RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

# Understanding Families' Access to Nontraditional-hour Child Care and Early Education

## Key Highlights

- About 40 percent of young children in the U.S. use child care and early education (CCEE)[a] at nontraditional hours, which include early morning, evening, overnight, and weekend hours.
- Working families who earn lower incomes, who are Black or Hispanic, or who have lower education levels were the most likely to need nontraditional-hour care.
- It can be hard to find care during nontraditional hours. Family child care homes were more likely than centers to offer care at nontraditional hours.



**The information in this publication was drawn from work by the Urban Institute on nontraditional-hour care, as well as work by NORC, and the Education Development Center.**

Most data presented are from the National Survey of Early Care and Education, a set of nationally-representative surveys on the child care and early education workforce and households with children. Data on household work schedules are from the U.S. Census.

## Overview

Nontraditional-hour CCEE—also referred to as nonstandard-hour CCEE—includes care in the early mornings (before 7 a.m.), in the evenings or overnight (after 6 p.m.), and on weekends. More than one-third of young children in the U.S. need CCEE during nontraditional hours,[1] and families who work nontraditional hours face challenges in finding care providers for their schedules.[2] Not all CCEE providers offer nontraditional-hour care, and when they do, they may focus only on particular time frames, such as early mornings or weekend care.[3]

We highlight reports with national data on families with young children who need nontraditional-hour care, as well as the characteristics of providers who offer nontraditional-hour care. It is important for CCEE leaders to understand the characteristics of families who work nontraditional hours, the types of care used at nontraditional hours, and the characteristics of providers who offer nontraditional-hour care. CCEE leaders can use this information to help increase the number of providers who offer nontraditional-hour care that families need and help the providers offer CCEE that supports children's development.

[a] Child care and early education (CCEE) refers to caregiving and educational services for children from birth to age 13. CCEE includes center-and home-based settings for infants, toddlers, preschool-and school-aged children. CCEE refers to services for a larger age group than early care and education (ECE), which consists of services provided only for young children (birth to age 5 who are not yet in kindergarten). ECE programs are included within the definition of CCEE.

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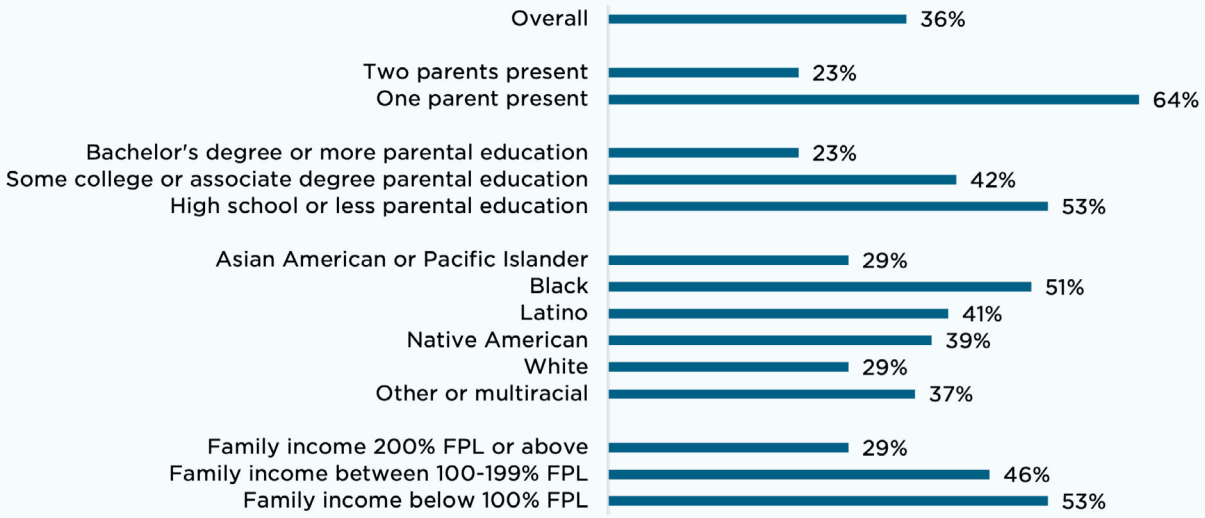
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# Understanding the Need for Nontraditional-hour Care

