accounts, with special focus on their linguistic features. The mothers displayed morally responsible motherhood through: (1) excusing work during non-standard hours as an external demand; (2) appealing to the inability to act according to good mothering ideals; (3) using adaptive strategies to protect child wellbeing; and (4) challenging the idea of risk. Our findings indicate that the moral terrain lone mothers must navigate is shaped by the ways in which their family situation contravenes powerful ideologies around good mothering, while their efforts to resist the ensuing stigma are constrained by the need to engage in work during non-standard hours.

Key words

motherhood; single mothers; accounts analysis; stigma; nonstandard work

Introduction

> 'I feel that those around me think that [because] I am a lone mother, I have two children, and I work during nights, too, it is like, oh my God, she is a bad mother.' (Emma)

The words above are those of a lone mother interviewed for the present study and aptly illustrate how, according to prevailing cultural understandings concerning 'good' motherhood in Finland and many other Western societies (Hays, 1996; Perälä-Littunen, 2007), lone mothers' work during non-standard hours (e.g., evenings and weekends) can be seen as posing a triple risk to child wellbeing. Not only does lone motherhood violate a core cultural understanding of the nuclear family as the ideal environment for child upbringing (May 2008, 2011), but 'modern familism' (Jallinoja, 2006: 154) in Finland tends to value family time and emphasize maternal care as the best way of ensuring young children's wellbeing (Repo, 2010). Furthermore, the issue of maternal non-standard working hours as a possible risk to child wellbeing has received considerable attention in academic literature (e.g., Han and Waldfogel, 2007; Hsueh and Yoshikawa, 2007; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al, 2016), also reflected in public debates in Finland (Jallinoja, 2006). Due to this triple risk, it is likely that lone mothers' work during non-standard hours is understood as violating the moral order of good motherhood (see Juhila, 2012), which is likely to make the rationalization of such work particularly pressing for lone mothers. However, we know little about how lone mothers deal with the paradox created by cultural expectations attached to good mothering and current working time demands, namely, non-standard work hours.

This study examines how Finnish lone mothers who work during non-standard hours account for their working hours and the effect these might have on the wellbeing of their children. A lone mother is defined here as a mother who does not have a residential partner and who has primary responsibility for both the upbringing and care for her child(ren) as well as for the everyday

reconciliation of work and family life. Drawing from an ethnomethodological category analysis approach (Jayuusi, 1999; Juhila, 2012), we ask (1) *how lone mothers perceive the relationship between their non-standard working hours and their children's wellbeing*, and (2) *how the mothers account for their work during non-standard hours*. We argue that the accounts told by our research participants allowed them to construct a sense of themselves as morally responsible mothers and to make their working comprehensible in the eyes of themselves and others (see Buttny, 1993; Scott and Lyman, 1968). This paper contributes to the literature concerning definitions of good mothering, which has shown a diversity of ways in which mothers with differing work practices respond to and thus transform such cultural expectations (e.g., Christopher, 2012; Johnston and Swanson, 2006). Our data allow us to investigate how well the mothers' own definitions map on to dominant understandings of good mothering and whether these understandings are changing in response to non-standard work hours that, although increasingly wide-spread, remain under-researched in the context of mothering.

Working lone mothers and the moral order of good motherhood

Motherhood as a social construction is perceived and evaluated according to the ideology and practices of socially appropriate child-rearing characteristic for each society (Hays, 1996). In the present paper, *the moral order of good mothering* refers to these social practices and culturally shared knowledge of appropriate child-rearing and mothering. This moral order is constituted by the rights and responsibilities attached to the category of 'mother', which in turn contribute to the moral expectations and presumptions that are used to determine who is acting 'normally' or 'appropriately' in a society, and who is defined as deviating from the norm (Jayuusi, 1991; Juhila, 2012).

A clearly dominant mothering ideology in Finland and other Western societies is that of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), which defines child-centred child-rearing as socially appropriate. Accordingly, a good mother bears the primary responsibility for her child and is expected by the prevailing 'moral imperative' (Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2000: 789) to prioritize, listen to and respond to the needs of her child(ren), something which requires considerable time and energy (Hays, 1996; Perälä-Littunen, 2007). Lone mothers are perceived as violating this moral imperative in most Western countries where, in light of psy-discourses that question lone mothers' ability to ensure optimum child development (e.g., May, 2008), lone motherhood is still characterized as problematic and even stigmatised (May, 2011).

Lone mothers who engage in paid work are further seen to violate expectations that define good mothering because time at work is seen as time away from the children. Although maternal work is the norm and therefore socially accepted in Finland, modern familism, which emphasises mothers' responsibility for caring for their young children, has gained popularity and has led to widespread public concern over the lack of family time in families where the mother is employed outside the home (Jallinoja, 2006; Repo, 2010). Consequently, the moral dilemma for working lone mothers with young children is whether they are harming their children by leaving them in the full-time care of other people, and whether they are doing so too early according to cultural understandings.

