

The Influence of Long & Nonstandard Employment Hours on Parental Time with Children  
in France, the UK, and the USA

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## Abstract

Parental time investments in children are essential inputs in children's present and future well-being. The extent to which mothers and fathers share child care with their partners, or engage in care work alone, is also a key indicator of gender equality at the individual and societal level. Long and nonstandard employment hours reduce parental time available for children, but more strongly for mothers than fathers, thus widening the gender gap in care time. Levels of child care time, and associations of long employment hours with child care time, vary cross-nationally according to the configuration of work hour cultures and cultural context, particularly gender norms and attitudes about children. I use nationally representative time diary data from France, the United Kingdom, and the United States to determine how cross-national variation in temporal conditions of employment and gender regimes influences mothers' and fathers' shared and solo time with children in routine and developmental child care and leisure activities. Preliminary findings indicate larger gender gaps but lower levels of solo and shared routine child care in the UK compared with the USA.

Parental time investments in children are valued, rhetorically and behaviorally, because they are an essential input in children's well-being. The extent to which mothers and fathers share child care responsibilities is also a key indicator of gender equality at the individual and societal level. The ability of parents to devote sufficient time to children, and the size of the gender gap in child care, is affected by temporal conditions of employment, specifically long and nonstandard employment hours. Because time is a finite resource, parental employment reduces hours available for child care, and reductions are greater among parents who work long and nonstandard hours (Craig and Powell 2011; Sayer and Gornick 2011; Wight, Raley, and Bianchi 2008). Workplace transformations have eroded gender differences in mothers' and fathers' work and family time, but mothers still do about twice as much child care compared with fathers (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006; Gauthier, Smeeding, and Furstenberg 2004; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson 2004). Long and nonstandard employment hours also reduce mothers' child care time more sharply than fathers', (Craig and Powell 2011; Sayer and Gornick 2011). Mothers also remain more accountable than fathers for prioritizing time with children over competing employment demands (Craig 2006b). Fathers are doing more child care, but research suggests dads continue to think about child care as discretionary "helping" time not in competition with employment because it alone fulfills their responsibilities as fathers and husbands (Coltrane 2000; Sullivan et al. 2009). As a result, fathers are more likely to spend time with children with a partner present, whereas women are more likely to direct partner involvement in child care, and more likely to do the task on their own (Craig 2006b; Sayer 2006).

The time fathers devote to child care activities and leisure time with children, when their partner is not present, offers critical evidence about the degree mothers retain overall responsibility for children. Studies have not considered how cross-national variation in the temporal conditions of employment affect levels of and gender differences across all domains of child care time. The majority of research focuses on summary measures of primary child care time only and documents that levels of child care, the gender gap in child care, and associations of long employment hours with primary child care time vary cross-nationally according to the contours of work hour regulations and the cultural histories and contemporary values regarding appropriate roles of mothers and fathers and conceptions of children as private or public goods (Bianchi et al. 2006; Bittman 2004; Gauthier et al. 2004; Pacholok and Gauthier 2004). Studies have not, however, examined how levels of solo and shared child care and time with children, and gender gaps in these domains, vary within and across countries. Considering shared time in domestic work and in leisure is important not just in terms of gender equality, but also because shared activities create and maintain "family" and strengthen couple relationships (Daly 2001; DeVault 1991). Shared time in leisure also has implications for gender differences in leisure quality, because more of mothers' leisure is spent in the company of children than is fathers' (Mattingly and Bianchi 2003). In sum, a greater understanding of factors associated with fathers spending time with children without their partner present and those that contribute to shared partner time with children is one part of the puzzle of whether the gender

revolution is stalled or if movement towards less gendered time use is distributed unequally across parents within countries and between countries.

The contribution of this research is to investigate crossnational gender differences in partnered mothers and fathers shared and solo time in developmental and routine child care, and leisure time with children, using Multinational Time Use Data from France, the UK, and the USA collected between 2000-2005. The three countries have distinct national configurations of employment regulation, family policies, including early childhood education and care (ECEC), and gender relations that influence the gender division of paid and unpaid work (Misra, Moller, and Budig 2007; Ray, Gornick, and Schmitt 2010).

