Father Involvement among Men in Couples with Non-Overlapping Employment Hours

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Research question

• What is the impact of nonstandard employment schedules (shift work) on the parental behavior of fathers in dual-earner couples with young children?

• Measures of fathering
  – Care giving
  – The elements of father involvement proposed by Pleck: positive engagement, warmth and responsiveness, and control.
Methods

• Structural equation modelling with latent variables is used to fit models to three waves of nationally-representative data from the Early Child Longitudinal Survey – Birth Cohort (ECLS-B).

• The sample is restricted to couples who remain together from the target child’s birth until the third interview (when the child is about four years old). N = 3450.

• To reduce bias caused by selection into nonstandard hours, parents’ schedules are modelled as endogenous functions of known covariates.

• The graphs below show the standardized (beta) effects of nonstandard scheduling on fathers’ care giving in dual-earner couples at nine and 24 months, in comparison to couples who are both employed during the day.
Nine months

- Father evening + mother day
- Father day + mother evening
- One parent other non-day + one parent day
- Both nonstandard

*** n.s.
Twenty-four months (different schedules at nine months)

Father evening + mother day
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Significance levels: ***(p < 0.001)***
Twenty-four months (same schedules at nine months)

- Father evening + mother day: n.s.
- Father day + mother evening: n.s.
- One parent other non-day + one parent day: n.s.
- Both nonstandard: n.s.
About these results

• In a cross-sectional model, nonstandard scheduling has *no effects* on fathers’ care giving at 24 months.
  – This finding is reproduced here when men and their partners have had the same employment schedule since the prior observation.

• This longitudinal model reveals that nonstandard scheduling reduces care giving among men when they and/or their partners have changed work schedules since the previous observation.

• Results for other measures of parenting available at both nine and 24 months are comparable.
Discussion

• Why does nonstandard employment increase father involvement at nine months, but reduce it at 24 months unless couples have maintained the same work schedules?
  – The “magic” of early involvement? The experience of being home with a baby while one’s partner is on the job may dispose one to current and future involvement.
  – Although the effect of selection is reduced through a treatment effects model that controls for known socioeconomic and other correlates of nonstandard employment, there may be additional unmeasured differences between men in couples in which one partner has a nonstandard schedule and those in which neither partner does.
Policy/practice implications

• The results of this analysis underscore the need to support fathers of young children who work different shifts than their partners.
  – This is particularly true of those who begin such arrangements after the first year.
  – Efforts should be made to support involvement among men who are home alone with their young children, perhaps by teaching skills and by communicating the value of engagement.