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## Time for children: Trends in the employment patterns of parents, 1967-2009

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June 2011

# **Time for Children: Trends in the Employment Patterns of Parents, 1967-2009**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Time for Children: Trends in the Employment Patterns of Parents, 1967-2009\***

Utilizing data from the 1967-2009 years of the March Current Population Surveys, we examine two important resources for children's well-being: time and money. We document trends in parental employment, from the perspective of children, and show what underlies these trends. We find that increases in family work hours mainly reflect movements into jobs by parents who, in prior decades, would have remained at home. This increase in market work has raised incomes for children in the typical two-parent family but not for those in lone-parent households. Time use data from 1975 and 2003-2008 reveal that working parents spend less time engaged in primary childcare than their counterparts without jobs but more than employed peers in previous cohorts. Analysis of 2004 work schedule data suggests that non-daytime work provides an alternative method of coordinating employment schedules for some dual-earner families.

JEL Classification: J13, J22

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Utilizing data from the 1967-2009 years of the March Current Population Surveys, we examine two important resources for children's well-being: time and money. We document trends in parental employment patterns, from the perspective of children, and show what underlies these trends. The analysis indicated that families are more engaged in market employment than ever before. In 1967, two-thirds of children had one parent home full-time while around one-third had all parents working; by 2009 the situation had reversed. This increase implies that parents have less time available for other activities, including potentially those spent investing in children, and that non-market time may be more pressured (Bianchi & Wight, 2010).

Increases in family work hours have not resulted primarily from changes in family composition (i.e. the rise of single-parent families) or longer work hours among the employed, but instead mainly reflect movements into jobs by parents who, in prior decades, would have remained at home. This increase in market work has raised incomes for the typical two-parent family but, for lone-parent households, it has largely been required to mitigate a secular decline in income that would otherwise have occurred. Time use data from 1975 and 2003-2008 reveals that employed parents spend less time engaged in primary childcare than their non-working counterparts but more than job-holding peers in previous cohorts. Finally, analysis of 2004 work schedule data suggests that non-daytime work provides an alternative method of coordinating employment schedules for some dual-earner families.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The trends underlying recent changes in parental employment patterns are well-known (see, e.g. Bianchi, forthcoming; Sandberg & Hofferth, 2001; Waldfogel, 2006). An increasing share of children live with single parents, and a rising fraction of mothers (in both single-parent

and two-parent families) work. Our analyses of March CPS data show that the share of children in single-parent families doubled from 13 to 26 percent over the 40-year period ending in 2009, and the proportion whose mother was employed rose from 36 to 70 percent (from 29 to 64 percent for preschool age children). As a result, the fraction of children in families where all parents worked grew from 37 to 66 percent (from 28 to 60 percent for preschool-age children).

This paper examines these trends and their implications. Our analysis is explicitly *child-based* because we are interested in investigating potential effects of secular changes in employment, income, and childcare for children. Thus, where most prior analyses have used the *family* as the unit of observation, we consider how the experience of the typical child has been transformed over time. From a mechanical perspective, the alternative approaches may yield disparate results because fertility rates differ across groups. For instance, the average number of children in single-parent families where the mother has less than a high school education was 2.7 in 1969 compared to 2.4 in all lone-parent families. One result is that whereas 55 percent of single mothers had these low levels of education in that year, this was the case for 59 percent of children raised by single mothers. We show below how adopting a child-based approach makes a difference for some of our results.

More importantly, our use of a child-based approach is motivated by our interest in how children are affected by changing employment arrangements. Our conceptual approach is one where child outcomes are produced by purchased inputs, parental time investments, and other (unstudied) factors, like the quality and cost of nonparental childcare or formal education. For instance, a relevant economic model for such an analysis is one where parents maximize a utility function whose arguments include child outcomes and other (non-child related) consumption subject to a budget constraint where income (over some specified period) cannot exceed

expenditures on child-related inputs and other consumption.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore interesting to examine how employment, incomes, and time investments have changed over time. To the extent our data permit, this is what we do.

In addition to its child-centered approach, this study differs from most related research by analyzing recent trends in parental employment for all children, rather than just selected groups. For instance, Bianchi and Wight (2010) use data from the March CPS to analyze trends (from 1965 to 2005) in maternal employment, and current patterns of time allocation, for married couple families with children. However, their analysis excludes cohabiting couples, single-parent families, and those where fathers do not work full-time. Earlier analyses of parental employment trends which included all types of families (such as Bianchi, 2000; Sandberg & Hofferth, 2001) focused on data prior to 2000 (and again are not child-based).

We provide new evidence on trends, from 1967 to 2009, in the distribution of children across three distinct categories: all parents work full-time and full-year; at least one parent home part-time or part-year; or one or more parents home full-time and full-year. We also decompose the factors leading to these changes.

All else equal, increased employment raises family incomes. However, secular growth in labor supply may sometimes be compensating for trend reductions in wage rates or income transfers (e.g. due to welfare reform). Thus, we also evaluate trends in family income, conditional on employment status, and provide evidence on the extent to which increases in work have been accompanied by income gains.

Finally, we are interested in understanding how changes in employment have affected the time that parents spend with children. Although longer work hours clearly reduce total non-

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<sup>1</sup>For examples of such models, see Blau et al. (1996) or Ruhm (2004). For a broader introduction to the economics of the family, see Becker (1981).

market time, prior research (Aguiar & Hurst, 2007; Bianchi, 2000; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Bianchi & Wight, 2010; Gauthier, Smeeding, & Furstenberg, 2004; Ramey & Ramey, 2010; Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004; Zick & Bryant, 1996) suggests that mothers have at least partially protected time with children by sacrificing sleep and other leisure activities, that both employed and non-employed mothers have increased their time in primary childcare, and that resident fathers have become more involved in childcare. We explore these issues using time use data from 1975 and 2003-2008. Finally, we use information from the Work Schedules and Work at Home Supplement to the May 2004 Current Population Survey to investigate the frequency of non-standard work schedules among two-parent families.

### 3. DATA

Our primary investigation is of parental employment patterns over the 43-year period 1967 to 2009, using data from the March Current Population Survey (CPS), a nationally representative annual survey of non-institutionalized households that provides detailed information on income, poverty, and labor force participation.<sup>2</sup> Each annual survey contains between 23,000 and 65,000 children, totaling nearly 1.9 million children over the 43 years.

Composition of the cross-sectional March CPS changes over time, along with national demographic characteristics. In particular, educational attainment and racial/ethnic diversity have increased while the share of children living in married-couple families has declined (see Appendix Table A.1). Because these factors are likely to be correlated with parental employment patterns, we accounted for these changes using a series of regression-adjusted estimates as

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<sup>2</sup>Incomes, work hours, and employment status refer to the preceding year (e.g. results in the 2010 March CPS are for 2009). For simplicity, we refer to the data year (i.e. 2009) throughout, not the calendar year (i.e. 2010).



detailed below but, since they do not materially change the main results, do not display them in the figures.

