Work and Family: Child-Care Arrangements of Young Working Mothers

Data from the National Longitudinal Surveys

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Due to the increasing labor force participation rate of mothers, adequate child care has become quite important to many working parents, employers, and policy makers. This report provides an analysis of child-care arrangements using data from the Youth cohort of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience (NLS). These data provide information on a sample of young men and women who were between the ages of 14 and 22 in 1979 and who have been interviewed annually since 1979. Questions dealing with child-care arrangements were asked in the years 1982-86 as well as in 1988.

The data in this report represent the primary child-care arrangements for the youngest child of working mothers aged 23-31 in 1988. The sample is restricted to those women whose youngest child is age 5 and under and is not attending regular school. The primary child-care arrangement refers to the usual arrangement used by the mother during most of the hours she worked.

Overview

An overview of child-care arrangements for the preschool children of working mothers is provided in table 1. The use of relatives is the most common form of child care. Roughly 2 out of 5 (41 percent) working mothers used husbands, grandmothers, siblings, and other relatives to care for their child while they work. Over a quarter (27.7 percent) of the care was provided by nonrelatives. This includes care by in-home sitters and care in other private homes. A slightly smaller proportion of care (23 percent) was provided by organized child care facilities, that is, daycare centers and nursery or preschools. A small proportion (3.4 percent) of mothers cared for their own children during work. The average weekly child-care expenditures for all women in the study was $64.39.

Table 1 also provides information on child-care arrangements by characteristics of the mother such as marital status, race, education, hours of work, earnings, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) status.

Marital status

There are very few differences in the types of child-care arrangements between women who are married with spouse present and other women. In particular, there is virtually no difference in the use of relatives as child-care providers between those who have a spouse present and those who do not. This implies that women without a husband present in the household make use of other relatives, such as the grandmother and siblings of the youngest child, to a greater extent than women whose husband is present. Married mothers do have substantially higher weekly child-care expenditures than single women ($70.60 vs. $48.48).

Race

While over one-half of blacks and Hispanics use relatives for their primary source of child care, only 36.8 percent of whites do so. Whites are much more likely to use nonrelatives than other groups, but, surprisingly, a higher percentage of blacks use child-care centers than the other racial groups. Whites have the highest average weekly expenditures on child care ($68.85), followed by Hispanics ($54.91), and blacks ($49.75).

Education

Those with lower educational attainment levels are more likely to use relatives for child care than those with higher educational levels. More than 53 percent of those with less than a high school education use a relative for their primary source of care, whereas just over 40 percent of high school graduates and almost 37 percent of college graduates do so. The likelihood of using a child-care center appears to be positively associated with educational levels, and the use of a nonrelative for care is higher among high school and college graduates than those with less than a high school education. It is surprising, therefore, that mothers with less than a high school education have higher average weekly

expenditures ($93.48) than both high school graduates ($56.23) and college graduates ($84.77).

Hours of Work

Employed mothers who work full time (35 hours or more a week) are less likely to use a relative for child care and are more likely to use child-care centers than those who work part-time. Women who work between 21 and 34 hours a week are more likely to use nonrelatives for child care than other mothers. These women also have the highest average weekly child-care expenditures, at $95.53, while women who work full time actually have the lowest weekly expenditures, at $59.12. This may be partially due to the fact that a higher proportion of women who work part-time are married, and consequently have higher family incomes and presumably can afford to spend more on child care.

Earnings

Children of mothers who have higher earnings than other mothers are less likely to be cared for by a relative, as 26.2 percent of mothers who earn $30,000 a year or more use a relative for care, whereas 46.6 percent of mothers who earn less than $10,000 a year use a relative. Mothers who earn less than $10,000 a year are less likely to use nonrelatives and child-care centers than other mothers. Women in the lowest income category and those in the highest are actually similar in their probability of caring for their child at work, as 13.2 percent of low income mothers and 14.0 percent of high income mothers care for their child while working. Average weekly child-care expenditures appear to increase with the mother's earnings. In particular, there is a jump from $52.03 for those who earn between $10,000 and $19,999 to $73.97 for those who earn from $20,000 to $29,999 per year.

AFDC status

There is surprisingly little difference in the types of child-care arrangements for those mothers who participate in the AFDC program and those who do not. The only significant difference is in average weekly child-care expenditures, in which AFDC participants pay $31.26, and other women pay $66.29.

Dual-earner parents

Part of the growth in the labor force participation rate of women has been due to a rise in the number of families in which both spouses are employed. There are particularly two issues relating to dual-earner families and the method by which these families coordinate their work and family schedules. First, is the issue of shift work. Do working couples arrange their work schedules so that one spouse can care for the child while the other is working? Second, sometimes the choice of child-care arrangement is made by the mother and the wife's earnings are used to purchase child care. Hence, is there a significant difference between the mother's earnings and the total income of the working couple when we discuss child-care arrangements for dual-earner parents?

Shift work. One of the most direct ways to analyze the extent of shift work by dual-earner parents is to examine the overlap in work hours of the spouses. Table 2 shows the child-care arrangements for two-earner couples by the number of overlapping hours of work between spouses (which does not reflect the time necessary to commute to work). Table 2 indicates that, while the majority of couples have over 6 overlapping hours of work a day, over 10 percent of dual-earner couples have 2 hours or fewer of overlap. Those couples who have fewer than 2 hours of overlap in employment are much more likely to use a relative for care than do other couples. The use of nonrelatives for care increases dramatically for those couples with more than 2 hours of overlap in employment. Those with at least 4 hours of overlap in employment use child-care centers more frequently than others. Working couples having between 2 to 6 hours of overlap include the highest proportion of mothers taking care of the child while at work.

