ORGANIZATIONS AS NETWORK EQUALIZERS?
EMPLOYER-PROVIDED CHILDCARE AND THE LABOR SUPPLY OF WORKING MOTHERS

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Abstract

Reconciling the competing demands of work and family life remains a persistent challenge for workers around the world. Yet, this burden is not shared equally. Women shoulder disproportionate family responsibilities, including caregiving, which can impact their employment outcomes. In this article, we ask whether workplace policies can improve the labor supply of disadvantaged women. First, we use a quasi-experimental research design to gain causal empirical traction on how an organizational-level work-family policy intervention – employer-sponsored childcare – affects women’s daily attendance in an Indian garment factory. Second, we explore heterogeneity in this effect by women’s family-based network support. Our results indicate a strong, positive effect of employer-provided childcare on women’s daily attendance. Additionally, we find that the positive effects of employer-sponsored childcare are concentrated among women whose family-based networks may be less likely to mobilize to provide informal childcare support, indicating that organizational policies can level the playing field for these women. Together, these findings hold theoretical insights for understanding the role of organizational policies as “network equalizers” that can counteract the challenges that arise when one’s social networks do not mobilize resources, while providing novel evidence about an intervention that can improve women’s employment outcomes in the Global South.

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ORGANIZATIONS AS NETWORK EQUALIZERS?
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Reconciling the competing demands of work and family life remains a persistent challenge for workers around the world (Bailyn 2006; Briscoe 2006; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Kelly et al. 2014; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Yet, this burden is not shared equally. Women generally bear heavier loads than men in terms of family responsibilities (Blair-Loy 2003), including caregiving (Bittman and Wajcman 2000) and household labor (Brines 1994), which can limit their employment opportunities or even lead them to leave the labor force altogether (Stone 2007).

In an attempt to address these challenges, a significant body of research has emerged to understand the set of policies and practices that may be able to mitigate the difficulties associated with balancing paid work and family life for women and mothers (e.g., Kelly and Dobbin 1999; Osterman 1995; Pettit and Hook 2005). There is compelling evidence from one set of studies that work-family programs and policies have a positive impact on employees’ well-being as well as their careers (Kelly et al. 2014; Kelly et al. 2011; Moen, Kelly, and Hill 2011). Yet, the positive effects of work-family policies are not universal. Other scholars have found that work-family policies and programs can produce null effects or even result in negative career outcomes for some workers (Briscoe and Kellogg 2011; Kalleberg and Reskin 1995; Glass 2004). Thus, scholarship on the consequences of work-family policies has produced somewhat mixed findings. In some cases, there are positive outcomes, in others cases there are null effects, and in another set of cases there are negative outcomes.

These mixed findings about the effects of work-family policies are particularly salient in the case of employer-provided, on-site childcare. In their review of the literature in this area, for
example, Glass and Estes (1997) write: “On-site child care appears to have little effect on either family or organizational functioning, although a link between employer-provided child care and decreased turnover has been demonstrated. That employer-provided child care does not affect absenteeism, depression, or work-family conflict is somewhat surprising” (p. 306; see also Eby et al. 2005). Although written two decades ago, this summary still describes the state of the literature, leaving open important questions about why scholars tend to find no relationship between employer-provided childcare and worker outcomes. We posit that the null results found in existing scholarship are due to two features of research in this area. First, the extant research on employer-sponsored, on-site childcare is almost entirely correlational in nature, making it possible that various selection processes are biasing the estimates in these studies. Second, scholars often focus on highly heterogeneous groups of workers without necessarily paying attention to key aspects of that variation, which may result in null average effects that obscure heterogeneity in who benefits from employer-provided childcare.

In this article, we address these limitations and advance scholarship in this area. We focus on how employer-sponsored childcare affects a central aspect of women’s labor force participation in India – their daily attendance at work – and use a quasi-experimental research design that provides us with a stronger causal identification strategy than has been utilized by existing research in this area. Our approach enables us to examine the direct relationship between employer-sponsored childcare and women’s daily attendance at work, limiting concerns about selection bias. Additionally, we focus on low-skilled women workers who face myriad disadvantages when it comes to maintaining employment. We pay close attention to heterogeneity in the social support among the women in our study, enabling us to further
investigate the role of organizational interventions for women workers who are particularly
disadvantaged and, thus, likely to benefit from formal organizational support.

In our conceptualization of the effects of employer-sponsored childcare, we believe it is
necessary to account for the complex interplay between formal and informal sources of childcare
support. Childcare – either provided informally through family and friends or formally through a
childcare center or paid in-home services – is a key resource that enables mothers to work.
Existing scholarship tends to highlight the valuable role that women’s family-based networks
play in providing informal childcare assistance, which in turn enables women to work for pay
(Compton and Pollak 2014; Posadas and Vidal-Fernandez 2013). While we agree that social
networks can play an important role in supporting women’s employment, we argue that family-
based social networks – including parents, spouses, relatives, and friends – come with their own
set of challenges and constraints, often due to the preferences, beliefs, and biases of the
individuals in those networks (Aassve, Arpino, and Goisis 2012). Just because one’s network is
available to provide key resources does not mean that they will necessarily mobilize those
resources (Abraham 2015; Smith 2005; Gulati and Srivastava 2014; Kwon and Adler 2014).
Specifically, we posit that whether one’s network mobilizes supportive resources may vary
systematically with attributes of the woman’s family – such as the gender or age of the woman’s
child – resulting in informal childcare support shortages among certain groups of women. When
informal childcare support is either not available or does not mobilize, we argue that formal
sources of support become integral. Organizational policies that are broadly available to a group
of workers – such as employer-sponsored childcare – may level the playing field for women
whose family-based networks are less likely to mobilize and provide informal childcare support.
In this paper, we draw on data from a large garment factory in India and compare the daily attendance of the same women workers before and after they obtain access to the on-site childcare center, where the timing of receiving access varies for different women and is quasi-exogenous. Additionally, we explore heterogeneity in the effects of employer-sponsored childcare among women by the nature of their family-based network support. While balancing work and family obligations is challenging for women in the Global South (Rajadhyaksha 2012), this population has received less attention from scholars of work-family policy, who generally focus on advanced industrialized countries (c.f., Berlinks and Galiani 2007) and the experiences of professional women (c.f., Damaske 2011; c.f. Clark, Laszlo, Kabiru, and Muthuri 2017). Yet, employment in the formal economy can play an important role in women’s empowerment and the reduction of poverty outside of the advanced industrialized world (Villarreal and Yu 2007). And, women have entered the paid labor force in large numbers over the past decades, increasing the salience of work-family conflict in many countries, including India (Ranganathan 2017; Ramadoss 2013; Stock, Strecker, and Bieling 2016; Walia 2014). Therefore, an investigation of work-family policies among low-skilled Indian women has consequences not only for broadening our understanding of the effects of organizational work-family interventions, but also for crafting social policies to promote development and gender equality for disadvantaged women in the Global South (Poster and Prasad 2005).

In addition to focusing on a population that has received less attention in the literature, our findings make two other primary contributions to research on gender and work-family policies. First, while the literature has been largely correlational and has offered mixed evidence about the effect of work-family policies and programs – particularly childcare – on women’s employment outcomes, we causally demonstrate that employer-sponsored childcare has a
positive and significant effect on women’s daily attendance in India. Second, for the first time in the literature, to our knowledge, we explore the relationship between formal and informal childcare support and show that organizations can act as “network equalizers.” Specifically, by providing childcare for women with daughters and women with young children – for whom family-based networks are less willing to mobilize in India – organizations can equalize the employment outcomes of these women. Our findings also contribute to research on social network support by showing that the mobilization of network resources cannot be assumed for informal childcare support. In this way, our paper brings a network mobilization perspective to the study of gender and work-family policies.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we build on existing research on the relationship between work-family policies and women’s career outcomes, with an emphasis on the consequences of childcare policies. Next, we discuss our theoretical argument about the role that workplace organizations can play in reducing inequality by serving as substitutes for women’s family-based networks when those networks do not mobilize to provide informal childcare support. We then discuss our data, methods and results. Finally, we conclude by discussing the ways that our findings hold theoretical insights for the understanding of social network support, gender inequality, and work-family policies, while at the same time providing novel evidence about an organizational intervention that can bolster economic security and reduce poverty in the Global South by improving women’s employment outcomes.

