



Parent Work Schedules in Households with Young Children

Parents' work schedules influence the utilization of public and private early care and education and non-parental care services, as well as families' work-life balance and well-being. When and how much parents work affects their earnings, their ability to care for their families, and their likelihood of furthering their education or training to help them in the workplace, among other things. The work schedules of parents with young children (0 to 60 months) are sensitive to and intertwined with their child care decisions, with non-standard hours of employment and irregular work schedules posing particular challenges for child care.

This research snapshot describes work schedules of parents of young children during a reference week in 2012. We describe how work schedules differ for households of different income levels; between one-parent and two-parent families; and in households where neither, one, or both parents work. One group of particular focus is 'fully-employed' households; these are households where all parents work – a one-parent/one-worker household or a two-parent/two-worker household. A few key findings about the work schedules of parents of young children include:

- Parents in fully-employed households work on average similar numbers of hours per week whether they are in one- or two-parent households.
- In two-parent households where only one parent works, that working parent works more hours per week than the parents in fully-employed households.
- Workers in two-parent fully-employed households arrange their work schedules so that they have relatively fewer hours per week when both parents are in work-related activities, even though both parents may work substantial numbers of hours each week.

The National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) is a set of four integrated, nationally representative surveys conducted in 2012. These were surveys of 1) households with children under 13, 2) home-based providers of ECE, 3) center-based providers of ECE, and 4) the center-based provider workforce. Together they characterize the supply of and demand for early care and education in America and permit better understanding of how well families' needs and preferences coordinate with providers' offerings and constraints. The study is funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This snapshot uses data for 8,130 children in the Household Survey.



- Across fully-employed one- and two-parent households, each parent works on average similar numbers of non-standard work hours each week, but very few two-parent households have any non-standard hours when both parents are working.
- Single parents are more likely to need child care during non-standard hours to cover parental work time. In two-parent households, it is extremely rare for both parents to have work activities at the same non-standard time.

Adults participating in the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education reported on their own and their spouse/partner's work schedules during the week prior to their interview.¹ The data allow researchers to count, for each hour of the week (say, Monday 10-11am), the number of parents in each household who were in work-related activities. This research snapshot reports information from these data about each parent's work schedule in households with young children.

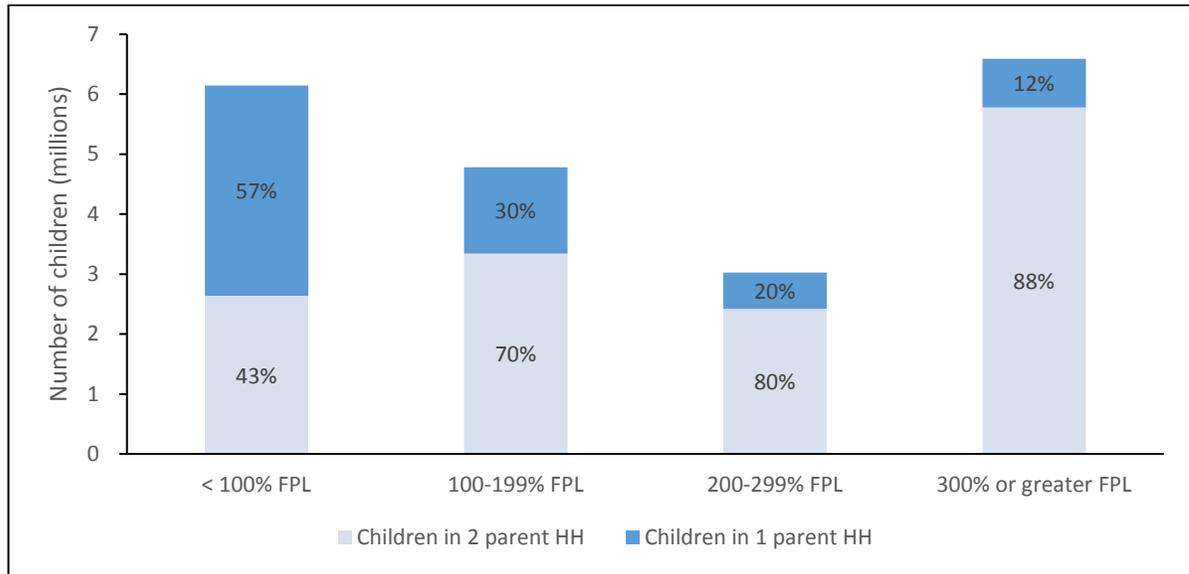
Exhibits 1 and 2 describe some characteristics of the 20.5 million children under 60 months living with one or two parents in 2012 by household income. Household income is classified in a ratio to the 2011 federal poverty level (FPL), which was \$18,530 for a single parent with two children and \$22,350 for two parents with two children.² Across all income groups, almost one third (31 percent) of young children live in single-parent households. As the percentage of FPL increases, the proportion of children in two-parent households increases, so that only 12 percent of children in the highest-income households (300 percent or greater FPL) live in a single-parent household. (See Exhibit 1.) About half of all children under 60 months (51 percent) have at least one parent who did not have any work-related activities in the prior week.³ (See Exhibit 2.) These could be children in two-parent households with zero or one working parent, or one-parent households with a non-working parent.

