

## CHAPTER 6

# LOW INCOME WORKING FAMILIES: PARENTS' EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND CHILD CARE QUALITY

This chapter explores parent employment and education outcomes in the 307 families who participated in the study. Each family was asked to report employment/education patterns for a female and male head of household; 116 male heads of households and 307 female heads of household were identified. Relationships between child quality variables (discussed in Chapter 4) and parent employment/education outcomes were examined. The combined relationships of a number of child care quality variables (discussed in Chapter 4) with parent employment/education were examined using correlation and regression analyses (see Appendix G for statistics). The effects of child's age in months, child care setting, and community residence were also included in these analyses. Parent outcomes included in this research were hours per week spent in paid employment or in a school or training program, work hours per day (full-time, part-time, temporary), work shift (day, evening, night, shift change), number of months working for employer, interruption in work due to illnesses or child care problems, and raises or promotions at work.

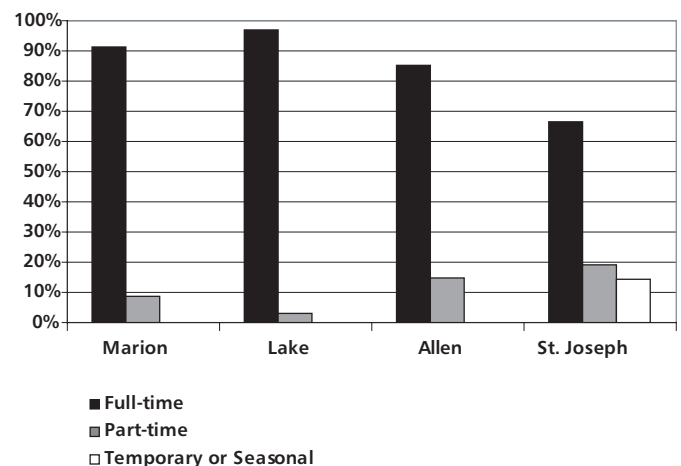
### PARENT EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION OUTCOMES

#### Parent employment and education outcomes: Male heads of household

One hundred and sixteen (38%) families identified a male head in the household. Almost three-fourths (72%) of the identified male heads of households were the child's biological father. The remaining male heads of household were the child's grandfather (10%), the child's stepfather (8%), or other male living in the household (9%). Among the male heads' employment outcomes, only work hours (full-time vs. part-time and temporary) and length of current employment differed among communities. (See results reported below.) In general, male heads of household reported the following employment and education patterns:

- A large majority of male heads of household (89%) were employed.
- On average male heads spent about 38 hours per week working or in school/training program.
- A majority (87%) of male heads worked full-time (35 or more hours per week not including time in school/training program). Only 14% reported working part-time (less than 30 hours per week) or at a temporary or seasonal position. Work patterns varied by community. A higher proportion of male heads worked full time in Lake, Allen, and Marion counties (96.8%, 85.2%, and 91.3%, respectively) than male heads in St. Joseph (67%). Although Lake County had the highest unemployment rate during the time of the study, male heads in the research sample in that county had the highest rates of both full- and part-time employment. St. Joseph County had one of the lowest employment rates, but male heads in the research sample in that county had the lowest rates of employment. Interestingly, the St. Joseph County sample was the group of males to report temporary or seasonal work. Figure 6.1 displays these differences. This community difference remained after child's age and type of child care setting were considered.

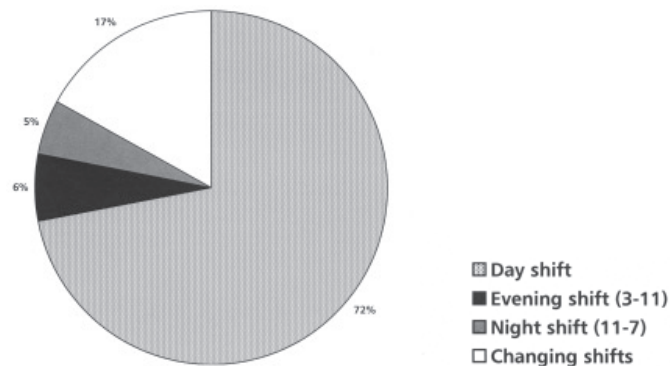
FIGURE 6.1. PERCENTAGE OF MALE HEADS IN FULL-TIME, PART-TIME AND TEMPORARY/SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT IN THE FOUR COMMUNITIES





