



Minnesota Child Care Choices:

Families' Employment Patterns and Child Care-Related Work Disruptions

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Introduction to the Minnesota Child Care Choices Research Brief Series

The purpose of this Research Brief Series is to summarize key findings and implications from the Minnesota Child Care Choices study, a three-year longitudinal survey of a sample of parents with low incomes who have at least one child age six or younger, have applied to receive financial assistance through Minnesota's welfare or child care subsidy programs, and lived in one of seven participating counties at the time of the baseline survey. Telephone surveys are conducted by Wilder Research every 5-6 months, starting in August 2009, and include questions about families' characteristics, parents' child care preferences, the processes

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OVERVIEW

One of the aims of the Minnesota Child Care Choices study is to explore the factors that influence child care stability and parents' employment outcomes.¹ This Research Brief looks at the work experiences of parents in the study and the connections between child care and work. In particular, this Research Brief explores how problems with child care affect—and in some cases disrupt—parents' work.

While the entire sample consists of 323 parents, this brief focuses on a few different sub-samples. The first is the group of respondents who report working for pay in the past week (N=136). The second is the group of respondents who are considered to be labor force participants (N=282).² The last group is respondents who report experiencing problems with their child care over the past four months that have caused them to make alternative child care arrangements, regardless of employment or labor force participation status in the week leading up to the survey (N=102).

How many and what types of jobs are held by working parents?

One hundred and thirty-six respondents (42%) reported either working for pay or holding a job but not working (due to vacation or sick leave) in the week prior to the survey. On average, those working for pay held 1.1 jobs. Thirteen respondents (10% of those working for pay) held two jobs, and no one in the sample reported working more than two jobs.

In the baseline survey, respondents described the type of job they held, and job types were then categorized by the study authors. Twenty-three percent of those working for pay were in sales or worked as a cashier, 19% worked in health care, and 12% worked as administrative assistants. Other jobs held included food service (waitresses and cooks; 9%), customer service (6%), and manual labor (6%). (See Figure 1 for more details.)

¹For more information on the Minnesota Child Care Choices study, see: Tout, K., Forry, N., Blasberg, A., Isner, T., Carlin, C., & Davis, E. (2011). *Minnesota Child Care Choices: Study and Sample Description*. Minneapolis, MN: Child Trends & University of Minnesota.

²While fewer than half of respondents reported working for pay in the week leading up to the survey, a much larger proportion of the sample was defined as being in the labor force. Respondents in the labor force included anyone who was working, was looking for work, or was in an unpaid job training program. Respondents who were considered as not participating in the labor force included anyone who was in school (and not either looking for a job or working for pay), staying at home full-time (and not looking for a job), or receiving disability payments.



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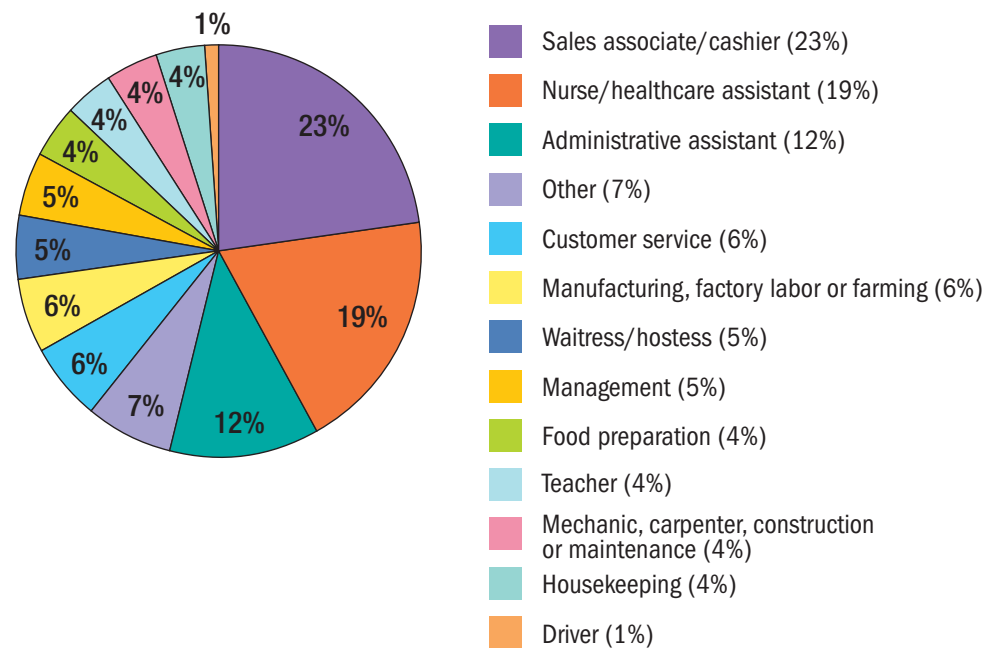
parents use to make child care decisions, parents' familiarity with and use of Parent Aware, Minnesota's pilot Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), parents' perceptions of the quality of their child care, child care-related work disruptions, parental employment, and use of public assistance programs.

