

How Many Hours Do Young Children Spend in Nontraditional-Hour Child Care, and How Does It Vary by Type of Care?

Findings from An Analysis of the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education

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KEY FINDINGS

Children who spent any time in NTH care spent substantially more time in child care than those in traditional-hour care only—47 hours compared with 31 hours a week.

Young children in NTH care average 8.5 hours a week in weekend care compared with an average of 5.5 hours of care in the evening and 1.7 hours overnight.

Children in NTH care spend more time in FFN care than in any other type of child care.

Black children spend an average of 19 hours a week in NTH care, compared with 16 hours for white children and 13 hours for Asian children.

Understanding the child care needs of parents who work nontraditional-hour (NTH) schedules is a growing concern for policymakers seeking to support families, boost the economy, and address issues of racial equity. Recent reports have examined the potential demand for NTH care (before 7:00 a.m. or after 6:00 p.m. on weekdays or anytime on weekends).

Research suggests sizeable shares of children younger than age 6 live in families with working parents who have NTH schedules. Such arrangements are more common among families of color: approximately 40 to 50 percent of Black and Latino/a children, whose families have historically faced structural barriers to good jobs and education, have parents working during NTH.

Recent research reveals that many parents who work NTH prefer care offered by friends or relatives during those hours. However, more analysis is needed to help policymakers decide how to best support these families.

This snapshot fills that gap by analyzing 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) data to explore the time in NTH care for children younger than age 6 in nonparental care but not yet in kindergarten. We use the term “young children” to refer to this group.

HOW MANY HOURS DO CHILDREN SPEND IN NTH CARE?

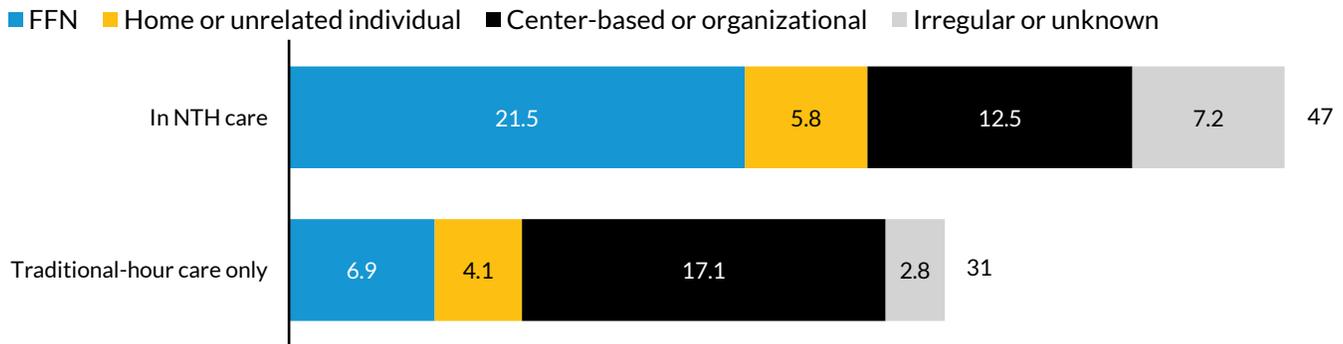
Young children in any NTH care spend substantially more time in child care overall compared with children in traditional-hour care only (47 hours and 31 hours a week, respectively; figure 1).

- Children in NTH care spent more than double the number of hours in family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care overall and a higher share of care hours in FFN than children in traditional-hour care only.
- Children in traditional-hour care only spent more time in center or organizational care than those in NTH care.

FIGURE 1

Children in Any NTH Care Spend More Time in Care Overall Than Other Children in Care

Average hours per week in care overall by type of care for children in NTH versus traditional-hour care only



Source: Urban Institute analysis of National Survey of Early Care and Education 2019 household survey data.

Notes: Figures are estimates, frequencies are rounded to the nearest 10, and percentages are rounded to the closest 1 percent. Children in each group were also reported as being unsupervised for an average of less than 0.1 hours per week (not shown). Irregular care is defined by the NSECE as a care arrangement in which a child spends fewer than 5 hours a week.

HOW MUCH TIME ARE CHILDREN IN CARE DURING DIFFERENT PERIODS?

