

Father-Provided Child Care among Married Couples in a Recessionary Context

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Abstract

The economic decline and consequent changes in parental employment associated with the Great Recession have forced families to re-examine the role and expectations of fathers. This paper looks at the impact of the economic shock of job loss among fathers on the provision of father-provided child care among married couples with an employed wife. Using longitudinal survey data from the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), we examine how changes in employment facilitate or impede child care provided by fathers. Findings suggest that fathers' child care provision is highly dependent on the fathers' employment situation and the available time they have for child care. Specifically, fathers who transition out of employment between 2010 and 2011 are more likely to provide child care during their wives' work hours than fathers who remain employed in 2011. Results shed light on the myriad of economic and social factors that influence the use of father-provided child care during times of economic uncertainty.

Introduction

The twenty-first century continues to highlight changes in women's labor force participation, household structure, and the role of fathers. As the rate of maternal labor force participation increased over the 1980s and well into the 1990s, the need for child care during a mother's working hours also grew (Hofferth, 1996; Spain & Bianchi, 1996). At the same time,

¹ This paper is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress. The views expressed on statistical and methodological issues are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

the role of fathers has been evolving from the distant 9 to 5 working man to the modern father who is more involved in the care of children (Cabrera, et. al., 2000). The Great Recession has drawn additional attention to the role of fathers. Between 2007 and 2009, the average unemployment rate almost doubled from 5 to 9 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).² Job losses occurred disproportionately among men as male-dominated occupations were hit harder (Elsby, Hobijn, & Sahin, 2010). In the face of high male unemployment, wives entered the labor force to supplement family income and fathers increased the time they spent physically caring for children (Gorshuch, 2014; Mattingly & Smith, 2010).

The recent recession and the general increase in father involvement have led to media reports about the sudden reversal in roles between mothers and fathers. News stories have recounted how fathers are choosing to stay home and take care of the children while mothers gladly serve as the primary breadwinners (Hymowitz, 2012; Williams, 2012). While gender norms may be evolving, we are hardly heading for a complete reversal in roles. Instead, many mothers and fathers are struggling to meet work and family demands in a 24/7 economy by working opposite shifts, working from home, or reducing work hours (Edgell, Ammons, & Dahlin, 2012; Presser, 2005). What is not clear from the research is how changes in parental employment or other household characteristics influence father-provided child care. In the aftermath of job loss, do families increase their reliance on father-provided care? And when fathers return to work, do they continue to provide child care?

This paper builds on previous research examining the influence of an economic recession on father-provided child care (Casper & O'Connell, 1998) by looking at a more recent

² According to the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research (the official arbiter of U.S. recessions) the Great Recession began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009 for a total of 18 months.

recession. Our study improves upon previous research by using direct measures of changes in parental employment by using longitudinal data, which contains measures of father-provided child care at two different time points, one year apart. Unlike past recessions, the Great Recession produced massive layoffs for longer periods than many families may have anticipated, forcing families to re-examine changes in parental employment and the role and expectations of fathers. Longitudinal data allow us to assess how these broader changes are related to father-provided child care in a recessionary context.

BACKGROUND

Trends in father-provided child care

Several theoretical explanations have been offered to explain the trends in father-provided child care. Prior research indicates that father-provided child care increased most dramatically during recession years and that father-provided care is related to father's availability, job security, and earnings (Casper & O'Connell, 1998; Maume & Mullin, 1993). There is moderate support that during recessions, but not during economic expansions, the more mothers earn relative to their husbands, the more likely fathers are to provide child care (Casper & O'Connell, 1998). However, research also shows that men resist participation in housework and other traditionally female household tasks such as child care as the relative earnings of wives increase (Brines, 1994; Raley, Bianchi, & Wang, 2012). Periods of unemployment among fathers can lead to more hours of child care while the mother is at work, but fathers who devote the most time to child care tend to be highly educated and have young children (Pailhe & Solaz, 2008). Conversely, low-income fathers tend to provide little child care following changes in their employment status (Waller, 2009).

Broader changes in the economy have also changed the nature of work and family balance. As the economy shifts to more service-based industries and more occupations have nonstandard hours, particularly among female dominated jobs, fathers are called upon to be more readily available to care for children in the evenings and on weekends (Brayfield, 1995; Glass, 1998; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Presser, 1995). While changes in the economy and increased maternal employment have created opportunities for fathers to be economic providers as well as be more involved in the day-to-day care of children, father-provided child care may lack the stability that working mothers need. In her study of families with a first birth, Glass (1998) found that few fathers consistently provided more than 20 hours of child care per week throughout the first year of the child's life. Other research suggests that most mothers want to have their spouses care for their children while they work, but find employment schedules to be the main barrier (Riley & Glass, 2002). Mothers working an evening or night shift are more likely to use father-provided child care, at least for preschool age children, (Casper & O'Connell, 1998; Presser, 1988; Riley & Glass, 2002) whereas mothers working longer hours are more likely to use family daycare homes or day-care centers (Connelly & Kimmel, 2003).

