

Single moms in college spend 9 hours a day on housework ^[1]

A new report details how this demographic divvies up their time, and it doesn't look relaxing.

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Source: The Atlantic

Format: Article

Publication Date: 10 May 2018

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Every year around this time—when commencement season and Mother's Day collide—moms across the country are praised for their grit and resolve. It's a tough job for just about anyone. But for 2.1 million ^[3] single mothers, according to the latest federal data, the normal difficulties are compounded by the stresses of going to college.

For these moms, there may not be enough hours in the day to do all the tasks they have to do at home while still going to college. A new report ^[4] from the Institute for Women's Policy Research, a think tank and advocacy group for advancing women's status, breaks down the data on the amount of time single mothers in college are spending on their obligations outside of the classroom compared with women students without children. The analysis, based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey, is instructive—and eye-opening.

Single moms who are enrolled in college full-time spend about two hours a day on active child care, six on supervisory care (meaning time spent looking after their children while doing another activity such as cooking or cleaning), and about two hours on housework; all told, these women are spending upward of nine hours a day on care and housework. Students without children devote about two hours to all of those activities combined. And on top of all of that, the report found, single-mother college students are getting less sleep, exercise, and social time than other students. In a separate IWPR study, ^[5] nearly half of women who attend community college and live with children said they thought they were likely to drop out.

"Single mothers in college are doing double and triple duty to make a better life for their families," said Lindsey Reichlin Cruse, a researcher at IWPR, in a release that accompanied the new report, "but too few have the support needed to juggle the competing time demands of college, parenthood, and employment."

It would make sense, then, that one of the most effective ways to help the population of students would be to give them back some of their time—time that could be spent on their classes—through child-care services. However, for many single mothers on campus, finding affordable child care isn't easy.

In 2015, fewer than half of both public four-year institutions and community colleges had campus child-care centers. And when those centers did exist, there was often a waiting list for their services. A 2016 report from IWPR found the average waiting list at campus child-care centers was about 80 children long. As the writer Amanda Freeman asked in *The Atlantic* in 2016 ^[6], "What does it say about the country's priorities that it's easier to find drop-in childcare while you take Zumba than English 101?"

Research on how campus child care affects graduation is limited, but data from at least one institution—Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York—suggests ^[4] it could have a significant impact. Student parents who used the campus child-care center between 2006 and 2014 were nearly 30 percent more likely to return to college the next fall than student parents at the same school who didn't use the service. And those students were 20 percent more likely to graduate on time.

Several colleges have launched programs aimed at students with children. Notably, Bard Microcollege Holyoke, a collaboration of Bard College and the Care Center in Holyoke, Massachusetts, is a first-of-its-kind college created specifically for low-income women whose educations were interrupted by pregnancy and parenting. And Endicott College, also in Massachusetts, is home to a "Keys to Degrees" program that is specifically tailored to provide assistance ^[7] to young parents—both men and women—and their children.

For parents not at one of these specialized institutions, change is coming—slowly: The federal government injected more money into child-care subsidies, through the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, doubling the funding ^[8] for the Child Care and Development Block Grant program, which means that states will have more money that they could allocate for student parents. And a handful of Democrats introduced legislation ^[9] in the House and Senate that would reauthorize the federal grant program specifically designed for on-campus child care, but their proposal has not yet gained much bipartisan momentum.

Still, as the report suggests, a lot of work remains to be done. States and federal lawmakers can target financial aid toward student parents. They can also tweak policy to allow college attendance to count towards work requirements for child-care funding. And, for their part,

colleges can improve their efforts towards making child care accessible and affordable—and giving time back to single mothers on campus.

Related link: Time demands of single mother college students and the role of child care in their postsecondary success^[10]

Region: United States^[11]

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