¹ NSECE data on schedules include time spent on work-related activities such as work, schooling, job training, and commuting time between these activities and home. All of these activities are included in work schedules in this analysis; the number of hours spent in school or training is very small and does not affect estimates reported here.

² See Exhibit A1 in the Appendix for counts of children by parental work status and income.

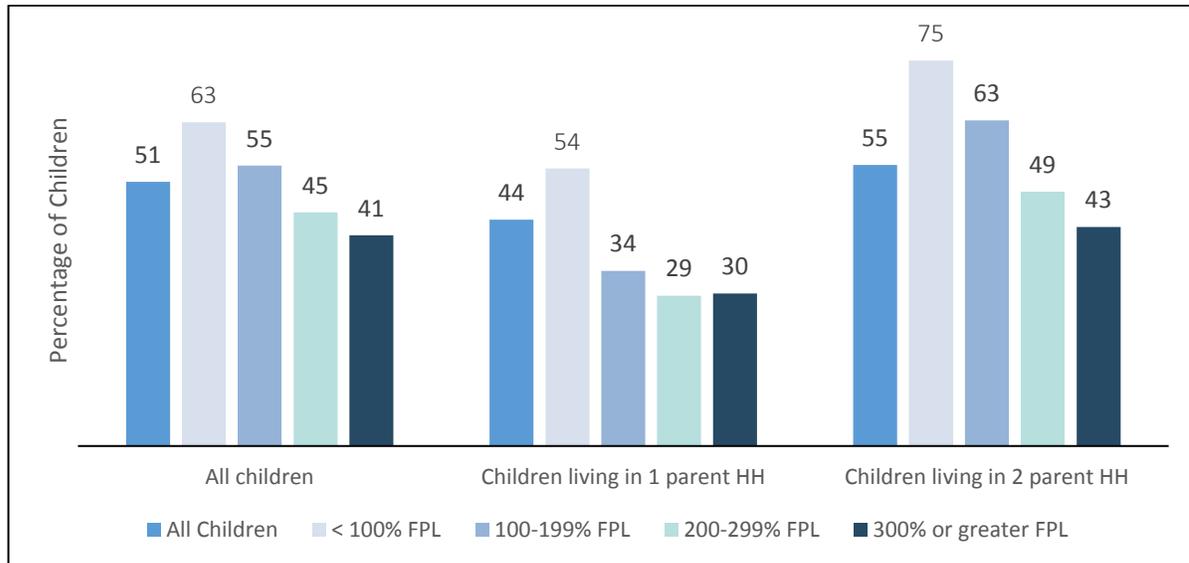
³ Non-working parents had no work-related activities in the reference week. They are generally not employed or in the labor force, but some could have been on leave from a job, searching for a job, or disabled during that week. Students and trainees are counted as having work-related activities and therefore 'working' in the reference week.