Although there is plenty of evidence to show the continued dominance of the intensive mothering ideology, contemporary research does indicate that as maternal employment becomes increasingly acceptable and prevalent, definitions of good mothering are diversifying. Research conducted in the USA (e.g., Christopher, 2012; Johnston and Swanson, 2006) shows that, in response to differing work practices, mothers themselves develop versatile definitions of good mothering and even challenge the expectations attached to intensive mothering. Christopher (2012) for example found that lone mothers were able to navigate between the demands of work and good

mothering by developing the notion of extensive mothering. They could, for instance, justify their work by emphasizing, not only the benefits to their children, but also the personal benefits they themselves received from working.

Lone mothers' decisions around paid work are thus affected not only by the cultural ideologies regarding good mothering but also by changing attitudes towards women's labour market participation and by family policies (Hakovirta, 2006). In Finland, the state's stance on the role of mothers as primary caregivers is ambivalent, which makes Finnish family policy rather unique compared to many other European countries where maternal part-time work is a more prevalent strategy to facilitate the combination of maternal work and family responsibilities (Beham et al, 2018). On one hand, maternal full-time work is supported in Finland with comprehensive and affordable childcare provision. Under-school-aged children have the right to receive government-subsidised early childhood education and care (ECEC). A particularly progressive aspect of the Finnish childcare system is that ECEC services are provided also during non-standard hours in municipal day-and-night care centres (see Rönkä et al, 2017). In principal, all municipalities are obliged to organize such 24/7 care to which families are entitled to if both parents (in two-parent families) or one parent (in lone-parent families) work(s) non-standard hours. On the other hand, the child home care allowance enables mothers of under three-year-olds to care for their child at home (Repo, 2010). This article argues that this apparent paradox in family policy can give rise mothers experiencing contradictory expectations. However, lone mothers who rely on the home care allowance face the risk of poverty (see Krok, 2009), which may leave little room to actually make a choice between staying at home and seeking paid work. Indeed, in 2017, 21% of lone-parent families fell below the margins of poverty compared with 5.1% of two-parent families (Mukkila et al, 2017: 4).

Moral order – fragmented by lone mothers' work during non-standard hours

The moral dilemmas experienced by working lone mothers, we argue, have been intensified by the demands of the contemporary labour market. The working time demands characteristic of the 24/7 economy, especially non-standard working hours taking place during early mornings, evenings, nights, and weekends (Presser, 2003), have complicated the challenges that mothers face in reconciling work and family (e.g., Moilanen et al, 2019). Non-standard working hours are common, for example, in the female-dominated service and health sectors characterized by shift work (Parent-Thirion et al, 2007). In Finland, some 26.9% of women work in shifts (Eurostat, 2018). Although existing statistics in Finland do not specify the number of lone mothers working non-standard hours, some international studies have indicated that lone parents are particularly likely to work such hours (e.g., Presser, 2003).

Mothers' non-standard working hours contravene general norms in industrialised societies regarding 'family time', according to which weekdays are for working, while evenings and weekends are seen predominantly as family time and nights as time for sleep (Daly, 2001). In Finland, the young children of lone parents working non-standard hours are often cared for in day-and-night care centres (Rönkä et al, 2017). Such children are spending their family time away from home and apart from their mothers more often compared to children living in corresponding two-parent families in which the parents can share childcare responsibilities (e.g., Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al, 2016). Mothers' non-standard work hours have re-ignited concern over the wellbeing of children of working mothers, which finds support in a number of studies. The potential risks that these schedules pose to the wellbeing of young children comprise the unpredictability in everyday family routines (Sevón et al, 2017), such as meal times, and irregular sleeping rhythms that result in insufficient amounts of sleep (Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al, 2016). Further possible risks relate to the irregularity in childcare (Sevón et al, 2017) and long periods of time children spend in day-and-

night care (Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al, 2016), which may hamper young children's socioemotional wellbeing. Furthermore, lone mothers' work in rotating shifts is possibly associated with an increased likelihood of reduced mother-child closeness and interaction, as well as lack of family time (Han and Waldfogel, 2007; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al, 2016), all of which are understood to be potentially harmful to children. Hsueh and Yoshikawa (2007) also found that when parents worked variable non-standard schedules, children showed more externalizing behaviour problems. Although previous studies have mainly focused on risks, it is noteworthy that not all findings on the relationship between parents' non-standard work hours and children's wellbeing are negative (see e.g., Han and Waldfogel, 2007; Hsueh and Yoshikawa, 2007; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al, 2016; Sevón et al, 2017).

