

# Continuity or Change in Father Provided Child Care Among Employed Mothers?

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## Abstract

Economic and normative changes are forcing families and society to re-examine changes in parental employment and the role and expectations of fathers. Previous research indicates an increase in the use of father provided child care among families with employed mothers. However it is unclear whether changes in father provided child care are related to economic or social changes and if fathers continue to provide child care when economic or household conditions change. Using longitudinal survey data and fixed effects, this study will examine the use of father provided child care among the same set of employed mothers at two different points in time. This study will focus on the characteristics of mothers and families who use father provided child care, the stability of father provided child care, and how changes in the use of father provided child care are related to changes in employment and household dynamics. Results will shed light on the myriad of economic and social factors that influence the use of father provided child care over time.

## Introduction

The twenty-first century continues to highlight changes in women's labor force participation, household structure, and the role of fathers. As the rate of maternal labor force participation increased over the 1980s and well into the 1990s, the need for child care during a mother's working hours also grew (Hofferth 1996; Spain and Bianchi, 1996). At the same time, the role of fathers has been evolving from the distant 9 to 5 working man to the modern father who is highly involved. Changes in maternal employment, periods of economic decline, joint work schedules, part-time employment, self-employment, and changes in the conception of

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress. The views expressed on statistical and methodological issues are those of the author and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

fatherhood are all associated with increases in father provided child care (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb 2000; Hofferth & Goldscheider 2010; Mattingly & Smith 2010).

The recent recession and the general increase in the use of father provided care has led to media reports about the sudden reversal in roles between mothers and fathers. Recent news stories have recounted how fathers are choosing to stay home and take care of the children while mothers gladly serve as the primary breadwinners (Hymowitz 2012; Williams 2012). While gender norms may be evolving, we are hardly headed for a complete reversal in roles. Instead, many mothers and fathers are struggling to meet work and family demands by working opposite shifts, working from home, or reducing work hours (Brayfield 1995; Casper & O'Connell 1998; Presser 1995). What is not clear from the research is how changes in parental employment behavior or other household characteristics influence father provided child care. Are un-or-under employed fathers willing to provide child care if they find full time work? Or will families continue to use father provided care and make compromises elsewhere?

Although many studies have examined the factors associated with the use of father provided child care during a mother's work hours, most previous research has used cross-sectional data and little is known about how changes in employment or family characteristics influence the use of and continuity of father provided child care among employed mothers. The present study will provide valuable insight into the existing research by using innovative methods to examine the socio-demographic differences between families who use and do not use father provided child care between two different points in time: spring of 2010 and spring of 2011. How often do families stop using father provided child care and what factors are

associated with such a change? How does the stability of father provided child care vary in connection with changes in employment, such as a change in a mother's or father's work status? Lastly, how does the use of father provided child care change as children age or other life events occur?

### **Trends in father provided child care**

Figure 1 shows the trend in the use of father provided child care between 1988 and 2010 by employed married mothers. Data come from several panels of data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation. Historical comparisons of SIPP data on fathers as child care providers are complicated by the changes to the questionnaire starting in 1997. Prior to that time, only the two most frequently used child care arrangement types were identified by the mother. The revised questionnaire allowed respondents to identify all of the child care arrangements they regularly use. As a result, increases in the percentage of fathers providing care are due in part to the addition of fathers who were not the primary or secondary care providers for their children.<sup>2</sup> From 1988 to 1993, between 19 percent and 23 percent of fathers with employed wives provided care to one or more of their children under 15 years of age (Figure 1). The percentage rose to 32 percent in 1997, stayed around this level in 1999, and dropped to 27 percent in 2005, only to increase again to 32 percent in 2010. The percentage of fathers who were the primary care provider for their child has varied between 9 percent and 14 percent since 1988. Despite some fluctuations, the proportion of fathers providing primary care for at least one of their children under the age of 15 has followed a downward trend from 12 percent in 1988 to 10 percent in 2010.