Exhibit 1. Number of Children and Percentage in 1 or 2 Parent Households, by Household Income



Note: Statistics calculated for children 0 to 60 months living in households (HH) with one or two parents. Income levels expressed as ratio to 2011 Federal Poverty Level (FPL). All estimates are child-weighted; a parent with more than one child age 0 to 60 months is counted once for each child.
 Source: NSECE Household Survey

Exhibit 2. Percentage of Children Living with at Least One Parent Who Had No Work-related Activities in the Prior Week, by Number of Parents and Household Income

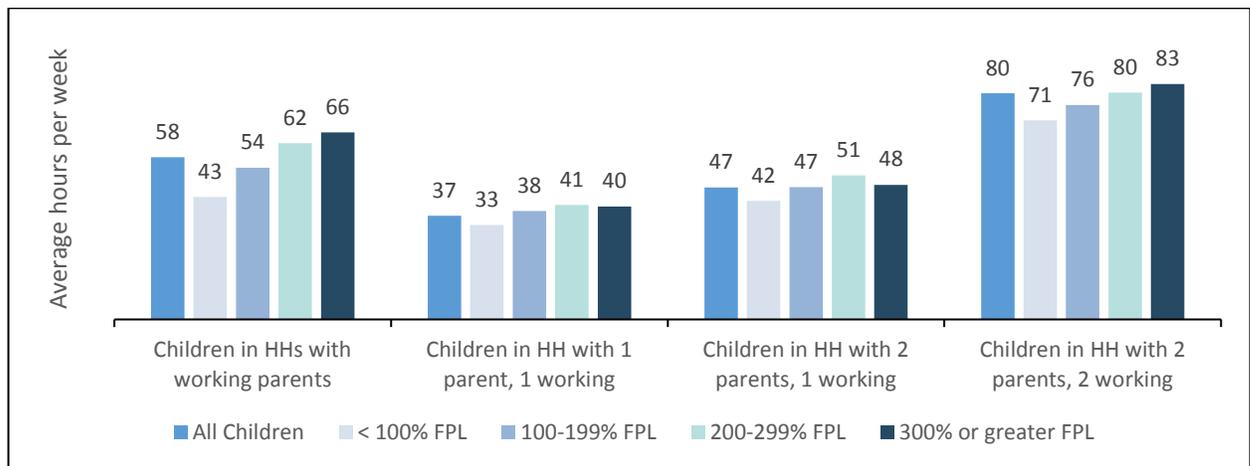


Note: Statistics calculated for children 0 to 60 months living in households (HH) with one or two parents, and show presence of parents within the household having no work-related activities during the prior week. Income levels are expressed as a ratio to 2011 Federal Poverty Levels.
 Source: NSECE Household Survey

Because we are interested in how children experience their parents' work schedules, this analysis presents child-level estimates describing the parental work schedules of children under 5 years old.⁴

Exhibit 3 shows the total number of hours spent in work-related activities across all parents in the household during the week. Two-parent/two-worker households log on average 80 hours of work-related activity each week. This implies that each of the two parents is working on average 40 hours per week. Single-parent workers work a similar 37 hours per week on average. The sole working parent in a two-parent household works on average 47 hours per week, more than each working parent in single-parent or two-parent fully-employed households. In general, the highest income households have more work hours than the lowest income households in each household type.

