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# SEARCHING FOR CARE AT NONTRADITIONAL TIMES: LOW-INCOME MOTHERS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND PERSPECTIVES ON CENTER-BASED CARE

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# Motivation

- Nonstandard work hours are common among low-income parents
- Child care decision-making processes are complex and dynamic
  - Work schedules and employment are important components
- Center-based care is a key way that public policy supports families, particularly in Texas, but...
  - It's not usually available at nontraditional times

# Research Questions

1. What social, economic, and structural factors are important in child care decisions among low-income mothers working nonstandard schedules who have young children?
2. Compared to other groups of low-income mothers with nonstandard schedules, are the roles or importance of certain factors different for:
  - a. Mothers working irregular schedules or
  - b. Mothers with different family structures?
3. What are mothers' perspectives on center-based child care during nontraditional hours, including its appeal and accessibility?

# Research Methods

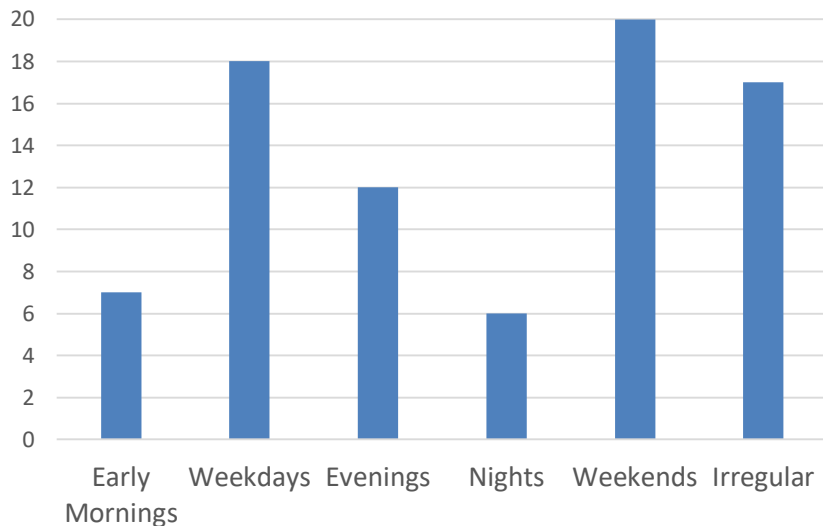
- Target sample
  - Low-income (<200% FPL) mothers of young children (< 6 years old) who reported working at least one job for pay that required work at nonstandard times (outside of 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday-Friday)
- Recruitment
  - Posting/distributing flyers in public and nonprofit community organizations, child care centers, and on Craigslist
  - Paid advertisements on Facebook
- Qualitative data collection
  - Eligibility survey and short demographic survey
  - In-depth, semi-structured interviews in English
  - Deductive and inductive coding

# Sample Description

- 20 mothers in Texas
- Typical mom: 29-30 years old, household size 3-4 people
  - 55% married/cohabiting
  - 45% single/dating/in a relationship
- Diverse by race/ethnicity
- Lower-income, lower-education

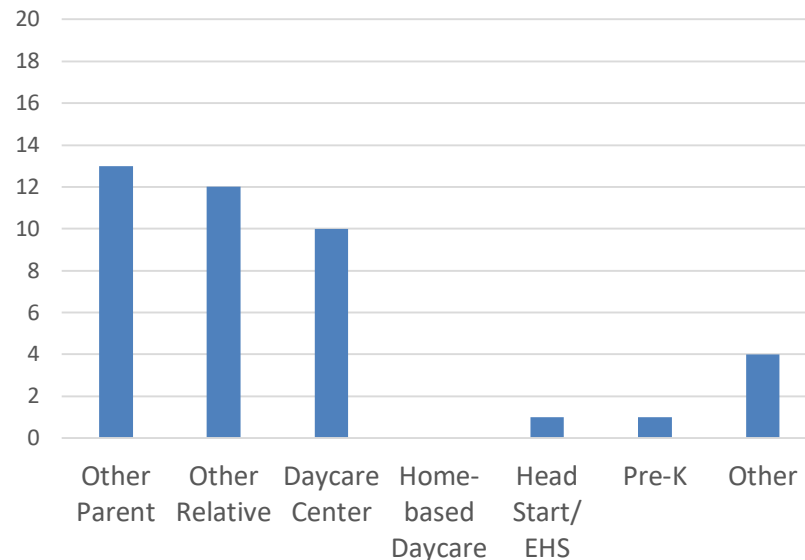
# Sample Description

Mothers' Work Schedules (n = 20)



Source: Demographic survey

Mothers' Child Care Arrangements (n = 20)



Source: Eligibility survey, interviews

# RQ 1. Decision-making Factors

SOCIAL	ECONOMIC	STRUCTURAL
Care settings - Opportunities for learning	Household income  Access to public programs	Cost  Hours
Caregiver characteristics - Personality and trust	Mother's work schedule	Availability
Availability of relatives - Partners and extended family		Location

# RQ 1. Nonstandard Work Schedules

- Opportunities
  - Ability to tag-team care
- Challenges
  - Careful balance of work and child care
  - Matching work schedules to availability and hours of operation (evenings, weekends)
  - Employer-based practices

“Our jobs, **we have to be there on the weekends no matter what.** So that’s another thing. It’s just a lot of [centers] don’t open on weekends.”

“I get my schedule two days before the first part of that schedule starts. So, ...I have to have a babysitter tomorrow. And that’s my notice...  
**That’s a really short notice.**”



## RQ 2. Irregular Schedules

- More irregularity leads to more challenges

“I used to have a set schedule, but I would do 6 am openings and closings to 10 pm depending on the day. And that was almost easier because then I could set things up... And now my position changed and so I’m picking up a lot of call-in shifts and vacation shifts. And it’s sort of expected at this point that I do that, and so, **it’s almost every week that it’s a little bit different now. And it’s hard to plan ahead.**”

# RQ 2. Family Structure

- Importance of support system for single moms

“When you’re doing it by yourself it’s really hard. When you have a second person there to help it makes it so much easier. Because y’all can balance...I work when you’re at home and then when I come home, you go to work. ...but since we’ve been split up, it’s been really hard...**I don’t have options, I don’t have four or five people who are going to come take [my] four kids... So, it makes it very difficult.**”

# RQ 3. Center-based Care

- Key factors in likelihood of use:
  - Necessity
  - Family support system
  - Time of day/day of week
  - Potential benefits
- Barriers to access:
  - Cost
  - Availability

“But you have to pay the bills... As parents, we have to provide the best life for them and so **if that means staying at work later, then that’s just what we have to do.**”

“**It’s a life saver.** And I know like going into that place on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, I’m not the only person using it... You have to call ahead and make a reservation, because they know they’re going to be packed.”

# Summary

- Nonstandard work schedules add important challenges to the child care decision-making process:
  - Difficulty matching work schedules to care availability
  - More irregularity makes it more difficult to find and plan care
  - Support systems are vital
- Center-based care at nontraditional times is appealing to mothers, particularly on the weekends, but cost and availability remain important barriers

# Contact

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