

Instability in Parental Employment: The relationship with child care instability

Ajay Chaudry, Urban Institute
Julia R. Henly, University of Chicago

2010 Annual Meeting of the
Child Care Policy Research Consortium
Washington D.C. October 22, 2010

Forms of Instability in Employment

It is useful to think about “Instability” in two ways:

- Instability across Jobs in terms of the movement in and out of jobs
- Instability within a Job
- Instability within a Job related to job turnover

Instability Across Jobs

- Lots of instability and movement in and out of jobs particularly for low-wage workers
 - Some evidence about employment dynamics/patterns
 - High Job turnover; movement across jobs
 - Variations by worker/family characteristics
 - Variations by occupation/industry
- Employment instability likely worse in the course of a recession and a slow labor market recovery

Instability Factors within a Job

- There are several aspects of low-wage jobs that create and contribute to instability
 - Nonstandard work schedules timing (especially in industrial sectors where low-income working women are concentrated, e.g., health care; retail; hospitality).
 - Fluctuating hours (no minimum hour guarantees in most hourly jobs; fluctuating hours translates into variable earnings).
 - Unpredictable and variable schedules (just-in-time scheduling and variable shifts and days are common in hourly jobs).
 - Limited Job Flexibility
- Instability within a job itself related to job turnover

Employment Instability and Child Care

- Paired Decisions
 - Child care and employment as simultaneous decisions
 - Employment characteristics shape child care needs and therefore are an important factor influencing child care decision making
- Interacting Instability
 - Employment instability can cause child care instability
 - Child care instability can cause employment instability

Flexibility: What is it? What kind is important for families?

- Families need flexibility somewhere: home, child care, work.
 - Emlen contributed to our understanding of flexibility
- In terms of work: important to recognize the kind of flexibility that benefits child care.
 - Employee control (input) over when, where, and/or how much they work
 - Common measures of flexibility do not properly distinguish employer vs employee-driven flexibility