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Parents' Time with Children**

Parents are motivated to spend time with their children for a variety of reasons. These range from an innate drive to invest time in offspring to ensure their survival and thus one's familial genetic line, to socializing children to prepare them to take their place in adult nonfamilial institutions, to maximizing family utility through sufficient child time inputs to produce "high quality" offspring (Becker 1965; Coleman 1988; Fawcett 1983). Time use research on parents' child care typically adopts the latter economic perspective. This framework posits that partnered households rationally allocate time and money resources to optimize outputs. The basic argument is that specialization in market or nonmarket activities is the most efficient way to maximize family utility because it harnesses each partner's comparative advantage and preferences. Biological reproductive differences and socialization patterns have historically meant women have a comparative advantage in unpaid household work and men in paid work (Becker 1991). The economic perspective thus predicts mothers will invest more time in children than do fathers, but it also implies that specialization should vary across households by levels of each partner's comparative advantage. However, findings that mothers and fathers in Western industrialized nations, on average, are spending more time in child care activities, despite widespread increases in maternal employment rates and educational attainment, and declining family size suggest factors other than efficiency also motivate care time (Bittman 1999; Gauthier et al. 2004; Sayer et al. 2004).

The "time availability" perspective, a variant of the economic model, suggests employment demands are more influential than specialization per se. Because time resources are delimited by the 24-hour day, paid work hours define how much time is "left over" for child care (Coverman 1985). Although critiqued because of the possible endogeneity of employment and child care time, empirical findings generally support the time availability perspective and indicate the association between employment hours and reduced child care is stronger for women than for men (Bittman 2004; Craig 2006a; Sayer et al. 2004). Employment also more strongly decreases child care time in some countries. For example, Bianchi et al. (2006) analyze time diary data from the Netherlands, France, Canada, the UK, and the USA and find full-time versus non employment depresses mothers' child care time by 50 percent in the UK (6.5 hours for employed mothers versus 12.5 for nonemployed) but only

64 percent in the Netherlands (7 versus 11 hours respectively). Additionally, contemporary levels of care time vary markedly. Average hours of child care are higher in the USA, Canada, and Australia, compared with the UK and France (Bianchi et al. 2006; Sayer and Gornick 2011a). Norwegian and Swedish fathers also do more child care compared with British fathers and the researchers point to variations in cultural parenting models as a potential explanation (Sullivan et al. 2009). More work is needed, however, on how systematic gender differences in nonstandard and long working hours affect levels of and gender differences in solo and shared child care time and time with children.

Global competition and corporate downsizing have increased the pace and insecurity of employment, elevating work hours, work intensity, and rates of nonstandard work (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Yet, at the same time, the climate of parenting has shifted, requiring “good” parents to devote copious amounts of time to “cultivating” their children’s mental and psychological development (Arendell 2000; Daly 1996; Hays 1996). Although the time “greediness” in both work and family domains has grown, cultural norms that mothers are “natural” caregivers and fathers are primary breadwinners remain deeply entrenched. Hence, norms prescribing equal sharing of employment and household labor clash with enduring parenting ideals that are based on gender specialization in breadwinning and caregiving. Feminist scholars argue that time is not distributed equally between men and women because women’s domestic responsibilities define women’s time as a “collective” household resource subject to the demands of husbands and children while men’s time is more of an “individual” resource (Berk 1985; Davies 1990; Hochschild 1989). Fathers feel more entitled to and have more time in leisure activities, and spend less of their leisure time with children (Henderson and Hickerson 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003). Fathers continue to prioritize employment over care time, because of the devaluation of care and continued gender inequality in wages (England 2011). Thus, it is likely that long or nonstandard employment hours do not exert as much competing pressure on fathers’ child care time as they do mothers.

Research indicates long and nonstandard employment hours reduce mothers’ ability to devote time to and coordinate child care, in particular when work occurs during the evening (Craig and Powell 2011; Presser 2004; Wight et al. 2008). Working night time hours, however, may facilitate “intensive” mothering because mothers are home when children are home and when child-related household labor has typically been accomplished (Garey 1999). Fathers who are employed on weekends spend less time caring for children compared to fathers who work standard hours during the week (Almeida 2004; Nock and Kingston 1988).

Associations of long and nonstandard employment hours and related gender differences in solo and shared child care should also vary across countries. Long work hours reduce mothers and fathers child care time in the USA, but affect only mothers’ time in the UK and have no association with either mothers’ or fathers’ child care time in France (Sayer and Gornick 2011). In the United States, about 30% of married mothers work nonstandard hours because fathers are available to care for children when the mother is employed (Presser and Cox 1997). Dual earner couples where one or both partners work nonstandard hours “tag-team” parenting, and

thus reduces the child care gender gap (Brayfield 1995; Presser 2003). In contrast, in Australia, being partnered with a man working long or nonstandard hours increases mothers child care time and widens the gender child care gap (Craig and Powell 2011).