WORK-FAMILY POLICIES AND WOMEN’S CAREER OUTCOMES

The time-consuming labor of caring for children and managing a household falls disproportionately on women in many areas of the world. The implicit and explicit demands for
women’s labor at home can make it difficult for women, and particularly mothers, to participate in the labor force (Pettit and Hook 2005; Gornick and Meyers 2003). Even if women are able to work in the paid labor market, broad expectations that they will continue to do the bulk of the childcare and housework can have negative consequences for getting a new job, pose challenges to career advancement, and make it difficult for mothers to maintain their employment altogether (Correll et al. 2007; Stone 2007; Shafer 2011).

The challenges with navigating work and family life have garnered much scholarly attention. Many studies have focused on the consequences of government-based work-family policies (e.g., Pettit and Hook 2005; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Lefebvre, Merrigan, and Verstraete 2009; Havnes and Mogstad 2011). However, workplace organizations – our focus – are also key actors that can implement work-family policies to support their employees (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Kossek et al. 2011). And, while early work in this area was largely correlational, recent scholarship has started to demonstrate how organizational policies can directly affect the challenges of balancing work and family life (Moen et al. 2016). Kelly et al. (2014), for example, examine whether training supervisors about valuing the personal lives of their employees, and helping workers to consider when and where they work, affects the work-family interface. They find evidence that this intervention increased schedule control for workers, improved perceptions of supervisor support for family and personal life, and reduced work-family conflict (Kelly et al. 2014). In a separate intervention, Kelly, Moen, and Tranby (2011) examine the consequences of shifting an organizational culture towards a set of norms with flexibility regarding when and where employees work as long as the work is completed. They find strong evidence that this intervention reduces work-family conflict, which holds strong implications for gender inequality at work and at home (Kelly et al. 2011). Work-family
programs that enhance work-time control and flexibility have also been shown to reduce employee turnover in general (Moen, Kelly, and Hill 2011) and especially when program users are initially assigned to powerful supervisors (Briscoe and Kellogg 2011).

Yet, organizational policies do not universally result in more positive outcomes for women’s careers. Glass (2004), for example, finds evidence that the use of employer-sponsored work-family policies is associated with weaker wage growth for women, even after controlling for productivity-related characteristics. Indeed, in a review of the literature, Sutton and Noe (2005) conclude that there are limited (or even negative) associations between work-family policies and programs and various worker outcomes such as promotions and retention. In an earlier review, Glass and Estes (1997) articulate that there is a complex set of empirical associations between work-family policies and various outcomes for workers, families, and organizations, such as productivity, turnover, absenteeism, and work-family conflict. Together, this literature suggests that the links between employer-provided work-family policies and the outcomes of workers – including mothers – are mixed.

What do we know specifically about the role of employer-based childcare interventions in supporting women’s careers, including their labor supply? As noted earlier, the extant scholarship on the connection between childcare support and employees’ outcomes, including the labor supply of working mothers, has produced conflicting findings (Glass and Estes 1997; Eby et al. 2005). Some studies find positive effects of employer-sponsored childcare, while others find null effects (Goff, Mount, and Jamison 1990; Feierabend and Steffelbach 2016; Hipp, Morrissey, and Warner 2017; Thomas and Ganster 1995).

In terms of positive associations, Casper and Harris (2008) find that both the availability of dependent care policies at work (including on-site childcare) and the actual use of those
policies shape organizational attachment (see also Feierabend and Staffelbach 2016). Additionally, Lee and Hong (2011) find that employer-based childcare subsidies are negatively correlated with employee turnover. By contrast, a separate line of scholarship in this area finds that employer childcare policies may not be associated with employees’ outcomes. Kossek and Nichol (1992), for example, find no direct association between childcare center use and absenteeism, our outcome of interest. Similarly, Goff, Mount, and Jamison (1990) find no evidence that use of a workplace childcare center impacts the work-family conflict or absenteeism of working parents. Indeed, in their review of the literature, Eby et al. (2005) write: “Interestingly, research has consistently failed to find a direct relationship between the use of on-site childcare and absenteeism” (p. 152, see also Miller [1984]).

The aforementioned evidence paints a complicated picture about the connections between supportive work-family policies, women’s employment, and balancing employment and family life. When structured in certain ways, work-family policies appear to improve the labor market outcomes of women and reduce work-family conflict. However, these effects are not universal and depend on the design of the policy and the context within which the policy is implemented. Additionally, we note that while important scholarship exists in this area, the body of research on identifying the causal effects of organization-based work-family policies is more nascent. Thus, our focus on identifying causal effects of a work-family policy – employer-sponsored childcare – in an organizational context contributes in important ways to this growing literature.

Effects for Disadvantaged Women

While there is open debate about whether or not supportive childcare policies have a direct effect on women’s labor supply, on average, there is reason to believe that supportive
work-family policies may operate differently across the occupational and skill structure of the labor market. Subsidized or free formal childcare – from either the government or one’s employer – could be particularly beneficial to working-class or non-professional women who often experience employment interruptions due to issues with their informal care networks or a lack of reliability of formal childcare (Gordon, Kaestner and Korenman 2008; Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl 2013). Additionally, for low-wage women, childcare expenses represent a higher proportion of their incomes than they do for higher-wage, professional women (Demaske 2011), making it so they may be particularly responsive to childcare subsidies and other forms of childcare support.

The existing research based on state-level policies (rather than organizational policies) and focused on labor force participation (rather than daily attendance at work) suggests that women who face social disadvantages are particularly responsive to subsidized childcare (see Bainbridge, Meyers, and Waldfogel 2003; Nollenberger and Rodriguez-Planas 2011). For most groups of women, for example, Cascio (2009) finds null effects on women’s labor force participation of access to kindergartens in the United States. However, for single mothers with no additional children under five years old, she finds a positive effect of the kindergarten expansion (Cascio 2009). Similarly, Berger and Black (1992) find that childcare subsidies had a strong positive effect on the probability of employment for low-income single mothers in Kentucky (although, the subsidies did not impact the number of hours they worked) (Berger and Black 1992). Drawing on evidence from the policy change in Quebec that provided universal access to subsidized childcare, Lefebvre et al. (2009) find the policy increased female labor force participation, but that the effect was driven by women with lower levels of education. Additionally, drawing on data from a randomized study of largely disadvantaged women in a
slum area of Nairobi, Kenya, Clark et al. (2017) find evidence that there are strong positive effects of subsidized early childcare on women’s employment.

Our analysis focuses on the consequences of employer-provided childcare for low-wage female garment factory workers in India, many of whom “earn so little that an entire month’s wages would not buy a single item they produce” (Chamberlain 2012, p. 1). With the growth of garment manufacturing and business process outsourcing, more job opportunities are available for women in the low-skilled labor market. This has likely heightened issues of work-family conflict and led to the need for working mothers to find alternative childcare support (Jatrana 2007). Indeed, there is still significant work to be done to provide the policies necessary to support working families in India, particularly to support working mothers (Rajadhyaksha 2012).

Recent work, however, finds a positive association between on-site childcare and workers’ job satisfaction in India (Stock, Strecker, and Bieling 2016). Additionally, the women in our study have limited education and face a set of important social and economic barriers. In other words, they are disadvantaged workers and, thus, in line with the scholarship discussed above, they may be particularly responsive to supportive childcare policies.¹ Thus, even though the extant literature finds mixed evidence for the effects of childcare on women’s employment outcomes in general, we build on the literature that finds strong effects of these policies for disadvantaged women. This leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Among low-wage working mothers in India, there will be a positive effect of employer-provided childcare on their daily attendance at work.

¹ Given that our data are limited to low-wage female workers, we are not able to empirically investigate whether there are differences in the effects of employer-provided childcare between women who are more and less advantaged in terms of skill, education, or occupation.
**Organizations as Network Equalizers?**

Extant research tends to emphasize the ways that organizations can reduce ascriptive inequalities through changing behavior *within* organizations (Dobbin, Schrage, and Kalev 2015; Edelman and Petterson 1999; Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly 2006). In this article, we shift the focus of our attention to the ways that organizational policies can increase equality by supporting employees who face work-family network constraints *outside* of the workplace. To develop this argument, we draw on the literature on social network access versus social network mobilization.