Lone mothers' breach of the moral order of good motherhood, as explained above, creates the practical necessity for them to reflect on and offer an *account* of their actions to mend the apparent discrepancy between their working hours and the expectations attached to good motherhood (Buttny, 1993; Juhila, 2012; Scott and Lyman, 1968). Damaske (2013) stresses that differentiating between the actions that women have taken and how they rationalise these actions enables a better understanding of the moral ideologies attached to work and family practices. Therefore, we situate the accounts provided by the lone mothers in our study in their broader socio-economic context. According to Wajcman (2015), working mothers are likely to feel the sharp end of having to manage family life within the constraints set by the demands of the labour market. It is mothers who tend to be responsible for housework and childcare and for coordinating the varying timetables of family members. Studies have found that instead of identifying the broader economic and policy context as the source of their difficulties in combining work and (lone) motherhood, mothers tend to see these as problems for which they must find individual solutions (Collins, 2019; Utrata, 2017). We argue that lone mothers working non-standard hours are particularly likely to experience pressures in their efforts to combine family life and work.

Methods

Participants and data collection

The data comprise semi-structured qualitative interviews collected as part of the "Families 24/7" research project. The study included one-to-one qualitative interviews conducted with 55 Finnish parents with at least one child aged 12 or under[1]. The data for the present study comprise a sub-sample of interviews carried out with 16 lone mothers. The average age of the lone mothers was 37 years, ranging from 22 to 52 years. The mothers were defined as lone mothers if they did not have a residential partner and bore the primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of their child or children and for the reconciliation of work and family life. The roles of the fathers in their children's lives varied. In nine cases, the father was not at all involved in the child's life due to bereavement of the father, a geographical distance or other reasons. At the other end were two families in which the parents had made weekly rotating living arrangements so that the child(ren) lived one week with the mother and one week with the father, and in two families the children saw their fathers on daily basis (but did not necessarily spend the nights in the father's home). Many mothers received help with childcare from the children's grandparents but the frequency of this help varied from occasional assistance (e.g., holidays) to a more frequent everyday assistance and taking care of sick children. Only two lone mothers did not receive any help with childcare from the child's father or grandparents. Furthermore, in Finland, non-residential parents are liable for paying child support, which is paid by The Social Insurance Institution in case the non-residential parent does not pay for it. The allowance, however, is marginal and allocated mainly to cover basic living costs. As a result, lone mothers may struggle to get by financially without income received from paid employment.

We gained informed consent from the participants. The interviews were tape-recorded, and conducted in the homes or workplaces of the participants, or in public places, such as cafes. The

interviews encompassed themes such as the mother's work and working times, childcare arrangements, everyday family life, motherhood and the wellbeing of the mother and the child. Because not all of the mothers could easily be categorized in terms of social class, we distinguish between two groups of mothers based on their educational background and occupation. Eleven mothers had attained secondary education through vocational training and were mostly employed in low-paid occupations in health, service, and industrial sectors, many of them working in rotating shifts (see Table 1). Four mothers had completed first stage tertiary education and they worked in various sectors representing different non-standard working time patterns.

'Table 1 here'

Data analysis

After transcribing the interviews, we first searched for instances where the mothers discussed their perceptions of the connections between their work during non-standard hours and child wellbeing, and observed that such talk was often filled with concern or worry. In such 'worry talk', the mothers constructed their working during non-standard hours primarily as *problematic* in terms of child wellbeing (Juhila, 2012). It is noteworthy, however, that in general, they characterised their children and their family life as happy, joyful, and in many ways fulfilling. Second, the mothers were found to offer explanations for their working. These observations led us to focus our analysis on *accounts*, that is, statements with which the mothers rationalized their work during non-standard hours in order to explain their seemingly problematic behaviour (Scott and Lyman, 1968). Because the analysis focused on accounts in relation to child wellbeing within the context of non-standard working hours, other aspects (e.g., the mothers' own enjoyment of work) were excluded from the final analysis. Furthermore, instead of providing accounts as a response to direct questions, the mothers produced accounts spontaneously in the interview. This can be seen as a potential

limitation or strength of the study as on one hand, the accounts did not emerge as responses to accusations or blame occurring in a natural real-life setting. On the other hand, the interview situation allowed the mothers to actively construct and formulate themselves what they deemed to be viewed as problematic. (see Buttny, 1993; Juhila, 2012.)

