

EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS IN MOTHERS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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BACKGROUND

- Parents of children with ASD are 4x as likely to quit, change, or not take a job compared to parents with typically developing children (Montes & Halterman, 2008).
- Mothers disproportionately quit their jobs compared to fathers to care for a child with ASD (Baker & Drapela, 2010).
- Research suggests that mothers of children with ASD experience more stress and lower overall health ratings than parents of typically developing children and children with other special needs (Herring et al., 2006; Pisula, 2007; Yamada et al., 2007).

RESEARCH QUESTION & HYPOTHESES

1. What are the factors underlying the reasons mothers of children with ASD decide to quit their job versus continuing work outside of the home?

Hypothesis: Financial factors such as needing health insurance and the high cost of raising a child with ASD lead some mothers to continue work outside the home while factors such as the need to take a child to therapy combined with having the lower paying job of the household lead some mothers to quit their job.

2. What are the effects of quitting a job to care for a child with ASD on a mother's mental health versus the effects of staying in a career while parenting a child with ASD on a mother's mental health?

Hypothesis: Mothers who remain working outside of the home will have worse psychological well-being than the mothers who quit their job since these working mothers are now facing pressures at work and pressures at home.

METHODS: PARTICIPANTS & PROCEDURE

Participants:

- 24 Mothers who quit their job to care for their child with ASD
- 43 Mothers who remain in the professional workforce while raising a child with ASD

Procedure:

- 45-60 minute online Qualtrics survey that included demographic, mental health, and employment decision measures

METHODS: MEASURES

Mental Health Measures:

- State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)
- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)
- Meaning in Life and Satisfaction in Life Scale
- Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)

Questions about Employment Decisions:

- What was your job prior to quitting to care for your child with autism?/What is your job?
The responses to these questions were categorized into 2 groups:
 - those jobs requiring a college degree
 - those jobs not typically requiring a college degree

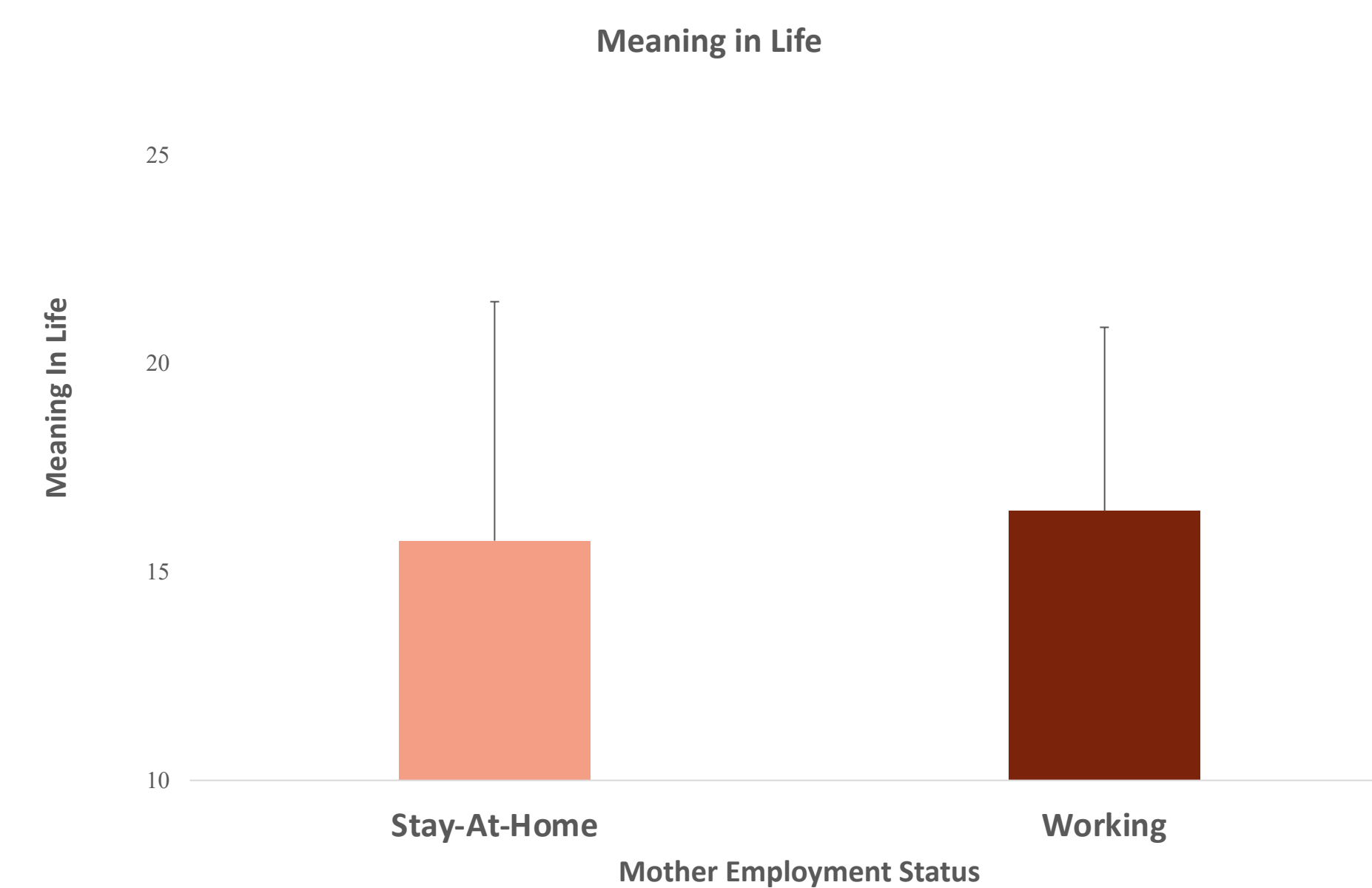
- What was the single biggest factor in your decision to leave/stay in the professional workforce?

