

Who Uses Nontraditional-Hour Child Care?

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

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KEY FINDINGS

40 percent of children younger than age 6 in nonparental care but not yet in kindergarten **were in some care during nontraditional hours (NTH).**

Nearly half of young Black children in nonparental care but not kindergarten spent **some time in NTH care.** This rate is higher than those for white, Latino/a, and AAPI children and may be related to structural inequities in educational and work opportunities.

About a third of children in families with higher incomes were in NTH child care, compared with **nearly half** of children in families with incomes **below the federal poverty level.**

Children in rural communities were **more likely to be in NTH care** compared with children in urban areas.

Children who lived in communities with less poverty were less likely to be in NTH care compared with those living in communities with either medium- or high-density poverty.

Understanding the child care needs of parents who work nontraditional-hour (NTH) schedules has become a growing concern for policymakers. Previous research based on an analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) data suggests **sizable shares** of children younger than age 6 live in families with working parents who work some NTH. Research has shown families working NTH schedules are in groups **more likely to be affected** by structural barriers to educational and employment opportunities.

These families may need 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. Limited information is available on how many families have used NTH child care in recent years, and more research is needed on the characteristics of families using NTH child care. 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 snapshot examines how common it is for families with young children to have parents working NTH schedules and the characteristics of these families and children. We refer to the sample of children younger than age 6 as “young children” for readability.

HOW COMMON IS IT FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN TO HAVE PARENTS WORKING NTH SCHEDULES?

About 40 percent of children younger than age 6 spent time in NTH care at least once a week. This amounts to approximately 5 million children out of the 12.3 million in any nonparental care.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN IN NONPARENTAL CARE DURING NTH?

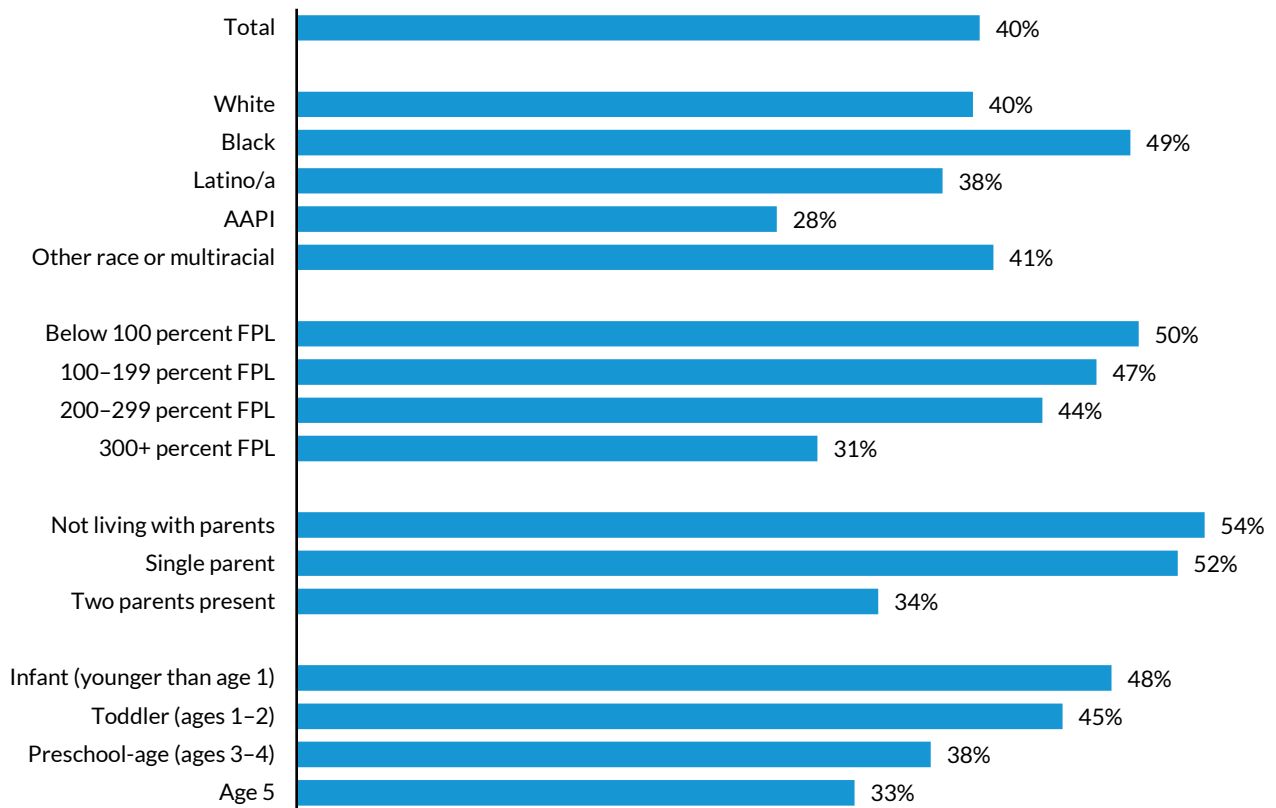
- Children from groups that have **faced greater structural barriers** to employment, education, and other opportunities are disproportionately likely to be in nonparental care during NTH (figure 1).

