

What Types of Child Care Do Families Use during Nontraditional Hours?

Findings from an Analysis of the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)

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KEY FINDINGS

Children in any nontraditional-hour (NTH) care were **more likely** than other children in care to be in **family, friend, or neighbor (FFN) care** or **irregular care**.

Children in any NTH care were **less likely** than other children in care to be in **center-based care**.

Children in any NTH care were **more likely** to be in **center-based care** during traditional hours than during NTH.

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

Previous studies using the American Community Survey (ACS) suggest a **large share of children** younger than age 6 live in families with working parents who work some NTH, and Black and Latino/a families account for a **higher share** of such families.

This research has also shown that families working NTH schedules are more likely to be affected by structural barriers to educational and employment opportunities that disproportionately affect families of color.

However, limited recent information is available on types of child care during NTH. This snapshot fills that gap. We analyzed 2019 NSECE household survey data to explore the share of families with children younger than age 6 in nonparental care but not yet in kindergarten. This analysis answers questions about the types of care young children are in during nontraditional hours.

HOW DO THE CARE ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN NTH CARE DIFFER FROM THOSE IN TRADITIONAL-HOUR CARE ONLY?

- Fifty-seven percent of children in care during any NTH period were in family, friend, or neighbor (FFN) care, compared with 27 percent in traditional-hour care only.
- Thirty-seven percent of children in care during any NTH period were in child care centers or organized care during any period, compared with 56 percent of children in traditional-hour care only.
- Thirty-four percent of children in care during any NTH period were in irregular or unknown care,¹ compared with 17 percent in traditional-hour care only (see figure 1 below.)

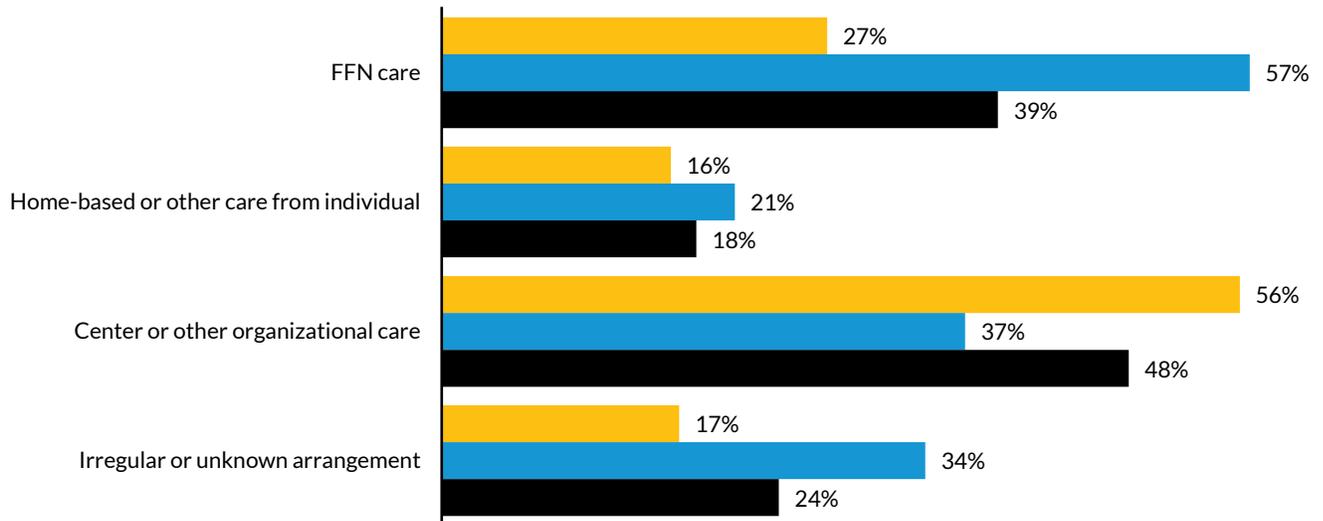
¹ Irregular care is defined by the NSECE as a care arrangement in which a child spends fewer than 5 hours a week.

FIGURE 1

Children in NTH Care Were More Likely than Those in Only Traditional-Hour Care to Receive FFN Care and Less Likely to Be in Center Care

Share of children younger than age 6 in nonparental care but not yet in kindergarten, by care arrangement for those in care during any NTH period versus traditional-hour care only

■ Traditional-hour care only ■ In NTH care ■ Total



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

Notes: Less than 1 percent of children in each group were also reported as unsupervised during the 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.