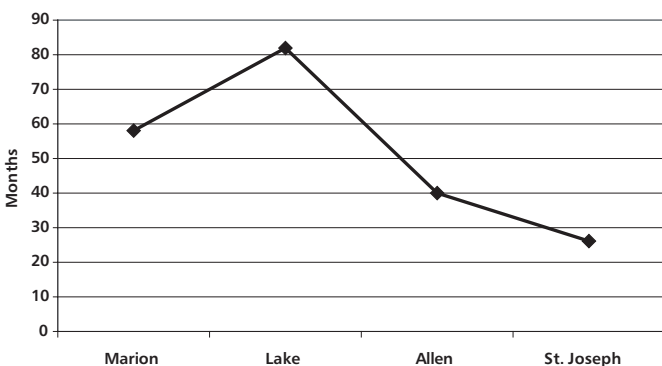
- Most male heads (72%) worked standard hours (daytime) as opposed to evening (3-11pm), at night (11pm-7am), or changing shifts. This ranged from 57% in Lake County to 81% in Allen County but did not differ statistically. Figure 6.2 displays the work shifts of all male heads of households.

FIGURE 6.2. MALE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD WORKING SHIFTS (N=116)



- The average number of months male heads had been employed at their current employer was 53 months. The means in each community were 26 months in St. Joseph, 58 months in Marion, 40 months in Allen, and 82 months in Lake County. Statistical tests revealed male heads in Lake County had a significantly longer employment history with the current employer than male heads in St. Joseph County. This difference remained after child's age and type of child care setting were considered. Figure 6.3 displays means for each community.

FIGURE 6.3. NUMBER OF MONTHS MALE HEADS WERE EMPLOYED WITH CURRENT EMPLOYER IN THE FOUR COMMUNITIES



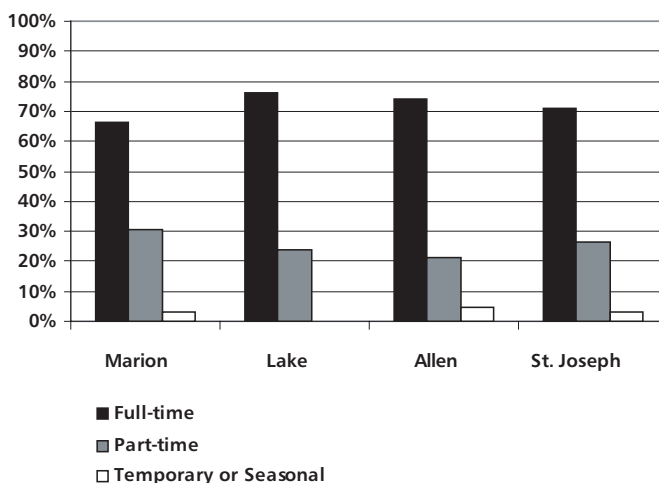
- Work had been interrupted at least once in the past month due to illness or child care problems for almost half of all male heads. The percentages of male heads whose work had been interrupted were 38% in St. Joseph, 61% in Marion, 43% in Allen, and 48% in Lake County. These community differences were not statistically significant.
- About one-quarter (27%) of the male heads of household in this study had received a recent raise or promotion. The percentage of male heads who received a raise ranged from 19% in St. Joseph County to 39% in Marion County, but community differences were not statically significant.