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<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 1997, primary arrangements are derived from the number of hours each arrangement is used each week rather than a direct question asking for the primary arrangement as used in prior surveys.

Several theoretical explanations have been offered to explain the trends in father provided child care. Prior research has indicated that father provided child care increased most dramatically during recession years and that father care is related to decreases in father's job security and earnings. The more mothers earn relative to their husbands, the more likely fathers are to provide child care to avoid paying for nonrelative care (Casper and O'Connell 1998; Maume and Mullin 1993). Periods of unemployment among fathers can lead to more hours of child care while the mother is at work, but fathers who devote the most time to child care tend to be highly educated and have young children (Pailhe and Solaz 2008). Conversely, low-income fathers tend to provide little child care following changes in their employment status (Waller 2009). Broader changes in the economy have also changed the nature of work and family balance. As the economy shifts to more service-based industries and more occupations that have nonstandard hours, fathers are more readily available to care for children in the evenings and on weekends (Brayfield 1995; Glass 1998; Presser 1995).

While changes in work schedules or employment status may provide opportunities for fathers to provide child care while the mother is working, other research suggests that the increase in the amount of time fathers spend with children may reflect changing conceptions of fatherhood (Deutsch, Lusier & Servis, 1993). Research examining the trends in the use of father provided child care found that the proportion of couples using father-provided child care has increased over time as younger fathers have a greater propensity to provided child care while their wives are at work than did fathers in earlier time periods (Brewster & Giblin 2000).

Lastly, many families do not solely rely on father provided child care. Instead families often use father care in addition to other child care arrangements (Fox Folk and Yi 1994; Glass 1998; Laughlin 2010). Research also indicates that father provided child care may lack the

stability that working mothers need. In her study of families with a first birth, Glass (1998) found that few fathers consistently provided more than 20 hours of child care throughout the first year of the child's life. Also, the fact that fathers provided child care tends to increase during economic recessions, suggests that fathers who do provide care do so when they are unemployed or laid off and their stability as a provider is highly dependent on their own economic situation for once they re-enter the workforce they no longer provide child care (Casper and O'Connell 1998).

### **Research questions**

Conceptually, there are two major reasons why employed mothers use father provided child care. First, changes in the macro-economic structure have allowed fathers to be more readily available for child care during their wives' work hours. Second, changing norms regarding father involvement have emerged and opened up opportunities for fathers to be more engaged in child care. However, it is unclear how much emerging norms of father involvement are related to changes in attitudes or general economic changes such as the increase in non-standard work hours, increase in women's wages, and recession effects.

This study will provide a fuller understanding of the circumstances under which fathers provide care while mothers are working by examining the relationship between father provided child care and various social and economic factors. Additionally, this study will also provide a greater understanding of the stability of father provided child care and factors associated with changes in the use of the father care by examining the same set of families at two different time periods: spring 2010 and spring 2011. Specifically, the following questions will be addressed:

1. What are the characteristics of families who use father provided child care versus families who do not use father provided child care in 2010 and 2011?
2. How consistent is the use of father provided child care between 2010 and 2011?
3. Are changes in the use of father provided child care related to social and economic factors such as changes in employment status of either parent, child characteristics, and household structure?

## **Data**

The data supporting these analyses come from two waves from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). The SIPP is a nationally representative household survey designed to provide detailed longitudinal information on the economic situation of households in the United States. Child care data are asked in “topical modules” administered during selected “waves,” or interviews. Data for the current analysis will be based of the 2008 SIPP Panel using wave 5, collected in the spring of 2010 (Time 1), and wave 8, collected in the spring of 2011 (Time 2). For each time period, SIPP asks the same questions regarding the type of child care and the hours in care for each child under the age of 15.