After having identified the accounts, we categorized them, following Scott and Lyman's (1968) typology, into 'excusing' and 'justifying' accounts. What distinguished these two categories from each other was who or what the mothers saw as responsible for their non-standard working hours. Excusing accounts were ones where the mother admitted the detrimental nature of her working times but placed the ultimate responsibility for these to some external actor (e.g., employer) or matter (e.g., family's economic situation). In justifying accounts, the mother accepted the responsibility for her work hours but denied their damaging nature. During the coding process, we came across several accounts that did not entirely fit in either of the two categories. Therefore, we extended the analytical frame of Scott and Lyman with a third category of account, which we have called defending accounts (see Buttny, 1993) in which the mother acknowledged the possibility of risk to child wellbeing and took responsibility for it while striving to defend herself as a mother by demonstrating that she prioritized child wellbeing.

Finally, we further nuanced our analysis by focusing on the linguistic features of the talk, specifically modality. Modality refers to the mothers' expressions illuminating the perceived obligations and necessities (e.g., should / need to / have to), possibilities and abilities (e.g., can / could), or volition (e.g., will / would) (Biber and Quirk, 1999) in relation to work and mothering. This analysis resulted in four types of account that we discuss below. All of the interviews, transcription and data analysis were carried out in Finnish. The data extracts in this paper were translated into English by the authors.

Findings

Worry talk and encountered criticism as indicators of the problematic

When talking about the relationship between their working times and child wellbeing, all but two of the lone mothers expressed an awareness of the perceived risks that their non-standard working hours posed to the wellbeing of their child(ren). Although they also mentioned positive effects of their working times on their children's wellbeing, the mothers' concern was palpable, with some even talking about their children suffering as a result of maternal working times.

> '[E]vening shifts are nice, but it is a long time for the child to spend in day-and-night care. And then he is really over-tired. And then he won't fall asleep immediately after we get home.' (Iris)

> 'The only time I don't sleep well is [when] I start to stress about my [two-year-old], about how hard it is for him. If he doesn't go nicely to bed in the evening, [I mean] help, [he needs to] get up at 6am; how will he manage all day.' (Amanda)

The two quotes above are representative of the 'worry talk' among mothers of under school-aged children found in our data. Iris refers to her child's tiredness and long childcare hours resulting from her work hours. Amanda voices a concern that was typical for mothers working in rotating shifts, namely that consecutive evening-morning shifts would disturb the stability of their children's everyday rhythms. Other descriptions included worry over the lack of family time and young children's exhaustion, feelings of insecurity, pining, tearfulness and restlessness that resulted from irregular everyday rhythms along with concerns over school-aged children being at home without adult supervision.

Such worry over the wellbeing of their children aroused feelings of insufficiency and guilt in the mothers. These negative feelings may result from an awareness of their actions running against the expectations they themselves or others have of them as mothers. Indeed, some mothers, exemplified by Emma's comment at the beginning of this paper, had encountered explicit criticism or had sensed a critical attitude from their surroundings concerning the perceived risk to child wellbeing posed by their working times, in combination with their status as lone mother. It is thus clear that the mothers in our study were aware of contravening key aspects of good motherhood and thus of the potential that their children's wellbeing was being put at risk. Accordingly, we interpret such worry talk as reflecting the mothers' view that their actions deviated from the moral order of good motherhood (Buttny, 1993; Juhila, 2012).

Ways of accounting for working

The mothers produced four types of account in rationalizing their work during non-standard hours: (1) excusing work during non-standard hours as an external demand; (2) appealing to the inability to act according to good mothering ideals; (3) using adaptive strategies to protect child wellbeing; and (4) challenging the idea of risk. The complexity of the demands attached to mothering was reflected in the fact that most of the mothers produced all four types of account.

Excusing work during non-standard hours as an external demand

In the first type of account, the mothers excused work during non-standard hours by appealing to external demands as the reason for why they worked such hours. This gave the mothers a chance to relieve themselves of the responsibility for their seemingly questionable conduct (Scott and Lyman, 1968). They used expressions that highlighted obligation or necessity for working non-standard hours, which indicated the mothers' lack of control over the decision about whether or not to work such hours. Although most of the mothers talked about the personal benefits gained from work (see

Hakovirta, 2006; May, 2011), when discussed in the context of child wellbeing and family life, work during non-standard hours was often referred to as *a must* instead of a choice. Several mothers, such as Ella, described their work during non-standard hours as an economic necessity:

> 'At some point, when I was really tired with this job, I thought that […] I would reduce my hours, […] for the family. I haven't done it because there is the financial aspect to it. I have to think about how to get bread on the table.' (Ella)

When asked whether they would choose other working time patterns if possible, some mothers said they would, and some were even studying alongside work so as to one day be able to work during standard hours which would ease their everyday family life (see Alsarve, 2017). Others appealed to their obligations as the sole breadwinner. Even if more 'family friendly' working time arrangements were available, economic necessity forced the mothers to work 'family unfriendly' hours which were better remunerated.

