

Who minds the kids when mom works a nonstandard schedule? ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Overview ^[2]

Full report ^[3]

Abstract

This paper examines the child care arrangements of mothers who work evenings, nights, or irregular schedules rather than regular daytime hours. Low-income working mothers in nonstandard schedules show greater use of any type of child care than low-income standard-schedule mothers and are more likely to use multiple child care arrangements. Partners are important sources of child care for mothers working nonstandard hours, and single parents rely on other relatives for child care at high rates. Nonstandard-schedule workers need not only child care at irregular hours but also more-flexible daytime care.

Who minds the kids when mom works a nonstandard schedule?

Growing shares of US workers operate on nonstandard schedules, with the majority of their work hours falling outside the traditional workday. Such workers who also have children have special child care needs because they require nontraditional child care hours. In this brief, we first give a background of what we know about nonstandard workers, their child care, and the associated policy environment. Then, we provide an up-to-date account of the prevalence of nonstandard work and the child care arrangements of low-income parents (those earning below 200 percent of the federal poverty level [FPL]) working nonstandard schedules; for this we use data from the 2008 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). We seek to inform development of work and child care policies that best fit the needs of these workers and their children in ways that advance child and family well-being.

Our research goes further than previous studies by examining the variety of child care arrangements used by working parents across work schedule, family type, and income. As stated by Adams (2009), "Child care decisions are an extraordinarily complex blend of preferences and constraints, each of which plays out differently for each family depending on their unique circumstances." By examining working families' child care use across different work schedules, incomes, and family structures, we seek to develop a greater understanding of how these unique circumstances are related to families' child care decisions. Information about the number of child care arrangements, the use of care provided by relatives, and how often working mothers use spouses or noncustodial parents for care can inform the design of child care policies, work support policies, and employment policies that are attentive to the well-being of low-income parents and their children.

We find that substantial shares of low-income working parents with children work nonstandard schedules, and that of these, about half work irregular schedules. Nonstandard schedules are more common among low-income parents than high-income parents. In comparison to standard-schedule parents, parents working nonstandard schedules are more likely to rely on multiple types of child care arrangements to fill their childcare needs. A working parent often relies on the other parent for care, including when the other parent lives separately. Single parents rely on relatives for child care at high rates.

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