### Parent employment and education outcomes: Female heads of household

Communities did not differ in the rate of female heads of household employment and education outcomes. In general, female heads of household had the following employment and education characteristics:

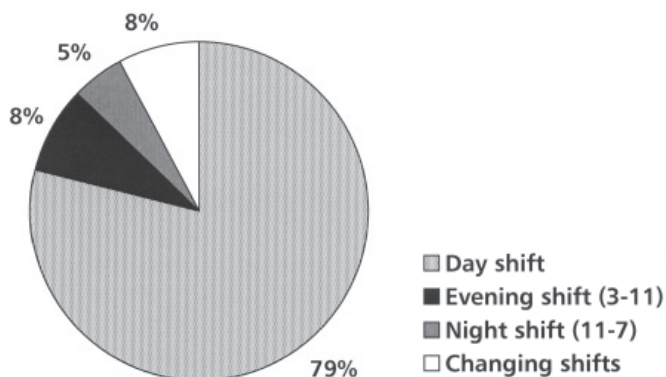
- A large majority of female heads (83%) were employed, ranging from 79% in Marion County to 89% in Lake County.
- On average, female heads spent about 33 hours per week working or in school/job training.
- On average, 72% of female heads worked full-time (35 or more hours per week, not including time in school/training program) as opposed to part-time (less than 30 hours per week) or temporary/seasonal position. The percentages of female heads working full-time were 71% in St. Joseph County, 66% in Marion County, 74% in Allen County, and 76% in Lake County. These differences were not statistically significant. Figure 6.4 displays these work patterns.

FIGURE 6.4. PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE HEADS IN FULL-TIME, PART-TIME AND TEMPORARY/SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT IN THE FOUR COMMUNITIES



- Almost 80% of female heads worked standard hours (daytime). The remainder either worked in the evening (3 pm-11pm), at night (11pm-7am), or changing shifts. The percentages of female heads working non-traditional hours were 17% in St. Joseph County, 16% in Marion County, 28% in Allen County, and 23% in Lake County. These differences were not statistically significant. Figure 6.5 displays the work shifts of all female heads of households.

FIGURE 6.5. FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD WORKING SHIFTS (N=253)



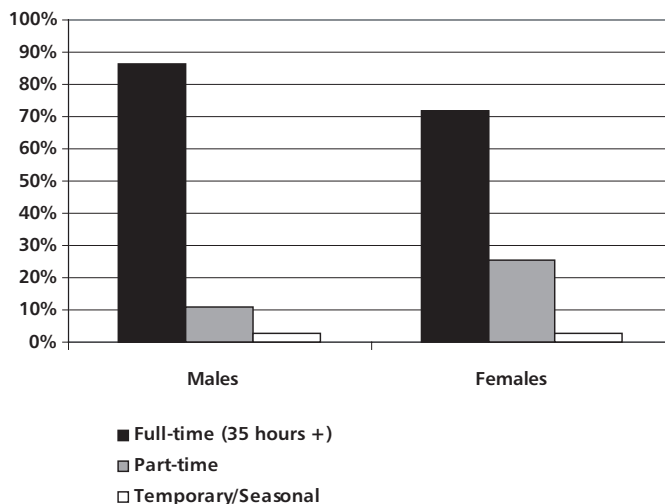
- The average number of months the female heads had been employed at their current employer was 36 months. The means for each community were 30 months in St. Joseph County, 34 months in Marion County, 31 months in Allen County, and 48 months in Lake County, but did not differ significantly.
- At least two out of three working female heads experienced missing work at least once in the past month due to illness or child care problems. The percentages of female heads who experienced missing work were 68% in St. Joseph County, 73% in Marion County, 63% in Allen County, and 70% in Lake County, but did not differ significantly.
- About one in five working female heads of household reported they had received a raise or promotion recently. The percentages of working female heads receiving a raise ranged from 13% in St. Joseph County to 32% in Allen County, but did not differ statistically.

### Comparison of Male and Female Employment

In general, there are many similarities between the working patterns of male and female heads in this study. Most males and females in this sample of low income working parents were employed or in school or training programs 35 or more hours per week. However, almost 15% more males reported working

full time than did females. Therefore, it appears that while male heads of household are spending more time away from home at work, many female heads of household are balancing work, school, and family. Figure 6.6 compares these working patterns.