The responses to these questions were categorized into 3 groups:

- Financial Needs
- Child's Needs
- Personal Development

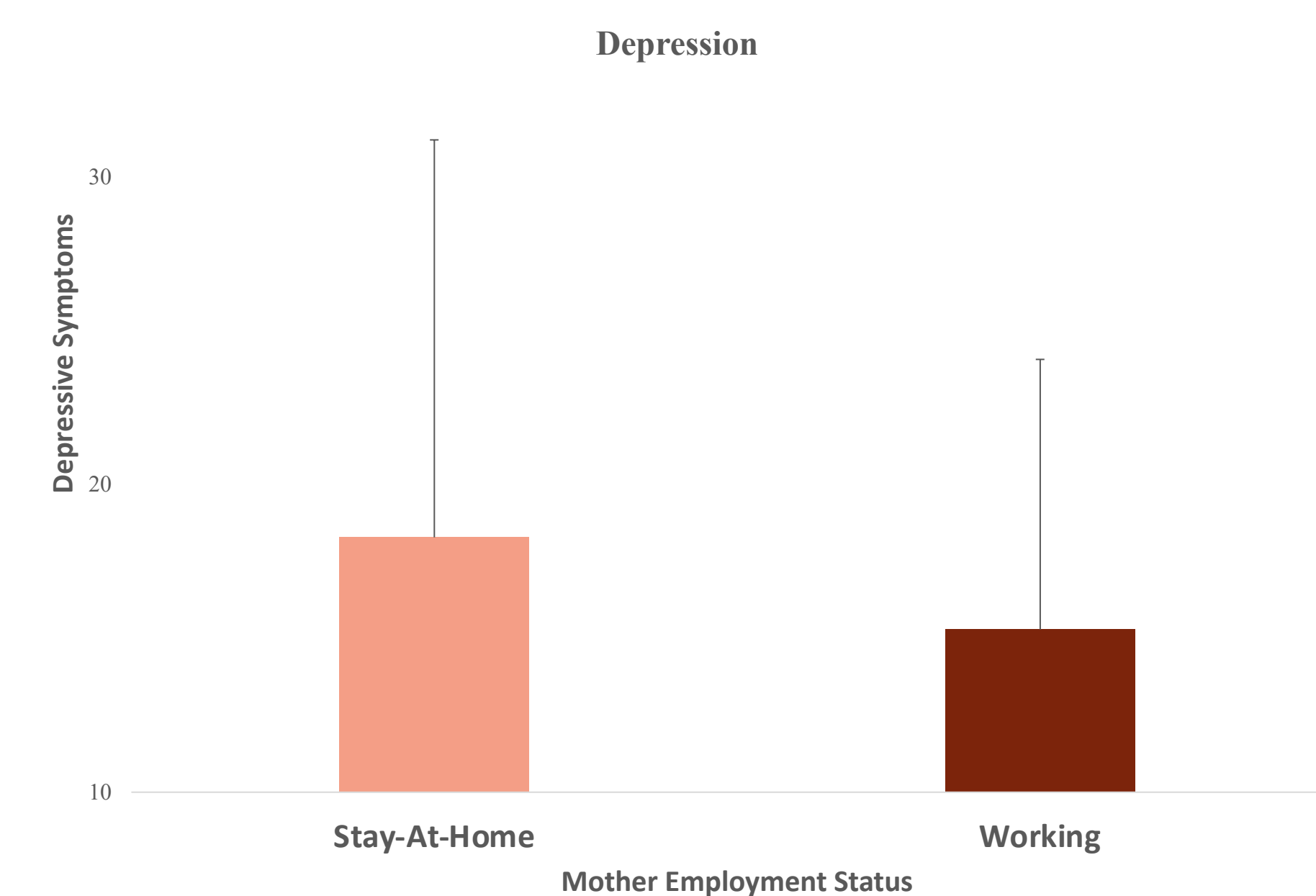
RESULTS: MEANING IN LIFE

Working mothers derive more meaning in life than mothers who quit their job to care for their child with ASD.