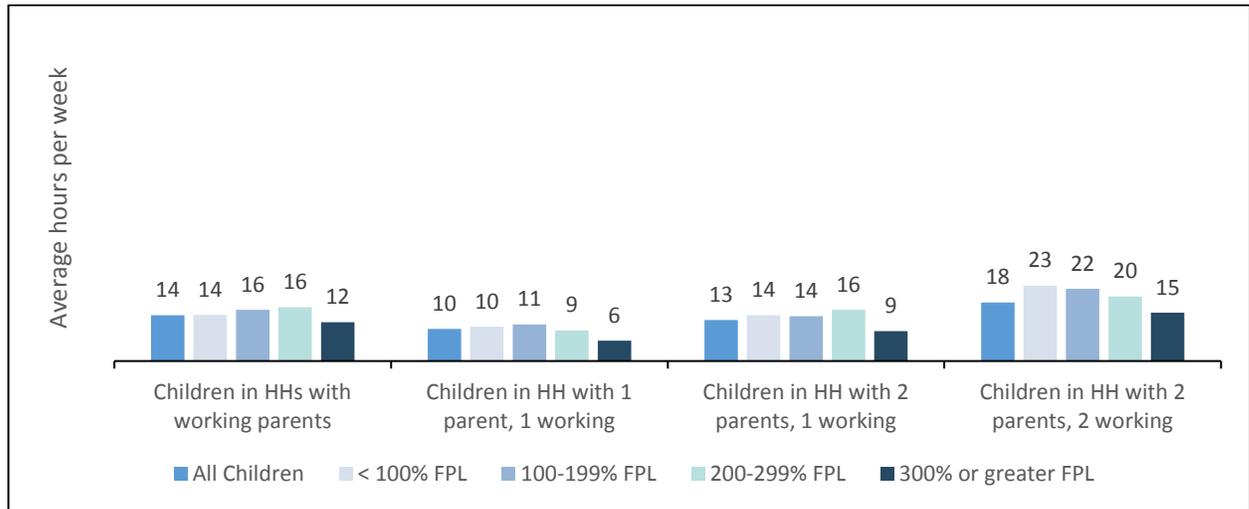
Exhibit 3. Total Hours of Parental Work in Prior Week, by Number of Parents, Workers and Household Income



Note: Statistics calculated for children 0 to 60 months living in households (HH) with one or two parents reporting work-related activities in prior week. Income levels expressed as ratio to 2011 Federal Poverty Levels.
 Source: NSECE Household Survey

⁴ For example, a parent with three children under 5 is counted three times in these estimates, while a parent is counted once in the estimates if s/he has one child under 5.

Exhibit 4. Total Parental Non-Standard Work Hours in Prior Week, by Number of Parents, Workers and Household Income



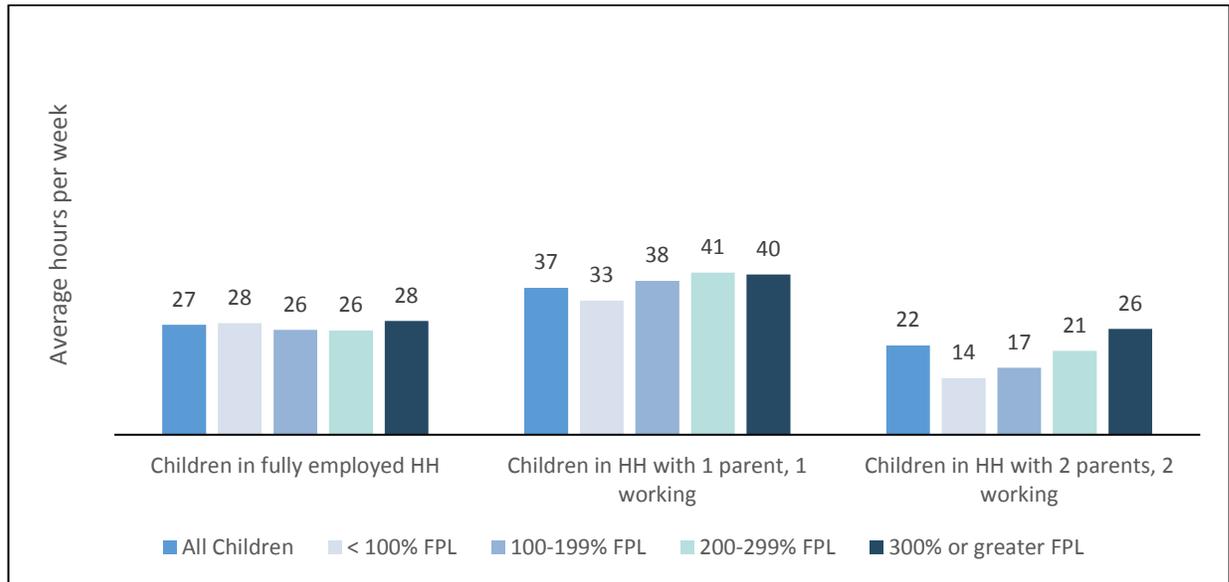
Note: Statistics calculated for children 0 to 60 months living in households (HH) with one or two parents reporting work-related activities in prior week. Income levels expressed as ratio to 2011 Federal Poverty Levels.
 Source: NSECE Household Survey