While, on average, 4.1 percent of working mothers or spouses lost work within the last 4 weeks due to child-care problems, there exists considerable variation in lost work by the extent of overlap. In particular, it appears that those couples with more than 6 hours of overlap in work hours are less likely to lose work due to child-care problems. This may be because those couples with over 6 overlapping hours are more likely to use child-care centers and nonrelatives, which provide care during regular work hours and are a less uncertain form of care than using a relative.

Mother's earnings. Are the mother's earnings the component of family income that is used to pay for child care? Child-care arrangements by mother's earnings and the earnings of both spouses (total family income) are shown in table 3. The data suggest that women with lower earnings and lower total family income are likely to use relatives for care. However, the use of a nonrelative appears to have a more consistently positive relationship with the mother's earnings than total family income. Yet, total family income has a positive association with the use of a child-care center, while it is not clear for mother's earnings. Consequently, it is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the relationship of the earnings of the mother to family income in the payment for child care.

Table 1. Primary child-care arrangements for employed women with preschool children in 1988
(in percent)

	Relatuve	Nonrelative	Child-care center	Mother during work	Other	Average weekly child-care expenditure
Total	41.0	27.7	23.0	3.4	4.8	$64.39
Marital status						
Married spouse present	40.6	28.2	21.6	4.0	5.6	70.60
Other	42.2	26.4	26.9	1.7	2.8	48.48
Race						
White	36.8	30.8	23.1	3.6	5.7	68.85
Black	54.3	15.9	26.2	2.0	1.6	49.75
Hispanic	50.9	26.1	14.4	4.3	4.2	54.91
Education						
Less than high school	53.4	20.5	17.3	5.2	3.7	93.48
High school graduate	40.4	28.3	22.6	3.5	5.1	56.23
College graduate	36.7	29.2	28.2	1.5	4.4	84.77
Hours of work						
1-20	47.1	19.2	21.2	4.3	8.2	68.49
21-34	49.2	31.0	15.8	2.8	1.1	95.53
35 and over	39.0	28.0	24.5	3.4	5.2	59.12
Mother's earnings						
Under $10,000	46.6	17.9	13.3	13.2	8.9	54.28
$10,000 - $19,999	39.6	27.8	21.4	6.6	4.7	52.03
$20,000 - $29,999	33.2	31.7	24.8	3.0	7.2	73.97
$30,000 and over	26.2	29.3	24.8	14.0	5.7	80.32
On AFDC						
Yes	43.4	24.6	18.8	4.1	9.0	31.26
No	40.9	27.9	3.3	3.3	4.6	66.29

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

Table 2. Number of overlapping hours of employment with spouse for dual earner families with preschool children, 1988
(in percent)

Number of overlapping work hours with spouse		Total	Relative	Nonrelative	Child-care centers	Mother during work	Other	Lost work[1]
At least	No more than							
-	0	4.7	84.4	4.4	11.3	0	0	0
0	2	5.4	69.5	13.6	6.1	1.6	9.1	12.1
2	4	6.1	27.6	39.1	15.7	8.7	8.8	8.6
4	6	10.5	38.6	30.6	21.2	8.5	1.1	12.8
6	8	33.4	33.4	34.0	27.6	3.0	2.0	2.8
8		39.7	25.6	35.9	27.2	3.8	7.6	1.7

[1] Did mother or spouse lose work within last 4 weeks due to child-care problems?

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

Table 3. Child-care arrangements by mother's earnings and total family income, 1988
(in percent)

	Relative	Nonrelative	Child-care center	Mother during work	Other
Mother's earnings					
Under $10,000	47.3	19.1	16.9	6.8	9.9
$10,000 - $19,999	39.7	32.2	23.6	1.7	2.7
$20,000 - $29,999	34.9	34.1	29.0	0.3	1.8
$30,000 and over	23.4	46.8	17.0	12.9	0.0
Total family income					
Under $10,000	65.0	22.4	9.8	0.0	2.8
$10,000 - $19,999	54.8	12.2	14.4	11.4	7.2
$20,000 - $29,999	49.2	27.7	16.7	3.0	3.5
$30,000 and over	34.7	31.5	25.9	2.6	5.4

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

Technical Note

Data in this report are from the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS), which are sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Bureau of Labor Statistics contracts with the Center For Human Resource Research of the Ohio State Universty to manage the surveys and provide user services. The NLS were begun in the mid 1960's with the drawing of four samples: Young Men who were 14-24 years old in 1966, Young Women who were 14-24 years old in 1968, Older Men who were 45-59 years old in 1966, and Mature Women who were 30-44 years old in 1967. Each sample originally had about 5,000 individuals with oversamples of blacks. In the early 1980's, the Young Men and Older Men surveys were discontinued. The two women's surveys continue and are currently collected every 2 years.

In 1979, a new cohort was begun with a sample of over 12,000 young men and women who were 14-21 years of age in 1979. It included oversamples of blacks, Hispanics, economically disadvantaged whites, and youth in the military. The military oversample was discontinued after the 1984 survey and the economically disadvantaged white oversample was discontinued in 1990. This survey is called the Youth cohort and it has been interviewed every year since it began.

The data in this report are weighted so that the sample is representative of the age group studied. All inferences that are discussed in the text are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Due to sampling variability, small differences between estimates that are not discussed in the text should be interpreted with caution. For a detailed explanation of the NLS, see *NLS Handbook 1991* (Center for Human Resource Research, Ohio State University). For information about the NLS, or to be placed on a mailing list, write to National Longitudinal Surveys, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Research and Evaluation, Room 2126, Washington, DC 20212, or call (202) 523-1347.

Information in this report will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 523-1221; TDD phone: (202) 523-3926; TDD Message Referral phone: 1-800-326-2577.