**Network Access versus Network Mobilization**

Simply because one has access to a person with resources in their social network does not mean that resources will be mobilized by that person, often referred to as an “alter” (Lin 2000). In other words, for benefits to accrue from informal social networks, access is insufficient. Mobilization is also necessary. Scholars of networks and social capital have paid close attention to this distinction between network access and network mobilization in order to better understand the ways that network-based social resources impact various outcomes (Smith 2005; Marin 2012; Abraham 2015; Gulati and Srivastava 2014; Kwon and Adler 2014).

Much of scholarship in this area has focused on the role that social networks play in the job search process. Conditional on having access to social network resources, network members can either increase job seekers’ likelihood of positive outcomes through their behavior or constrain a job seekers’ opportunities by withholding key resources. Thus, in the job search context, recent scholarship has been careful to distinguish between access to social networks and the mobilization of resources by those networks (Smith 2005; Marin 2012). Even when social
network support is technically available, scholars find that the alters in one’s network may not mobilize the relevant resources.

One of the key mechanisms that may lead to a lack of mobilization of network resources in the job search context is the reputational concerns of the network alter (Smith 2005; Marin 2012). For example, a network alter may be concerned about putting in a good word with their employer for an individual because this act may put them in a difficult position with their employer if the person they refer is hired and then does not turn out to be a good employee. Beyond reputational concerns, another potential mechanism that may produce differences in how likely a network alter is to mobilize resources is their level of bias. If a network alter is biased toward a sub-group of the people in their network, they may selectively mobilize resources for those toward whom they are not biased and provide limited resource mobilization for those whom they are biased against.² Indeed, there is evidence in the U.S. context that black job seekers are less likely than similar white job seekers to have their networks mobilize resources on their behalf during the job search process (Royster 2003; McDonald 2011). Racial bias is a potential mechanism that may assist in explaining these findings.

We argue that this underlying social process – whereby the biases or preferences of social network members produce differential willingness to mobilize supportive resources – exists not only in the case of the job search, but also in terms of the ways that family-based networks support the ability of mothers to attend to their jobs. Existing scholarship on the role of social networks in providing childcare generally paints an optimistic picture of the role of these network ties in various countries, including in India where grandparents provide significant

² Issues around bias may extend beyond the network alter him or herself. If the network alter suspects that relevant third parties – for example, the person with whom a network alter would connect someone – is biased, this may also limit mobilization of resources. Abraham (2015) refers to this concept as “anticipatory third-party bias.”
informal childcare support (Arpino, Pronzato, and Tavares 2014; Stoloff, Glanville, and Bienenstock 1999; Compton and Pollak 2014; Husain and Dutta 2015). And, certainly, as this research has documented, social support can play a pivotal role in enabling mothers to work. Yet, family-based social networks can also play a constraining role due to their size, the other demands faced by nodes in the network, or the beliefs and attitudes of network members. Indeed, one’s family-based networks are not insulated from the set of norms, expectations, and biases that infuse the broader social order with regards to gender, race, and other dimensions of life (Ghysels 2011; Aassve, Arpino, and Goisis 2012). Thus, they may be more or less likely to mobilize supportive resources depending on their own preferences and how those preferences relate to characteristics of the mother and her family.

In our case, we posit that network mobilization to provide informal childcare support may vary with the preferences of the individuals in a woman’s network (Ghysels 2011; Aassve, Arpino, and Goisis 2012). Our study is focused on women who are already working and, thus, have childcare arrangements that enable them to participate in the labor force. Yet, even when women have childcare arrangements, those services may be unavailable on certain days (Gordon et al. 2008), requiring women to figure out alternative childcare arrangements in these cases. Many of the women in our study use informal, neighborhood-based childcare centers before gaining access to the employer-provide childcare center. However, these centers can be unreliable. And, when a child is sick – a central challenge for mothers with paid employment (Maume 2008; Gerstel and Clawson 2014) – they may not be able to go to their neighborhood-based childcare facility. In these cases, as well as others, women may need to rely on their family-based networks for childcare support. Insofar as the people within those networks are less
willing to care for particular types of children, women will be differentially able to attend work depending on those characteristics of their child.

By contrast, employer-sponsored childcare centers do not discriminate in who they care for. As long as the child is qualified to participate in the program, the attributes of the child will not impact whether they can attend the childcare center. And, in our case, women are able to bring their children to the employer-based childcare center even if the child is sick, in part due to the availability of on-site healthcare services. Additionally, employer-provided childcare may be more reliable than informal neighborhood-based care because the employer is likely to lose money if its workers are unable to come to work due to childcare center issues. Thus, women’s attendance at work may be more responsive to employer-sponsored childcare in the cases where women’s social networks are less likely to mobilize. We focus on two characteristics that may limit a woman’s social network’s willingness to provide informal childcare support: the gender of a worker’s child and the age of a worker’s child.

Below, we discuss each type of variation and the potential effects it may have for how women will respond to employer-sponsored childcare. Importantly, our broader theoretical argument centers on the ways that organizations can mitigate the obstacles workers face in mobilizing their support networks and, thus, our findings have implications for understanding network support, work-family conflict, and women’s employment outside of the Indian context. Thus, even though the aspects of a woman or her family that may shape levels of informal support are likely to vary between social contexts, a similar underlying process is likely to occur. In the United States context, for example, family-based networks may be less likely to mobilize for women who have children with severe medical needs or disabilities. Our focus on child
gender and child age therefore illustrates the broader ways that the limitations of family-based networks can be overcome by formal organizational interventions.

**When Social Networks May Not Mobilize: The Role of Child Gender and Age**

**Child Gender.** Having a girl, rather than a boy, may limit the willingness of a woman’s family-based social network to provide informal childcare support in India, where there is a well-documented “son preference” (Arnold, Choe, and Roy 1998; Clark 2000; Das Gupta et al. 2003; Pande and Astone 2007). Evidence for “son preferences” is found in a broad array of empirical literature. Son preferences manifest themselves in multiple ways throughout Indian society in terms of the resources that are allocated to sons versus daughters. For example, Jayachandran and Pande (2017) write: “… the Indian firstborn height advantage [a key marker of nutritional investments] only exists for sons, and the drop-off varies with siblings’ gender … in ways consistent with the hope for a male heir determining Indian parents’ fertility decisions and their allocation of resources among their children” (p. 1). There is also evidence that boys receive more childcare time from parents than girls (Barcellos, Carvalho, and Lleras-Muney 2014) and even that child mortality rates for girls significantly exceed child mortality rates for boys (Arnold et al. 1998). We are by no means arguing that it is worse to have a girl than a boy. Rather, we are suggesting the social structure that exists around the gender of a child may lead to additional challenges for women who have girls compared to women who have boys, in part because of the preferences and biases that exist in their family-based networks.

These “son preferences” are likely to intersect in important ways with women’s ability to mobilize their family-based networks to provide childcare support. Insofar as these gender preferences infuse women’s family-based networks, spouses, parents, and other relatives may be
more likely to provide informal childcare support when it is needed for sons than daughters.

Thus, family-based networks may enable mothers with sons to attend work when their regular childcare arrangement is unavailable. This same support may not be available for women with daughters. Thus, women with girls may be more responsive to employer-provided childcare than women with boys. We therefore posit:

**Hypothesis 2a:** Among low-wage working mothers in India, employer-provided childcare will have a stronger positive effect on daily attendance for those with daughters than for those with sons.

We expect that the gender of the child may shape women’s responsiveness to employer-provided childcare due to the preferences of her family-based networks. Specifically, we argue that women’s networks may be less likely to mobilize informal childcare support for boys than girls.

To test this proposed mechanism, we analyze whether the predicted gender-of-child differences exist among two subgroups of women in our analysis: 1) those with family-based networks (specifically, a woman’s spouse or parents) residing in their house, versus 2) those without family-based networks in their home. If the network-based mechanism is accurate, the moderating effect of child gender on the effect of employer-sponsored childcare will be concentrated among those women who have access to family-based networks (e.g., have family-based networks in their home). Specifically, we articulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2b:** Among low-wage working mothers in India, the moderating effect of a child’s gender on the relationship between employer-provided childcare and daily attendance will only exist when a working mother’s spouse or parents are present in the household.