- Among children younger than age 6, **48 percent of Black children** were in NTH care. This rate is higher than those of white and Latino/a children (**39 percent** and **37 percent**, respectively), while Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) children were slightly less likely to be in NTH care (**31 percent**).
 - Nonetheless, white children still accounted for the largest number of these children in NTH care (2.6 million), followed by Latino/a children (1.0 million), and Black children (820,000). Smaller numbers of AAPI children (160,000) and children who reported being another race or multiracial (360,000, or 41 percent) were in NTH care.
- Among children younger than age 6, children in families with incomes below the poverty level were more likely (50 percent) to be in NTH care than families with incomes at 300 percent of the federal poverty level or above it (31 percent).
- Children in nonparental care but not yet in kindergarten who lived with a **single parent** or **no parents** (i.e., living with a grandparent or other guardian) were more likely to be in NTH care (52 percent and 54 percent, respectively) than those living with two parents (34 percent). The latter rate may reflect multiple parental caregivers' availability and their ability to coordinate schedules.

Among children younger than age 6, infants and toddlers were more likely to be in NTH care (48 percent and 45 percent, respectively) than preschool-age and 5-year-old children (38 and 33 percent, respectively) (figure 1).

FIGURE 1
Percentages of Children in Nonparental Care Who Were in NTH Care, by Child and Family Characteristics

Share of children younger than age 6 in nonparental care but not yet in Kindergarten who were in 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. FPL = federal poverty level, AAPI = Asian American and Pacific Islander.

WHAT VARIATION EXISTS IN THE SHARES OF CHILDREN IN NTH CARE BY COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS?

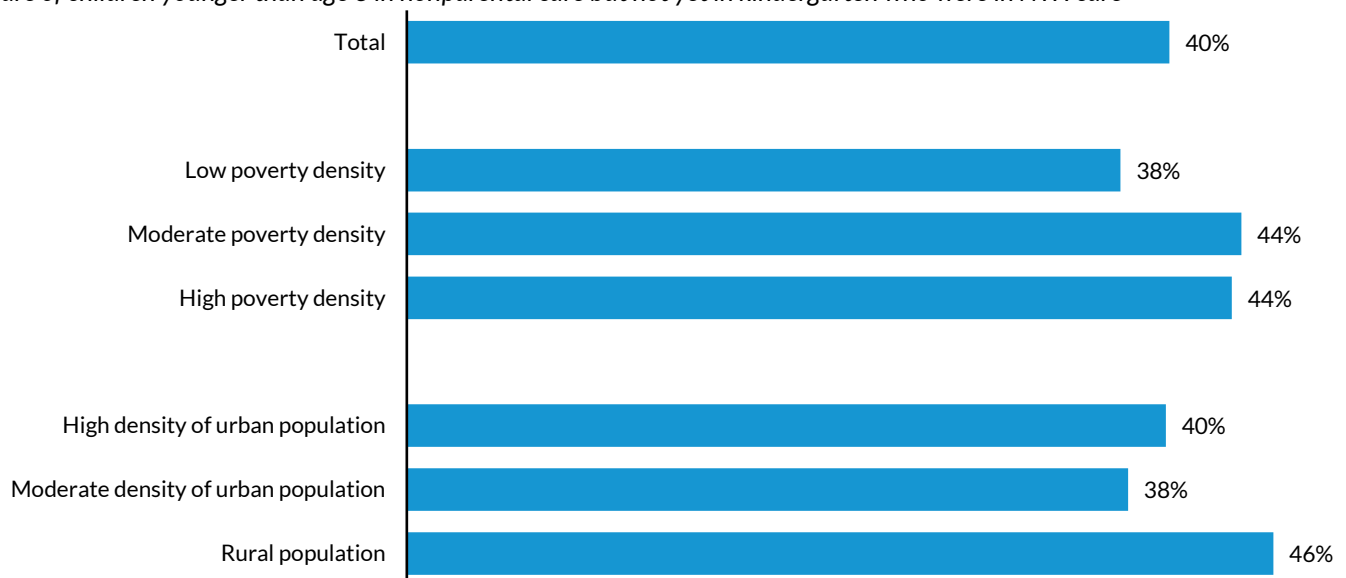
Analyses of 2019 NSECE data showed some variation by community characteristics, but high shares of children younger than age 6 are in NTH care across communities (figure 2).

- Among children younger than 6, a higher share of those in rural communities were in NTH care than those in urban communities. In 2019, 46 percent of young children in nonparental care in rural areas were in care during NTH compared with 40 percent in high-density urban communities and 38 percent of children in moderate-density urban communities.
- Young children in communities with low poverty density were less likely to be in NTH care (38 percent of those in nonparental care but not yet in kindergarten) compared with children in communities with high or moderate poverty density (both 44 percent).

FIGURE 2

Percentages of Children in Nonparental Care Who Were in NTH Care, by Community Characteristics

Share of children younger than age 6 in nonparental care but not yet in kindergarten who were in NTH care



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

Note: Figures are estimates, frequencies are rounded to the nearest 10, and percentages are rounded to the closest 1 percent.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESEARCH

Many children younger than age 6 live in families with parents working NTH. The share is higher for groups who are more likely to face barriers to opportunities, families with infants and toddlers, and families in rural areas.

- More research is needed to understand how child care policies can meet the needs of families working NTH, especially those who have historically faced barriers to opportunities.
- Research is also needed on the higher share of young children in NTH care who live in rural communities. Research on [child care deserts](#) suggests that rural areas have an inadequate supply of licensed care.

Nevertheless, questions remain about whether this is a reason parents are working NTH schedules or if there are other factors—for example, questions remain around whether this results from rural labor markets.

- Given the high share of children younger than age 6 who live in families with parents working NTH schedules who have low incomes, it is important for federal and state policymakers to focus on subsidy policies. Addressing these policies is essential to ensure equitable distribution of public dollars to meet the needs and preferences of families eligible for child care subsidies.

ADDITIONAL READING

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