To examine continuity and change in the use of father provided child care, the current study is limited to mothers who were employed at both Time 1 and Time 2 and who were married or cohabitating with the father of at least one of her children. The SIPP child care module does not ask unemployed mothers if they use father provided child care, therefore limiting our ability to understand father provided child care among unemployed mothers. Despite these limitations, SIPP is an appropriate data source for this study because it includes detailed child care data for each child under the age of 15 and extensive information on household

structure, income, employment, and work schedules. More importantly, the longitudinal design of SIPP panels provides the opportunity to examine changes in father provided child care among the same set of employed mothers between 2010 and 2011. Data files will be created to produce a file of mothers who were employed at Time 1 and Time 2 and include information regarding child care usage, employment characteristics, and household structure at those two time points.

## **Measures**

*Child care variables* For each child, mothers are asked to identify what type of child care provider was used to look after the child while she was at work. Child care providers can be broadly classified as relative care (father, grandparent, sibling, some other relative) or nonrelative care (organized center, family day care, Head Start). This information will be used to construct a set of binary variables to indicate whether or not father provided child care was used at Time 1 and/or Time 2. Descriptive statistics will provide information on the number of hours fathers provided child care at Time 1 and Time 2. Additional variables will also be constructed to measure the use of other relative care, organized care, family day care, and other non-relative care at these two time periods.

*Work and income variables* At each point in time, mothers and co-resident fathers were asked detailed information about their earnings, work hours and work schedules. Variables will be created to indicate work shift (day or night), number of hours worked, total family income, and the proportion of income earned by the mother and by the father. Similar data is unavailable for non-resident fathers.

*Family variables* The mother's age, years of education, marital status, number of and age of children will be used as demographic controls. A dichotomous variable will also be created to measure whether the father resides in the household.

## **Analytical Strategy and Future Research**

To unravel the underlying social and economic factors that impact the use and stability of father provided child care, this study will provide various descriptive statistics on use and non-use of father provided child care in 2010 and 2011. Appendix A provides an outline of the tables and table shells that will be prepared for this study.

The association between several economic and family characteristics and the use of father provided child care may change over time. For example, a mother or father who experiences a change in employment status, number of hours worked, wages or shift may impact if a father is available to provide child care. Similarly, changes in marital status, household size, ages of children, use of other child care arrangements can reduce the use of father provided child care. Because most previous research in this area has primarily used cross-sectional data (Brayfield 1995; Brewster and Biblin 2000; Casper and O'Connell 1998), we do not have a full understanding of how the changes mentioned above can impact the use of father provided child care over time. This study aims to fill that research gap.

The current study will first conduct a random effects logistic regression model to compare mothers who use or do not use father provided child care. Second, to specifically model change over time, a fixed effects model will be used to predict changes in the use of father



provided child care. The fixed effect model will examine how a mother's use of father provided child care at a Time 1 deviates from that same mother's use of father provided child care at Time 2. As such, the fixed effect model will attempt to assess the association between time-varying characteristics, such as family size, family composition, parental work hours, wages or employment status and the use of father provided child care. This approach differs from the random effects model that will be initially be completed because a random effect model compares relations between predictor and outcome variables across different mothers, where as the fixed effects model will examine an individual mother over time and related changes in the predictor to changes in the outcome. This approach will maximize the longitudinal structure of SIPP and limit the influence of potentially biasing unmeasured characteristics of mothers or their families (Allison 2009).

Table 4 in Appendix A provides an outline of the fixed and time-varying covariates that will be applied. Fixed covariates are typically factors that do not change over time, such as race gender, or education. Time-varying covariates are factors that have the potential to change over time and may be predict changes in the outcome. For the current study, the fixed covariates include the mother's race and education. While educational attainment can change over time, given that the two time points in this study are only a year apart, relatively few mothers' educational attainment changed. Time-varying covariates include parental work characteristics, family characteristics, and household income characteristics.

## Conclusions

While recent media accounts would have us believe that father provided care will become the new norm for working families, previous research and the current study all point to the need to carefully look at the circumstances under which fathers provide child care while mothers are at work. This study will also help determine how consistent father provided care is as mothers and fathers face economic and social changes, by examining the same set of families between two different time points.

