

The Effect of Parents' Joint Work Schedules on Infants' Behavior Over the First Two Years of Life: Evidence from the ECLSB

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Presented at the 2007 NICHD-NCES ECLS-B
First Release Conference, May 8-10, 2007

Background

- Increasing prevalence of dual earner families, even in child's first year
- Increasing prevalence of nonstandard work schedules ("24/7 economy")
 - Little to no overlap in parents' work schedules
- Nonstandard work hours usually not for family/non-work reasons

Research question

- How do nonstandard work hours—as well as little or no overlap in partners' schedules—affect children's behavioral development?
 - Mediating factors
 - Parental depression
 - Relationship quality
 - Quality of parent-child interactions
 - Special look at fathers

Existing research

- Parents' joint work schedules affect children's outcomes in some studies
 - Cognitive, behavioral, emotional outcomes
- Mediating factors play major role

Existing research

- Strazdins et al (2006)
 - Sample: Canadian children ages 2-11
 - Outcome: More social and emotional problems
 - Partly mediated by mothers' mental health and parent-child relationship

Existing research

- Joshi and Bogen (2007)
 - Sample: Working low-income families, kids aged 2-4
 - Outcome: More negative behaviors, fewer positive behaviors
 - Partly mediated by mothers' parenting stress

Existing research

□ Han (2005)

- Sample: 10 sites across U.S.
- Outcome: Reduced cognitive outcomes, including language
- Partially mediated by type of care used, possible effect of fathers/father care

Our research

- What is the effect of one or both parents working shifts at nine months on behavioral development at 24 months?
- Sample of dual-earner households (no single parents); N = 1,700

Our research

- Dependent variable
 - Infant/Toddler Symptoms Checklist (ITSC)
 - Average of seven items on:
 - fussiness or irritability
 - progression from whimpering to crying
 - being unable to wait without crying
 - being easily distractible
 - needing help to fall asleep
 - tuning out from activity
 - not easily shifting focus
 - Reported by respondent parent
 - Never=0; Used to=1; Sometimes=2; Most times=3

Our research

- Parents' joint work schedules
 - Day shift
 - Evening shift
 - Night shift
 - Irregular shift
 - Detailed typology (see below)

Our research

- Key mediating factors
 - Parental relationship
 - Mother's reports of argument frequency
 - Mothers
 - Depression
 - Happiness in relationship
 - Physical health
 - Mother-child interaction
 - Reading books, telling stories, errands, singing
 - Speaking spontaneously, responding verbally, providing toys, slapping or spanking, caressing/hugging/kissing, keeping the child in view, whether the play environment appeared safe

Our research

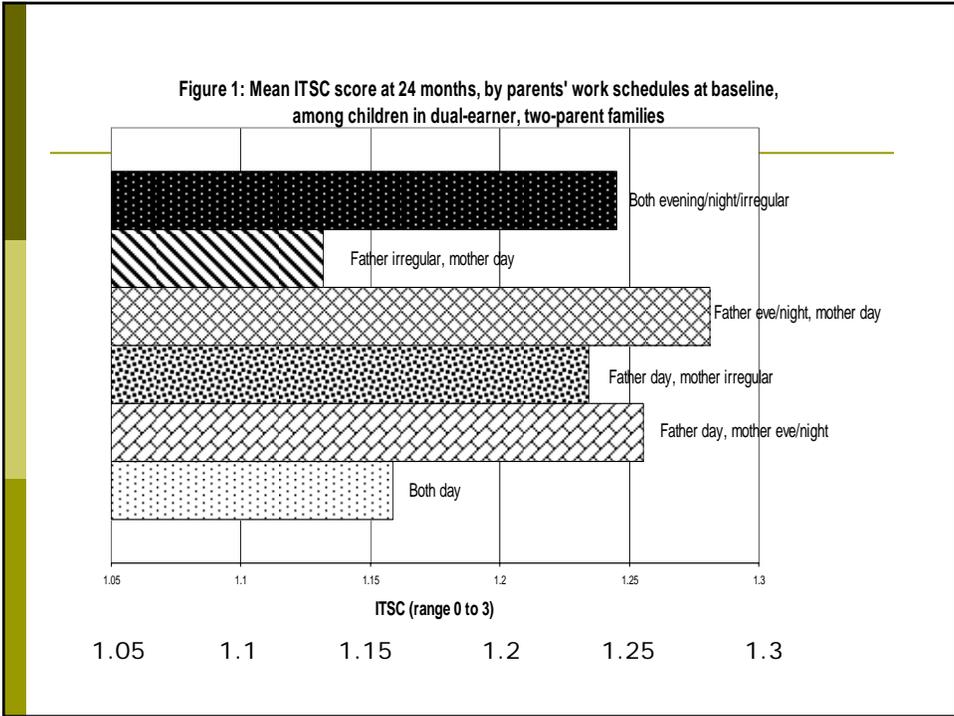
□ Key mediating factors (cont.)

- Fathers
 - Self-assessed parenting competence
 - Frequency watched infants
 - Depression
 - Happiness in relationship
- Sharing meals
 - Breakfast
 - Dinner

Our research

□ Controls

- Parents' job characteristics
 - More than one job, PT, health care, child care
- Parents' sociodemographic characteristics
 - Race, age, marital status, childhood family structure, nativity, SES
- Number of siblings
- Infant's characteristics
 - Gender, birthweight, premature, type of child care



Model I: Bivariate regression (plus selection term)

Model II: Background characteristics

Model III: Key mediators

	I	II	III
F day - M eve/nite	.217	.203	.193
F day - M irreg	.143	.133	.139
F eve/nite - M day	.202	.205	.158
F irreg - M day	n.s.	n.s.	-.119
One irreg, one e/n/i	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Adjusted R ²	.024	.069	.122

Other results

- Regulatory problems increased by:
 - infrequent involvement of fathers in care (once/twice per month v. daily care) (.144)
 - father's depression (.009)
 - mother's depression (.008)
 - more frequent arguments between parents (.153)
 - poor maternal health (.194 for excellent v. fair/poor)

Other results

- Regulatory problems decreased by:
 - More frequent mother-child interactions (-.085)
 - Higher quality mother-child interactions (-.049)

Other results

- Group with more regulatory problems on left
 - Black parents > white parents (.139)
 - Younger mothers > older mothers (-.006)
 - Married parents > cohabiting parents (-.084)
 - Lowest SES group > highest SES group (.100)
 - Boys > girls (.092)
 - Center-based care > no non-parental care (.112)
 - Zero/fewer siblings > more siblings (-.036)

Contributions

- New outcome (ITSC), using national sample and detailed shift categories for *both* parents
- Fathers matter
- Direct effect of nonstandard hours more pronounced

Implications for policy/practice

- Address mediating factors
- Pay attention to joint shifts
- Processes within joint-shift couples
- Even small changes in work schedules might make a difference
- Policy opportunities: Welfare to work, other employment programs

Expansions/refinements/weaknesses

- Underwhelming effect sizes?
- Use of self-reports on ITSC?
 - Other measures of behavior?
- Other child outcomes
- Formal accounting of T2 work schedules
- Use more father behaviors and attitudes
- Look at shift work in single-parent families
- By race-ethnicity and nativity