Despite the changing conceptions of fatherhood, participation in child care may be simply motivated by economic circumstances. If a father experiences unemployment or a reduction in work hours, he is, in theory, more likely to be available to provide child care. Using cross-sectional data, Casper and O'Connell (1998) explain the rise in father-provided child care during the 1991 recession as a function of the change in macroeconomic conditions which lead to an increase in father's time available for child care. They contend that father-provided child care increased during the economic recession because fathers provided care when they were

unemployed or laid off, but once they re-entered the workforce they no longer provided child care.

The Great Recession and Families

The average length of unemployment during the Great Recession was the longest ever since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began recording such data in 1948 (Weller, 2009). The economy lost 8.7 million jobs between December 2007 and January 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Men accounted for more than three-quarters of the recent job losses as male-dominated industries such as construction and manufacturing were particularly hard hit (Elsby et al., 2010). Additionally, the most recent recession was also accompanied by the collapse of the housing and financial markets (Grusky, Western, & Weiner, 2011). The loss of jobs in conjunction with losses in the housing and financial markets meant that many families not only lost income generated by employment, but lost investments related to their housing and other financial assets (Pfeffer, Danziger, & Schoeni, 2013).

Married-couple families have responded to a husband's job loss with increased dependence on wives' earnings. Research on the Great Recession shows that wives who were previously out of the labor force often sought and found work between 2008 and 2009 if their husbands stopped working (Mattingly & Smith, 2010). In addition, wives' contribution to total family earnings rose markedly during the Great Recession and has remained at high levels (Smith and Schaefer, 2014). The demand for married women's employment should have been stronger in households where men were employed in industries that were hardest hit by the recession. However, not all women were equally able to respond to husbands' unemployment during the recession. Employment rates were lower among married women with lower levels of

education and work experience, contributing to greater household economic polarization following the recession (Landivar, 2012).

Economic uncertainty related to the recent recession has also affected the day-to-day routines of families. Berik and Kongar (2013) found that the composition of men's unpaid work changed considerably during the recession. Men shifted their unpaid work time away from housework and shopping toward child care. However, they note that gender differences in unpaid work after the recession widened as women increased their time spent doing unpaid labor, with women picking up the decline in child care hours of men. Recent research indicates that nationally, father-provided child care during mothers' work hours increased following the aftermath of the Great Recession. The share of married fathers who provided child care during their wives' work hours rose from 27 percent in 2005 to 31 percent in 2011 (Smith, 2015). These studies point to the continued importance of the relationship between economic opportunities and men's involvement with child care. We improve upon previous research by tracking couples' use of father care, changes in fathers' employment status, and changes in wives' work hours using longitudinal data collected following the Great Recession.

CURRENT STUDY

Previous studies examining father's time with their children during the recent recession have primarily used the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) (Gorsuch, 2014; Berik & Kongar, 2013). The ATUS collects information on the amount of time adults spent physically caring for children as well as time spent providing child care while doing other activities. This information is helpful for examining daily activities, but does not help us fully understand how children are

cared for when mothers are at work, and more importantly, the role fathers play in providing child care in light of their own employment circumstances.

The current analysis uses the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a longitudinal survey that tracks employment transitions over the life of the study. Unlike the ATUS, the SIPP directly asks employed mothers if they use father-provided child care during their work hours. The SIPP enables the examination of the link between married fathers as care providers, work schedules, and family income in a changing economy. Furthermore, the SIPP asks child care questions at two different time periods during the panel (in 2010 and 2011), allowing for the examination of employment transitions and changes in father-provided child care among the same married couples. This will allow us to determine if fathers' job loss triggered father-provided child care in a post-recessionary context.

Similar to Casper and O'Connell (1998), we expect to see a "recession effect" on fathers' provision of child care while their wives are at work. In other words, we expect that father care in 2011 will be positively associated with a father's transition out of employment and negatively associated with a father's transition into employment between 2010 and 2011, as the father's available time for child care fluctuates with employment status. We argue that the Great Recession not only left families feeling economically insecure, but that the depth and length of the recent recession coupled with greater job losses among men will affect fathers' participation in child care while their wives are otherwise employed.