Jessica, a lone mother of a two-year-old, explained that due to financial reasons, she had to return to work as soon as her son learned to walk. This indicates that for some lone mothers it would be a struggle to get by financially as a stay-home mother by means of the child home care allowance. As research has shown, lone mothers who rely on the child home care allowance face real risks of falling below the margins of poverty (Krok, 2009). Therefore, mothers may feel they have to accept any job that is available. Although the mothers indicated their willingness to work (see Hakovirta, 2006), they did not necessarily have the luxury to choose when or where to work. Both mothers with lower and higher educational background experienced difficulties in combining working times and what the mothers perceived as the ideal kind of mothering (see Roman, 2018). Whereas mothers working in low-income occupations were likely to ascribe this to the lack of financial freedom to choose their working times, for mothers with a higher educational background

it was more often either the heavy workload or the work time demands originating for the nature of their work that created these difficulties.

There was also talk about a need for the mothers to adapt themselves and their family lives to the demands of the labour market. Many mothers said that family life had to accommodate working times, not vice versa. The mothers further rationalized their working hours by appealing to some external actor, for example, 'employer' or 'society' requiring them to work. Amanda identified a paradox faced by Finnish mothers who must try to square the circle of conflicting expectations: "*On one hand mothers are encouraged to immediately start work [after parental leave] and on the other, one should be there, at home*." As noted above, this paradox is partly caused by contradictory family policy measures, which tend to support either mothers' full-time work or full-time motherhood. This can create a particular pressure for lone mothers, who have to navigate between these contradictory demands, often in combination with financial stress.

Appealing to the inability to act according to good mothering ideals

In the second type of account, the mothers defended themselves against anticipated criticism by highlighting that their *intentions* to prioritize their child's needs conformed to what is expected of good mothers and by emphasizing their *inability* to act according to these good intentions due to their working times. Ribbens McCarthy et al (2000) note that intentions alone are indicators of mothers caring for their children, and reflections of their moral character (also Buttny, 1993). While expressing their aim to maintain child wellbeing, the mothers blamed their working times as posing challenges to their ability to perform good mothering:

> 'We always try to eat dinner together, but I don't necessarily manage to do that. So, the children are there [at home] eating with somebody, and I am not necessarily there. But we have tried to maintain proper meal times and morning routines, of course.' (Anna)

Anna illustrates that despite her efforts to have dinner with her school-aged children, this is not always possible because of her working hours. Despite her absence from family dinners, she assures that she has at least tried to ensure 'proper' meal times for her children. Although unable to perform motherhood to desired standards, the mothers used moral language attached to motherhood as a way of demonstrating their sense of responsibility for their children. In stating what they as mothers 'should' do, they were displaying their knowledge of the cultural expectations attached to good motherhood:

> 'I guess it's the feeling of insufficiency. Just that you are supposed to be good at your work, and good at home, to be present and to listen. That you should feel up to be interested in everything, support, and teach, be an example, and also take care of your own well-being. Yeah, really good phrases! It is the balancing between everything that is a constant challenge. Just that when I have hundreds of things going on in my mind, and he is drawing something lovely there beside you, and you should be present.' (Helena)

Helena's comment illustrates how the expectations the mothers attached to good mothering were often in conflict with their work-related responsibilities, consequently giving rise to feelings of insufficiency or guilt. Such conflicts between expectations and reality were also depicted when the mothers of young children talked about their preferences to stay at home by using the expression 'would rather', by which they highlighted that they valued their roles as mothers above that of workers, as demonstrated by Marianne:

> 'Perhaps the challenges [are], when you are working in the evening and you know, for example, my parents are there [at home] with him, and my mother sometimes says that he

asks, when is mom coming home, so I feel a bit sad being at work; I would rather be there, at home than here [at work].' (Marianne)

Using adaptive strategies to safeguard child wellbeing

The third type of account, which was the most frequent, referred to by all of the mothers, emphasized the value that the mothers placed on their families. In contrast to the second type of account, these accounts highlighted the mothers' *abilities* and success in implementing their intentions to prioritise their children's needs and thereby acting according to good mothering expectations despite their working hours. Indeed, the focus lay on the *adaptive strategies* that the mothers had actively implemented, thereby demonstrating that they had done their best in compensating for or countering any risk posed to their children's wellbeing by their working hours.

The 'moral imperative' of parenthood was echoed in such talk, as the mothers prioritized their children and motherhood above work (see Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2000: 789). Prioritizing the child was often voiced through strong volition:

'The thing with lone parenting is that when I am not working, I make sure that I'm with my child. […] He spends some of my working days with his father, and so then he naturally spends my days off with me. And if I have those days off, I do want to spend them with my child. I don't want to go anywhere, like to a bar, because I don't feel the need to do that.' (Jessica)

The mothers demonstrated in several ways how they actively sought to put the needs of the children first. The mothers had often made 'trade-offs' to prioritize their children's needs and time spent with them ahead of their personal time, sleep, and housework or over paid work and money (see Damaske, 2011).