**Child Age.** A second factor that may shape the willingness of women’s family-based networks to provide informal childcare – and, in turn, impact her responsiveness to employer-provided childcare – is the age of her child. In many contexts, including parts of India (Desai 1994), strong normative pressures exist for women with young children to take time out of the
labor force (Aassve, Arpino, and Goisis 2012; Bergemann and Riphahn 2015). Thus, the women in our study – all of whom are working – may face disapproval from their families if they have young children. In these cases, there may be more hesitancy from the woman’s family-based network to provide childcare support for a young child if they believe that the mother should stay home with young children. Thus, women with young children may have more challenges showing up to work each day than women with older children if spouses, parents, and relatives are more hesitant to care for young children when that is needed. Therefore, we generate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3a:** Among low-wage working mothers in India, employer-provided childcare will have a stronger positive effect on daily attendance for those with younger children than for those with older children.

Similar to the heterogeneity by child gender, we expect that women’s responsiveness to employer-sponsored childcare may differ by the age of her child due to the preferences of her social networks. Family members may be less willing to care for younger children than older children when impromptu childcare is needed. To gain empirical traction on this network mechanism, we examine the differential effects of employer-sponsored childcare by child age for women who do and do not have family-based social networks (again, a woman’s spouse or parents) living in their home. If our proposed mechanism is correct, we expect that the moderating effects of child age will be concentrated among the women with family-based networks present. Therefore, we posit:

**Hypothesis 3b:** Among low-wage working mothers in India, the moderating effect of a child’s age on the relationship between employer-provided childcare and daily attendance will only exist when a working mother’s spouse or parents are present in the household.

Below, we describe our data and methods, empirically test our set of hypotheses, and then discuss the implications of our findings.
DATA AND METHODS

Setting

To evaluate the predictions developed in the previous section, we obtained access to a large garment factory in India employing over 1,800 women in low-skilled jobs. The factory we studied was established in 2001 and is located in the outskirts of the southern Indian city of Bangalore. The factory specializes in producing menswear, primarily trousers and jackets, and produces on average 100,000 trousers and 50,000 jackets per month.

In India, by way of background, the labor force participation rate for working age women was 31% in 2011-2012 according to the National Sample Survey Office (Andres et al. 2017). Importantly, nearly 20 million Indian women are reported to have left the workforce between 2004-2005 and 2011-2012. And, leaving the labor force was concentrated among young women (between the ages of 15 and 24) who were living in villages and likely working in low-wage jobs (Andres et al. 2017). Therefore, studying the role of organizational work-family interventions on female labor supply in our particular context is especially important.

The factory we study provides employer-sponsored childcare to its workers through an on-site childcare facility. Providing such childcare services is not uncommon in India as the Factories Act of 1948, a key piece of legislation in India’s employment law, mandates that

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3 Note that even though the factory employs more than 1,800 women, only a subset of women are likely in need of employer-provided childcare. Rough estimates suggest that about half of the women employed by the factory have children who live with them (the other half do not have children or have children who have already left home). Further, out of the roughly 900 women with dependent children, we estimate that about a third have young children under the age of 6. Thus, our estimates suggest that the childcare center is likely a useful resource for about 300 employees.
manufacturing facilities employing more than 30 women provide “a suitable room or rooms for the use of children under the age of six years.” That being said, compliance with the law is subject to interpretation. Some factories designate a room on their premises for a childcare facility, but do not create an environment conducive to the care of children and, as such, there are no children in attendance. Other factories, by contrast, have functional childcare facilities but do not have enough space to accommodate all children whose parents would like to use this service (Ray 2017).

The childcare center in this factory is housed in an administrative building on the factory premises, a short walk away from the shop floor. Mothers are allowed to visit their children during their work breaks. The childcare center is run by two women trained in the care of children and infants. The brightly painted and mural-decorated childcare center consists of two rooms and a washroom. The first, a “sleeping” room, stocks a row of cots and cradles for the children, while the second, a “learning and play” room, has a blackboard, some educational material and toys. The factory also provides for the children’s food and health needs: the factory canteen prepares breakfast, a mid-day lunch and an afternoon snack for the children in the childcare center. Additionally, the factory’s resident nurse treats children when they become sick and also conducts regular health checkups of all the children in the childcare center. Of note is that workers are not charged for using the childcare center and the accompanying meals and healthcare services for their children are also provided free of cost.4

Interviews with working mothers at the factory indicate that they are pleased with the quality of care in the childcare center. However, despite being a desirable employee benefit for

4 In the United States, by contrast, employer-sponsored childcare is often not free, although it is sometimes subsidized modestly. However, it still provides workers with childcare that is generally high quality and convenient.
mothers with young children, women at the factory do not receive immediate access to the on-site childcare facility because the childcare center has limited capacity – the facility can accommodate a maximum of one hundred children at any given time. Therefore, working mothers desiring childcare services put their names on a waitlist maintained by the factory’s Human Resources department. When a vacancy in the childcare center opens, the worker at the top of the waitlist is offered the opportunity to enroll her child in the childcare center. The timing of such vacancies is hard to anticipate given the generally high level of satisfaction with the quality of childcare. Further, our interviews suggest that when access to the childcare center is offered to a mother who had earlier put her name on the waitlist, she rarely declines using the childcare services.

**Data and Identification Strategy**

In this setting, we obtained access to three sources of data maintained by the factory in order to investigate our key research questions about the effect of employer-sponsored childcare on working mothers’ labor supply. The sources of data include: 1) the factory’s childcare center records, 2) data on the daily attendance of each worker, and 3) data on workers’ demographic and family characteristics. Using these sources, we constructed a dataset at the worker-date level tracking the daily attendance of 160 working mothers between April 2012 and January 2016, where every worker in the sample used the childcare center for some amount of time in our observation period. All of the workers we study are employed in full-time positions.

The factory’s childcare center records allowed us to construct our sample of 160 workers by providing us details on when workers received access to the childcare center as well as basic descriptive characteristics of the children in the childcare center. The attendance records tracked
whether a given worker was present on a particular date, thereby serving as our measure of working mothers’ labor supply. Finally, we also obtained some data on worker characteristics, such as their per day wage, marital status, and household composition, which we merged into our dataset to facilitate an investigation of the economic implications of our findings and mechanisms underlying our key results. These data on worker characteristics were collected by the factory through a survey conducted at the time women entered the organization. However, the survey was administered unevenly by officers at the factory, resulting in some missing data.\(^5\) While efforts were made to obtain all data for all women in our sample, this was not always possible. Thus, some analyses are limited to a subsample of women for whom we were able to obtain the relevant data.

In order to causally identify the impact of employer-sponsored childcare on working mothers’ labor supply, we exploit two key features of our setting and data. First, working mothers in the factory gain access to the on-site childcare center at different points in time, and the timing of receiving access to employer-sponsored childcare is quasi-exogenous since it depends on vacancies at the childcare center. Importantly, given that a worker does not know when a vacancy will open up, she is unlikely to change her attendance behavior in anticipation of getting access to the childcare center.\(^6\) Second, the majority of the women in our sample get access to the childcare center during our observation period, allowing us to track their attendance both before and after they start using the childcare center.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) We note that the women in our sample who were surveyed do not seem to be systematically different from the women who were not surveyed along demographic characteristics available for both groups.

\(^6\) Even if a worker could anticipate when she was going to get access to the childcare center and change her attendance behavior in anticipation, this would likely make our regression estimates conservative.