We ask the following research questions:

- 1) Do “available” fathers care for their children while their wives are working in the context of the shock of an economic job loss (or gain)?
- 2) How do couples balance work and family within the context of the Great Recession? Are changes in mothers’ work behaviors, such as increases in work hours, pushing fathers to be more involved?
- 3) What are the characteristics of fathers who do (or do not) provide child care while their wives are at work? How often do fathers serve as the primary care provider? How does father-provided child care vary by the age of the child?

METHODS

Data

The data supporting these analyses come from two waves from the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). The SIPP is a nationally representative household survey designed to provide detailed longitudinal information on the economic situation of households in the United States. Child care data are asked in “topical modules” administered during selected “waves,” or interviews. Data for the current analysis will be based of the 2008 SIPP Panel using wave 5, collected in the spring of 2010, and wave 8, collected in the spring of 2011.

We limit our sample to married couples where the mother was employed in 2010 and 2011. The SIPP child care module does not ask unemployed mothers if they use father-provided child care, therefore limiting our ability to understand father-provided child care among unemployed mothers. Despite these limitations, SIPP is an appropriate data source for this study because it

includes detailed child care data for each child under the age of 15 and extensive information on household structure, income, employment, and work schedules. More importantly, the longitudinal design of SIPP panels provides the opportunity to examine changes in child care usage, employment (including work hours and schedule), income, and various other social and economic characteristics.

We present descriptive statistics and estimate any father-provided child care and primary use of father-provided child care while the mother is at work using multivariate logistic regression models. We are particularly interested in how changes in the father's employment status or changes in the number of hours worked by the mother between 2010 and 2011 predict father-provided child care in 2011. Our models control for mother's and father's demographic characteristics, including race/Hispanic origin, age, educational attainment, number and ages of children, labor force characteristics, and household income.

MEASURES

Dependent Variables

SIPP collects information on over ten types of child care arrangements used on a regular basis for children ages 0 to 14. We use two dichotomous dependent variables to measure father-provided child care in 2011: *any father care* and *primary father care*. *Any father care* indicates that the father provided any child care for any of his children during the hours the mother was working. A father is considered the primary child care provider if he provided care for the highest number of hours for any child during the hours the mother is working.

Independent Variables

Employment transitions, work hours, and work schedules can facilitate care giving by fathers with employed wives. We use several variables to describe the employment behavior of fathers and mothers between 2010 and 2011. *Fathers' employment transitions* measures whether the father went from being employed to not employed, not employed to employed, not employed at each interview period, or remained employed at each interview period. *Mother's work hour transitions* measures whether the weekly number of hours worked remained the same, increased, or declined between 2010 and 2011.

Another set of variables measures the *shift and employment characteristics* for both spouses in 2011. A set of variables measures the relative work shifts of the spouses. A day shift is defined as usually working the majority of one's hours between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Other work schedules are defined as nonday shifts. We look at both spouses' work schedules to produce a set of four dummy variables: the mother works a day shift and the father works a nonday shift, the mother works a nonday shift while the father works a day shift, both spouses work a dayshift, and both spouses work nonday shifts. We also include relative hours worked measures for both spouses. Husbands and wives who usually worked 35 hours or more per week in 2011 are classified as full-time workers.

Spousal economic resources includes two measures – the ratio of the wife's earnings to total family earnings and the husband's average monthly earnings. The husband's income is divided into \$1,500 increments up to \$4,500, with dummy variables included in the models.

Our analysis includes a number of household, demographic and geographic controls. Our analysis includes the number of children 0 to 14 in the household and a dichotomous variable indicating if a preschooler (child 4 or younger) is in the household. Our models also include a number of control variables based on the father's characteristics in 2011. We include a continuous variable for age and whether the father was White, non-Hispanic (reference category), Black, non-Hispanic, Asian, non-Hispanic, other race, non-Hispanic, or Hispanic. A set of four dummy variables indicate the father's education level: less than high school (reference category), high school degree, some college, or college degree. Lastly, we include a dichotomous measure for geography. Nonmetro residence refers to persons living outside officially designated metropolitan areas.

RESULTS³

Descriptive Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the sample. In general, 31.9 percent of fathers of employed wives provided any child care to one or more of their children under 15 in 2010. A similar percentage of fathers provided care in 2011 (29.8 percent).⁴ Smaller percentages of fathers were the primary caregiver in 2010 and 2011, 9.5 percent and 9.1 percent respectively. Looking at the data longitudinally, more than half (55.7 percent) of fathers did not provide child care in either 2010 and 2011. Father-provided child care was not particularly stable between

³ The estimates in this paper (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. For further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates including standard errors and confidence intervals, go to <<http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements/2008/SIPP%202008%20Panel%20Waves%201-16%20-%20Core%20and%20Topical%20Module%20Source%20and%20Accuracy%20Statement.pdf>>.