## What are the characteristics of families who work nontraditional hours?

As of 2019, just over one-third of children younger than six in working families in the U.S. have a parent working at nontraditional hours.[4] Rates are higher for those in single parent households, those with lower levels of parental education, those who are Black, and those in families with lower incomes (see Figure 1). In one-parent households with the parent working full time, that parent worked an average of nine hours a week during nontraditional hours. However, in households with two parents both working full time, only two of their weekly work hours were during nontraditional times. Working parents in two-parent households staggered their work schedules so that both parents' schedules only overlapped for 2 hours during nontraditional hours on average.[5] Analysis of data collected by the U.S. Census has shown similar trends.[6]

**Figure 1.** Shares of children under six in the U.S. in working families with nontraditional-hour work schedules by child, parent, and family characteristics

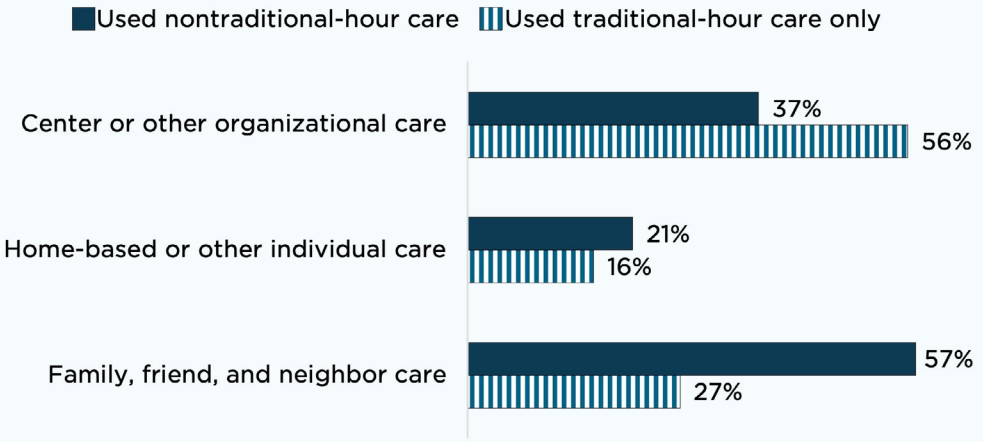



**Note:** Adapted from Schilder, D. & Lou, C. (June 2022). Parents' demand for and use of nontraditional-hour child care. In C. Waterman (Chair), Child care access for parents with nontraditional work schedules [Symposium]. National Research Conference on Early Childhood, virtual.

## What types of care arrangement do children in nontraditional-hour care use?

Compared with children who are in traditional hour care only (i.e., care between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday through Friday), those who used any nontraditional-hour care were much more likely to use family, friend, and neighbor care providers (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Share of children younger than six in CCEE, by care arrangement and whether they used nontraditional- or traditional-hour care only

