



Child care and working parents

Fundamental facts from the Minnesota child care survey

Working parents have to contend not only with their children's illnesses, but also with their providers' availability.

Nearly one in four (23%) families lose work time because of a problem with their child care arrangement.

- No particular type of child care arrangement is more likely than others to conflict with work.
- 32% of parents using child care centers and child care homes (licensed and unlicensed) lose work time due to scheduled or unscheduled closings.
- 35% of those using informal arrangements lose work time due to illness of the caregiver or the caregiver's family.

Working parents patch together more child care arrangements for their children.

- Children of working parents average 2.6 arrangements in a week, while those who have at least one stay-at-home parent average 1.7 arrangements per week.
- 23% of working parents have work schedules that vary from week to week.

Parents with irregular work schedules have more child care problems.

Compared to parents with regular work schedules, parents with schedules that vary from week to week are more likely to:

- Take whatever arrangement they can get (27% vs. 21%).
- Be less satisfied with their current primary arrangement.
- Find it "always" or "usually" difficult to deal with child care problems at work (18% vs. 10%).

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For 1 in 10 parents, child care problems prevent taking or keeping a job.

Parents who report such problems are more likely than other parents to:

- Have at least one child age 5 or younger (12% vs. 6%).
- Have two or more children (12% vs. 7%).
- Be from a racial or ethnic group other than white (25% vs. 8%).
- Have less than a college education (12% vs. 6%).
- Have an income at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (16% vs. 7%).
- Work a schedule that varies from week to week (14% vs. 7%).

A child's illness usually leads to lost work time.

- 75% of parents report that their usual back-up plan is for a parent to stay home or go home from work.
- Parents in Greater Minnesota have greater concerns about finding a child care provider willing to care for a sick child (65% vs. 56% in the Twin Cities area).

- Missing work time for a sick child is most common among parents of young teenagers (31%) but still significant among parents with an infant under age 1 (12%).

- 22% of working parents do not have a spouse, partner, or someone else who regularly shares parenting responsibilities.

After-school care is used more by employed parents.

- 19% of children of working parents are regularly in some kind of care arrangement after school, compared to just 1% of children who have at least one stay-at-home parent.

Children of working parents are more likely to regularly spend at least part of their time after school:

- In the care of relatives (15% vs. 3% of children who have a parent not working).
- In the care of friends or neighbors (5% vs. 1%).
- In family child care homes (3% vs. 0%) and in center-based care (10% vs. 0%).

However, children of working parents are also more likely to take care of themselves after school (11% vs. 5%).

These results come from a survey of 2,450 parents throughout Minnesota, sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning and conducted by Wilder Research Center. "Child care" in this survey includes anything other than the direct care of a parent or the regular K-12 school day. The survey covers the arrangements for the youngest child in each family (infants through age 14). The survey was conducted from June 1999 through March 2000, so it includes both summer and school-year patterns of care. Any difference between groups that is mentioned here has been tested and found to be statistically significant, unless specifically noted otherwise. The overall margin of error is about plus or minus 2 percentage points.

Other fact sheets in this series, as well as the full research report *Child care use in Minnesota*, are available for free download at www.wilder.org/research. Printed copies of the research report can be purchased from Minnesota's Bookstore, 800-657-3757, www.commedia.state.mn.us/bookstore.

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