

Child care elusive for non-traditional workforce ^[1]

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Source: Forbes

Format: Article

Publication Date: 18 Jul 2015

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EXCERPTS

Finding quality child care is a challenge for all parents. It is expensive and safe and enriching care is in high demand. Yet low-income women not only face the burden of cost, but also availability — especially when they are working non-traditional schedules.

For the 30 percent of low-income women working off-hours — like nightshifts, weekends and irregular schedules that change from week to week — traditional child care is hard to secure, according to a new study from the Urban Institute. The study, “Who Minds the Kids When Mom is Working the Shift,” examines childcare challenges for low-income parents who work off-hours.

Child care facilities cannot accommodate such schedules, effectively excluding children from these programs and their benefits. Mothers rely heavily on partners and when there is none, they rely on extended families, often cobbling together multiple child care situations.

About one-fifth of parents who have children under age 14 work nonstandard hours and as the job market evolves, that number will continue to increase. Jobs with atypical schedules are among the fastest growing occupations, making access to alternative childcare options a growing concern for an increasing number of parents — and ultimately their employers.

This is not the push-back of Millennials against traditional 9-to-5 work, according to the report. For 72 percent of the low income women working non-traditional schedules say they do so because they have no other work options.

Studies have shown that formal child care is associated with better developmental and educational outcomes – a luxury largely inaccessible to low-income parents working odd hours.

But getting into those formal child-care systems — five-day-a-week centers offering day care — is out of reach for many of these families. Working inconsistent hours makes it more difficult for low-income parents to obtain assistance with child care costs. Many subsidy programs require a minimum and consistent number of hours worked per week.

Only 27 percent of low income single parents working a non-standard schedule use formal childcare for their young children. For many of these working women, multiple child care methods are used in a given week. One in four use other-parent care while they are working and about half use other relative care.

The report calls for policy examination of flexible child care options in communities with many parents on non-standard schedules. There may be opportunities, the report concludes, to look at how funding streams for care and subsidies for families might better help families working off-hours. Non-traditional work schedules call for non-traditional care.

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