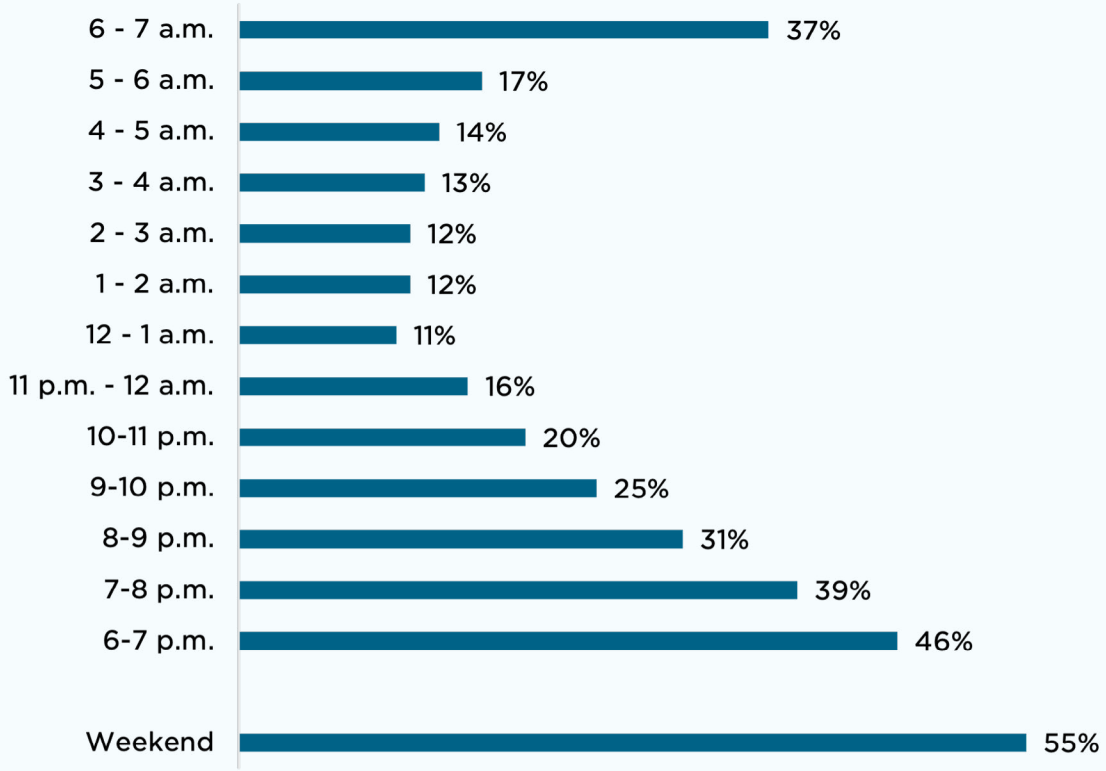



**Note:** Adapted from Lou, C., Schilder, D., Wagner, L. (2022a). What types of child care do families use during nontraditional hours? Urban Institute.

## When are young children in nontraditional-hour care?

As shown in Figure 3, young children were most likely to be in nontraditional-hour care on the weekends, followed by evenings hours and from 6-7 a.m. Young children were least likely to be in nontraditional-hour care overnight on weekdays.

**Figure 3.** Share of children younger than six in nontraditional-hour care, among those who used any nontraditional-hour care




**Note:** Adapted from Lou, C., Schilder, D., & Wager, L. (2022). When are children in nontraditional-hour child care? Urban Institute.

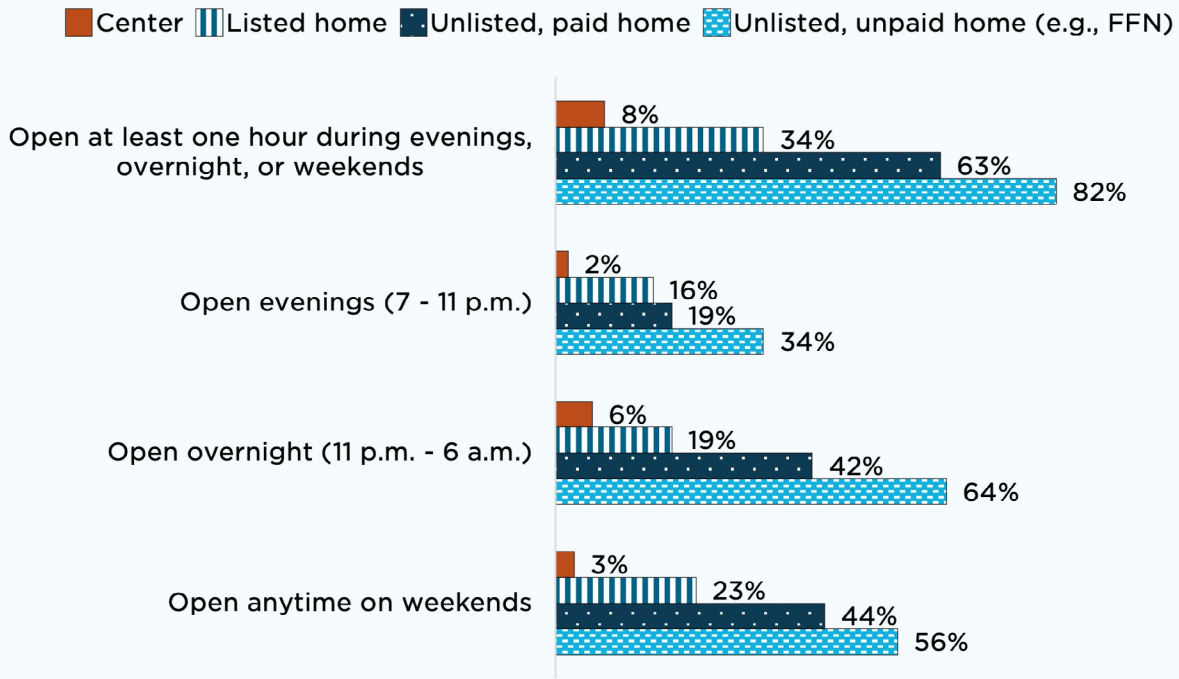
# Understanding the Supply of Nontraditional-hour Care