\(^7\) Our results are robust to dropping the women in the sample who had access to the childcare center during our entire observation period.
Using these two features, we employ a within-person analytic approach to obtain causal identification. We compare the daily attendance patterns of the same women before and after receiving access to the childcare center. This analytic strategy eliminates concerns about cross-sectional differences in observed and unobserved individual worker characteristics, and is therefore superior to an alternative strategy of comparing women who use the employer-sponsored childcare to a different set of women with young children who do not use the employer-sponsored childcare.\footnote{In supplemental analyses, we constructed a comparison sample of 271 working mothers employed at the factory who had a child of or under the age of six, but who did not use the on-site childcare facility during our observation period. A comparison of our sample of 160 working mothers who used the on-site childcare to this other sample revealed that our sample is disadvantaged relative to other workers at the factory. While this aligns with our theory that employer-sponsored childcare might be especially important for disadvantaged women, it highlights the problems that would arise if we compared the attendance patterns of women using the on-site childcare facility to other women not using the facility since there could be important differences in individual-level characteristics between these two groups.} We are thus able to estimate models with worker-specific fixed effects as well as time fixed effects to approximate a causal relationship between employer-sponsored childcare and working mothers’ daily attendance. Additionally, we are able to causally estimate the differential effect of employer-sponsored childcare for mothers enrolling girls versus boys in the childcare center, exploiting the fact that whether a mother has a boy or girl is random.\footnote{The exception to this is if there is a high rate of sex-selective abortion. While there may be some sex-selective abortions in India, we do not believe that it is a large enough phenomenon to be a significant threat to the validity of our findings, in part because sex-selective abortion is less common in the state of Karnataka where our data were collected (Shetty and Shetty 2014).} We also estimate the differential consequences of employer-sponsored childcare for mothers enrolling older versus younger children, as well as how these effects vary depending on whether a worker’s spouse or parents (e.g., the child’s father or grandparents) are present in the household.

**Key Variables and Statistical Methods**
The main dependent variable in our analysis is daily attendance at the factory for our sample of working mothers, which we conceptualize as a measure of labor supply. Daily attendance is a dichotomous variable that takes the value of 1 when a worker was fully present at work on a given date and 0 when she was absent. We have a few observations where a worker is recorded as being present for half the workday – we code these observations as absences since the worker was unable to fully participate in work on that day. Given this dichotomous dependent variable, we employ logistic regression techniques for analyzing daily attendance.

A secondary dependent variable in our analysis is the log daily wage earned by the working mothers in our sample. We use daily wages earned to identify the monetary benefits of childcare access. While the daily wage rate of a given worker does not change in our observation period, we have data of the daily wage earned by the workers in our sample. Daily wage earned is a continuous variable that takes the value of 0 when a worker is absent and takes a value between Rs.242 and Rs.343 (her negotiated wage rate) when she is present. We compute log daily wages earned by converting the zero values to one before logging them. For analyses using this dependent variable, we employ linear regression techniques.

Our primary independent variable is a categorical variable called Post Childcare that is defined at the individual worker level for the dates that she was employed at the factory in our observation period. Post Childcare takes the value of 1 on dates that followed the date of the worker receiving access to the childcare center and 0 on dates that preceded the date of the worker receiving access to the childcare center, thus allowing us to conduct a within-worker comparison of how childcare center access affects daily attendance at work.

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10 Our results are robust to coding these half-days as the worker being present.
11 Our results are robust to instead adding 1 to the wages of all employees before computing log wages.
Additionally, we analyze the differential effect of employer-sponsored childcare for women enrolling sons versus daughters in the childcare center. We measure this differential impact using an interaction term Post Childcare x Daughter, where Daughter is a binary variable that takes the value of 1 when the child being enrolled in the childcare center is a girl and 0 when the child is a boy. We also explore how the effect of employer-sponsored childcare varies depending on the age of the child in the childcare center. To conduct this analysis, we construct Child Age as a continuous variable defined as the age of a child at the time of entering the childcare center (measured in years) and an interaction term Post Childcare x Child Age to capture the differential effect for women with younger versus older children in the childcare center.

Finally, in order to test whether family-based network support mechanisms underlie our main results, we additionally exploit variation in key family characteristics among our sample of working mothers. In particular, we split our overall sample by whether the worker’s spouse is present in the household and whether at least one of her parents or in-laws is present in the household. We then rerun our analyses examining the moderating role of child gender and child age on the consequences of childcare access for women’s daily attendance separately for households with and without workers’ spouses and parents.\textsuperscript{12} Having described our key variables and methods, we now move on to our results.

**RESULTS**

\textsuperscript{12} We analyze the effect of the presence of a worker’s spouse separately from the presence of a worker’s parents or in-laws for two reasons. First, theoretically, spouses and parents could offer different kinds of family-based childcare support to working mothers. Second, empirically, given that we have different amounts of missing data for workers’ spouses and parents, it makes sense to analyze the effect of having access to these different family members separately.
We begin our analysis by understanding the sample of factory workers and children receiving access to childcare in our observation period. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on the working mothers in “Panel a” and on the children in “Panel b,” using all available data. All 160 workers in our sample were female and the workers had 1.8 children on average. Our results are robust to keeping only women with one child in our dataset. Working mothers in our sample had a mean tenure of 4 months at this factory and were, on average, 25 years old at the start of our observation period. About 10% of these working mothers were single and 28% lived with their parents. The working mothers earned a mean starting wage of Rs. 275 per day (translating to roughly $4.25 per day) and, on average, they were present 89% of working days. With respect to the children entering the childcare center in our observation period, about 48% of them were female, they were on average 1.9 years old (the youngest was 0.7 years old and the oldest was 6.6 years old) and had 0.8 siblings. Importantly, only 1.2% of them had siblings in the same childcare facility. Therefore, for simplicity, we only keep in our dataset the first child who received access to the childcare facility in a given family.

Main Effects of Employer-Sponsored Childcare

Next, we examine the effect of receiving access to childcare on the likelihood of being present for working mothers. Table 2 presents estimates from a logistic regression of daily attendance on the Post Childcare variable. Models (1) and (2) include worker random effects, rather than worker fixed effects. Models (3) and (4) include worker fixed effects. Models (1) and (3) do not include month and year fixed effects, while models (2) and (4) include them. The

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13 This robustness check ensures that our results are not driven by where the focal child falls in the birth order or interactions between the characteristics of the focal child and the characteristics of their siblings.

14 Our results are robust to instead keeping in our dataset the second child who received access to the childcare facility in a given family.
coefficients vary slightly in size after controlling for worker and month/year fixed effects. We will only interpret the results in model (4), our most stringent specification, for brevity. The positive and statistically significant coefficient for Post Childcare indicates that, when women received access to employer-sponsored childcare, their odds of being present at work were 1.71 times higher (exp[0.536]=1.71) than when they did not have access to such childcare provisions, after controlling for worker and month/year fixed effects. Supporting Hypothesis 1, this suggests that employer-sponsored childcare has a large, positive, and meaningful effect on working mothers’ labor supply among low-wage women workers in India.

[Table 2 About Here]

Heterogeneous Effects by Child Gender and Child Age

Having seen the main effects of gaining access to childcare on working mothers’ daily attendance, we next explore how these effects vary depending on whether or not a working mother’s social networks mobilize to provide informal childcare support. As discussed before, having a girl rather than a boy, and similarly having a younger child rather than an older child, may limit the willingness of a woman’s family-based network to provide childcare support in India. Therefore, in our analyses, we investigate the differential effect of obtaining access to the childcare center on working mothers’ daily attendance by their child’s gender and age.

Table 3 presents results by child gender. The estimates are from a logistic regression including variables for Post Childcare, Daughter, and the interaction term Post Childcare x Daughter. The categorical variable Daughter takes a value of 1 when the child in the childcare center is a girl and 0 when the child is a boy. Again, Model (1) includes worker random effects rather than fixed effects, which enables us to identify the effect of having a daughter on working mothers’ attendance. Model (2) includes worker random effects and month/year fixed effects,
Model (3) includes only worker fixed effects, and Model (4) includes both sets of fixed effects. Given potential concerns about interpreting the statistical significance for interaction terms when utilizing logistic regression models (Allison 1999; Ai and Norton 2003), we also estimated the models in Table 3 (and later in Table 4) using linear probability models. The findings hold with this alternative specification.

In Models (1) and (2), we see that the coefficient for Daughter is large, negative and statistically significant, suggesting that women with daughters have lower odds of being present at work than women with sons before gaining access to the childcare center. In Models (3) and (4), when we add worker-fixed effects, the coefficient for Daughter cannot be estimated given that Daughter does not vary across observations for the same worker. In Models (3) and (4), we see that the coefficient for Post Childcare x Daughter is large, positive and statistically significant, offering support for Hypothesis 2a. In Model (4), our most conservative model, this coefficient indicates that when women with daughters received access to employer-sponsored childcare, their odds of being present at work were 1.79 times higher (exp[0.586]=1.79) as compared to when women with sons received childcare access. This Post Childcare x Daughter interaction is positive and statistically significant across models. Moreover, the coefficient for Post Childcare is not statistically significant, suggesting that receiving access to childcare was not statistically meaningful for working mothers with sons. Overall, this indicates that getting access to childcare matters significantly more for women with daughters as compared to women with sons and in this way, the benefits of employer-sponsored childcare are especially salient when a woman’s family-based network is unlikely to mobilize to provide childcare support.