WHAT TYPES OF CARE DO FAMILIES USE DURING TRADITIONAL HOURS AND NTH FOR CHILDREN IN ANY NTH CARE?

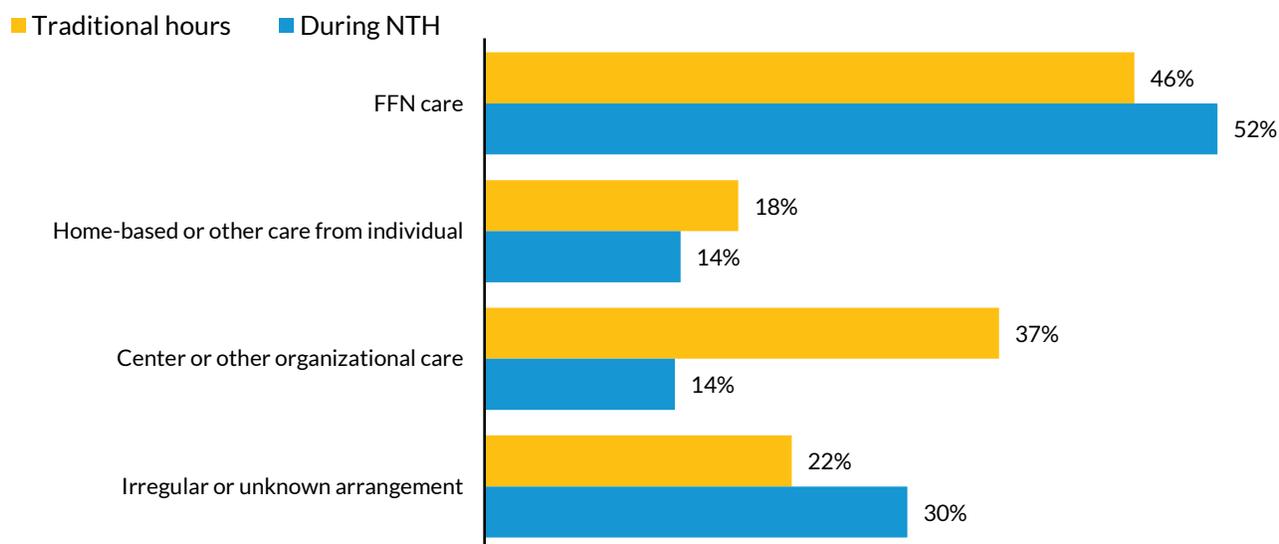
Recent research based on interviews with a racially and ethnically diverse sample of 41 parents suggests that parents with NTH child care needs want and use FFN care during NTH periods and prefer center-based care during the day. To address questions about the generalizability of this finding, we analyzed the type of care children in any NTH care received during traditional hours versus NTH (figure 2). We found the following:

- For children in any NTH care, only 14 percent are in center-based care during NTH, compared with 37 percent in center-based care during traditional hours.
- Fifty-two percent of children in any NTH care are in FFN care during traditional hours, compared with 46 percent who are in FFN care during NTH. This was the most common care type reported for this group in both periods.

FIGURE 2

Children in NTH Care Are More Likely to Be in Center Care during Traditional Hours Than during NTH, but FFN Is the Most Common Care in Both Periods

Share of children in NTH care but not yet in kindergarten, by period



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

Notes: Less than 1 percent of children in each group were also reported as unsupervised during the 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

Many children younger than age 6 live in families with parents who work NTH. More than half of these children are in FFN care overall, although the types of care they receive vary based on the specific period.

- More research is needed to understand the differences in the needs of children in NTH care and supports offered to their families. For example, we require more information about how NTH child care use relates to child care subsidy access, the types of care families have access to, historical barriers to opportunity, and parental preferences.
- Federal and state policymakers could craft policies to support the types of care that parents who work NTH prefer and use. For example, they can explore ways to support and ensure FFN care is safe and encourages child well-being and development, if parents prefer these arrangements. Addressing this issue is important to ensure the distribution of and access to public dollars is equitable and meets the needs of families eligible for child care subsidies, particularly given that a greater share of such families are [Black or Latino/a](#).

ADDITIONAL READING

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