FIGURE 6.6. COMPARISON OF MALE AND FEMALE HEADS IN FULL-TIME, PART-TIME AND TEMPORARY/SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT



There were also differences in the stability of work reported by male and female heads. Male heads reported they had worked for their current employer longer than female heads ( $M = 53$  months and  $Mdn = 30$  compared to  $M = 38$  months and  $Mdn = 19$ ). This may have been due in part to women needing to take maternity leave. Also, not surprisingly, females were more likely to have their employment interrupted due to illness or child care problems. While a little over two-thirds of females reported this interruption, less than one-half of males reported it. This gender difference coincides with the gender differences we found in work flexibility (see Chapter 3). Females were more likely to report that their employer would allow them to stay home when their child was ill. Again,

*Not surprisingly, females were more likely to have their employment interrupted due to illness or child care problems.*

this could be a reflection of mothers' perceived or actual greater responsibility for child care. A greater role in child care may affect women's job stability as well. These apparent differences in child care responsibility and job stability may affect the types of jobs low-income men and women are able to obtain.

## Comparison of Parent Employment Outcomes for Children in Home- and Center-based Care

The employment patterns for parents using home- and center-based care were compared. No differences were found between employment patterns of female heads using home-based care and those using center-based care. Only one difference between employment patterns of male heads was found. Males whose children were in center-based care were more likely to report their work had been interrupted during the past month due to illness or child care problems compared to those whose children were in home-based care (56% compared to 36%). There was a similar trend with female heads; however, the difference (72% compared to 63%) was not statistically significant. This difference between home- and center-based care may be explained by the relative lack of flexibility in hours for center-based child care

*Males whose children were in center-based care were more likely to report their work had been interrupted during the past month due to illness or child care problems compared to those whose children were in home-based care (56% compared to 36%).*

that parents reported in the focus group interviews. Licensed family child care or more informal home-based care are often more flexible in terms of allowing a parent to pick up their child later than scheduled, as well as in caring for sick children, services not often available with center-based care. Again, this gender difference

in work interruption reflects gender differences reported in work flexibility (i.e., employers would be more likely to allow mothers to stay home when their child was ill).

## Comparison of Parent Employment Outcomes for Infants/Toddlers and Preschool-age Children

There were few differences in parent employment patterns between parents of infants/toddlers and preschool-age children. The only statistically significant difference was in the number of months male heads of household had been employed with their current employer. Male heads of household with preschool children reported being employed longer by their current employer than male heads of infants/toddlers (M=65 compared to M=38 months). There was a trend for male heads of household with preschool-age children to be more likely to report their work had been interrupted sometime in the past month due to

illness or child care problems (53% compared to 41%). This difference is likely due to differences in types of care chosen for preschool-age children versus infants/toddlers. As reported in Chapter 3, preschool-age children are more likely to be found in center-based programs, and infants/toddlers are slightly more likely to be found in home-based care. As reported above, males whose children were in center-based care were more likely to report their work had been interrupted due to illness or child care problems. For female heads of household, there were no statistically significant differences in employment patterns of parents with infants/toddlers and preschool-age children, but there were some trends. Female heads with preschool-age children were more likely to work full-time than those with infants/toddlers (70% compared to 63%). In addition, female heads with preschool-age children were more likely to work a daytime shift (82% compared to 75%). Again, there was no difference in hours working or in attending school. Taken together, these results suggest mothers of infants/toddlers may be working slightly less, but may be more often involved in education or training programs, which would necessitate part-time employment and evening or changing employment shifts. Therefore, although mothers of infants/toddlers may not work outside the home as many hours as fathers, they are spending similar amounts of time away from their children, necessitating similar demands for child care.

## Comparison of Parent Employment Outcomes for Single vs. Two Parent Households

A little over two-thirds of our sample reported they were single with no partner, divorced, or widowed. Marital status and living arrangements for the child had implications for the parent outcomes examined. For female heads, the only difference existed in the length of time employed with current employer. Single, divorced, or widowed female heads with no partner reported shorter employment durations with their current employers (36 months compared to 46 months for married mothers). This may reflect more demands that single parents encounter when they are juggling employment, family, and child care.

We were also interested in comparing families who reported two heads of household with those who reported only one. Sixty percent of families reported only one head of household, which was female. Females in families with two heads of household reported a longer length of time employed with current employer (47 months compared to 29 months for women who were single heads of household). On the other hand, three-fourths of females in families with two heads of household reported their work had

been interrupted due to illness or child care problems in the past month, compared to two-thirds of females who were the sole head of household. Therefore, it appears that, regardless of marital status and living arrangements, low-income working

*Low-income working families of all types were experiencing similar struggles in balancing employment, schooling, and the child care needs of their family.*

mothers are experiencing significant challenges with employment and child care.