[Table 3 About Here]
Similarly, Table 4 presents estimates from a logistic regression model including variables for *Post Childcare, Child Age* and the interaction term *Post Childcare x Child Age*. We measure *Child Age* at the time of the child’s entry into the childcare center (in years). In Table 4, as in the previous tables, Models (2) and (4) include month/year fixed effects while Models (3) and (4) include worker fixed effects (note that similar to Table 3, *Child Age* cannot be estimated in Models (3) and (4)). In the random effects model – Model (1) – we see that the coefficient for *Child Age* is large, positively and statistically significant, suggesting that women with older children have greater odds of being present at work during the period before obtaining access to the childcare center. In Model (4) with month/year and worker fixed effects, the interaction term *Post Childcare x Child Age* is large, negative and statistically significant. In line with Hypothesis 3a, this coefficient indicates that women with older children are less responsive to access to the childcare center than women with younger children. Thus, characteristics that may limit a woman’s social network’s willingness to provide informal childcare support such as child gender and child age, indeed seem to influence the effect of childcare access on working mothers’ labor supply.

[Table 4 About Here]

*Test of Family-Based Network Support Mechanism*

To test the mechanism of differential family-based network support underlying our child gender and child age results, we split our overall sample by whether the worker’s spouse or parents are present in the household and rerun our analyses examining the moderating role of child gender and child age on the consequences of childcare access for women’s daily attendance. For ease of interpretation, we visually depict our key regression coefficients using
the various subsamples for Post Childcare x Child Gender in Figure 1 and Post Childcare x Child Age in Figure 2. The full regression tables are included in Appendix A.

In Figure 1, the first bar represents the overall estimated effect of childcare access on the log odds of being present at work for working mothers with daughters as compared to sons using the full sample. Note that the depicted value in this first bar, 0.59, is the same as the Post Childcare x Child Gender coefficient from Model (4) of Table 3. The next four bars represent the estimated effect of childcare access on the log odds of being present at work for working mothers with daughters as compared to sons when a) the woman’s spouse is present, b) the woman’s spouse is absent, c) the woman’s parent is present, and d) the woman’s parent is absent. The bar chart indicates that the benefits of access to childcare for working mothers with daughters are concentrated among the group of working mothers whose spouse or parent is present (and that these benefits are indistinguishable from zero when the spouse and parent are absent).\(^{15}\) In line with Hypothesis 2b, Figure 1 provides more direct evidence for our proposed mechanism of family-based network support by highlighting that those women with family-based networks at home are likely to benefit from employer-sponsored childcare when they have children whose characteristics are less likely to draw support from these networks.

[Figure 1 About Here]

Figure 2 similarly portrays the estimated effect of childcare access on the log odds of being present at work for working mothers with younger versus older children, for five different samples of workers: a) the full sample, b) a subsample with the spouse present, c) a subsample with the spouse absent, d) a subsample with the woman’s parent present, and e) a subsample with the woman’s parent absent. The pattern of results is broadly similar to those in Figure 1. The bar

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\(^{15}\) We note that the three-way interactions between Post Childcare, Daughter, and Spouse Present/Parent Present are not statistically significant. This lack of a statistically significant results may be due to reduced sample size.
chart indicates that the benefits of access to childcare for working mothers with younger children are concentrated among the group of working mothers whose spouse or parent is present. However, while the effect for the subsample with the spouse present is statistically significant, the effect for the subsample with the grandparent present is not, possibly because of the diminished size of this subsample, offering partial support for Hypothesis 3b.\textsuperscript{16} In this way, Figures 1 and 2 provide direct evidence for the mechanism of family-based network support by demonstrating that the moderating effect of child gender and child age on the effect of employer-sponsored childcare are concentrated among those women who have access to family-based networks.\textsuperscript{17}

[Figure 2 About Here]

**Broader Economic Implications of Receiving Childcare Access**

Finally, we investigate the effect of access to employer-sponsored childcare on working mothers’ take-home pay. In many settings, including the factory that we study, daily attendance is directly linked to workers’ monetary compensation and, therefore, it is useful to additionally consider how childcare access might influence the money that a working mother takes home to support her family. Note that individual workers’ wage rates remain unchanged during our observation period, but because the earning of daily wages is contingent on showing up to work, working mothers could earn more by showing up to work on a more regular basis. Below, we quantify the change in working mothers’ take-home earnings once they receive access to employer childcare.

\textsuperscript{16} Similar to the consequences of child gender noted above, we note that the three-way interactions between Post Childcare, Child Age, and Spouse Present/Parent Present are not statistically significant.

\textsuperscript{17} These findings also provide evidence against the potential counter-argument that women’s own preferences – rather than the biases or preferences of their family-based social networks – may shape the differential effects of childcare access for women with daughters and younger children. If women’s own preferences were driving the moderating effects of child gender and age, we would expect to see continuity in this pattern across women with different types of network ties in their household.
For this analysis, we use our secondary dependent variable of log daily wages earned and we run OLS models with both worker and month/year fixed effects. Results are presented in Table 5. Model (1) estimates the main effect of childcare access on working mothers’ log daily wages earned. Models (2) and (3) estimate the differential effect of childcare access on working mothers’ log daily wages earned by child gender and child age, respectively. The Post Childcare coefficient in Model (1) is positive and significant, indicating that when women receive access to childcare, they earn 45% more, on average, than when they did not have access to such childcare provisions, after controlling for worker and month/year fixed effects. Further, the positive and significant Post Childcare x Daughter coefficient in Model (2) and the negative and significant Post Childcare x Child Age coefficient in Model (3) reveal that the monetary gains of receiving childcare access are magnified for working mothers with daughters and younger children, whose family-based networks are less likely to offer informal childcare support. Thus, receiving access to employer-sponsored childcare has real and tangible consequences on the economic livelihoods of low-wage working mothers in India.

**DISCUSSION**

The challenges of reconciling the competing demands of paid work and family life are strong and persistent for women in many parts of the world (Blair-Loy 2003; Rajadhyaksha 2012). Given the disproportionate demands placed on women to take responsibility for childcare and household labor, it can be difficult for women to maintain employment and advance in the world of work (Stone 2007; Gornick and Meyers 2003). In this article, we examine whether an organizational work-family policy intervention – free, on-site, employer-provided childcare – can improve maternal employment outcomes, here measured through working mothers’ daily
attendance. Drawing on data from a quasi-experimental research design in a garment factory in India, we find strong evidence that access to employer-sponsored childcare has a positive effect on women’s daily attendance at work.

Beyond the main effect of childcare access, we also explore whether the consequences of this organizational policy vary depending on women’s levels of family-based network support. If family-based networks are less likely to mobilize to provide informal childcare support for particular women, then these women will be more likely to benefit from the formal and non-discretionary nature of an organization-based childcare center. In our case, we argue that women with daughters and women with younger children are less likely to have their family-based networks mobilize on their behalf than women with sons and women with older children. Thus, the daily attendance of women with daughters and younger children is likely to be most positively impacted by access to employer-sponsored childcare. This is precisely what our results demonstrate. The positive effect of childcare access on women’s daily attendance is stronger for women with daughters than for women with sons. Before obtaining access to the childcare center, women with daughters are significantly less likely to attend work than women with sons, but that disparity closes once women with daughters have access to employer-sponsored childcare. A similar pattern is found for women with young children. Thus, our data provide compelling evidence that the effects of employer-provided childcare are heterogeneous and that they appear to be concentrated among women whose family-based social networks are less likely to mobilize resources.

