

Nonstandard Work Schedules and Adolescents' Socio-Emotional Outcomes

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Recent studies examining an important dimension of maternal employment – mothers' work schedules – have found that mothers working nonstandard hours (e.g., evening, night, or rotating shifts) may have some adverse influences on their young children's cognitive and behavioral outcomes (e.g., Heymann, 2000). This fact, together with the findings from recent welfare studies that a) mothers who have left the welfare system are likely to find jobs that require irregular schedules (Loprest, 1999; Schumacher & Greenberg, 1999) and b) contemporary maternal employment may have some adverse effects on adolescent outcomes (Gennetian, et al., 2002) raises concerns about the extent to which different dimensions of maternal employment may affect children's outcomes, particularly for adolescents. Given that an increasing number of mothers are working and a nontrivial share of them are likely to work at jobs that require nonstandard hours that will have some impact on their children, a careful examination of the associations between maternal employment and children's outcomes at various ages is warranted. This understanding is important for creating an informed child and family policy that re-examines current welfare programs that require mothers to work without paying attention to which hours they are working and why this might matter.

Presently, however, there is very little theory or research available to help us understand whether or not maternal nonstandard work schedules are associated with child outcomes and whether any associations are a positive or negative, let alone whether these effects may vary among different sociodemographic contexts. This paper serves as the first comprehensive study to explore the association between maternal nonstandard work schedules and adolescents' socio-emotional outcomes at as late as age 13 or 14 years of age using a contemporary national data set – the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-Child Supplement (NLSY-CS). In addition, this paper examines the extent to which nonstandard work schedules that are associated with child development may differ in various family sociodemographic contexts. Particularly, borrowing from literature on maternal employment and child outcomes, and the work done by scholar Harriet B. Presser (2003), this paper examines whether or not maternal cognitive ability, family type, welfare status, family income, mother's working hours, job satisfaction, and mother's occupation may serve as the moderators in the links between maternal nonstandard work schedules and child socio-emotional outcomes.

The sample consists of all the children in the NLSY79-CS who could be followed longitudinally for a thirteen to fourteen year period with no missing data on any of the outcome variables - from birth to their assessment at the age of 13 or 14. Because of the way the NLSY79-CS is structured, the sample consists of approximately 1,000 children born between 1982 and 1989, who could be followed from birth to age 13 or 14 in 1996, 1998, 2000, or 2002. Of these, approximately 57% are non-Hispanic white, 28% are non-Hispanic African American, and 15% are Hispanic.

The NLSY79-CS is well suited for this analysis because, in addition to collecting detailed information on family demographic background, it also contains information on various dimensions of maternal work schedules (e.g., working at evenings, nights, or rotating shifts) at every assessment point along with a rich set of information on early child care and home

environment. In addition, several dimensions of adolescents' socio-emotional outcomes that are available in the NLSY79-CS and examined in this paper are: depression, substance use (e.g., smoking, using drugs, drinking alcohol), sexual behavior (i.e., ever had sexual intercourse and the age when first had sexual intercourse), and defiant behavior (e.g., lying to parents about something important, staying out later than parents said, damaging property on purpose, hurting someone bad enough to need a doctor, taking something without paying for it). These assessments were available for children aged 10 or older. In addition, to account for selection bias in estimating the effects of maternal employment, an extensive set of child, mother, and family characteristics are controlled for in the model: whether the child is male; whether the child has any older siblings; mother's cognitive capability (measured by Armed Force Qualification Test; AFQT); mother's age at birth; mother's education at birth; mother's marital status at birth; years living in a single-parent family; family income in the year before birth; and whether the family was ever in poverty up until the assessment point. In addition, in the separate models where the income effects were examined, the average family income-to-needs ratio (family income divided by the poverty threshold for its household size) for each assessment point was calculated. In the separate models where the effects of maternal work schedules were examined in the context of welfare, the yearly information on whether or not the family had ever received welfare in the past calendar year was used.

As a greater share of young children are raised in working families wherein parent(s) may often times juggle between different work schedules and family responsibilities, there is a void in our understanding about the developmental experiences of these young children in general, and the extent to which a variety of individual and external factors may affect their daily experiences in particular. The results from this study will fill gaps in knowledge about child development in the context of maternal work schedules, and the knowledge thus gained should prove useful in shaping policy responses.

References:

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