⁴ All comparative statements in this paper have undergone statistical testing, and, unless otherwise noted, all comparisons are statistically significant at the 10 percent significance level.

2010 and 2011. Less than a quarter (17.4 percent) of fathers provided child care at both time points. Among fathers who provided child care in 2010, 14.5 percent transitioned out of providing child care during their wives' work hours by 2011, while 12.4 percent went from not providing child care in 2010 to providing child care in 2011.

Around eight in ten fathers were employed in both 2010 and 2011. Small percentages of fathers either transitioned out of employment (3.9 percent) or into employment by 2011 (4.4 percent), while 7.2 percent of fathers were not employed in 2010 and 2011. Looking longitudinally at the work behavior of mothers, 6.1 percent reported working fewer hours in 2011 compared to 2010. A comparable similar percentage of mothers increased their work hours (6.6 percent).

Among dual-earner couples in 2011, 79.8 percent of mothers and fathers both work a day shift. One in five couples work non-overlapping shifts. For example, 16.5 percent of wives work the day shift, while their husbands work the night shift. Whereas, 2.7 percent of mothers work a nonday shift while their husbands work a day shift. Rarely do both spouses work a nonday shift (1.1 percent).

Regression Results

As expected, fathers' child care provision is highly dependent on the fathers' employment situation and the available time they have for child care (Table 2). Fathers who transition out of employment between 2010 and 2011 are more likely to provide child care during their wives' work hours than fathers who remain employed in 2011. Fathers who remain not employed are more likely to provide child care. Fathers who transition into employment is

not associated with providing child care, but the coefficient is in the expected direction. In addition, fathers who provided care in 2010 are more likely to provide child care in 2011 than fathers who did not provide care in 2010.

Moreover, changes in mothers' work hours also are related to fathers' provision of child care. If mothers reduce their work hours (and essentially increase their available time for child care), fathers are less likely to provide child care.

Fathers' work hours and shift are related to the provision of father care in the expected directions. When couples work different shifts, fathers are more likely to provide child care than when both spouses work day shifts. Additionally, when both parents work nonday shifts, fathers are more likely to care for their children. Fathers who work full-time are less likely to provide child care, supporting the time available for child care thesis. Fathers' monthly earnings are negatively associated with the provision of child care.

Mothers who work full-time are less likely to rely on fathers as care providers. This may seem counterintuitive, since it seems logical that the more hours a mother is at work, the more likely she would rely on her husband. However, this finding echoes findings of Connelly and Kimmel (2003) and their analysis of part-time and full-time working mothers. Families with married full-time working mothers reported less father-provided child care than families with part-time working mothers. As expected, we find that as mothers' earnings rise relative to their husbands, fathers are more likely to provide child care.

We find the expected relationships between father care and our control variables. Father care is more likely as the number of children rises in the family, if there is a preschooler in the

family, and as education increases. Father care is less likely among older fathers. To test the robustness of our results we ran the same model predicting fathers as the primary child care provider. Our results are essentially the same in direction and significance with a few exceptions. Most notable is that the size of the coefficient for having a preschooler in the household is much larger when predicting fathers as primary child care provider, although the coefficients are not standardized. Additionally, we find that Hispanic fathers are more likely to provide primary child care.

CONCLUSIONS

This study began by asking how couples balance work and family within the context of the Great Recession. We find support that changes in fathers' and mothers' time availability is predictive of whether fathers provide child care. In a recessionary context, we find that fathers who transition out of employment are more likely to provide child care. Our findings suggest that changes in mothers' work hours are also related to father care.

Our results support previous research (Casper & O'Connell, 1998) and reinforce the notion that fluctuations in the economy and changes in work schedules affect father-provided child care. Our findings suggest that, on average, fathers increase their time in child care when their wives increase their work hours or work a nonstandard work schedule. However, what are the consequences of staggered work shifts on family life? The depth and length of an economic recession may be a factor influencing spouses' ability to engage in adaptive strategies, such as having a wife work extra hours or working non-overlapping work schedules.

Future research should seek to uncover the various mechanisms that facilitate father-provided child care. Our findings suggests that short-term economic pressures increase the likelihood that fathers provide child care and highlights the need to give more attention to the obstacles that parents face when managing work and family demands in a changing economy.