Exhibit 4 shows the total number of parental non-standard work hours by number of parents, number of workers, and household income. Following previous studies, we define non-standard hours as times outside of Monday through Friday 8am through 6pm, that is, early morning, evenings, nights and weekends. Workers in fully-employed households (such as workers in single-parent households, or both working parents in two-parent households) each work on average similar numbers of non-standard hours. Single parent workers across all incomes work an average 10 non-standard hours per week; in two-worker households, the two parents work a combined average 18 non-standard hours (about twice as much). Exhibits 3 and 4 together indicate that many parents work a combination of standard and non-standard hours. For example, a parent who works from 10am to 7pm on a weekday works 8 standard hours and one non-standard hour that day. Another way to combine standard and non-standard hours of work-related activity would be to work a standard 9 to 5 week and take an evening college course.

Not only do the number of work hours matter, but also their timing. This is especially true for parents of young children, who will require non-parental care arrangements for children when parents are not available.⁵ Exhibits 5 through 7 don't just count total hours of parental work, but ask when those hours occur. How many hours in the prior week were all parents in the household in work-related activities, at the same time?

⁵ In some cases, parents work or attend school at home or in a setting where the child can be with them.

Exhibit 5. Number of Hours per Week All Parents in Household Are Working, by Number of Working Parents and Household Income



Note: Statistics calculated for children 0 to 60 months living in fully-employed households (HH; where ALL parents in the HH have some work-related activities). Hours pertain to week prior to interview. Income levels expressed as ratio to 2011 Federal Poverty Levels.

