

Keeping Child Care a Family Affair: Maternal Nonstandard Work Hours and Dual-Earner Couples' Child Care Arrangements

Today, most married mothers work in paid employment (Cohen and Bianchi 1999; Cohany and Sok 2007). The shift over the past three decades in married mothers' roles away from traditional homemaker to dual breadwinner has not gone unnoticed. Indeed, a voluminous literature offers explanations for the shift in their roles and assessments of the impacts of the shift on women's health, gender relations, and children's well-being (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bryant 1996; Bryant and Zick 1996; Desai et al. 1989; Presser 1989; Sandberg and Hofferth 2001).

Plainly, the increase in the number of mothers in two-parent families working in the labor force has dramatically affected how mothers with preschool-aged children manage their own time and organize childcare for their children while they work. Many mothers in two-parent families juggling work and family responsibilities claim that paid work imposes a time cost. A sizeable group state that they have little or no time for themselves and spend much of their non-labor market time on a "second shift" doing housework and caring for children (Hochschild 1997; Schor 1991; Hochschild and Machung 1989). Studies also report that mothers find balancing work and family time difficult to achieve; that they feel pressed for time; and, that they forgo time for themselves (Gershuny 2000; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Zuzanek 2000; Folbre and Bittman 2004; Bryant and Zick 1996).

Organizing child care is another potential cost of maternal employment in two-parent families, both financially and emotionally. Some working mothers suffer severe separation anxiety when they leave infants or toddlers with market child care providers while others experience acute stress when they discover that child care is unavailable (Ross and Mirowsky 1988). Even after they locate child care other problems often arise, e.g., unexpected out-of-pocket expenses, high children-to-staff ratios, inferior programs, insufficient hours or days of needed care, and basic trust about the care provided (Wheelock and Jones 2002). Hence, pecuniary and nonpecuniary costs associated with arranging child care can undercut the benefits of maternal employment. Unsurprisingly, governments have responded by defraying some out-of-pocket costs of child care and by regulating the child care market.

Undoubtedly, advancing research on the costs incurred by two-parent families when mothers work and use market-provided child care is essential. But, equally important is advancing a greater understanding of the link between maternal employment and parent-provided child care, especially since this form of child care obviates the need for market-provided care. Though often ignored, an astonishing number of working mothers have relied primarily on themselves or partners for child care for over 20 years (Overturf 2005). If this trend persists, millions of working mothers in two-parent families will continue to use parental care as their *primary* form of child care rather than use alternatives in the formal and informal child care markets (Overturf 2005).

What enables so many working mothers to keep child care provision a family affair deserves further investigation. We build upon past studies of work schedules and child care (Presser 2000, 2003) to offer new insights into factors leading working mothers to use parental child care as their primary form of care rather than other forms of child care. Using Australian time diary data, we explain further than past studies could why parental child care is the preferred child care choice among millions of mothers in dual-earner families. We argue that maternal nonstandard work hours help explain the high rates of parental child care currently utilized by dual-earner families. By underscoring the impact of maternal nonstandard work hours on the organization of child care, our research adds to the literature and informs a new generation of work-family policies.