In general, families with children of different ages, in different child care settings, of different household composi-

tions, and in different communities reported similar employment outcomes. Therefore low-income working families of all types were experiencing similar struggles in balancing employment, schooling, and the child care needs of their family.

### **Relationship Among Child Care Quality and Parent Employment and Education Outcomes**

One goal of this research was to determine if child care quality had any impact on parents' employment or education. In general, we found few relationships among indicators of child care quality and parent education and employment outcomes. Appendix G presents the significant correlation and regression statistics among child care quality and parent employment variables.

For male employment outcomes, greater child-adult ratio (more children per adult) was related to the number of hours in work, school, or training program and interruption to due to illness or child care problems. After the effect of child's age and type of child care setting were considered, these relationships remained. They did not vary by community. Although center-based settings were more likely to have higher child-adult ratios and, as reported above, males who reported work interruptions were more likely to have their child in center-based care, the type of child care setting did not contribute significantly to this relationship. Therefore, males with children of the same age were more likely to work or attend school for more hours and experience work interruptions if their child's care setting had a higher child-adult ratio, regardless of child care setting and community residence. It is possible that settings with more children per adult are less able to provide flexible care, and thus child care interruptions are more likely for fathers.

More positive ratings of the parent-caregiver relationship by the parent and higher levels of children cognitive activity were related to daytime working shifts of male heads of household. As reported in Chapter 4, more positive relationships between caregiver and parent were more likely in home-based care. Therefore, when relationships with type of child care setting and child's age were controlled, this connection between parent-caregiver relationship and working shift disappeared. This did not vary by community. The relationship between child's cognitive activity and working shift persisted after child's age and type of care was considered. The child's level of cognitive activity, as we observed it in child care, is a reflection of quality in the child care environment, but may also reflect more advanced development in the child. It is possible that stable daytime employment of fathers is supported by higher quality child care. It is also possible that fathers with more stable daytime employment are better able to support their children's cognitive development.

For female employment outcomes, higher levels of caregiver general education were related to interruption in females' work due to illness or child care problems. Caregiver general education was higher in center-based care, and center care tends to be less flexible in terms of allowing a parent to pick up their child later than scheduled, as well as caring for sick children. Thus, when relationships with type of child care setting and child's age were controlled, the relationship disappeared. This did not vary by community.

Caregiver specialized education was related to a recent raise for female heads. When relationships with type of child care setting and child's age were controlled, the relationship remained. Although communities differed in caregiver specialized education, the relationship between specialized education and recent raise did not vary by community. Advanced training is another child care structural quality indicator. It is possible that mothers who have their children in higher quality child care are also mothers who are more likely to advance in their employment. Higher levels of children's cognitive activity were related to the number of months female heads of household had been employed with their current employer. This is further evidence supporting the hypothesis that more stable employment of parents is related to more advanced cognitive activity in child care by children, either as a cause or effect. This relationship remained after child's age and type of care were considered, and did not vary by community.



## CONCLUSIONS

In general, there are many similarities between the employment and education patterns of male and female heads of households in this study. A majority of both males and females were employed and worked or attended school or training programs 35 or more hours per week. Most worked standard daytime shifts.

■ *There was some evidence that families whose children are enrolled in higher quality child care settings have more stable employment patterns.*

However, 15% more males reported working full time than females. Males tended to report working at their current employer longer than females, and female heads were more likely to have experienced work interruptions due

to illness or child care problems. In general, families with children of different ages, those in different child care settings, those of different household compositions, and those in different communities reported similar employment patterns and outcomes. Therefore, in this research sample, many low-income working families were experiencing similar challenges in balancing work, schooling, and the child care needs of their families.

In general, there were few relationships among indicators of child care quality and parent education and employment outcomes. The type of child care setting or the community residence did not contribute to parent employment or education outcomes. However, there was some evidence that families whose children are enrolled in higher quality child care settings have more stable employment patterns.