Possible risks posed by non-standard working times to child wellbeing were offset by being responsive to the children's needs (see Johnston and Swanson, 2006), for instance, by creating a stable family environment (see Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2000). For the mothers of young children this, for example, meant maintaining regular routines for the children, as exemplified by Julia: "*When the children are with me, we stick to a regular schedule because of my work, for one thing.*" In accordance with the expectations of good working mothers (Hays, 1996), the mothers also assured that they had ascertained that they left their children in the care of skilful caregivers: "*I am just that kind of a protective mother in that I leave my children in the hands of trustworthy [childcare] professionals*" (Iris). Most of the mothers could also rely on their social networks, mainly the grandparents and in some cases the father, for childcare. Four mothers of young children talked about how this help reduced the number of hours – especially night-time hours – their children spent in a day-and-night care centre (see Alsarve, 2017).

The mothers tried to further compensate for any potential harm to their children's wellbeing by making changes to their work schedules in favour of family time or maintaining a stable everyday rhythm. For some mothers in low-paid occupations, such measures were enabled by making flexible working time arrangements with employers such as ending an evening shift earlier, working fewer evening shifts, not working night shifts, and not having consecutive evening-morning shifts:

> 'I have requested a shift pattern that would avoid evening shifts followed by morning shifts. For the sake of my youngest alone, so that he wouldn't have to spend such a long time in childcare.' (Amanda)

Flexibility was clearly an important means by which these mothers could successfully reconcile work and family. Nevertheless, one of the more highly educated mothers, Helena, although able to

determine her own working times, faced conflicts between an excessive workload and a lack of time with her child (see Roman, 2018). As a result, she often worked on her laptop while her child was asleep, thus cutting down on her own sleep instead of mother–child time.

The mothers also demonstrated maternal responsiveness through openness and emotional accessibility (see Johnston and Swanson, 2006), that is, by sensing and openly discussing with their children about the children's worries and difficulties, for example in relation to irregular daily rhythms or spending too much time in childcare. By explaining to their children what would happen in the near future, the mothers tried to make any inconsistencies in the structure of everyday life more manageable and predictable for the children.

In addition to flexibility and adaptability, creativity was required in getting the children to school on time when the mothers were working early morning shifts, such as setting an alarm clock to notify the children when it was time to leave. The importance of mobile phones in enabling the mothers to be in contact with their children during work hours was revealed in Laura' reference of them as a 'saving grace'. This shows how mothers, in general, are expected to be accessible at all times, even when working (Johnston and Swanson, 2006). Moreover, some mothers working on evening shifts prepared dinner for their school-aged children beforehand (see Alsarve, 2017) or let the children prepare their own dinner, which usually comprised ready meals heated in the microwave.

Challenging prevailing norms and the idea of risk

The fourth type of account posed a challenge to the normative perception that maternal non-standard working times are automatically detrimental to child wellbeing. The accounts comprised justifications, in that the mothers aimed to assert the positive value of their work during non-standard hours or to neutralize the questionable act of working such hours and their consequences on child wellbeing (Scott and Lyman, 1968). In these cases, morality was displayed by denying or

diminishing the putative harm, instead highlighting how their working hours might benefit their children and contrasting their situation with those who have it worse.

The mothers justified working by denying either completely or partially that their working times posed a risk to their children's wellbeing. This type of justification bears resemblance to what Scott and Lyman (1968: 51) termed 'denial of injury', in that the mothers asserted that their children had not been injured by maternal non-standard working hours or, in cases where the mothers did feel that their working hours possibly had negative consequences for their children, these consequences were presented as trivial. These accounts surfaced, for instance, when the mothers talked about their school-aged children being at home without adult supervision or young children being cared for in a day-and-night care centre – an issue that has aroused some concerned public discussion over child wellbeing (Jallinoja, 2006):

> 'I feel that [my child] is nonetheless relatively balanced despite, if you know what I mean, having to be cared for in day-and-night care.' (Sara)

The above extract from Sara's interview illustrates how on one hand, mothers may express their concern over child wellbeing but on the other, assure that their child is faring well in spite of *having* to be cared for in a day-and-night care centre. By delegating childcare to others and by defining this as not posing harm to children, the mothers were challenging the idea of intensive mothering, which sees maternal caregiving as the best or even only way to ensure good-quality care (see Christopher, 2012). The mothers of young children emphasized the importance of day-and-night care for successful work–family reconciliation and the genuine trust and appreciation they felt towards the professional caregivers. That their children were doing fine in the care of others also offered the mothers a justifiable way to talk about their work as benefitting their own wellbeing, as exemplified by Sara:

> ‘My work is kind of therapy for me. And especially now that I am working in the evening, I don’t need to worry about the children while I’m at work [because] I know that they are in good care.’ (Sara)

Another way the mothers justified that their children were not harmed by being cared for in a day-and-night care centre was by comparing their own and their children’s situation to those who have it worse, thereby diminishing the possible harm caused to their child (see Scott and Lyman, 1968). Below, Jessica compares her actions, that is, only occasionally leaving her 2-year-old in day-and-night care, to those of other lone mothers whose children spend several consecutive nights there:

> ‘There are parents and lone mothers who, for example, work night shifts only or several consecutive night shifts and the child spends several nights in day-and-night care. And then I’ve heard stories about parents working on cruise ships and their children spend a week in childcare. So, I think that [my child] spends relatively little time there.’ (Jessica)

The mothers also presented any risks to child wellbeing as minimal by pointing out that because of their days off following shift work, the children did not spend too many days in day-and-night care in any one month (see Sevón et al, 2017).

The mothers further highlighted the beneficial effects that their working times could have on their children, which was another way to challenge the view that maternal non-standard working times are necessarily detrimental to child wellbeing. Working hours, for example, permitted some of the mothers to spend more time with their children (see Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al, 2016) or encouraged the independence of school-aged children who were given responsibility over housework and preparing their own meals. Emma illustrates how she does not consider her work

during night shifts as injuring her son, who spends the nights that Emma is at work in a day-and-night care centre, but actually as something that enhanced his wellbeing:

> ‘My child doesn’t need me during the night, so I don’t feel that my working hours are in any way harmful. I am always accessible when [he is] awake. I think it is merely positive.’ (Emma)

Emma assures that she is always accessible when her child is awake, something that all of the mothers considered an important factor facilitating child wellbeing. The viewpoint of Emma, that a mother–child-relationship is not developed during the night-time, differs greatly from some of the other mothers, who did not feel comfortable in leaving their children in childcare overnight. Emma is challenging the normative view of family time, according to which mothers and children should sleep at home during the night (Daly, 2001). However, Emma constructs the meaning of maternal accessibility on the basis of her working hours by modifying the mothering expectations to reconcile them with her working times (see Johnston and Swanson, 2006), which helps her to meet the expectations of good mothering.

The mothers voiced how they tried to remain positive by thinking that their children would benefit from the present situation in the future, as exemplified by Jessica:

> ‘My child has had to be extremely flexible from very early on, because he doesn’t have that kind of a rhythm according to which certain things are done at a certain time every day. But maybe it can turn out to his benefit. I have to think that way, because otherwise I would have such a bad conscience.’ (Jessica)

This kind of positive thinking seemed to relieve some of the guilt caused by the feelings of worry over their children, which worked as a kind of absolution and hope for the best.

Discussion

This paper examined how Finnish lone mothers account for their work during non-standard hours in light of child wellbeing. The paper makes an important contribution to the literature concerning definitions of good mothering by exploring how these mothers deal with the paradox between good mothering expectations and work time demands characteristic in 24/7 economies. The experienced paradox was reflected in the worry talk in relation to child wellbeing that nearly all of the mothers produced in their interviews. Echoing findings from research on the effects of maternal non-standard working hours on child wellbeing (e.g., Han and Waldfogel, 2007; Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al, 2016), this worry typically related to irregularity in children's everyday rhythms, long childcare hours, and the inaccessibility of the mother during evenings, nights and weekends, times that are conventionally understood as 'family time' (Daly, 2001). The intensity of the worry talk was an indication that the mothers viewed the relationship between their working hours and child wellbeing as problematic (Juhila, 2012). We argue that this, together with the perceived criticism of or doubt about their capacity to sustain their children's wellbeing, created the necessity for them to offer accounts for their work during non-standard hours. The mothers produced four types of account by excusing and justifying their work hours and defending themselves as responsible mothers (Buttny, 1993; Scott and Lyman, 1968).

The findings showed that the lone mothers defined good mothering in the context of non-standard work hours by largely conforming to the idea of intensive mothering. Conformity surfaced, firstly, through the defending accounts, 'Appealing to the inability to act according to good mothering ideals' and 'Using adaptive strategies to protect child wellbeing', with which the mothers

emphasized the importance of prioritizing the needs of the children (Hays, 1996; Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2000). Although in general, the mothers talked about the personal benefits they gained from work, which can actually be seen as an indication of the mothers challenging the intensive mothering ideal (see Christopher, 2012), when their talk focused on non-standard work hours, work was seen to fit poorly with notions of good mothering. Indeed, several mothers voiced their preferences for either caring for their children full-time at home, working in the daytime or reduced hours. Yet, the excusing accounts showed that these were not feasible options because of the financial pressure in which many of the mothers found themselves as sole earners (see Mukkila et al, 2017; Roman, 2018) and the relative lack of jobs offering standard hours. Instead, the mothers relied on their personal resources (e.g., sleep, time) and adaptability in responding appropriately to the needs of their children, on their social support networks (see Alsarve, 2017; Roman, 2018) and on negotiating flexible hours with their employers in striving to protect child wellbeing while having to work non-standard hours.