We classify parental employment patterns, based on usual weekly work hours, as full-time and full-year ( $\geq 35$  hours per week and  $\geq 50$  weeks per year), part-time or part-year ( $< 35$  hours per week or less than 50 weeks per year), or not working.<sup>3</sup> Children are classified as belonging to one of three parental employment categories: all parents work full-time and full-year; at least one parent is home part-time or part-year; or at least one parent did not work at all (i.e. is home full-time and full-year). In our pooled sample, covering 1967-2009, these categories respectively constituted 27, 35 and 38 percent of children. Total annual parental work hours are calculated as usual weekly hours times weeks worked during the previous year, summed over all parents in the household.<sup>4</sup> We also often examine children in single-parent and two-parent families separately and refer to this distinction as "family structure." Two-parent families include both married couple families and those with unmarried cohabiting opposite-sex couples.<sup>5</sup> In some estimates, we distinguish families by maternal education (less than high school, high school only, some college, or a college degree or more) or child age (0-4 years old, 5-11 years old, or 12-17

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<sup>3</sup>The March CPS records usual hours worked per week in the preceding year. The monthly CPS separately asks about hours on primary and secondary jobs but contains smaller samples and less detail on child and family characteristics. We experimented with merging the monthly and March CPS and found that work estimates from the latter were systematically an hour or two lower per week less than those from the former; however, this slight discrepancy did not differ over time or across demographic groups.

<sup>4</sup>Prior to 1975, respondents were asked about actual hours worked last week, not usual weekly hours. However, they were also separately asked if they worked full-time, part-time, or not at all in the previous year. For classification into an employment category we used the later variable for 1967-1974. For analyses that required annual hours worked we imputed usual hours from actual hours, weeks/year worked, education, number of children, marital status and age.

<sup>5</sup>Prior to 1995, we identify unmarried partners based on Census recommendations for persons of opposite sex sharing living quarters (adjusted POSSLQ), defined to include unrelated, unmarried, opposite-sex individuals living together in a household without other adults, other than related adult children (Casper, Cohen, & Simmons, 1999). After 1995, the CPS contains an explicit category identifying unmarried partners. This change in definition creates a break in the data with 1.5 million unmarried parent families in 1994, using the adjusted POSSLQ, and 1.1 million in 1995 using the explicit "unmarried partner" designation. However, in a weighted sample of 35 million families annually, this difference was not noticeable in the results.

years old). In our descriptive analyses, weighted data are used so as to provide nationally representative statistics.

March CPS data are also used to investigate how parental employment status is related to total family income. The latter is defined as the sum of all earned (from wages, salaries, business and farm self-employment) and unearned (from interest, dividends, retirement, child support, public assistance, disability, social security, SSI, unemployment compensation, veterans' or workers' compensation) income for all adult family members, converted to 2009 dollars using the CPI-U-RS.<sup>6</sup>

We provide a (somewhat rudimentary) analysis of time use, as a function of parental employment status. To provide a contemporary portrait of time use, we use the 2003-2008 waves of the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), which provides nationally representative data for U.S. adults (15 and over) from 24-hour time use diaries collected from one randomly selected household member drawn from CPS respondents.<sup>7</sup> This portion of the analysis focuses on "primary childcare", defined as time spent caring for and helping children in the household, as well as activities related to their education and health. Daily minutes are converted into weekly hours by dividing total minutes by sixty and then multiplying by seven. We also examined other categories of time use (e.g. paid work, secondary childcare, sleep, housework, eating, grooming, and free time) but do not emphasize these findings. Families were classified into the employment categories using information about usual weekly work hours for the respondent and spouse (if

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<sup>6</sup>Income from both partners is included for families with unmarried partners. The CPI-U-RS is the price deflator used by the Census Bureau to adjust historical income statistics (Steward & Reed 1999) and the series begins in 1977. For earlier years, we created predicted CPI-U-RS series by regressing the CPI-U-RS on the CPI-U, for 1977-2009, and then backcasting values of the CPI-U-RS based on CPI-U changes between the specified year and 1977.

<sup>7</sup>This sampling procedure allows the ATUS to be matched to labor market data from the monthly CPS, with a 2-5 month lag. The ATUS sample is drawn from households who have completed their eighth and final month of interviews for the CPS. The restriction to one household member limits the analysis of joint time use choices within families. See <http://www.bls.gov/tus/> for further information on the ATUS. The ATUS sampled over 20,000 individuals in 2003, its first year; it was reduced (for budgetary reasons) to between 12,000 and 14,000 in subsequent years but remains nationally representative.

any), obtained from the monthly CPS.<sup>8</sup> Full-year versus part-year employment is not distinguished here since the required information is unavailable in the monthly CPS; nor is it identified in the 1975-76 time diary data discussed next.

To provide information on secular changes in primary childcare, conditioning on parental employment status, we used information from the 1975-1976 Time Use in Economic and Social Accounts data, a representative sample of 2,406 adults interviewed in October-November 1975.<sup>9</sup> The 24-hour time diaries also indicate work status and earnings as well as demographic characteristics such as marital status, education, and age. We categorize types of time use in the 1975 data using adapted versions of STATA programs from Aguiar and Hurst (2007). Unmarried partners are not identified, so we only examine children from single mother and married couple families in this portion of the analysis.<sup>10</sup> Also, the small number of single mother households implies that the related estimates are imprecise, so that our analysis of secular changes in time use primarily focuses on married couple families.

Finally, we use data from the Work Schedules and Work at Home Supplement to the May 2004 CPS to investigate how often dual-earner families coordinate work schedules (in the week prior to the survey). Specifically, we distinguish families where both parents work only daytime hours (between 6 am and 6 pm) versus those where at least one parent works outside of daytime hours.<sup>11</sup> For the latter group, we further examine the reason the parent worked a non-standard shift distinguishing, for ease of exposition, between family/personal reasons ("better arrangements for family or childcare" or "personal preference") and all other reasons ("better

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<sup>8</sup> We use information about work hours from the CPS file so we can examine both spouses' work patterns (since the ATUS respondent file only includes work information on the respondent, not their spouse). However, if the respondent's work status changed between the CPS and the ATUS, we use ATUS-reported work hours.

<sup>9</sup> Families were re-interviewed three more times in 1976 but we analyze only the first wave of the 1975 data to maintain comparability with the ATUS in which respondents were interviewed only one time.

<sup>10</sup> General information on this survey is available at: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACDA/studies/7580>.

<sup>11</sup> Both parents work non-day shifts in around 2% of families. Additional information on the Supplement is available at: <http://www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cpsmay04.pdf>.

pay", "could not get any other job", "nature of the job" and "other reasons"). While these data cannot tell us the extent to which parents are providing childcare, non-day hours for family/personal reasons seem most likely to indicate the possibility that parents are engaged in "tag-team" parenting (where parents select different work schedules to cover childcare).<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. TRENDS IN PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT

The increased difficulty that families face in balancing the competing needs of work and home is reflected by dramatic changes in patterns of parental employment over the last four decades. We show this by documenting trends in employment and work hours between 1967 and 2009, using the March CPS data, from the perspective of children. The analysis is primarily descriptive, but we also examine the contributions of changes in family structure and in employment patterns within family structures in accounting for the overall trends. Our results are summarized in Figures 1 and 2, with additional details provided in Table 1.<sup>13</sup> Five main findings deserve mention.

First, whereas approximately two-thirds of children were in homes with a nonworking parent in the late 1960s, only around one-third were at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Figure 1). By 2009, there were three distinct and approximately equally sized groups of children: those with one or more parents home full-time and full-year; those with all parents working full-time and full-year; and those whose parents had intermediate work arrangements (Figure 2a).

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<sup>12</sup>The unit of analysis is again the child and, as with the ATUS, we divided final CPS May Supplement weights by the number of children in the family, so as not to over count children in large families.