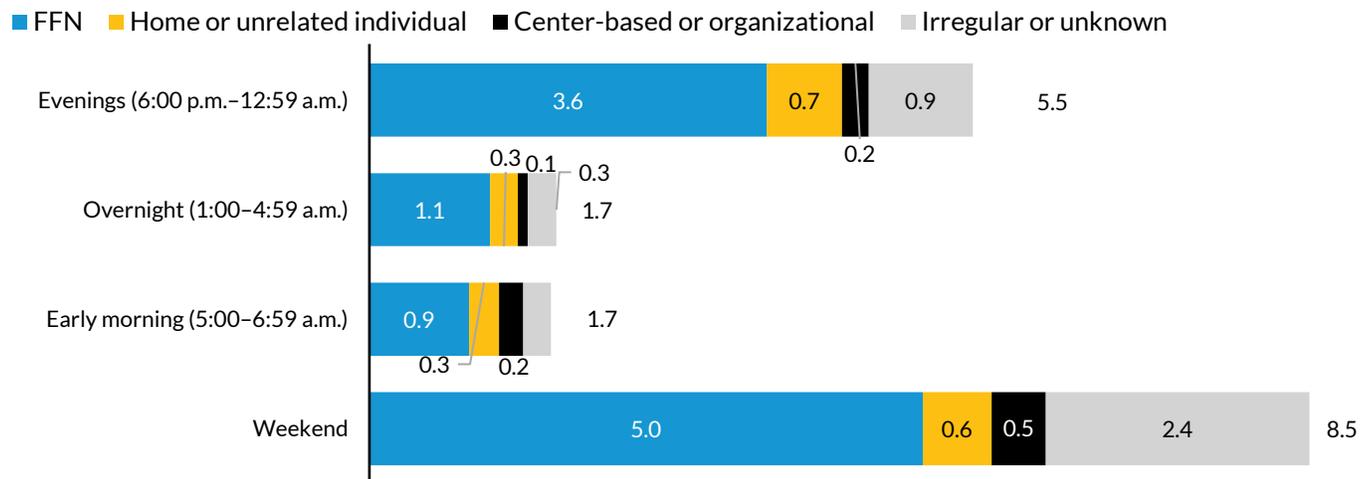
Young children in NTH care spend more time in care during the weekend, followed by evenings and other NTH periods (figure 2).

- Children in NTH care spend an average of 8.5 hours in care during the weekend, 5.5 hours in care during weekday evenings, and 1.7 hours in overnight and early morning care on weekdays.
- Children in NTH care spend the majority of time in FFN care and the least time in center-based or organizational care.

FIGURE 2

Children in NTH Care Spend More Time in Care during Weekends Than Other NTH Periods

Average hours per week in care during period by type of care for children in any NTH care



Source: Urban Institute analysis of National Survey of Early Care and Education 2019 household survey data.

Notes: Figures are estimates, frequencies are rounded to the nearest 10, and percentages are rounded to the closest 1 percent. Children were also reported as being unsupervised for an average of less than 0.1 hours per week in each NTH period (not shown). Irregular care is defined by the NSECE as a care arrangement in which a child spends fewer than 5 hours a week.

HOW DOES THE AMOUNT OF TIME IN NTH CARE VARY FOR CHILDREN WHOSE FAMILIES ARE AFFECTED BY STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITIES?