Smyth and Craig (2017: 120) note the importance of considering 'how parents' capacity to opt out of intensive parenting ideology is constrained by context'. Indeed, because of their stigmatized status, lone mothers may feel the need to consciously and persistently work on representing themselves as good enough mothers, and to assure their children are doing well (May, 2008, 2011). Furthermore, the perceived risks to children that the mothers associated with their work hours – which mirrored general perception of such risks (see Jallinoja, 2006) – and their ensuing worry over their children's wellbeing might also have encouraged conformity to the cultural ideal of good mothering.

In addition to conforming to good mothering expectations, some of the mothers challenged these expectations by excusing and justifying their work during non-standard hours. The excusing accounts, 'Excusing work during non-standard hours as an external demand', emphasized the financial stress that particularly the mothers working in low-paid occupations were in as sole

earners (see Roman, 2018) and the lack of choice over working hours, both of which can be seen to make these mothers less accountable to the cultural expectations of good mothering (see Christopher, 2012). The situation in which these mothers found themselves possibly highlights the ambivalent stance of Finnish family policy, which tends to support either full-time motherhood or paid work. In reality, due to the low level of financial support offered to full-time mothers in the form of the child home care allowance (Krok, 2009; Repo, 2010), even when combined with legally guaranteed child support from the non-residential parent or child maintenance allowance from the state, many lone mothers may have little choice but to work in order to adequately provide for their children. The justifying accounts, 'Challenging the idea of risk', again, enabled the mothers to justify their work while challenging the normative perception that non-standard working hours or the care offered in day-and-night care centres are harmful to child wellbeing.

Negotiating these contradictions led many of the mothers to express feelings of insufficiency and guilt (see Roman, 2018), indicating that they view the situation as an individual responsibility rather than one caused by broader structures, including the labour market and family policies (see Collins, 2019; Utrata, 2017). This then helps shed light on the pressures that many mothers face in contemporary neo-liberal societies. Consequently, we argue that any study on mothering must take into consideration the structural conditions under which mothers are trying to meet the expectations of good motherhood. We have shown that in the case of lone mothers working non-standard hours, the moral terrain they must traverse is shaped by the ways in which their family situation contravenes powerful ideologies around good mothering and the superiority of the nuclear family, while their efforts to resist the ensuing stigma are constrained by the need to engage in work during non-standard hours as a way of fulfilling another cultural requirement, namely to provide for their children. However, our findings also point to the transformative potential of such negotiations, as some of the mothers in our study challenged dominant cultural expectations by highlighting the positive aspects of their work hours and reassuring that these hours are not harming their children.

In solving the apparent mismatch between their family and work situations and child wellbeing, these mothers are contributing to new cultural accounts of what can constitute good motherhood in the face of social change such as is evident in the emergence of the 24/7 society.

Notes

[1] The "Families 24/7" research project included also a web-based survey administered in Finland, the Netherlands and the UK, which was directed at working parents with at least one child aged 12 years or younger. The parents interviewed for the present study had either participated in the initial survey and expressed their willingness to take part in the one-on-one interviews or were recruited through the Finnish research team's social networks.

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Conflict of interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Table 1: The participants

Pseudonym	Ages of children	Work sector	Working schedules
Katariina	5	Service[S]	Evenings and weekends
Helena	4	Science and environment[T]	Early mornings, evenings, weekends
Julia	5, 6	Service[S]	Three-shift work
Olivia	9, 11, 15, 17	Service[S]	Early mornings, evenings, weekends
Marianne	5	Industrial[S]	Three-shift work
Anna	9, 11	Service[S]	Long shifts (11 to 14 hours)
Linda	5, 6	Service[S] + student	Three-shift work
Ella	8, 11	Art and culture[T]	Weekends, occasional evenings
Laura	8, 16, 16	Health[S]	Two-shift work
Iris	5	Health[S] + student	Two-shift work
Sara	3, 6	Health[S]	Three-shift work
Jessica	2	Health[T]	Three-shift work
Emma	5, 11	Health[S] + student	Only night-time work
Hanna	6	Art and culture[T] + student	Evenings and weekends
Amanda	2, 11, 15, 15	Health[S]	Three-shift work
Paula	< 7	Health[NA]	Two-shift work

Note. [S]Seconday education. [T]First stage of tertiary education. [NA]Educational background not informed.