

## **A More Complex Image of the Relationship between Fathers' Time with Children and Maternal Employment**

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The rapid increase in maternal employment across the 20<sup>th</sup> century has led to sustained interest in understanding how families have adapted to this change in women's roles. Many people worried that increased maternal employment would be associated with reductions in maternal time with children and subsequently with reductions in child well-being. Yet research has consistently shown that mothers who are employed spend only slightly less time with their children than mothers who are not employed (Bianchi 2000; Sandberg and Hofferth 2005). Others have examined whether women's move into the labor market has been accompanied by a corresponding shift in the time that men contribute to the domestic sphere (Bianchi et al. 2000; Hook 2006). While married men have increased their time with children over the past 50 years (Bianchi 2000; Sayer, Bianchi and Robinson 2004), these increases are only very modestly associated with the employment status of their wives (Hynes under review; Nock and Kingston 1988). A large literature now focuses on theorizing and studying couples' division of household labor to understand why men do not appear to have changed their domestic work as much as women have changed their employment (Bianchi et al. 2000; Shelton and John 1996; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Studies about couples' time with children have typically compared the amount of time mothers spend with their children to the amount of time fathers spend with their children. Folbre et al. (2005) argue that there are considerable overlaps between measures of mothers' and fathers' time with children because these measures do not separate out mother-only time, father-only time, and joint parental time (in which both parents are with the child). When Craig (2006) uses this measurement strategy on time diary data from Australia, she finds that much of fathers' time with children is joint parental time, with fathers spending little time alone with their children. This paper builds on Craig's work by using U.S. data to examine mother-only, father-only, and joint parental time. We further extend this research by focusing on patterns of father-only and joint parental time with children in relation to maternal employment. We

conclude by discussing our findings in light of the literature on couples' division of household labor. Based on our findings we suggest several areas for further research on the barriers to more equally shared parenting among working couples.

### **Data and Measures**

Data for this study comes from the 1997 Child Development Supplement of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (CDS). We restrict the sample to children who lived with both biological parents at the 1997 interview, had time diary data from both a weekend and a weekday, and did not have missing information on their parents' work hours (N = 1,669). Following Hofferth (2003) we converted these two time diary days into weekly measures of time with children. For this abstract we restrict our results to children ages 0 – 5 but the full paper will include results for children ages 6 – 12 as well.

We have developed multiple measures of mothers' and fathers' time with children. First we create traditional measures indicating the time that mothers' and fathers' spend engaged with (or engaged with and available to) their children, independent of whether the other parent is present or not. We have also developed couple-level measures that account for joint parental time. For the abstract we show results for a measure of time "present" with the child; the full paper will include additional couple-level measures for comparison. For the time "present" measure, 'father only' time means the father is either engaged with the child or available to the child and the mother is neither engaged with nor available to the child. Thus the father is solely responsible for the child and the mother is not available. 'Mother only' time indicates that the mother is engaged with or available to the child and the father is neither engaged nor available to the child. Joint time means that both parents are either participating with or available to the child – this includes time when the father is engaged with the child and the mother is available but not engaged, or vice versa.

### **Preliminary Analysis, Next Steps, and Areas for Further Research**

Table 1 shows traditional measures of mothers' and fathers' time with children ages 0 – 5 by maternal employment. Mothers who work longer hours spend less time with their children than mothers who are not working. Fathers' time with children does not vary consistently with maternal employment.

Because of the lower time with children among working mothers, fathers' time with children as a proportion of mothers' time with children is strongly correlated with maternal work hours (Table 2).

Table 3 moves to measures that separate out mother-only, father-only, and joint parental time. Using the strict definition of father-only time described above, fathers spend very little time alone with their children; for most of the time they are with their children, mothers are either also engaged with the children or are available to the fathers and children if needed. More father-only time is observed among employed mothers than among not-employed, and the proportion of fathers who spend no father-only time with their children on the two time diary days is highly correlated with maternal work hours. The total time that children spend in parental care (mother-only + father-only + joint parental time) is considerably less than the sum of regular measures of mothers' and fathers' time with children because of the large amount of joint parental time.

Table 4 shows that fathers with employed wives are present for half or more (50% to 62%) of the time that their children are in parental care. However, they are sole care providers for only 10 – 19% of the time that their children are in parental care. How women and men perceive joint parental time may influence their perceptions of how much fathers contribute to care-giving.

By PAA we will have conducted multivariate regression models to examine whether the descriptive association between maternal employment and father-only time with children still holds after controlling for other factors associated with both maternal employment and fathers' time with children such as parents' education and gender role ideology, child age, number of children, and mothers' proportion of the family income.

**Areas for further research.** Joint parental time is a significant component of fathers' time with children. The results from this study indicate that further research on what mothers, fathers, and children are doing during this joint parental time and how mothers and fathers perceive this time may help us understand women's and men's different perceptions of fathers' contributions to child rearing.

Table 1. Traditional Measures of Mothers' and Fathers' Hours per Week with Children Ages 0 – 5 by Maternal Work Hours

Mother's Work Hours	Mother's Time Engaged with Child	Father's Time Engaged with Child	Mother's Time Engaged with or Available to Child	Father's Time Engaged with or Available to Child
0	37.2	17.0	65.5	30.3
1 - 14	31.8	20.0	59.3	33.0
15 - 29	33.3	19.4	55.2	34.8
30 - 44	30.5	18.0	47.4	30.6
45+	26.4	19.8	43.9	32.8

Table 2. Proportion of Fathers Spending As Much or More Time with Children Ages 0 - 5 than their Wives, by Maternal Employment

Mother's Work Hours	Proportion of Fathers Spending As Much or More Time than their Wives with Children Ages 0 – 5	
	Engaged with Child	Engaged with or Available to Child
0	0.12	0.07
1 - 14	0.16	0.06
15 - 29	0.23	0.15
30 - 44	0.23	0.18
45+	0.29	0.33

Table 3. Father Only, Mother Only, and Joint Parental Time with Children Ages 0 - 5

Maternal Work Hours	Father Only	Joint Time (Father & Mother)	Mother Only	Child's Weekly Time in Parental Care	Prop. of Fathers with No Father Only Time
Present with Child (hours per week)					
0	3.6	26.7	38.9	69.2	0.50
1 – 14	6.0	26.9	32.4	65.3	0.31
15 – 29	8.0	26.8	28.4	63.2	0.22
30 – 44	6.9	23.7	23.7	54.3	0.36
45+	10.1	22.7	21.2	54.0	0.19

Table 4. Different Measures of How Much Time Fathers Spend with their Children Relative to Mothers

Maternal Work Hours	Proportion of Child's Time in Parental Care that is Father-Only + Joint	Proportion of Child's Time in Parental Care that is Father Only
Time Present with Child		
0	0.44	0.05
1 – 14	0.50	0.10
15 – 29	0.55	0.13
30 – 44	0.58	0.12
45+	0.62	0.19

Source: 1997 Child Development Supplement

Notes: All analyses are weighted and are restricted to children living with both parents.

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