For each family, one child is designated as the focal child and detailed information is collected about the child care arrangements used for this child. In addition to the survey data, this study uses administrative data from the Minnesota child care subsidy program to track participants' use of subsidies and the type of subsidized care arrangements they use over time.

The Minnesota Child Care Choices Research Briefs are designed to answer questions of interest to state child care administrators, county agency staff and other early childhood stakeholders. The questions they have include: How do parents make decisions about child care arrangements? What factors affect whether a family uses child care subsidies? How will Minnesota's QRIS affect families with low incomes, particularly those eligible to receive a child care subsidy? What family, community, and child care characteristics affect child care stability and reliability, and parents' employment outcomes?

This brief is based on data from the baseline survey of the Minnesota Child Care Choices study. Readers who want additional details about the study design and the sample of parents who participated in the baseline survey are referred to the Study and Sample Description Brief. The entire series of baseline briefs is available online at: www.mdmnresearchpartnership.com.

FIGURE 1: Job type reported by parents working for pay



SOURCE: Minnesota Child Care Choices Wave 1 survey data

What are the work schedules of parents?

On average, parents who reported working for pay worked 29.9 hours per week, with a range from 5 to 50 hours. Among parents working 20 or fewer hours per week (24%), the average number of hours worked per week was 16.2. Among parents working between 20 and 40 hours per week (45%), the average was 29.6. Parents who worked 40 or more hours (31%) worked an average of 41.1 hours per week. The number of hours worked by the parent did not vary significantly by type of job.

More than half of parents reported working some type of non-traditional schedule. Fifty-seven percent of those working for pay reported that their job regularly requires them to work weekends. Close to half of the sample (47%) reported that their job regularly requires them to work evenings (after 6:00 P.M.), and 15% reported their job regularly requires them to work early mornings (before 6:00 A.M.).³

In terms of job tenure, parents have been with their current employer for an average of 1.5 years. The majority of those working for pay (69%) have been in their current job for one year or less, and 13% have been in their current job for more than 3 years.

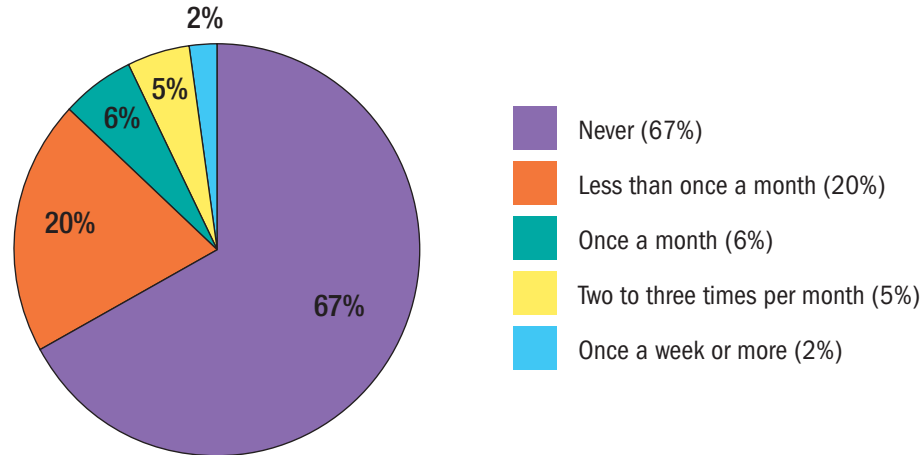
How frequently do parents have problems with their child's primary care arrangement?

While the majority of parents in the labor force (67%) report that they have not had any problems with their child care provider (e.g., the provider getting sick or having personal problems or the child care facility being closed) over the past four months that required them to make alternative child care arrangements, nearly one-third did report having child care problems (see Figure 2). This finding is nearly identical to findings reported in the 2009 Statewide Minnesota Child Care Survey where 35% of families said they lost work time or income in the past six months because of

³ Note: these groups are not mutually exclusive.

a problem with a child care arrangement.⁴ About one-fifth of the sample reported having problems less than once a month, 6% reported having problems once a month, 5% reported having problems two to three times per month, and the remainder of the sample (2%) reported having problems at least once a week.