Although limits on work hours can make more time available for child care, whether they do so may depend on the correspondence between formal regulations and cultural norms of work time, as well as cultural mores about the appropriate relationships of the state, families, and individuals (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Actual hours worked vary across industrialized countries because of dissimilar labor markets, gender relations, and distinct institutional and regulatory environments, but analyses of working time regulations indicate countries can be grouped into two categories: those with short work hour cultures, like France, and those with long work hour cultures, like the UK and the USA (Lee 2007). The proportion of employees with long work hours (50 or more weekly) is less than six percent in France (Lee 2007). Much larger proportions of workers report long work hours in the UK and the USA, because of weak working time regulations and cultures that link long work hours with job commitment and economic growth. Additionally, France has a pattern of standard full-time employment hours among fathers and mothers, whereas the UK and the USA share a pattern of long work hours among fathers, but only the USA combines high rates of maternal full-time employment with long work hours among mothers (Fagan 2007).

European Union directives mandate work hour limits, in part because they are perceived as a mechanism of work/family reconciliation (Fagan 2007). Yet, in the market-oriented UK and the USA, long work hours are perceived as necessary evils in an era of global competition and heightened employer need for a flexible, on-demand workforce. Consequently, actual hours worked are higher than statutory limits (Lee 2007). Continental European countries, like France, prize short work hours because of their potential to reduce conflict between employment and care, and/or reduce unemployment through job sharing (Fagan 2007). French labour market structure and gender norms favor full-time employment among mothers and France has a long history of state-provided child care in crèches and early childhood education programs (Fagnani 2002). White (2009) argues that French public support for work/family reconciliation systems is closely interwoven with the cultural conceptualization of motherhood as “a social function, similar to the military service for men, that had to be financially supported by the whole community” (Bodard Silver 1977). In other words, rearing children is a public good that rightly deserves to be supported with public funds. Consequently, among French parents, short work hours may not translate into more time in child care or time in leisure with children because children are “less central to couples’ daily lives” and adult-only leisure is valued (see text in Appendix C by Lesnard and Chenu, Bianchi et al. 2006:201).

In contrast, British and American parents consider children “private goods” and are likely strongly motivated to devote most time not spent doing paid work and necessary self care to child care because of pervasive norms that children’s development is stunted without intensive parental interaction and involvement in

all activities (Daly 2001; Lareau 2003). Widespread attitudes that children are private goods discourages work/family reconciliation policies, such as non-parental early childhood education (ECEC) services.

The similarity of market-oriented countries in work time does not extend, however, to gender norms, the extent of part-time work, or the availability of options to outsource non-care related housework, all of which should lead to dissimilar employment/child care tradeoffs. Disentangling the long work hours association with child care time requires comparisons across countries by working time regimes but also across gender regimes, with the latter referring to the extent the State promotes a male breadwinner family model, an earner/carer model for women only, or a dual earner, dual carer model (Anxo 2007; Figart and Mutari 2000).

In sum, the negative associations of nonstandard and long employment hours with child care time should be moderated by complex interrelationships of the regulatory framework, policy packages, and cultural norms. I hypothesize that gender differences in shared routine, developmental, and leisure time with children will be greater in France, but overall levels of care lower, compare with the UK and the USA. This is because of the priority the French give to adult centered leisure, combined with widespread acceptance of public care of children and high rates of maternal full-time employment, once children have reached age 3 and older. Gender differences in all types of child care time should be greater in the UK than the USA because of the dominant 1.5 earner gender model, where mothers combine child care with part-time, irregular employment hours, and fathers work long and/or nonstandard hours. Policy mixes favoring the 1.5 job model, as in the UK, can decrease employment / child care time tradeoffs, but only when combined with employment cultures that facilitate reduced full-time work hours and flexibility as a means of minimizing tension between employment and care time. Flexibility without an egalitarian gender ideology generally means mothers but not fathers adopt flexible practices, leading to the development of “mommy track” jobs, which are often part-time, with little autonomy, security, or advancement potential (Ellingsæter 1998; Fagan 2007). Fagan (2007) notes that the option of part-time or reduced work hours in “high-status” professional or managerial jobs is limited, meaning mothers in these jobs have less ability to reconcile work and care unless extensive state support for parental leave and/or child care systems are in place. Hence, mothers in the UK with long and /or nonstandard work hours will face more barriers to devoting time to child care because of limited cultural and institutional support

In the USA, in contrast, levels of child care should be greatest but gender differences lowest, because of the dominant dual earner gender model, combined with the limited availability of state provided child care and ideological norms of gender equality in intensive parenting. Although France and the USA have similar histories of relatively high employment for mothers, particularly since 1970s, where they differ is the large proportion of American citizens with a strong distaste for state provision of family support and the American history of a class and race-differentiated approach to women’s employment.