## Which types of providers offer nontraditional-hour care?

Listed home-based providers (i.e., family child care) and informal settings (e.g., family, friend, and neighbor care and unlisted homes) were more likely than center-based programs to provide nontraditional-hour care.[7]

Among home-based providers, overnight care and weekend care were more commonly offered than evening care (7-11 p.m.), particularly among unlisted paid and unpaid home-based providers.

**Figure 4.** Share of providers serving young children who offered nontraditional-hour care, by provider type




**Note:** This figure does not include the early morning hour of 6–7 a.m. Adapted from National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2015). Fact sheet: Provision of early care and education during non-standard Hours. (OPRE Report No. 2015-44). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

# Conclusion

While these national data provide a preliminary understanding of the needs of families and the supply of CCEE during nontraditional hours, research suggests that there is substantial variation across states in the number and characteristics of families who work nontraditional hours. An analysis of data from the American Community Survey 2015 – 2019 indicates that 42 percent or more of young children in Alabama, Louisiana, Nevada, and Mississippi are living with working families with potential nontraditional-hour child care needs, compared with only about 25 percent of young children in Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.[8] This underscores the need for state CCEE leaders to understand the needs of working families and providers offering nontraditional-hour care to help them develop strategies to improve equitable access to nontraditional-hour care that supports children's development. State CCEE policymakers are planning a range of actions, such as using contracts to increase the supply of care operating during nontraditional hours and changing the payment rates for nontraditional-hour care.[9]

### Understanding equity issues in nontraditional hour care access

Families who face the greatest barriers to economic opportunity, including Black, Latino, and Native American households, those with lower education levels, and those with lower household incomes, are the most likely to work nontraditional hours. Therefore, they likely need CCEE for their children at nonstandard hours.[10] These families face a unique challenge, in that they more often use family child care homes and providers legally exempt from licensing, such as family members, friends, and neighbors due to supply constraints and likely other access factors, such as affordability or cultural match.[11] Yet, these settings are much less likely to participate in public child care assistance programs. In fact, in 2018, over 75 percent of children served through Child Care and Development Funds were cared for in a center.[12] While CCEE leaders cannot by themselves address the systemic issues that drive particular groups to nontraditional-hour work, they can work to better understand the needs of families who work nontraditional hours and support the supply of the full range of CCEE providers to increase access to care during the hours families need.

For additional information on promoting equitable access for families who work nonstandard hours, please see this report from the Urban Institute.



## References


[1] Lou, C., Schilder, D., & Wagner, L. (2022). *Who uses nontraditional-hour child care?* [Fact sheet]. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/who-uses-nontraditional-hour-child-care

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[3] National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2015*). Fact sheet: Provision of early care and education during non-standard hours.* (OPRE Report No. 2015-44). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-andeducation-nsece-2010-2014

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[7] National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2015*). Fact sheet: Provision of early care and education during non-standard hours*. (OPRE Report No. 2015-44). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-andeducation-nsece-2010-2014

[8] Schilder, D., et al. (2021). *Comparing potential demand for nontraditional-hour child care and planned policies across states*

[9] Ibid.

[10] Lou, C., Schilder, D., & Wagner, L. (2022). *Who uses nontraditional-hour child care?*

[11] Lou, C., Schilder, D., & Wagner, L. (2022). *What types of child care do families use during nontraditional hours?* [Fact sheet]. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/what-types-child-care-do-families-use-during-nontraditional-hours

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