FIGURE 2: Frequency of problems with child's primary care arrangement



SOURCE: Minnesota Child Care Choices Wave 1 survey data

Does the frequency of provider problems vary by any observable characteristics?

The frequency of provider problems experienced by parents in the labor force does not depend on the type of primary care arrangement, the age of the child, whether or not the family is using a subsidy (the Child Care Assistance Program [CCAP]),⁵ or family income.

Do working parents have family or friends that can provide care at the last minute?

Amongst those parents in the labor force (N=282), the majority (79%) report that they have family or friends who can provide care at the last minute. Families earning between 100% and 175% of the federal poverty level were significantly more likely to have such support available than were families earning more than 175% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Ninety-four percent of families earning between 100% and 175% of FPL had family or friends available for last minute care, compared with 62% of families with relatively higher incomes ($\geq 175\%$ of FPL).⁶ There were no significant differences in the frequency of provider problems experienced by those who have family or friends available at the last minute, compared with those who do not have family or friends available.

How many respondents report at least one parent experienced child care-related work disruptions?

Parents who reported any type of provider problem that forced them to seek an alternative child care arrangement (32%), regardless of their labor force participation, were asked a series of questions to determine the consequences of child care disruptions for their work life over the past four months (see Figure 3). Within this group, 23% stated that one parent had to miss an entire day of work, and 25% stated that one parent had to arrive at work late or leave early because of problems with their child's primary care arrangement. Other scheduling disruptions experienced by families included one parent needing to change his/her work schedule (21%), being unable to work

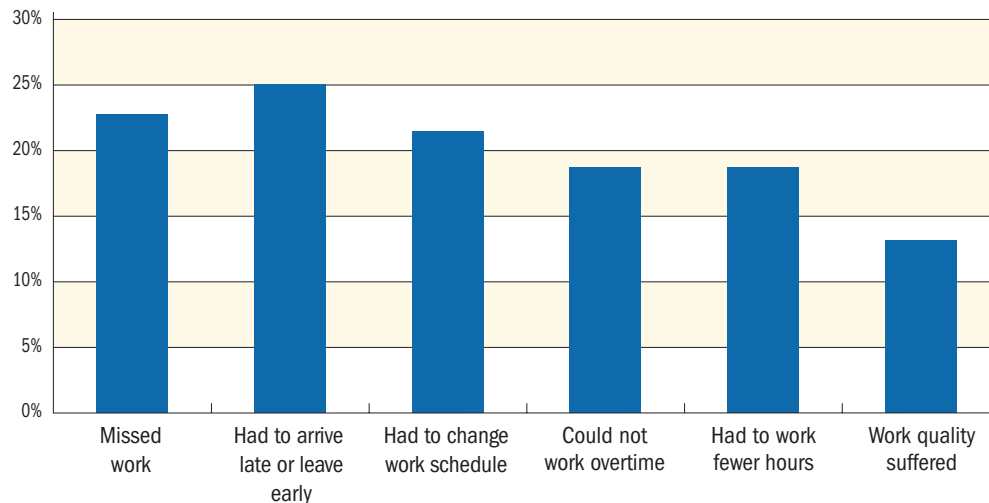
⁴For more information about Minnesota's Statewide Child Care Survey, see: Chase, R. & Valorose, J. (2010). *Child Care Use in Minnesota: Report of the 2009 Statewide Household Child Care Survey*. Wilder Research: St. Paul, MN.

⁵Note: 48% of labor force participants reported receiving CCAP at the time of the survey.

⁶The proportion of the sample that has family or friends who can care for the child at the last minute does not vary significantly by type of primary care arrangement, the age of the child, whether or not the family is using a subsidy (CCAP), type of job, or the respondent's marital status.

overtime (19%), and needing to work fewer hours (19%). Thirteen percent of parents reported that their work quality suffers because of problems with their child’s primary care arrangement.⁷

FIGURE 3: Frequency of work disruptions for families experiencing problems with primary child care provider



SOURCE: Minnesota Child Care Choices Wave 1 survey data

Does having family or friends who are available to provide last-minute care buffer families from the impact of problems with their primary care provider?