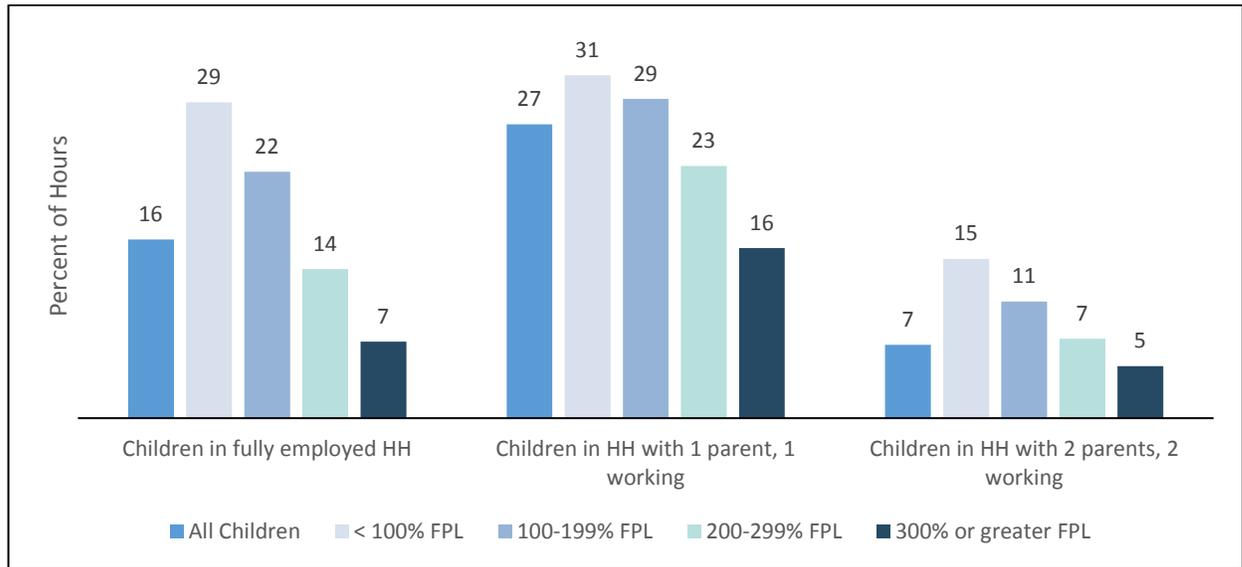
Source: NSECE Household Survey

In a single-parent household, any time that the parent is in work-related activities is a time when all parents in the household are at work. The situation is more complex in fully-employed two-parent households. In households with two working parents, if both parents worked exactly the same schedules, then a workweek with 80 hours of parental work would translate to 40 hours per week when they were both working. Instead, Exhibit 5 shows an average 22 hours per week that both parents are at work in two-parent/two-worker households. The reduction from a hypothetical 40 hours per week when both parents are at work to a realized 22 hours per week suggests that parents are staggering their work schedules to reduce the number of hours that they are both at work simultaneously.

Exhibit 5 documents that two-parent, two-worker households work staggered schedules so that the time that all parents are at work is much less than for one-parent, one worker households, even though each worker in these fully-employed households tends to work similar numbers of hours per week on average.

Exhibit 6 explores this pattern further by looking at the percent of non-standard hours among all hours when all parents are at work. In single-parent working households, the parent works on average 31 hours per week, of which 27 percent (8 hours) are non-standard. In the average two-working-parent household, the parents have 22 hours when they are both at work, and 7 percent of those (1.5 hours) are non-standard. These differences between fully-employed one versus two-parent households are starker for non-standard hours (Exhibit 6) than for all hours (Exhibit 5).

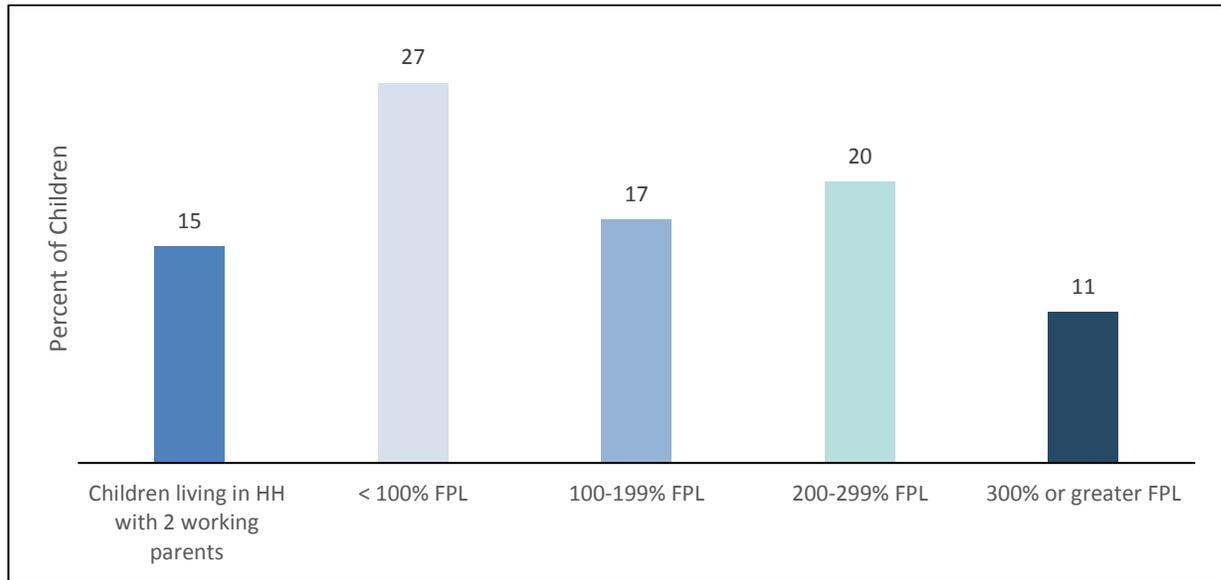
Exhibit 6. Percent of Non-Standard Hours Among All Hours That All Parents in the Household Are In Work-Related Activities, by Number of Working Parents and Household Income