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## **Appendix A: Tables and Table Shells**

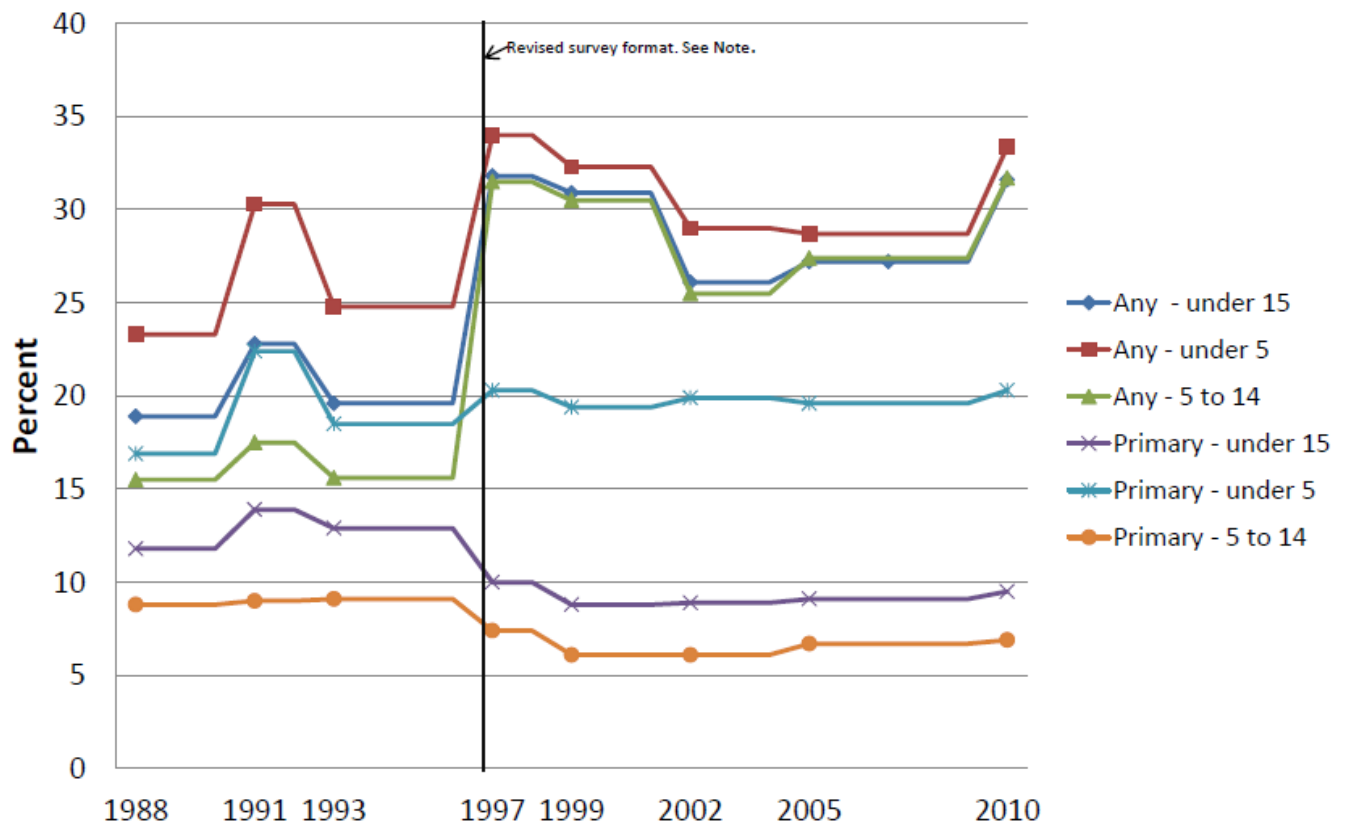
Table 1. Hours of Father Provided Child Care Per Week in 2010 and 2011 by Mothers' Work Hours

Table 2. Child Care Arrangement Type by Use of Father Provided Child Care

Table 3. Use of Father Provided Child Care by Characteristics of the Mother: 2010

Table 4. Random Effect and Fixed Effect Logistic Regression Models Predicting Use of Father Provided Child Care

