

How employment constraints affect low-income working parents' child care decisions ^[1]

Perspectives on low-income working families: Brief 23, February 2012

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AVAILABILITY

[Full brief in pdf](#) ^[2]

Description:

Low-income families often face employment situations consisting of irregular hours, inflexible schedules, few benefits such as paid time off, and low-wages. Urban Institute's new brief offers greater insight into how low-income parents' employment experiences shape their child care decisions. The brief analyzes qualitative data from a larger study on child care choices, which collected information from two low-income communities, one in Providence, Rhode Island and the other in Seattle-White Center, Washington. These two communities were intentionally chosen for their high-concentration of low-income families and immigrant populations. The study draws from two rounds of interviews with a total of 86 parents of young children.

The brief finds that parents face daily challenges in their employment situations that in turn affect their child care arrangements. Changing work schedules, nonstandard and shifting hours meant that some parents had to remove their children from center-based care to family care because centers weren't open beyond the standard working hours of 9-5. Transportation challenges between home, work, and child care also added constraints for some families, especially those that did not have personal vehicles and had to rely on public transportation. Job inflexibility and lack of benefits also made it hard for parents to address child care needs. Lack of paid sick leave or paid time off made it difficult for parents to address family emergencies or take care of a sick child. According to the brief, parents most often prioritized work requirements and had to fit their child care around job constraints.

In order to address the difficulties families face trying to align their jobs and child care options, Urban Institute offers a set of recommendations.

- Expand the supply of publicly funded early childhood care and education programs, particularly in low-income communities.
- Make sure that these options address the varying contexts of parents' employment situations.
- Give greater attention to the fit between work and child care for low-income families that have nonstandard and changing work schedules.
- Provide families with a minimum number of paid sick days that employed parents can use to care for their family members.
- Establish employee-financed paid family leave programs, so that parents have some financial and employment security to address the needs of their family.

Related link: [Child care choices for low-income working families](#) ^[3]

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