In this analysis, I use nationally representative time diary data from France, the UK, and the USA to address two specific questions. First, how does solo (versus shared) time in routine, developmental, and leisure

time with children vary within countries between mothers and fathers? Second, how does the gender gap in solo (versus shared) time in routine, developmental, and leisure time with children vary across countries? Adequate investigations of this question require comparisons of employment and child care time across countries with varying levels of parental employment and employment hours, dissimilar work time regulations and cultural and institutional contexts. Investigating associations of specific measures of working time regulation, family policy, and cultural norms is not my focus. French, British, and American parents decide how to allocate time among paid work, child care, and other activities (housework, leisure, sleep) vis-à-vis the complex and sometimes contradictory interrelationship of work time regulations, work/family policy configurations, and gender. Lewis, Campbell, and Heurta (2008) argue that empirical studies showing associations between policies and parental work and care behaviors are abundant but careful reading points to heterogeneity in links between similar policies and parental behavior at the country level. Gershuny and Sullivan (2003) find more robust evidence for links between state policy and women's labor force participation than for housework and carework. Policies that are similar across countries may have different associations with child care time because of country variation in other policies that exert countervailing influences or produce distinct interactions with gender and parenting norms and work hours cultures. Hence, I develop expectations and interpret results in reference to the literature on country variation in working time regulations, work-family policy, gender norms, and attitudes about children but do not test direct effects of distinct policies or norms.

### **Data and Method**

Data are from the 2003 American Time Use Study (ATUS) and surveys collected in the late 1990s and early 2000s archived in the Multinational Time Use Study (MTUS). The ATUS is the first federally administered time diary survey in the United States and was designed to collect nationally representative data on how adults allocate time to paid work, unpaid work, self care, and leisure (Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau 2004). The ATUS sample consists of all noninstitutionalized U.S. residents age 15 and over and is drawn from outgoing rotations of the Current Population Survey. In 2003, the response rate was 57% yielding a sample size of 20,720. The Multinational Time Use Study (MTUS) provides harmonized data files on time spent in child care, as well as paid work, housework, self care, and leisure. I use the MTUS surveys for France 1998 (88% response rate, sample size 15,441) and the UK in 2000 (72% response rate). Analyses are weighted, to adjust for sample design and nonresponse, as well as ensure equal representation of days of the week and seasons of the year.

The time diaries were administered using different methods across countries. France and the UK use time diaries with fixed-time intervals collected on the day of the interview whereas the USA uses recall time diaries with unfixed intervals. Respondents who fill out fixed-time interval diaries account for activities during specific blocks of time whereas those responding to diaries with unfixed intervals provide specific start and end times of all activities. Methodological differences raise the possibility that data are not entirely comparable across countries and scholars differ in their interpretation of whether these differences compromise conclusions about



country-level differences in time use (Folbre et al. 2005; Gershuny 2000). In general, studies indicate that recall diaries like those in the USA underreport activities of short duration and hence brief periods of child care may be missed. However, estimates of activities that occur on a routine basis, such as most child care activities, have been found to have high validity across different types of survey instruments and methodologies (Juster 1999). Further, there is no indication that methodological differences vary systematically by parental long or nonstandard employment hours. Hence, I am reasonably confident that methodological differences are not a source of significant bias. Additional technical details on sample populations and survey administration across the various countries are available online at the MTUS data archives <http://www.timeuse.org>. The sample excludes retired, disabled, and full-time students because of the focus on the association between employment hours and child care time. This limit also has the advantage of removing potential spurious influences on parental child care time from cross-national variation in the ages that people complete their educations and/or retire.

### **Preliminary Results**

In preliminary results presented, the sample is limited to partnered mothers and fathers in the UK and the USA, because the French MTUS data do not allow researchers to distinguish solo versus shared time in child care activities or time with children. Doing so requires secondary analysis of the original French time diary survey, specifically matching the chronological time diaries of French mothers and fathers to determine when both or only one are present. This work has begun and will be completed by the time of the PAA.