**Figure 1. Fathers Providing Care for Children with Employed Mothers:  
Selected Years, 1988 to 2010**



Note: Beginning in 1997, primary arrangements are derived from the number of hours each arrangement is used each week rather than a direct question asking for the primary arrangement as used in prior surveys. Also, prior to 1997, information on father care was only collected if mentioned as being the primary or secondary care arrangement. Sources: Tabulations derived from Current Population Reports, Series P-70-59, Tables 1 & 2, U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel Waves 4 & 10, 2001 Panel Wave 4; 2004 Panel Wave 4, 2008 Panel Wave 5

**Table 1. Hours of Father Provided Child Care in 2010 and 2011 by Mothers' Work Hours**

(Average hours per week among children)

	<b>2010</b>		<b>2011</b>	
Mothers' work hours	Average hours in father care	Proportion of Mother's Work Hours	Average hours in father care	Proportion of Mother's Work Hours
All				
Full-time				
Part-time				

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2008 Panel, Wave 5 and Wave 8

For information on sampling and nonsampling error see [http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW8%28S&A-13%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW8%28S&A-13%29.pdf)**Table 2. Child Care Arrangement Type by Use of Father Provided Child Care**

(Percent of mothers)

	<b>2010</b>		<b>2011</b>	
Arrangement Type	Father Care	No Father Care	Father Care	No Father Care
Relative care				
Day care center or nursery school				
Family day care				
Other Non-relative care				

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2008 Panel, Wave 5 and Wave 8

For information on sampling and nonsampling error see [http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW8%28S&A-13%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW8%28S&A-13%29.pdf)

**Table 3. Use of Father Provided Child Care, by Characteristics of the Mother: 2010**

(Numbers in thousands.)

Characteristic	2010		
	Total	Any Father Care	No Father Care
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>			
White			
Non-Hispanic			
Black			
Asian and Pacific Islander			
Hispanic (any race)			
<b>Education Level</b>			
Less than high school			
High school graduate			
Some college			
Bachelor's degree or higher			
<b>Employment Status</b>			
Employed			
Not employed			
<b>Employment Schedule</b>			
Employed full-time			
Employed part-time			
<b>Shift Work Status</b>			
Worked day shift			
Worked nonday shift			
Self-employed			
<b>Family Monthly Income</b>			
Less than \$1,500			
\$1,500 to \$2,999			
\$3,000 to \$4,499			
\$4,500 and over			
<b>Poverty Status</b>			
Below poverty level			
At or above poverty level			

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2008 Panel, Wave 5 and Wave 8

For information on sampling and nonsampling error see [http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW8%28S&A-13%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW8%28S&A-13%29.pdf)

**Table 4. Random and Fixed Effects Logistic Regression Models Predicting use of Father Provided Child Care**

Characteristic	Random Effects Model	Fixed Effects Model
<b>Mother's Race and Hispanic Origin</b>		
Non-Hispanic White (omitted)	X	
Black	X	
Asian and Pacific Islander	X	
Hispanic (any race)	X	
<b>Mother's Education Level</b>		
Less than high school	X	
High school graduate	X	
Some college	X	
Bachelor's degree or higher (omitted)	X	
<b>Father's Education Level</b>		
Less than high school	X	
High school graduate	X	
Some college	X	
Bachelor's degree or higher (omitted)	X	
<b>Parental Work Characteristics</b>		
Mother - Number of hours worked	X	X
Father - Number of hours worked	X	X
Mother works night shift	X	X
Father works night shift	X	X
<b>Household Characteristics</b>		
Married (omitted)	X	X
Cohabiting	X	X
Number of adults in the ome	X	X
Children young than 6	X	X
Children 6 and older	X	X
Family income (logged)	X	X
Father's proportion of family income	X	X
Used multiple child care arrangments	X	X

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2008 Panel, Wave 5 and Wave 8

For information on sampling and nonsampling error see [http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08\\_W1toW8%28S&A-13%29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/sipp/sourceac/S&A08_W1toW8%28S&A-13%29.pdf)