*Contributions to Gender and Work-Family Research*
Our findings offer important contributions to research on work-family policies and gender inequality more broadly. First, we draw on evidence from a quasi-experimental research design that enables stronger causal claims to show that employer-sponsored childcare has a positive and significant effect on women’s daily attendance at work in India. This finding is important because existing scholarship – which has been largely correlational in nature – has offered mixed evidence about the effect of employer-sponsored childcare on women’s employment outcomes (Eby et al. 2005; Glass and Estes 1997). Far from being exogenous, work-family policy use may be correlated with a host of worker-level attributes that also shape workers’ outcomes (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002), masking any effects of the policies that may exist. Thus, our findings suggest that as scholarship on the effects of organizational work-family policies continues, experimental and quasi-experimental research designs that allow for stronger causal claims – such as the design we use – will be important.

Second, our study theorizes and develops a novel channel through which organizations can serve as network equalizers for women whose family-based networks may be hesitant to mobilize resources. Existing research has demonstrated the important ways that organizational policies can reduce ascriptive inequalities within organizations, largely by creating structures that alter the behavior of key actors, such as managers, within the organization (Kalev et al. 2006). Our argument and findings point to a different manner in which organizations can serve as equalizers, namely by helping individuals overcome the biases they experience from members of their family-based networks outside of the workplace. By providing formal work-family policies, such as on-site childcare, organizational interventions can serve as substitutes for individuals’ family-based social networks when these networks have a set of preferences or biases that limit
their mobilization of resources on a worker’s behalf. This potential mechanism should be explored in future research on the consequences of work-family policies.

Finally, much of the extant scholarship on work-family policies has focused on the Global North. Yet, work-family conflict is an important issue that many women and families are grappling with in the Global South (Poster and Prasad 2005; Walia 2013). With increasing female labor force participation in many parts of the world, additional scholarly attention to the policy supports necessary to ensure quality employment for working mothers outside of the United States and Western Europe is warranted. Our findings offer a generally positive view on this point: organizational policies can improve employment outcomes for disadvantaged women in the Global South. Beyond improving daily attendance, our findings also indicate that access to employer-provided childcare has important consequences for women’s take-home pay. In turn, higher earnings may provide women with additional decision-making power within the home as well as more control over the allocation of financial resources for themselves and their children (Jensen 2012; Oster and Steinberg 2013). Thus, these findings have important implications for scholarly debates on the role of organizational interventions (Kelly et al. 2011; Kelly et al. 2014) as well as policy debates in development studies focused on improving gender equality and economic security of women and their families in the Global South (Viterna and Robertson 2015).

**Contributions to Research on Social Networks**

Our findings also contribute to research on social network support by showing that – similar to the way that the mobilization of network resources cannot be assumed in the job search context – it cannot be assumed for informal childcare support. Several important sociological
studies have highlighted that the mere presence of a set of social network connections does not necessarily translate into the mobilization of resources by those network members for referrals or support with finding a job (Lin 2000; Smith 2005). We bring these ideas to a very different context and show that the presence of family-based network ties does not necessarily translate into the mobilization of network resources to provide informal childcare support. In the job search context, one reason for a lack of network mobilization is reputational concerns (Smith 2005). Another is likely the bias of the people who are part of one’s network (Royster 2003). While reputational concerns are unlikely to be at play in the case of providing informal childcare support, the biases and preferences of one’s network members are likely to matter in the work-family context. This finding also pushes future research to consider the multiple pathways and mechanisms that may limit the translation of network access into network mobilization across various social contexts.

We further highlight how organizations might act as substitutes for family-based network support and thereby act as a network equalizer. Indeed, the theoretical argument that formal organizations can substitute for social networks that do not mobilize has important implications outside of the work-family domain as well as the job search context. In the case of low-wage workers facing eviction, for example, workplace organizations may be able to offer material, legal, or informational resources to support those individuals whose social networks do not mobilize the necessary assistance. While this is just one additional example, our theoretical argument and empirical results open new avenues for scholarship on how organizational policies can equalize opportunities for individuals who are situated similarly on socio-demographic dimensions, but where some individuals still experience disadvantages due to a lack of mobilization of their social network.
**Implications for the Work-Family Interface in the Global North**

Although our data are from one factory in India, the findings presented here also open the door for future research on how similar mechanisms may operate in different social and institutional contexts, including the Global North. For example, our results raise the question: what types of women would be most impacted by employer-provided childcare in the United States as opposed to India? Perhaps women’s family-based networks in the United States would be less likely to provide informal childcare support for children with special needs or significant disabilities. Thus, women with children who have special needs or disabilities may benefit disproportionately from employer-sponsored childcare in the United States context.

More generally, our findings provide a clue about why existing scholarship in the Global North may find conflicting evidence about the role of employer-sponsored childcare in shaping women’s employment outcomes (Glass and Estes 1997; Eby et al. 2005). Our reading of the literature and our findings suggest that employer-sponsored childcare may be most effective at improving outcomes for disadvantaged women. While our data do not enable a direct comparison between women of different economic, occupational, and education standing – they are all low-skilled workers – future research would be well served to explore this issue in more depth. More generally, our argument suggests that heterogeneous treatment effects for work-family policies may mask the detection of effects if only average effects are explored.

**Potential Limitations**

While making important advances in scholarship on work-family policies, social network support, and organizational sociology, our study is not without limitations. First, our data provide
some direct traction on the family-based social network mechanism that we propose. However, due to our data, we are limited to examining whether the differential effects of childcare access by child gender and child age are concentrated among women whose spouses and parents are present. In the future, more fine-grained information about women’s social networks would be useful for further probing our proposed mechanism. It would be useful to know how many close contacts a woman has in the proximate geographic area, such as sisters, aunts, and close friends as well as how active those individuals are in providing various types of support. Additionally, it could be interesting to collect information on the preferences and beliefs about the provision of social support among the individuals in a woman’s social network. Future scholarship in this area would be well served by collecting this type of detailed information about women’s social networks.

Additionally, the workers at the garment factory that we study are almost all women and our dataset consists entirely of women. Thus, we are not able to examine how men’s labor supply is affected by gaining access to employer-provided childcare. Given the gendered nature of the division of household labor, childcare access may have less of an impact on men’s employment than it does on women’s employment. Yet, it would be theoretically interesting to empirically examine men’s responsiveness to employer-provided childcare and to explore whether childcare access has stronger consequences for particular groups of men. This type of inquiry has the potential to further the contributions made in the current study as well as shed light on the gendered nature of work and family life.

**CONCLUSION**
In this article, we advance the literature by providing quasi-experimental evidence about how a workplace policy – employer-sponsored childcare – can affect working mothers’ labor supply. At the same time, we identify important heterogeneity in that effect – pointing to a key role that organizations can play in equalizing opportunities for workers whose family-based social networks may be less likely to mobilize supportive resources. Additionally, we focus on a population – low-wage women workers in India – that is often absent in scholarship on work-family policies. Ultimately, our theoretical argument and empirical findings provide new insights that assist in understanding the role that organizations can play as substitutes for individuals’ social networks when those networks do not mobilize necessary resources. In addition to its implications for scholarship on reducing social inequality, our work provides clear evidence about a work-family policy that can bolster economic security and reduce poverty in the Global South by improving women’s employment outcomes.
REFERENCES


### Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Factory Workers and Children Receiving Childcare

#### (a) Factory Workers Receiving Childcare Access in Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion female workers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>1.815</td>
<td>0.646</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory tenure at time of receiving childcare access (in months)</td>
<td>4.429</td>
<td>9.799</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s age at time of receiving childcare access (in years)</td>
<td>25.181</td>
<td>3.462</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion single</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>0.305</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion with parents present</td>
<td>0.278</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage at time of entering factory (in Rupees)</td>
<td>274.648</td>
<td>30.318</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance (proportion of days present)</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### (b) Children Receiving Childcare Access in Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion female children</td>
<td>0.481</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child age at time of receiving childcare access (in years)</td>
<td>1.919</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of siblings</td>
<td>0.815</td>
<td>0.646</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion with siblings in same childcare</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1. Descriptive data not available for all women or children; summary statistics calculated based on maximum available data
2. While all women in our data had at least one child, whether they had additional children is known for only a subset of women
3. This represents the average of the average attendance per worker
4. For these few instances, only the first child to receive childcare access in the family is kept in our dataset
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare</td>
<td>0.512**</td>
<td>0.520**</td>
<td>0.389*</td>
<td>0.536*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.171)</td>
<td>(0.199)</td>
<td>(0.167)</td>
<td>(0.273)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>59064</td>
<td>59064</td>
<td>58605</td>
<td>58605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clusters</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month/Year Fixed Effects</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker Fixed Effects</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Worker-date level observations