Regression adjusted means are presented for daily minutes of solo and shared routine and developmental child care time. The adjusted means were computed using Stata's "margin" command from OLS models that included an ordinal measure of employment hours (working 41 or greater work hours, standard full-time hours, part-time hours, or zero work hours), education (post-secondary = 1), age, presence of children age 4 or younger, household income, homeowner status, and weekend diary day. Results are shown in Figure 1 and indicate American moms and dads do more solo routine & developmental child care than British counterparts, and British moms and dads do more shared routine & developmental child care than American counterparts. British moms do more shared routine child care than dads, but American moms & dads both do about 10 minutes. Results not shown comparing couple reports in the UK (as opposed to the individual reports for mothers and fathers shown because the USA data are not for couples) indicate that fathers are sharing time with mothers, but mothers are sharing child care with individuals other than their spouse. Gender gaps are larger in the UK than the US: British moms do 3.6 times more solo routine and developmental child care compared to British dads, whereas American moms do 3 times more solo routine but only 1.8 more solo developmental child care than American Dads. Results not shown also indicate that gender gaps in solo and shared routine child care are larger in 1 earner households in the UK, compared to other earner types. But, no gender differences by employment status are smaller in the USA

than the UK and no gender differences for shared routine child care are observed for dual earner households in the USA, vis-à-vis other earner types.

In future analyses, I plan to include a covariate for nonstandard work hours and test additional specifications of long work hours. I will also test associations using “usual” employment hours and nonstandard status, as well as time reported on the diary day to examine long- and short-term associations (Frazis and Stewart 2010). I also plan to present two analyses of subsamples. The first will consist of partnered mothers and married fathers of children ages 4 and under, because the majority of child care activities coded in time diaries are done for younger children and younger children typically require more intensive time investments at specific times. The second will be restricted to French and British parents only, because those data allow me to examine shared and solo time in child care and leisure time among couples. The USA data are for individual mothers and fathers, not couples, and this is a key limitation of the ATUS data.

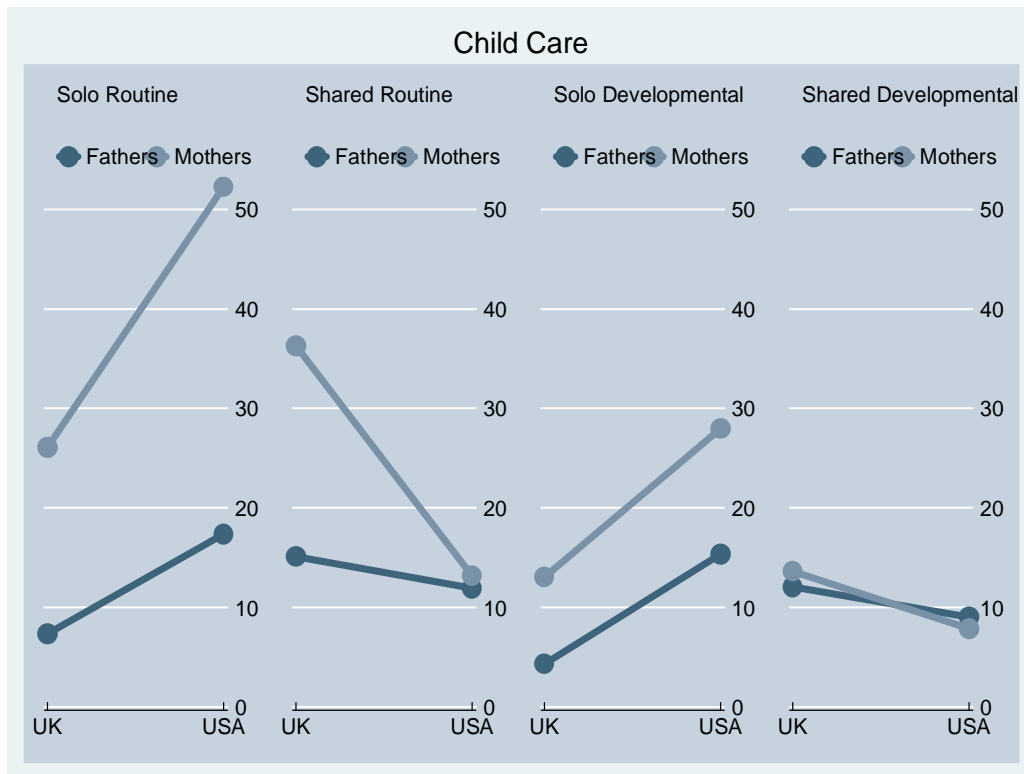


Figure 1. Gender and Cross-National Differences in Solo and Shared Child Care

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