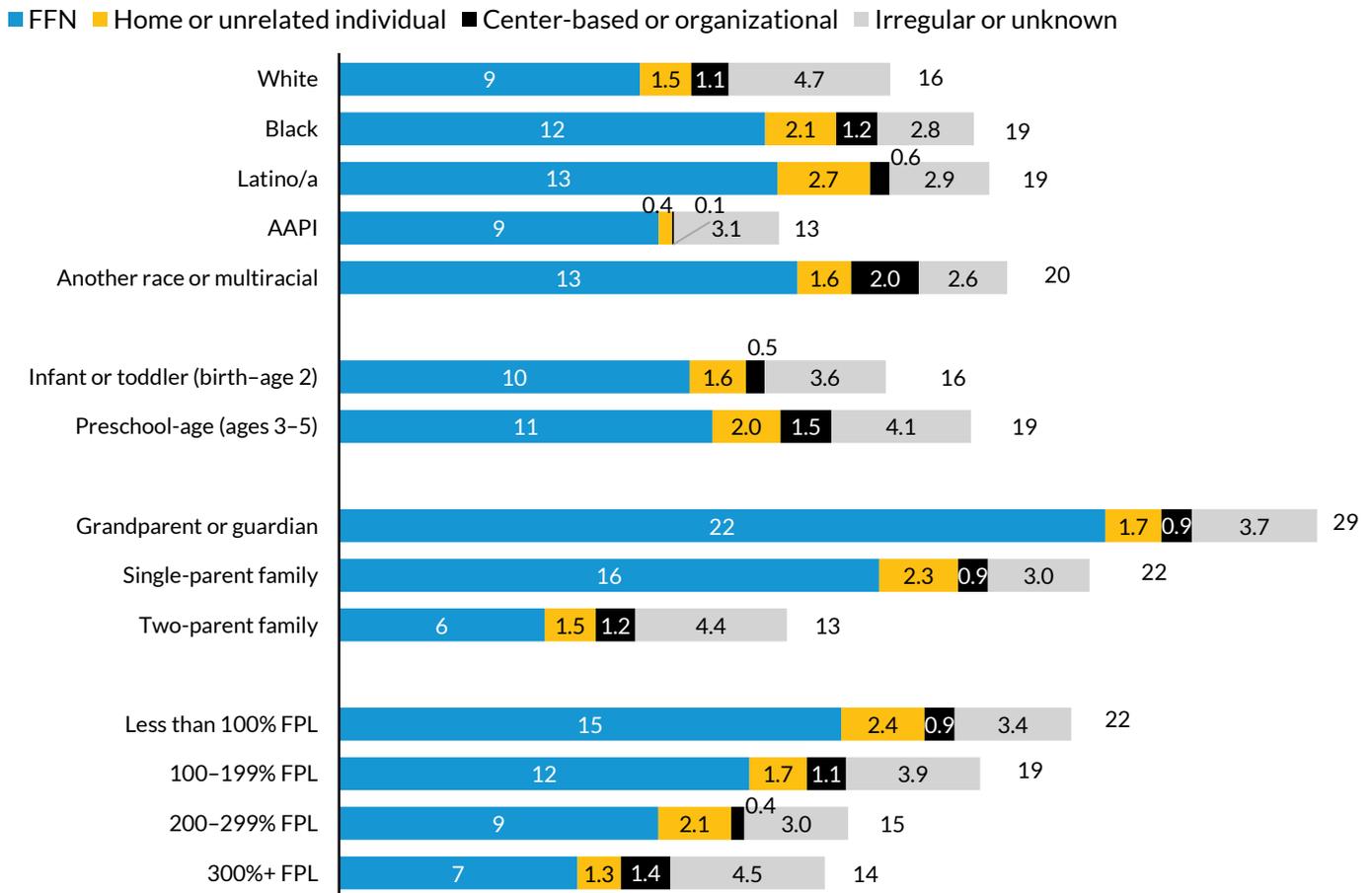
Among young children in any NTH care, those in families facing structural barriers to employment and education opportunities spend more time in NTH care overall (figure 4).

- Among young children in any NTH care, Black and Latino/a children average 19 hours each week in NTH care compared with 16 hours and 13 hours, respectively, for white and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) children. Children who live with their grandparents, a guardian, or another caretaker rather than parents and those with a single parent spend more time in NTH care than those in two-parent families.
- Children in families with incomes below the federal poverty level (FPL) average 22 hours in NTH care. Those in families with low incomes but who are not poor (100 to 199 percent of FPL) average 19 hours in NTH care. Those with higher incomes average around 14 to 15 hours in child care each week.
- All children in NTH care spend more time in FFN care during NTH than in other types of care. Further, children in groups more likely to face structural barriers tend to spend more time in FFN care during NTH than children in other groups, which may partially account for the difference in their time in NTH care.

FIGURE 4

Children in Groups More Likely to Face Structural Challenges Spend More Time in NTH Care

Average hours per week in NTH care by type of care and subgroup for children in any NTH care



Source: Urban Institute analysis of National Survey of Early Care and Education 2019 household survey data.

Notes: Figures are estimates, frequencies are rounded to the nearest 10, and percentages are rounded to the closest 1 percent. Children in each group were also reported as being unsupervised for an average of less than 0.2 hours per week (not shown). Irregular care is defined by the NSECE as a care arrangement in which a child spends fewer than 5 hours a week.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESEARCH

Children younger than age 6 who spend any time in NTH care spend more time in child care than those who are in traditional-hour care only. Most of the time they spend in care during NTH is in FFN care. Children in families more likely to face structural barriers to opportunity spend more time in NTH care, with much of this additional time in FFN care. If federal and state policymakers want to support child care for all families equitably, it is important to account for the amount of time children spend in NTH care and their perspectives on and use of FFN care.

More research is needed to better understand

- the types of child care parents believe are best for their young children during NTH periods;
- parents' motivations for using different types of care;
- how parents view their children's needs when receiving FFN care and NTH care more generally;
- how policymakers, lead agencies, and technical assistance providers can help support FFN care providers and other types of programs in making safe, high-quality care available during NTH; and
- whether NTH working parents with young children access child care subsidies during NTH periods.

ADDITIONAL READING

Informing Policy Decisions about Nontraditional-Hour Child Care <https://urban.is/3zVU04a>