<sup>13</sup>In the figures, shaded vertical bars show periods of economic recession as defined by the NBER. Unless otherwise noted, all statistics are weighted but not otherwise adjusted. Regression-adjusted results, presented in Table 1, control for family structure, maternal education, child age, race/ethnicity, number of preschool, school age, and older children in the family, annual national unemployment rates, and a vector of state dummy variables, all of which are factors that may affect parental employment decisions. Regression adjustments generally do not much affect the results, and so are not shown in the Figures. The most important change is that controlling for unemployment rates reduces the procyclical variation in employment and work hours. This helps to explain why the regression adjusted employment rates in 2009 (a recession year), shown in Table 1, are considerably below the unadjusted rates.

Second, the secular reduction in the availability of nonworking parents occurred for virtually all groups of children but with somewhat different starting points and magnitudes of the changes. Children raised in lone parent families have always been less likely to have a nonworking parent but the trend decreases have been larger in absolute (but similar in percentage) terms for two-parent households: the shares of children with a parent home full-time fell from 47 to 27 percent for the former group and from 67 to 37 percent for the latter (Figures 2b and 2c).

Third, young children are most likely to have a nonworking parent in all the periods analyzed but the secular increase in parental employment is largest for them (in percentage or absolute terms): 72 percent of children under the age of 5 had a parent home full-time and full-year in 1969 compared to just 40 percent in 2009; the comparable figures for 12-17 year olds were 55 and 29 percent (Table 1). Over the same period, the share of 0-4 year olds with all parents employed full-time and full-year grew from 7 to 26 percent, versus an increase from 20 to 39 percent for 12-17 year olds.

Fourth, Table 1 also illustrates dramatically different trends by maternal education. In 1969, for example, children in families where the mother had not finished high school were just eight percentage points more likely than their counterparts with college graduate mothers to have a nonworking parent (68 versus 60 percent) but the disparity increased to 31 percentage points in 2009 (58 versus 26 percent). There has recently been much discussion about whether highly educated mothers have been "opting out" of work (see, e.g., Boushey, 2008; Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2010; Stone, 2007), and there is some hint in our data of an uptick in parents at home during the last decade we analyze. However, these statistics illustrate that any such effects are small compared to the long-term trend increase in the labor supply of highly educated

mothers. There are also racial disparities in the secular changes although, in this case, the pattern is towards convergence – in particular, with the parental employment rates of white children catching up to those of their black counterparts.

Fifth, although the overall trends are similar (at least in direction) for all groups of children, the timing of the changes is not. Notably, for children in two-parent families, most of the decline in the availability of a nonworking parent occurred between 1967 and 1989 (falling from 67 to 32 percent), with little change during the last decade of the 1990s and a slight increase towards the end of the sample period (to 37 percent in 2009). This last effect probably combines a modest amount of "opting out" behavior, observed during the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, along with recession-related employment reductions during the last sample years. Conversely, for children in lone-parent families, the share with nonemployed parents fell sharply between 1972 and 1979 (from 52 to 32 percent), was relatively stable through 1993, and then declined precipitously during the next six years (from 35 to 18 percent), before rising towards the end of the analysis period. Although it is beyond the scope of this analysis to precisely identify sources of these trends, and differential impacts across family structures, much of the shift during the 1970s seems likely to reflect dramatic overall growth in female labor force participation rates, while the increase in the employment of single mothers during the middle to late 1990s coincides with the work incentives associated with welfare reform and changes in the Earned Income Tax Credit, combined with a period of robust economic growth.<sup>14</sup>

Our child-based analysis examines parental employment trends from the viewpoint of the typical child. Table 2 shows that the general trend towards reduced availability of a parent at home holds using either a child-based or family-based analysis, but that the secular changes faced

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<sup>14</sup> Blank (2002) and Grogger & Karoly (2005) provide evidence that welfare reform, and a strong economy, increased the employment of single mothers. Meyer & Rosenbaum (2001) demonstrate positive effects of the EITC reforms of the late 1980s and early to mid 1990s on the employment of single women with children.

by the average child are understated when using the latter approach. For example, the share of single-parent families with a nonemployed parent fell from 42 to 28 percent between 1969 and 2009, but the proportion of children in this type of family decreased more – from 47 to 27 percent. We do not interpret this as indicating that our analysis method is superior for all related issues of interest. For instance, a family-based analysis may be preferred when considering whether *parents* feel more constrained now than in the past. However, a child-based investigation does seem more relevant when considering how these changes affect the typical child.

Although the increase in parental employment rates could theoretically be offset by reductions in work hours for those who are in jobs, this has not occurred in practice. Total annual parental work hours increased by 16 percent (from 2663 to 3092 hours) between 1967 and 2009 for the average child in a two-parent family and by 35 percent (938 to 1262 hours) for the average child in a single-parent family (Figure 3). As above, the hours growth is particularly concentrated among children with highly educated parents, consistent with other research showing growing disparities in hours worked (see, e.g., Bianchi, forthcoming; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004).<sup>15</sup>

## 5. DECOMPOSING PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

We next examine the extent to which secular increases in parental employment reflect changes in family structure versus changes in patterns of work within family structures.

Consider:

$$Y_j = (\beta_j * \gamma_j) + ((1 - \beta_j) * \delta_j) \quad [1]$$

where  $Y_j$  is the share of children with a nonworking parent in year  $j$ , for  $j$  equal to either 1967 or 2009,  $\beta$  is the share in single-parent families,  $1 - \beta$  is the share in two-parent families,  $\gamma$  is the

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<sup>15</sup>In results not shown, we found that after controlling for family structure and parental employment status, there was virtually no change over the last 40 years in average or median weekly work hours.

share of single-parent families with a nonworking parent, and  $\delta$  is the share of two-parent families with a nonworking parent.

The share of children who would have a nonworking parent in 2009 if family structure had remained at 1967 values can then be expressed as:

$$Y_a = (\beta_{1967} * \gamma_{2009}) + ((1 - \beta_{1967}) * \delta_{2009}) \quad [2]$$

and the share with a nonworking parent if employed patterns had remained constant within family structures would be:

$$Y_b = (\beta_{2009} * \gamma_{1967}) + ((1 - \beta_{2009}) * \delta_{1967}). \quad [3]$$

These counterfactuals can be compared with actual 1967 and 2009 values to indicate the role of changes in family structure or employment patterns within family structures in accounting for the total change in work trends from 1967 to 2009.

Results of this exercise, summarized in Table 3, show that almost none of the growth of children in households with a nonworking parent resulted from changes in family structure.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, whereas the actual share of children with a nonworking parent declined by 30.0 percentage points (from 64.4 to 34.4 percent) between 1967 and 2009, the increase in single parent families accounted for just 1.3 percentage points of this drop, with a 27.4 point reduction being due to changes in work patterns within family structures (5.1 points for single-parent and 22.2 points for two-parent families).<sup>17</sup> Thus, changes in work patterns among two-parent families represent the largest source of the decrease in the share of children without a stay-at-home parent.

## 6. PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT AND FAMILY INCOME

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<sup>16</sup>We also conducted this decomposition in the reverse way—predicting 1967 values using 2009 data—and obtained consistent findings.

<sup>17</sup>The remaining 1.3 percentage point drop represents the interacted effects of changes in family structure and of work patterns within family structures.



The secular increases in parental employment documented above presumably reflect trade-offs that parents are making between available non-market time and the family income that market work provides. This section examines whether parents are being "pushed" into the labor force, by which we mean that they are increasingly finding it necessary to work to avoid income declines relative to similar households in past decades, or if they are being "pulled" into jobs by the prospect of increased family incomes, again compared to previous cohorts.

Family incomes (in 2009 dollars) have grown much more markedly for children in two-parent households, from \$57,854 in 1967-76 to \$93,348 in 2000-09, than for those in lone-parent households (where they increased from \$23,949 to \$29,157).<sup>18</sup> This provides an initial suggestion that the influences of push and pull factors differ depending upon family status, but educational attainment, work patterns, and racial composition have changed over time and across groups, so that a more comprehensive analysis is needed.