Table 1. Characteristics of couples with an employed wife in 2010 and 2011

Characteristics	Percent (weighted)
Father Provided-Child Care	
Any father care in 2010	32.5
Any father care in 2011	29.9
Father primary provider in 2010	9.6
Father primary provider in 2011	9.0
Father-Provided Child Care Transitions	
Father provides care in both 2010 & 2011	17.7
Father transitions into providing care	12.2
Father transitions out of providing care	14.9
Father does not provide at either time	55.3
Fathers' Employment Transitions	
Father remains employed	85.3
Father becomes not employed	3.6
Father becomes employed	4.6
Father remains not employed	6.5
Mothers' work hour transitions	
Mother reduces work hours	5.9
Mother increases work hours	6.7
Fathers' and Mothers' shift and employment in 2011	
Mother works day shift, father works nonday shift	17.0
Mother works nonday shift, father works day shift	2.5
Mother and father both work day shift	79.4
Mother and father both work nonday shift	1.1
Mother works full-time	69.9
Father works full-time	72.5
Spousal Economic Resources	
Father's monthly earnings	
Less than \$1,500	21.8
\$1,500 -\$2,999	20.0
\$3,000-\$4,499	20.7
\$4,500 or more	37.5
Ratio of mother's earnings to total family earnings (mean)	0.5
Household Characteristics	
Number of children (mean)	1.7
Preschooler in household	38.2
Father's characteristics in 2011	
Age (mean)	40.5
Less than high school	6.9
High school degree	22.6
Some college	33.1
College degree	37.4
White, non-Hispanic	70.3
Black, non-Hispanic	8.5
Asian, non-Hispanic	4.4
Other, non-Hispanic	1.8
Hispanic	15.1
Nonmetro residence	15.8
Number of cases in 1,000s (weighted)	10,601

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 5 and 8.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Predicting Fathers' Participation in Child Care in 2011

Variable	ANY FATHER CARE		PRIMARY FATHER CARE	
	Coefficient	Standard error	Coefficient	Standard error
Father provided care in 2010	1.50 ***	0.05	1.35 ***	0.09
Fathers' employment transitions				
Father becomes not employed ¹	0.86 ***	0.12	1.54 ***	0.19
Father becomes employed	-0.12	0.12	-0.08	0.20
Father remains not employed	1.13 ***	0.12	1.62 ***	0.17
Mothers' work hour transitions				
Mother reduces work hours	-0.23 *	0.11	-0.07	0.16
Mother increases work hours	0.15	0.10	0.14	0.16
Fathers' and Mothers' shift and employment in 2011				
Mother works day shift, father works nonday shift ²	0.53 ***	0.06	0.59 ***	0.11
Mother works nonday shift, father works day shift	1.12 ***	0.14	2.28 ***	0.20
Mother and father both work nonday shift	1.24 ***	0.21	0.87 **	0.30
Mother works full-time	-0.22 ***	0.06	-0.85 ***	0.10
Father works full-time	-0.29 ***	0.06	-0.33 **	0.11
Spousal Economic Resources				
Father's monthly earnings ³				
\$1,500 -\$2,999	-0.10	0.09	-0.18	0.14
\$3,000-\$4,499	-0.28 **	0.09	-0.18	0.15
\$4,500 or more	-0.28 **	0.09	-0.34 *	0.15
Ratio of mother's earnings to total family earnings	1.40 *	0.64	1.77 ⁺	1.02
Controls				
Number of children	0.06 *	0.03	0.04	0.05
Preschooler in household	0.26 ***	0.10	2.63 ***	0.12
Fathers' characteristics in 2011				
Age	-0.01 *	0.00	-0.03 ***	0.00
High school degree ⁴	0.55 ***	0.11	0.50 *	0.18
Some college	0.46 ***	0.11	0.30 ⁺	0.18
College degree	0.46 ***	0.11	0.44 *	0.19
Black, non-hispanic	0.16 ⁺	0.09	-0.14	0.16
Asian, non-hispanic	0.23 ⁺	0.12	0.19	0.20
Other, non-hispanic	-0.37 ⁺	0.19	-0.16	0.29
Hispanic	0.05	0.07	0.64 ***	0.12
Nonmetro residence	-0.05	0.07	-0.25	0.12
Intercept	-2.19 ***	0.38	-4.28 ***	0.19
Chi-Square Likelihood Ratio	1998.18 ***		2204.30 ***	
Degrees of freedom	26		26	
N	10,610		10,610	

⁺p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

¹Reference group are fathers who remained employed.

²Reference group are mothers and fathers who both work day shifts.

³Reference group are fathers who earn less than \$1,500 per month.

⁴Reference group are fathers who have less than a high school degree.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 5 and 8.

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