

What About The Children?

Patrons: Sir Michael Morpurgo, Rebecca Abrams, Sir John Timpson



RESEARCH SUMMARY

Non-parental childcare during non-standard hours: Does participation influence child well-being?

Casey H. Boyd-Swan

Labour Economics **57** (2019) 85-101

The children of parents who work non-standard hours, often fare worse than children of parents who work normal hours as their childcare arrangements are likely to be lower quality and unpredictable in nature.

Parents working during evening or overnight hours (non-standard hours) find it harder to secure good quality childcare for their children, because centre-based care is not normally an option available to them. Children of parents who share the childcare rather than use non-parental care, are less negatively affected.

Boyd-Swan analysed data from the Urban Institute's National Survey of America's Families (NSAF) from 1999 and 2002. In U.S.A., where this research is based, 20% of the working population are either in permanent or rotating non-standard hour positions (based on a 2004 survey). A third of these workers are parents with children under 6 and half are parents with children under 13.

Within the group of parents who work evenings and overnight shifts, Boyd-Swan compared parents using tag-team care, in which parents take turns to go to work, with non-parental care (both parents being absent during non-standard working hours).

Children were classified into non-parental non-standard hours childcare (NNCC) if they met four criteria:

- 1) parent mostly works outside of the hours 6 am – 6 pm
- 2) whilst their parent is at work, looking for work, or in further/higher education, the child's primary source of childcare is non-relative, relative out-of-home or centre-based.
- 3) the parent works for as many or more hours as the child participates in care
- 4) any cohabiting spouses also work non-standard hours.

Just under 2,000 children in NNCC were compared with 2,430 children of tag-team non-standard hours care. The numbers of children in the age 0-5 and 6-11 year groups were 1,270 and 699 respectively for NNCC, and 1,127 and 1,303 respectively for tag-team care.

This paper is the first to consider how children are affected when their parents are at work during non-standard hours. The sector and type of care used during these hours has a significant influence on the degree to which child well-being is affected. Across

(This Summary may be photocopied)

all non-parental childcare arrangements, and regardless of age group, the children in non-parental care had worse parent-child attachment, school engagement and behavioural problems, relative to children in tag-team parental care. Children's participation in informal arrangements (compared to formal arrangements such as centre-based care) was, statistically, more likely to be associated with declining well-being.

Parenting aggravation is a measurement of stress experienced by parents associated with caring for children. The scores of four responses were combined to give a level of "aggravation" between 4 and 16.

The four questions the parents were asked to score from 1 to 4 were

- Is your child harder to care for than most?
- Does your child really bother you a lot?
- Do you give up a lot of your needs for the child?
- Have you felt angry with your child?

Care by a relative outside the home was associated with increased parental aggravation towards the focal child in both age groups and greater behavioural problems for the 6-11 year group. Care by a non-relative, either in-home or out-of-home, was associated with increased parental aggravation, increased school disengagement and increased behavioural problems. Parents relying on non-parental care are under more stress and experience more anger with their child.

A review of the literature suggested that children in low quality non-parental settings would experience cognitive and behavioural setbacks. Boyd-Swan agrees with this statement. The children in non-standard, non-parental care are more likely to receive special education services (ages 0-11) and develop behavioural problems such as depression, problems in socialisation, inattentiveness, anxiety and self-doubt (ages 6-11) than those in tag-team parental care.

Children in non-standard non-parental care are put into a greater number of childcare arrangements and for more hours than their tag-team counterparts. They are exposed to features of the lowest quality care, including the informal sector, across multiple arrangements and for long hours.

The relationship between child well-being and non-standard employment is significantly mediated by the source and type of care used during non-standard hours. Children raised by both parents did not show the same declines in cognitive, behavioural and physical well-being as children in non-parental care.

Dr E.A. Bland.