



**Institute for
Research on
Poverty**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

All in the Family: Parents of Children with Disabilities and Retirement

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Study Background

- Mothers of children with disabilities
 - Face unique constraints in work, and savings, in prime labor market years
 - May require greater financial resources while balancing caregiving responsibilities into retirement
- A variety of SSA benefits have the potential to provide economic security for families

How does parenting a child with a disability influence mothers' retirement?



Are there differences in retirement planning, savings, and timing for mothers of children with disabilities?

How do mothers of children with disabilities think about retirement?

What is the role of SSA benefits in their planning?

Explanatory, Sequential, Mixed Methods Approach



- Quantitative analyses informed subsequent qualitative interviews
- Together, findings provide more nuanced understanding of mother experiences (breadth + depth)

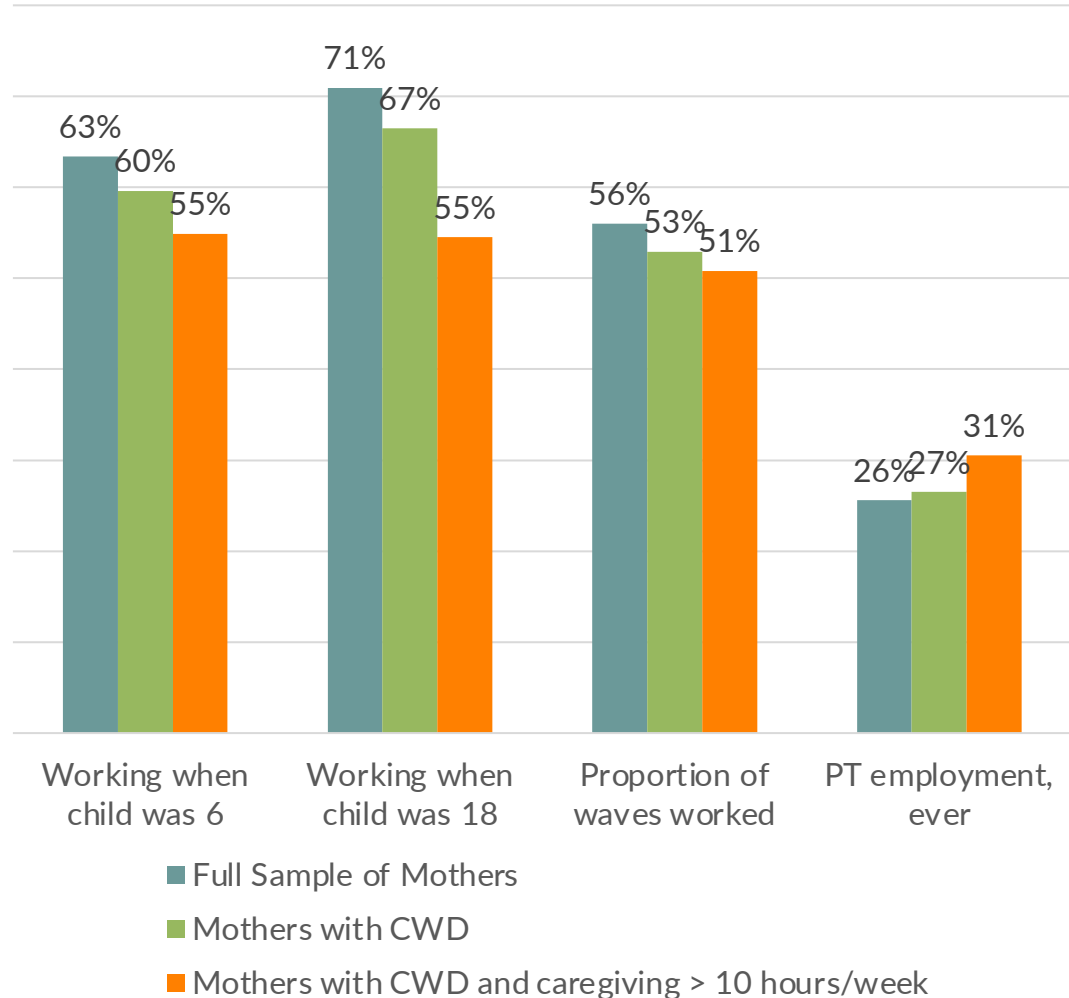
Sample and Methods (Quant)


- Quantitative analysis
 - **Sample:** 4,941 mothers from the NLSY79 linked to 11,545 children in the CYA sample
 - **Measures:**
 - Employment, retirement savings, planned retirement timing, retirement planning, retirement definition, SSA retirement benefit receipt
 - **Analysis:**
 - IPTW to create a more balanced sample
 - Bivariate, OLS, and event history models

Sample and Methods (Qual)

- **Sample:** Mothers in Dane County, WI; 45 years+; 1+ child with a disability; minimum 10 hours of care per month
- **Methods:** Semi-structured interviews (avg. 60 minutes); transcripts transcribed, coded, thematically analyzed

Findings: Differences in retirement savings, and planned timing (Quant)



- No differences for:
 - Retirement savings or early withdrawals
 - Planned retirement age
 - Likelihood of working at 65
 - Planned age for claiming SSA benefits
- Caregiving  risk of retirement