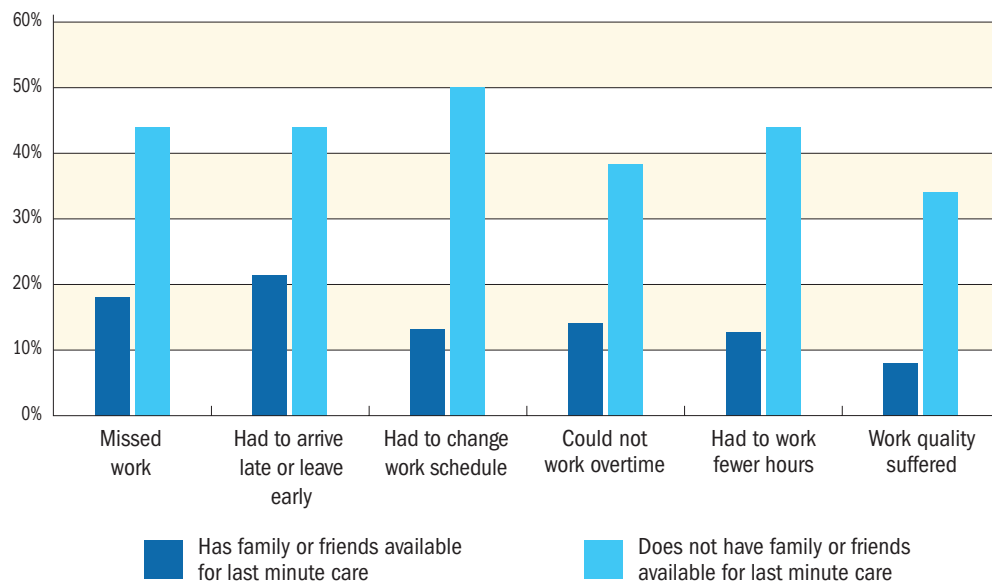
Of the 102 respondents who report any child care-related work disruption, 82 respondents (80%) have family and friends available for last minute care.⁸ On every dimension of child care-related work disruptions there are statistically significant differences between parents who have family or friends available for last-minute care and those who do not. Among parents who have family or friends available for last-minute child care, 18% of respondents report missing work due to provider problems, compared to 44% of those who do not. This pattern holds for all of the child care-related work problems: families who have sources of last-minute support are less vulnerable to work disruptions. Additionally, respondents who have family or friends available for last-minute child care are significantly less likely to report that their work quality suffered due to problems with their child’s primary care arrangement. (See Figure 4 for more details.)

The availability of family or friends to provide last-minute care is the only characteristic significantly related to the number of child care-related work disruptions that parents experienced. For example, there is no statistically significant difference in the number of child care-related work disruptions between parents who have flexible workplace policies (such as whether the respondent is eligible for sick leave, paid vacation, or flexible work hours), and parents who do not. There are also no statistically significant differences according to the type of primary care arrangement, whether the family is using a child care subsidy, the family’s income, the child’s age, the parent’s type of job, or the parent’s marital status.

⁷ Respondents were allowed to report more than one type of work disruption; thus these categories are not mutually exclusive.

⁸ This portion of the analysis was not restricted to those people defined as participating in the labor force. The survey design permitted all respondents to answer the questions about child care-related work disruptions, regardless of their labor force participation.

FIGURE 4: Incidence of child care-related work disruptions



SOURCE: Minnesota Child Care Choices Wave 1 survey data

Is there an association between problems with child care and parents' employment outcomes?

Only 5% of respondents who experienced provider problems reported that one parent did not get a raise or promotion due to problems with their child care provider. Five percent of the sample reported that one parent either quit or was fired due to such problems. These categories were not mutually exclusive; however, only 1 family experienced both of these negative employment outcomes.

Implications and Next Steps

The findings in this Research Brief revealed important connections between problems with child care and work disruptions, and how supports from family and friends can buffer the impact of child care problems on parents' work. These findings have important policy implications, because child care-related work disruptions can interfere with families' abilities to achieve and maintain economic self-sufficiency.

Similar to the findings reported in the 2009 Statewide Household Child Care Survey, about one-third of parents in the Minnesota Child Care Choices Survey reported having child care problems that required them to seek alternative arrangements. In future waves of the survey it will be possible to see whether the same families continue to experience child care problems and work disruptions, or whether child care problems cause work disruptions among different subsets of the sample over time.

The presence of family and friends available to provide last-minute child care is a critical support for families. Program developers and policymakers should consider what supplemental arrangements can be made available for families that do not have access to a supportive network, and explore the extent to which parents would be willing to use these arrangements. For example, drop-in or temporary care arrangements might be a useful resource to prevent work disruptions, if families can trust and have access to them. Because more than half of the parents in the study work non-traditional hours, supplemental child care options would need to be flexible and offer hours convenient for parents.