ABSTRACT. The time allocated to various activities by both husbands and wives influences the stress experienced in life roles. Looking at the division of labor before as well as after the birth of a baby gives an indication of the parents' ability to cope with the stress of parenthood. Here, time allocation variables as well as child characteristics that might explain parental stress are examined based on responses of 117 couples to the Abidin parental stress index 4—7 months after the birth of their first child, measuring stress in 2 domains—parental and child each modeled for both mother and father as a function of personal characteristics of the baby and time allocated to child care, household production, paid work, and leisure. Standardized regression analysis reveals the most important predictor variables to be age and sex of the infant, with older infants and girls predicting lower stress scores, especially in the child domain of the mother. The allocation of time by both parents failed to predict stress scores.

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between daily time allocations and stress for mothers and fathers. Stress is measured in two domains: the parental domain and the child domain.

BACKGROUND

Transition to parenthood has both positive and negative changes in parents' lives especially in the early postpartum period (Cowan and Cowan, 1988). High levels of stress have been linked to the potential for child abuse (Finkelhor, 1986, Hyman, 1987; O'Donnell, 1989) and relationship problems (Boss, 1986) and marital dissatisfaction after the birth of the child (Cowan and Cowan, 1988; Miller and Myers-Walls, 1983).

Contextual stress models have been suggested as reference points for the type and magnitude of stress experienced (Walker, 1985). Caplan (1964) defined stress as an upset in the steady state. Several researchers have identified stress as a process rather than a particular event (Pearlin et al., 1982; Walker, 1985).
Boss (1987) implied that the dynamics of the process make stress synonymous with change. Parental stress may be seen as related to the process which occurs with the change in roles and other changes in the family's functioning after the birth of the infant. The most significant of these changes is evident in changes in the allocation of time by both the mother and the father. The effect may be compounded for those women who combine motherhood and paid work.

Resources of the family to deal with stress have been seen by some researchers as more important in predicting the level of stress than the stressor event, in this case the birth of a child, itself (Walker, 1985). Family resource management researchers typically include variables such as age, education, and income as important resources in the management process.

METHOD

The sampling frame for this study was compiled from two sources: a list of preparation for birth classes and parents who had toured one of several of the hospitals before the delivery of the baby. It is common practice for women under obstetric care to attend a Lamaze or other preparation for birth class, during their first pregnancy. In order to include women from lower socioeconomic classes who may not receive prenatal care, contact was made with two hospitals more likely to care for lower income patients. Tours of the facilities are offered to all maternity patients in their last months of pregnancy. Either tour guides or preparation for birth instructors distributed information about the study. Women and their husbands were asked to cooperate in the research study if they were married and they were expecting their first child.

One hundred seventeen couples cooperated in the study. Data were collected by interview in the third trimester of pregnancy and again at least three months after the baby was born. Data from 109 couples are included in this report. Eight fathers failed to complete the post-birth interview.

The prebirth survey instrument collected time use and demographic data. Time diaries were in the form of preceded charts for 24 hours from midnight to midnight, with definitions of time use categories...