

PROJECT BRIEF

Limited Resources, Little Time: Work, Family, and Childcare Challenges for Low-Income Families

Project Team: Peter Hepburn (scholar), Sandra Smith (mentor/PI), Lisa Gennetian (mentor)

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Project Description.

This project explores how parental employment and household structure shape low-income families' access to and use of (a) developmentally-beneficial childcare options and (b) childcare subsidies. The project includes three main studies (each a free-standing paper). In the first, changes over time in parental work schedules in single-mother and two-parent households are analyzed. The second enumerates the consequences of these parental work schedules for a range of childcare outcomes. The third paper investigates changes over time in household structure and their effects on the use of relative care for young children.

Research Questions.

- How have the working schedules of parents in both single-mother and two-parent households changed over time? What accounts for these changes?
- Does working a nonstandard or an unstable schedule lead to greater childcare complexity? Greater childcare instability? More or less of certain types of care? Decreased likelihood of making use of childcare subsidies?
- How has the composition of households that include young children changed over time? How can we best characterize household complexity? Is relative care increasingly being provided by cohabiting relatives?

Sample. Analysis is based on the household samples of the 1990 National Child Care Study (NCCS) and the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE). Both are nationally-representative surveys of the use of and demand for early care and education services. Both surveys include detailed parental and child schedules and household rosters that allow for the assessment of relationships among cohabiting members.

Methods. The first paper employs sequence analysis and clustering to develop typologies of work scheduling and stability in single-mother and two-partner households. Regression methods are used to describe and account for changes in distribution over time. In the second paper, regression methods are used to estimate the effects of work schedules on a set of childcare-related outcomes (use of three types of care, childcare complexity and continuity, and use of subsidized care). The third paper employs network methods to characterize household structures and links to Census data to demonstrate how changes over time are or are not driven by changing population factors. The paper also demonstrates the role of cohabiting “additional adults” in providing care for young children and facilitating parental employment.

Progress Update. The first paper is completed and currently under review for publication. Nonstandard scheduling has increased in prevalence in single-mother households but not in two-parent households; day-to-day schedule instability has become far more common in both sorts of household. Changes to the educational and occupational composition of the population between 1990 and 2012 do not serve to explain these changes. The second paper is completed and currently under second revision at the *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Results from this paper will be discussed in greater depth at the grantee meeting. Analysis for the third paper is ongoing.

Implications for policy/practice

Having a better understanding of the full set of factors that shape parents' use of certain types of care and of childcare subsidies helps policy-makers and practitioners to tailor more effective programs. This projects helps to broaden the set of such factors under consideration. If we know, for example, that (a) single-mothers are increasingly working evening and nights and (b) such schedules lower the likelihood that

such mothers take advantage of subsidies, then we can begin to create programs that reach out to these subpopulations and facilitate access.

Implications for research

This project contributes to the sociological study of work, family, and inequality. The first paper offers an unparalleled look at family-level scheduling dynamics and their change over time. The second brings to bear a range of methods to explore the consequences of such schedules. The third contributes to ongoing debates within Sociology regarding family complexity

and the long-term consequences of growing economic insecurity.

For more information:

Draft papers are available from Hepburn upon request.

Contact

Peter Hepburn
Doctoral Candidate in Sociology & Demography
University of California, Berkeley
website: pshepburn.github.io
email: pshepburn@demog.berkeley.edu
phone: 612.202.5433