To isolate changes in the returns to work, we predict what the incomes of families in alternative employment circumstances and time periods would be, by using standard decomposition procedures to allow for different assumptions about the demographic makeup of the specified groups and the returns to these characteristics.

As a first step, we separately estimated the natural log of annual family incomes for four subgroups of families as:

$$\ln(Y_{jt}) = a_{jt} + \delta_{jt}X_{jt} + \mu_{jt}, \quad [4]$$

where  $Y_{jt}$  is the income of family type  $j$  at time  $t$ ,  $j$  distinguishes between single-parent versus two-parent families and those with a parent home full-time versus those where all parents work full-

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<sup>18</sup>We use multiple years to reduce the effects of economic conditions in a single year. Both time periods experience similar economic cycles, with 27 recession months occurring during 1967-76 and 26 months during 2000-09.

time and full-year, and  $t$  alternatively indicates 1967-76 or 2000-09.<sup>19</sup>  $X$  includes controls for: parent's age (and age-squared), education, race, and the number and ages of children in the family. We retransform predicted log incomes to levels by exponentiating equation [4] and adjusting for the smearing factor, which is the expected value of the exponentiated error term (Duan, 1983). Finally, we construct counterfactual estimates by calculating predicted incomes after assigning the characteristics ( $X$ 's) to their average values in the other period (1967-76 in 2000-09 and vice versa) and, similarly, by assuming that the returns ( $\delta$ 's) take the earlier or later period values.

As shown in Table 4, average family incomes for children with a nonworking parent fell by 46 percent (from \$14,651 to \$7,958) in the former case but rose 21 percent (from \$47,629 to \$57,765) in the latter. Conditional on all parents working full-time/full-year, family income rose 16 percent (from \$31,798 to \$36,751) for children in single-parent households but by 44 percent (from \$69,344 to \$99,886) for those with two parents present.

These results, however, do not account for secular changes in family characteristics. To do so, we turn to the counterfactual estimates. Consider children in single-parent families with a nonworking parent. If characteristics had remained at their 1967-78 levels, 2000-09 income would have averaged \$9,487, a 35 percent decline from the actual value in 1967-78 (\$14,651). Alternatively, actual incomes in 2000-09 were 37 percent lower than they would have been in 1967-76 had family characteristics remained constant at 2000-09 values (\$7,958 versus \$12,730).

Table 4 provides evidence of striking differences in income patterns across family structures, whether the changes are evaluated holding characteristics constant at 1967-76 or

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<sup>19</sup> In this analysis, we omit families where a parent works part-time to focus on the most sharply contrasting categories.

2000-09 values. Family incomes for children in single parent nonworking families declined by 35 percent or more, whereas those for children with employed lone-parents remained approximately constant (falling by 3 percent or rising by 4 percent, depending on the comparison method). This suggests that single parents were being pushed into the labor force to avoid the large secular decline in incomes that would have otherwise occurred.

The picture is different for children in two-parent households, where family incomes were predicted to either fall or rise slightly (by -10 and 4 percent) if there was a nonemployed adult but to have increased fairly dramatically (by 13 to 24 percent) if both parents worked full-time and full-year. The precise results are more dependent on the choice of base period characteristics (than for lone-parent families) but suggest that such adults are being pulled into jobs by the attractive income opportunities that work now provides.

It therefore seems likely that children in single-parent households have become worse off in recent years – their parents are working more to keep family incomes approximately constant – while the situation is less clear in two-parent family households, where higher incomes seem likely to have at least partially offset the reduced availability of parental non-market time.

## **7. PARENTAL TIME WITH CHILDREN**

Fewer children now live in households with a nonworking parent than in the past, and having all adults in the family work full-time and full-year is increasingly common (although with a modest reversal of these trends over the last decade). While the lives of families have probably become more hurried and stressed, the time parents spend caring for children has not necessarily fallen, because there are numerous margins over which time can be reallocated. We explore these issues next, comparing time use in 1975 and 2003-2008, the earliest and latest years of our analysis period for which comparable data are available. As with the rest of our

investigation, we carry out these estimates from the perspective of the child (rather than the family). Several limitations deserve mention. First, we examine only two time periods, constraining our ability to comment comprehensively on long-term trends. Second, the sample for 1975 is small, reducing the precision of these estimates. This restriction is particularly important for single-parent households and, as a consequence, our analysis of this group is quite limited. Third, we focus on primary childcare only, because secondary childcare (i.e. total time with children) is harder to define and data on it are unavailable for 1975. Finally, we cannot undertake a careful analysis of joint decision-making among two-parent households, since time use information in 2003-08 is obtained for only one adult in the household. Some examination of this issue is provided, however, when we consider the potential coordination of work schedules.

Our time use analysis yields three main findings, which are apparent in both unadjusted and regression adjusted estimates (both shown in Table 5). First, consistent with the prior research (reviewed earlier), we find that employed mothers spend significantly less time in primary childcare than their nonemployed counterparts.<sup>20</sup> Second, also consistent with prior research, both working and nonworking parents spent more time with children in 2003-08 than did their 1975 counterparts (although imprecise estimates for single mothers do not allow us to reject the null hypothesis of no secular change for them). Interestingly, employed married mothers in 2003-08 spent almost as many hours in primary childcare as did their *nonworking* peers in 1975, and employed fathers spent more time caring for children in the later period, whatever their employment status.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, primary childcare hours, conditional on employment status, have changed less for single mothers, suggesting that the substantial

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<sup>20</sup>Employed mothers also spend less time doing housework and sleeping and have less free time than their non-employed counterparts, and married fathers sleep less and have less free time when their wives work (see Appendix Table A.2 for details.).

<sup>21</sup> About 20 percent of married families with one parent home full-time in 2003-2008 had "reversed" gender roles, with mothers working full-time and fathers not working.

increases in their labor supply may have reduced time with children (although again the small sample size for 1975 limits our ability to test for such trends). Third, parental time in primary childcare decreases with child age and has not changed as much over the four decades for older children as for those of preschool age. For instance, married mothers in households where both parents work and with a child younger than 5 raised their primary childcare time from 9 to 14 hours per week between 1975 and 2003-08, compared an increase from 4 to 6 hours if their children were 5 or older.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, we investigate the possibility that two-parent families might engage in "tag-team" parenting, using data from the Work Schedules and Work at Home Supplement to the May 2004 CPS.<sup>23</sup> Our analysis is preliminary, because the supplement does not explicitly ask about coordination of employment within the household, nor does it provide information about whether parents are providing childcare. Instead, we examine the potential for such behavior by checking whether a parent works non-standard hours (i.e. some of their employment occurs between 6 pm and 6 am), as well as the reasons for doing so. Again, our analysis is child-based, and we provide results for all children as well as separate results for preschool-age and older children.

Our results, shown in Table 6, indicate that at least one parent works during non-day hours in about a quarter of dual-earner families. When one of the parents is employed part-time, the non-standard hours are worked for family/personal reasons almost half the time (12.4 of 25.7 percent), suggesting that the coordination of employment may be relatively common. Non-day hours occur with similar frequency when both parents work full-time but in only about one-third

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<sup>22</sup> Age-specific results are not shown for single mothers because of the very small sample sizes in 1975 but, the trends are consistent with those displayed on the table. We also do not show results disaggregated by parental education due to the small sample sizes in 1975, but note that prior research has found that hours in childcare have increased more over time for more educated mothers than for their less educated peers.

