

When Are Children in Nontraditional-Hour Child Care?

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

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KEY FINDINGS

Children were most commonly in nontraditional-hour (NTH) care on weekends and weekday evenings.

During weekdays, children were most likely to be in NTH care in the hours right before and after traditional hours.

Children were least likely to be in NTH care overnight.

IMPLICATIONS

To equitably meet the child care needs of children in NTH care, policies should account for when children are in care.

Understanding the child care needs of parents who work nontraditional-hour (NTH) schedules has become a growing concern for policymakers. 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 **sizable shares** of children younger than age 6 live with parents who work some NTH. This previously published research has also shown families working NTH schedules are **more likely to be affected** by structural barriers to educational and employment opportunities. However, limited information for recent years exists on when families use NTH child care.

This snapshot fills that gap. We analyzed 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) household survey data to explore the share of families with children younger than age 6 in nonparental care but not yet in kindergarten.

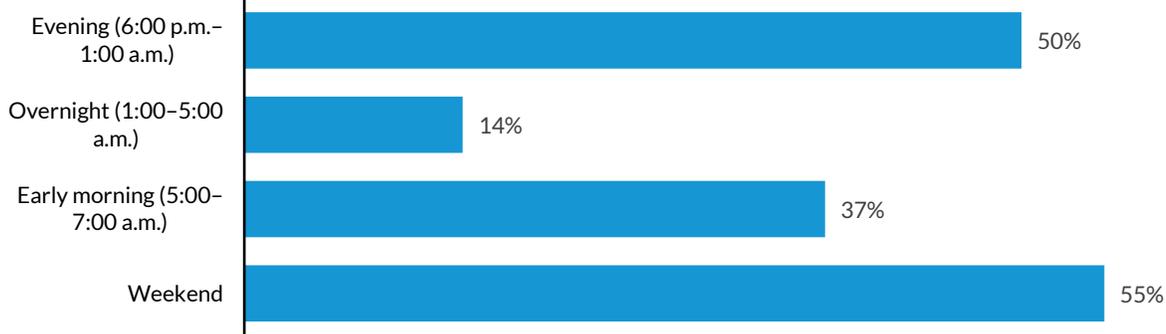
WHEN WERE CHILDREN IN NTH CHILD CARE?

- Children were most commonly in NTH care during the weekend and weekday evenings (6:00 p.m.–1:00 a.m.).
 - » Among children younger than age 6, half or more children in NTH care but not yet in kindergarten were in care during the weekend (55 percent, or 2.7 million children) or weekday evenings (50 percent or 2.0 million). Nearly two-fifths (38 percent, or 1.8 million) of children in NTH care were in care on weekdays in the early morning (5:00–7:00 a.m.).
- Children were less often in NTH care overnight from 1:00 to 5:00 a.m. on weekdays.
 - » Fewer children in NTH care (14 percent, or around 700,000 children) were in care overnight on weekdays.

FIGURE 1

Children in NTH Care Were Most Often in Care during the Weekend and on Weekday Evenings

Share of children younger than age 6 in NTH care but not yet in kindergarten that were in care during each NTH period



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

Notes: Figures are estimates and percentages are rounded to the closest 1 percent. Children could be in NTH care during multiple periods, so the categories sum up to more than 100 percent.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON HOURS CHILDREN ARE IN NTH CHILD CARE?

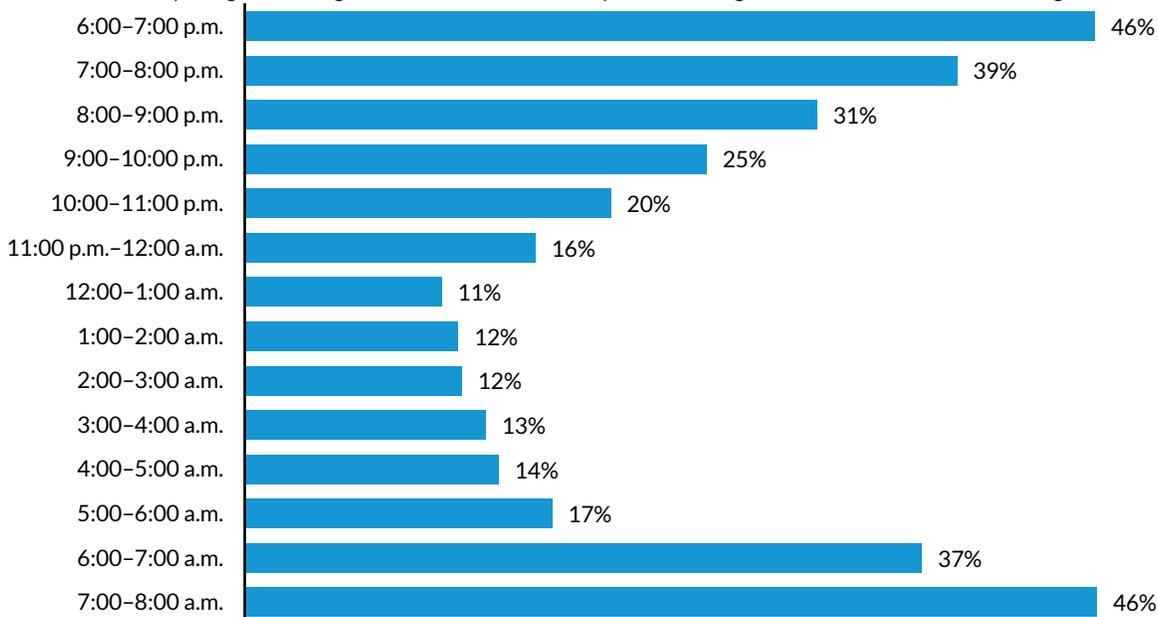
On weekdays, children in NTH care were most commonly in care in the first two NTH hours of the evening (6:00–7:00 p.m. and 7:00–8:00 p.m.) or the last hour of NTH in the early morning (6:00–7:00 a.m.; figure 2).

- Forty-six percent of children in NTH care were in care from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. and 39 percent from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.
- Thirty-seven percent of children were in NTH care from 6:00 to 7:00 a.m.
- Only 11 percent of children in NTH care were in care from 12:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m.

FIGURE 2

Children in NTH Care Were Most Often in Care at the Beginning and End of NTH

Share of children younger than age 6 in NTH care but not yet in kindergarten that were in care during each NTH weekday hour



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

Notes: Figures are estimates and percentages are rounded to the closest 1 percent. Children could be in NTH care during multiple periods, so the categories sum up to more than 100 percent.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESEARCH

Many children younger than age 6 live in families with parents who work NTH. The share is especially high in the hours immediately before and after the traditional workday. Policymakers need to account for families' preferences if they aim to ensure policies support equitable access to the types of child care families want and need. To support equitable child care for all families, state and federal policymakers could consider the following:

- the types of child care families want and use during NTH periods
- the prevalence of different types of NTH care during different periods
- the high share of young children in care in the hours immediately before and after the traditional workday

Recent qualitative research suggests that most parents want and use friend and relative child care during most NTH periods. That study found that many parents of children who attended formal child care during the traditional workday said they wanted child care providers to open an hour earlier and stay open an hour later.

Our analysis of 2019 NSECE data on the **types of care families with NTH schedules** use begins to address this question. Policymakers and other actors need more research on how NTH care use varies by demographic and geographic characteristics to develop policies, programs, and supports that meet families' and providers' needs.

ADDITIONAL READING

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