Parents’ Jobs and Children’s Health: Differences by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity

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Outline

• Conceptual framework
• Parental employment trends
• Variation in parents’ job quality
• Summary of evidence: parents’ job quality and children’s health
• Research recommendations
Conceptual framework
Pathways between parents’ jobs and children’s health

- Local economy
- Work and family public policies
- Family and child characteristics
- Local child care market

Parent job quality (e.g. wages, tasks, benefits, schedules) *intensity, stability

Child care arrangements (e.g. quality, safety)

Parent resources and investments (e.g., finances, time, energy)

Parent health and family dynamics (e.g., stress, role strain, parenting, marital conflict)

Child health and development

diversitydatakids.org data for a diverse and equitable future
Parental employment: differences by race/ethnicity and nativity
High levels of parental employment: by race/ethnicity and nativity

![Bar chart showing parental employment by race/ethnicity and nativity.](image)

More mothers work when their children are older: by age of youngest child, race/ethnicity and nativity

Employment characteristics of families with children vary:
by family composition, race/ethnicity and nativity

Parental job quality components: differences by race, ethnicity and nativity
Components of parental job quality

• Family supporting wages
• Employer provided benefits
• Standard weekday schedules
• Predictable schedules
• High flexibility, autonomy, complexity
• **Intensity**: work hours (overtime, full time, part time)
• **Stability**: duration/transitions
Black and Hispanic working parents are exposed to a higher number of bad job characteristics

Note: Bad job characteristics include: low wages, lack employer-provided health insurance and pension

Source: Earle, Joshi, Geronimo, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2014
Foreign born Hispanic working parents have lower access to employer- or union- provided health insurance

Foreign born working parents predicted to have less exposure to bad job quality the longer they live in the U.S.

Source: Earle, Joshi, Geronimo, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2014
Hispanic workers have less access to employer-provided paid parental and family leave

*Note: Paid family leave is paid leave to care for a sick family member

Source: Bartel, Kim, Nam, Rossin-Slater, Ruhm & Waldofogel, 2019
Mothers’ nonstandard schedules: by race/ethnicity

Proportion of Working Mothers with Nonstandard Work Schedules By Race/Ethnicity

Source: Pilarz & Walther, 2020
Mothers’ evening/night work schedules: by race/ethnicity

Source: Pilarz, & Walther, 2020
Unpredictable schedules for hourly workers: by race/ethnicity

Summary of evidence: parental job quality and children’s healthy development
Positive effects of parents’ ‘good’ job quality

- Job quality (latent class, index, multiple variables): wages, hours, tenure, stability, employer-provided benefits, control, flexibility, security
- Young children: reduced children’s emotional and behavioral difficulties
- School-age children: improved cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes
- Adolescents: grade repetition, school dropout, mastery, self-esteem
- Mediators: mothers and fathers’ psychological distress
- Moderators: low income, family composition
- Mothers: positive general health and financial stability, less family routines
- Cross-over effects: new mothers’ leave policy reduced fathers’ anxiety

Sources: Review by Heinrich 2014; Kalil & Ziol-Guest 2005; Coley & Lombardi 2014; Lombardi & Coley 2013; Perry-Jenkins et al. 2017; Pilkauskas, Brooks-Gunn & Waldfogel 2018; Strazdins et al. 2010; There are new studies underway by Pilkauskas and Pilarz & Lin.
Adverse effects of parents’ nonstandard schedules

• **Parents**: sleep, marital conflict, social support, family formation, father involvement

• **Young children**: emotional/behavior problems and cognitive outcomes for preschoolers, income-based gaps in child care participation for infants and toddlers

• **School age/adolescents**: depression, behavior problems, adolescent smoking, drinking, drug use, delinquency, sexual activity, math/verbal scores, BMI, sleep

• **Mediators**: child care, parenting stress, parental time, depression, home environment

• **Moderators**: family and work schedule composition, income, child gender, child age, schedule timing and duration, cashier or service occupations

• **Night shifts** have the largest negative effects particularly when kids are young

Adverse effects of parents’ unpredictable schedules

- **Parents**: worse parenting stress, parent-child interactions, parental mood, sleep quality
- **Child care**: more numerous care arrangements, informal care, sibling care, home alone without adult supervision
- **Children**: behavior problems
- **Mediators**: economic insecurity, work-life conflict, time, parental well being

Sources: Ananat & Gassman-Pines 2020; Harknett, Schneider & Luhr 2019; Henly & Lambert 2014; Johnson, Kalil & Dunifon 2012; Schneider & Harknett 2016; Schneider & Harknett 2019

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Key take aways:

• Children have high exposure to parental employment (with some variation across childhood and for foreign born Hispanic families).

• Job quality (individual and multiple components) is worse for Black and Hispanic parents and foreign born Hispanic parents who have lived in the US for a shorter duration.

• There are studies that find poor job quality negatively affects kids, often indirectly through parents health, stress and child care.

• Good job quality and predictable standard schedules potentially have larger effects for lower income families and single working mothers.

• This suggests that differential exposure to poor parental job quality can help to explain some of the racial/ethnic disparities in child health.
Research recommendations
Evaluate policies proposed to improve (parental) job quality

- Fair scheduling and minimum wage laws
- Child care schedules to match changing work schedules
- Sectoral strategies and benefit pools
- Social insurance with progressive wage replacement
- Inclusive programs for immigrant working families (EITC changes)
Research recommendations

• Analyze existing data sets to estimate pathways of effects by race/ethnicity and nativity
• (Pool data to increase sample size for racial/ethnic groups)
• Account for family members’ job characteristics
• (Re)evaluate public and private policy solutions designed to increase job quality and estimate the impact on children by subgroups
• Use innovative data collection to reach workers in multiple sectors and geographies