All estimates are from logit models; log odds presented

Daily Attendance: 0/1 = 1 if worker is present on given day

Post Childcare: 0/1 = 1 after access to childcare received

Standard errors clustered by worker are in parentheses

Sample size reduces in Models 3 and 4 because 8 women in the sample are never absent

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001 (two-tailed tests)
### Table 3: Differential Effect of Childcare Access on Daily Attendance of Female Factory Workers by Child Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.196)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>-0.734**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.269)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare x Daughter</td>
<td>0.875**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.284)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>59064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clusters</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month/Year Fixed Effects</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker Fixed Effects</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Worker-date level observations

All estimates are from logit models; log odds presented

Daily Attendance: 0/1 =1 if worker is present on given day

Post Childcare: 0/1 =1 after access to childcare received

Daughter: 0/1 =1 if child is a girl

Standard errors clustered by worker are in parentheses

Sample size reduces in Models 3 and 4 because 8 women in the sample are never absent

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001 (two-tailed tests)
Table 4: Differential Effect of Childcare Access on Daily Attendance of Female Factory Workers by Child Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare</td>
<td>1.201***</td>
<td>1.213***</td>
<td>0.893**</td>
<td>0.959*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.308)</td>
<td>(0.323)</td>
<td>(0.282)</td>
<td>(0.420)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>0.392**</td>
<td>0.386**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.127)</td>
<td>(0.125)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare x Child Age</td>
<td>-0.353**</td>
<td>-0.344**</td>
<td>-0.287*</td>
<td>-0.267*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.135)</td>
<td>(0.125)</td>
<td>(0.122)</td>
<td>(0.129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>56138</td>
<td>56138</td>
<td>55868</td>
<td>55868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clusters</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month/Year Fixed Effects</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker Fixed Effects</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Worker-date level observations
All estimates are from logit models; log odds presented
Daily Attendance: 0/1 =1 if worker is present on given day
Post Childcare: 0/1 =1 after access to childcare received
Child Age: Age of child at time of entering childcare (in years)
Child age missing for approximately 10% of our sample
Standard errors clustered by worker are in parentheses
Sample size reduces in Models 3 and 4 because 4 women in the sample are never absent
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001 (two-tailed tests)
Table 5: Effect of Childcare Access on Log Daily Wages for Female Factory Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Log Daily Wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>0.451*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.219)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare</td>
<td>0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare x Daughter</td>
<td>0.621*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.260)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare x Child Age</td>
<td>-0.227*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                              | (2)             |
| All                          | 0.190           |
| Child Gender                 | 0.871*          |
|                              | (0.349)         |
| Post Childcare x Daughter    | 0.621*          |
|                              | (0.260)         |
| Post Childcare x Child Age   | -0.227*         |
|                              | (0.097)         |

|                              | (3)             |
| All                          | 0.871*          |
| Child Gender                 | 0.349           |
| Post Childcare x Daughter    | 0.260           |
| Post Childcare x Child Age   | 0.097           |

Observations: 40785, 40785, 39184
Clusters: 63, 63, 61
R²: 0.058, 0.060, 0.059
Month/Year Fixed Effects: Yes, Yes, Yes
Worker Fixed Effects: Yes, Yes, Yes

Worker-date level observations
All estimates are from OLS regression models
Dependent variable is log of daily wages in Rupees
Zero daily wage (when worker is absent) converted to 1 to compute log wages
Post Childcare: 0/1 = 1 after access to childcare received
Daughter: 0/1 = 1 if child is a daughter
Child Age: Age of child at time of entering childcare (in years)
Wage data available for approximately 40% of the sample
Standard errors clustered by worker are in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001 (two-tailed tests)
Figure 1: Variation in the Effect of Childcare Access on Daily Attendance for Women with Daughters versus Sons, by Family-Based Network Support

All estimates are from logit models with worker and month/year fixed effects; log odds presented.

Sample size represents number of worker-date observations, rather than number of workers.

Spouse present = 1 if worker is married.

Parent present = 1 if at least one of the worker’s parents lives in the same household.

Marital status data missing for approximately 30% of our sample.

Grandparent data missing for approximately 60% of our sample.

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001 (two-tailed tests)
Figure 2: Variation in the Effect of Childcare Access on Daily Attendance for Women with Older versus Younger Children, by Family-Based Network Support

All estimates are from logit models with worker and month/year fixed effects; log odds presented
Sample size represents number of worker-date observations, rather than number of workers
Spouse present = 1 if worker is married
Parent present =1 if at least one of the worker’s parents lives in the same household
Marital status data missing for approximately 30% of our sample
Grandparent data missing for approximately 60% of our sample
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001 (two-tailed tests)
## APPENDIX A. REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF FAMILY-BASED NETWORK SUPPORT MECHANISM

Table A1: Differential Effect of Childcare Access on Daily Attendance for Women with Daughters versus Sons by Spousal Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
<th>(1) All</th>
<th>(2) Spouse Present</th>
<th>(3) Spouse Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>0.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.253)</td>
<td>(0.216)</td>
<td>(0.647)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare x Daughter</td>
<td>0.586*</td>
<td>0.818**</td>
<td>0.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.278)</td>
<td>(0.317)</td>
<td>(0.770)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Observations     | 58605  | 43495             | 9790             |
| Clusters         | 152    | 96                | 11               |
| Pseudo R²        | 0.074  | 0.069             | 0.076            |
| Month/Year Fixed Effects | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Worker Fixed Effects | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Worker-date level observations
All estimates are from logit models; log odds presented
Daily Attendance: 0/1 =1 if worker is present on given day
Post: 0/1 =1 after access to childcare received
Daughter: 0/1 =1 if child is a girl
Marital status missing for 30% of the sample
Standard errors clustered by worker are in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Table A2: Differential Effect of Childcare Access on Daily Attendance for Women with Older versus Younger Children by Parental Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>Parent Present</td>
<td>Parent Absent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.253)</td>
<td>(0.356)</td>
<td>(0.199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare x Daughter</td>
<td>0.586*</td>
<td>1.388**</td>
<td>0.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.278)</td>
<td>(0.499)</td>
<td>(0.427)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 58605
Clusters: 152
Pseudo R²: 0.074
Month Fixed Effects: Yes
Worker Fixed Effects: Yes

Worker-date level observations
All estimates are from logit models; log odds presented
Daily Attendance: 0/1 = 1 if worker is present on given day
Post: 0/1 = 1 after access to childcare received
Daughter: 0/1 = 1 if child is a girl
Child grandparent data missing for 60% of the sample
Standard errors clustered by worker are in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Table A3: Differential Effect of Childcare Access on Daily Attendance for Women with Daughters versus Sons by Spousal Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare</td>
<td>0.959* (0.420)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare x Child Age</td>
<td>-0.267* (0.129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>55868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clusters</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month/Year Fixed Effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker Fixed Effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Worker-date level observations
All estimates are from logit models; log odds presented
Daily Attendance: 0/1 =1 if worker is present on given day
Post: 0/1 =1 after access to childcare received
Child Age: Age of child at time of entering childcare (in years)
Child age missing for 10% of our sample
Marital status missing for 30% of the sample
Standard errors clustered by worker are in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Table A4: Differential Effect of Childcare Access on Daily Attendance for Women with Older versus Younger Children by Parental Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>0.959*</td>
<td>0.974</td>
<td>0.747*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.420)</td>
<td>(0.783)</td>
<td>(0.376)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare</td>
<td>-0.267*</td>
<td>-0.633</td>
<td>-0.246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.129)</td>
<td>(0.518)</td>
<td>(0.129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Childcare x Child Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>55868</td>
<td>9264</td>
<td>18287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clusters</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month Fixed Effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker Fixed Effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Worker-date level observations

All estimates are from logit models; log odds presented
Daily Attendance: 0/1 =1 if worker is present on given day
Post: 0/1 =1 after access to childcare received
Child Age: Age of child at time of entering childcare (in years)
Child age missing for 10% of our sample
Child grandparent data missing for 60% of the sample
Standard errors clustered by worker are in parentheses

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001