Findings: Differences in retirement savings and planned timing (Qual)

- Caregiving responsibilities limited how much mothers worked and types of jobs; many chose flexibility over pay or advancement
- Some mothers worked longer to save for retirement; others retired early to provide care
- Mothers often felt prioritizing caregiving over work was not a choice, but a necessity

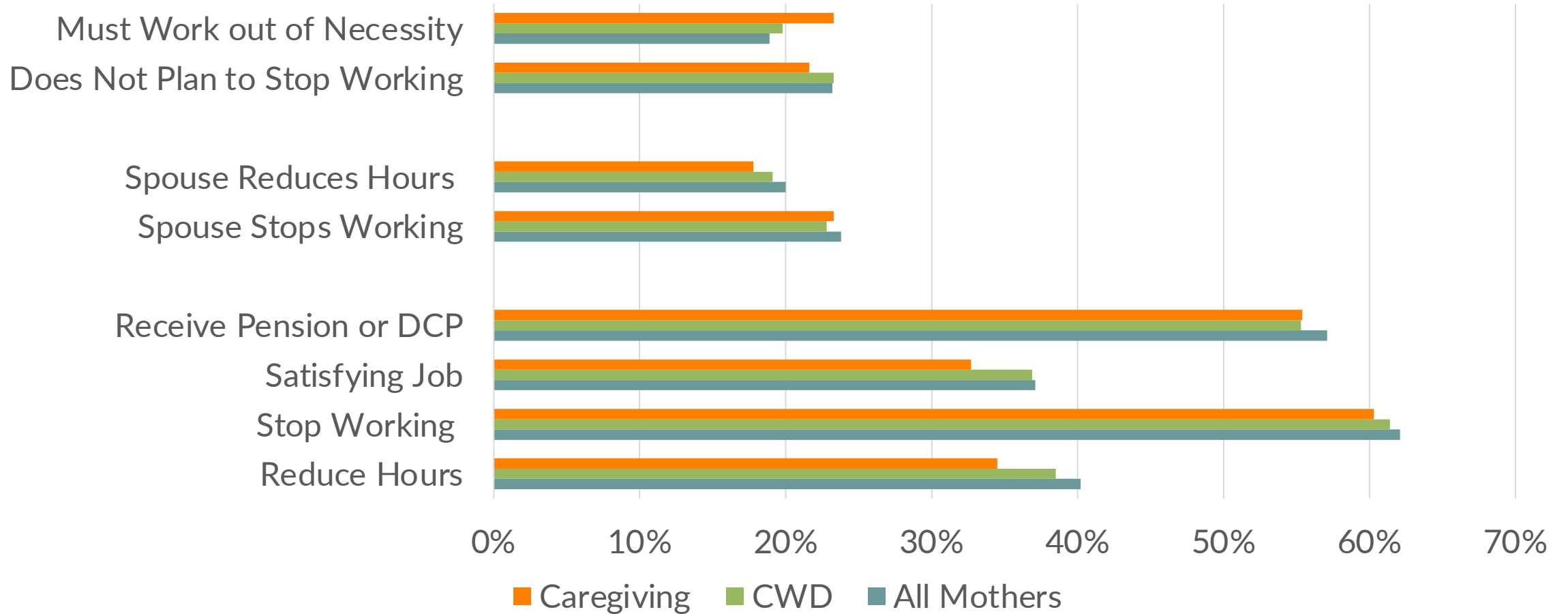
“ At one point he had over 20 different doctors. Juggling appointments, juggling surgery, complications, routine tests all the time - there would just would be no way, I can't work. There's just too much that needs to be taken care of.”

Findings: How mothers think about retirement (Qual)

- Mothers' retirement plans changed since having a child with a disability, particularly due to financial needs of children
- Definitions related to retirement varied, but leaving paid employment not the end of "work", as caregiving would continue
- Household financial circumstances, caregiving, spouse's plans, child's living situation, affected decision-making

"I think I need to be earning [up to 72 years old] to make sure that I have more set aside for my daughter. I don't consider my needs to be primary. I consider hers to be primary...I have always thought everything I'm putting into the pot is 50% mine, 50% hers."

Findings: How mothers think about retirement (Quant)



Findings: Retirement Planning and SSA Benefits (Qual)

- Mothers figured SSA benefits into retirement planning but did not expect to rely on them
 - Potentially affected by economic advantage of sample
- Most planned to draw on employer- or investment-based retirement sources
- Many had a general sense (rather than specific information) about their household's retirement picture

“[SSA benefits] are part of the picture but they are not THE picture. We are not relying on those benefits.”

Conclusions

- Limited available data to understand potential retirement disparities for, and within, this population
- Attending to economic well-being of more diverse samples may be important
 - Relatively well-off qualitative sample expressed significant financial concerns about retirement

Potential Policy Implications

- Caregiving's consequences for economic well-being, work, and retirement underscore the value of broad family support policies
 - Child Tax Credit, paid family leave, access to ECE programs
- Mothers of children with disabilities have unique needs and constraints
 - Economic/other supports could improve retirement equity (e.g., current SSA benefits, adapting broad policies/supports)
- Targeted outreach could help families understand available SSA benefits