<sup>23</sup> Work schedule supplements have been conducted in 1985, 1991, 1997, 2001 and 2004, but the survey questions have frequently changed making it difficult to provide comparisons over time. An in-depth analysis that attempts to do so would be an interesting topic for future research.

(7.1 of 23.1 percent) of these cases are they for family/personal reasons. Consistent with prior findings (Presser, 2003; Presser & Cox, 1997), non-day shifts are more common among less-educated mothers, who are also more likely to report working them for family/personal reasons. This indicates that tag-team parenting may be important for a substantial minority of American children, especially those with less educated parents. A caveat is that non-daytime employment in families with a college-educated mother who works part-time also occurs relatively frequently for family/personal reasons.

## **8. DISCUSSION**

The lives of children have altered in fundamental ways during the last 40 years. One of the most important is the change in family arrangements. More children are raised in single-parent families and, whether they have one or two adults in the home, they are much less likely to have a nonworking parent. In 1967, the first year we study, approximately two-thirds of children lived with a parent who did not engage in market employment. By 2009, the fraction was only around one-third, with an equal proportion in families where all parents worked full-time and full-year. Although considerable attention has been paid recently to highly educated mothers "opting out" of the labor force, such effects are small relative to the longer-term trend towards higher maternal employment.

The implications of this enormous change for children are not entirely clear. Working parents have less time available for non-market activities and devote less time to childcare than their nonemployed counterparts. On the other hand, this has been at least partially offset by a secular increase in parental time devoted to primary childcare. Before being too sanguine about this result, we note that there is considerable heterogeneity across groups of children and reason to be concerned that the overall trends may have had negative effects on at least some of them.

Children with single-parents, for example, are much less likely to have a nonworking parent now than in the past and, although primary childcare time has trended upwards for both working and non-working single mothers, the increase for those who are employed has been modest (from 5.7 to 6.9 hours per week). The average child in a single-mother family receives fewer hours of primary childcare from the mother than the average child in a two-parent family; and, of course, the shortfall is even greater if one adds in the childcare provided by fathers in two-parent families (which has been increasing over time). Nor has the extra employment increased family incomes for the single-parent group. Similarly, while employed mothers in two-parent families now spend about the same amount of time caring for young (0-4 year old) children as their nonworking peers did in the 1970s, the same is not true for 5-17 year olds. Moreover, time in primary childcare by two-parent families with a nonemployed parent has also increased, so that children with two working parents still receive less care time than their peers in that group. And even when child time is protected, the lives of working parents are likely to have become more stressed and hurried, possibly with harmful effects on children. On the other hand, for children in two-parent families, increased parental employment has been accompanied by substantial growth in family incomes.

Many questions remain unanswered. For instance, we do not know how the time crunch associated with more parental employment has affected the quality of time spent between parents and children. We provide evidence that roughly one-quarter of dual-earner families had at least one parent working a non-day time schedule in 2004, lending credence to the possibility that some families engage in "tag-team parenting". However, we have not investigated whether this has changed over time and, lacking data on childcare activities in such families, we do not have direct evidence on the extent to which non-standard schedules are used for this purpose. Nor

have we been able to examine the role of market work taking place at home; this is an important point for future research.

While the overall pattern of increased parental employment holds for virtually all children, the implications are likely to be most pronounced for the youngest among them. Those of preschool age are still more likely than their older counterparts to have a parent at home, but the growth in working parents has been largest for them. We cannot say whether these age disparities are socially optimal, but it is noteworthy that parents with infants and toddlers are less likely to work in most other industrialized countries, partly because they generally have rights to lengthy periods of paid leave when their children are young, and that part-time work (particularly for mothers) when they do return is relatively common (Ruhm, forthcoming). Finally, changes in parental employment prompt modifications of other institutional arrangements, such as in childcare (Smolensky & Gootman, 2003; Waldfogel, 2006), the effects of which have not been examined here.