Note: Statistics calculated for children 0 to 60 months living in one-worker/one parent or two-worker/two parent households (HH). Income levels expressed as ratio to 2011 Federal Poverty Levels.
 Source: NSECE Household Survey

One example of staggered schedules is when two parents both have work-related activities over the course of the week, but at no time are they both at work. This can happen, for example, if one parent works only nights or weekends, while the other only works standard hours shifts. Exhibit 7 focuses only on children in fully-employed two-parent households. Among these children, 15 percent never had a time in the prior week that both parents were working at the same time.

Exhibit 7. Percent of Children from Households with Two Working Parents Where Both Parents Were Never at Work at the Same Time



Note: Statistics calculated for children 0 to 60 months living in households with two working parents, but 0 hours when both parents are working. Income levels expressed as ratio to 2011 Federal Poverty Levels.
 Source: NSECE Household Survey

CONCLUSION

This snapshot uses detailed work hours data from the 2012 NSECE to compare parental work schedules for a nationally-representative sample of young children. Single parent workers and both workers in two-parent households each work similar numbers of standard and non-standard hours weekly, but two-parent workers have significantly staggered schedules that greatly reduce the number of hours that both parents in the household are simultaneously at work. Moreover, although workers in two-parent households work similar numbers of non-standard hours each week to single-parent workers, children in two-parent households are extremely unlikely to experience non-standard hours when both parents are at work.

The work schedules of fully-employed households can provide information about when and who may require nonparental care to support parental employment. Single-parent workers have more hours per week that they need non-parental care to support parental employment than do two-worker households. Among households with two working parents, low-income households have the most staggered work schedules, partly due to non-standard hours of work. These tabulations do not indicate how much control these families may have had over their work schedules. The need for non-parental care to support parental employment during non-standard hours occurs primarily for single-parent workers, and more for those with lower incomes.

APPENDIX

Exhibit A1. Number of U.S. Children 0-60 months by Number of Parents, Working Status, and Household Income to Poverty Ratio

Number of Children (in thousands)						
Number of Parents	Working Parents	Household Income to Poverty Ratio				
		< 100% FPL	100-199% FPL	200-299% FPL	>= 300% FPL	All Income Levels
1 Parent	0 Working	1,893	491	177	241	2,802
1 Parent	1 Working	1,615	950	428	572	3,565
2 Parents	0 Working	561	296	84	223	1,164
2 Parents	1 Working	1,417	1,821	1,113	2,237	6,589
2 Parents	2 Working	660	1,224	1,222	3,317	6,423
Total		6,147	4,782	3,024	6,591	20,543

Note: Weighted survey estimates for children 0 to 60 months living in households with one or two parents and classified by 2011 ratio of household income to poverty. Work status includes work-related activities such as work, school, training, and commuting to these.

Source: NSECE Household Survey

SUGGESTED CITATION

National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2017). Snapshot: Parent Work Schedules in Households with Young Children. OPRE Report No. 2017-48, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-and-education-nsece-2010-2014>.