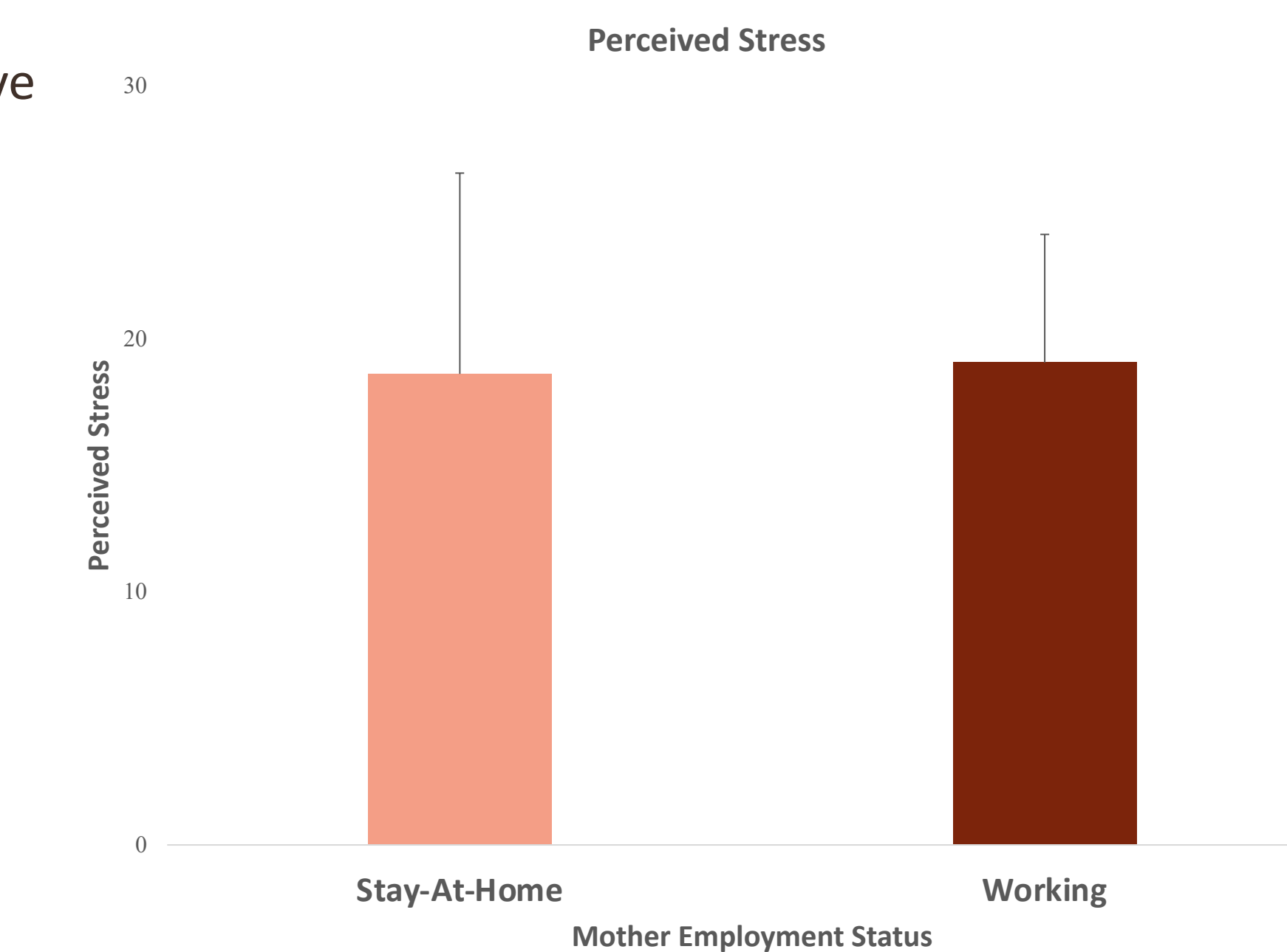
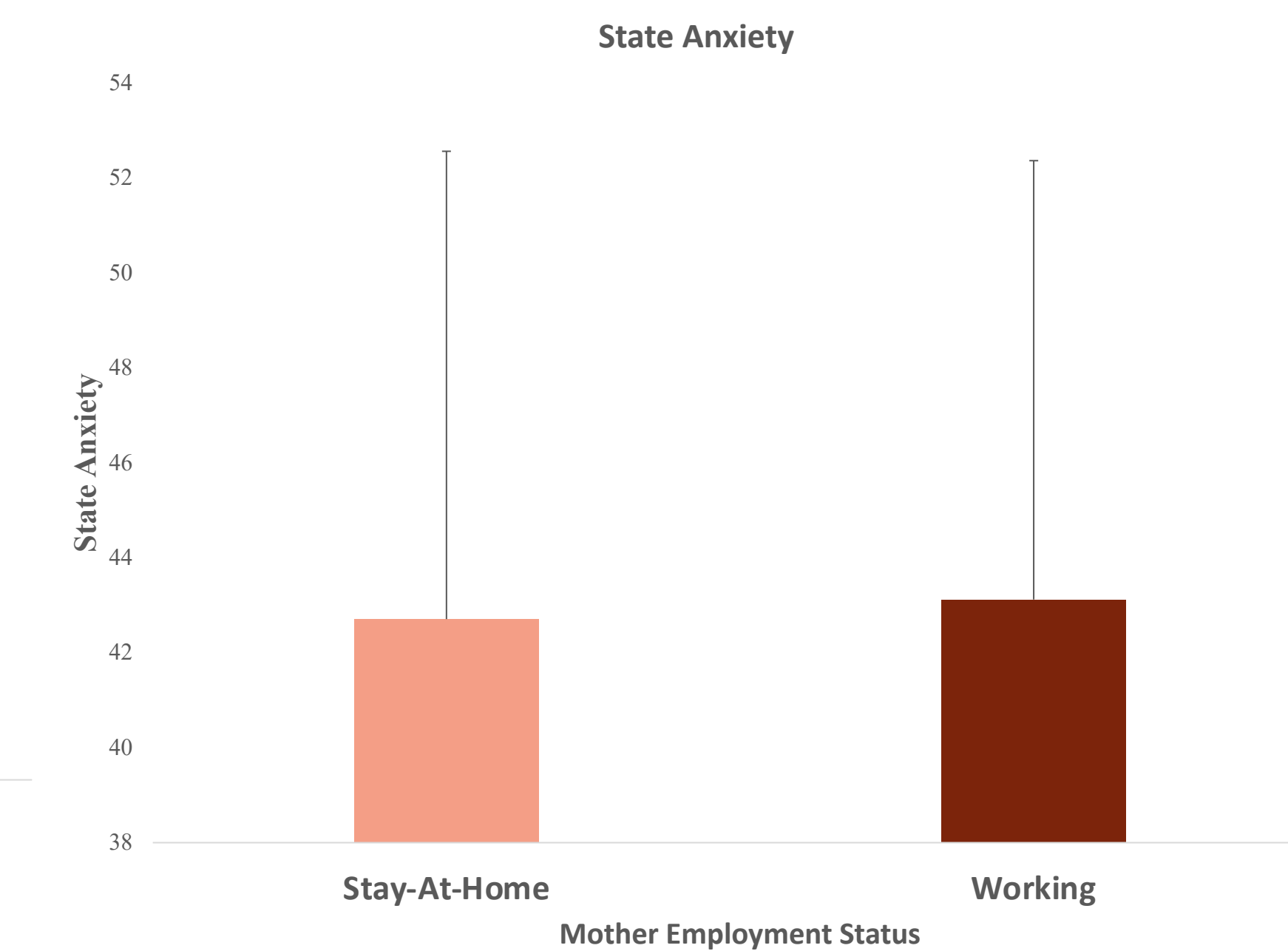
RESULTS: DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

Mothers who quit their job experience more depressive symptoms than working mothers.



RESULTS: STATE ANXIETY & PERCEIVED STRESS

Working mothers experience higher levels of anxiety and perceived stress than mothers who quit their job to care for their child with ASD.



RESULTS: FACTORS UNDERLYING A MOTHER'S EMPLOYMENT DECISION

- Mothers remaining in the professional workforce: Financial Needs
- Mothers who quit their job to care for their child with ASD: Child's Needs
- No statistically significant association between mother employment and job prestige when deciding whether to leave job

LIMITATIONS

- Recruiting mothers who quit their job to care for their child with ASD
- Demographics: majority white & individuals above poverty line

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

- Increased flexibility in leave time
- Better support groups
- More respite care