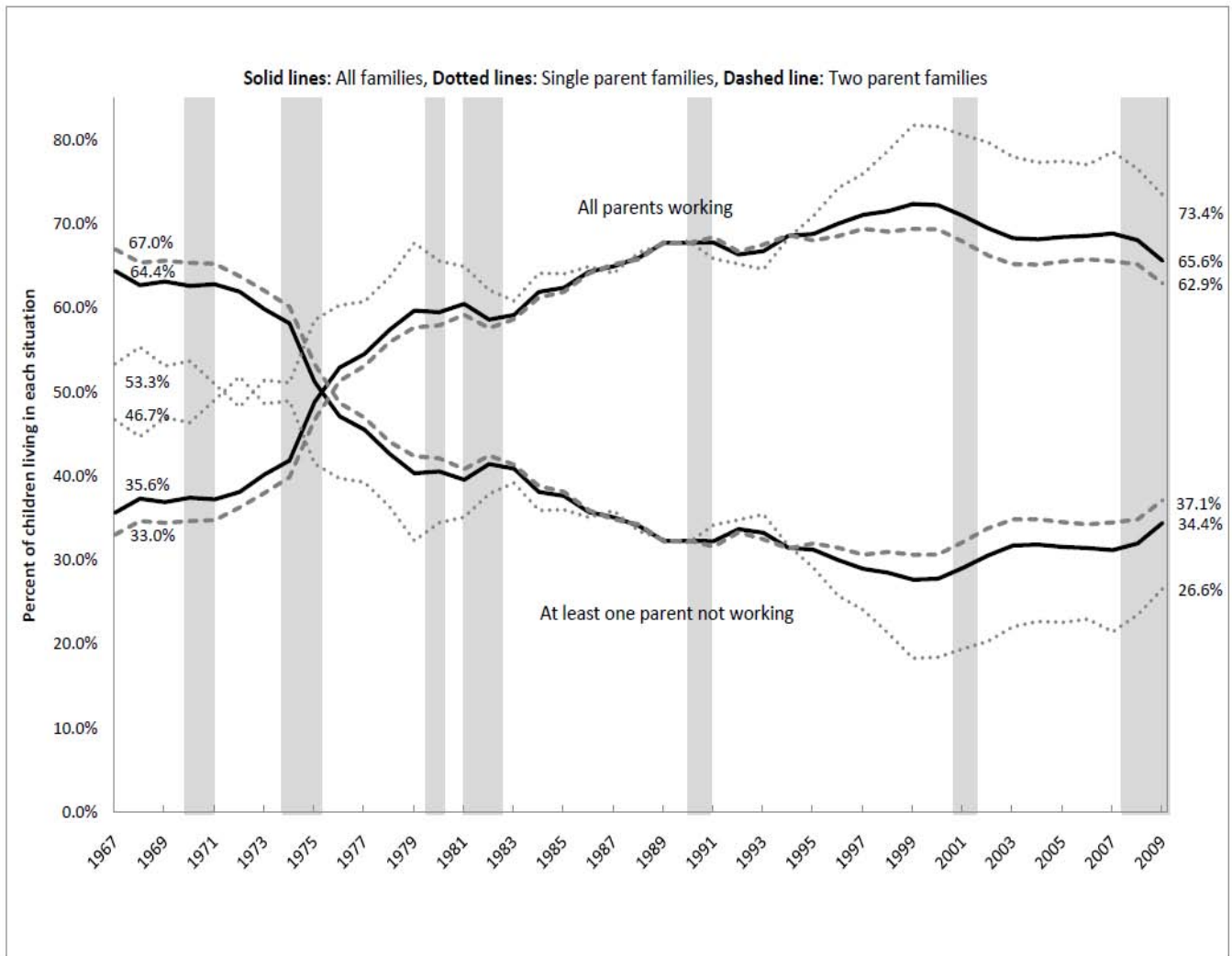


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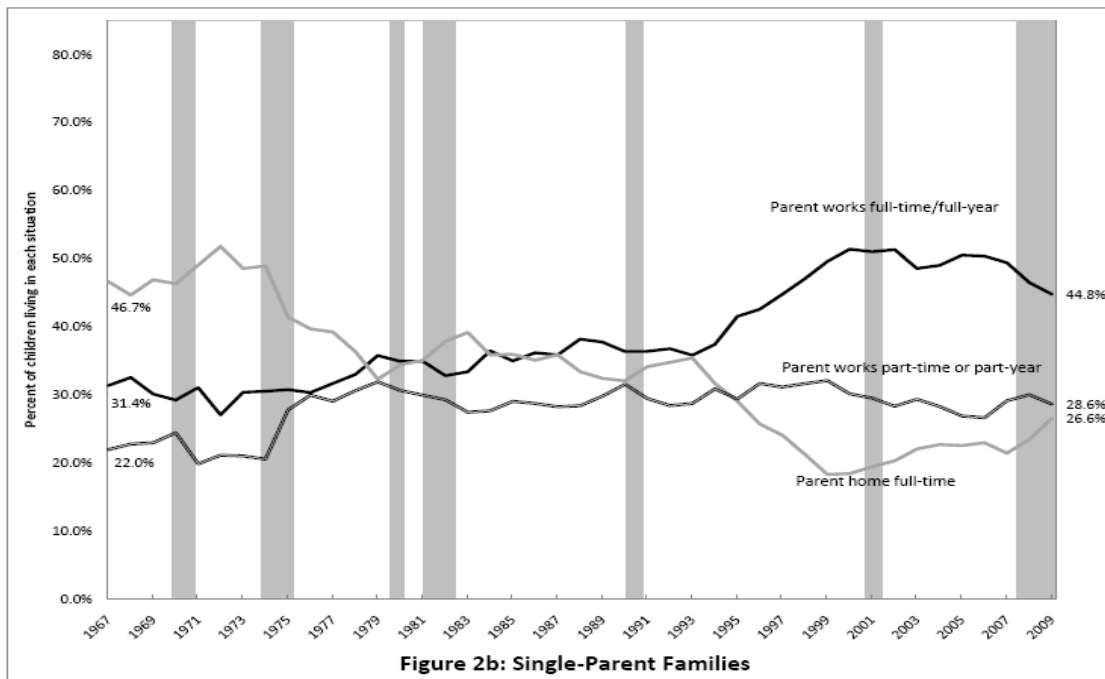
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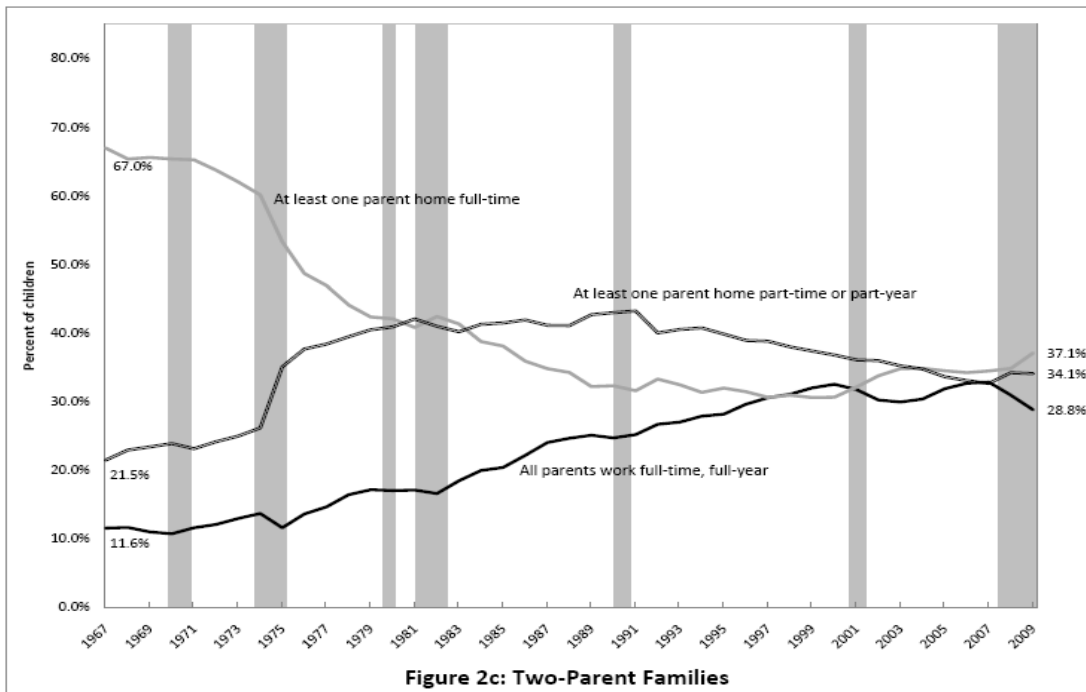
**Figure 1: Trends in Parental Employment Patterns, 1967-2009**



Note: Shaded bars are recessions as defined by the NBER. Source: March Current Population Survey, 1967-2009.

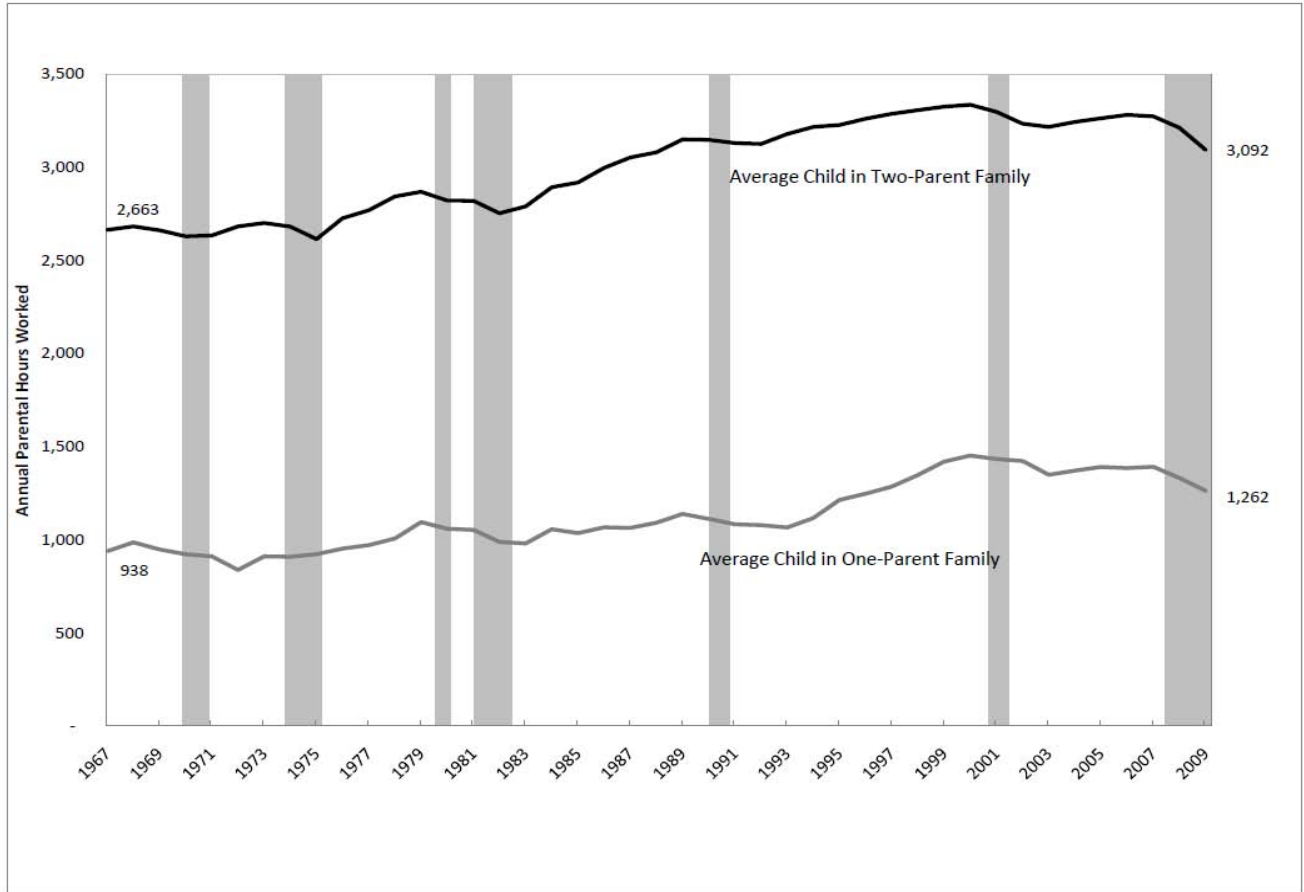
**Figure 2: Trends in Detailed Parental Employment Patterns by Family Structure, 1967-2009**





Note: Shaded bars are recessions as defined by the NBER. Source: March Current Population Survey, 1967-2009.

**Figure 3: Average Annual Parental Work Hours, 1967-2009**



Note: Shaded bars are recessions as defined by the NBER. Source: March Current Population Survey, 1967-2009.

**Table 1: Trends in Parental Availability (Selected Years)**

	All Parents Work Full-Time & Full-Year			A Parent is Home Part-Time or Part-Year			A Parent is Home Full-Time and Full-Year		
	1969	1989	2009	1969	1989	2009	1969	1989	2009
<i>Overall</i>									
Unadjusted	14%	28%	33%	23%	40%	33%	63%	32%	34%
Regression-Adjusted	15%	28%	34%	27%	34%	40%	58%	38%	25%
<i>Age of Child</i>									
0-4 Years Old	7%	21%	26%	20%	40%	34%	72%	38%	40%
5-11 Years Old	12%	27%	33%	23%	41%	33%	64%	32%	35%
12-17 Years Old	20%	36%	39%	25%	37%	32%	55%	26%	29%
<i>Maternal Education</i>									
Less than High School	11%	14%	16%	21%	31%	27%	68%	55%	58%
High School	14%	28%	30%	25%	42%	32%	61%	31%	38%
Some College	14%	30%	34%	24%	43%	36%	62%	27%	30%
Bachelors Degree+	17%	34%	40%	23%	42%	34%	60%	24%	26%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>									
White	12%	26%	31%	23%	42%	34%	65%	32%	35%
Black	19%	31%	38%	28%	33%	28%	53%	36%	34%
Other	13%	27%	33%	19%	31%	29%	68%	42%	38%

Source: March Current Population Survey, 1967-2009

Note: Observations are weighted so as to be nationally representative. No other adjustments are made unless otherwise noted.

**Table 2: Trends in Parental Availability, Child versus Family Based Analysis (Selected Years)**

	Child-Based Analysis			Family-Based Analysis		
	1969	1989	2009	1969	1989	2009
<i>Overall</i>						
All Parents Work Full-Time & Full-Year	14%	28%	33%	16%	31%	35%
A Parent is Home Full-Time & Full-Year	63%	32%	34%	58%	30%	33%
<i>Single-Parent Families</i>						
All Parents Work Full-Time & Full-Year	30%	38%	45%	34%	43%	46%
A Parent is Home Full-Time & Full-Year	47%	32%	27%	42%	30%	28%
<i>Two-Parent Families</i>						
All Parents Work Full-Time & Full-Year	11%	25%	29%	14%	28%	31%
A Parent Home is Full-Time & Full-Year	66%	32%	37%	61%	30%	35%

Source: March Current Population Survey, 1967-2009.

Note: Observations are weighted so as to be nationally representative.



**Table 3: Decomposition of Effect of Changing Family Structure on Likelihood of Having a Nonworking Parent**

	<i>Share of children with a nonworking parent</i>	<i>Change</i>
Actual value, 1967 ( $Y_{1967}$ )	64.4%	
Actual value, 2009 ( $Y_{2009}$ )	34.4%	
<u>Predicted value in 2009</u>		<b>30.0%</b>
Holding constant family structures ( $Y_a$ )	35.7%	1.3%
Holding constant work patterns ( $Y_b$ )	61.8%	27.4%
<i>Holding constant 1P work patterns</i>	39.5%	5.1%
<i>Holding constant 2P work patterns</i>	56.6%	22.2%

*Note:* Values may not sum exactly due to rounding.

Source: March Current Population Survey, 1967-2009.

**Table 4: Actual and Predicted Annual Family Income (2009\$) by Family Structure, 1967-76 & 2000-09**

Actual or Predicted Average Income	Single-Parent Families		Two-Parent Families	
	A Parent is Home Full-Time& Full- Year	All Parents Work Full- Time& Full-Year	A Parent is Home Full-Time& Full- Year	All Parents Work Full- Time& Full- Year
Actual Income, 1967-76	<b>\$14,651</b>	<b>\$31,798</b>	<b>\$47,629</b>	<b>\$69,344</b>
Actual Income, 2000-09	<b>\$7,958</b>	<b>\$36,751</b>	<b>\$57,765</b>	<b>\$99,886</b>
Predicted Income				
1967-76 Characteristics, 2000-09 Returns	\$9,487	\$30,802	\$42,899	\$78,083
2000-09 Characteristics, 1967-76 Returns	\$12,730	\$35,319	\$55,517	\$80,451
Change in Income (1967-78 to 2000-09)				
Actual	<b>-45.7%</b>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>21.3%</b>	<b>44.0%</b>
At 1967-76 Characteristics	-35.2%	-3.1%	-9.9%	12.6%
At 2000-09 Characteristics	-37.4%	4.1%	4.0%	24.2%

Source: March Current Population Survey, 1967-2009.

**Table 5: Hours Spent by Parents in primary Childcare**

	<b>A Parent is Home Full- Time</b>	<b>All Parents Work Full-Time</b>	<b>Unadjusted Difference</b>	<b>Regression- Adjusted Difference</b>
<i>All Children</i>				
<b>Married Mothers</b>				
1975 (N = 693, 266)	10.6 (0.5)	5.3 (0.5)	5.2 ***	5.0 ***
2003-08 (N = 18,437, 16,120)	15.9 (0.3)	8.2 (0.2)	7.7 ***	8.0 ***
<b>Married Fathers</b>				
1975 (N = 612, 249)	2.6 (0.2)	3.2 (0.9)	-0.7	-0.7
2003-08 (N = 17,576, 15,721)	6.2 (0.2)	5.3 (0.2)	0.9 ***	1.3 ***
<b>Single Mothers</b>				
1975 (N = 103, 69)	10.6 (1.6)	5.7 (1.0)	5.0 ***	4.6 **
2003-08 (N = 2,331, 4,540)	12.1 (0.4)	6.9 (0.2)	5.1 ***	5.7 ***
<i>Children Under Age 5</i>				
<b>Married Mothers</b>				
1975 (N = 200, 52)	13.9 (1.0)	9.1 (1.3)	4.8	4.6 **
2003-08 (N = 5,527, 3,445)	22.7 (0.5)	14.2 (0.5)	8.5 ***	8.7 ***
<b>Married Fathers</b>				
1975 (N = 181, 53)	3.6 (0.5)	6.0 (2.5)	-2.5	-1.6
2003-08 (N = 5,207, 3,355)	8.4 (0.4)	9.8 (0.5)	-1.3	-0.3
<i>Children Age 5-17</i>				
<b>Married Mothers</b>				
1975 (N = 493, 214)	8.9 (0.5)	3.9 (0.4)	5.0 ***	3.8 ***
2003-08 (N = 12,910, 12,675)	12.2 (0.3)	6.1 (0.2)	6.1 ***	5.2 ***
<b>Married Fathers</b>				
1975 (N = 431, 196)	2.0 (0.2)	2.0 (0.4)	0.1	-0.7
2003-08 (N = 12,369, 12,366)	4.9 (0.2)	3.8 (0.2)	1.1 ***	1.2 **

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Regression-adjusted differences are obtained by regressing total hours in primary childcare per week on the mother's (father's) age, education, race/ethnicity, number of children in the family, and employment status.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Source: Time Use in Economic and Social Accounts 1975-1976 and American Time Use Survey, 2003-2008.

**Table 6: Work Schedules For Dual-Earner Parents**

<b>Work Schedule</b>	<b>All Parents Work Full-Time</b>	<b>A Parent is Home Part-Time</b>
<i>All Dual-Earner Parents</i>		
Both work daytime hours only	76.9%	74.4%
At least one parent works at non-day time hours	23.1%	25.7%
For family/personal reasons	7.1%	12.4%
For other reasons	16.0%	13.3%
<i>Maternal Education: Less than High School</i>		
Both work daytime hours only	65.5%	67.8%
At least one parent works at non-day time hours	34.5%	32.2%
For family/personal reasons	15.5%	14.5%
For other reasons	19.0%	17.8%
<i>Maternal Education: High School Graduate</i>		
Both work daytime hours only	74.4%	74.1%
At least one parent works at non-day time hours	25.6%	25.9%
For family/personal reasons	7.9%	12.3%
For other reasons	17.7%	13.6%
<i>Maternal Education: Some College</i>		
Both work daytime hours only	74.6%	70.9%
At least one parent works at non-day time hours	25.4%	29.1%
For family/personal reasons	7.6%	13.0%
For other reasons	17.9%	16.1%
<i>Maternal Education: College Graduate</i>		
Both work daytime hours only	83.4%	78.5%
At least one parent works at non-day time hours	16.6%	21.5%
For family/personal reasons	4.3%	11.5%
For other reasons	12.3%	9.9%

*Note:* Statistics are weighted to be nationally representative. Family/Personal reasons include “Better arrangements for family” or “personal preference.” Other reasons include “Better pay”, “Could not get any other job”, “Nature of the job”, or others such as allows time for school, local transportation.

Sample size is 20,021 for the full sample and 2,103, 5,202, 6,086 and 6,630 for less than high school, high school graduates, some college, and college graduates.

Source: Work Schedules and Work at Home Supplement to the 2004 May Current Population Survey.

**Table A.1: Family Demographics, (selected years)**

	All Children			Children in Single-Parent Families			Children in Two-Parent Families		
	1969	1989	2009	1969	1989	2009	1969	1989	2009
<i>Family Structure</i>									
Two-parent families	87%	76%	74%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Married families	87%	73%	69%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unmarried cohabiting	0%	3%	6%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Single-parent families	13%	24%	26%	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Age of Child</i>									
0-4 Years Old	25%	30%	29%	22%	31%	27%	26%	30%	30%
5-11 Years Old	42%	40%	39%	39%	38%	38%	42%	40%	39%
12-17 Years Old	33%	30%	32%	39%	30%	35%	32%	30%	32%
<i>Maternal Education</i>									
Less than High School	38%	19%	14%	59%	32%	19%	35%	15%	13%
High School	44%	40%	26%	32%	38%	33%	46%	40%	24%
Some College	10%	24%	70%	7%	22%	34%	11%	25%	28%
Bachelors Degree+	7%	17%	30%	3%	8%	14%	8%	20%	35%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>									
White	84%	81%	78%	59%	63%	64%	88%	87%	82%
Black	15%	15%	15%	41%	33%	31%	11%	9%	10%
Other	1%	4%	7%	1%	5%	6%	1%	4%	8%

Source: Source: March Current Population Survey, 1967-2009.

**Table A.2: Average Hours per Week in Selected Activities, by Marital and Employment Status**

	1975		2003-2008	
	A Parent is Home	All Parents Work	A Parent is Home	All Parents Work
	Full-Time	Full-Time	Full-Time	Full-Time
<b>Single Mothers</b>				
Paid work	0.9 (0.9)	40.4 (5.2)	0.3 (0.1)	39.7 (0.6)
Primary childcare	10.6 (1.6)	5.7 (1.0)	12.1 (0.4)	6.9 (0.2)
Housework	25.9 (2.0)	14.6 (1.9)	19.0 (0.5)	12.3 (0.3)
Shopping/services	5.2 (1.2)	4.2 (0.6)	6.8 (0.3)	5.9 (0.2)
Sleep	62.3 (1.5)	59.9 (2.4)	67.0 (0.6)	58.3 (0.4)
Eating and grooming	15.4 (1.4)	14.4 (1.4)	11.6 (0.3)	13.3 (0.2)
Free time	47.3 (2.8)	26.5 (2.5)	44.5 (0.8)	27.3 (0.4)
<i>N</i>	103	69	2,331	4,540
<b>Married Mothers</b>				
Paid work	3.7 (0.7)	39.6 (2.4)	5.2 (0.3)	39.6 (0.6)
Primary childcare	10.6 (0.5)	5.3 (0.5)	15.9 (0.3)	8.2 (0.2)
Housework	28.8 (0.8)	17.6 (1.2)	23.9 (0.3)	14.3 (0.3)
Shopping/services	7.6 (0.5)	5.0 (0.7)	8.3 (0.2)	6.3 (0.2)
Sleep	59.6 (0.6)	54.6 (1.5)	60.8 (0.2)	57.2 (0.3)
Eating and grooming	15.3 (0.5)	19.1 (3.8)	13.2 (0.2)	13.7 (0.2)
Free time	41.3 (0.9)	26.3 (1.5)	35.5 (0.4)	24.8 (0.3)
<i>N</i>	693	266	18,437	16,120
<b>Married Fathers</b>				
Paid work	44.1 (1.7)	48.7 (3.3)	39.2 (0.7)	46.1 (0.7)
Primary childcare	2.6 (0.2)	1.7 (0.2)	6.2 (0.2)	5.3 (0.2)
Housework	6.5 (0.6)	6.1 (0.8)	9.1 (0.3)	10.0 (0.3)
Shopping/services	3.9 (0.4)	3.1 (0.7)	4.9 (0.2)	4.4 (0.2)
Sleep	56.6 (0.7)	56.0 (1.3)	58.0 (0.3)	56.0 (0.3)
Eating and grooming	14.9 (0.5)	16.9 (0.7)	13.0 (0.2)	12.7 (0.2)
Free time	38.6 (1.4)	34.1 (2.7)	34.1 (0.5)	30.3 (0.4)
<i>N</i>	612	189	17,576	15,721

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Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. \* $p \leq 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ .

Source: Time Use in Economic and Social Accounts 1975-1976 and American Time Use Survey, 2003-2008.